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Ian Schrager: Coronavirus pandemic will not be a “paradigm shift” in hospitality

By Jill Menze (/Jill-Menze) | September 24, 2020

Although the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic brought travel and hospitality to a near standstill, hospitality and nightclub legend Ian Schrager believes it's only a matter of time before things return to normal.

Specifically, a return to the “same normal,” not a “new normal,” Schrager explains, speaking during the **BLLA** (<https://blla.org/>) (Boutique Lifestyle Leaders Association) summit last week.

“It’s just a question of when. There may be certain adjustments [that need to be made], but I don’t believe in paradigm shifts. I don’t think all the pundits really know what they’re talking about because there is no precedent, no frame of reference,” he says.

“In the history of humanity, I don’t think there’s been one event dating back to biblical times that have changed things. We always go right back to the way we were, except that we make certain evolved adjustments. I’m absolutely certain that will happen again.”

Tech: A new frontier

Schrager says technology represents a “new frontier” for hospitality companies as they look toward rebuilding following the crisis.

“Technology is making an impact in the lifestyle business in the same way entertainment and design has in the past,” he says, referencing the boutique hotel concept Schrager and his partner Steve Rubell helped pioneer.

But technology “has to be done with intelligence – not contrived. Technology that’s smart and either makes your stay cheaper or easier. If it doesn’t fit one of those two criteria, there’s no reason for technology for technology’s sake.”



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He believes that, because of the pandemic, people will be more likely to embrace new technologies.

Travelers were resistant to automated check-in at hotels at first, for example, but because of heightened hygiene concerns brought on by COVID-19, they will now want touchless solutions.

He cites the technology powering digital check-in and checkout as a solution that’s actually useful, “not like some of the contrived technology things like mood boards in the lobby that really don’t do anything to improve the stay.”

The future, Schrager believes, is “invisible check-in and invisible checkout,” which will make the hotel experience more seamless in a similar way to how the concepts of hotels, residences and offices have blurred at properties.



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That said, “the difficult thing about [technology] is that in this country, the big companies don’t cooperate with each other. [The United States] is the country that invests in the technology but can’t really use it because everything is so competitive. It’s quite frustrating.”

The hotel experience

As travelers begin booking rooms again, hoteliers will need to be sensitive to health and wellbeing concerns; however, Schrager doesn’t believe every aspect of the hotel experience has to fundamentally change.

Buffets, for example, might evolve into a format more similar to automats.

He says scaled-back housekeeping services - to prevent cleaners from interacting with guests during a stay - make sense from a health perspective, but “it is money saving. I wonder if a lot of people will be doing it for that reason rather than health concerns.”

Asked about the future of business travel and meetings and events, Schrager says the shift to working remotely does not sound the death knell for meetings in the hotel business.

“I’ve been hearing the death knell when they invented faxes, when they invented cellphones, when they invented the internet,” he says. “Things are going to be changing somewhat because of the new [work-from-home] technology, and we have to respond to that, but it’s not the end of business travel.”

Schrager - who made the “heartbreaking” decision to close his **Public** (<https://www.publhotels.com/>) hotel in New York City amid the pandemic (“the first time in my whole career I’ve ever shut anything down”) - says he’s “not really enthusiastic” about opening until people feel safe traveling again.

And when they do: “I’m convinced we’ll return to normal, and the normalcy will be something we’re quite comfortable with.”

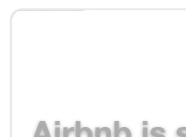
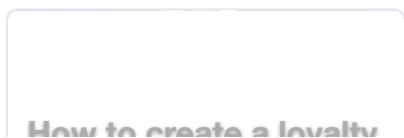
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Covid has ALREADY had a massive paradigm shift to the industry. In this issue alone, in his column, Arnie states: "Half the members of the American Hotel and Lodging Association (AHLA) are in danger of foreclosure, and, absent government relief, 68% would last only six months. Without additional assistance, 75% will lay off additional employees."

In addition to the above:

- 30 million Americans are unemployed; a large portion of the number work in our industry
- Hotels are closing left and right
- Gig workers out of work
- United and American airlines laid off or furloughed over 35,000 employees
- No hope in sight for any of us who have been laid off

This isn't like 9/11 where we bounced back within a few months, This will take years to correct itself. Years. All the while, people starve, their credit is destroyed, hotels are closed forever, small businesses are gone, cities and towns decimated, people lose their homes, savings gone, and people actually die.

I have no idea what kind of "legend" you are, but if you don't think any of this is paradigm shift, I am glad I don't work for you.

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zelman1 → JavalinTigerpaw · 6 hours ago

He's not disregarding the bad circumstances we are in currently - in fact that's why he shut down one of his hotels. He's just saying that once this crisis passes, whenever that is, things will go back to normal.

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