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The Fast-Forward Tech Stack for 2024

The Hotel Yearbook Technology 2024

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Will Tech touch every part of the hotel guest journey?

Guest Journey

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Synopsis

It's not just a hotel's tech stack that needs to change, it's the innate processes in the guest journey that need to be future-proofed to drive true innovation in hospitality

The hospitality industry continues to embrace technological advancements to enhance the guest experience and streamline hotel operations. We saw adoption accelerate during the global pandemic with the inherent need for contactless solutions. However, looking at other sectors such as retail, banking and e-commerce, it seems hotels still lag when it comes to digital transformation. The signs of apprehension, whether fueled by societal beliefs that hospitality is about service delivered by people not Tech, or hindered by the complexity of the existing hotel tech stack, hamper true innovation.

Looking at emerging technologies and solutions like AI, biometrics, IoT devices and cloud computing, it's evident that technology has the potential to touch every part of the hotel guest journey. The question is, what can, and should future hotel technology look like to allow our industry to be more agile, to drive innovation, respond to consumer behavior and operate more sustainably?

From my perspective and experience as a tech entrepreneur that has more recently come into the hospitality sector, I see the future of hotel technology influenced by three key drivers: guests, sustainability, and commerce.

GUESTS ARE READY, BUT ARE THE HOTELS?

Hotel guest expectations are ever evolving and are partly driven by consumers' experiences in other parts of their lives such as the way they shop, dine and bank. Over the years, I have had many conversations with hoteliers around the world who worry about guest adoption of new technology in their hotels. They express concerns about travelers not being ready; not wanting to embrace technology as part of their hotel stay or the tech being too complex to navigate. Truth is, the technology that hotel guests use today to research, book, travel, and arrive at the property is likely more complex than the Tech offered on premise in the hotel during their stay. From biometric-enabled immigration gates at airports and mobile wallets and payments to voice assistants and mobile apps, a typical traveler will have used a lot of tech on their journey before they've even arrived at the hotel's doorstep. So, guests are ready, but are the hotels?

Given the accessibility of emerging technologies, hoteliers have a great opportunity to build further intelligence into their hotel to anticipate and personalize the guest experience. Examples of this include immersive rooms with features like intelligent bedding to enhance sleep as well as smart privacy mirrors and digital walls to optimize ambience. In a hotel's public areas, the use of interactive surfaces (i.e., tables) can support smarter concierge services through digital itinerary development and aided sales of hotel services and amenities, which brings me to the next key driver of hotel tech, commerce.

DRIVING COMMERCE

For hotels to remain competitive in a rapidly changing industry, the adoption of technology is critical. Technology has the potential to elevate the guest experience and to drive ancillary

revenue, cost optimization and profitability. Hotels have a unique opportunity to curate hotel-inspired storefronts and to create new channels of engagement with guests that will drive business. There is a plethora of opportunities out there for hoteliers to explore, one of which is the creation of digital marketplaces and in-room showrooms that allow guests to buy bed linen, furniture items, art and amenities directly by scanning the items on their phone and to possibly integrate this with the hotel's mobile App. Another way to increase hotel commerce is through the set-up of pop-up stores in hotel lobbies that display merchandise, whether from the hotel directly or from community artisans. To power these services, we will see contactless payments such as mobile wallets and digital payment platforms become the norm in the future.

Personalization, including the increased use of AI-powered and biometrics-based technologies, will continue to play a significant role in hotel commerce. Hotels can leverage guest data, including preferences, past behaviors, and demographics, to deliver tailored experiences and offers. This could involve personalized promotions, room preferences, curated amenities, and customized service recommendations that can lead to better share of wallet for hotels.

Also, Augmented Reality (AR) and Virtual Reality (VR) technologies can enhance the guest experience and engagement, and influence purchasing decisions by providing virtual tours of hotel rooms, allowing guests to visualize amenities, explore destinations, and even customize their room settings before arrival.

GOING GREEN(ER)

The role of IT in realizing an organization's ESG strategy and sustainability goals is growing. A hotel's operating systems need to be agile enough to adopt new technologies that not just enable guests to travel more sustainably and for hotels to attain certain operating standards, but as an integral driver of an organization's sustainability strategy.

Guest Room Management Systems (GRMS) will continue to have a significant role in this space to support hotels to operate more sustainably. With the Internet of Things (IoT) enabling connectivity between smart devices including thermostats, lighting, and entertainment systems, energy consumption can be reduced while simultaneously enhancing guest comfort. IoT sensors provide valuable data to drive eco-friendly operations in hotels, and by integrating room controls in a hotel's mobile App, this technology is at the fingertips of environmentally conscious guests, allowing them to minimize the impact of their stay.

Guest awareness and engagement with green technologies is important here too. Through in-room displays or a hotel's mobile application, hoteliers can provide guests with energy consumption information and tips on sustainable practices throughout their stay to promote eco-friendly travel and encourage guests to participate in sustainability efforts.

Besides energy management, there are many other ways in which hotel technology can help achieve sustainability goals. This includes the deployment of digital and paperless solutions for key processes in a hotel, such as check-in and check-out including digital guest folios, e-invoicing, and digital guest

communication. These solutions reduce paper consumption and streamline operations to improve efficiency and decrease a property's environmental impact.

TECH AS A TOOL, NOT AN END SOLUTION

Having looked at the guest, commerce and sustainability as key drivers of the future of the hotel tech stack, it's clear that the opportunities to advance our industry are plentiful. What's important to consider is that the successful implementation of new technologies often requires changes in processes, workflows and roles.

In my view this is the key in driving true innovation in our industry. Too often we see hotels automating existing processes as opposed to rethinking workflows and employee roles as part of the digital guest journey. To do so effectively, it's important that hoteliers clearly define the goals and objectives they want to achieve through the implementation of technology, whether it's to increase revenue, reduce environmental impact or enhance the guest experience.

Before technology decisions are made, it's important to do a review of existing processes and identify the pain points, bottlenecks and inefficiencies that can be addressed through automation and involve key stakeholders, including your tech vendors. We would love for hoteliers to call on us more often to help in this process to ensure the technology solutions align with their needs and can effectively support the workflows.

I mentioned earlier in my article that I believe hotels guests are ready to adopt new technology, but it's equally - or even more- important that your employees are ready too. Make sure to engage staff in the process by highlighting the benefits of technology and address any concerns they may have. Build and foster a culture of innovation within the hotel and encourage employees to explore new technologies, share ideas, and experiment with process enhancements. Once new tech solutions are implemented regularly monitor and evaluate the effectiveness of both the technology and the associated processes. Gather feedback from staff and guests, analyze performance metrics, and identify areas for improvement. Use this information to refine processes, provide additional training if necessary, and adjust the tech stack as needed. Embracing innovation is an ongoing practice with technology as a tool, not the end solution.



Prince Thampi — Founder & CEO, Hudini

Prince Thampi is a serial entrepreneur with over 30 years experience in business leadership. With his broad knowledge of business formation and operations, Prince has successfully incubated numerous technology start-ups, raised capital, and nurtured them to growth stage. Prince is Co-founder and CEO of Hudini, a technology company at the forefront of digital transformation in the hospitality industry. Prior to founding Hudini in 2019, Prince was the Founder CEO of Arowana Consulting, an IT services and consulting company. Under Prince's leadership, Hudini's customer base has grown to over 400 hotels across 25 countries.

Hudini — hudini.io

Hudini is the leading digital transformation platform for the hotel industry. Powered by a proprietary middleware and an omnichannel (App, Web, TV) guest interface, Hudini leverages data + AI to increase guest engagement, hotel revenues and enhance guest experience. Through its 100+ pre-built integrations across all functionalities, Hudini delivers personalised, immersive guest experiences that enable guests to communicate, control and interact with hotels closer than ever before. With over 400 hotels across 25 countries, Hudini is fast becoming the industry benchmark for digital transformation in the hospitality industry.