



NOW SHOWING

Personalized video content and new technology take in-room televisions to a new level of entertainment

Hoteliers are accomplishing things today with in-room televisions that were just a dream a few years ago. Two major trends — new technology and a growing demand for personalization — are driving the personalized video content industry and inspiring vendors to offer super-sophisticated systems that allow for digital entertainment, direct-to-guest marketing and promotions.

In-room televisions have historically provided a constant yet fairly limited stream of revenue for hotels. However, today's newer digital TVs and other in-room technology devices provide larger revenue opportunities. Technology is actually ahead of the curve in this industry. There is so much that can be done to please the customer; it's just a matter of the hotelier selecting the right mix of hardware and services to match their guest preferences and the objectives of their business. As people

become increasingly dependent on computer devices and connectivity, hotels are realizing that providing these services is no longer considered an amenity; it is an expectation.

Technology takes the lead

Bruce W. Craul, chief operating officer of Legendary, Inc., believes that personalized video content served up on unparalleled technology is a great way to differentiate his properties from competitors. Craul chose Extenway (www.extenway.com) as his interactive TV and guest media solution with entertainment, marketing, reporting and service capability.

"We provide a 'Ritz' level of service in a condominium hotel," Craul says. "I chose Extenway because we like to give people a little unexpected extra; something that separates us from everyone else."

In fact, technology in the area of personalized video content has come a long

way from analog television and video tapes. With the upgrade to high-definition TVs, LCDs and plasmas, the hotel television has become more of a focal point in the room, not only for entertainment, but also for communication, messaging, and other interactive information purposes. Many hotels are using them as supplemental guest services and micro-marketing systems that allow guests to get to know the hotel and its amenities better. Expanded offerings include full-capability Internet over TV, interactive advertisement and e-commerce, hotel-to-guest messaging, and IPTV with advanced features such as network-based personal video recorders and

PICTURED ABOVE:

Guests at the Orchard Garden Hotel in San Francisco turn on their in-room televisions and are greeted by a personalized welcome message: "Welcome to the Orchard Garden Hotel, Mr. Johnson. We hope you enjoy your stay."



PICTURED ABOVE:

Legendray Resorts uses personalized video content on cutting-edge technology to differentiate its resorts, such as the Emerald Grande Resort on Florida's Emerald Coast, from the competition.

time-shift TV (pause, rewind and forward capability), and express checkout.

Data systems integration is also driving the future of in-room technology. Many hotels have a wealth of guest information housed in customer relationship management (CRM), voice over IP (VoIP), and property management system (PMS) databases and they are putting that data to work by making the guest experience more personalized and thus more memorable. New systems allow the property to know which guest is in which room, their names and their purchasing history. It's digital technology that enables these systems, allowing content to be delivered by satellite to the TV and typically with no signal degradation. Both Extenway and NxTV (www.nxtv.com) boast this type of cutting-edge technology, while some others deliver content digitally to the site's main computer first but then transfer the content in an analog format to the in-room TVs, which can degrade the signal. Most hotels will be forced to upgrade when the FCC mandates the shutdown of all analog broadcasting by February 2009. The newer



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BUILDING SATISFACTION, ONE GUEST AT A TIME

screens (LCD, Plasma, etc.) also allow for better picture quality and greater convergence. These systems have massive storage capacity. LodgeNet (www.lodgenet.com), for example, boasts a system that can store up to 2GB of content.

In Craul's case, he had the chance to build new hotel condominiums while keeping in mind the technology he wanted to install. He explains: "This is a product that requires CAT 5 wire going to each unit. You have to figure out when you order your furniture where the processor is going to go. So we have an armoire that we ordered specifically designed to accommodate a specific LGHD LCD TV with room for a processor under it. These processors are connected with CAT 5E wire to another rack of computers downstairs in the lobby in a composite where there's another rack of computers with all the movies and content stored on hard drives." Changes to content can be made on-site and show up instantly.

Most of these personalized digital entertainment systems are compatible with guest peripherals. Extenway and NxTV, as well as OnCommand (www.oncommand.com) accommodate these by including an on-board DVD player, an Audio/MP3 device interface so that guests can play their own music, and a picture viewer so that guests can upload the pictures from their digital cameras for viewing and emailing directly to their family, friends and colleagues.

A personalized experience

Allowing guests to operate their own hardware using in-room technology is just one way these systems are allowing for a more

personalized experience. YouTube and MySpace, along with portable media devices, reflect the increasing personalization of entertainment — content that users want, when they want it and where they want it. The desire to deliver a more personally relevant experience is also driving hoteliers to explore how they can integrate their TV and broadband solutions with their PMS, CRM system, etc., to build a personal bond with the guest at periods throughout the stay. Guests also want to be appreciated. They want frequently visited hotels to remember their name, and they want local news, weather and radio. Personalized digital content solutions allow for these desires without being intrusive.

Since the opening of the hotel in December 2006, Orchard Garden Hotel, in San Francisco found cutting edge technology in SuiteVOD, powered by InfoValue SuiteTV (www.infovalue.com). With 86 rooms, the video-on-demand system is very good at making each guest feel noticed and important, explains Stefan Muhle, general manager, Orchard Garden Hotel. "When a guest turns on the TV and sees the Orchard Garden home page, we can offer a first-person greeting, such as, 'Welcome to the Orchard Garden Hotel, Mr. Johnson. We hope you enjoy your stay.' We also can use the system to provide interactive local information, room service ordering, and more options that will be available soon."

It was also this personalized service that sold Craul on the Extenway solution. "If you go fishing on one of our fishing boats and we snap a picture of you in front of your catch of the day, by the time you walk into your condo and turn on your TV, the TV will default to that picture of you taken only 10 minutes ago, while showing you your itinerary for the rest of the day, your dinner reservation, hour-to-hour weather forecast, and your folio balance."

SuiteVOD is provisioned to handle multiple terabytes of video content. This includes first-run Hollywood content and specialty content that is directed toward the type of hotel in which the system is deployed. For example, a family resort site may require additional children's content aimed at families with young children, whereas a business hotel in a large city would require more international content provided in several languages.

Packages may consist of music and concerts, standup comedy and adult and children's content. LodgeNet offers Hotel SportsNet(SM) service, which enables guests to buy pay-per-day access to any of the most popular subscription sports packages, e.g., NFL Sunday Ticket, NBA League Pass and NHL Center Ice, while Tangerine Global's (www.tangerineglobal.com) most popular packages include yoga and Pilates, IMAX, fashion, food and wine, and international language content. OnCommand reports that the highest revenue item watched on VOD is Hollywood movies, followed by TV Internet, TV on Demand, music, games and then live sports.

"I believe the technology is driving the trends currently, but as the hotel guests catch on to the varied use of the system, I believe they will begin to drive the technology by requesting more and more capabilities of the interactive video-on-demand system," projects Muhle. "From the feedback of the guests at checkout, I would say they are very satisfied with the personalized video content." **HT**

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