

2018 hospitality IoT trends: Creating a home away from home

By  Pieter Engelbrecht

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There's a seismic shift happening in the hospitality industry, as consumers demand more home-like experiences when they stay at hotels, B&Bs and other establishments. In the wake of popular services like Airbnb, consumers are increasingly coming to expect familiar comforts - like automatically getting connected to the Wi-Fi when they walk through a hotel's door.



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This is forcing hospitality businesses to take their wireless infrastructure beyond just offering free Wi-Fi, to enabling next-generation guest journeys.

Regardless of the size or type of property you operate, brands like yours will be embracing IoT devices and related innovations over the next year to get you to your goals. Here are the four most important IoT and wireless trends for the coming year.

Trend #1: Create a home away from home with location awareness

Few things are more annoying than having to ask reception for a Wi-Fi password, only to find that it's the wrong one or you can't join the network.

By deploying Bluetooth-enabled IoT sensors throughout your property, along with the latest innovations in location-aware mobility and analytics solutions, you can automatically recognise and register guests the minute they step onto your property. Eliminating the stop at the check-in desk goes a long way toward mirroring the experience of walking in the door at home.

Here's one way this could work. Some guests may arrive before check-in time. When they do, they'll receive an automated update, through your mobile app, letting them know that their room is not yet ready. This will be followed by an offer, also through the app, for a discount on a meal or a free drink while they wait for their room. They will also have the option to turn on the heating or air conditioner before they head to the room so that it's comfortable from the moment they walk through the door.

Once in their rooms, your IoT-enabled and location-aware infrastructure will work for you in other ways. For example, guests can use their mobile app to stream personal content onto their in-room television, book a massage at the spa, or order a drink before they head to the pool, so it's ready when they get there. As wireless solutions advance, expect even more options, such as using a mobile device to project a preferred fitness routine onto a full-length mirror.

Trend #2: Remove the friction with improved access management

An important contributor to creating home-like experiences is reducing friction, including around mobile connectivity.

For example, cumbersome authentication routines for accessing the Wi-Fi will be on its way out in 2018. Rather than typing in arcane, lengthy usernames and passwords, you need to enable guests to authenticate with a single touch – and let your access management solution handle the device identification and network security chores.

Advanced access solutions allow regular guests to only log-in once over a certain period of time, e.g. quarterly, meaning they'll automatically connect every time they visit your establishment. Also, if they log into your Johannesburg branch and visit your Cape Town branch two weeks later, they'll already be recognised.

Navigation features within your mobile app that guide guests to food and beverage options, is another way to alleviate friction. More advanced implementations can include real-time seating availabilities that encourage guests to visit underutilised locations.

Sophisticated mobile engagement tools can also draw data from other records to automatically detect when a large group appears to be heading for refreshments and offer them specials at locations where demand is currently low. Similarly, such solutions can help you redirect staff to ensure locations experiencing demand spikes are adequately resourced.

Trend #3: Enhance experiences and resource utilisation with asset tags

Even the most home-like experiences and frictionless journeys can be overshadowed by frustration caused by something as simple as a luggage cart delay. However, this perennial bottleneck is solved by adding cost-effective asset tracking technologies to your location-based solution. Then, you can enable your staff, or even your guests, to pinpoint carts for fast retrieval on your mobile app.

Similarly, when guests are making their way to their rooms, they might not appreciate a gauntlet of dining carts and trays that have been left in the hallway by other guests. It's also not a very pretty sight. With asset tagging, your staff can get alerts whenever meal carts leave a room – and wherever they are in the building – for fast and efficient retrieval.

The best deployments even track how long an asset remains stationary, such as in a guest room, and alerts staff. Then a human can check whether a guest is finished or, in the case of luggage carts, may even need assistance – but not before the guest is sent a personalised message, asking if they need that assistance. This is another way to create one more touchpoint that feels unique and special.

Trend #4: Improved security with AI, IoT and zoning

To effectively drive the experiences we've discussed, IoT-enabled systems must also be secure. We've already seen attempts by hackers to access hospitality networks via IoT devices, such as compromising an [IoT fish tank sensor](#) in an attempt to steal data.

With the ability to group connected IoT devices into "zones" through advanced IoT security options, you're able to better segregate them on your network. And better segregation allows you to apply customised security policies to each zone. Those you set for asset tags might differ from those you set for network-connected door locks, for example.

Additionally, the best solutions infuse real-time intelligence, advanced analytics and AI-based machine learning. Such tools can spot changes – at millisecond speeds – in user or device behaviour that may indicate an invasion of your network. Affected devices can then be automatically quarantined and an alert sent to a designated human to investigate.

No matter what your specific guest experience modernisation entails, it's clear that IoT will play an increasingly vital role in 2018 and beyond. To get the most from your deployment now is the time to consider the options available to help your organisation stand out from the rest, through superior and frictionless customer experiences.

ABOUT PIETER ENGELBRECHT

Pieter Engelbrecht is the business unit manager at Aruba, a Hewlett Packard enterprise company.

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