

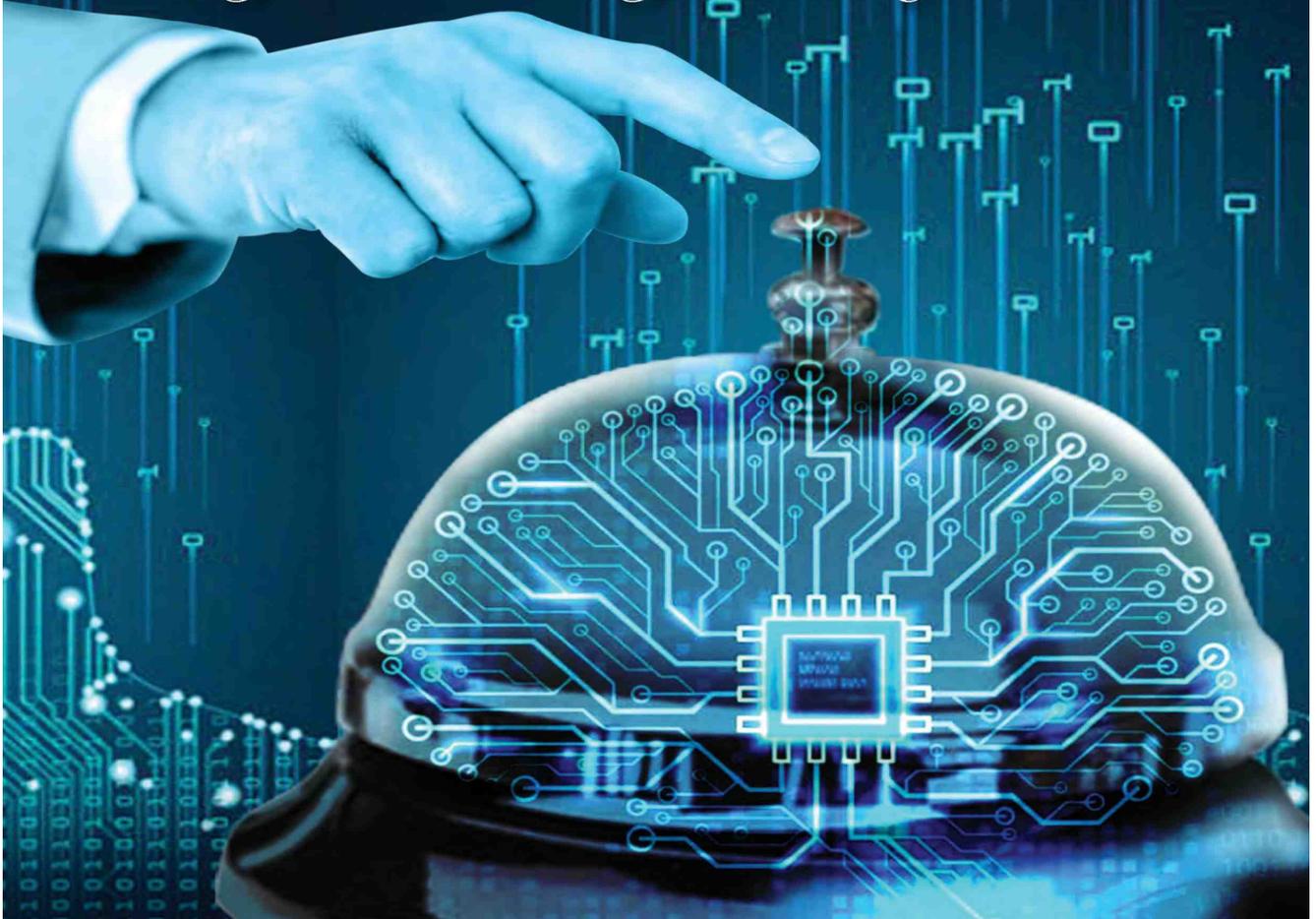
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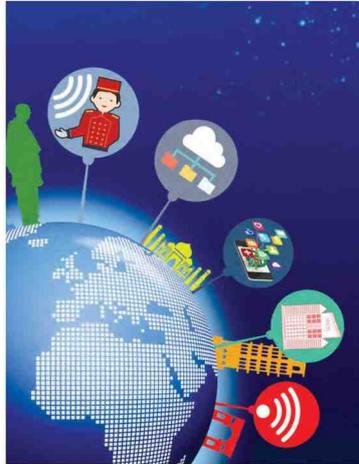
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Hospitality Takes the Digital Highway



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Hitting Refresh With Technology

The pandemic has upended the way we transact in our daily lives. The digital world connected us in contactless times. Now it is seeping into all sectors, streamlining work, identifying new markets, transforming experiences. In Hospitality it means, making way for a new wave of responsive, guest-centric technologies that help to uniquely cater to each guest. Digital environments contain the largest catchment areas of customers. The use cases for technology in hospitality are growing, and savvy hoteliers are able to translate these into stylish experiences for their customers, where guests can engage on their own terms. To rebound faster and to take a sustainable turn, Hospitality is moving closer to tech.

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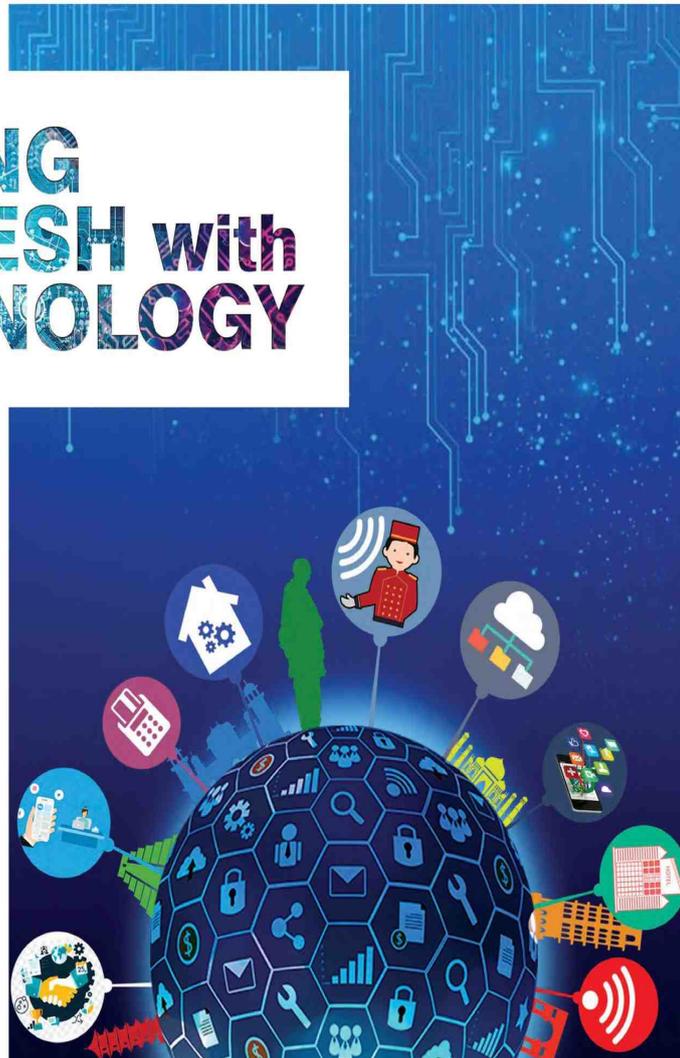


HITTING REFRESH with TECHNOLOGY

1 The pandemic has upended the way we transact in our daily lives. The digital world connected us in contactless times. Now it is seeping into all sectors, streamlining work, identifying new markets, transforming experiences. In Hospitality it means, making way for a new wave of responsive, guest-centric technologies that help to uniquely cater to each guest. Digital environments contain the largest catchment areas of customers. The use cases for technology in hospitality are growing, and savvy hoteliers are able to translate these into stylish experiences for their customers, where guests can engage on their own terms. To rebound faster and to take a sustainable turn, Hospitality is moving closer to tech.

BY NITI SINGH

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W e are on the threshold of a new age of travel, with people expecting seamless personalized services right from the stage of booking. The pandemic propelled the growth of digitization which is bringing about a huge transformation in Hospitality. Who would have thought that one day AI-based assistants can help us know that our guest would only have his coffee decaffeinated or is celebrating a milestone birthday and we can engage him with some irresistible offers?

Predictive analytics is a game changer in Hospitality. With online bookings and registration, transfers through e-wallets, Hotels can rely on a whole lot of data in their possession to curate unforgettable experiences for their customers. The new tech's ability to scan and understand data means that the recommendation engines now offer suggestions based on the specific needs of the user. And such contextual recommendations, like offering a great holiday package to a family looking for a break, or a sugar-free meal for a guest without asking pointed questions, and based on earlier meal ordering data, and so on, are striking a right chord in the industry, making such interactive content work for both the end-users as well as the Hospitality players. Thanks to its powerful capabilities of ushering in personalization, AI can run successful business campaigns.

What are the emerging opportunities? What are the occupancy rates at a given point in a certain location, what price points will provide the most competitive edge, how to offer personalised experiences? New tech is providing answers faster than you frame them and at a scale more than any human capability can offer. It's not just about robots coming to clean your rooms. The technology highway is winning new ground each day, making operations smooth and easy and engaging customers in unique and exciting ways. Another most

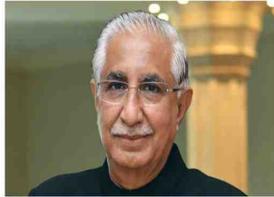
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detectable fact of technology is that this is a game all can play irrespective of the size or scale of the hotel. You don't have to be a luxury seven star hotel to grab the compelling opportunities provided by data or AI. With the advancement of custom-built algorithms and machine learning tools, recommendation engines have improved opportunities for cross-selling and up-selling by providing the most relevant data collected from a user's digital browsing history.

Says Nakul Anand, Executive Director - ITC Ltd: "A barrage of digital technologies are now reshaping the hospitality world. Technology is changing both the expectations of guests as well as the way in which the hospitality industry conducts its business. Some of the trends are leading to great improvements and savings, while some are changing the way hotel developers plan their buildings, infrastructure and staffing requirements. Hospitality operations are evolving constantly, due to the impact of the pandemic, technology, global warming, supply chain issues, and so on."

He says that moving hand in hand with tech is bringing in vast opportunities. Hoteliers now feel more



"Hyper-personalization can lead to much better business results through higher conversions, increase in online purchases, and most importantly, higher levels of brand engagement. Using the correct technical tools will unleash the maximum potential"

NAKUL ANAND
Executive Director - ITC Ltd

connected to their staff across all departments as they can access the management systems whenever they want, wherever they want, on their phone, tablet or computer/laptop.

"Additionally, customers are aiming for a great experience when they book a hotel. With the induction of the right technology, traditional processes have been rejigged. At every step in the customer journey, technology now plays a pivotal role. From enabling a seamless booking process to enhanced loyalty related experiences, immersive experiences, deep learning to slice and dice data for providing hyper-personalized services, active marketing campaigns and more. However, any new innovation comes with its own challenges. Cyber security and regulatory data compliances are a couple of them."

He also adds that it's critical to the success of any hotel to have a strong online presence and on social media channels. In their efforts to achieve visibility, hotels compete to incorporate inviting, Instagrammable backdrops into their design. Research

AI is flattening the space wherein small hotels are able to deliver the same guest experience as large hotels

from Travolution shows 40% of millennial travellers choose a destination based on how Instagrammable it is, bypassing the cost and availability of alcohol (24%) and the opportunities to explore local cuisine (9.4%). Guests lookout for desirable locations that they can tag in their posts, while business analysts scramble to

determine whether this helps to drive ROI. There's also the phenomenon of influencer marketing, where celebrities post positive stories about hotels or brands.

"Social media gives the hotel industry the chance to not only reach potential guests, but to build on relationships with them. Good reviews strengthen the brand's reputation, regular postings (either by marketers or guests) generate SEO content, and instant chat mechanisms support the decision-making and booking processes. Almost all our campaigns are omni-channel now," he says. At ITC Hotels, he says, "we have an aggressive strategy towards collection of first party data, and harness this universe for better targeting and optimized campaign performance through multiple digital channels. Further, martech

BLOCKBUSTER TECHNOLOGIES



ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE:
AI has brought in huge personalization and efficiencies in the last decade. By adopting AI-based recommendation engines, Hotels can deliver enhanced Customer Experiences. The greater level of guest familiarisation is helping hotels offer services uniquely catered for each guest. AI is flattening the space wherein small hotels are able to deliver the same guest experience as large hotels. As hotels pin hope on travel revival, AI enables higher levels of innovations in services.

BLOCKCHAIN:
Blockchain technology offers security and stability. It is a system of recording information that is tamper-proof, as the records are kept in blocks. With the use of blockchain, Hotel processes can potentially be streamlined and made more transparent. Travel industry relies upon information and personal financial details being passed between multiple different companies. Blockchain makes both accessing and storing information easier and safer. Even for small hotels, blockchain provides an efficient platform to make and receive payments, with the levers of security, permissions, and access being in the hands of the Hotel.



"ABCD" IN HOSPITALITY



CLOUD COMPUTING:
Since cloud infrastructure is managed differently than on-site servers, cloud computing proves to be more efficient and less costly. Moving to the cloud enables faster services, seamless access of information, reduction in paper use, safer transactions and more flexibility. Cloud offers huge leaps of innovation for Hotels to reduce the carbon impact since tasks can be performed remotely.

DATA ANALYTICS:
Data is the new oil. Every search, click or digital interaction leads to large amounts of data that can be used to deliver personalized services. Data helps in locating new hotels, understanding new trends, discovering revenue opportunities, makes it easier to predict the kind of facilities a hotel will need to create (as per location data), and also in delivering personalized services. Today's customers demand hyper-personalized experiences. Starting from the warm welcome to a speedy and efficient departure, hotel analytics help to create frictionless experiences for guests.



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“Hotels have been early adopters of many end-user technologies and have even pioneered a few technologies, such as contactless check-in. The new digital technologies are helping us with in-room automation, movies on demand, seamless connectivity over Wi-Fi, advancement in TV content with OTT, mobile keys, IoT implementations to run operations efficiently, ERP and BPM to streamline processes, thereby boosting operational efficiencies and reducing costs”

ASHISH AGARWAL
Chief Technology Officer & SVP, Information Technology, The Oberoi Group

tools enable us to create look-alikes of this universe, hence helping us reach wider audiences of similar interests and behaviour. In addition, we also carry out regular remarketing activities to target guests who have expressed interest in our offerings/products. According to a survey from Chadwick Martin Bailey, nearly 40% of users choose whether or not they'll open an email solely based on the subject line. Clearly, this is a key element of email messages. Thanks to machine learning email technologies, you'll soon be able to determine which subject lines work (and which don't) with ease. CIO magazine suggests that businesses seem to be spending between 4-6% of their revenue on digital technology. However, it also depends on the size of the business and the strategy that they wish to adopt.”

Says Ashish Agarwal, Chief Technology Officer & SVP, Information Technology, The Oberoi Group: “Technological advancements have made operations efficient and helped make guest experiences personalized. The onset of the pandemic has only propelled tech to make further inroads. Hotels have been early adopters of many end-user technologies and have even pioneered a few technologies, such as contactless check-in. The new digital technologies are helping us with in-room automation, movies on demand, seamless connectivity over the Wi-Fi, advancement in TV content with OTT taking over traditional television, mobile keys, IOT implementations to run operations efficiently, ERP and BPM to streamline processes, robotics that automate mundane processes, thereby boosting operational efficiencies and reducing overall costs.” However, he cautions that ensuring guest data security and privacy in a fragmented industry with multiple vendors and third-party ecosystems is the biggest challenge of the current times.

Says KB Kachru, Chairman Emeritus & Principal Advisor – South Asia, Radisson Hotel Group: “We have introduced a game-changing offering in the form of EMMA – Radisson Hotel Group’s unified technology platform. This 360-degree customer experience platform is designed to encompass revenue



“We have introduced a game-changing offering in the form of EMMA – Radisson Hotel Group’s unified technology platform. This 360-degree customer experience platform is designed to encompass revenue management, property management, and business analytics. EMMA allows us to harness big data and improve every aspect of our operations, with an integrated system for reservations, distribution, sales, catering, loyalty programs, and more”

KB KACHRU
Chairman Emeritus & Principal Advisor – South Asia, Radisson Hotel Group

management, property management, and business analytics. The augmented and open platform offers our partners the speed to market new capabilities and delivers an enhanced guest experience by allowing consistency across all our hotels. EMMA further allows us to harness big data and improve every aspect of our operations, with an integrated system for reservations, distribution, sales, catering, loyalty programs, and more. We will continue to invest in technology and talent. With our new growth blueprint, we are nurturing a future-ready organization that delivers efficiencies with a structured approach, led by a quality-driven mindset.”

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"I see consumer screen time as a big opportunity. Today's typical online travel consumer visits an average of 18 websites via multiple devices across eight sessions before making a hotel booking. AI, ML and Blockchain are a few new technologies that can significantly change the hotel reservation system in the future. About 10%-12% of the yearly revenue budget may be assigned to new tech adoption, including paid campaigns"

SUMAN SUR
Director, Information Technology and E-Marketing, Park Hotels

Adds Suman Sur, Director, Information Technology and E-Marketing, Park Hotels: "Using smart technology can offset overconsumption of electricity and reduce the hotel's carbon footprint. Technologies like online booking engines, revenue management systems, website SEO, SEM and new property management systems are creating a seamless experience for customers and hotel staff. Throughout the pandemic these contactless options have proved necessary in reducing the spread of germs and improving safety." He adds that two guest-facing technologies should be the focal point for hoteliers; one is the Guest Engagement, Acquisition and Retention Technology, and the second is the Guest Services Technology to improve guest comfort and satisfaction." He adds that he sees consumer screen time as a big opportunity. "Today's typical online travel consumer visits an average of 18 websites via multiple devices across eight sessions before making a hotel booking.

AI, ML and Blockchain are a few new technologies that can significantly change the hotel reservation system in the future. A mobile-first approach will be the winning strategy for hotels," he adds

He lists out some elements that are redefining customer experiences. These are:
 • Facial recognition for ease of access to properties coupled with security



HOW DATA-BASED RECOMMENDATIONS HELP IN MARKETING CAMPAIGNS

- New reservation - generation and targeted marketing
- Re-target abandoners
- Personalized confirmations
- Loyalty campaigns
- Pre-stay target upgrades and E-concierge
- During stay onsite events, discount coupons
- Post-stay - Thank you and book direct campaign

(as told by Suman Sur, Director, Information Technology and E-Marketing, Park Hotels)



"One of the most dramatic shifts witnessed in marketing in recent years is the shift from offline to online. Almost all our campaigns flow either only, or primarily, through social media and display/search ads"

PATU KESWANI
Chairman & MD, Lemon Tree Hotels

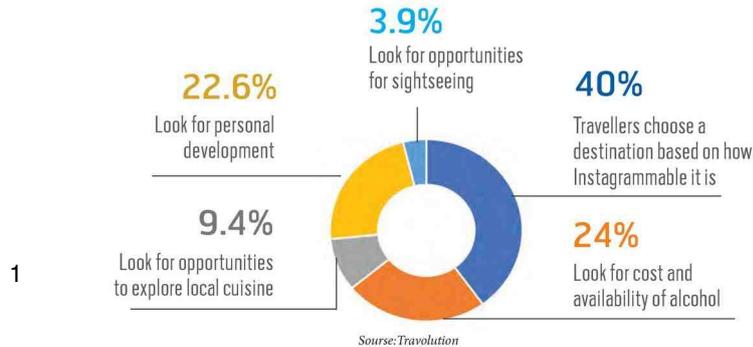
- IoT and smart rooms/voice controlled services for seamless in-room experience
- RFID wristbands that hold a unique ticket information about an attendee
- Chatbots
- Mobile room keys for effortless check-in/check-out
- Smart Concierge that allows guests to book amenities and order food from their mobile device

Says Patu Keswani, chairman and MD, Lemon Tree Hotels: "The most critical usage for greater technology initially was related to health, hygiene, and safety measures across all our brands and hotels. At Aurika Hotels & Resorts, we upped the ante through the Aurika Hotels & Resorts app and, guests can digitally access not just the hotel facilities, but also local sightseeing and tourist activities. The app allows the

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Instagram is key factor in Destination Choice for Millennial Travellers



guest to communicate and transact online, right from unlocking their doors, to accessing menus and placing orders, booking spa appointments and special experiences, and processing check-outs and payments." However, he adds that Hospitality is a people-centric business, and there is no real replacement for people. They have spent the past couple of years assessing how technology can assist staff in creating an environment that is even safer and cleaner, and more contactless. "We've been able to understand those areas where technology can be used in marketing and communication and eliminate the need for printing of menus and promotional literature, making our solutions not just contactless, but environmentally sustainable too. Live chats, messaging services, and audio/video communication platforms are some tools we use to communicate with a guest safely and effectively. From messaging and video communication services to dining platforms, QR codes, online payments and e-forms for data collection, the world is moving in a more digitally optimized direction and these digital solutions will go a long way in bridging communication in a safe and controlled environment," he says.

"One of the most dramatic shifts witnessed in marketing in recent years is the shift from traditional/offline marketing to online marketing. Earlier, the split between online and offline creative design and promotion was 50:50 for our city hotels, and hotels in tier II and III cities often focussed more on offline



"We recently announced our partnership with Samsung and Legrand to power the IoT Guestroom Innovation Lab. The lab explores concepts that have the potential to elevate guest experiences, create more efficient hotel room designs, and contribute to Marriott's global sustainability efforts and goals"

RANJU ALEX
Area Vice President – South Asia,
Marriott Hotels India Pvt Ltd

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mediums of communication. The past couple of years have seen almost all campaigns flow either only, or primarily, through social media and display/search ads. Even today, while we can see a resurgence of offline communication, the split now stands at 80:20 in metro/tier I cities and 70:30 in tier II & III, with the focus clearly on digital communication and marketing mediums."

Says Ranju Alex, Area Vice President – South Asia, Marriott Hotels India Pvt Ltd: "With travellers embracing a 'digital-first' approach, hotels can gain a competitive edge by implementing trendy technologies to exceed guest expectations. From operations and guest experiences to marketing, innovative hotel technology offers a variety of cost saving and revenue opportunities, and it is enabling stakeholders to reach new levels of profitability." However, she adds, as much as we can advance in the field of technology, at no given time can it replace the human connection. "Relationship building is key to the guest experience when it comes to hospitality. Our marketing campaigns have a 50-50 mix with regard to distribution. We are as strong offline as much as online. We are designing guest-facing technology to enable them to personalize their stays to their individual needs at their convenience. Allowing guests to use their mobile phones as hotel room keys, for booking tables, for

With increased personalization made possible by new tech, today's hotel is more like a homotel, offering comfort and flexibility of a home, with all the trappings and the facilities of a hotel

check-in/check-out, saves time, and increases comfort for them. At Marriott, we recently announced our partnership with Samsung and Legrand to power the IoT Guestroom Innovation Lab. The lab explores concepts that have the potential to elevate guest experiences, create more efficient hotel room designs, and contribute to Marriott's global sustainability efforts and goals. The technology, for instance, inside the IoT Guestroom Lab allows a user to ask a virtual assistant for a 6:30 a.m. wake-up alarm, to start a yoga routine or request additional housekeeping services and start the shower at the desired temperature stored in their customer profile – all by voice or app. Apart from that, AI analyses the large data sets that we have and helps us pick out the narrowed down audience to send them with the most purposeful content resulting in the delivery of highly personalized campaigns."

Hotel managers need to embrace new tech, pass on repetitive tasks and concentrate on areas where they can add more value to their hotels. As with every other sector, big data is likely to take away some jobs and create others. And yes, as with every other aspect of technology, it is going to evolve. However, the very roots of hospitality are embedded in the idea of creating immediate and personal engagement that can enhance guest experiences and drive loyalty. This is unlikely to change. **HAI**