Hospitality Technology Predictions for 2017

While there have been many heretofore predictions about the coming year, both for the hospitality industry and for technological advancements, none thus far have effectively bridged the gap between these spaces. When it comes to technology, hotels are often seen as laggards to adoption, but I don't see this as the case. Quite the opposite in fact, with our resources and the diverse range of operations, we're very well situated to be the benefactors of many incredible tools soon to be released.
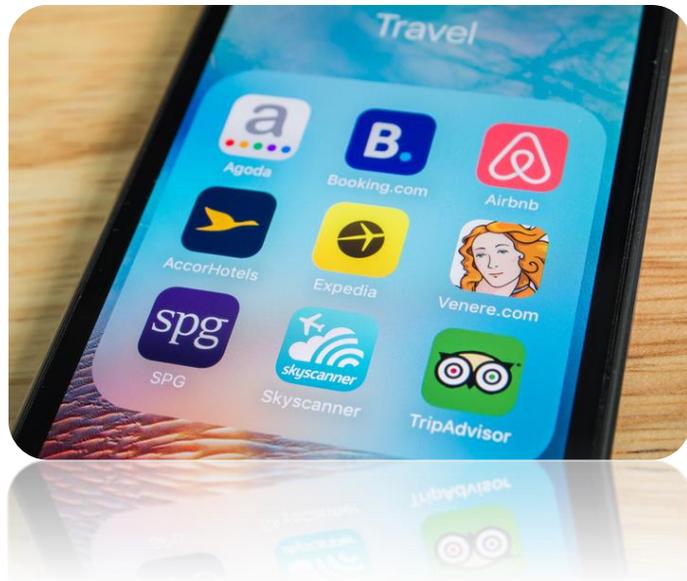
Hence, it would serve you well to keep pace with what's on the forefront so that you can make a better decision about what will work for your particular hotel. Highlighting general industry trends and a few companies that I consider to be game-changers, here are my top five hospitality technology predictions for 2017.

1. **Energy efficiency everywhere.** Whether or not you are a proponent of climate change is besides the point that adopting cleaner, more efficient electronics and equipment can save your property upwards of millions of dollars on your annual energy and utilities bill. To highlight that third word in the first sentence, energy savings are no longer the solely the domain of fringe appliances or incompatible devices. Just about every operation can be more efficiently managed – to name three, laundry units that more effectively recycle water, new OLED TVs that cut down on power usage or smarter thermostats that better regulate room temperatures. There are also guest-facing savings programs like towel reuse, keycard-activated lighting and carbon offset donations, all of which help to some degree and, more importantly, help people become accustomed to this new normal.

2. **Further proliferation of smart televisions.** It used to be that your TV was designed for the sole purpose of entertainment via the delivery of movies or cable channels. Now, however, they have more in common with computers as they can handle all the mandatory viewing experience channels from broadband to streaming services (and all without the need for an external box) in addition to integrating with other room devices such as the blinds, lighting or that shiny new smart thermostat. That's just the start, though, as now these smart TVs are moving beyond the guestroom with a myriad of uses in public spaces such as replacing signage, acting as in-elevator touchpads or even serving as lobby wall art. One of the most fascinating applications came from a demonstration by Samsung whereby they replaced a bathroom mirror with a device that let you comb your hair while you also checked the weather forecast and swiped through your Instagram feed.

3. **The housekeeping technology revolution is nigh!** If there ever was a bona fide slowpoke on the technology adoption front, it would be the housekeeping department – more so than any other, an operation where great social capital is integral to success. Even with companies like Maidbot, Intellibot and Savioke, realistically we are still a couple decades ago from having robots clean our guestrooms instead of living persons. In the interim, though, there are quite a few innovators striving to make your housekeepers better at their jobs through the use of various technologies. There are now numerous software modules that seamlessly integrate with nearly any PMS to more effectively schedule shifts while other providers are focused on accountability and reducing shadowing time such as Lobster Ink with its online learning platform or Novility which combines a live, motion-capture training apparatus with a back-end monitoring system.

4. **Easily integrated future upgrades.** Forced obsolescence will itself soon be obsolete, somewhat at least. Many consumers these days are hesitant to purchase unproven or next gen devices because they fear that they will have to through the entire buying cycle within three years' time because their current slate is already out-of-date. It's a headache that many providers are addressing by only introducing forward-thinking devices and firmware that are adaptable to future innovations so you don't have to constantly blow your capex budget on new electronics. To build upon the previous points, smart TVs now has excellent internal operating system upgrading abilities while

most other software tools have migrated to cloud-based systems that only require a browser and no disruptive installations whatsoever.

5. **An unending democratization of devices.** We've seen this throughout the modern era whereby a certain piece of technology starts off at prices too expensive for the average person only for new entrants and economies of scale to bring those prices down to fair market levels. Barring some exponential leap in virtual reality processing ability – that is, solving the display latency problem – there's nothing truly 'game changing' hitting the market in the next six to twelve months insofar as major innovations that will forever impact the ways we interact with the world. Instead, companies are largely focusing their efforts on maturing what's already out there by increasing accessibility to next gen iterative devices and expanding functionality. We're seeing this for smart TVs which have better prices for larger sizes with each passing season alongside more robust integration with other nearby electronics, more advanced internet-based services and interesting new uses beyond their traditional placements in the guestroom. While you might initially think it wise to keep waiting for prices to drop to the commoditized range, this is folly because by the time you are ready to upgrade, everyone else already has and your new tech won't have any emotional impact on guests. In other words, knowing that this democratization is endless, it's your duty as a leader to stay on the forefront by implementing change before the average household or office building has done so.

As is the case with many incremental upgrades, it's no longer a matter of what you can do but of what you should do. That is, while it would be great to revamp every crack and crevice with the latest gizmos, you must first address where your core pain points are, and then research what technologies are available to ameliorate your problems. For a final suggestion, make plans to go to HITEC, the tradeshow focused solely on hospitality technology, which for the first time ever has a European show at the end of March followed by the annual June exhibition happening this year in my hometown of Toronto.