

We asked **Christian Berthelsen** of Fourth Hospitality to give us his top 10 tips for the technology that hospitality firms should embrace to drive sales and profits

Technology: key to happy guests

Embracing the latest technological developments is essential to meeting the challenges of the current economic climate.

The findings of a recent report by Fast Future Research are not that surprising – guests expect more for their money at every turn. It means pubs, bars, restaurants and hotels must focus on customer satisfaction without losing sight of profitability.

The work, which was commissioned by Amadeus, and was dubbed “Hotels 2020: Beyond Segmentation”, revealed that guests want greater personalisation, increased comfort and more innovative experiences without paying over the odds. As savvy operators know, it means that the hospitality industry must increasingly focus its attentions on customer happiness while maintaining a healthy back-of-house operation.

Technology plays a central role in this process, and must be taken seriously as a tool for moving a company forward through the ongoing difficult financial times. From CRM and loyalty programmes to mobile devices, social media and energy management, new applications and software have a vital role to play in the hospitality industry, helping to keep firms at the forefront of the sector, boosting guest satisfaction and improving time and money management.

Keeping on top of the latest developments is crucial, but not necessarily difficult or time-consuming. Even the least tech-savvy managers can get to grips with these new tools of the trade and learn how to incorporate them into their routines to ensure success without wasting precious resources. Taking advantage of the wide range of programmes and software available will ensure firms put assets to best possible use and help secure a prosperous future with a strong, loyal customer base.

Top 10 technologies to utilise

1. Top of the list is customer relationship management and loyalty software. CRM and loyalty programmes ensure you can make the most of every guest who walks through the door. We all know that outstanding customer service is the best way to keep people coming back, and these tools allow firms to use all the information they have on each guest to their advantage. By collecting and collating details such as age, children, lifestyle and average spend, it is easy to develop targeted campaigns and offers that really speak to the customer and bring about higher success rates from marketing efforts.

2. These days, everyone has a mobile phone and we are all used to doing more and more with gadgets, so incorporating hand-held devices into your systems is a great way to improve productivity. Play to the strengths of your workforce and take advantage of their adaptability and willingness to do things in new ways. Hand-held devices can be utilised in stock counting and ordering, allow employees to book holidays or check rotas, and even to make payments without getting out your wallet.



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3. It seems that every day a new super-food is announced, or we are warned against eating certain products. While we cannot always take what we read at face value, it is vital that customers are given the details so they can decide for themselves what they want to put into their bodies. Detailed information on ingredients and nutrition is vital, and such figures must be presented in an easily-accessible way to ensure guests can make informed choices about their meals.

4. As with mobile phone use, surfing the net has become a daily occurrence and most of us think nothing of logging on to Facebook or Twitter to find out what friends have been up to. This should extend into the business world as well. Having a presence on social networking sites is the ultimate in time-effective marketing strategies, as posts can reach thousands of potential customers instantly. Creating a brand presence online also meets the desires of guests, who appreciate the two-way communication and control over contact that it gives them.

5. We all have a duty to make the most of the planet's resources and firms have a legal responsibility to do their bit towards cutting emissions. Technology has already helped us to work smarter and more efficiently and can ensure waste management and energy use are running as smoothly as possible. Addressing issues such as food miles and carbon footprints is far easier with the help of technology and in turn can be communicated more effectively with detailed reports and statistics.

6. All this technology can be quite expensive if bought outright by each location. Although over

the long-run it will still be worthwhile, entering the world of cloud computing is a more cost-effective way for many hospitality firms. No longer does each outlet require a dedicated room of computer equipment and individual software licenses. Instead, server and software needs can be outsourced to reduce costs and energy use. Utilising on-demand, “software-as-a-solution” programmes over the internet has company-wide benefits for every level of user, with expert knowledge and advice available as and when needed.

7. Maintaining a good hold over timekeeping and attendance is the only way to ensure you have the right staff in place at the right time. Keeping control of rotas and ensuring holidays and sick days are well-managed can only be achieved through an effective software solution that is usable by all members of the management team and understandable to every member of staff. Failing to prepare for key promotions and busy times is bound to bring problems and your customers will not appreciate being kept waiting if you are short-staffed.

8. Fixed phone lines were once an absolute necessity; these days an internet connection is the staple equipment for any business. Voice over Internet Protocol (VoIP) uses the world wide web to make voice calls, cutting costs and adding extra functionality such as video messaging. The internet connection itself does not even have to be wired – wireless services are just as good and infinitely more flexible.

9. Mobile payment is a growing trend that the most forward-thinking hospitality businesses are already using. Table ordering and payment not only utilises the latest advances in technology, but frees-up waiting staff. It is a great way to show off your expertise while boosting customer engagement. Get on board this trend now and you can really place your business at the cutting edge of the industry.

10. Finally, no business can succeed without knowing where it wants to go and how it will get there. Being prepared for the future ensures any problems or challenges can be met quickly and effectively, without damage to the firm. Predicting trends ensures the right product is offered to the right people at the right place and time and at the right price. Without proper planning your business will soon descend into chaos, so time spent preparing is well spent.

Making the most of the emerging technologies and utilising them to their full potential will help hospitality firms meet and exceed customer expectations while keeping costs down and productivity up. It may seem daunting to implement new systems, but with proper support and training, firms will soon be reaping the benefits and can concentrate on what they do best while looking forward to a brighter future.

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