

HOTEL Yearbook 2014

FORESIGHT AND INNOVATION IN THE GLOBAL HOTEL INDUSTRY

SPECIAL
EDITION ON

TECHNOLOGY



Going mobile!

by *Ian Millar* 

In the not-too-distant future, more and more services and hotel-guest communication are likely to move out of the realm of face-to-face interaction and onto our mobile devices, writes Prof. Ian Millar, the technology specialist at Switzerland's Ecole hôtelière de Lausanne. Here he takes us on a tour of some of the myriad touchpoints that may soon be taken over by cleverly designed smart phone apps, fundamentally empowering guests... and changing their hotel experience.

Due to the very nature of the hospitality business, our guests are truly mobile. They are with us because they are travelling. Some will be on a short trip, while others will be on those long-haul international business trips, visiting many countries. But whatever the reason for their trip, one thing all our guests have in common is what is in their pocket: their phone. Whether it be a normal phone or a smart phone, almost everyone today has a mobile. The International Telecommunications Union (ITU) predicts that by 2014, there will be more phones on the planet than people. Mobile-cellular penetration rates stand at 96% globally (128% in developed countries, and 89% in the developing world). More than 50% of Internet consumption is now done via mobile.

Add to that the current trends of BYOD (bring your own device) and BYOC (bring your own content), and the increase in tablet sales. Apple says it has sold just fewer than 84 million iPads, and in the first quarter of 2013, according to IDC, Samsung shipped 8.8 million tablets. In total, more tablets were shipped in the first quarter of 2013 than in the first half of 2012. Desktop PC sales have fallen off the cliff. Some 34% of Americans have a smart phone or tablet on the top of their Christmas list.

So our customers are all going mobile. How can we as an industry integrate the mobile device into the experience we are providing to our guests? I am not going to say here that the mobile will replace front desk staff and remove all forms of guest interaction, but what I will say is that in the future, we should cater for guests who want to have their experience and interaction on their mobile device. For me, a great example of how this can be done is happening now in the airline industry. How many of us have booked our flight online, or through an airline app on our device, then checked ourselves in through our device, chosen our seat and downloaded the boarding pass? Imagine now that the possibility to do this was taken away. We would find ourselves back in the days of travel agents and arriving at the airport not knowing what seat you will be assigned. What would your impression of your airline be if that happened? The mobile device has empowered our guests to do more for themselves, by themselves – and they are fundamentally happy about it.

In a recent survey by toonz.com, 42% of the respondents say they have researched or booked a hotel room on their mobile device, with 70% of those people confirming that they have booked a room on their phone in the 24-hour period before arrival.



Ian Millar's double expertise in the areas of hospitality and information technology sets him at the forefront of new developments in the international hospitality industry. He is also a Certified Hospitality Technology Professional (CHTP) Ian Millar is a frequent presenter at international IT conferences and is a member of the Advisory Board of the European Hospitality Technology Education Conference EHTEC, as well as on the advisory board for HITEC the world's largest hospitality technology conference.

Ian Millar has been instrumental in developing the exceptional resources and expertise available to students at the school. He created EHL's unique CyberHotel, a specially equipped and fully functional centre on campus that features best practical IT solutions in hospitality technology currently used in the industry. Within CyberHotel Ian Millar teaches the students about the latest technologies for the hospitality industry.

As of October this year Ian Millar is a member of the executive committee of HFTP, the world's largest organisation for hospitality and financial professionals. Ian Millar served on their board of directors from 2008 to 2011.

So why do we still make our guests queue to check in? More and more of our guests will see it as an added service to be able to get their room number confirmation on their phone, bypass reception and go straight to their room. That will of course depend on the device they have, but increasingly, we will see phones having the capability to open hotel room doors, either by MMS, NFC, Wi-Fi direct or other features.

Once your guest has entered this hotel room of the future, allowing her to connect her mobile device directly to the TV will be the norm. Wi-Fi direct or Miracast will allow the syncing of the hotel room TV and guest device. Guests will play movies, music and games on their device, all of which will be beamed onto the TV. We could even replace the traditional remote control and have the guests' own device control the TV.

Then what would be wrong with having guests interact with the hotel through their own device? Marriott has been trialling this with their app called "Red Coat Direct", designed specifically for meeting planners. The future of such services as room service, concierge, valet parking and many more could move as well to the guests' own device. Think how much we could save on printing alone by getting rid of the in-room compendium!

By empowering our guests who want this experience, we are fundamentally giving them a better experience. But with all this mobility comes the ultimate question of power. The Achilles' heel of all mobile devices is their battery life. There is nothing worse than having "juice jitters" - knowing you're down to your last 10% of power with no possibility of charging in sight. We always want our guests to have a good night sleep and wake up fully recharged, don't we? So we should do the same for their phone.

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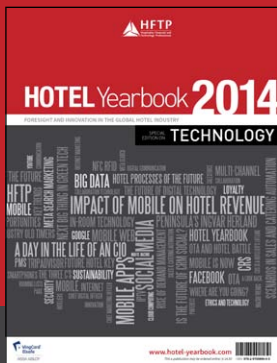
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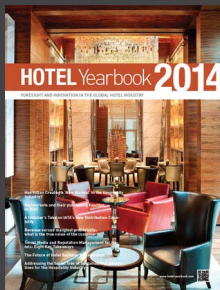
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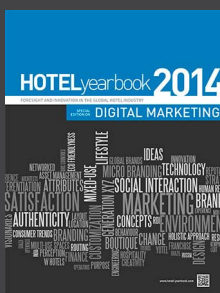
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Hotel Yearbook 2014

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The Hotel Yearbook branches out again with a new Special Edition on innovative hotel concepts within the global hospitality industry. Authors include some of the industry's best known thinkers and doers in various fields such as architecture, interior design, branding and consumer marketing. More information on this special edition will be made available very soon!

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