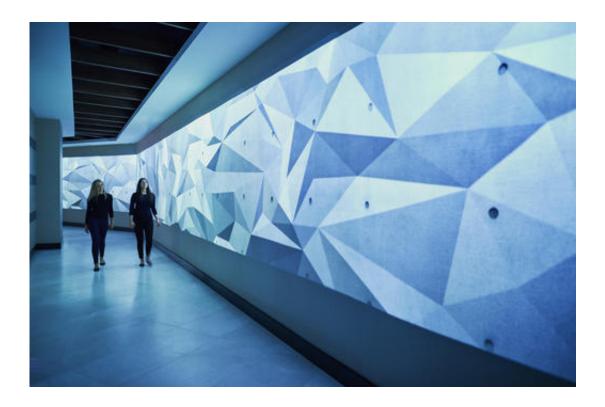# Interactive digital walls offer art and info in hotel lobby

May 12 2016, by By Beth J. Harpaz

This undated image provided by Renaissance Hotels shows a hallway at the Renaissance NY Midtown hotel in New York with an interactive digital tapestry on the wall. The digital tapestry has 50 different displays that interact with human movement as people pass by, changing colors, designs and sounds. (Troy House/Renaissance Hotels via AP)

Walk down a hallway in the new Renaissance NY Midtown hotel and the walls come alive.

On one side, there's an interactive digital tapestry of images and sounds that changes as you pass by. On the other side, merely point at the wall and a tourism portal opens up, providing information about things to do and see in response to your gestures.

"It's a unique opportunity to come in and discover the city in a different way," said hotel manager David DiFalco. "It's all designed to be interactive. We want it to be an engaging experience."

Both are examples of how the hospitality sector is going high-tech. Jessica Rodriguez, an expert on new technology in the hospitality sector who works for the Wagstaff Worldwide marketing firm, says "technology as a whole in the hotel space has advanced to a completely new level."

The tourism portal at the Renaissance feels like something out of a sci-fi movie. You stand in footprints in a circle on the floor, point at categories displayed on the wall, and screens open up delivering information on things to do within a 10-minute, 20-minute or 30-minute walk, including price, hours and a map. Attractions include shopping, shows, museums and restaurants. "It ranges from the band playing at Madison Square Garden to a real cool sushi bar nearby that maybe not a lot of people have heard about," DiFalco said.

The digital tapestry is an interactive work of art with 50 displays that respond to movement as people pass by. The tapestry changes color and form and also offers sound effects, with images ranging from leaves to buildings to starbursts to abstract art.

This undated image provided by Renaissance Hotels shows people using a digital tourism portal at the Renaissance NY Midtown hotel in New York. Users get information from the tourism portal about things to do around New York City by pointing at different screens and categories. (Troy House/Renaissance Hotels via AP)

Rodriguez says some tech applications in the hotel sector are designed to improve service, with texts that let you know when your room is ready or apps that provide keyless entry to your room via cellphone. Others combine function with fun: robots that deliver towels or room service that can be ordered by emoji text.

Among other things, technology can also help hotels gather data on what their guests require, and use that information to improve the hotel experience by anticipating customer needs.

Rodriguez says some hotels are replacing those big notebook-style directories typically found in guest rooms with tablets that offer room service menus and how-to information. Many hotels see the switch to digital as important in appealing to millennials who may think that using a landline to call the front desk for help is absurdly old-fashioned.

But Rodriguez cautioned against hotels going overboard with technology. "Sometimes you want to go analog," she said. "Sometimes you just want to turn on the light."

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If You Go...

RENAISSANCE NY MIDTOWN: The hotel's digital walls are located in a causeway on the ground floor, accessed through 218 W. 35th St. in Manhattan.