



hotel

TECHNOLOGY

GUIDE

December 2013

Differentiating touches at luxury hotels

- BYOD
- Wi-fi
- Connectivity
- In-Room Entertainment

Simply wired...

By Lachlan Colquhoun and Daniel Chan

GMs:



**Mr. Daniel Welk, Hilton
Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia**



**Mr. Jason Friedman, The
Siam, Bangkok, Thailand**

HOTEL TECHNOLOGY is anything but simple. While we are focusing on all the bells and whistles, are we moving in the right direction? Some hoteliers in the luxury segment propose that human touch is the backbone of hospitality and this fundamental should not be changed, regardless of technological advancement. Similarly, it has been suggested that intuitiveness and ease of use trumps functionality. Hotel Management Asia caught up with two general managers from luxury hotels for their views on the latest trends in hotel tech.

Hotel Tech Guide: If you were allowed only 3 words to describe your hotel, what would they be?

Daniel: Bold, Forward-thinking, Seamless

Jason: Experiential, Personal, Luxurious.

The cities your hotels are located in are competitive and ever-changing markets. How do your hotels perform, compared to other properties in these markets? What changes in demographics or purchasing behavior of your guests have you noticed?

Daniel: Given all the change that has been taking place in our industry, our economy, and in the consumer, we have learnt that most importantly, it drills down to guests' engagement in a way that makes them feel emotionally connected to the brand. It is the guest's experience during their stay that keeps them coming back. Providing exceptional customer service has always been the most inherent part of Hilton Kuala Lumpur's culture and DNA. It is more important now than ever before that we focus on creating an experience that is truly extraordinary and attuned to each of our guest's desires, needs, and preferences.

Jason: Bangkok is an incredibly competitive city but there is one market where Bangkok has had zero hotels servicing what has always been a huge amount of demand. And that has always been for the small super luxury resort. You've always had a lot of people traveling around Thailand doing luxury resorts, but then they have no choice but to go to a 400 hotel property when they come to Bangkok. So we were able to build a product that already had high demand in the marketplace with no direct competition. So we can focus on product, without having to compete on rate like everyone else does in this town.

When it comes to new technology and innovative products, what three amenities set a hotel apart from its competitors?

Daniel: The three key amenities that would set a hotel apart from its competitors would be:

1. Seamless Wi-Fi Access – Guests nowadays want to be connected anywhere and anytime.
2. Intuitive technology design (BYOD)–With the recent exponential growth of smart phones and tablet devices in recent years, the trend nowadays is moving towards guests bringing their own devices (BYOD) and watching their own content online. The technology which

the hotel offers must be able to support this content in order to remain competitive.

3. Mobility–To set a hotel aside from the rest, we must have the means to interact and interface with our guest anywhere and anytime in the hotel by leveraging on mobile technology and applications to deliver a unique guest experience.

Jason: So many hotels incorporate an iPad into the experience. This creates complications to systems and services and I am a firm believer that in the luxury world the shift will be towards using technology for greater human to human interaction, not to replace it. Our hotel is state of the art, but you can't order dinner through the TV. Our technology creates convenience for the guest, but you still have to talk to somebody

What new equipment or technologies have made it into your guestrooms recently?

Daniel: Hilton Kuala Lumpur has been a pioneer in Hilton Worldwide's StayConnected program setup since early 2013. This program provides our guests with a consistent and high quality internet experience at any Hilton Worldwide property, anywhere in the world.

Jason: Aside from our state of the art IPTV system which allows for seamless coverage throughout the property, no.

Speaking of technology, what is the one product or solution that is on your wish list, but you have yet to come across?

Daniel: If there is any solution which is on my wish list, it would be having smart technology which can enhance the total guest service experience. From the moment a guest steps into the hotel, the technology should allow the hotel to immediately identify the guest by their name, their room preference, membership, etc. When the guest steps into their room, the technology should also be able to set up the room with their preferred room setting like room temperature, lighting mood, favorite TV channels, etc. Everything should be done in a seamless manner with minimal human intervention. This should be the next level of

technology which we should be looking at, but at the moment have yet to come across.

Jason: Only thing that is really cool, is Apple TV's. I have a stock of them, and certain guests want it, so we have that available. It's something we put in selectively.

Tell us a bit of your social media and mobile marketing strategies: what works for you and what doesn't? What are the hurdles you are facing along the way?

Daniel: Nearly nine out of 10 Hilton Worldwide guests are socially active and 43% of our guests expect companies to listen to what they're saying, tweeting, and posting online—and to respond in real time if they have complaints. With information readily available everywhere, a customer's enquiry, complaints, or great reviews are all accessible at the flick of a button and the click of a mouse. This means whether we like it or not we have to be a part of those social media conversations.

Jason: We have, but it depends on the market. Facebook works well with our Thai clientele, because they are here. For everyone else, it's keeping people familiar with us.

Internet access and Wi-Fi remains a controversy amongst hoteliers. Should hotels charge for it or should it be free? Why?

Daniel: Hilton properties have started to offer complimentary free wireless access to our guests in all our public areas and the hotel lobby. This is a growing trend and hotels will just have to constantly evolve and adapt their service offerings according to market demands and the needs of the guests.

Jason: Controversy comes from hotels wanting to charge. Wi-fi is like electricity, it's a necessity. A hotel is being greedy by charging for it. But because so many bookings are through OTAs, hotels want to unbundle the wi-fi from the showing rate.

Another hot topic right now is mobile door access, since it enables guests to bypass front desk. Will it be a spreading trend that will transform the luxury / upper upscale segment, or will it be a way for limited as a way for mid-scale and budget hotels to save on labour costs?

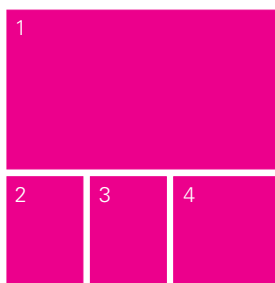
Daniel: This could be a way for mid-scale and budget hotels to save on labour costs. However, we cannot totally remove the dedicated human touch required to provide an opportunity for our service staff to interact with our guests. This is especially true for luxury or upper scale hotels like ours. We will still need to have some direct integration with our guests to understand and hear from them in order to serve them better. I would say this is what quality service is all about, especially for us all at Hilton.

Jason: I think it's a great way forward for the convenience of business travellers. I don't think it's a great way forward for the luxury travel experience. You don't want your guests leaving the hotel without having any final interaction with the staff.



1. Hilton KL
2. The lounge lobby
3. Vascos restaurant
4. Bed room
5. Graze restaurant

1. The Siam hotel exterior
2. Chinese villam bathroom
3. Infinity pool
4. Maenam suite, bedroom



With recent technological advancement, hotels are gradually losing the human touch. Yet, Oriental Hospitality has always been the distinguishing factor for hotels in Asia. Are service standards slipping? Are there fewer opportunities for hoteliers to impress? What are your views on this?

Daniel: Asia has always been synonymous with good hospitality. With a strong cultural backdrop of hard work and hospitality, no matter how technologically-advanced a market is, a touch of warmth and great hospitality remains a hallmark of providing great experiences for guests. I truly believe that in good times or in bad times, we need to create a unique experience for travelers and the human touch is irreplaceable.

Jason: We can't let technology replace the interaction between guests and staff but we can use technology to enhance that. If you replace staff with technology, you are replacing the experience.

If money was no object, what would be the top three FF&E upgrades that you would do?

Daniel: Ongoing rooms upgrades, dining and entertainment venue upgrades, seamless IT solutions throughout the hotel.

Jason: We just spent US\$60 million to open the hotel with everything we needed. So nothing. We've got what we need.

With the on-going war for talent, how do you retain and attract employees? What does it take to work in your hotel?

Daniel: It takes extraordinary people with great passion to work with us. Hiring, training and retaining the right talent will win us moments of success. Our strategy is to hire the right people (and not just within the hotel industry but constantly looking out for great

talent), ensure that they are trained to be the best that they can be, and give them a career development path to retain them.

Jason: We try to create a better and more empowered workplace which lets staff take the initiative and be a bit more creative. We don't hire people based on skills sets, we hire them based on personality and then train those skills sets.

To work in my hotel, it takes passion, dedication, honesty and integrity and a really good smile.

For aspiring hotel GMs who want their own hotel someday, what is your advice in terms of career path, skillsets and experiences they should acquire?

Daniel: Value the art of listening as typically, team members and partners can provide ideas that create a fantastic competitive advantage. Value each team member equally and treat people as you would like to be treated.

Jason: You need to be a great people person. But you need to know the numbers, have a deep understanding and love for the numbers. You know how to look at the numbers and interpret them. ●

Three Cs

By Terence Ronson, ISHC

ON A REGULAR BASIS, I discuss with users of hotels, and hold planning meetings with organizations who build hotels, about the effective and efficient deployment of tech. And when you get right down to it, the basic requirements of a hotel guest are as simple as 1-2-3:

1. Connectivity 2. Charging 3. Control

Connectivity

One question that pops up on a fairly regular basis is, should we still be placing a wired Internet connection at the desk? You know exactly the type I refer to – one that has either a cable spring-loaded from some kind of heavy blob sat on a desk, or a coiled up cable found loose in the desk drawer. Perhaps if you are staying at a more up-market property, it would be housed in a nice cable bag. All too often, these have broken connectors, meaning they don't necessarily hold well in the socket of the guest's computer, contributing to a faulty and unstable connection.

Someone from the Sales or Operations team may have a knee jerk reaction and say "yes," mistakenly believing companies still need it, and that by not providing it, the chances of getting business from corporate clients will be jeopardized. Personally, I have yet to find a significant source of business that still requires this – especially through the arrival and prolific penetration of smartphones and TABs.

So if you ask me whether you need it, I say, "No, just go with Wi-Fi." Save the infrastructure cost and associated headache.

If you have particular guests who really needs this, then direct them to your Business Center, or if you have IP phones in your rooms, then the likelihood is that there will be a through port which could be enabled for this purpose.

While on the subject of connectivity, there are a couple of extra golden rules you should apply:

Rule 1: Do not restrict the number of devices a guest can connect to the Wi-Fi network.

Rule 2: Do not keep asking a guest to re-authenticate on your Wi-Fi network when they move across your property.

Rule 3: If a guest stays more than one night, and wants to pre-pay Wi-Fi (if you charge) for three days – let them do it all at once. Don't ask them to re-authenticate every 24 hours.

Charging

This is not whether or not you charge for internet access, it's more to do with the quantity and positioning of power sockets – not just inside the guest room, but also in public areas.

Walk around any airport, mall, coffee shop or place where people congregate, you see people trying to tether their mobile device to some kind of power source to get a quick boost. For a lot of people, seeing that their battery level is less than 70% is like seeing the reserve fuel light come on in their car – panic sets in, and they start to wonder if they have enough to last the journey.

Control

We all like to be in control of our lives, but all too often when we stay in a hotel, we place ourselves in the hands of interior designers and consultants who think they understand what is needed – yours truly included.

Well, I can safely say that one of peeves – if not the top peeve – is "how to switch off the #@*! lights!"

Bedside control panels, controls on the TV and all sorts of apps are no substitute for the simple master switch found within easy reach of both sides of the bed.

Fooling ourselves into believing that the guest needs any more than this is way off tangent. Yes, you can have moods, modes, dimming and all sorts of bells and whistles, but when you boil it all down, they just want to switch off the #@*! lights and go to sleep.

Life is simple. It's just about the Three C's. ●



Terence Ronson

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MANAGEMENT



Lachlan Colquhoun

Editor,
Hotel Management Asia

Hotel industry at technology's cutting edge

NO MATTER WHERE you look in the hotel industry, you will see technology and the potential for more technology.

Let's start with the guest experience. Today's hotel guest is looking for a hotel experience which is so much more than the experience they have in their own home.

They want to be amazed, delighted and pampered by technology systems which cater to their comforts and whims, and take the whole guest experience to a new level of luxury. The themes are mobility, privacy, integration and simplicity, often using the guests own smartphone, laptop or tablet device.

At one time, the idea of a cable television system and – paid for – wi-fi in the rooms was the extent of what guests could expect in the way of hotel technology. Not any more.

Today, guest hotel technology combines the best of personal entertainment technology with the Bring Your Own Device (BOYD) movement to – at its best – deliver a deeply personalised luxury experience.

Want to jump the check-in queue? Well, now you can check in with your smartphone, and use it for the lift and the room door as well. This saves the guest time, enhances the feeling of exclusivity and luxury, and can save the hotel manager time and also money. A win-win, for guest and hotel.

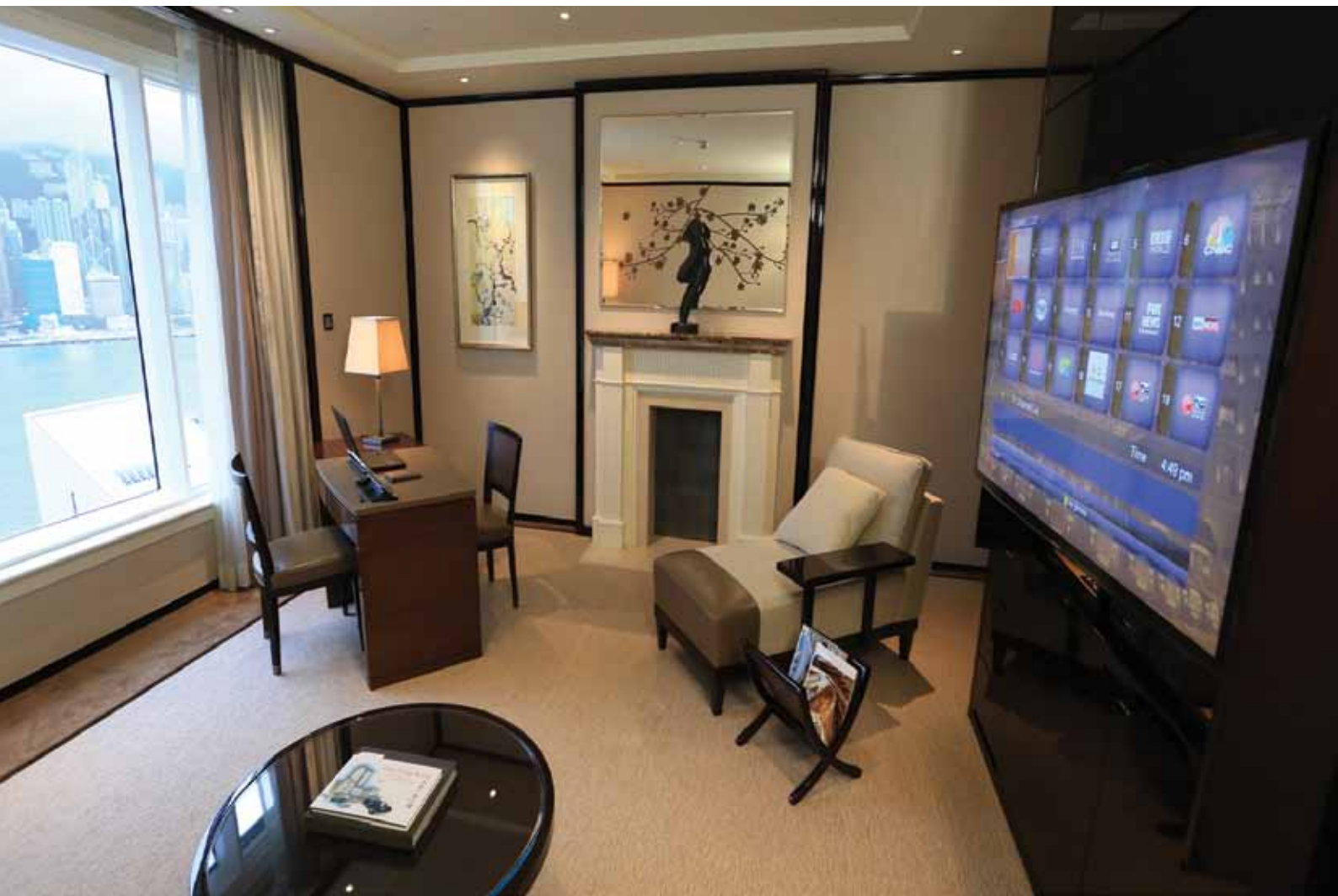
The modern hotel guest travels with his or her favourite television programs on their tablet device. They've come from a flight where they've managed to catch up on several episodes, but are desperate to see the finale. Today, they can view that on the big flat screen in the room, which has IPTV connectivity.

And those hotels which are not striving to deliver this, in Asia at least, are lacking a competitive edge.

Within hotel management itself, the move to the cloud is driving some major changes in Property Management Systems.

Those old servers humming away under the air-conditioners have been thrown away, saving space, time and money, but also delivering significant agility in the potential to connect and interface with a whole new range of systems, from energy saving monitoring to the most aggressive online travel agent.

Asia is witnessing an unprecedented growth in its hotel industry, with a pipeline of around 1800 hotels totalling over 380,000 rooms. With technology now a major differentiator for hotels, and with Asia leading the charge, we are on the cusp of an explosion of exciting innovation in the industry. ●



Samsung leads the way

As technology has become a differentiator in the hotel industry

Lachlan Colquhoun reports.

TECHNOLOGY, says Craig Gledhill, has become a differentiator in the hotel industry and the Samsung brand is the brand of choice for those hotel operators wanting to differentiate on quality.

Samsung has become a leading player in hotel technology, not only through the widespread adoption of its IPTV technology at the top end of the market, but also through innovative partnerships with software developers creating new applications on the Samsung platform. Samsung tablet devices, for example, feature very strongly in hotel renovations as key devices for in-room entertainment and for accessing guest services.

“What is going on in the hotel industry is about how hotels are trying to differentiate themselves and be more targeted,” says Gledhill, Samsung Asia’s Singapore-based Vice-President of Enterprise and SMB.

“What we are seeing is a lot more segmentation in hotels and what that is doing is really driving hotels to offer some more personalised service features, and by doing that they start to analyse where they

can add customer value to the people who stay in their premises.

"To the business traveller, they will say 'how can I make my hotel more appealing' and what is happening is that this then moves them into the area of technology, and that is something that Samsung really prides itself on."

The key themes in hotel technology, says, Gledhill, are integration, mobility, and personalisation. In many cases, these all come back to the hotel guest's Samsung smartphone which can be integrated into a whole suite of applications from the moment they enter the hotel property.

"I might walk into the hotel, and the hotel knows that I am there and it will send me a text message of welcome," he says.

"If it is really advanced, it can then send me my electronic room key and use NFC technology on my phone, so I can just walk up in the lift, tap my phone, walk to the room door, tap my phone and enter, and I haven't had to go and stand in a queue to check in and get my key.

"The other thing we are seeing through our solution partners is that you can actually do room settings – and this is one I particularly like in Asia – and turn on your air conditioning while you are out before you even get back into the room."

Samsung technology has been used in some of the most significant hotel upgrades in Asia, such as Hong Kong's prestigious Peninsula Hotel.

At the Peninsula, the hotel selected Samsung as part of its hospitality displays. Standard guest rooms were furnished with displays of varying sizes – from 22 to 55 inches – and three Samsung Galaxy Tablets in each room.

The displays enabled guests to watch full HD video content, connect to web-based smart TV content, display content from the guest's own device, and operate in-room systems such as air-conditioning, lighting, curtains, messages and the room printer. The goal was to build a Peninsula custom app which enabled the integration of tablet devices with the displays and the in-room controls.

"We see hotels which use Samsung products as ones which really stand out as a premium brand," says Craig Gledhill.

"When a guest walks into a hotel room and sees a Samsung television, it really gives them a feeling of prestige, and we certainly have a segment of the market where that applies."

In another key Samsung implementation, US-based hospitality provider White Lodging deployed Samsung 590 Series Smart Hospitality TV's, including H-Browser, for all guest rooms at its three Clark & Grand branded hotels.

H-Browser, developed as part of an ongoing partnership with solutions provider Guest-tek, offered the hotels a streamlined, robust and full-featured system, all delivered over IP, and without the need for a set-top box.

Samsung technology is finding its way into hotels all around the world as the premium technology of choice. In September, Canalta Hotels – one of Western Canada's fastest growing hotel groups, announced an exclusive deal with Samsung to supply entertainment electronics.

The deal will bring Samsung Electronics Canada, a global leader in digital media and digital convergence technologies, to guest rooms

in all 37 Canalta properties, and will also extend into future properties including new properties being built this year.

Another key Samsung technology is Magicinfo, a remote control technology enabling users to play a wide range of content – from video, images, PowerPoint and Flash – using a USB or after connecting with a server. It can deliver full screen or multi-frame layouts.

Samsung's Craig Gledhill says the firm's technology is not just about the guest experience, it can also create efficiencies in hotel management, and can drive higher revenues in areas such as food and beverage (F&B), largely through making it much easier for guests to access services.

"Hotels can use our technology to turn off lighting and air-conditioning and drive energy efficiencies," he says.

"And we've also seen great benefits in staff management and housekeeping applications.

"For example the cleaning person can clean the room, tap on an app, which notifies the supervisor to check the room and then make it available, and this is all done through an app on a mobile phone."

From his extensive travels throughout the world, Gledhill's assessment is that Asian hoteliers are "real trailblazers" in the implementation of technology. Returning to Asia from travels in other parts of the world, he says he notices that the region's hotels are ahead of the rest of the world in terms of technology implementation, and in making technology a centrepiece of the guest experience.

"The Asian hotel industry is highly competitive and perhaps travellers here are more discerning," he says.

"It all means that this region is at the forefront of hotel technology innovation."

Samsung's hotel technology goal, says Gledhill, is to drive the guest experience throughout integrated and personalised systems, often using the guest's own devices, to enhance the convenience and enjoyment of the hotel stay.

"We really want to deliver that end to end experience," he says.

"While it is critical for guests, we also want to make life easier and more efficient for the owner, so there's a significant dual purpose." ●

Peninsula Hotel Delivers Exceptional In-Room Entertainment with Samsung Hospitality Displays

Overview

Challenge

Provide guests with an in-room entertainment experience that is advanced, immersive and convenient

Solution

Samsung hospitality displays integrated with Galaxy tablets and in-room systems

Results

Guests enjoy sleek, advanced displays with a wide variety of web/broadcast content and seamless connectivity with in-room systems and personal devices

Challenge

The Peninsula Hotel needed to implement an advanced in-room technology for guest entertainment, communications, and comfort. The hospitality displays would be the centerpiece of the state-of-the-art system and had to:

- Deliver an immersive viewing experience
- Harmonize with the “modern elegance” room decor
- Integrate seamlessly with other infotainment and comfort systems
- Provide long-term durability and manageability

About the client

The Peninsula Hong Kong is the flagship hotel of the Hong Kong & Shanghai Hotels Limited and has nearly 300 luxury rooms and suites. The hotel chain serves affluent business and leisure guests and builds loyalty through impeccable service, elegant décor, and modern in-room technology. The company also operates prestigious properties in other major cities including New York, Shanghai, Beverly Hills, Manila, Bangkok, Paris, Chicago, Tokyo, and Beijing.

Solution

The Research and Technology team of the Hong Kong and Shanghai Hotels was responsible for developing and implementing Peninsula’s in-room technology upgrade. “Our guests expect the in-room technology to be very advanced, very user-friendly, and very intuitive,” says Mr. Ingvar Herland, General Manager, Research and Technology. After a thorough evaluation, the team selected Samsung hospitality displays. Standard guest rooms were furnished with two displays (22” and 46” size class), while the one-bedroom suites were furnished with three displays (22”, 46”, and 55” size class). In addition, each room was outfitted with three Samsung Galaxy Tablets (10.1”). The displays enable guests to:

- Watch Full HD video content on large LED screens
- Connect to Web-based Smart TV content
- Display content from a guest’s own device
- Operate in-room systems like air conditioning, lighting, curtains, messages, and printer

The hotel deployed nearly 700 Samsung hospitality displays for their immersive viewing experience, sleek design, and seamless connectivity.

Immersive Viewing

Samsung hospitality displays have full HD resolution, high brightness screens, and with enhanced color contrast and color management that provides an immersive viewing

experience. “With Samsung panels, there is just no question about the quality of the product - they always provide for a good resolution and contrast in nearly any lighting condition,” says Mr. Edward Yu, Audio-Video Engineer.

Sleek, Slim Design

Since in-room design is critical to the guest experience, the displays had to fit the “modern elegance” room décor of the guest rooms. The displays had to be brilliant when turned on, but unobtrusive when turned off. “One of the key features of the Samsung hospitality displays is their thin profile,” says Mr. Christopher Chan, Manager, Research & Development. “The design is sleek and creates a modern and pleasant ambience.”

Seamless Connectivity

Peninsula built a custom app that enabled the Samsung Galaxy tablets to connect with the hospitality displays as well as in-room controls. “We integrated all room functions like lighting, air conditioning, curtains,



printer, stereo, broadband and of course television into a custom app that's intuitive and easy to use," says Mr. Chan. "So our guests have smart control at their fingertips throughout the room." Now, a guest can turn off the lights, open curtains, control the television channels, listen to her own music, and order in-room dining – all with the swipe of a touchscreen.

Proven Quality

The Peninsula also chose Samsung for operational reasons. Since the displays would be at the heart of the in-room technology platform, they had to be engineered for long-term reliability. "We wanted to partner with a company that makes quality products that are durable, already proven in the market, and will be around for many years," says Mr. Chan.

Reliable Support

In addition, expert technical support from Samsung was critical during the development phase. "We are always a step ahead of others in terms of our in-room technologies – we go above and beyond," says Mr. Chan. "Given the complexity of our needs, Samsung was helpful and even sent engineers to help us." The close planning and development collaboration ensured a smooth implementation.

Results

Guest feedback on the Samsung hospitality displays and Galaxy tablets has been very positive. "They love the large screens and the ability to manage all of the room functions with a simple swipe," says Mr. Chan.

The hotel has also been pleased with the deployment. "Samsung is a premium consumer electronics brand, so it fits nicely with Peninsula – a premium hotel brand," says Mr. Herland. "We are very happy to work with Samsung and the excellent relationship we have with Samsung."

The Samsung hospitality displays and tablets have been such a hit that the Hong Kong & Shanghai Hotels Limited plans to deploy them in other existing and new properties. "We are in the process of upgrading the Peninsula New York with Samsung and will outfit our new Paris hotel with Samsung as well," says Mr. Chan. "We are also expanding into other markets in the coming years and Samsung will be the standard across the group."



BYOD. The next wave for hotels

By Lachlan Colquhoun

JUST AS the Bring Your Own Device (BYOD) movement is revolutionising workplace technology around the world it is also having a major impact on the hotel industry.

Business executives who are used to using their laptops, tablet devices and smartphones to integrate with any number of systems in their workplace are increasingly comfortable in using the same devices to integrate with hotel systems. The early years of this decade has seen the rapid “consumerisation” of technology, with barriers broken down between devices deployed in business, work and personal situations.

Ovum estimates that already, 70 percent of all smartphone owning professionals are using their personal device to access corporate data.

Increasingly, hotels are designing technology which interfaces with the devices carried by their guests, which opens up a new world of potential outside of the hotel room. Travellers rely on their mobile devices on a 24X7 basis, and expect that hotel internet speeds are at least as good as their home or work access.

Guest access to hotel systems through smartphones means they can remotely control the air-conditioning and curtain configuration, so the room climate can be exactly as they like when they walk in, not 30 minutes later.

Another area is guest access to lifts and the room itself, with the guest’s smartphone replacing the room key. At iClub by Regal Sheung Wan Hotel in Hong Kong, for example, guests will have the option to use their mobile device for check-in and guestroom access.

Using their own mobile device, guests at the selected-service hotel will be able to completely by-pass the front desk and check-in queues to automatically lock and unlock their guestroom doors.

Guests booking through the Regal website are prompted to register for the mobile service, and on the pre-booked arrival date a text message is sent detailing the room number. Guests then call the messaged number to receive an audio signal which is detected by a sensor to open the door. Two other Regal properties in Hong Kong, at Tin Hau and in the Soho district, also plan to offer the mobile check-in.

BYOD also poses challenges to hotel bandwidth. It is not unusual for guests to bring, and simultaneously use, an average of three personal devices during their stay. This level of BOYD can place tremendous strain on hotel network bandwidth, both in terms of speed but also potential security risks.

All this means that hotels need a BYOD policy, which is also a good way to manage guest expectations.

BYOD doesn’t only apply to hotel guests, but is also applicable to hotel employees too. Housekeepers, for example, can use their mobile phones to report on plumbing issues in guestrooms, managers can operate hotel systems remotely, and engineers can be advised of equipment problems.

All this presents challenges of governance and security, but hotels



– like many agile organisations worldwide – are adapting quickly to the BYOD world because they understand it can be a major differentiator.

Hotel employees are now carrying out an array of tasks on their personal smartphones and tablets — from documenting and reporting accidents to submitting expense reports, capturing a new opportunities and updating sales pipelines — all without ever having to turn on their computers.

It is an area which has attracted a number of solutions providers to are helping hoteliers enhance their BYOD strategies by equipping the mobile hotel workforce — primarily the engineering, housekeeping and security departments — with a mobile access on their own devices to secure and efficient access to guestrooms and the overall property.

In a hotel environment, leveraging the power of employee BYOD delivers savings in terms of time and money, and also keeps employees engaged with the technology they prefer to use, and which they find most familiar.

It is the ultimate win-win situation for both employees and management. ●

Wi-fi wars. The battleground moves outside

By Lachlan Colquhoun

GUESTS HAVE WON in the wi-fi wars with hotels. One by one, the major hotel chains have realised that one of the major irritants – and deterrents – for guests is a hefty wi-fi bill, so the move to free wi-fi has become a stampede.

So what is next? Hong Kong's Ovolo Hotels has announced an initiative which hints at the next stage of the wi-fi battle, and takes it outside of the hotel itself.

In collaboration with the Hong Kong Broadband Network, Ovolo guests at the group's four Hong Kong hotels will receive unlimited access to over 9000 HKBN wi-fi hotspots across Hong Kong.

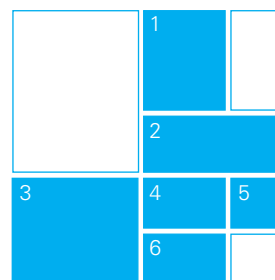
With a single log-in, Ovolo guests will be able to access wi-fi not only at the hotel property, but throughout the Territory during their visit.

The connectivity will be made available to guests from 24 hours before their stay, and for 24 hours after they check out.

Ovolo is also upgrading its internet capacity 50 times to HKBN's 1 Gbps FTTB high speed wi-fi, around 50 times the current speed at the group's hotels. Usage is free, uncapped, and available on an unlimited number of devices per room, such as the new Apple TV and 3D SMART TV's in Ovolo guestrooms.

"At Ovolo we have always believed that the internet is as essential to guests as air or hot water. It should be free, fast and plentiful," says Dirk Dalichau, Ovolo chief operating officer.

"The idea to extend this commitment outside of our hotels with free uncapped access to wi-fi hotspots across Hong Kong will allow travellers to avoid excessive roaming charges, making for huge improvements in the way they can interact globally as they travel." ●



1. Ovolo Aberdeen
2. Lo Lounge
3. Bed room
4. Suite living area
5. Seaview suite
6. Ovolo_Aberdeen_Bathroom



Connectivity moves beyond Wi-fi

By Lachlan Colquhoun



AT ONE TIME, not so long ago, the first thing a hotel guest would do on arriving in a new room would be to test the wi-fi service and then turn on the television and check the options.

Was there cable or satellite? Was there a menu of movies which could be downloaded, for a charge? How good was the local free to air service, if that was all that was available?

As with almost all areas of hotel technology, in-room connectivity means so much more today that it did in the past. "Connectivity" is a key factor which guests rate on a range of hotel review websites around the world, and today connectivity defines so much more than it did before.

Connectivity, of course, is relevant not just to the guest experience, but is also a key part of the hotel's management and operational systems, driving efficiency gains, helping to improve service and ultimately improve revenues. Booking engines and channel management, for example, are key hotel functions which benefit from enhanced connectivity, down to the level of an employee's personal device.

The integration of the guest's own devices with the internet and TV devices in the hotels mean that the room TV functions as a kind of technology hub for a range of functions which go far beyond watching television, and now encompass room control of systems such as lighting, curtains and air-conditioning.

Often, it can be integrated into the hotel's Property Management System (PMS). DigiValet, for example, offers a fully automated in-room technology system which is fully integrated with the firm's PMS offering.

While a large part of the in-room push is to enhance the guest experience and differentiate the hotel's offering, it can also be a revenue driver. The ease of use and convenience can help upselling items and creating new revenue streams from services enjoyed

in-room, from dining to media to online shopping.

The new rules of thumb are: does it improve the guest experience, and if it does, does it enhance brand loyalty, drive revenue opportunities and decrease costs?

In the modern state of the art hotel room, the TV must connect with the guest's suite of devices, matching the new patterns of entertainment usage with people watching their favourite films and television programs on tablet devices, complete with memberships of providers such as Netflix.

This was the trend which wrongfooted US hotel guest-room entertainment provider LodgeNet which was forced into filing for Chapter 11 bankruptcy recently.

LodgeNet is being revamped, but the fact is that the number of hotel rooms it serviced dropped to 1.5 million in 2011 from 2 million in 2009, at a time when the hotel industry worldwide was in major expansion.

The aim of most major hotel chains today is to have all their guest room TV's connected to the internet.

Marriott International's plan, as articulated recently by C. Scott Hansen, the group's director of guest technology, is to limit the number of TV channels its brands offer to a targeted, all high-definition lineup and augment these with Internet based



streaming content via service providers such as Netflix and YouTube.

It is a strategy also being pursued by other major global brands. Hilton Worldwide is offering a range of low price TV programs in many of its hotels in addition to a free service from DirecTV.

But perhaps the most advanced is the system now installed at the Peninsula Hotel in Hong Kong, where the revamp – at a cost of around US\$20,000 per room – features a fully customizable bedside and desk tablets in a choice of five languages, with more to follow.

Through the table, the guest organized housekeeping and concierge services, controls lighting, curtains and privacy. Connected also to a LED television, the system delivers a range of terrestrial and international television channels, nearly 500 radio stations, and HD and 3-D movies.

One interesting development has been the removal of sex-related content. Once upon a time, hotel rooms were a sanctuary – for some people – for the consumption of pornography.

If that is the case now, then it is not because hotels are offering it to their guests. Today, it's falling very much into the Bring Your Own category.

The modern hotel guest looks at the hotel room as a combination of his office and their home, and has been educated to expect a higher level of technology in the hotel than he or she experiences elsewhere.

In a competitive market, hotels need a “wow” factor which comes not just from the layout and decoration, but also from what the technology can deliver.

Can the guest access their email, use their own devices through the hotel entertainment systems and access all of the room services while they sit up in their hotel bed?

If not, then the property is not delivering world class connectivity, and the guest may be thinking of booking elsewhere next time. ●

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2. LiveAccess by Locatel
3. Mobility Companion by Locatel



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