Special Issue: Guestroom Technology

Essential Components to Planning an Upgrade

Building an Infrastructure for In-room Entertainment

Guest Empowerment Technologies

Wireless Energy Management Systems

Conducting Internet Traffic

Real-time Room Maintenance

Prepping for tech gadgets and sound systems
2009

Hospitality Financial and Technology Professionals’

Annual Convention & Tradeshow

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10. Get Empowered

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A Sure Bet to Hospitality Success

HFTP
Hospitality Financial and Technology Professionals
Communicate, Define, Document and Test
Critical components for planning a system implementation or upgrade
By Allison Morris, CHTP

Guest Empowerment Technologies
Tools that give hotel guests personal control over their stay in a hotel
By Mehmet Erdem, Ph.D., CHTP; Thomas Schrier and Pearl Brewer, Ph.D.

Beyond a Good Night’s Sleep
Building the right infrastructure and content for in-room diversion
By Peter O’Connor, Ph.D.

Central Environment Control
Wireless energy management systems offer flexibility, unique features
By Glenn Hasek

Managing Internet Traffic
Bandwidth as a business driver in a recession economy
By JP Hebert and Trevor Warner

Real-time Room Maintenance
Enhance service quality and staff productivity with guestroom operational technologies
By Ian Millar, CHTP

Tech Accommodations
Prepping a guestroom to support high-tech gadgets and powerful sound systems
By Jeff Loether, ISHC

Between the Lines
All the Comforts (Away) From Home — Guestrooms technology is booming in our industry

Q&A From The HFTP Research Institute
Compensation by Region — A breakdown from the 2008 HFTP Compensation and Benefits Survey; plus IFRS vs. GAAP — Income statement

HFTP News and Notes
Back to the Future — Tour GUESTROOM 20X’s popular technologies throughout the years
Taxes to Budgets, Stay Atop Current trends — HFTP’s Club and Hotel Controllers Conferences help attendees maintain a competitive edge in today’s slow economic climate

HFTP Event Calendar

The Bottomline Resource Guide
HFTP Club and Hotel Controllers Conference 2009

The HFTP Club and Hotel Controllers Conferences offer the essential tools to help you solve professional challenges and maximize the potential for your workplace. Join other controllers and industry experts to discuss a wide range of topics that reflect your diverse responsibilities, from technology to taxes, human resource management to personal inspiration.
The guestroom experience has changed dramatically over the years. Today, it takes more than signs advertising air-conditioned rooms and free cable TV to set one hotel apart from its competitor. Hotel companies are progressively incorporating modern technology into their rooms to provide guests with comforts and conveniences. Technology has also dramatically played a major role in improving operations and bringing cost-savings to hotels. And as guests increasingly embrace tech-gadgets as part of their modus operandi, techno-centric, guestroom tools are quickly transforming from having the wow factor to being part of the expected services — much like the hair dryer and iron.

It was over four years ago when HFTP’s HITEC Advisory Council conceived the idea of GUESTROOM 20X (originally GUESTROOM 2010), a hands-on, model hotel room that would display the cutting-edge in guestroom technology. HITEC, one of the oldest hospitality technology conferences in existence, was a natural fit because it is where industry professionals annually confer on technological innovations’ impact on the hospitality industry.

When the council greenlit GUESTROOM 20X in 2005, the momentum towards techno-centric amenities as a means for upgrading guest services was really gaining ground. In the early years of hospitality technology, much of the emphasis in our industry had been on back-of-the-house systems, like POS and PMS development. Customer satisfaction was left to the hotel staff, offering helpful and attentive service, and comfortable clean rooms.

While these features are certainly still very important, our guests are also looking to be connected at about the same level they would be as if they were still on their living room couch or office. And so our industry expands, with IT professionals developing the best way to deliver Internet to guests, self-service environmental controls, a variety of in-room entertainment options and so much more.

And with GUESTROOM 20X, the advisory council was able to offer a medium for exploring the possibilities in guestroom technology. I have been a participant in the technology selection committee since the exhibit’s inception, and an aspect of this project that I’ve greatly enjoyed is the free pass to think outside of the box. Our goal was to incorporate a variety of items, from the obvious to the out-of-this-world. The goal is to spur discussion and explore what might be the thing to enhance the guestroom experience, while also generating additional revenue for the property. To review what’s been in the room, go to the overview article on page 8.

We had three successful incarnations of GUESTROOM 20X, and we are in the midst of selecting new, and innovative technologies for the next exhibit at HITEC 2010 in Orlando, Fla. In the meantime keep updated with this special issue of The Bottomline magazine dedicated exclusively to guestroom technology.
COMPENSATION BY REGION

A breakdown from the 2008 HFTP Compensation and Benefits Survey

Question: Can you provide detailed U.S. regional compensation information for lodging properties? I would like information specific to the accounting department, as well as other management positions.

Answer: In the summer of 2008, the HFTP Research Institute sent out a Compensation and Benefits Survey to the entire HFTP membership via e-mail. This survey gathered specific information on salaries, bonuses, benefits and qualifying demographic data. The overall report can be found in the September 2008 issue of The Bottomline. For this HFTP Research Institute Q&A we will focus specifically on regional salary and bonus data. The map and chart on this page provide a breakdown of the U.S. regions by state and indicate which regions had enough responses to provide regional data. The greatest number of responses were from the South Atlantic Region (Delaware, Florida, Georgia, Maryland, North Carolina, South Carolina, Virginia, and West Virginia) and the Pacific Region (Alaska, California, Hawaii, Oregon, and Washington).

First of all, HFTP members were asked to provide compensation and benefits data for their position. The chart on page 7 provides projected 2008 annual salary and bonus information for HFTP members with accounting and finance positions. Since the survey was conducted during the summer months, members had to provide projected data for 2008 rather than actual figures. Due to the current economic crisis, it would be interesting to see if everyone received the bonus amounts they projected in the survey.

As stated earlier, the 2008 HFTP Compensation and Benefits Survey was distributed to the entire HFTP membership. The number of members holding technology positions has continually grown through the years offering increased opportunities to analyze data regionally. The chart on page 7 provides data on the technology positions with the greatest response rates.

Key to U.S. Regions

- East North Central
- East South Central
- Middle Atlantic X
- Mountain X
- New England X
- Pacific X
- South Atlantic X
- West North Central
- West South Central X

X means that the region is represented in the study.

Contact the HFTP Research Institute: For questions and further research contact the Tanya Venegas, MBA, MHM at hftp@hrm.uh.edu, +1 (713) 743-1839 or (866) 572-4387.
## 2008 HFTP Member Compensation — Accounting and Finance Positions

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<th>Job Title</th>
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n=number of responses; blank cells indicate less than three responses

## 2008 HFTP Member Compensation — Technology Positions

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n=number of responses; blank cells indicate less than three responses
**Staff Salaries**

In addition to reporting their own salaries, respondents were also asked to provide salary data for other positions at their properties. The following charts provide data on accounting and finance staff salaries and IT staff salaries. For positions such as accounts payable clerk, some respondents indicated that this position is a salaried position, while other respondents indicated it was an hourly position at their property. When available, both the annual salary and hourly rate are noted.

### Accounting and Finance Staff Salaries

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n=number of responses; blank cells indicate less than three responses
**IT Staff Salaries**

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<th>Bonus</th>
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n=number of responses; blank cells indicate less than three responses

**Income Statement**

Neither the U.S. Generally Accepted Accounting Principles (GAAP) and the International Financial Reporting Standards (IFRS) provide a specific layout when it comes to the income statement. IAS 1 *Presentation of Financial Statements* provides guidance in the fact that there are some minimum reporting requirements. Even though U.S. GAAP does not require a specific layout, all public companies must follow regulations set forth by the SEC which includes detailed requirements in Regulation S-X. Regulation S-X provides the form, content and presentation of financial statements and can be found on the SEC web site at www.sec.gov. The reporting requirements listed in Regulation S-X are more comprehensive than those currently listed in IAS 1.

**U.S. GAAP**

Classification of Expenses: SEC registrants must present expenses by function (cost of sales, administrative, etc.)

Extraordinary Items: Includes items which are both unusual and infrequent.

Significant Items: Presented separately as a component of continuing operations on the face of the income statement.

**IFRS**

Classification of Expenses: Expenses may be presented based on either function or nature (salaries, depreciation, etc.)

Extraordinary Items: Prohibited.

Significant Items: Requires a separate disclosure of the nature and amount which can be presented in either the income statement or notes.

**Source**

BACK TO THE FUTURE

Tour GUESTROOM 20X’s most popular technologies throughout the years

By Katy Walterscheidt

Since 2006 the hospitality industry has been abuzz about the future of hotel room technology thanks to HFTP’s GUESTROOM 20X (formerly known as GUESTROOM 2010), a futuristic model guestroom that showcases new and upcoming technologies. Part of the project’s appeal is the hands-on exhibit displayed at various conferences like HITEC (Hospitality Industry Technology Exposition and Conference). Those that see the exhibit can walk through and experience a life-sized replication of the future of hotel room technology. They could use RFID technology to enter the room without a key, control the room’s controls from the television remote and even lay on a bed with no mattress.

Here’s a look at some of the most popular technologies that have been showcased throughout the years.

**Guestroom Staples**

There are some parts of a typical guestroom that will always remain the same. For example, there will always be a bathroom, a bed and a television. But that doesn’t mean that technology can’t enhance these guestroom staples.

Over the years, GUESTROOM 20X has shown how luxury and technology can meet in the bathroom. **Kohler’s Fountainhead VibrAcoustic Bath** uses the science of sound vibration and ergonomic design to provide an unprecedented level of relaxation. And getting ready in front of the mirror in the morning is never boring with **dëcorus Worldwide, Inc. and Unique Bath Solutions, Inc.’s Television Mirror**. When the television inside the mirror is turned on, the images and colors of the television are visible through the mirror, as the anti-fog feature ensures a clear picture in steamy bathrooms. Once the television is turned off, it completely disappears, leaving only the true mirror reflection.

The GUESTROOM 20X bed has been the centerpiece of the room since it originally debuted. **Ammique’s 21st Century Bed Technology** throws away the old mattress and uses 20,000 components to create a mattress-less bed that contours inch-by-inch to the natural curves of the moving body. Each year attendees lie on the bed and dream about how nice it would be to spend the whole night sleeping on a mattress-less bed, while hoteliers dream about no longer having to turn a mattress or replace a worn-out bed.

Now that high definition televisions are more commonplace in homes, hotels are also trading their old bulky televisions for flat screen televisions. GUESTROOM 20X goes a step beyond the common flat screen television to showcase the next generation televisions, like **Sony’s OLED Digital TV**, which is about three millimeters thin and produces picture quality with high contrast, brightness, color reproduction and rapid response time. **Philips’ 3D Autostereoscopic Display** uses lenticular lens technology to turn a flat screen into a breathtaking high-resolution 3D image, without needing special glasses.
Conveniences
GUESTROOM 20X showcases how technology can provide a seamless stay for guests, as well as hotel staff. RFID (Radio Frequency Identification) is one of the technologies making life easier for guests and hotel staff. No longer does the guest need to stop at the check-in desk upon arrival. From the partnership of IBM and VingCard Elsafe came the Near-Field Technology-Based Keyless Opener. Using their cell phone, guests can open their hotel door and no longer have to worry if they have their key with them on their way out the door. RFID is also helping the guest services at the hotel. The Empty Food Tray Detection System by Axxess Industries, Inc. alerts staff when an empty food tray is detected in the hotel corridors, offering quick removal of the tray for safer and cleaner hallways.

Today, people don’t travel with a suitcase full of just clothes — they also drag their collection of electronic devices. GUESTROOM 20X makes traveling with laptops, cell phones and MP3 players easy with charging devices like the Powermat and WildCharger Pad. These charge pads wirelessly recharge electronic devices without the mess of cords, leaving one less thing for guests to worry about packing.

Control4 Suite Systems redefines the guestroom experience by delivering state-of-the-art control of audio, video, HVAC, lighting, drapes and services — all controlled from the hotel room television. The system also allows hoteliers the ability to adjust brightness of lights and room temperatures, creating an eco-friendly room.

Going Green
Speaking of eco-friendly, over the past several years the hospitality industry has seen a surge in environmentally-friendly options as properties realize the benefits to the environment and their bottom line. Each year GUESTROOM 20X showcases various technologies that are “green” and began distinguishing them with a special symbol in 2008 so they are easily identified.

Showing innovation in design, each year the toilet of GUESTROOM 20X becomes a popular discussion topic among attendees. Whether it’s the TOTO USA, Inc. NEOREST 600 with remote controlled features and cleansing system or Kohler’s Purist Hatbox toilet, GUESTROOM 20X toilets showcase lids that open and close on their own, as well as save water. TOTO’s toilet uses only 1.2 GPF a flush while Kohler’s toilet is tankless. Also saving water in the bathroom, Sharper Image’s Oxygenics Resort Spa Self-Pressurizing Showerhead generates a full-power spray with water pressure as low as 20 psi, saving up to 70 percent water.

Electronics can eat up a lot of energy in a hotel. That’s why energy-saving televisions are an important addition to the future hotel room. Philips Smart-Power®, named “Best in Show” by CNET’s Best of CES 2008, uses proprietary dimming technology that is designed to lower the LCD panel backlight to reduce power consumption without compromising the picture quality. It consumes as little power as 75W while active, which is nearly 50 percent less than most LCD HDTVs of the same size.

Textiles can go green too. Recyclable Modular Carpet from Interface FLOR offers GUESTROOM 20X eco-friendly flooring with 34 percent PLA, a highly renewable corn-based polymer.

For Fun
While traveling, guests need to make time to relax and have a little fun. Each year GUESTROOM 20X imparts a little bit of entertainment into the room to ensure guests are relaxed during their stay.
And there’s no better way to learn about what relaxing amenities the property has to offer than through a tour. **IBM’s Cave Virtual Reality Goggles** allows guests to tour the property from the comfort of their room while guests wearing 3D virtual reality goggles see the amenities of the property in the first-person perspective. At the end of the tour, guests can make reservations for the spa or a tee time on the golf course without leaving their room.

The international sensation of the Wii gaming console is not lost on the future hotel room. **Nintendo’s Wii for Hotels** is a special version of the gaming console, licensed for commercial use. Property managers can control game menu content, erase saved game data and receive updates of popular new games via a network connection. Add in the Wii Fit board and you’ve got an in-room fitness center.

After both displaying their respective technologies in the first edition of GUESTROOM 20X, Lux Art and Polytronix Inc. combined their technologies for the 2007 version. The entryway window of the room displayed Lux Art’s traditional art on a “non traditional” surface, the **Switchable Privacy Glass**. The unique way of displaying art was a welcome alternative to heavy drapery as it masked the window and created privacy within the room.

And after a long night sleep, even waking up in the morning can be fun. **Nanda LLC’s Clocky** is an alarm clock that rolls away and hides when the snooze button is pressed. When the alarm sounds again, the guest must get up to search for the clock.

**Impact on Industry**

While the massive size and expense of the exhibit makes it hard to travel, HFTP has devised a portable presentation of GUESTROOM 20X. The portable presentation has been featured in conferences throughout North America, Europe and Asia, educating the industry on the potential of technology for guestrooms. Along with participating in conferences around the world, GUESTROOM 20X has inspired other projects and serves as a reference for a number of ongoing hospitality projects. The project has also garnered attention from a wide variety of media sources (Bloomberg TV, MSNBC.com, *New York Times*, *CIO Magazine* and more), reaching audiences beyond the hospitality industry.

Each year as the buzz of the project gets bigger, more industries see the value of GUESTROOM 20X. By providing a forum that showcases and discusses hospitality technology, GUESTROOM 20X’s greatest success is the open dialogue that has ensued among industry professionals.

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**CALENDAR**

For more information about HFTP events, please call (800) 646-4387 or +1 (512) 249-5333, or visit www.hftp.org.

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TAXES TO BUDGETS, STAY ATOP CURRENT TRENDS

HFTP’s Club and Hotel Controllers Conferences help attendees maintain a competitive edge in today’s slow economic climate

The thematic thread of discussion at this year’s Club and Hotel Controllers Conferences is keeping ahead during this tough economy. Produced twice annually, the conference offers an education program with two industry-specific tracks, one for hotels and the other for clubs. While the spring conference has passed, the summer conference is still coming this June.

Over 100 hospitality professionals gathered in March for the first conference at the Westin Tampa Harbour Island in Tampa, Fla. “This year’s conference came at a very critical time for the hospitality industry,” said David Manglos, director of finance for The Club at Carlton Woods and a director on the HFTP Global Board. “As the economic crisis has hit all of us, we are often on the forefront of helping lead our organizations through these difficult financial times. The conference sessions and topics were extremely relevant to these times and the offline networking with other industry professional provided me with actionable plans for my club. I sent my general manager a 24-point memo on things for us to consider immediately upon my return from the conference.”

Online registration is available now for the June conference, which is co-located with HITEC 2009. Attending the June Club and Hotel Controllers Conference gives attendees the chance to visit the HITEC exhibit hall with hundreds of companies exhibiting and attend the HITEC Welcome Reception on Monday, June 22. Take advantage of this important education opportunity to keep yourself competitive.

2009 Club Sessions
- Rock the Recession — Ultimate Club Update
- Important Tax Issues for the Club Controller
- Budgeting with a Purpose — A Practical Approach to Creating a Valuable Management Tool
- Been There, Done That — An Interchange of Solutions to Issues Facing Clubs Today
- Using Technology and Process Improvement as a Financial Leader

2009 Hotel Sessions
- Internal Control System Diagnostic and Tune Up
- Can We Talk Integrating Systems?
- An Unqualified Success — A Guide to Preparing for a Financial Statement Audit
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Be the best we can be. Business groups are continually challenging technology groups to improve and increase capabilities. Enter system upgrades. Just as we get comfortable with a system, it seems it’s time to upgrade. For some, knowing a particular system is going to be upgraded is a welcome breath of fresh air. For others, the news hits like a brick and causes panic and nightmares. So what can we do to help make an upgrade a welcome prospect?

Anyone having experienced an upgrade process will undoubtedly have a myriad of advice, the most common is to have a good detailed project plan and ideally an experienced project manager to oversee the upgrade and ensure the success by minimizing risk. But what does that mean? Unfortunately, while there are several key aspects, no two project plans will be identical since no two properties are identical. However, in this article, I will concentrate on what years of experience have taught me are some of the most critical components to consider when planning for any system implementation and in particular a system upgrade.

**Communication**

This component cannot be stressed enough. When choosing a site location we have all heard the three most important items are location, location, location. When constructing and ultimately executing a project plan, it can be said that the three most important items are communication, communication, communication. I like to expand on this word and remind everyone that especially in today’s environment, both verbal and written communication are necessary and need to be properly balanced. Too much verbal communication causes the documentation component to

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Allison Morris, CHTP is president of ForEm Consultants. She is also a member of the HITEC 2009 Advisory Council and a speaker at HITEC 2009.
be lost. On the other end of the spectrum, an abundance of written communication removes the personal touch and denies us the opportunity to truly understand the need and often underlying truth.

Communication also needs to flow to the right people. Just as the operational success of a hotel relies on teamwork, the success of a project relies on teamwork. The user base will undoubtedly have significant input regarding their needs and ultimately their perspective of the importance and impact of the upgrade. An executive or corporate business sponsor is also a key player in reminding everyone of the commitment and significance of their participation and can be invaluable in helping get over potential political hurdles. Of course, clear and precise communication with the system vendor needs to occur on a regular basis. Further, the vendor may be able to assist with providing their recommendations for a basic project plan framework.

Often overlooked in the beginning of a project, support personnel also need to be involved. Too often, support is thought of as a component that can be brought into a project at the end or worse, when the project is over and we ‘transition’ into support. However, nothing can better help us plan for a successful end than a glimpse into the future. Many times, support personnel are the true professionals in providing some hidden information gems. Lastly, it is imperative to do a thorough analysis to verify that any third party representatives are included in regular communication. Who and what are the immediate touch points, and then where does the domino effect take us — how deep downstream does information really flow? The little things that are easy overlooked at the beginning are what often create the largest challenges in the end.

Requirements Definition
If we do not know where we are going, it is awfully difficult to get there. Likewise, in a system upgrade, clearly defining the requirements and expected outcomes is equally as important. The better you capture everything in the early stage, the better the project is defined. Many people understand that an investment in planning saves time during execution. Yet, contrary to popular belief, a project plan is not the first step. Rather, communication and a discovery discussion and ultimate definition of current shortfalls, desired results and critical impact need to occur before the project plan can start to take shape. Thus, the requirements definition is another piece of the puzzle that if not approached properly can have devastating effects. Depending on the scope of the upgrade the requirements may drastically change. What is good for one property may not necessarily be good for another property. Similarly, a high priority for one hotel may not be important or even needed for another property. Regardless, an investment in this early phase saves time in both planning and execution.

As a result, it is vital to research the desired outcomes of the upgrade and thoroughly compare them to the realistic outcomes of the upgrade. It is during this time that you are able to begin to properly set expectations regarding both the pros and the cons of the upgrade. People are much better able to accept potential negative impacts and policy changes if they have proper notification and time to prepare and adjust. Some people believe in setting low expectations in an attempt to insure the apparent success of the project when expectations are exceeded. However, an experienced project manager responsible for the overall upgrade will know how to accommodate for potential setbacks and therefore set realistic expectations. This ability is essential to building trust — both for the individual, as well as for the ongoing success of the system.

Documentation and an Organized Plan
Once the initial communication has begun it is vital that the written communication and documented plan begin. A common mistake is to wait too long before beginning documentation or to let too much time pass between documentation updates. Documenting the plan, even if it is a simple overview version provides a strong foundation and base from which to continue to move forward. Frequent and regular updates help prevent the process from losing momentum and the document becomes a tangible item to track upcoming milestones and/or missed milestones and subsequent consequences.

Testing — Focus on two distinct aspects of testing: the technical strength of the upgrade process and, equally important, the satisfaction of the end users.
Oftentimes, it is easy to get caught up debating the right way to put a project together, the right tools to use to manage the project or the proper methodology. These discussions can start to cloud the bottom line — creating a well-thought and organized documented plan. Remember, the tools used to manage do not guarantee the success — it’s the details and the ability of the team to understand the plan and keep communication going that guarantees success. An organized plan becomes the common language for the project. It’s first important that we are all speaking the same language and one we can all understand and then of course, it’s important to keep speaking — keep the communication going.

Ongoing documentation also needs to be developed for potential changes to existing written (and sometimes unwritten) standard operating procedures. These are also important documents to help develop a solid end-user test plan as discussed in the next point.

Testing
Testing typically occurs once the project is underway. By now we have a fairly solid plan and by all accounts believe we are ready to move forward with the upgrade. But skipping a testing phase or even not thoroughly testing can doom a project. It can be a frustrating and exhaustive phase, often using any slippage time built into an initial plan, but testing helps us find defects in our plan. And defects can be the most powerful negative. Further, it is important to focus on two distinct aspects of testing: the technical strength of the upgrade process and, equally important, the satisfaction of the end users.

For any upgrade, regardless of the scope and assumed impact, a bullet proof testing of the technical stability of the system is critical. Our preconceived ideas regarding the length of time and the impact of the network infrastructure can be reassessed and verified. This is our opportunity to detail every part of the process — every key stroke, every firewall, every configuration setting, etc. More importantly, even the smallest failure needs to be researched and corrected and the test needs to start again from the beginning. It is unfortunately all too common for people to overlook the importance of starting the test again from the beginning. Instead, often to save time, they make the incorrect assumption that the correction midway will not have any effect. When the final upgrade is then executed, the surprise occurs and the remainder of the test plan becomes null and void. It cannot be stressed enough: a flawless test has the greatest ability to reduce risks during the executed upgrade process.

Once we have a flawless technical upgrade process, we also need to consider the end-user testing. This is necessary even if we believe there will be no change to the end users. How many times have we assumed the end user will not notice a difference — but they do! It is during the end-user testing that we can verify that our initial research and analysis of the product specified in our requirements definition measures up to the final product. Proper testing will also reassure us that we have set realistic expectations. An upgrade plan without any place for user testing is destined for disaster. As a result, the scope of the test effort, to determine if the software is ready to be placed into production, should be defined in a test plan. The test plan can almost serve as a contract between the project leaders and the end-users. To move forward without both aspects of testing being considered leads to failure and an inability to make an evaluation of the completeness of the upgrade.

While this article is certainly not exhaustive of all considerations and steps to be taken when planning for an upgrade and deciding what is best for your property, it highlights some of the critical components. At first glance, it certainly is likely to seem overwhelming, and in today’s world, too time-consuming for the latest ‘now’ mentality. It is always important to really look at options and be wise enough to select the best option for the business case. Sometimes fast and high risk is necessary. Sometimes slow and low risk is better. Regardless, some level of planning is always helpful. Absolutely, planning always takes time, but that time reaps rewards during the test and final execution. “It is always important to really look at options and be wise enough to select the best option for the business case. Sometimes fast and high risk is necessary. Sometimes slow and low risk is better. Regardless, some level of planning is always helpful. Absolutely, planning always takes time, but that time reaps rewards during the test and final execution.”
The recent economic downturn has hit many sectors. The high profile cases of economic problems in the auto industry, as well as the financial sectors have caused consumers to reevaluate their spending habits. Many of which are finding that they have less discretionary income to spend on products and services, as well as entertainment and even travel options that they once enjoyed. As such, the hospitality industry and particularly the hotel industry has seen a drop in revenue in recent months (Hudson, 2009). With fewer guests checking in to hotels, as well as less guests spending money in hotel lounges and restaurants, hotel properties must find ways to make up for the lost revenue by whatever means possible. Thus, it should come as no surprise that many organizations are attempting to save money wherever they can. As such, massive cost control measures are underway in most major organizations. With traditional cost cutting programs, such as employee restructuring and vendor contract renegotiations, organizations have been able to squeak by in these bad economic times in hopes of a brighter future around the corner. However, some innovative organizations are not content to simply wait for guests to return to drive up revenue; they are leveraging their current technologies in order to drive down costs and increase guest services. By doing so, these properties have not only seen expenses decrease, but also in some cases a slight increase in revenue through sales of additional services that they are able to offer to guests.

The driving force behind this innovative way of thinking is various types of technologies that make up the domain of Guest Empowerment Technology, commonly referred to as GET. Guest Empowerment Technologies are often termed as self-service technologies; however, GET is a specific subset of the self-service sector inherent to the hotel industry.
GET provide better convenience for guests without direct intervention from hotel staff. These technologies include systems and applications such as in-room check-out systems, in-room entertainment systems, on demand printing services, lobby kiosks and online reservation systems.

GET — What Is It?
Self-service technology is broadly defined as technologies that allow customers to create a product or service without the direct involvement from the organization responsible for the sale and/or the facilitation of the creation of the product or service (Meuter, Ostrom, Roundtree & Biter, 2000). Examples of such technologies can include ATM machines, grocery store self-check-out systems, photo kiosks and even simple vending machines. The difference between basic self-service technologies and guest empowerment technologies is that GET takes on a narrower focus to examine technologies specific to guest experiences within the hotel industry. In essence Guest Empowerment Technologies are electronic systems and tools that allow hotel guests to have more personal control over their stay in a hotel. These systems provide better convenience for guests without direct intervention from hotel staff. These technologies include systems and applications such as in-room check-out systems, in-room entertainment systems, on demand printing services, lobby kiosks and online reservation systems.

It should come as no surprise that one of the most practical cost saving applications of GET is through lobby check-in kiosks. Several large corporations such as Marriott, Hilton and Starwood are using guest check-in kiosks in the lobbies of many of their properties (Chakrovarty, 2005). These systems have not only enabled the hotels to reduce their labor costs, but also created opportunities for them to reassign staff to additional duties that they did not have the time to perform prior to the installment of the kiosks. An additional added benefit in this is that some of the staff has been reassigned to activities in which they are able to better directly serve the guest. The installation of check-in kiosks has allowed these properties to increase their level of customer service and guest satisfaction.

In-room Entertainment
Another type of GET is for in-room entertainment such as a flat-screen TV or HDTV. This is in part due to the push for conversion from analog to digital television broadcasting. Due to the methods in which most hotels already receive television signals there is no need for the majority of properties to make any modifications to their current television systems. However, some of the larger chains that have not already done so, are using this opportunity to upgrade their in-room televisions to high definition sets. Properties that have in-room high definition television sets are experiencing various benefits. One of these benefits is a noticeable increase in hotel guest satisfaction. In the travel environment of today, where the line between business and leisure travel can sometimes get blurred, travelers are beginning to think of hotel rooms as a home away from home (Pareds, 2004). Therefore, the expectation of travelers when it comes to entertainment options is that hotels should have the same level of entertainment that they have in their homes, if not greater. While the digital transition has prompted many consumers to purchase high definition (HD) television sets, it is estimated that less than 40 percent of American households have high definition sets. Additionally, only 22 percent of American households actually watch high definition programs (In-Stat/MDR, Dec. 2008). Hotels that offer HD viewing options to guests are able to make guests who already have HD televisions feel more at home, while at the same time letting guests who do not have HD televisions feel as if they are being a bit pampered. As such both groups, the HD haves and the HD have-nots, get an increased feeling of comfort during their stay. This in turn can lead to increased loyalty and higher likelihood that a guest will return to the property (Li & Petrick, 2008).

As one may surmise based on hotels’ investments in upgrading in-room televisions a large portion of in-room entertainment options are focused around the television set. This is partly due to the rapid advancements in available consumer electronics. In the recent past, the amount and types of in-room entertainment options in hotels was limited. This was not a huge issue as entertainment options in general were limited. However, today’s consumers have multiple entertainment options at their finger tips. As such guest are expecting more entertainment options when they travel. A recent study of hotel managers found that in-room entertainment systems ranked second, behind wireless Internet, as technologies that hotel guest care about most (Brewer, Kim, Schrier, & Farrish, 2008). These increased expectations have brought forth a flood of methods for integrating consumer entertainment technologies into hotel rooms (Beldona & Cobanoglu, 2007). With this, varying types of electronic devices being used in hotel rooms for guests are becoming increasingly diverse.
The reason for this is that hotels have been witnessing an increase in guests bringing personal electronic devices with them. From handheld devices, laptops and even full game consoles, an increasing number of tech savvy guests are connecting their personal electronics to the hotel’s HDTV screens. The usage of a hotel’s television provides the guest with a better experience than what they would have by using a portable screen (Sanders, 2005). There is an emerging business model which lets properties take advantage of this trend to generate revenue by having agreements with vendors which allow guests to rent popular software titles on site or use the hotel’s Internet connection to download software and games.

Internet
The Internet is another enabler of guest empowerment technologies, as well as a potential tool for revenue. One application of this is through the usage of online reservation systems. Online reservation systems have been in existence for several decades. However, it has not been until recently that advancement in technology and bandwidth has allowed the average consumer to take full advantage of such applications. When guests use the Internet to make hotel reservations, they often perform tasks other than simply booking a room. They often search for information about the surrounding area, as well as the hotel itself. Hotel’s that make such information available to potential guest through the hotel’s reservation portals have seen increases in usage of such sites (Morosana & Jeong, 2008). Additionally, providing potential guests the ability to book their own room online provides them with a sense of control and comfort. This can create more of a feeling of being connected with the property which has the potential to increase customer loyalty (Namasivayam & Mount, 2006). Additionally, by allowing guests to book rooms without the direct contact with the hotel’s staff, properties reduce the amount of labor needed for reservations activities, and can reallocate employees to other activities.

…Hotel managers and owners should swiftly consider using the current competitive advantage offered by GET in order to be prepared and meet the ever-changing expectations and norms of future guests.

References

Reduce Costs, Increase Satisfaction
This article has touched upon some of the major forms of guest empowerment technologies. It should be of interest to note that the result of using multiple types of GET not only reduces costs, but also increases customer satisfaction. As technology advances, the types of applications and services available for guests through GET will increase to the point that guests will expect them to be part of the basic services. Hotels that do not use them may find themselves losing market share to those that do. To a certain degree this is already happening. As such hotel managers and owners should swiftly consider using the current competitive advantage offered by GETs in order to be prepared and meet the ever-changing expectations and norms of future guests.
Hoteliers face a constant challenge keeping up with the rapid pace of change in technology. This is true not only of administrative systems such as the PMS, but in fact may be even more of a challenge when it comes to in-room technology. Driven by increasingly wired consumers, who use state-of-the-art entertainment systems in their own homes, the need to provide sophisticated systems in the hotel room continues to grow. Yet in this highly complex area, knowing what systems to invest in, and how to find the right financial deal to make it all worthwhile has become increasingly difficult.

It’s clear that guest room entertainment systems have moved on from the 26-inch television propped up in the corner of the room. However satisfying the needs of today’s consumer is more than just a matter of swapping out that creaking equipment for sparkly new flat panel units. Not only is choosing the right technology difficult (and potentially expensive if you make a mistake), but the actual flat panels themselves are only a tiny part of the puzzle. Potentially more troublesome is providing the right infrastructure to support these new technologies, and populating the system with appropriate content at a selling price that justifies the investment, but at the same time is not off-putting to the guest. Navigating this minefield is problematic and becoming more difficult as technology continues to rapidly develop.

Challenges Defined
Challenges can basically be grouped into four categories: EQUIPMENT. It’s clear that the era of the old CRT-based TV is gone, with consumer demand forcing hoteliers to install LCD or plasma flat panels (the bigger the better) in the guestroom. However, buying such panels is a far more complicated decision for hotels than the typical home user. Issues such as compatibility with analog and digital broadcasts, Video-on-Demand services and High Definition Television (HDTV) signals; how to set viewing angles so that they can easily be seen from everywhere in the room; how to lock down configuration settings so that they cannot ‘accidentally’ be scrambled by the guest all need to be considered. Even how to fix panels to walls or other furniture so that they are not easily damaged or stolen. The HDTV standard is now a given when replacing existing TVs because of eventual obsolescence or refurbishment. With image quality up to four-times better than traditional TVs, such technology is commonplace in the consumer market and, despite the higher costs and the limited content currently available, hotels would be foolish to select anything that’s not HDTV compliant to ensure their investment is future proof.

However, the need for new and updated equipment isn’t limited to the TV set itself. Quality audio has also become an issue, often necessitating the installation of separate costly amplification systems to provide a cinema-like experience. Furthermore, today’s digital lifestyle has led to many guests travelling with their own content on MP3 players, smart phones and laptops, which they increasingly want to access through the room’s audio and video systems. Instead of being satisfied with what the hotel provides (or tries to sell), guests increasingly want to play their own music or...
“Hotels are increasingly allowing guests to adjust everything from lighting, temperature, wake-up calls and even curtains through the television’s remote control. As a result, suppliers are building interface cards to enable this functionality into flat panels destined for the hotel market, further increasing costs.”

A U.S. example shows where it’s all going. Although casino hotels are notorious for providing inadequate in-room guest facilities (preferring instead to drive guests to the casino floor where they can be tempted into gambling), the MGM Las Vegas, always famous for going over the top, has both invested in advanced in-room entertainment systems and is using them in an interesting way. In its new CityCenter development, technology in the room can tell when a new guest has just arrived. Once the guest touches his or her RFID key to the door’s sensor, the flat screen panel and high quality audio system in the room spring into action, playing an especially composed fanfare to welcome the guest!

watch their own movies. While some hotels started by installing iPod docking stations, the trend seems to be to provide easy access to the room’s audio and video systems using “connectivity panels” which allow guests to hook up their personal devices to the room’s system through a variety of interfaces.

A complication is the fact that increasingly the television is not just being used for entertainment, but also to control other guestroom technologies. Hotels are increasingly allowing guests to adjust everything from lighting, temperature, wake-up calls and even curtains through the television’s remote control. As a result, suppliers are building interface cards to enable this functionality into flat panels destined for the hotel market, further increasing costs.

**CONTENT.** Installing even the most sophisticated flat panels is pointless unless you provide appropriate content. Currently challenges lie in terms of both the range of channels offered and their format. Until recently, many hotels offered just domestic broadcast channels, supplemented by a small number of overly expensive pay-per-view movies (the so-called Hollywood / Adult business model).

However, with the typical guest now having access to several hundred channels covering a diverse range of specialized interests on their domestic set, it’s clear that more choice is required in the hotel room. Offerings need to be expanded to include not only terrestrial and satellite channels, but also cable, IPTV and even content sourced from the Internet such as YouTube or Hulu. A key trend is the provision of shorter content (with 30 minutes appearing to be the sweet spot) as few guests have the time to watch an entire movie during their stay.

Providing access to this increased range of content brings its own set of challenges, not least of which is security. With movie studios typically making their offerings available to hotels before their DVD release, piracy is a real risk, and therefore hoteliers need to take steps to adequately protect content. Thus it has become essential to work with content providers that use appropriate encryption technology to prevent digital signals being copied electronically, and can digitally watermark content to help thwart pirates making copies simply by pointing a HD video camera at a HD screen. Providing access content streamed from the Internet may also be fraught with difficulties, as the liability for pirated content on such sites is not yet clear, and hotels that facilitate access may get caught in a legal crossfire.

**INFRASTRUCTURE.** As both the range and format of content becomes more sophisticated, the infrastructure needed to support it has also grown. More sophisticated content typically requires higher bandwidth, and thus the hotel’s network may need to be upgraded or replaced. In the case of new builds, using a fiber optic cable as the backbone has become the norm, while a variety of alternative solutions, including using structured cabling or Cat3 / DSL-based IP services can be used to retrofit existing properties.

When installing a new network, a key decision is whether to keep the entertainment system network separate or use a converged solution, whereby all in-room services (such as IP-based telephone, the in-room bar and energy management system) share the same wiring. In either case, building redundancy into the system so that a fault doesn’t shut down all IT-based services to an entire floor becomes important, further driving up costs.

**BUSINESS MODELS.** With consumers demanding more sophisticated equipment and a wider range of enhanced content, which in turn has to be delivered over an enhanced network, hoteliers are naturally worried about cost and ROI issues. While in the past content providers helped pay for the investment (or in some cases even provided the televisions and infrastructure for free), this has become less common as the use and sophistication of systems diversifies. The most common solution today is a revenue share model, where the hotel sets prices for different options, kicking back a negotiated percentage or fixed fee to the content provider. In some cases, properties are building this fee into their room rate, using it as a differentiator to provide enhanced content to their guests for “free.” Others are using it as a supplemental revenue source, with the good news that guests seem willing to pay for better equipment and a wider range of content. Many hotels that have already moved to the additional fee model are reporting revenue gains of up to 30 percent. Thus while guests would like to have such enhancements for free, they seem ready and willing to pay for an exceptional experience.

A U.S. example shows where it’s all going. Although casino hotels are notorious for providing inadequate in-room guest facilities (preferring instead to drive guests to the casino floor where they can be tempted into gambling), the MGM Las Vegas, always famous for going over the top, has both invested in advanced in-room entertainment systems and is using them in an interesting way. In its new CityCenter development, technology in the room can tell when a new guest has just arrived. Once the guest touches his or her RFID key to the door’s sensor, the flat screen panel and high quality audio system in the room spring into action, playing an especially composed fanfare to welcome the guest!

**The Bottomline**
Believe it or not, guestroom energy management systems have been around for almost 30 years now. According to Lodging Technology, it originated in infrared occupancy, sensor-based hotel energy conservation in 1980. It is only in the past few years, however, that wireless versions of the many hard-wired systems on the market have become available. Some vendors are just rolling out their wireless offerings. No two wireless systems are exactly the same, but they all rely on thermostats, motion and/or passive infrared (PIR) occupancy sensors, along with door switches and transceivers/controllers to power down heating and cooling when guests have left the room or left a balcony or patio door open. While some wireless systems are very basic, others integrate with property management systems and/or provide centralized monitoring and reporting capabilities.

Hard-wired systems are still very reliable, but can be cost-prohibitive to install in existing buildings, especially at the mid-scale and economy end of the lodging sector. Wireless systems are not bound by construction or fixture limitations. They are flexible and operate using IEEE 802.15.4 ZigBee wireless protocol — now a widely accepted networking technology. While some wireless systems may currently cost more than their hard-wired counterparts, Jeff Sobieski, chief operating officer for Telkonet, Inc., says some are currently less expensive and the technology is only going to become more affordable.

“A year from now, all of our sales will be Networked Telkonet SmartEnergy systems (NTSE),” Sobieski says.

NTSE is indicative of how many wireless systems work. It uses a ZigBee wireless IEE802.15.4 “mesh” network, where each device functions as a wireless repeater and enables energy management thermostats to communicate with each other.

other and aggregate communications up to a single master NTSE Gateway Server on site. Through the company’s Telkonet Central, one can manage and monitor all NTSE devices via a Web-based portal. Sobieski says an online “dashboard” allows a hotel owner to see how many rooms are currently occupied, view estimated kilowatt-hour savings, and adjust temperature setbacks. Alerts, or “alarms” can be set to go off when maintenance is needed.

Telkonet’s Recovery Time technology measures temperatures in a room every three seconds. Each room is evaluated independently in real time to determine its energy efficient temperature, or setback, based on many environmental conditions, such as room location, window placement, dry versus humid climate, varying weather conditions, the HVAC unit and so on.

What’s Available
As mentioned earlier, in most guestroom scenarios where energy management systems are in place, there are four main components: the thermostat, sensor, the switch (or switches) and the transceiver/controller. In Onity’s SensorStat Wireless DDC system, the infrared sensor is built into the thermostat. Onity’s Wireless innPULSE system, which works in conjunction with the SensorStat Wireless DDC, allows a manager to control HVAC systems from the front desk one floor at a time or individually by guestroom. Room temperature, humidity, occupancy, run time and other metrics can be monitored. Brian Bevins, business development manager for Onity’s Energy Management Systems division, says Onity’s system can reduce equipment run time by 25 to 35 percent.

Lodging Technology recently introduced its GEM Link Wireless energy management system. What’s unique about it is its ability to program a thermostat to four setback levels. For example, in a room heating situation where the guest has been gone from a room for five minutes, the system can be programmed to set back the temperature by two degrees. After the guest has been gone for an hour, the thermostat can be programmed to lower the temperature another two degrees.

“The timing and temperature setback for heating and cooling are flexible and programmable,” says Bill Fizer, founder and president of Lodging Technology.

The GEM Link Wireless system includes a Programmer Maintenance Module that allows one to monitor room occupancy and other status features and change programming parameters from outside the guestroom.

A typical guestroom is unoccupied 65 percent of the time. Investing in a system that powers down heating and cooling equipment when rooms are vacant, especially in areas where significant utility rebates are available, makes a lot of financial sense. In addition to reducing energy costs, guestroom energy management systems also reduce run time for HVAC equipment. This extends equipment life and reduces maintenance-related time and costs. Energy management systems also demonstrate a commitment to the environment and reducing one’s carbon impact. Numerous surveys have shown that both business and leisure travelers alike seek out green hotels when making travel plans.

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MANAGING INTERNET TRAFFIC

Bandwidth as a business driver in a recession economy

By JP Hebert and Trevor Warner

The current state of the economy is affecting all business verticals around the globe including the hospitality sector. To meet this new challenge, businesses in this sector are tasked with the challenge of containing operational costs and maintaining a high level of service to preserve if not augment guest satisfaction scores. Guest loyalty should prove critical in this current economy since it will drive recurrent revenue in a price-sensitive marketplace.

It is now widely accepted that to ensure positive guest satisfaction scores, which properties need to address, guest Internet access is the number two driver, just after clean rooms. It has become vital to business travelers to stay in touch with both work and home, and failure to deliver this service can prove to be a loyalty deterrent.

Internet traffic can be easily compared to the traffic we all experience going to work, where we are dependent on many factors which determine the overall trip time and the enjoyment of the experience. Should the commute happen on a single-lane road, there is no opportunity to go around the obstacle, be it a damaged road segment, a stalled vehicle, a slower vehicle causing congestion or the weather.

Internet access is very similar to managing road traffic and has been a challenge for properties to manage because of the ever-expanding repertoire of Internet-based services guests connect to. The days of basic Web browsing, e-mail and VPN are behind us, where guests will continue to use them, but will use media-rich services as well. Common examples include Hulu.com, Slingbox appliances to watch one’s own television set at home while on the road, Skype and other voice/Web conferencing services, online games, network games, peer-to-peer applications and so much more. Hence, the single-lane approach has to be migrated to a more suitable format for the guests.

JP Hebert is vice president of business development for Elfiq Networks. Trevor Warner is a principal with Warner Consulting Group.
Most properties and property management organizations are in a position of re-evaluating their needs and planning a better infrastructure. The traditional model of T1 circuits (or multiple T1 circuits) has proven very expensive because the throughput is limited to 1.5 Mbps per circuit, which doesn’t meet guest demand.

A viable approach many hospitality sites have introduced in the past few years is the principle of combining multiple, locally-available, low-cost ISP links to supplement business class circuits. ADSL circuits and cable modem links are providing 5 to 25 Mbps download throughput, some regions’ providers can reach 40 Mbps, and this proves to significantly help properties meet their guests’ requirements because for the most part guests will be downloading from the Internet. While independently, these circuits are not engineered to handle guest volume, combined with other Internet connections the load can be balanced intelligently so as not to overuse any individual connection.

A Case-by-Case Analysis
Financially, the advantages of this route are significant on a per-property basis, where savings can be immediately achieved in most cases; the cases shown above-right outline some commonplace bandwidth situations.

In both cases, soft benefits are experienced by properties:

- Throughput is significantly improved on the download segment, which is very beneficial to guest satisfaction scores. When guests can view online entertainment, connect to the office, talk with close ones and catch up with the world, a large portion of the bandwidth used for these activities will be for downloading information to the guest’s laptop, not the other way around.

- Multiple carriers and multiple ISP technologies will introduce a new level of uptime since multiple carrier technologies are used, thus eliminating points of failure and raising guest satisfaction scores. When a carrier using a common telco technology such as T1 becomes unavailable, it will most likely result in other telco technologies following suit since they usually connect at the same point on the local loop of the network. By combining technologies that connect at different points and using different mediums, the risk of downtime can be significantly reduced.

- Additional resilience can be achieved by adding a low-cost wireless link such as a 3G mobile link or WiMAX to ensure maximum uptime in worst-case scenarios for front desk operations, payment and reservation systems. Should wired links prove unavailable, these can deliver the continuity required to operate normally.

CASE 1: Multiple T1 circuits used at a property from one or many providers.

In many cases, multiple T1s are used to supply the required bandwidth for both administrative and guest networks.

**Existing bandwidth**
3X T1 at $450/month (total $1,350/month) providing a symmetrical 4.5 Mbps circuit.

**With the addition of extra circuits while reducing the T1’s capacity**
1X T1 at $450
1X Cable modem at $100/month (15 Mbps/2 Mbps)
1X DSL at $100/month (6 Mbps/1 Mbps)

**TOTAL** — $650/month for 22.5 Mbps download/4.5 Mbps upload capacity.

In this scenario, the organization would save $8,400 in bandwidth costs on a yearly basis.

CASE 2: A single large ISP link used to supply the property’s guest Internet access.

In some cases a single large and more expensive ISP link is used to deliver Internet services to guests. While providing significant capacity, the real requirement is on the downstream segment, and the throughput on the upstream is rarely fully utilized.

**Existing bandwidth**
1X DS3 circuit at $3,500/month providing a symmetrical 45 Mbps circuit.

**With a different array of low-cost ISP circuits, significant gains can be achieved:**
3X Cable modem at $100/month (15 Mbps/2 Mbps)
2X DSL at $100/month (6 Mbps/1 Mbps)

**TOTAL** — $500/month for 57 Mbps download/8 Mbps upload capacity.

In this scenario, the organization would save $18,000 in bandwidth costs on a yearly basis.

Continued on page 26.
Managing Multiple Routes

The traditional way to use multiple ISPs is through routers (devices that connect a network to the Internet), where the commonplace scenario is a single carrier T1 used with a second one to satisfy a failover requirement. While this is a viable approach, it proves to be fairly expensive because a second link is paid for, but not put to use in the property’s environment. Routers are designed to connect one network to another, but not to proactively manage bandwidth from multiple carriers.

Link balancing appliances are better suited for these projects, where they will complement existing routers. Some individuals refer to these devices as “WAN switches” or “router switches,” and they permit the use of multiple concurrent ISP circuits to handle guest and administrative networks (they manage multiple routers so they connect a network to the Internet through multiple Internet providers).

By combining multiple ISPs including low-cost DSL and cable modems into such a device, a maximum return on investment can be achieved. All the links can be used concurrently, and should one not be available for a period of time, others will be used to compensate in a failover process. With these devices, the concept of “multi-lane highways” for bandwidth becomes possible to enable more traffic across more highway lanes. With high-download capacity ISP links such as DSL and cable modems, the T1 can be significantly complemented.

Traffic segmentation is commonly used in properties, supported by these devices to direct traffic based on specified parameters such as protocol, source and destination. This way, low-cost links can be used for low-priority traffic such as watching online television, and more expensive links can be used for more critical applications such as PMS or reservations. This could be compared to having regular, public transit and commuter lanes on a highway.

With link balancers which support traffic segmentation and quality of service (QoS), hotels can now better control traffic usage and prevent bandwidth-intensive applications such as peer-to-peer from using too much available bandwidth, by isolating less critical traffic and by promoting more important traffic such as e-mail and VPNs. The T1, which is commonly installed for the administrative network, can also be shared and bandwidth can be guaranteed for key applications as well. The unused part of the T1 can be used to provide guest Internet access in a controlled manner to prevent guest traffic from overwhelming administrative traffic.

One important note properties must be aware of with regard to link balancers is that they are business continuity devices, but like any item in the telecom closet, it can physically fail. Should the unit fail, all connectivity to the guest rooms and administrative networks will be lost. There are two ways to ensure a defective unit does not cause harm to a property:

• **Redundant units** — for larger properties, this can be a viable option, where two units are installed to handle the traffic; one is active and the second monitors the first in case of failure. Should the active unit fail, the second one takes over. The issue with this approach is that it can prove to be expensive and out of reach for smaller properties.

• **Bypass ports** — some devices when they lose power fall into “bypass mode,” which means the unit will no longer supply link balancing capabilities, but bandwidth will be allowed to flow from/to one Internet link until the problem is solved. With this approach, even smaller properties can guarantee maximum uptime to their guests and internal users.

Internet access can prove to be both a gift and a curse depending on how it is installed and managed. In this economy, it has become vital, and the right strategy will provide significant dividends for both cost reduction at each property, as well as guest loyalty and improved satisfaction scores. Just like our road systems, more lanes mean less congestion and faster speeds. Bandwidth can be added quickly to meet and exceed demands, and unlike many municipal projects... under cost.
Recent years, there has been an increase in the importance and investment of guestroom technology. This has mainly been led by the industry norms of flat screen televisions and installation of guest Internet access as a standard in hotel rooms. Add to this the numerous other devices used to offer guests connectivity, both audio and visual. However, these technological advances, as good as they are and needed by our industry, are all “guest-facing technologies.” Has the same investment and importance been placed on technology for the room employee? Are there the same advantages and return on investment as guest-facing technologies?

Investing in technology in these difficult financial times may seem inappropriate, however improved service quality and, more importantly, increased staff productivity can arise by the implementation of guestroom operational technologies. This year, the HITEC exhibit hall offers the latest hospitality technology solutions and products that can reduce costs, attract customers and help employees, “In today’s rocky economy, it is imperative to know as much as possible about solutions that can improve an organization’s bottom line,” said Frank Wolfe, CAE, CEO of HFTP. This approach is imperative because in the end, a hotel is a business and a business is there to make money.

Given the current economic climate, change for the sake of change is not a good idea, but the use of technologies such as automated mini bars, mobile technologies and RFID technologies can hold great advantages for hoteliers trying to save on costs, increase productivity and improve customer service.
### Operational Technologies Help Maintain Guest Services

**MINI BARS** Automated mini bars give hotel staff real-time tracking of guest use, and the option for remote locking.

**RFID TECHNOLOGY** Incorporation helps secure on-site furniture and electronics, track luggage movement, offers cashless payment throughout the property, maintain stock levels and much more.

**MOBILE TECHNOLOGY** Mobile units help staff and guests keep current with the hotels’ status — guests can be alerted to special hotel services and staff can keep up with back-of-the-house needs — wherever they are.

**TRAINING ELECTRONICS** New training programs use entertainment systems to offer virtual scenarios to test staff’s skills.

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### Mini Bars

The use of automated mini bars has been around for years; however for some hotels implementation has been difficult due to infrastructure problems. The benefits of an automated mini bar system are clear:

- Better billing accuracy and an end to the ever-annoying, check-out question, “Anything from the mini bar?”
- Remote locking of the mini bar from reception is a great advantage for the hotel in case the room is occupied by minors and cash-only paying guests.

Staff who manage the mini bars save a lot of time and effort by knowing in advance, and remotely, the status of the mini bars throughout the hotel. Knowing if a mini bar has even been opened greatly reduces restocking time by being able to skip the unused ones. Also, knowing exactly what products need to be replaced improves refill time and stock control. It also reduces unnecessary intrusion on guests who haven’t been using their mini bars?

All of these special features offer cost-savings to the hotel, for they increase productivity with a reduced staff. With traditional, non-automated mini bars, one employee is needed per 100 mini bars. With an automated system, only one employee is needed to cover 400 mini bars. This is a major decrease in staff costs. For a 250 bedroom hotel this would mean saving approximately $30,00 per month in labor costs, based on a five hour day.

A hotel can also do its part in reducing its carbon footprint by implementing an automated mini bar system with a computerized energy saving system. Cooling can be set according to rate periods set by the electricity supplier of the hotel and room status, thus allowing the management to enhance the cooling efficiency, reducing energy costs significantly. Research by the Danish Institute of Technology states that mini bars can be responsible for up to 10 percent of a hotel’s total electricity costs.

For the same 250 bedroom hotel, this could mean a $600 per month savings on energy.

One last advantage to an automated system is the ability to inform guests, in a very clear way, that any item removed from its position will be charged directly to their bill, even if they replace it afterwards. This reduces the number of disputes at check out.

**RFID**

RFID (Radio frequency identification) technology is widely used today from highway tolls to paying for public transport like the oyster card in London, which has now been modified as a payment method in certain shops and restaurants in London. In hospitality, RFID has primarily been used on guest key cards for room entry. However this technology possesses many current and future uses for the operational staff in a hotel.

**PRODUCT TRACKING.** RFID technology gives the hotel the potential to track various products within the establishment, such as fine art or television screens. Or the hotel can use RFID tags to track guest luggage as it moves from the lobby to the guestroom, or vice versa. The Millennium and Copthorne hotel in Singapore uses this system, allowing staff to know in real time where guest luggage is located, as well as the delivery times.

**BRACELETS.** Giving your guests RFID-enabled bracelets has great advantages for the hotel manager. Obviously this is not for all hotels, but leisure guests in your resort could use these bracelets to pay for food, drink and services, without having to sign. A cashless RFID payment system makes it extremely easy for guests to purchase high-margin items such as drinks, food, specialized services and hotel merchandise — increasing the chances that those purchases are made.

As an example, Wild Rivers Waterpark in Irvine, Calif., has implemented a system that enables guests to set up an account linked to an RFID wristband. The wristband is used to spend money anywhere in the park to purchase food and other items. This system has yielded an immediate return on investment with visitor-spending quadrupling since implementation.

**INVENTORY TRACKING.** Applying RFID technology to inventory has maybe the greatest potential for hospitality properties. As an industry, we hold enormous amounts of stock and use vast sums of money and resources to track and control stock. Knowing in real time stock levels in a hotel using RFID can reduce labor costs and inventory inaccuracies, and simplify business processes.

The use of RFID technology in bars is already in place, tracking liquor amounts served to guests saves money.
and increases operational efficiency. With an RFID system in place, a bar that serves 30 bottles of liquor a week can save $12,000 per year and increase efficiency by 50 percent. It is estimated that the return on investment on such a system is approximately six months.

In my point of view, the best application for RFID has to be the RFID chip implanted in golf balls for tracking. The use of such tracking ranges from the ability to search for a lost ball using a homing device, to a computerized driving range format that tracks shots made by a player and gives feedback on distance and accuracy.

Already on the market and part of the HFTP GUESTROOM 20X is the tray detection system. The hotel can now remotely detect when a guest has placed his room service tray in the corridor outside his room. Use of technology for this particular situation is actually very useful. Room service staff can be more productive and efficient, knowing exactly where the trays are, therefore spend less time “looking” for the trays, and have them cleared faster from the corridors.

From a guest perspective, this also has its advantages. There are not too many guests who like going to their room and passing trays with half-eaten club sandwiches in the corridor. Also, if these trays are left too long, they could potentially pose a health and safety problem. With a food tray detection system, the room service department, could have faster tray turnaround and hold less room service stock, in terms of trays, plates and covers.

Mobile Technology
The use of mobile technology for operational staff has now reached a peak, with most hotels equipped with wireless networks, and the market filled with PDAs, iPhones and Blackberry technologies.

There are many mobile applications for hotel guests, such as hotelforyou, urbanspoon and runtriz™. The latter is an application for iPhone, PSP® and BlackBerry that allows a guest to see the daily menus, reserve a service such as spa or transport, and interact with the hotel using the mobile technology. This is using technology to meet guests’ expectations and is a green way to deliver information by reducing paper use, notably menus and paper-based guest information.

But there are also advantages for a hotel’s housekeeping and maintenance staff. Potential advantages include instant communication between management, staff and front desk, avoiding delays and saving money from “wasted time.” Housekeeping results in increased labor savings and quicker room turnaround times with instant transmissions of guest departure.

The hotel maintenance department increases productivity with mobile technology by knowing in real time what are the outstanding tasks, prioritizing these tasks, saving on labor costs and quickly eliminating outstanding issues.

The Bardessono Hotel, an MTM Lodging-managed property in Yountville, Calif., has implemented MTech’s Room Expeditor for its housekeeping department. By referencing this tool while refreshing rooms, the room attendant is kept aware of guest histories and preferences. This enables the attendant to refer to the guest by name and set up the room with guest preferences, such as room temperature and favorite amenities. The system also allows management to track how many minutes were spent in each room, so the hotel can track who is working efficiently and who needs better training and help.

Training Programs
To finish on a training note, Hilton Garden Inn has implemented a new training program, Ultimate Team Play for PSP. Each hotel will receive a PSP handheld entertainment system and the Ultimate Team Play game featuring guest satisfaction training for positions in housekeeping, food and beverage, engineering and maintenance, and the front desk. Ultimate Team Play puts team members in a 3-D virtual Hilton Garden Inn hotel where they must choose how to respond to various guest-related scenarios in a given time frame, while also ensuring that they complete their specific hotel duties, i.e. answering the telephone, checking guests in and out, and general guest interaction (in the front desk scenario). The level and speed, as well as the appropriateness of their response directly affect the simulated guest’s satisfaction.

Tough times call for tough measures, and as a lot of hotels are just trying to keep operational, investing in innovative technology may seem to most hoteliers idiotic. But if the cost reductions are there, guest and staff satisfaction increase, and the will to gain competitive advantage is strong, then hotels should be looking to these technologies for now and the future.

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Let’s look at guestroom 2.0 and the issues, implications and potential consequences resulting from our efforts to accommodate our younger generation guests. What’s the nature of this updated version? It is participation, interaction and integration of the guest — the guest’s technology, the room and it’s technology, and “the cloud.” It is how the guestroom “turns on and tunes in” the guest, to borrow a phrase from the past.

First off, let’s be clear: the strategy is to accommodate, not to compete or try to wow them. Our newer generation guests are “self-provisioning” in that they already own their favorite technologies. They check-in with their favorite laptops, cell phones, iPods, etc. They will not use your Internet-enabled television to get their e-mail; they will use their laptop or cell phone for that. They will not listen to local radio; they will listen to their XM or Sirius radio, or listen to online radio stations.

**Streaming Content**

So how do we accommodate the guest’s tech gadgets? Readily accessible power outlets, including if you will, powered USB ports on the desk or nightstand. Quality televisions that have conveniently located “jack-packs,” even though we’re finding that they do not get used anywhere near as often as we thought. Provide input connections for the MP3 player both on the nightstand and television, if possible. Provide wired HSIA access connectors at the desk and night-stand if possible, as well as WiFi.

To further accommodate our newer generation guests, understand that they are “self-provisioning” their own content. What does self-provisioning content look like and what does this mean to you? How about YouTube™ and Slingbox™ and LocationFree® devices? Everyone by now knows that YouTube is the million-channel, Internet-delivered streaming video/television system. What Sling Box and LocationFree (and a dozen other similar technologies) do is give the guest a control unit as part of their home entertainment system. This allows them, from anywhere in the world where they have a broadband HSIA connection, to tune into their home system. They can watch their hometown local cable television, watch their TiVo®, see their kids soccer game from last night, etc. All courtesy of your high-speed, broadband connection.

So, what does this tell us about the capacity of our Internet access system? In a word: Fiber. Streaming video is the broadband hog of Internet applications. And the move to high-definition is making it twice as bandwidth hungry. Look at your Internet services provider and cable plan. How much concurrent bandwidth can you deliver to the guestrooms? On the low end, each standard definition YouTube channel requires 700Kb/s to 1.2 Mb/s bandwidth. On the upper end, a guest watching a HDTV program from their home server via SlingBox or LocationFree requires 4 to 16 Mb/s bandwidth for uninterrupted viewing. How many guests can you accommodate simultaneously?

We offer that providing blazing, amazing high speed Internet service will not garner your hotel extra kudos from your guests; but, it is actually the ante in today’s marketplace. It is what it takes to be a player. On the flip side, not providing reliable high speed Internet earns you a reputation very quickly, and not one you want. We suggest that, above all else, when capital expense money is budgeted, look at your Internet infrastructure first and do everything you can to make it a super structure that will last well into the future.

**New Standards for Sound Isolation**

Let’s consider another perspective on accommodating guests. At home, there is a sense of privacy and safety that we want to duplicate for our guests. We have gone to great lengths in the development of architectural design standards to ensure that the guest feels comfortable, safe and secure in the guestroom. From night latches to airtight windows with blackout curtains to door seals; we wrap the guest in visual and psychoacoustic privacy.

Jeff Loether, ISHC is president of Electro-Media Design, Ltd. an acoustical and audiovisual consulting firm. He is also a previous speaker at HITEC.
But wait! Those architectural design standards were developed in the ’80s, when the thing on the nightstand was a “clock radio” and the TV had a two watt, 50 cent speaker. Now we have bass-enhanced Bose Wave radios and 50 watt stereos, flat panel LCD televisions, and some places, even surround sound. The guestroom walls designed three decades ago were intended to provide acoustic isolation between typical bedrooms. Today’s guestrooms are approaching the acoustic dynamics of dorm rooms and home theaters. We know of one high-end property whose guest complaints quadrupled immediately after installing new nightstand radios in every guestroom.

Further, even if the walls were originally built to standards published at the time, over time remodeling efforts and room changes can diminish sound isolation. Attachments such as headboards, wall art and millwork furniture act as “sounding boards” by transferring sound vibrations from one side of the wall to the other.

So, how big of a problem do we have? A conservative estimate of the difference in sound levels of today’s well-equipped guestroom compared to those of the ’80s is approximately 10 dB. Subjectively, what we are saying is that the sound levels generated from the music and television systems being installed today is twice as loud as before. But to sound twice as loud, that also means that this new equipment is generating eight times more sound energy, and that is what must be dealt with.

How do we improve the sound isolation qualities of the guestroom walls? Of course, there is not one simple answer, since there are a dozen different types of wall constructions used in hotels, and each has its own qualities and weaknesses. But, to put things into perspective, the “good quality” guestroom standard walls of the ’80s provided approximately 48 to 50 dB of sound isolation (STC 55 wall type). In order to provide the same level of privacy, security and acoustic isolation with today’s guestroom technologies, we would need to provide a minimum of approximately 60 dB of isolation (STC 65). That’s a big difference.

This kind of improvement cannot be made with wall coverings. It involves the combination of mass and limp acoustically-absorptive materials. There are various specialized products and wall components available, but none work in all cases and some may exacerbate the problem if not properly specified and installed. Further, there are other factors that can have an impact on your efforts to improve acoustic isolation, such as penetrations, HVAC and peripheral sealing details, and the attachment issues described above.

So, the best suggestion we can offer as you plan your next wave of guestroom remodeling projects is to consider the opportunity you have to anticipate and prevent the unintended impact of the new guestroom technologies. Apply the Hippocratic Oath to these projects, “First, do no harm,” then think how to best accommodate the new guest with their self-provisioned technology and content, and with your new high-fidelity, high-definition entertainment technologies.
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