

Tech Impact Report

Is tech rewriting the hotel sales and marketing rules?

06 FEBRUARY 2019 1:09 PM

Several extremely impactful technologies are taking hold, and hoteliers need to adapt, according to experts.



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NEW YORK—The growth of the interstate highway system drastically reshaped the hotel industry in the 20th century, and now some industry observers believe the industry is on the cusp of seeing a similar sweeping change at the hands of some emerging technologies.

Speaking at the 2019 HSMIAI Digital Marketing Strategy Conference, David Atkins, principal at Digital DNA Infusion, said there is an “alphabet soup” of technologies that could drastically change the landscape for hoteliers.

Among them are: artificial intelligence (AI), machine learning (ML), virtual reality (VR), voice interface (VI), augmented reality (AR) and autonomous vehicles (AV).

Atkins, who worked on Expedia as that company split from Microsoft in the 1990s, believes autonomous vehicles could be the technology that proves to be the most impactful in the long run.

“It could radically change people’s travel patterns in the ways interstates did,” he said. “It’s going to be the equivalent of going from horse and buggy to the Model T.”

Speaking earlier at the same event, Gopi Kallayil, chief evangelist of brand marketing at Google, said a similarly transformative change has been going on for

the past decade as smartphones become ever more pervasive. Since phones are so ubiquitous, he said they essentially serve as an additional organ to the typical human.

“They’ve completely changed the expectations for how consumers behave and interact,” he said.

How hoteliers, marketers should react

Just acknowledging those changes without adapting as companies is useless, sources said.

Kallayil said that consumers now only wait three seconds on average for a website to load before moving on to something else, meaning hoteliers and marketers have to make sure their sites load quickly to provide guests with relevant information to succeed.

He said the average load time for mobile sites is six seconds, and most businesses fail to meet that benchmark.

Smart companies are now pivoting to quickly provide relevant personalized information in order to reach consumers more effectively, he added.

“The hypothesis at Google is consumers are looking to be assisted, so in their journey, they want you all to be of assistance to them,” he said. “That is the new battleground for growth. Brands that are the most assistive will stand apart.”

He noted there are three pillars of this philosophy, and they are to “be present, be quick and be personal.”

Being present means understanding when your brand will have touchpoints with consumers. Being quick means things like limiting the “clicks” required to make a transaction as low as possible, with some companies like Domino’s Pizza experimenting with ways to have a “zero click” transaction. And being personal means delivering an experience that is unique to specific consumers and what they want.

Atkins described hospitality as a “laggard industry” when it comes to technology adoption, but that will need to change in order to adapt to the new norm.

“Within two years there will be trucks that are either autonomous or semi-autonomous at enough scale that if you care at all about them showing up at your property, it’ll matter,” he said. “And if you don’t build for that, you have to ask yourself ‘What’s going to happen?’”