



White Paper

Hospitality Technology: Friend or Foe?

Technology Use in the World of Hospitality

by Charisse Fazzari

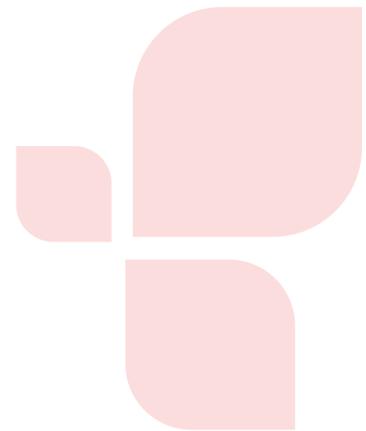
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Introduction

Les Clefs d'Or, the only professional association of hotel concierges, conducts annual meetings for its members both on a national and international level. This year's 62nd Union Internationale des Concierges d'Hôtel (UICH) International took place in the beautiful wine country region of Mendoza, Argentina. Over 400 attendees from more than 35 countries gathered for education, motivation, to rekindle established friendships, and create new bonds. This is done in the name of, "In Service through Friendship", the motto of the association, Les Clefs d'Or.

One of the components of these meetings is the educational symposium, where guest speakers are invited to impart their knowledge of the hospitality profession. While many topics were discussed, this white paper will focus on one aspect of "The Future Agenda", Technology in the World of Hospitality which included a presentation by speaker Dr. Tim Jones, Program Director of The Future Agenda project. His presentation "ONE world - NEW world" - the world's first global open foresight program which has shared the unique views of the next decade around the world and is used by many different companies as stimulus for challenge and new thinking. (April 14th, 2015 at the Les Clefs d'Or Congress in Mendoza, Argentina)



Benefits of Technology in Hospitality

In many respects technology has made our lives easier. People can connect across the globe in a matter of seconds, they can bank and pay bills without paper, or research a vacation from home instead of going to a travel agent. There is no doubt that technology has also greatly enhanced the manner in which business is conducted within the hospitality industry:

Property management systems have improved

Reservations- better booking accuracy
Ability to build and share guest profiles across the brand
Point of Sale systems - revenue management increased/maximized
Improved check-in systems

Reservations are generated from several sources, minimizing overhead

Hotel websites
Booking engines i.e. Expedia, Travelocity, Priceline, etc

Ease of communication with guests, vendors and colleagues

Guest Satisfaction Surveys provide valuable data

Key driving factors are determined
Problem areas discovered

Network and Communication capabilities are global

Social Media creates brand awareness

Customer Loyalty Programs

Information resources, efficiency reports readily available

Web Portals
Front Office Systems

Property Operations are improved

Revenue Management
Yield Management
Fleet Management Solutions
Inventory Management
Credit Card Authorization
Purchase & Billing Application
Planning & Scheduling

This list of benefits only scratches the surface. These technology tools “allow reduction in the overall paperwork, the development of new growth strategies, and a comprehensive rationalization in the sector as a whole” (Les Roches Marbella, 2013). This also gives a concierge greater speed in servicing their clients and keeping up vendor relations.



Drawbacks of Technology in Hospitality

As technology becomes more widespread in travel and tourism, travelers becoming so reliant on technology that concierge services becomes increasingly unnecessary to guests. However, this guest connection is still needed to create memorable stays and keep guest satisfaction high. From a concierge's perspective, if proper safeguards are not taken, the human connection runs the risk of being in jeopardy:

People no longer engage as they are so focused on their devices

Ultimate human connection is lost and this becomes the 'norm'

Guests trust amateur reviews over first hand experience

Credibility of the concierge is questioned

Immediate responses are expected

Responses become short and unprofessional

Patience is decreasing both internally and externally

Guests may make their own bookings online then fault the staff for the quality of the experience

Staff must be reminded not to be fixated on the computer

Hiding behind emails as opposed to being out there meeting clients, creating a physical presence or representative of yourself or a brand

Centralized departments moved away from the actual Hotel Property, diminishing speed, productivity, and guest personalization

Reliability of information may not be accurate and/or current

Multitasking online may be efficient but there is a loss of interaction both with guests and vendors

Social media

One erroneous post can be extremely harmful and have long lasting effects

Recommendations

In order to achieve the balance between genuine hospitality and technology, property managers may want to consider the following recommendations:

1. Management must lead by example

- a. Be engaged with guests and staff
- b. Limit focus on devices i.e. do not check email in the middle of a conversation, look up from the computer and acknowledge guests
- c. Written communication should not be abrupt with 'intent' of being efficient
- d. Staffing must allow time for colleagues to engage with guests - being short-staffed may reduce expenses in the short run but can create unhappy guests and possible long-lasting negative effects

2. Service training should include the topic of technology

- a. Keynote speakers to address achieving the balance
- b. Dangers of Social Media
- c. Use technology to your advantage, not to the point of disconnecting, and recognize the difference

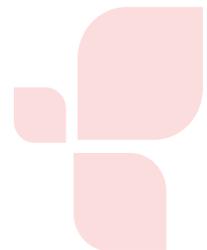
3. Communication between colleagues must be maintained

- a. Effective communication starts at the top - Management should always be 'in touch' with the colleagues
- b. Colleagues will be more engaged and feel a part of the success of the hotel

4. Concierge relationships should be nurtured with guests, colleagues and vendors - don't always rely on booking engines

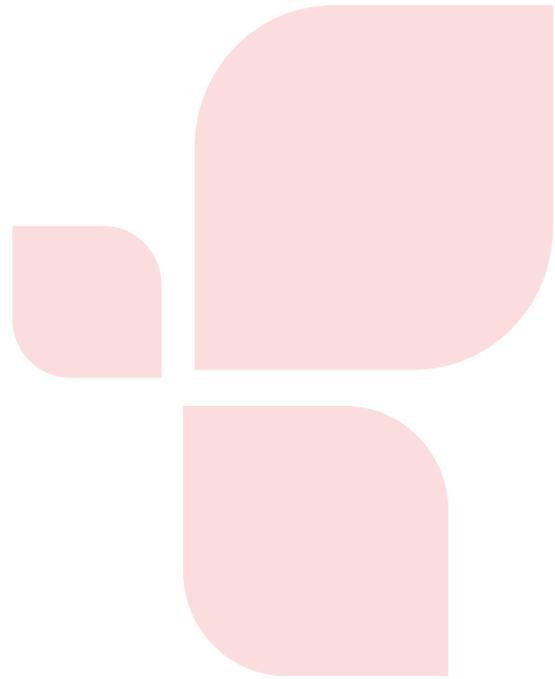
- a. Creates brand loyalty from guest perspective
- b. All people want to feel a connection
- c. Vendors should know the concierge personally, not just via the web
- d. These relationships will be beneficial when least expected

5. Maintaining the human connection will ensure that the concierge profession remains relevant



Conclusion

Hospitality is first and foremost a people business. While technology can be used to enhance efficiency, a fine balance must be achieved so that it is a beneficial tool. There must be an awareness that if it is allowed to grow out of control, the travel and tourism industry risks becoming robotic. Gatherings such as the annual Les Clefs d'Or Congress are a constant reminder that human relationships are irreplaceable. The ability to provide service to our guests with the assistance of the global network that is established and maintained at these meetings is made possible by the human connection. Customer satisfaction depends largely on a value added experience. There is no doubt that technology is extremely beneficial to the hospitality industry on many levels. However, technology can never replace the human touch, the foundation of hospitality.



References

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About the Author

Charisse Fazzari is Chef Concierge at the Mandarin Oriental, San Francisco and has been with the property for 17 years. Charisse is responsible for training, budgeting and guiding the Guest Services Team toward service excellence. She manages and facilitates summits for the leaders of the local concierge associations and has played an integral part in the compilation of standard operating procedures for the brand. Her most recent project was the creation of the Presidents' manual for the BOD of local concierge associations. She currently serves on the Board of Directors for Les Clefs d'Or USA, as the Director of Concierge Relations.

Acknowledgements

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