

How tech can boost hospitality in 2021 and beyond

Suffering a loss of over R68bn, the hospitality industry was annihilated by the inability to trade in the early stages of the lockdown, and while the easing of restrictions has shown an improvement of trade in the accommodation sectors, those who have survived remain cautious about the status quo.



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An area where hospitality businesses have already adjusted well is using technology to address changing environments to remain competitive. Hospitality brands that are positively responding to the crisis have deployed more advanced technologies, digital products, and tech talent to speed up innovation — and they expect most of these changes to outlast the pandemic.

For the hospitality space, technology can be easily integrated to streamline the booking process, eradicate paper trails and the administration process, manage occupancy and revenue in real-time, and provide instant access to customer data for future sales and marketing.

Covid19, the great tourism reset

When the borders open, last-minute travel is going to be critical for hotels. That is when the right technology is going to be crucial for business. Most establishments may still be using older legacy systems that — because they are manual and work on static rates — aren't as effective as real-time, all-in-one solutions. It is for this reason that tech-led, automated yield management serves as an important, intelligent asset for accommodation property management of varying sizes.

The first step in adopting technology is to transform and simplify the labour-intensive management function to ensure business is ready and prepared for the next normal.

As lockdown restrictions change, establishments need to be as agile as possible to manage and adjust availability and rates in real-time, even down to the hour. By implementing up-sell offers, effectively increases the total revenue per available room (TrevPAR). Technology that underpins real-time, all-in-one solutions automatically puts these dynamic possibilities in place.

When it comes to partnerships with online travel agencies (OTAs) such as Expedia, Booking.com, Airbnb, Google Hotel Ads and others, property managers should seek solutions that result in more, accurate visibility that ultimately translate into direct bookings based on smart, competitive, real-time pricing.

The appetite for automation has not dimmed, but — moreover — the factors for success are shifting.

More and more small and medium-sized accommodation establishments are finding ways for people to work in concert with new technologies. **Tech functionality creates direct engagement between properties and their guests, allowing them to:**

- View real-time availability, pricing and generate special packages.
- Implement contactless online check-in and key-card activation (effective for social distancing measures).
- Further support health and safety measures by booking and paying for reservations via online credit card or instant EFT.
- Transmit instant communications regarding booking and payment confirmations, pre-arrival (online check-in) as well as post-stay, follow-up communications.

While cancellations are no stranger to the hospitality industry, advancements in tech show great promise in dealing with this. As South African tourism starts its journey to recovery, we will most likely see an increase in local competitive pricing. Establishments should consider solutions that will help with on-the-go changes to create quicker, more relevant pricing.

Tech can assist by flagging a last-minute cancellation in property management systems and update and reflect across all the accommodation platforms and OTAs.

What is important is to provide 360 degree functionality in the hands of property managers, so that they can make the most of new opportunities in a quick and speedy manner and deliver a safe and memorable experience for guests to remember — even in today's extraordinary times.

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