The Irony Of Automation: Technology Brings Us Closer To Humans - Not Farther

Thanks to innovations like chatbots, artificial intelligence and mobile hotel check-in, the era of automated, "self-service" travellers may seem like a foregone conclusion. But as a growing segment of business travellers will tell you, tomorrow's best-in-class corporate travel organisations don't care about automation: they're concerned with service. Whether it's proactively solving problems for time-starved road warriors, providing a comfortable environment for relaxation and productivity, or knowing how to keep guests safe, providing the right attention to detail matters much more for today's business travel providers than outsourcing to a machine or a computer.

Funnily enough, it's technology and automation which are finally delivering a closer look — and a greater opportunity — for hospitality to deliver on what matters most to business travel.

"We believe that enriched data allows us to serve guests with precision and care — without discounting the human experience. Technology allows us to pinpoint requests and perfect almost every interaction. Does it matter? It's the ability to meet every wish and peccadillo of the business traveller that allows business to flourish.

In a recent white paper from Hotels 2020 by Rohit Talwar — Responding to Tomorrow's Customer and the Evolution of Technology - we discovered that this insight is strongly reinforced. 95% of respondents expect that "Hotels will increasingly look to new technologies to drastically increase efficiency, reduce costs, personalise the customer experience and improve service". Despite the emphasis on technology, people will still be the ultimate differentiator — 93% agreed that "Highly trained staff backed up by technology will be key to delivering personalised service and experiences".

"Responding effectively means a fundamental reframing of how we view our hotels. We need to develop a mindset that enables us to rethink our strategies, revolutionise business models, rework service delivery and — as a result — reinvent the customer experience".

With some insights from our experts, HospitalityTech and Business Insider, let's first give you a glimpse at what's already creating the experiences that guests want and need:

Fixed-Mobile Convergence

It may sound like science fiction, but many of pieces of this scenario are already available or in development. The guest of tomorrow will be more connected than ever before.

Once upon a time, people used their room phones. However, the pervasiveness of mobile devices has relegated the conventional room phone to a vastly reduced role. But that doesn't mean it doesn't have a role moving forward. The room phone of the future may serve as a hub for a larger connected experience.

Imagine a guest arrives at your property and pairs his mobile device to his room phone. Now they can use their mobile to control the TV and the sound system, perhaps even the blinds. They can use it to request a wake-up call if they find themselves out late. You can let them know that their dry cleaning is ready, even if he's across town at a meeting. And if he needs to take his call from your lobby into a cab so he doesn't miss a meeting, the handoff from Wi-Fi to 4G is seamless.

Mobile Device As Door Key

It's fascinating that a function as simple as a door key could undergo so much evolution. But the tool that once started as a carefully shaped piece of metal quickly turned into electronic key cards, and is set to shed its physical form altogether. The next evolution of the hotel key transforms it into data on a guest's mobile device. Some hotels have already started implementing this, whether it involves NFC technology or visually scanning a code like many airports now do with plane tickets.

The Seamless Use Of Apps

There's a glut of clever apps that make complex tasks — and even painfully difficult ones — a breeze. The issue is picking and choosing. It's hard to collect all of your favourites and then use each one selectively. That borders on overload and can test the limits of the benefit they intended to provide. The ability to wrap all of your favourite apps into a platform that's supported by your hospitality provider makes all the difference. It means you get personalised amenities and hacks, each baked in to the overall experience.

For example, we have pulled together these gems as a part of the daily/overall service experience:

- Duffl (my favourite) — allows you to hit multiple cities without worrying about baggage
- Open Table and Blue Apron
- TripAdvisor and CityUnscripted.

Artificial Intelligence

Hotels are now using AI to create unique and memorable customer experiences in combination with automated room features. For instance, when a room is programmed by the guest to "wake-up" during the morning hours, AI could trigger automated features such as the drapes opening and turning on a preferred news or radio station.

AI could also be used, in the form of push marketing offers or chatbots, to remind hotel guests to grab a meal or drink from the onsite bar and restaurant, to schedule a room cleaning service, or to add a spa service to their stay.

SEAN WORKER
President & CEO, BridgeStreet

BridgeStreet is using technology to push the industry forward. Completely dedicated to their new technology platform where it is EASY to LIST and BOOK ExtendedStay experiences, BridgeStreet has embodied these transformational changes. It's no longer sufficient to rely on incremental improvements to marketing and service delivery to attract tomorrow's guest. To reach tomorrow's Business Traveller, we may have to re-imagine how we'll relate to an increasing diversity of future guests with constantly evolving needs.
Yes, it's a bold new world.
And we're excited about it.
Visit BRIDGESTREET.COM