

THE RISE OF MOBILE HOSPITALITY

With modern travelers tethered to personal devices, hotels must offer frictionless and customized mobile experiences to drive bookings and loyalty



Mobility has evolved from being a nice-to-have to being a must-have. Guests have come to expect and demand mobile experiences with many potential hotel guests admitting that mobile engagement will influence their hotel selection. According to *HT's 2016 Customer Engagement Technology Study*, pre-, during and post-stay functionality of guests' personal devices is a factor in booking decisions. The study reveals that 56% of consumers will be swayed to book a hotel if it offers high-tech guestroom features

such as mobile key. Meanwhile 56% want mobile booking capabilities, 48% want a useful, easy-to-use mobile app, and 41% want personalized, relevant and timely deals based upon their location and travel purpose. When queried as to what mobile features are important to them, 66% named mobile check-out, 62% said mobile check-in, and 61% said smartphones as room controls. In this thought leadership report, three experts offer insights into how hoteliers can leverage mobility to improve operations and the guest experience.



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of senior roles with the likes of Starwood, Marriott Hotels, Regal Hotels and Millennium Hotels Int'l.

HT **When considering the omni-experience for guests, what would you identify as top mobile enablers when it comes to frictionless experiences?**

WALKER: Whether the guest chooses self-service or wants to be taken care of, delivering the entire spectrum of options in the same venue helps to differentiate a hotel from the competition. It's even better if these options are available through a common business system. Hotels are able to satisfy the demands of their eager guests with mobile POS technology, extending service offerings to guests, whether at a pool, on the golf course or at the convention hall. This increased attention is already resulting in greater guest satisfaction and an increase in revenue for properties who have implemented mobile POS.

LIEBMAN: One of the great facets of a mobile application is that it can run in the background and respond to time or location. This means that hotels can now instantly provide two-way communication with guests on a proximity-to-the-hotel basis before, during and after their stay. Hotels can deliver everything from weather and traffic conditions to special offers and upgrades to real-time communication with hotel staff to post-stay messages from the general manager. The link between hotel and guest becomes more intimate with hotels able to ensure a stress-free, personalized stay and an outstanding guest experience.

SUT: When looking at the options mobile provides hotel guests, there are a few key things that aid the most in creating frictionless experiences: 1) the convenience of an easier booking and check-in/check-out process; 2) loyalty rewards and programs that have more unique focuses; and 3) increased options and choices for users before/during their stay and for future stays.

HT **How can mobility play a part in curating personalized experiences? How can and should hotels be gathering data from mobile touchpoints in a secure manner to create customized experiences?**

WALKER: Start with a reservations system. One that is truly interactive goes beyond allowing guests the opportunity to make a reservation. Guests want to select their preferred room and even preferred floor at the time of booking. Automate communication with text messages to confirm reservations or notify guests once their room is ready. Most hotels are capturing phone number at the time of reservation already. Every time an on-property guest makes a choice, it's important

to curate that knowledge to create personalized experiences, whether they typically purchase something from the mini-bar, order extra towels or prefer late check-outs. Leveraging already-curated data, hotels are better prepared to ensure the rooms are equipped with the special touches that guests will ask for anyway. Data analysis is helping hotels and resorts add a personal touch to the total stay experience.

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SUT: Mobility plays a large and important role in curating and tailoring customized guest experiences. A property is able to monitor more feedback from guests and users through its mobile application, gaining insights into what will motivate the guest to want to keep coming back. Hotels can improve the guest experience by pulling data from loyalty points programs, in-app feedback from both single and repeat guests, and interaction within the app to see which features users are interacting with the most. This has the potential to give hoteliers much more understanding on guests' needs and demands.

HT **While 53% of consumers want to use mobile keys, only 12% of hotels offer them. This lag can also be seen in other areas of mobility, as well. What is causing this hesitance? How can hotels make up the difference and catch up with guest demands?**

LIEBMAN: It's a matter of investment. The technical infrastructure to support keyless door locks is a lot more complex than when the world moved from metal room keys to Ving cards — the last big change in door locks. Not only do hotel owners have to change or reconfigure all their locks, but they need their hotel app and PMS both configured to enable this functionality — not to mention ensuring there is a stable network in the hotel as well. We will no doubt eventually see

all hotels offering this, but owners will need to be convinced of the ROI before laying out capital expenditures for this technology.

SUT: This isn't so much a hesitance from hotels in offering this technology, but more a situation of how quickly changes and upgrades can be implemented. There is a process required when hotels choose to update, upgrade or add entirely new technologies and it takes time to implement this process. Consumer demand can change overnight and shift as quickly and as freely as the consumers want it to, which is why these lags can be seen between the demand and what hotels are currently offering. It does not mean that it isn't coming, the process simply requires more time.

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HT What are some best practices for hotels to streamline operations and workforce with mobility?

WALKER: Hotels are always looking for ways to improve housekeeping processes and better utilize housekeeping staff. There are mobile solutions that automate and monitor housekeeping statistics. An intelligent assignment-based system can even provide room status updates to housekeeping, and to the front desk, via mobile devices. Moving technology systems above property is another proven method of streamlining productivity. There is less downtime than when using data servers on property that consume local resources and valuable time.

SUT: One of the key benefits with mobility is that staff members have more time to handle tasks that are directly related to boosting positive guest experiences. For example, when guests use a mobile application to check-in and out or to receive room keys, it gives hotel employees more time to focus on improving amenities, responding quickly to guest requests, and giving guests more one-on-one attention.

HT How is the trend for mobile payments impacting hotel operations?

LIEBMAN: In the retail world, if we want a product or service, we simply find it and buy it. In hotels, we typically accrue expenses throughout a guest's stay on the guest folio and then charge them all at once upon checkout. That means we always have to interface with the hotel's POS infrastructure in order to buy anything. Having a guest charge an item or service directly and instantly to their credit card is a new paradigm for hotels. So the “folio” mindset needs to change for hotels to really embrace guest-driven transactions.

WALKER: In addition to the guest's personal device, hotels are looking at tablet and kiosk options for mobile payments. Hotels should ensure their mobile payment options are not only diverse and secure, but also attuned to the guest segments they serve. Mobile payment technology can be made very secure. The important things to look into are securing data transmission from the handheld devices to application servers, securing data storage on the local handhelds, securing all web services and interfaces and, something that seems obvious but often forgotten, protecting mobile device security in case of tampering, theft or loss.

HT What role can location-based technologies play in creating a mobile hospitality environment? What are some areas of opportunity?

LIEBMAN: Location-based communications offer the ultimate in providing an ultra-cool guest experience. Knowing where a guest is in or around the hotel allows us to communicate relevant information to “surprise and delight” throughout their stay. We can ping the guest upon arrival at the airport with transport options, offer an upgrade if they check-in with the app, prompt them to order room service and have it ready in their room upon arrival, allow them to order room service at the beach or pool or get a special offer for a massage at the spa at the 18th green on your golf course. **HT**