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Technology and Green Hospitality

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Technology has been used in hospitality venues for years. There is new technology that can make hospitality venues more efficient and provide a better guest experience, and contribute to the greening of the hospitality industry. From information technology to communications technology to RFID technology, it's there for improving business. And what a great way to reduce environmental issues and waste around the property!

Guest Services

The latest craze for upscale hotels is the "pillow menu". Nice idea, I think. I tend to like pillows that are soft and not too thick -- a pillow style I don't find on nearly enough pillows. I'd love to have my choice of which pillow I sleep on, and without playing "20 questions". And there are lots of reasons to ask guests questions about their likes/dislikes, preferences and needs. Sometimes those questions can be a bit overwhelming to the road-weary or hungry traveler, your guest. Use technology to track that "20 question" survey you may be wanting to give guests to better serve them. You can track their preferences, needs and special requests directly and indirectly.

Directly you can get information at reservation time, from staff who have interacted with guests, and through guest-completed questionnaires during and after their stay. You can learn about special days (anniversaries or birthdays), food preferences, allergies or medical needs, smoking needs, ADA requirements and activity needs just by asking questions as their reservations are processed. Be sure to ask guests questions so you can improve your customer service, just don't ask it all at once, especially as they arrive. Let them slip into your atmosphere and the guest experience before you try to learn more.

The information you can gather indirectly would be through tracking their activities and purchases. Are your guests using your fitness center, spa or shops? What food and beverage are they buying, and when? Are they requesting linen reuse? How are your guests arriving; airport limo, taxi, rented car, or their own car? What else can you learn from your guests just by watching and helping? Careful observation can tell you a lot about what your guests want and need from you. And technology can help you observe their habits.

Guestroom Entertainment Centers

What sorts of entertainment are you providing your guests? TV, movies, music, high speed internet, interactive games? Are you offering TV-based entertainment on a new flat-panel TV, or something a bit older, yet still quite functional?

Is your internet broadband, wifi, or dial up? I personally think free internet is a must in guestrooms, just as water and climate control are free. But if the only way you can justify adding internet access to your guestrooms is to charge for it, then do at least that. People increasingly need to access the internet for information or email, so give your guests yet another reason to select your hotel; make that access feasible and fast.

Can your guests check-out through a "channel" on the TV? Can special requests be made from the TV

through hotel channels, services like room service, massage appointments, and dinner reservations? Is music available from the TV, a CD player or radio? Technology can provide many ways to improve your guest services. If you are going to provide it for guest comfort, you might as well use it for hotel services too.

Be Cashless!

Through radio frequency identification (RFID) you can initiate a system whereby your guests are easily identified to gain access to the hotel's guest-restricted services (health club, spa, pool, business office). This is the same technology that lets commuters zip through toll booths without stopping to pay. It also lets employees enter and exit offices or secured areas by waiving their ID card before a reader. The guests key card could be used for this guest service, or you could provide bracelets for your guests' (that would also be a great advertising opportunity for you) use.

These ID tags are great for cashless payments at POS outlets (your dining room, bar, salons, spas and gift shops) that you have around the property. They are also good for security. When guests, as opposed to non-guests, pass through location identifiers placed at strategic gateways or entrances, staffs are alerted and can pay attention to who's around.

Back-office Systems

These systems can be allowed to talk to each other more easily than ever before. If you have computers and departments are actually on "speaking terms", i.e. need to exchange or share data, take advantage of the more flexible interface standards to make it happen, and both ease the challenge of that communication and speed the transfer of data. There are system-to-system and central messaging hubs, for starters, you can utilize to improve property communications. When you stop to think of the amount of paper that could be saved by implementing such systems, you'll be pleased.

And if the various departments can share information faster, you eliminate dropped or lost payments, which you may have now. That "bonus" could pay for the system quickly.

Self-diagnosing Maintenance Issues

Technology can be utilized so that you feel you have one 24x7 maintenance wizard on the property. And with no overtime or workman's comp to pay! You can have pro-active system monitoring to identify incipient problems or issues. This could be like a self-healing hotel technology in that either the repair could be made automatically or reported to a help desk for action before the issue causes a disruption or problem.

You could monitor water flow, energy consumption, HVAC systems, and many other property issues around the property. What a great way to make your property more resource conserving. And the savings will pay for this technology many times over. A win-win for everyone.