# Hospitality Tech & the New Guest Experience

The Travel Game has Changed

After a disruptive few years for the hospitality industry, the public is firmly back in the travel mindset. According to Deloitte, hotel occupancy rates exceeded 2019 levels for several consecutive months last year, with daily rates up double-digit percentages over 2021.

At the same time, amid economic uncertainties, travelers—both leisure and business—are approaching travel budgeting with a higher level of scrutiny and focus on quality. So for hospitality providers, customer experience should be at the top of their priority list—followed immediately by cost-saving and revenue-building measures like automation and analytics.

Meanwhile, the matter of sustainability has entered the calculus for travel decision-making—and presents a new opportunity for cost savings among hotel operators. According to a Booking.com survey, 71% of global travelers say that they want to travel more sustainably over the coming 12 months and 70% of global travelers say they would be more likely to choose a sustainable accommodation—whether they were looking specifically for one or not.

The new challenges facing hotel operators demands a new technology approach—one that spans the entire customer journey, from reservation to check-out and beyond.
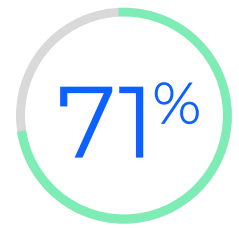
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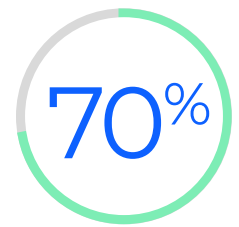
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SOURCE: Booking.com

Seamless Reservations

Automation is becoming a greater part of the hotel guest experience, and it starts at the beginning, with the reservation process. Given that more guests are now booking directly instead of through online travel agencies, hotels need to ensure the process is simple and seamless.

Whether guests use a hotel app or its website, the reservation process is an opportunity to collect data in advance of the stay, including desired room location, proximity to elevators or other hotel facilities, type of bed, and any special requests. Such data can be valuable later for future visits when the guest's preferences can be pre-populated.

The reservation process is also a chance to deliver useful information to guests, such as about area attractions and restaurants, hotel amenities, and any special services, such as a spa.

Finally, hotels should send an automated message that enables guests to confirm arrival and departure dates, payments, and other details in advance via their mobile device, with a link that enables them to easily make any changes.

Automating the Arrival Experience

Guest arrival is the time when automated systems can really kick into gear—and it's more imperative than ever. Hotels have two main options for automating the check-in process. One is a kiosk in the lobby, similar to the check-in kiosks that are common at airports. In addition to checking in guests, the kiosks can be used to accept payment by credit cards or even cash, as well as offer upsell opportunities. They can also dispense keys or barcodes that let guests into their rooms.

The other option is a fully contactless system that works either from a hotel website or an app. As with the kiosk, the contactless solution can offer upselling opportunities and provide a level of personalized service, based on what the hotel knows about each guest from past stays or the reservation process. That can range from

setting the temperature in the room to offering recommendations for local attractions and events. Mobile apps can also serve as room keys, eliminating the need for a separate physical key entirely.

Automation can also extend to baggage delivery. Front desk management tools can help manage and track bellmen, luggage valets, guest deliveries, laundry, room service, and more. Guests can print out baggage tags at a kiosk, attach it to their bags, and be on their way. Or they can request baggage service ahead of time from a mobile app.

Once they get to their rooms, guests may be welcomed by name with a pre-recorded video on the television that serves as another opportunity to inform them of hotel amenities and offerings.

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It's All About the App

Going forward, hotel loyalty applications will be an even more important vehicle for delivering both automation and personalization.

To succeed with loyalty apps, hotels will need to step up their game in terms of the sorts of benefits they deliver in order to garner guests' attention. The 2022 Loyalty Report, an annual study of more than 35,000 North American consumers by Bond Brand Loyalty and Visa, found consumers belong to an average of 16.6 loyalty programs but are active in only 7.6 of them. Of those, the travel sector accounted for only 0.9% of them, although that was up 4% from the 2021 report.

But the influence of a strong loyalty program is significant. Nearly three quarters of respondents (74%) say they are more likely to recommend brands with strong loyalty programs while 78% say the programs make them more likely to continue doing business with a given brand.

The good news is hotels have multiple ways to make their loyalty apps more attractive. They can, in fact, become instrumental to the hotel experience.

Today it's possible for the apps to manage all features of a guest's stay in a hotel. In a post-Covid world that puts a premium on touchless experiences, guests will welcome the ability to have such control from their own mobile device.

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say they are more likely to pursue business with brands offering loyalty programs

SOURCE: 2022 Loyalty Report

Consider just some of the possibilities

→ Customers can control the television from their phone—either through a hotel app or an app provided by a connectivity partner

→ Lighting and temperature can likewise be controlled from the app.

→ All requests for housekeeping, toiletries and other miscellaneous items can be made through the app.

→ Room service requests can be entered via the app, with ample opportunities for upselling. Guests can also be given an estimated time of arrival for their orders.

→ Concierge requests can be entered and answered via text, voice, or video calls. The concierge can send links with additional information, such as about local attractions, reservations at area restaurants or tickets to a local show.

→ Apps double as room keys, again obviating the need for physical keys— giving guests one less thing to touch, or potentially lose.

As customers use their apps, hotels can garner valuable data that drives further personalization efforts, including insights on offers that, based on their past preferences and experiences, guests will find valuable.

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In-room Considerations

In terms of in-room offerings, the basics come down to entertainment and fast, reliable, and secure WiFi.

Today, guests expect entertainment offerings that are akin to what they have at home. That means not only plenty of channels to choose from, but also seamless access to their own streaming accounts, where their preferences and content appears just as it would at home.

Fast WiFi is also crucial for a number of reasons. First, leisure travelers may opt to stream content on their own devices rather than use the in-room TV. For a family traveling with two kids, that can mean four people streaming simultaneously.

In a corporate environment increasingly defined by hybrid work and populated by digital nomads, WiFi is also crucial for business travelers who treat their hotel room like a remote office. Fast, reliable WiFi is an absolute necessity, not only to support activities like browsing and email, but also more bandwidth-intensive video conference calls.

Digital Signage

As guests venture out of their rooms, hotels can increase their use of digital signage to help keep them informed and at ease. In gyms, at the pool and in other common areas, digital signs could be used to indicate the last time the area was cleaned and any other steps the hotel is taking to mitigate health concerns.

Digital signs can also be used throughout the hotel to help guests find their way and keep them informed about things like restaurant opening and closing times. If a hotel is hosting a conference or private event such as a wedding, digital signs could be used to both welcome attendees and inform them which room to go to, and where it is.

A step up from digital signs are voice-activated interactive video kiosks deployed in strategic locations to anticipate and answer guest questions about hotel amenities, local attractions, restaurants and the like.

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Automated, App-driven Check-out

When it comes time for guests to check out, that experience can be fully automated. Using the hotel app, guests should be able to:

Arrange transportation

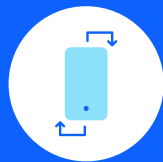**Review and settle all hotel charges**

Schedule baggage delivery to the departure area

Receive payment confirmation
Including where to send the transaction

Using the app for the checkout process makes the experience fast, convenient and completely touchless.

IoT-enabled Sustainability

As individuals and organizations increasingly factor sustainable practices into their buying decisions, hotel operators have the opportunity to leverage sustainability not only to cater to guest preferences, but also reduce waste and spending.

By leveraging IoT sensors and automation, supported by local wireless networks and low power wide area networks like LoRaWAN, hotels can monitor things like air temperature and water usage. At the same time, automated alerts when refrigerators or HVAC units malfunction can prevent food waste and energy loss.

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Technology Requirements

Delivering on these various automated, hands-free, personalized interactions will require hotels to have sound technology infrastructure in place.

In terms of wide-area connectivity, hotels need options that are reliable and scalable. Many will find software-defined wide-area network (SD-WAN) services will address these requirements well. With SD-WAN, network control functions are abstracted from the underlying network. This enables hotels to choose the WAN service that matches the requirements of each application. Some applications may require the performance of private lines while others can be supported by lower-cost Internet links.

SD-WAN also can help support a reliable network because it's simple to configure backup links for each connection, such as using an Internet or even wireless service should the primary connection go down. And security tools such as firewalls and intrusion detection/prevention software are often built into the SD-WAN appliance at hotel sites. The appliances, which can be physical or virtual, can be simple to deploy, which is important for hotel chains that don't have IT personnel at every location.

As mentioned previously, robust WiFi is a must in every guest room but also in common areas and meeting rooms. Strong WiFi is also important for back-office applications and should be configured separately from guest networks to help keep them secure.

Working with a Managed Service Provider

For hotels with numerous locations, installing and supporting all this infrastructure can be daunting, especially if IT staff is limited. In such cases, employing managed services may make good sense.

Managed Service providers can help implement and manage SD-WAN, Internet connectivity, Ethernet-Dedicated Internet, WiFi, and cybersecurity solutions. Partnering with a provider can take some of the burdens off internal IT staff, enabling them to stay focused on strategic projects.

Comcast Business also offers the voice and entertainment services that hotels need, making it a one-stop-shop for supporting advanced automation and personalization efforts.

The rules of the hotel game are changing post-pandemic. To meet guest expectations as they once again venture out, hotels will need to employ a heavy dose of automation and deliver services in a hands-free fashion. Their loyalty apps will play an outsized role and all of the efforts will depend on fast, reliable, networks being available throughout the hotel environment.

At Comcast Business, we partner with hospitality leaders to reimagine what's possible, delivering technology solutions that help streamline hotel operations and create unforgettable experiences that inspire loyalty and help keep guests coming back.

Learn more

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