

The Future of Hotels

Hotels have always been a high-touch low-tech business. Today, and into the foreseeable future, hotels are moving away from the pure 'people serving people' model towards a more high-tech low-touch business, and doubling down on digitalization. In the paragraphs below, I envision ways in which tech can innovate and enhance the guest experience throughout the guests' 6 stage hotel journey: Imagine-Book-Stay-Report-Recommend-Return.



Hotels are going to take back the **Imagine** part of the guests' journey from OTA, search, and social platforms by carefully curating informationally and emotionally engaging messages, beamed directly to past guests using sophisticated **customer relationship management (CRM)** systems via software providers like Salesforce.com, and to future guests who have clicked on, liked, or forwarded their messages on multiple legacy and social media channels. Helping guests imagine themselves in the hotel or resort via the **augmented reality** will enable them to pre-experience their stay.

With the 'book direct' campaigns going into overdrive at most hotel companies, building a one-to-one relationship to enable a smart and customized 'one-click' **Book** capability via apps are going to be more the norm than the exception. During the reservation process, and at check in, instead of agents trying to get guests to sign up for the brand's loyalty program, they will be incentivized to have guests download their app instead. Repeated use of the app will result in more customized content using **machine learning**.

Self-service, a frowned upon brand standard for hotels, especially at the high end, for example: espresso machines in luxury hotels, already prevalent in several luxury hotels, is going to be much more prevalent during the **Stay** stage enabled by intuitive, tailored, and easy to use **smart technology** of all kinds. **Geolocation** technology can help pinpoint and amplify guests' social media posts and create opportunities for hotels to surprise guests by offering value-added amenities to enhance the occasion (birthday, honeymoon, anniversary, promotion, deal closing, etc.) about which they are posting.

Real-time guest feedback systems, attended to 24 hours, via for example a text message as I received as I checked in to my stay at The Breakers Palm beach, will become the more prevalent form of dialog between guest and host hotel staff to **Report** all requests, service failures and overall satisfaction. Enabling dialog in this way will move hotel guests away from having to report their problems on social media sites, and publicly shame the hotel to get their attention, and offer them a direct, two-way, and real-time private communication channel. **Big data** will enable hotels to anticipate guests' requests and service failures to optimize each stay.

High value incentives to **Recommend** the hotel to all family, friends, and colleagues of the guest, enabled via lucrative, targeted, and easily claimed offers (no fine print) generate with the help of **artificial intelligence** (AI) systems which the guests' can upload to their LinkedIn, Facebook, Instagram and TikTok feeds, will be much better thought out and executed.

Well-timed, thoughtfully constructed collage of pictures and videos, including messages from staff from the prior stay to evoke memories, deeply personalized (same room same amenities, same special food and beverage orders, some surprises) SPNT (same period next time) or 'call back' campaigns will be designed, coupled with rich three dimensional dynamic experiences placing the guests and their favorite service providers virtually in the hotel via the **metaverse**, will motivate guests to **Return** to the same place by giving them compelling reasons to do so.

In all, in one sense the hotels of the future will be like hotels of the past, way past: **intimate, personalized, and welcoming**. In another sense, everything in the hotel will be different: **better, smarter, and faster**, enabled by technology.

--

[Dr. Chekitan Dev](#), a distinguished professor at [Cornell University's Nolan School of Hotel Administration in the SC Johnson College of Business](#), is an internationally renowned expert who wrote [the book on Hospitality Branding](#), and has testified in numerous hospitality-related lawsuits including many cases involving hotels.