

Winds of change

Accelerated digital transformation

The pandemic has significantly disrupted the way, the hospitality business works. While the industry mainly depends on human interactions, it is now being swiftly transformed into a contact-less and touch-less landscape, owing to the demands brought by COVID-19. Experts believe that the future of hospitality has taken a significant stride towards digitisation. **Asmita Mukherjee** spoke with industry leaders and technology vendors to know more about the trending technologies in the hospitality industry.

TRANSITIONING THROUGH TECHNOLOGY

“While technology has always played a key role in the hospitality business, over the last few years, a lot has changed in the way we interact with our guests. Contactless service is the new normal for the hospitality industry through technology automation and innovation. Chatbots, interactive virtual reality tours, technologically equipped meeting spaces, location-based hotel services, and the usage of mobile devices as hotel keys are some of the technologies that have been adopted in the recent past,” stated Vineet Verma, Executive Director and CEO, Brigade Hospitality.

According to Sonica Malhotra Kandhari, Joint Managing Director, MBD Group, technology has presented the hoteliers with unique solutions to differentiate, and to operate more safely & efficiently. “Digitalised guest thermal scanners & contactless services/ experiences have gained new momentum. Technology-assisted options, such as mobile check-in, digital menu, contactless payments and services, voice-controlled biometrics to name a few, have catalysed our business,” she added.

The ability to provide contactless services has been the main focus for most technology providers, from minimising the contact points within the hotel operations to touch-free interactions with guests, opined Varun Balwani, Commercial Director, FCS Computer Systems - India, Nepal, Bhutan, Bangladesh.

However, hoteliers are still a bit skeptical of adopting technology full-fledgedly. “The existence of technology does not necessarily guarantee the adoption of it, and the same can be noticed even during this pandemic. Hotels are still mindful of what they would like to adopt, especially since the pandemic has had a direct impact on business. As a technology provider, what is crucial is to listen to the market needs of the moment, and deliver products that will meet the requirements of the customers,” added Balwani.



Vineet Verma
Executive Director and CEO
Brigade Hospitality



Sonica Malhotra Kandhari
Joint Managing Director
MBD Group

ADAPTING TO THE NEW NORMAL

Due to the deadly nature of the pandemic, many hoteliers are making sure that COVID appropriate behaviour is maintained at their premises by implementing Artificial Intelligence-based face readers to mitigate the risk, “Technological solutions like face mask readers & temperature scanner at the entrances, sanitization docks at strategic points, contactless check-in/ check-out options, digital payment gateways, digital food & beverage menus, and Ultra Violet disinfectant cupboards/units for operating equipment have upheld the protocols designed. All these technological advancements offer additional convenience and confidence to our guests so that they can travel and dine hassle-free,” Kandhari added.

Mentioning the importance of implementing Artificial Intelligence (AI) at hotel premises, Verma said that AI is fast being considered as the future technology drive in the hospitality industry. Technologies like AI play a key role in ensuring a seamless guest experience. “Post pandemic, the focus has been on customer-facing tools which are app-based to ensure a contactless secure experience to customers. QR codes now replace elaborate physical menus and mobile phones double up as room keys and interfaces for

payments. Recurring safety and sanitization procedures are also being digitized. We have also implemented contactless menus and payment. We have adopted technologies like ‘ALICE’ concierge to empower the frontline associates and help them deliver memorable experiences through an all-in-one platform. The Guest Service Directories are replaced with QR codes which are displayed on the television. Guests can now browse relevant information via mobile phone and place any requests or orders. We also have cash deposit machines (CDMs) at our hotels, thereby enhancing the productivity of our associates. We are also working on bringing in automation in daily functions such as night audits,” informed Verma.