By Leslie Lang, Contributing Editor • Additional reporting by Lisa Terry

Frictionless Hotels
THROUGH Omni-Engagement

FROM **PRE- TO POST-STAY,** HOW HOTELS CAN BENEFIT FROM ENABLING SEAMLESS EXPERIENCES

HOTELS RECOGNIZE that omni-engagement is key to enhanced customer experience and seamless operations. Using technology to engage guests from pre-stay, during and while they are on-site to check-out and beyond, requires thoughtful investment. In this Business Solution Brief, *HT* highlights five ways that investments in frictionless experiences pay dividends.
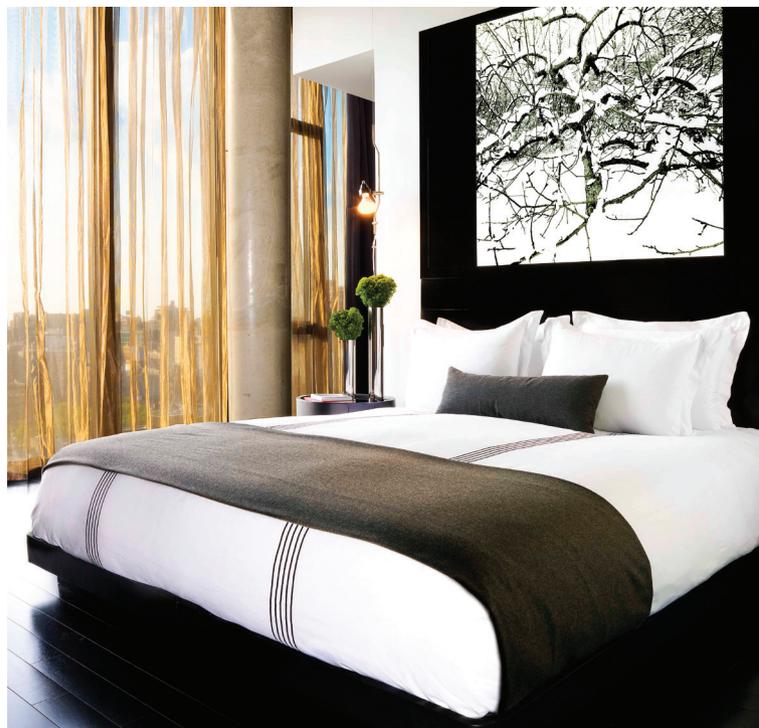
Issue: Data Blindspots

Solution: When guests book through an OTA or other booking service, hotels don't always receive complete information such as phone numbers and email addresses, which can hamstring hotels looking to generate repeat and direct bookings.

"It's an issue hotels are still working on figuring out," says Noah Lemaich, head concierge of Sixty Hotels (**www.sixtyhotels.com**). Without the ability to interact with a guest before arrival, he notes, nor add them to your database, the hotel starts out already behind.

The property management system is a vital component of gathering guest data and can help hotels bring bookings back home. WebRezPro (**www.webrezpro.com**) acknowledges that analytics are essential. Having access to guest data not only helps hotels identify who guests are, but also why they choose a property. Those key analytics will help to shape relevant offers for the most profitable customer segments, ultimately driving direct bookings.

One solution is to collect guest data at first point of contact, either at check-in or if they call into the hotel pre-visit, a strategy used by William Vale Hotel (**www.thewilliamvale.com**). Record guests' preferred booking channel to tailor future offers.

SiteMinder (**www.siteminder.com**) suggests capturing and acting on guest data you do receive by integrating the channel management tool with the PMS/CRS, rather than manually entering data and risking delays and errors. Data then becomes accessible to revenue management, marketing and other important tools. Make sure the integration uses standardized coding. William Vale uses SiteMinder to automatically integrate its OTA reservations, while its RMS automatically feeds rates to the OTAs.

Sixty Hotels makes sure it has access to guest data by using ALICE (**www.aliceapp.com**), which allows the hotel to communicate with guests pre-arrival and post-stay.

Issue: Cumbersome check-in process

Solution: Although guests say they would rather check-in using mobile devices, many hotels still don't offer this option. According to HT's 2016 Customer Engagement Technology Study, two-thirds of hotel guests say being

Pictured Above: Sixty Hotels communicates with guests pre- and post-stay by using ALICE to access guest data.

Enabling the Frictionless Mobile Guest Experience

WARNING: MOBILITY IS NO FAD

56%

of guests say the ability to use a smartphone as a room key will influence hotel selection.

FOCUS ON INNOVATION

53%

of hotels name improving digital customer engagement as a top strategic goal for 2017.

Hotels that aren't engaging guests via mobile devices do so at their peril!

COMPETITION IS FIERCE

89%

of hotel operators plan to invest in technologies that offer a mobile experience across the guest lifecycle in 2017.

1 OUT OF 4

hotels say mobile check-in/out is a top tech investment area to deliver a frictionless experience.

Still think it's not worth the investment?

GAIN
COMPETITIVE EDGE

53%
OF GUESTS **WANT** MOBILE KEY

+ PLUS

12% ONLY
OF HOTELS OFFER MOBILE KEY

= OPPORTUNITY

able to check-in on a mobile device would influence hotel selection, but only 39% of hotels offer it.

As guests increasingly expect and demand control over all aspects of their stay, the check-in will offer a first impression on a hotel's ability to deliver a frictionless experience.

Based on guest research and feedback, Marriott International, Inc. (**www.marriott.com**) launched a newly redesigned mobile app for iOS users and expanded its use of mobile key, rolling out to more than 500 hotels globally this year. Reward members who check-in using its mobile app — can choose to skip the front desk and go straight to their room, using their smartphone to open the door.

"Smart devices are now everyone's indispensable travel companion, as more and more travelers increasingly expect to have their needs satisfied using their mobile phone," says George Corbin, senior vice president of digital, Marriott International.

Radisson RED (**www.radissonred.com**) created a dedicated hotel app that enables guests to manage bookings and hotel stays from start to finish. Guests can interact with reservations and enter their guest room from a single platform on their own devices, seamlessly. The RED app uses Hospitality Mobile Access from ASSA ABLOY (**www.assaabloy.com**) to assign guestrooms and generate encrypted digital keys. ASSA ABLOY has made advances in its mobile key systems to help hotels track guests and provide targeted, tailored messages.

"Our aim was to provide guests with an omnipresent digital approach that fits guests' wants and needs," says Christel Cabanier, curator.

Issue: Delayed Communication Impacts Satisfaction

Solution: Many hotels still use an inefficient hodgepodge of systems that communicate poorly with each other, if at all.

"Guests and staff just want things to 'work' in the way that's easiest for them," Lemaich says.

Oracle Hospitality (**www.oracle.com**) advises that with instant access to information via mobile, guests expect a different hotel experience than in the past, including interactive and personalized service.

Amadeus (**www.amadeus.com**) recommends providing a modular, component platform to reduce complexity so hoteliers can concentrate on brand and guest experience. Amadeus Service Optimization Systems take any guest request, whether it came in by phone or text, in-room, in person, or via WhatsApp, and automates and streamlines the workflow.

Issue: Guests Prefer Faceless, Mobile Communications

Solution: At Brooklyn's Wythe Hotel (**www.wythehotel. com**), lead concierge Erin Webb says that while guests won't answer cell phones when staff calls to confirm dinner reservations or let them know their room is ready early, they'll respond to a text message. The property uses ALICE to message guests, which has increased effective communications between guests and staff.

Agilysys (**www.agilysys.com**) also finds that guests prefer to communicate with staff through mobile devices, rather than face-to-face. The company has added texting capabilities to its systems, which allows hotel staff to message guests when necessary. Providing guests an easy way to communicate with staff and place orders, can increase upsell opportunities. Ease of ordering leads to increased room service and ancillary revenue.

Voice control is emerging as the next must-have to provide seamless communication. Guests at hotels that use the EcoSmart intelligent automation platform from Telkonet (**www.telkonet.com**) can contact a concierge directly from the app or using Amazon's Echo voice platform.

Issue: Seamless Check-out & Post-stay Engagement

Solution: According to *HT's 2016 Customer Engagement Technology Study,* two-thirds of guests want mobile check-out, but only 25 percent of hotels offer it.

RLHC (Red Lion Hotels Corporation; **www.redlion. com**) has enabled digital wallet and mobile payment for its new mobile application Hello Rewards through a partnership with MyCheck. This gives guests an end-to-end experience on- and off-property — from reservations, to check-in, viewing the hotel folio, ordering room service, paying in hotel restaurants to check-out. MyCheck MyWallet, which works on Apple Pay, PayPal and Android Pay, allows guests to check-out and even change payment type without stopping at the front desk.

To address post-departure guest engagement, Hotelogix (**www.hotelogix.com**) works with TripAdvisor to provide hotel owners an automated option of receiving reviews after a guest leaves. It also enables post-stay mailers to encourage repeat bookings and referrals.

John Edwards, CIO of Red Lion, encourages hotels to think beyond the immediate benefits that mobile apps can offer for guests.

"Guests aren't just looking for pre-arrival or check-in functionality in an app," he says, "they also want features that enhance their stay on property and after departure." **HT**

COMCAST BUSINESS B4B BUILT FOR BUSINESS | WWW.BUSINESS.COMCAST.COM

EXECUTIVE Q&A

Solid Networks Provide Framework for Frictionless Guest Experience

REGAN YELDELL, SENIOR DIRECTOR, ENTERPRISE MARKETING VERTICAL SEGMENTS, COMCAST

What technology will play the biggest part in enabling hotels to provide frictionless experiences for guests?

YELDELL: Mobile will only become more pervasive with Bluetooth and beacon technology continuing to play a leading role enabling smartphone apps, such as the ability to unlock doors and adjust in-room thermostat temperatures or TV channels. Allowing personal mobile devices to be used as room controls will become a necessity for hotel operators to meet the needs of tech-savvy guests. This ability is becoming a key element of personalizing the customer experience — by letting guests use their own devices to set preferences in a 360-degree connected environment. As homes become "smarter" and more connected, creating this smart home-away-from-home experience will become more expected.

With "always-on" connectivity playing a leading role in customer engagement, how will this impact hotel networks?

YELDELL: Hotels will need to separate WiFi networks into corporate and public-facing networks to address security requirements and evolving customer expectations. High-speed Ethernet, directly connected to the cloud, will serve as the dynamic machine behind new guest experiences and distributed enterprise operations between hotel locations, corporate headquarters and the systems that keep business humming. While customers enjoy coffee, refreshments and connections via public WiFi, hoteliers will be gathering and analyzing customer behaviors to create a warm, welcoming environment through instant offers and opportunities for greater guest engagement and satisfaction.

As customized service is expected and demanded, how must hotels address analytics?

YELDELL: Big data and artificial intelligence will create a new "concierge" culture by creating fresh, personalized experiences for guests. The ability for software and machines to collect and synthesize data through the Internet of Things will enhance hoteliers' ability to tailor offers and anticipate guest preferences to meet and exceed expectations. Guest rooms will feature preset temperatures, radio and TV stations and customized welcome messages, with tailored offers — developed by big data, specifically with each guest in mind.

What technologies can help hotels meet and exceed expectations for in-room experiences?

YELDELL: As guest rooms become more like "smart homes away from home," in-room services will evolve and deliver the promise of personalized TV anywhere. Guests will be able to enjoy TV as they're accustomed to at home, including video-on-demand and digital video recording (DVR) capabilities. Voice-activated TV controls will also play a role and guests who are used to transferring content from a mobile device to the big screen at home will be able to do so in-room.

What role will Internet of Things play in empowering hotels to remove friction from all phases of the guest lifecycle?

YELDELL: By connecting every aspect of the guest room, hotels will be able to provide more personalized experiences to customers. Connected thermostats will be able to recognize guests from their mobile settings and pre-adjust to preferred temperatures. Automatic blinds will set themselves to guest preferences, based on time-of-day and previous guest settings. Mini bars will be able to instantly alert staff that favorite guest items need to be replenished, so guests will be able to immediately satisfy their next cravings.