Hotels upgrade tech to meet guests' demands

February 27 2013, by Arlene Satchell

Hotels are adopting new technologies or tapping existing ones to enhance the guest experience and better serve customers in an increasingly mobile age.

With hotel guests becoming more reliant on smartphones and other mobile devices such as iPads and laptops, demand for faster and more seamless technology before and after check-in is growing, experts say.

To that end, some hotels are installing self-service kiosks in lobbies, or arming front desk staff with handheld devices to speed the check-in process, while others allow frequent travelers to digitally check in online and even select their own rooms.

At Homewood Suites by Hilton in Dania Beach, Fla., guests who are Hilton Honors members can take advantage of its e-check-in and suite selection services.

"It's fairly popular with our regular guests," General Manager Mike Walker said of the services that allow them to check in online, or preselect the suite of their choice up to 36 hours prior to arrival.

Although usage numbers weren't available, Walker said the digital services were relatively new to the hotel, which opened in 2009, and used mostly by business travelers.

"The road warriors really like this feature," he noted. "It does save people some time."

Management at Hawthorn Suites by Wyndham in West Palm Beach, Fla., knew it needed to find a fix for the hotel's Internet service based on the "slow" and "sporadic" comments it often got on the hotel reviews website TripAdvisor.com.

"That was the only negative," said General Manager William Murray of the reviews about the 4-year-old hotel on TripAdvisor. "We were working on doing something."

And they did.

Just recently Murray signed up Hawthorn Suites for Comcast Business Hospitality, which bundles Ethernet, Internet, video and phone services customized for the lodging industry.

Now the hotel's Internet service is ten times faster than the old Web connection.

"For us it was a night and day difference," said Murray of the improved free Wi-Fi service. "Guests definitely notice it and appreciate it."

Comcast officially launched its new hospitality product suite in January. "With the rising use of tablets, smartphones and other devices, the needs of today's modern traveler are changing, making high-performance connectivity nearly just as important as price, location and loyalty programs when selecting a hotel," said Spero Canton, spokesman for Comcast's Florida region.

"The new suite of products enables hotels and motels to leverage advanced technology from a single provider to improve the guest experience, streamline back-office operations and reduce costs."

Industry trackers also say more hotels are poised to incorporate social

[media](#) booking tools to generate more direct bookings.

By the end of 2013, the majority of hotels will have booking engines integrated into their social media channels and mobile websites, according to findings of a recent survey from TravelClick, a provider of revenue-generating solutions for hoteliers.

Some 48 percent of the nearly 400 global hotels surveyed had a booking engine on Facebook or another social media site, and of the 52 percent that did not, about half planned to add one this year.

"With so many users relying on Facebook for research and information, it is critical that hotels make it easy for consumers to use Facebook to initiate a booking," Jason Ewell, a TravelClick executive vice president said.

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