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KIOSKS

Self-service Kiosks Provide Superior Service

First there were ATMs and pay-at-the-pump. Then self-checkout spread from supermarkets to other retail formats. Today we can print our own boarding pass at the airport and check ourselves in once we reach our hotel.

The hospitality industry is next in line for widespread application and adoption of self-service technology. And, given the growing consumer comfort with and expectation of self-service convenience in other areas of our lives, it's likely to take hold quickly. Many hoteliers are in fact currently testing, piloting and rolling out self-service solutions.

Hospitality is not much different than the other transaction-oriented businesses utilizing self-service kiosks. Hotels need to provide superior service, control costs and increase revenue. Self-service kiosks are providing the industry with the means to accomplish these goals and achieve a competitive advantage.

Service is the cornerstone of our industry. A self-service kiosk can enhance the service that your guests expect by providing them with the option to quickly check-in after a long flight rather than wait in line at the registration counter. The front desk staff is now available to handle guests that have an issue or require special assistance. Guests requiring special assistance now perceive improved service also. Best practices in self-service indicate that at the beginning the best implementations utilize existing staff as a greeter or concierge. Staff can assist guests as they check in or out, thus providing a more personalized service.

Self-service kiosks enable large resorts and casinos to manage numerous guests arriving concurrently or in groups. Smaller properties that may employ only a single person on any shift can utilize a kiosk to handle frequent guests that do not require assistance, rather than making them wait. Upon check-out, a kiosk can allow a guest to print an airline boarding pass. We may even see a time when certain times of the day are not staffed and the kiosk is the only means for check in or out, as is the case in Europe today.

The technology available gives all types of properties choices for the kind of kiosk to deploy. There are free-standing kiosks that support multiple automatic key encoders as well as in-counter units with an automatic or manual encoder. Emerging technologies such as biometric lock systems may eliminate the key card altogether, allowing the kiosk to accept the guest's fingerprint and encode the lock. The range of available options can make deploying a kiosk cost effective and efficient for any size hotel.

Front desk of the future may be a counter with an integrated kiosk. The professional, friendly staff member may meet guests as they arrive, usher them to an available kiosk and assist them as they check in. The staff member is then available to advise the guest of amenities or other offerings within the property. Once considered an expense, the staff can now generate additional revenue.

The kiosk also offers a more consistent means to increase revenue by providing another touch point that can be used to make offers to the guest. Would you like to upgrade your room? Would you like to be our guest for dinner at a special price? Would you like breakfast delivered to your room?

The intuitive, touchscreen kiosk also provides a means to control costs. Turnover in the industry is significant, and a kiosk can help reduce hiring and training costs for front desk staff.

As frequent guests become more familiar with the kiosk, it provides a way to promote the brand and customer loyalty. For example, frequent guests can be alerted to real-time rewards and incentives at the time of check-in, such as a free upgrade, or notified that they have reached a new plateau that qualifies them for a free nights stay.

As the travel industry has introduced self-service, both kiosks and Web-based check in have become commonplace. These methods of check in coexist for the traveling public and provide options depending on the traveler's personal situation at any point in time.

Technology today provides the means to combine the self-service functions of the travel and hospitality industries. The hotel kiosk can at check out or check in allow the guest to print an airline boarding pass. The kiosk now becomes a multi-use device to provide additional services to the guest. The same will be true for the hospitality industry, where kiosks and Web based will not only coexist, but will be complementary and provide a multi-channel environment.

With Web-based airline check in, the flyer has all the documents required for boarding. With Web check in for a hotel, someone is still responsible for encoding the room key. Once checked in on the Web, the traveler could print a document with a bar code that is scanned at a kiosk to issue a room key. Once at the kiosk, the guest can be offered rewards, upgrades and other promotions.

A guest's first impression when checking in to a property is most often a lasting impression. Self-service kiosks offer a real opportunity to delight your guests with superior service, provide a significant marketing tool and control costs.

The hospitality industry is next in line for widespread application and adoption of self-service technology. And, given the growing consumer comfort with and expectation of self-service convenience in other areas of our lives, it's likely to take hold quickly.

KIOSKS

What Are the Hotel's Real Objectives –
Are Kiosks the Answer?**Kris Lambrecht**

Program Director, Express Yourself
Carlson Hotels Worldwide

It is amazing that kiosk debates go back over two decades to the early 80s, and yet even today different hotel brands are still testing kiosk systems on a limited basis. Many online and print editors who interview me about Radisson's Express Yourselfsm online check-in service are surprised when I state that Radisson has "leap-frogged" kiosk systems upon the launch of our new online check-in service. The question comes down to what are the real service objectives to an expedited check-in process. How can you keep the focus on the customer needs and deliver on those objectives.

Radisson targeted an expedited check-in system after extensive branding research and J.D. Power Guest Satisfaction survey information that showed the hotel's check in/check out service was one of the top five elements that, if it was improved, would increase the guest satisfaction with a hotel brand. Further research showed that guests wanted a quick and easy check-in experience, one similar to their experience with airlines. They also wanted more control over their stay and more information choices. Finally, the guests wanted us to retain what they told us upon check in and they also did not want us to eliminate the friendly and helpful front desk staff.

Kiosk systems today can address the quick check in but fail to meet most of the other points called out in our market research. Kiosks are costly to the hotel, they add another piece of equipment in the lobby and create a cold and impersonal touch to the guest check-in process. Some guests would find the check-in process via a kiosk to fit their needs perfectly, but most business travelers will tell you that there are enough cold and impersonal parts of the business travel environment already. They like having a warm, friendly personal greeting and service by a front desk agent while providing a fast and efficient check-in. Also, while the concept of a kiosk check-in process might fit the needs of some hotels, it may not be the right fit for all the hotels in a brand. The Express Yourself service is available in all Radisson hotels in the Americas and for all guests who would like to use it.

The Radisson brand positioning is about "Enabling Choice and Engaging People." Radisson is able to offer relevant options to all of its guests, giving them the freedom to choose the elements that will best meet their needs, making each experience satisfying. A Radisson signature standard is an experience or guest touch-point

that delivers value to our guests in unique and meaningful way that delivers our brand positioning. Express Yourself is a signature service owned by Radisson and delivers choice to our guests in a unique and meaningful way. Kiosks would not be a signature standard because they do not provide the same level of unique experience and would not be available or used consistently across all of our hotels.

With Radisson's Express Yourself online check-in service, you can book your reservation any way you want from home or office via phone, hotel direct, online or through a travel agent, and then "Express Yourself" with Radisson's exclusive online pre-arrival check-in service. Upon arrival at a Radisson hotel, you show your ID to the front desk staff and receive your room key. There are no signatures and no waiting. With kiosks, assuming that information gets loaded correctly and the keys are dispensed in the right order, you might have a quick check-in experience with a kiosk system, but you would not have an "Express Yourself" check-in experience.

The Radisson guest will receive a warm welcome and smile, be handed a key packet quickly and be directed toward his or her room. Can the kiosk provide a similar experience? The Radisson front desk agent will handle any last minute questions or changes, faxes or messages, credit card authorization issues, inform the guest of a room upgrade, and may even present the guest with a small gift as an elite member of our goldpoints plussm loyalty program, all in a matter of seconds during the expedited check-in process. Can the kiosk handle all of that? We have found that there is much more to the expedited check-in process than just quickly handing the guest a key.

As stated earlier, guest satisfaction is the major objective of the Express Yourself online check-in service. Our guests have told us that they want a fast and efficient check-in process while being serviced by a guest service representative. That is why we state that Radisson has "leap-frogged" the kiosk check-in systems with Express Yourself online check-in service. We are developing a relationship with guests and learning their needs and preferences. One last reason to avoid that extra piece of furniture in the lobby is that we view the kiosks of the future via technology to be a variety of methods that are more friendly to the guest and convenient for the hotel. As always, more to come in the future on that topic.

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