

Where Is HOTEL TECHNOLOGY HEADED IN 2010?

Earlier this year I had the opportunity to travel to Las Vegas to attend the largest consumer electronics show in the world, CES. This show provides a wonderful insight in where consumer technology is headed this is certainly the event to attend.

What does this mean to hotels that are refurbishing guestrooms is too early to say, but in order to understand and plan for the future we must take our lead from where consumer technology is headed and plan accordingly.

Rise of Social Networking

Over the last 12 months the industry has seen the increasing importance of social phenomenon and many hotels chains have announced booking applications for the Apple iPhone and now also for Blackberry smartphones. Many hotels have launched Facebook pages to reach new guest segments, and some have even begun to offer special deals and updates on Twitter. With this continued use of social networks it is imperative for hotels to manage activities on multiple social media Websites and to monitor online reputation.

Consumer Technology

With the increasing number of Apple iPhone's sold worldwide we are seeing many vendors incorporating the Apple iPhone as an interactive device for both guests and staff. Some examples include applications as a handheld point of sale, housekeeping software and productivity device, a guest-enabled online bookings device, a check-in/check-out and folio review device, a restaurant reservations and room service bookings device, and realtime SMS text messaging application from guests to staff in hotels and vice versa. The deployment of Microsoft's Surface Table Computing in several hotel lobbies in New York and Atlanta further encourages guests to use them for information purposes either for local attractions or hotel services.

Energy Conservation

With the continued rise in costs for electricity, and water usage greater emphasis should be placed investing in guestroom technology that allows consumption of both to be reduced without being obvious to the guest. Greater integration is required between the hotel's front office systems, the guest door locking system and in room lighting and air conditioning systems so that when a guest checks out or leaves the room for an extended period the lights are either dimmed or turned off automatically and the same applies to television and air conditioning. Where hotels have invested in these automated systems a clear return on investment has been demonstrated in a very short time frame.

It is clear we are witnessing some important new trends. If you intend to refurbish or are building a new hotel then these are some of key things that you may need to consider: Seek independent advice on the cabling requirements to guestrooms as many of the new systems need a different cabling platform. Do not solely rely on vendors' advice; the guestroom TV has the capability to deliver a wider range of services than ever before so make sure you spend time to review all the new systems in the marketplace; and investigate energy management systems that can integrate with your hotel front office system or door locking (or both) so that you take



advantage of the savings in consumption they can deliver.

The other major highlight of the trip was to stay at the new 4,022 room MGM Mirage Aria Hotel, which is part of the \$12 billion CityCentre project on the Las Vegas strip. This new property opened in December 2009, and featured amazing new guestroom technology. The integrated technology provides guests with a single remote and on-screen view to

WHAT2WATCH

1. The emergence of 3D televisions with all major TV suppliers rolling out new 3D televisions.
2. The emergence of LED TV with very thin panels
3. The use of Skype on TV with two major vendors featuring built-in Skype as part of their TV offering.
4. The rise of IPTV
5. Tablet computing as an alternative to the traditional laptop

use the TV to set the systems in the room, from personal preferences, including lighting levels, room temperature, television/video systems, music, blinds and guest services. As part of the system, an automated welcome experience activates when the guest opens the door to the rooms. The lights gradually come on and the blinds open, the TV turns on to display a list of automated controls. After a guest has checked out, a room can quickly be put in unoccupied mode, which shuts off the lights, heating or cooling, entertainment systems, and any other electronic device in the room. Integration with property management systems has also been installed to deliver concierge-type services, as well as automate the guestroom, based on check-in/check-out status. An example of the power of the system is that it has the capacity to alert staff when a problem in the room arises, such as low batteries in the remote.

The great advantage of this system (see screen shot above) is that it allows a guest to control everything in the room if desired from the lighting, curtains, temperature, drapes, TV, music, concierge services and even to check airline arrivals and departures at nearby McCarran airport from the guestroom TV using the remote control device. Guest feedback to date has been very encouraging as the system is very user friendly.

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