

# Hotel tech must do more than ‘wow’ guests

 [hotelnewsnow.com/Articles/142950/Hotel-tech-must-do-more-than-wow-guests](http://hotelnewsnow.com/Articles/142950/Hotel-tech-must-do-more-than-wow-guests)

30 MAY 2017 7:18 AM

The next stage is here for technology, but hotels need to adapt quickly to avoid being left behind while others are evolving.

By [Gary Isenberg](#)

Undoubtedly, we have become an on-demand society. A tap on the Uber app, a car is summoned and in minutes you are off to your next destination. Crave a restaurant-quality meal? Browse the menus on Seamless and have it delivered to your door. In our households, Amazon's Alexa controls our temperatures, sets our alarms and plays our music—all at the sound of our voices.



These on-demand giants would not have succeeded without the innovative technology that allows consumers to directly receive the service without going through a middleman. It's the app—not the cars or drivers—that has made Uber so successful.

These user-friendly applications have further pushed the on-demand model to acceptance in our society. The next is here, and it is the “Internet of Things” (IoT). Uber has begun to test self-driving cars in Tempe, Arizona, and Pittsburgh. These cars utilize a wide variety of devices through the IoT to safely deliver passengers to their destination. The question for the hotel industry is whether it can adapt quickly enough to these changes—or will be left behind as others take advantage of these advances.

## **Not just a novelty**

Several hotel brands have already incorporated tech-enabled services in their hotel rooms. Many permit guests to set room temperatures through an app, and Aloft recently debuted Botlr, a robotic butler through which guests can order deliveries or amenities like towels. Through the IoT, Botlr summons the elevator and rings the guest room phone to announce its arrival.

Hotels must do more with technology than merely wow guests with what are essentially novelties. Soon enough, every hotel will have a cyber butler. So how does it make one hotel different from another? It will be a natural part of the room, like the bed or chair. Instead, hotels must use technology, the IoT and big data to truly deliver a personalized, on-demand guest experience.

To do that, hotels need to act outside of its four walls and realize the guest experience begins the moment guests embark on their journey to the hotel. The hotel serves as the hub of the travel experience. The technology is already here to deliver get-it-instantly-by-a-tap service.

## **Personalized experiences before the guest arrives**

Imagine you are a guest arriving at an airport. The hotel where you've made a reservation is notified of your arrival, and the hotel's automated system dispatches a shuttle to pick you up. The driver already knows your location via GPS, and you receive a message and map on your cellphone pointing you in real time to the location of your shuttle. How's that for on-demand, personalized guest service?

But it doesn't stop there. Once in the van, the hotel is notified of your expected arrival time. The system assigns your room, and transmits your key electronically to your phone. Upon arrival, your bags are hoisted by a robotic luggage handler for delivery to your room. You no longer need to wait in line at the front desk; instead you head directly to the room.

As you approach the elevator, a door opens and welcomes you by name. As you walk down the hall to your room, the lights automatically turn on in the hallway to illuminate your path. Your guestroom door opens, and there is a hologram of a hotel employee welcoming you and explaining all the amenities and features of the property. Shortly after entering your room, the robotic luggage delivery system rings the phone to let you know your bags are at your door.

The technology to accomplish this illustration of personal service currently exists. Nothing mentioned is anything new; the current technology only needs to be harnessed. Luckily, hotel owners have taken note. A recent survey compiled by [Hospitality Technology](#) magazine found more than half of hotels (57%) plan to boost IT spending this year, with the purpose of that technology aimed at enhancing “digital customer engagement.”

The opportunity for personalized services due to the IoT and big data is endless. Thanks to the big data in the cloud, hotels can learn guest preferences. We all leave a digital trail whenever we purchase items through our smartphones or on our credit cards.

### **A differentiating factor**

In the past, hotels have been slow to embrace technology. It's why the online travel agencies were able to grab hold of our inventory. OTAs such as Expedia, Priceline and TripAdvisor eventually eroded the power of the brand's reservation systems, and now they are even cutting into the brand's reward programs. Similarly, Airbnb hijacked hotels' bricks and mortar by enabling people to book rentals in private homes. All these disruptors have marginalized the power of the brands.

But there is one area where hotel brands can recapture their prominence, and that's through furnishing a personalized, unique guest experience for each traveler who comes through their doors. Airbnb offers the room, but not the kind of services a hotel can provide. We have the ability through technology and apps already in existence. For example, hotels can partner with Uber or Lyft to drive guests to the hotel. It would not take a large investment on the part of hotels, and the revenues and savings would be significant.

I believe it's up to the brands to harness the power of technology, IoT and big data to deliver on the promise of an individualized, on-demand guest experience to truly differentiate hotels from the OTAs and Airbnb. Through these innovations, hotels offer guests experiences they can't get anywhere else when they travel. It's not through tech novelties (like robots) but through the practical application of technology that will enhance the guest experience.

Welcome to the future of hotel service. The technology needed to deliver this experience exists today, and it needs to be harnessed. It is coming soon to a hotel near you.

Gary Isenberg is President of LW Hospitality Advisors Asset & Property Management Services. With more than 30 years of diversified hospitality experience in Hotel Management, Finance, and Asset Management, Gary's expertise includes third party asset management, serving as an owner's representative, due diligence for real estate investors, and development services to negotiate management or franchise agreements. His asset management specialties include, among other services, capital budgeting and PIP costing as well as internal control and accounting.

The opinions expressed in this column do not necessarily reflect the opinions of Hotel News Now or its parent company, STR and its affiliated companies. Bloggers published on this site are given the freedom to express views that may be controversial, but our goal is to provoke thought and constructive discussion within our reader community. Please feel free to comment or contact an editor with any questions or concerns.