

COMPUTING strategy

Using Technology For A Better Guest Experience

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Technology has made inroads in all walks of life. It has truly been an enabler for a better quality of service and thereby improving life. In today's day and age there is no industry that is technology agnostic and the same holds true even for the hospitality sector. According to Technopak- a retail consultancy firm, the Indian Hospitality sector is pegged at \$23 billion out of which hotels constitute 75 percent of the total market size. The hotel segment is projected to double in size by 2018. About \$12 billion is likely to be invested over the next five years. About 40 new international hotel brands will operate by 2011. Conventionally having stayed away from technological assistance, the hotel industry in India is observing a sea change - in its objective and management's role towards delivering quality customer service. Technology sits at the core of these shifts in the lives of the hotelier and the traveler. It is fair to say that over the last five years, technology has done more to shape the future guest's expectations and preferences than any loyalty program or room upgrade. There are many reasons to believe that technology will continue to drive the guest experience today, and tomorrow.

'Service', related to personalized care and hospitality, is finding a friend in advanced systems, gadgets that accentuate service imparted.

For years, hotels have been built with separate networks to support different applications, including in-room entertainment systems, telephony, high-speed Internet, building control systems, and administrative systems. The CIO community has understood the redundancy of old methods and realizes that it is imperative for hoteliers to migrate to a single converged network; identify the alternative infrastructure; and considers the key applications that need to coexist - entertainment, Internet access, telephony, and room controls.

To deliver a true home away from home experience, hoteliers will constantly have to innovate and re evaluate the way they offer best in class service to their customers. When it comes to delivering supreme quality guest experience, there

is a plethora of options to choose from. From sophisticated in room technologies to intelligent Point of Sale solutions and fancy yet cutting edge display solutions, the sky is the limit.

Like any other industry, opportunities and challenges are equally predominant. While hoteliers want to improve their guest experience, they are constantly striving to reduce the total cost of ownership. With the influx of technology and sophisticated solutions, conventional sources of earning revenue have dwindled. With the intention of increasing revenue the hotels are looking at offering a bouquet of value added services like movie on demand, music downloads, interactive games which will entice the guest and also add revenue.

Digital Signage solutions

The number of choices for both products and services available to consumers has grown exponentially, creating a demand for better communication systems that place relevant product information closer to the point-of-purchase. Increasing information-on-demand, however, can quickly overwhelm human resources in hospitality settings. Herein lies a major advantage for digital signage solutions. Even though modern digital signage can be passive, today's more process-oriented digital signs can interact with consumers-giving them power to drive the media that interests them- thereby providing valuable assistance in making choices. Additionally, content can be automatically pushed to digital formats from back-office database systems automating the update and management processes, freeing up important human resources for other tasks. Breaking traditional communication paradigms into multifaceted strategies, digital signage synergizes with modern marketing goals.

Increasingly, the hospitality industry is turning to digital signage to satisfy its informational and marketing communications requirements. Applications vary but can be broken down into six main areas, including: in-room channel, door cards, reader boards, advertising signage, way-finding and hybrid, interactive display.

As a new communications medium, digital signage

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solutions can be utilized to playback relevant information to the guests (weather, airline info, news, etc.), branding messages, promotional messages, or even third party advertising which can provide a new revenue source for the hotel.

A digital signage solution can interface with the hotel's existing sales and event management programs, dynamically distributing the meeting schedules to flat panel monitors located throughout the hotel.

In-room technologies

Travelers are becoming more demanding than ever. Guests still expect a comfortable night's sleep, but they also want wireless internet, movies that start at their convenience and a customizable guest experience and technology sits at the heart of their demands.

Hoteliers can learn a lot about their guests long before they even leave the house. Many inferences can be drawn about in-room technology preferences by understanding how people use technology in their homes and offices.

The in-room technology race is not about revolutionary devices or complex functionality instead, is setting new industry standards by featuring systems that are as technologically advanced at the same time are user-friendly. The guest of the future will not favor any one device, and a 'loyal' guest will not fall into any one generational category. Guests of the future will be young and old, technology-savvy and technology-simple, and they will look at resources to provide them with access to their content and the ability to personalize it.

In room technology such as in room entertainment options, are witnessing a paradigm shift. Hotels have no choice but to upgrade their properties and constantly invest in better and more intelligent solutions to safeguard their competitive position. Needless to say, adoption of these solutions and technology requires huge amount of investment, and the objective of such investments should be to generate newer streams of revenue through the next generation of in room technologies.

Unified Communications

Today's Hyper connected traveler is accustomed to getting anytime, anywhere access to information and services — which makes meeting their every need all the more important at the hotel. Being able to anticipate and exceed the requirements of this visitor not only demands that the hotel offers instant self-service amenities, but that it also equips a mobile staff to respond quickly and accurately to service requests by reaching the right resources at the right time. Unified communications represent an unprecedented opportunity to streamline communications across the board and enrich the entire guest experience with improved service times, personalized assistance and quality communications. Guests can enjoy ubiquitous access to excellent service while management, concierges and staff can have secure, anytime access to the information and resources they need to best perform their jobs. With a unified



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communications system that integrates all communications tools into a single interface, guests and staff can enjoy the flexibility to communicate by voice, email, voicemail, instant message or even video.

It's important that hoteliers constantly innovate to ensure that hotels have the right telephony system that fits perfectly with the service-revenue business model. According to industry analysts ABI Research, sophisticated systems based on IP telephone networks in hotels will increasingly enable a range of new services aimed at improving customer service in hotels and resorts. Although worldwide revenue from such systems totaled only \$869 million in 2008, by the end of 2014 annual earnings will exceed \$2 billion.

These systems will eventually penetrate mid-range hotels, but in the initial period will be found mainly in the top-tier of properties.

In a nutshell, the hospitality sector in India is a dynamic sector with unparalleled growth prospects and unlimited business potential, and with the influx of technology in this industry it is certainly on the foyer towards being a key player in the nation's changing face. •