

Pandemic speeds up the growth of guest services technology

With over 40 years of industry experience, **TigerTMS** provides world-class technology solutions to hotel groups and independent hoteliers. John Owen and Paul Hammond, CEO and independent consultant at TigerTMS, respectively, discuss the effect of the pandemic on the take-up of guest services technology.

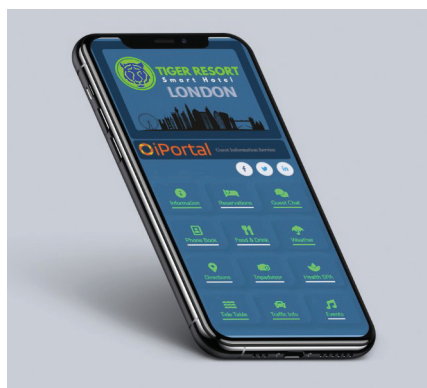
As the world emerges from the coronavirus pandemic and enters into an era of the 'new normal', there are several new challenges that many hoteliers are facing:

- change in occupancy types from business to leisure travel
- heightened guest expectations around health, well-being and social interaction
- ability to attract and retain staff.

Everyone is pleased to see travel starting to rebound from the dark days of 2020. The welcome peak in demand from 'staycationers' across Europe and the US has brought high occupancy and room rates for many properties. Similarly, the backlog of weddings, anniversaries and belated birthday parties has helped kick-start the events-led side of the industry.

Embrace the new normal

Consumer activity, whether it is travel or retail, remains volatile and highly unpredictable. It is majorly affected by the latest news regarding Covid-19 variant outbreaks, severe acts of nature (such as wildfires and floods) and travel restrictions. Business travel remains at very low levels for most countries and is forecast to remain so until at least the end of 2023. Bill Gates has gone so far in saying that "over 50% of business travel and over 30% of days in the office will go away". Employers continue to restrict staff travel and many employees have fully embraced new ways of working, leveraging online meetings and a variety of collaboration tools in favour of a better work/life balance, plus welcome savings in travel and entertainment expenses.



New technology can help hoteliers meet the challenges facing the hospitality industry.

Health and well-being have seen a significant increase in focus from people across the world over the past 18 months, for example:

- from a physical perspective, as a means of reducing the likelihood of catching Covid-19 and/or being in better physical shape to deal with any resulting infection
- mentally, due to widespread attention and removal of stigma attached to mental health disorders and conditions.

The increased adoption of technology over the past 18 months to facilitate the continuation of work, ordering of groceries and retail goods, and virtual socialising has accelerated the demise of 'bricks and mortar' retail outlets and increased the frequency of eating 'out', albeit the majority of which is in the form of takeaway or delivery. Contact-less solutions abound and the QR code has made a stunning comeback. Technophobes have had to overcome their fears to simply survive, and swathes of baby boomers and older generations are now regulars on Facebook, Deliveroo and Zoom.

New technology to meet challenges

Lastly are the acute staff shortages across the hospitality industry. Former hospitality employees finding work in different industries and many workers returning to their country of origin during the pandemic are impacting hotels' abilities to maintain high levels of guest satisfaction. Attracting, retaining and upskilling staff is proving difficult in many locations around the world.

A guest's decision of which hotel to select for their stay is likely to be based on traditional and new factors influenced by the above considerations. New technology can assist hoteliers in meeting these challenges:

- middleware software can provide freedom of application choice and lower running costs, reducing the dependency on the PMS
- IoT technology can improve operational efficiencies enhancing workflows, resulting in easier property management
- new PWA solutions on the guest's smartphone can offer a fast and easy way to access information about facilities, order food and drinks, automatic check-out and communicate with the hotel via messaging, email or voice.

The pandemic has accelerated change in many things. Hoteliers need to adapt to the new normal and retune to meet revised guest requirements and expectations. New technology will be an intrinsic factor in enabling this, enabling solutions that provide a superior guest experience. ●

Go to the *TigerTMS* website to view the white paper "The Future of Guest Services" for more information.

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