

Towards better guest experience

★ Hoteliers have to adopt new solutions and technologies to improve customer services

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ACCORDING to Technopak, a retail consultancy firm, the Indian hospitality sector is pegged at \$23 billion, out of which hotels constitute 75% of the total market size. The hotel segment is projected to double in size by 2018. About \$12 billion is likely to be invested in the sector the next five years and around 40 new international hotel brands will operate in India by 2011.

The hotel industry in India is experiencing a sea change—in its objective and the management's role towards delivering quality customer service. Technology sits at the core of these shifts. 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 programme or room upgrade. There are many reasons to believe that technology will continue to drive the guest experience of today and tomorrow.

For years, hotels have been built with separate networks to support different applications, including in-room entertainment, telephony, high-speed Internet, building control systems, and administrative systems. The CIO community has understood the redundancy of old methods and realises that it is imperative for hoteliers to migrate to a single converged network, identify the alternative infrastructure and consider 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 customers. When it comes to delivering supreme quality guest experience, there is a plethora of options to choose from. From sophisticated in-room technologies and intelligent point-of-sale solutions to fancy yet cutting-edge display solutions, the sky is the limit.

But then, both opportunities and challenges are there. As 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, hotels are looking at offering a bouquet of value-added services like movie on demand, music downloads, interactive games.

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 informa-

tion-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 the power to drive the media that interests them. Additionally, content can be automatically pushed to digital formats from back-office database systems. Breaking traditional communication paradigms into multifaceted strategies, digital signage gels with modern marketing goals.

Increasingly, the hospitality industry is turning to digital signage to satisfy its informational and marketing communications requirements. Applications vary, but they can be broken down into six main areas: in-room

entertainment options, we 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.

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. Today's hyper connected traveller is accustomed to getting anytime, anywhere access to information and services—making meeting their every need all the more important at the hotel. Unified communications represent an unprecedented opportunity to streamline communications across the board and enrich the entire guest experience with

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channel, door cards, reader boards, advertising signage, way-finding and hybrid, and interactive display.

Digital signage solutions can be utilised to playback relevant information to the guests (weather, airline info and news), branding messages, promotional messages or even third-party advertising. A digital signage solution can interface with the hotel's existing sales and event management programmes, dynamically distributing meeting schedules to flat panel monitors located throughout the hotel.

The in-room technology race is not about revolutionary devices or complex functionality. Instead, it's setting new industry standards by featuring systems that are both technologically advanced and user-friendly. The future guest will not favour 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. They will look at resources to provide them with access to their content and the ability to personalise it.

In room technology such as in room

improved service times, personalised assistance and quality communications. With a unified communications system that integrates all communications tools into a single interface, guests and staff can enjoy the flexibility to communicate by voice, email, voice-mail, instant message or 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 totalled only \$869 million in 2008, by the end of 2014, annual earnings will exceed \$2 billion.

Hospitality is a dynamic sector in India. With the induction of technology, it is certainly on the foyer towards being a key player in the nation's changing face.

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