The Tech Advantage

New technology trends are revolutionizing the hospitality industry, enhancing guest experiences, reducing expenses, and boosting operational efficiency.

BY BINDU GOPAL RAO

Tarun Dutta, Cluster Director of Sales & Marketing, Sheraton Hyderabad Hotel

Vishal Kenkre, Cluster Information Technology Manager, Novotel & ibis Styles – North Goa

Farhan K Shaikh, Assistant Marketing Manager, The Orchid Hotel, Pune

Jerlyn Dsilva, Marketing and Communication Manager, Sheraton Grand Pune Bund Garden Hotel

The hospitality industry is entering a transformative era defined by the evolving preferences of consumers and the rapid advancement of technology. These advancements have made travel planning seamless and effortless, offering a complete home-to-home travel solution through online platforms.

"Globally, the hospitality industry is increasingly incorporating robots for tasks like housekeeping and serving, with even robotic chefs becoming a reality. Technology is integral to all hospitality experiences, continuously adding value and is expected to grow in importance over time," says Tarun Dutta, Cluster Director of Sales & Marketing, Sheraton Hyderabad Hotel.

We list some technology trends that are shaping the future of hospitality with expert industry voices.

CONTACTLESS MENUS AND PAYMENTS

The rise of contactless payment in the hotel industry has had a strong impact on both guests and hoteliers alike. Contactless payment methods, such as mobile wallets, QR codes, or tap-and-go cards, offer guests a convenient and efficient way to settle their bills. Guests no longer need to carry cash or wait in long queues at the front desk to check out.

Vishal Kenkre, Cluster Information Technology Manager, Novotel & ibis Styles – North Goa, says, "This transition allows guests to seamlessly manage their stay, enhancing convenience, security, and personalisation. Solutions like the Accor digital key, UPI, and mobile wallet payments enable guests to unlock their rooms with their smartphones, settle bills on the go, and more, meeting modern travellers' expectations for a quick, hassle-free stay."

Farhan K Shaikh, Assistant Marketing Manager, The Orchid Hotel, Pune, adds, "As technology continues to evolve and consumer preferences shift further towards digital solutions, the adoption of contactless payments is expected to grow. Hotels that invest in these technologies will likely see enhanced guest satisfaction, operational efficiencies, and a stronger competitive position."

INTERNET TECHNOLOGIES

Technology is revolutionizing the hospitality industry, driving operational excellence, and enhancing marketing effectiveness. By leveraging advanced innovations, businesses can deliver superior guest experiences and achieve new levels of efficiency.

"The Internet of Things (IoT) and smart devices enhance guest convenience and satisfaction, offering seamless control over room settings and personalized services. These technologies also provide valuable data to refine marketing efforts and improve operational efficiency. Advanced data analytics offer deep insights into guest behaviours and preferences, enabling the creation of targeted marketing campaigns," says Jerlyn Dsilva, Marketing and Communication Manager, Sheraton Grand Pune Bund Garden Hotel.

Augmented reality (AR) and virtual reality (VR) technologies provide immersive experiences such as virtual property tours, making marketing content more engaging and memorable.

ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE

The industry is shifting towards sustainability, wellness-centric amenities, AI-powered personalisation, and a focus on unique, locally inspired accommodations. These in-

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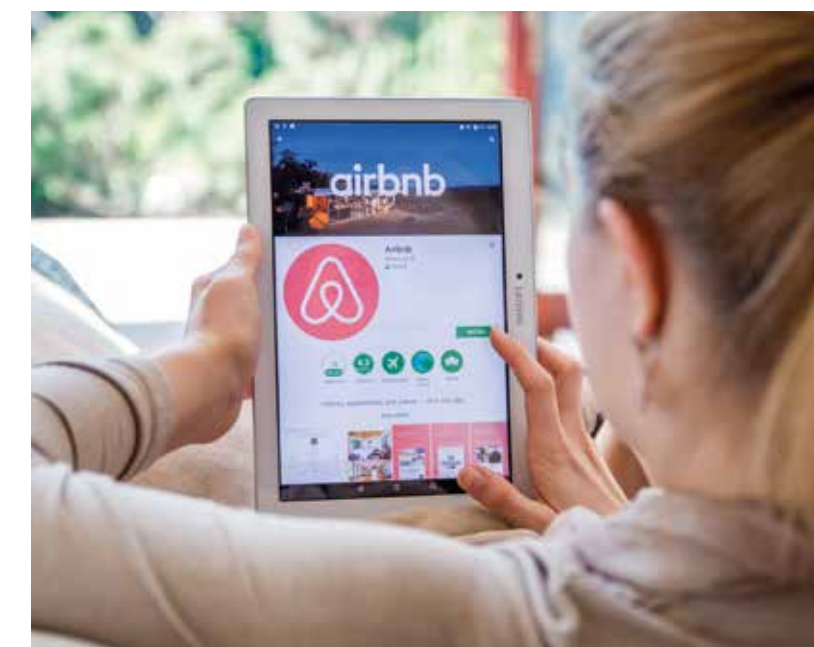>
> **Farhan K Shaikh, The Orchid Hotel, Pune**

William Hall, Vice-President, Marketing and Digital team at RCI

Kapil Bardeja, CEO & Co-Founder, Vehant Technologies

Rahul Verma, Head of Business, Kaara Hotels & Resorts

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- Abhinav Singh, Devrana

enabling more targeted and efficient service delivery. This hands-free convenience extends to hotel services, enabling guests to request room service, book spa appointments, or seek information about local attractions through voice interactions. This integration reduces the workload on staff, as automated responses handle common queries and requests, allowing personnel to focus on more complex tasks and improving overall efficiency," says Mehul Sharma, Founder & CEO, Signum Hotels & Resorts.

ROBOTS AND AUTOMATION
The hospitality landscape is undergoing a digital metamorphosis. "We are seeing a strategic integration of technologies that not only elevate the guest experience but also unlock significant operational efficiency gains. Furthermore, the lightning-fast speeds of Wi-Fi 6 ensure seamless connectivity for both guests and staff, crucial for smooth operations. The future of hospitality service resides in automation. Robots are transitioning from novelty to necessity, alleviating staff of repetitive tasks like deliveries or housekeeping. This allows them to focus on what truly matters: Personalized guest interactions," says Abhinav Singh, MD & CEO, Devrana.

novations streamline operations, reducing wait times and providing personalized assistance. "Personalization is at the heart of this transformation, enabling the curation of experiences that align with individual interests. Advanced data analytics recommend destinations, accommodations, and activities that cater to travellers' passions. AI-powered translation tools facilitate seamless communication between travellers and locals, enhancing cultural immersion and meaningful interactions. This trend streamlines processes, reduces manual intervention, and enhances communication, leading to a better customer experience," says William Hall, Vice-President of the Marketing and Digital team at RCI, overseeing the EMEA, APAC, and India regions.

Kapil Bardeja, CEO & Co-Founder, Vehant Technologies, adds, "Our technology empowers hotels to elevate their security protocols while streamlining operations. Hotels that integrate with our advanced scanning systems can ensure the safety of their premises by rapidly and accurately identifying potential threats. This not only enhances security for guests and staff but also significantly reduces delays caused by lengthy manual inspection processes, thereby improving the overall guest experience."

CHATBOTS
Developing and maintaining a rapid response system to address guest inquiries is essential for enhancing business performance and elevating customer satisfaction. Chatbots have emerged as a game changer and an effective solution for meeting this need.

Rahul Verma, Head of Business, Kaara Hotels & Resorts, says,

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"Incorporating chatbot technology into business operations enables personalised assistance through an interactive interface, significantly elevating the level of customer service provided. As per the survey conducted by the American Hotel & Lodging Association, 84% of respondents preferred technology for check-in and check-outs. Chatbots streamline operations by handling common queries from the database, making them increasingly popular in the hospitality industry."

VOICE TECHNOLOGIES
Voice control and voice search technologies enhance guest experiences and operational efficiency. "By integrating these voice-activated assistants, guests can manage lighting, heating, and entertainment systems with simple voice commands, creating a seamless and personalized stay. Additionally, voice data analytics provide valuable insights into guest preferences and behaviour,

Mehul Sharma, Founder & CEO, Signum Hotels & Resorts

Abhinav Singh, MD & CEO, Devrana

Ramit Sethi, Co-founder, Seclude Hotels Home Style

CHATGPT
ChatGPT allows hospitality businesses to enhance guest satisfaction, streamline marketing and answer questions without much human intervention. For instance, each Seclude property has a unique story behind it; some of them are heritage homes, and ChatGPT does a decent job of bringing those stories to life.

"Across the hospitality industry today, CRM, personalised recommendations, social media strategy and email marketing tools have AI plugins which can be quite useful. Even from a room booking point of view, these tools can be valuable while assisting guest communications and retention," says Ramit Sethi, Co-founder, Seclude Hotels Home Style. ▣