Digital advancement revolutionising hospitality enterprises

According to Susina Jooste, director of the Stellenbosch-based Private Hotel School, which celebrates its 10th birthday this year, digital applications have revolutionised the way hospitality enterprises interact with guests, but have also had a significant impact on operations too. The ability of occupational training to stay ahead of the trends is more important than ever.

Susina Jooste

"In his seminal 1970 book *Future Shock*, Alvin Toffler's said: 'The illiterate of the 21st century will not be those who cannot read and write, but those who cannot learn, unlearn, and relearn'. Never has this been more applicable than today." Jooste says that in the hospitality environment, today's guests expect to be able to use their smartphones to do almost everything. "They're more mobile than ever and consider technology to be a central part of their lifestyle. Customers expect mobile services wherever they are and for whatever they are searching."

Studies show, however, that hospitality enterprises have been slow to meet the demand. In one example, 75% of hotels surveyed said they're aware of the importance of booking via mobile apps for their guests, but only one out of four are actually taking advantage of this opportunity. "By offering their own apps, hotels can create an important competitive advantage over properties that have not yet launched any; the demand from the customer's side is high, but the offers from hotels are still low," Jooste says.

Applications for hospitality operations

This doesn't mean the technology isn't available. While AirBnB, Room77, Booking.com and many more have transformed the way guests manage their needs, applications for hospitality operations are improving efficiencies across departments, from stock control to staff performance. There are apps to allow for efficient menu management and housekeeping apps, for example, that allow floor supervisors in a hotel to check room status before guests check in. "The challenges for training and education institutions are to focus on the practical issues in the implementation and use of a range of technologies; and, providing insight into emerging real world changes and future potential," Jooste says.

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The Private Hotel School promotes the use of technologies for improved efficiency, but also to equip students for the job market. Applications are used at various levels among others, basic communication and the dissemination of campus and industry news, course planning, maps and course material.

"Our motto 'Developing tomorrow's best' is inspiring us to explore global trends for mobile learning, online learning and to grasp new opportunities to enable our students to continuously being able to 'learn, unlearn and relearn'," Jooste says.

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