

Redefining Hospitality Customer Service with a Technology Boost

Customer demand for frictionless experiences is transforming the hotel experience from booking to check-out.



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Introduction

Pent-up demand for travel is bringing people out in droves. As travel restrictions lift and vaccination rates rise, airports are reporting record crowds and hotel rooms are filling up months in advance. Yet travelers are still exercising caution, including when it comes to customer service interactions, and hoteliers need to be cognizant of this new reality to be sure their guests feel comfortable during their stay.

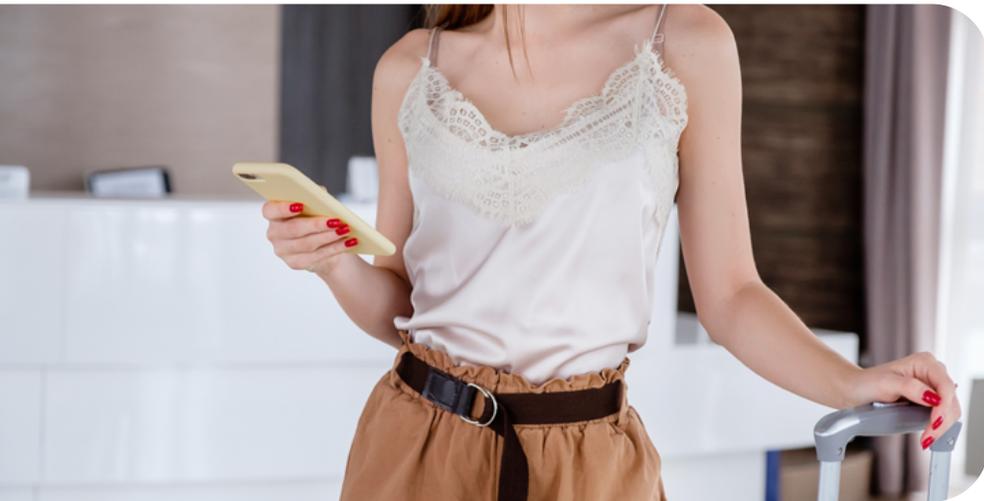
As we transition to a more normalized travel environment, guest expectations are growing rapidly and certain must-haves like frictionless check-in and check-out, keyless room entry, automated amenities, and more stringent cleaning protocols top the list. Contactless business models are not only necessary for safety reasons; they seem preferable for many people as a simple and easy way to purchase and request service. Due to the pandemic, we've also seen rapid adoption of mobile and digital technology.



Digital Transformation Enables Socially Distanced Guest Experience

Working from home taught us that the easiest way to keep in touch from a safe distance is to take advantage of communications technology.

Applying these technologies to the hospitality industry brings the same advantages. Hotel staff can greet and serve guests even though they never visit the front desk. Staff can also communicate with guests and provide access to accommodations through guests' own mobile devices.



Defining Digital Transformation for the Hospitality Industry

The phrase digital transformation refers to more than simply changing or upgrading installed technologies. It focuses more on dramatic, even disruptive ways in which people use technology to improve their lives.

On-premise WiFi and internet access at hotels were originally designed and provisioned for relatively light traffic. Simply adding more WiFi access points for better coverage and increasing available bandwidth across the internet is likely not enough to support all of the necessary connectivity needed to support the adoption of digital technologies.

To make guests feel more comfortable during their stay, here are some transformational digital best practices that can be easily enabled and adopted by hotel management.

- Leveraging Loyalty Programs to Convey Caution & Care

Just as popular apps redefined personal local transportation car service and take-out order and delivery, hospitality brands have the opportunity to either disrupt or be disrupted. Leveraging already existing loyalty and affinity programs, they have the opportunity to reduce interpersonal contact while simplifying the reservation, check-in, and check-out processes by incorporating book-and-pay in advance capabilities. Special offers of lower pricing for those who choose to book and pay remotely in advance can be offset by fewer staff interactions, which can help lower operational expenses.

Guests literally never need to visit the front desk before, during, or at the end of their stay.

- Continuing the Personal Touch – From a Distance

Video calling has become the norm and when it's a menu item on your loyalty program's app, guests can call the front desk and see the person they're talking to. They can also see the concierge, a host for room service, and other hotel staff, creating more personal relationships than they ever did pre-pandemic.

- Give Guests More Control – from their Own Mobile Devices

More mobile devices are in use on the planet than there are people. Guests can easily download your loyalty program or similar app from their app store and log into your system which provides all the identification, preference, payment, and other data you need to provide a full-service, full-spectrum experience. The rare guest who doesn't possess a smartphone can be furnished with a carefully cleaned and sterilized loaner tablet packaged in plastic.

- Automated Advance Planning & Payment – Leveraging the Digital Delivery Model

One way to create an early opportunity to communicate your cleanliness and safety message is to expand the concierge concept to begin at the point where a guest is considering a stay. Video access to an advisor coupled with menu access to information about amenities and highlights begin the guest experience earlier than ever. During the conversation, the advisor can deliver assurances regarding measures being taken to provide cleanliness and safety.

This interaction can then lead to the next step...



- Remote Registration & Check-In

This is not new. Even before the pandemic guests were able to browse, select, and register for a stay at most facilities.

Leveraging a model similar to those used by many delivery apps, guests can not only register for their stay but also commit to payment on a credit card registered with your loyalty program. This also increases the convenience of continuing to use your facilities regularly.

They can also check in on the day their stay begins. This could also include room selection based on location, bed size, and other amenities.



- Remote Resource Requests – QR Codes to Guides & Menus

Many restaurants now have QR codes affixed to each table that diners can scan to access a menu without having to handle a physical menu. This same method can be applied liberally around any hotel facility. A QR code in the bathroom to enable ordering of additional towels and toiletries. Replace the guidebook usually found in any room with a QR code giving guests access to lists of local sites and activities, a room service menu, channels on the room television, contact information, and more. Having the option for more touch-free experiences will help to make guests feel more comfortable.

- Automating Amenities

When guests wish to enjoy amenities such as a spa, swimming pool, exercise room, or others, they often have to check in and obtain items including towels, chairs, and more. These can also be easily made available through requests from their mobile device or room key.

- Digital Concierge/ ConciergeBot

The concierge is often an excellent opportunity to provide a truly personalized service to guests in search of local restaurants or other local attractions. Bringing this interaction to their own smartphone makes this service even more accessible and video preserves most of the personal feel. Alternatively, this video interaction can be conducted using the room television.

Many businesses are proving “bots” to automatically answer texted requests. With access to appropriate databases, they can deliver a considerable amount of information without the need for a human operator. The option of reaching a human makes the bot a convenience and not an obstacle.



Big Data: Your Powerful Bonus

Each of these digitally transformed activities can generate more data about your guests and their preferences, which can be used to drive further guest experience improvements. Improve capacity planning, increase revenue per available room, correlate guest demographics with preferences, gain insight into time-of-day requirements, sharpen inventory min/max level management and cycle counts while controlling cost. All of these insights and more are available from data you may already be collecting.

Another Assurance for You and Your Guests – Data & Network Security

In the wake of recent large-scale cybersecurity attacks, it's more important than ever to maintain maximum vigilance over the security of your network, the data you collect, and the privacy of your guests. Given that [two of the top five biggest data breaches were made public in 2020 were at hotel chains](#), it's critical to have a technology partner that understands the complexity of these challenges, which often require multi-faceted IT solutions.

Touring a Digitally Transformed Property

Your guest has arrived at the local airport. Here's a step-by-step tour of their progress from that point forward, complete with suggestions for digital enhancements and innovations to improve their experience and their perception of personal safety:



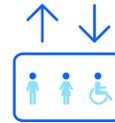
Courtesy Shuttles

Already in use by some facilities, guests can summon their hotel courtesy shuttle from the loyalty program app and track the progress of that vehicle until it arrives.



Baggage Services

Guests will appreciate seeing their baggage wiped down immediately before and after handling. Those planning to pick up their baggage can communicate their request to the bell captain via smartphone and receive a confirmation that their baggage is available at a specific location fully sanitized and ready for pick-up.



Passageways, Stairs, and Elevators

Digital signage can be deployed to provide wayfinding service to guests wishing to reach specific destinations. Stairwell doors can be automated similar to elevators, and elevators can be outfitted with sensors guests can pass their hand over instead of pushing buttons.



Eateries & Shops

Similar to many restaurants, hotel eateries can provide QR codes guests can scan to access menus. Alternately they can be available from loyalty program apps. Reservations can be made on the app with payment automatically charged to the credit card registered. This return from the pandemic may also bring about the return of guests purchasing treats from larger versions of today's vending machines.



Room Service & Other Food Services

Room Service menus and ordering can be brought to the loyalty app or accessed via a QR code posted in the room. Payment can be automatically charged to the registered credit card.





Room Cleanliness Messaging

Housekeeping can be furnished with small digital signage throughout the room on which they can post confirmation of sanitization.



Concierge Services

In addition to the services already discussed, the concierge can offer a truly comprehensive service completely digitally. Reservations can be made and confirmed back to the guest. Materials and resources can be arranged. Use of facilities like a business center can be scheduled, and much more.



Recreational Amenities – Pools/ Spas/ Gyms/ Etc.

Supplies can be obtained through mobile request. Access can be scheduled and obtained similarly.



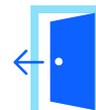
Business Centers/ Conference Rooms

Digital signage can convey the current cleanliness status of these facilities. Automatic expiration can be timed to assure a regular regimen.



Robust WiFi

With so many additional functions being handled online, most facilities will require upgrades to their internal networks and internet access to handle the increased traffic.



Departure

Stopping at the front desk when checking out has long been merely an option in most facilities. Many guests check-out using their room television, or simply drop off their room key and go. Adding check-out to the mobile loyalty app will also enable immediate delivery of final bills and any special messaging. The entire departure experience, including baggage handling, arrangement of local transport, and closing of billing, can be a completely automated last experience that will impress every guest.

Making the Connection with Comcast Business

All these advances will require a strong, reliable, resilient network that can handle spikes in bandwidth, connect the front of the house to operations, and enable real-time data.



Learn more about how you can optimize property management, manage costs, and create a frictionless, productive, and memorable stay for your guests with [support from Comcast Business](#).

Go to: business.comcast.com/hospitality

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