

Automatic for the people

Most guests now have an abundance of technology in their homes, so how can hotels continue to impress? John Tavares from **INNCOM by Honeywell** explains the room automation systems that could make all the difference to the client and how data from this technology can be used for determining consumer comfort.

In the US in the late 1960s, colour television began to outsell black and white. Hotels were so proud to offer such products in guest rooms that the new technology became an integral part of their marketing.

Back then, people relied on the hospitality industry to experience things they did not have at home; today, that trend whis rapidly reversing, according to John Tavares from INNCOM by Honeywell, a supplier of energy-management systems for hotels.

“Most of us have more technology in our homes and in our pockets than you’d find in a typical guest room. If I walk into a hotel room that still has a CRT television, my reaction is, ‘am I living in a cave?’,” he says.

Guest expectations have stepped up a gear, and it’s getting much harder for hotels to impress their clients with in-room technology. INNCOM, founded in 1986 and purchased by Honeywell in 2012, wants operators to consider the difference advanced room automation might make to consumers. All of its products are designed to provide unsurpassed comfort, energy conservation, safety and satisfaction while also increasing the facility’s profitability.

Great expectations

“When we approach clients to put in integrated room-automation systems [IRAS], we’re talking about presenting the client with a welcome scene,” Tavares says.

“Lights come on and drapes may open so you can enjoy the view. The television displays a welcome message. We can do all of this, but most hotels are still struggling with how they can budget for this, given the competition.”

He highlights the importance of bearing in mind the needs of customers; a clean room is an absolute must, of course, but after this, the next vital factor is what Tavares calls “comforts” – from controlling the thermostat to ensuring belongings are entirely safe.

“If you like a cool room, you want the ability to chill that room to your selected temperature. Or, if you’re the type of person that likes a warmer environment, you want to warm it up a bit,” he says.

He explains that what INNCOM offers is a balance between meeting the needs of the guest – their comfort levels and their preferred temperature levels – with the concurrent goals of the hotel operator to not waste energy on any space or device that is not noticeable for the guest.

“Our 25 years of experience in this business has given us the data, the proof that when you’re in a room, you

care. You want to be in control and you want to be comfortable,” says Tavares. “When you’re at the beach, in a business meeting or out to dinner, you couldn’t care less what happens to the room as long as when you return, your experience is not impacted adversely.”

“While the sensors are designed with guest comfort primarily in mind, energy efficiency comes a close second, and the technology allows operators to make real savings.”

He believes the traditional key card method, where a room’s electrics will not work until the tag is inserted into a slot by the door, used by many properties to save energy, doesn’t sufficiently bear in mind the needs of the guest.

“If you’re staying in a hotel in Barcelona and it’s a hot day, by the time you come back to the room, it’s going to feel a little muggy,” he explains. “With our product, we use sensors that require no participation from the guest.

“We have switches on the doors that indicate when it has been opened and occupancy sensors on our devices, so we know when people have left the room. And then, instead of turning things off, we allow the temperature to drift a couple of degrees.”

When the guest comes back to the room and opens the door, the room automatically starts to chill or warm depending on the season, so the change in temperature is imperceptible to the client.

Green light

While the sensors are designed primarily with guest comfort in mind, energy efficiency comes a close second, and the technology allows operators to make real savings. By using multiple motion sensors to decipher a room’s occupancy state, the digital thermostat will know when to maintain a guest-selected temperature or when to slip into a hotel-selected energy-saving mode. This succeeds in reducing HVAC runtime and also helps to prolong equipment life.

For environmentally conscious guests, INNCOM’s eco mode makes it easy to be green. By touching the relevant button, clients can activate the thermostat’s enhanced energy-saving mode and can effortlessly opt-in to a host

Caption xxxxxxxxxxxxxx

of environmentally friendly programs predetermined by the hotel.

Poring over the data

Such systems are undeniably impressive, but they also churn out a lot of data that can easily be overlooked by operators; it's the age-old case of drowning in data but having no idea what to do with it. INNCOM by Honeywell recently filed for a patent where patterns of what happens in a guest room are used as an indication of comfort.

“If you understand where people sleep well and where they don't, all of a sudden you have a very good method by which to steer your maintenance dollars to where they're really going to make a difference.”

“We now do analytics of guests who should be asleep but in reality are operating thermostats and light switches. If it happens significantly more often in one room over another, you can deduce that a particular room may have a problem,” says Tavares.

This means an operator can benchmark rooms within a hotel against one another. It also means they can benchmark properties.

“If you have a particular maintenance budget and you understand where people sleep well and where they don't, all of a sudden you have a very good method by which to steer your maintenance dollars to where they're really going to make a difference.”

INNCOM is taking an approach that it believes has thus far been ignored: the integration of multiple sources of data – guest feedback, thermostat metrics, revenue generation and so on.

“The value we bring to the party is that we know how to sift through this data and point out the things you should be doing tomorrow, perhaps even today, to improve the outcomes of what your guests are experiencing,” explains Tavares.

He points out that if you look at the hospitality industry through the eyes of just one property, you get a limited perspective. By handing your reams of data to an expert that has the benefit of looking at tens of thousands of properties, you can open your eyes to possibilities you never even imagined.

“The minute you start asking guests to change their behaviour to reduce their expectation, you're going nowhere,” Tavares cautions. “I anticipate the proliferation of smartphones among the population of guests will enable hotels to start offering things that they are currently holding back.”

It is vital operators begin to view technology as one of the basic elements for investment. It will become almost as necessary as providing a comfortable bed.

“Hotels will need to find ways of providing the connectivity and the bandwidth that make guests almost feel like they're at home,” concludes Tavares. ■

Further information

INNCOM by Honeywell
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