Reverse Engineering the Hotel Operation

Through Digitization and Adaptation to a Changing World

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Introduction

With reduced travel options, and corporate work-from-home policies, the hospitality industry has been deeply impacted by COVID-19. This has been a wildly unpredictable year for hoteliers. For some, business has significantly decreased. However, when the threat of the pandemic passes, we will not be going back to "business as usual."

Travelling public are beginning to demand that their indoor environment contribute to their own health and well-being. In the new era of COVID-19, health and wellness has become more front-of-mind than ever. As people start returning to travelling, clean air, clean water, clean and disinfected surfaces, and social distancing will become even more important.

The definition of the guest experience is changing, and that is not only going to impact how designers design new hotels, but also how hoteliers upgrade their current properties to meet new expectations. Though purse strings are tight for almost everyone right now, hoteliers are going to need to make both immediate and long-term changes to properties to accommodate this new set of expectations and ensure guests feel not only comfortable, but safe and secure. The same applies to employees of the hotel as they return to their jobs -- from management to housekeeping to facilities engineers, everyone this industry touches will want to know that measures have been taken to keep safety from the spread of germs top of mind.

Now, more than ever, as social behavior and physical distancing impacts the way we live our lives, and the hospitality industry is facing numerous obstacles in delivering a high level of hygiene-driven safe and secure guest service, and as resources are reprioritized, there is an urgent need for leadership. And that requires a new way of thinking.

The good news is that through careful integrated technology and operations, hotel owners and operators can have it all — resource efficiency and wellness.

Rationale

As a hotelier, it is more crucial than ever to be resilient to change and responsive to the unexpected. A successful reaction to the pandemic has involved investing in and thoughtfully applying the right technologies in the right places.

It is the long-term vision, however, that hoteliers need to focus on, because it is a methodology for defining a future state and working backwards to set priorities and milestones. It is an iterative and nonlinear way of thinking that goes beyond an organization's established way of doing things. And it requires a fundamental system change.

Hotel leadership must recognize this need and initiate a study to determine the business case that can be developed for system integration of the numerous siloed software solutions currently operating in the hotel. Management must use a business case to quantitatively and qualitatively determine the economic feasibility of a system integration effort currently lacking in definition.

Imagine yourself as the guest, walking into a hotel. You have just Checked-in via the smartphone, entered a Touch-free elevator using your Smartphone application that enabled you to set both the arrival and destination floors.

On arrival at your room door, the door had automatically unlocked to allow access into the pre-assigned room. You just entered without touching the doorknob. The AC automatically switches on, as occupancy sensors recognize your presence in the room. You press a button on your phone, and the lights turn on. You immediately recognize the visual cues that indicate and reassure cleanliness.

You head into the bathroom and put your hands underneath the faucet - because you are still doing your 20-second hand-washing, just to be safe! - and the water at a pre-set temperature runs without having to touch the tap. Soap automatically dispenses. You dry your hands and

press a button on your phone opening the blinds for some natural sunlight. Finally, you plop on your bed and plug your phone into the charger that is conveniently located in your headboard, and rest after your long journey to the hotel.

Hotels will need to adapt the same contactless technology solutions to limit points-of-contact for guests in public spaces. It must become a safe haven "nest", something the travelers have refocused on in the wake of the pandemic. For example, bypassing the terminal at the front desk or the restaurant/bar – whether you give a credit card to the front desk agent/restaurant attendant or insert it yourself into the terminal handed to you by them – is no longer acceptable.

in addition to accessing the on-site parking garage, fitness centre or pool area, the smartphone could alert users when their room is ready and can unlock the door upon arrival.

Here's how:

Artificial Intelligence: With the introduction of data analysis and Artificial Intelligence (AI) in the context of guest experience management, guests expect the hotel to know if they are returning guests, and become proactive in their service, based on their past preferences. Such changes in guest expectations can have a huge impact on the hotel sector.

Check-in via smartphone: Use mobile check-in and room selection, guests will now be expecting this as the norm to avoid in-person interactions with people they don't know.

Touch-free elevators: Smartphone application that enables a more personalized, seamless experience with elevators. The guest would have the ability to call an elevator remotely from anywhere in the building and set both the arrival and destination floors in advance.

Scalable Open System Investment: To reduce the costs and risks of bringing technology into the guestroom, we look at technology that can be easily integrated into your current set-up and that allows you to add more features over time. .

Door Lock Integration: Door lock integration expands upon the benefits of basic occupancy sensor systems to paint a real-time picture of whether a room is occupied or not. This system also works with other Internet-of-Things (IoT) add-ons to communicate occupancy for energy savings.

HVAC: Air quality has long been a concern for guests and was exacerbated last year by a legionnaire's disease outbreak in North Carolina. Now, it is at the top of mind across the country: guests will want to know their HVAC systems are offering filtered air that's free from pathogens.

Touchless Faucets: In a post-pandemic world, motion-censored faucets are "need-to-have" features to combat the spread of germs amidst frequent hand washings.

App-Controlled Shading: This product allows guests to touch fewer elements of the room, with the bonus of having a major impact on the guest convenience factor (who doesn't love to open their shades in the morning without having to get up?).

Human Interaction: On the human interaction side, contactless interactions between staff and guests through digital check-in, messaging guests and digital ordering will all be critical. These technologies when adopted will allow guests to float through the hotel keeping to themselves until we collectively regain confidence.

Robotic and other Services: Robotic service and electrostatic spray disinfection technologies will aid in gaining the confidence of guests by ensuring verified cleanliness and ensuring a limited chance of COVID-19 relapses.

Now that hotels will be so focused on leaner operations, they should be more proactive in turning to software to manage all their workflows.

This change in business model could be achieved by deploying technologies that apply two specific elements: data and the "now", which combine to provide a positive impact on hotel economics. They open the door for better fiscal decision making in terms of staffing issues,

operational expenditures and increased efficiencies that save time for hotel employees who can then focus on meeting other needs of a hotel's guests.

We have a long way to go before the hospitality industry is fully back up and running, but over the past few months hoteliers have been reminded once again of the incredible resilience of people in the hotel business, and we know they can make it through to the other side!