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Travelers and hoteliers turn to mobile

14 Jun 2013

From mobile apps to mobile marketing, hoteliers need to embrace the changing technological times.

Highlights

- 2013 is all about mobile technology.
- Expedia is seeing 20% of its site's transactions come from mobile devices.
- One of the biggest challenges for all properties continues to be satisfying the huge demand for in-house Internet bandwidth.

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This is the final part in a four-part series from the International Society of Hospitality Consultants discussing technology trends in the hospitality industry. Read part [one](#), part [two](#), and part [three](#).

From marketing to booking to offering concierge services, 2013 is all about mobile technology. Whether for smartphones or tablets, for guests or employees, apps will rule the hotel scene, and this trend shows no sign of slowing down.

The trends

Last year Traveport, which provides business services to the travel industry, reported that 87% of those aged 35 and under, and 80% of those 36 to 45, owned or planned to purchase a smartphone in the next six months. This increased access to the Internet is changing the expectations, demands and behaviors of leisure travelers.

Sixty percent of these travelers consider a smartphone to be their "personal travel assistant or companion," according to the study, enabling interaction to take place at any time. Both groups prefer to access pre-travel information via mobile technology rather than through traditional devices. This indicates the importance of travel itineraries that can be integrated with other apps and formats that are easily read on mobile devices. Recently Expedia reported that 20% of its site's transactions come from mobile devices

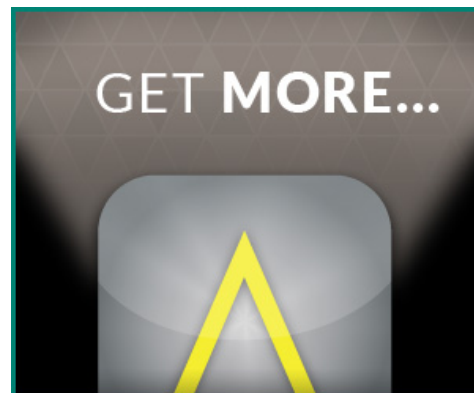


Ted Horner

Social media 2.0

More than any other industry, consumers' decisions regarding travel are influenced by the Web and, more specifically, social media. If a hotel property is not proactively managing its online presence, it does so at its own peril. One of the biggest mistakes hotel operations make in this digital age is living in denial. That is, ignoring the impact that new communication channels have on their businesses.

Online social media outlets are vital components to a hotel's online presence and overall image. In addition to Facebook, Twitter and Foursquare, relative newcomers such as Pinterest and Instagram may prove to be as important in the future.



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Interactions on these platforms can affect a property's bookings and guest spend during any given stay. While it is a daunting task to keep up with everything that might be posted, tweeted, pinned or otherwise said about an operation, it is important to pay attention, respond to, and when possible, control the conversations

Virtual concierges

In December, Conrad Hotels & Resorts announced the brand as a whole would be launching a concierge program that allows travelers to customize their accommodations through a mobile device throughout its portfolio.

And now the Ritz-Carlton, Riyadh in Saudi Arabia is launching a new virtual concierge service for business travelers, giving them the chance to customize their stay before their arrival by requesting special amenities and services such as floral arrangements, honeymoon amenities, spa treatments, dining reservations, transportation and many other numerous services. Guest itineraries will be sent to the guest once all requests have been confirmed, along with presenting an itinerary during the check-in process.

Mobile marketing

Marketing on smartphones offers a unique opportunity to engage guests in a way that's more immediate than other marketing channels.

"I think if you're looking at strictly mobile (marketing) in the smartphone sense of it, there is and probably always will be a certain degree of immediacy about it that is heightened relative to other channels," says Noah Elkin, principal analyst at eMarketer Digital Intelligence. "You have travelers who are interested in solving an immediate need. 'I need a hotel reservation today.' And the fact that, with location targeting capabilities, it allows for the consumer and the hotelier to connect in a much more direct and relevant way.

"Search is a big mechanism for discovery on mobile devices, and smartphone users in particular that are conducting searches on their devices are in the mode of trying to satisfy an immediate need," Elkin said. "Hoteliers that can target ads and content through search, they may be able to connect with consumers that way. For hotels and individual chains that have booking apps, you can certainly target consumers with offers through that mechanism as well."

Control the room with your fingertips

In-room technology has become more streamlined. Hotel guests expect their workplaces to provide the latest technology, and homes increasingly are integrating smart technology under one roof. Hotel guests are often disappointed with the devices on offer. It's no longer acceptable for guests to be fumbling about in the dark looking for a remote control for the TV, another for climate control, music, lights and so on.

But the expectations on hotels to provide sleek hardware that captures cutting edge entertainment, information and comfort applications are bigger than ever. Guests still expect to not only find easy-to-use solutions to their in-room experience but also expect to be wowed by it. A number of in-room control systems are beginning to appear in hotel rooms. These units are able to provide guests with interface devices such as iPod touch or iPad, which are used in conjunction with a small controller. In-room integrated systems offer the possibility to provide guests with a number of room functions within one device

One of the biggest challenges for all properties continues to be satisfying the huge demand for in-house Internet bandwidth. A TripAdvisor survey reported that the availability of Wi-Fi is a critical selection factor for 85% of

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travelers, and demand is made worse both by the increasing number of devices guests want to connect and those devices' increasingly heavy bandwidth needs.

Technology is constantly moving on and changing for the better, and hotels worldwide will be looking to adopt super-fast fiber optic broadband with speeds of up to 100 megabits per second. This form of Internet access is best served room by room.

Ted Horner is Managing Director of E. Horner & Associates, a technology consulting practice specializing in the hospitality industry. Mr. Horner is widely respected as Australia's leading consultant in this area. Over the last 22 years Mr. Horner has consulted for a variety of clients from developers and international operators of large resorts, boutique hotels golf clubs, convention center's and licensed clubs covering the full range of technology. In 2011 Mr. Horner established an alliance with JBA Consulting Engineers, a company started in Las Vegas in the 60's and now has seven offices worldwide with multi-discipline expertise in electrical design, security, AV, fire and safety, data center design and systems integration. In the last 12 months Mr. Horner has formed a strategic alliance with jba consulting engineers in Las Vegas who are a world leader in providing consulting advise to the casino/resort market on a global basis Mr. Horner can be contacted at +61 2 98768119 or ted@hornertech.com.au

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