

Guest Electronic Devices:

Adapting to today's ubiquitous digital devices

HOW DID WE EVER SURVIVE WITHOUT OUR ELECTRONIC DIGITAL DEVICES?

So pervasive are they now that even most five years olds starting school know how to operate a smartphone and accept use of such technology as a natural part of their schooling. And for the vast majority of adults, laptops, iPads, iPods, e-readers and tablets have become an intrinsic part of their lives.

Of course, this usage transmutes to the accommodation industry. Today's traveller expects much more from their hotel than a place to store their bags and a bed to sleep at night. They now expect all of the comforts of home, along with all of the benefits of the holiday experience. When they travel, they want their electronic gadgetry to travel with them.

This has major implications on the type of in-room technology that hotels and many motels now need to provide. Guests prefer to use their devices in the privacy and comfort of their rooms, leaving the accommodation industry with little alternative but to provide them with all the backup and ease-of-use they desire.

These requirements have now gone well beyond simple recharging. Guests may now want to wake up to their own music, interact with social media, view their family photos, and access stored entertainment on the in-room TV.

For business travellers, it might be essential to be able to access the latest electronic information. The success of their whole trip could depend on it. It is almost certain they will have ascertained what technology is available before making their booking, and would not return to an establishment that they thought inadequate in that regard.

This all creates a need for accommodation providers to have innovative products and smart design concepts available that are in tune with the modern guest's expectations. Providing an up-to-date docking station in guest rooms is no longer a luxury, but a basic need of modern business guests and more tech-savvy tourists.

Evidence that this technological trend is rapidly becoming the expected industry norm is everywhere and means that there is an urgent demand for more information, greater product clarity and more varied choice. Hotel managers can no longer leave such knowledge and decision making to their IT experts. While they might not need to master the intricate detail that their specialists do, an educated overview of the latest trends and products is now becoming an essential part of their knowledge base. Attending international trade shows, such as HITEC, held in Los Angeles this year and to be held in Austin, Texas in 2015, might be a very sensible additional business date on their calendar.

Many have come to realise that even exploring the options currently available for docking stations – just one part of an increasingly baffling enigma, is like negotiating a minefield where mistakes can be very expensive. But the most essential requirement is easy access to WIFI.

WIFI becoming standard

Jan Strijker, director of Brantas international Technology in Auckland, says WIFI connectivity is nearly ubiquitous these days. "Free WIFI is becoming the standard. Traditionally, guests would play content stored on their personal devices but with WIFI becoming free and without capped dataplans, guests will increasingly stream content, whether it be music from sites such as Spotify, iTunes, Pandora, Google Play and their favourite local radio or TV stations via sites such as Streema.



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"BYOD" or Bring Your Own Device has become a standard term."

Mr Strijker says the most flexible option to facilitate guests connecting to in-room devices is via Bluetooth. "Bluetooth is wireless technology standard for exchanging data over short distances (using short-wavelength UHF radio waves in the ISM band from 2.4 to 2.485 GHz) from fixed and mobile devices.

"Most personal devices, such as smartphones, tablets and laptop computers offer Bluetooth connectivity. Bluetooth makes connecting between devices extremely easy and is used for streaming of sound (voice and music).

"As such, the best option for hoteliers to offer guests the possibility of streaming their own content via their own devices from the internet, and in turn play it through in-room devices such as bedside clock radios and TV screens, is by offering Bluetooth enabled devices and interfaces. For video content, HDMI is now the norm in the industry for high quality picture and sound. This is delivered via an HDMI cable," he said.

Mr Strijker says because guests now expect to be able to use their own smart devices, even while in transit, interesting developments are appearing frequently in a field of technology that is constantly evolving.

"For instance, I was on a Jetstar flight recently and that airline has started to provide its passengers with the opportunity to play Jetstar content via WIFI on the passenger's own device. There is always something new coming along."

Brantas International distributes a range of clock radio docking stations to the industry in New Zealand, with the iHome units one its bestsellers. "Our point of difference to other units is that they are the only units on the market with specified hotel features," said Mr Strijker.

"The units have a range of features that work well in accommodation properties, with alarms that operate as single day alarms only, preventing one guest's 4am wake up affecting the next guest's lie-in."

Ample USB charging essential

All these personal devices need to be charged. For that to happen, ample USB charging in the room is becoming a must as it alleviates the need to offer "international" plugs and adaptors.

USB (or Universal Serial Bus) is a universal industry standard that defines cables and connectors, and nowadays all personal devices offer USB charging.

Hospitality providers offering ample USB charging capabilities and Bluetooth / HDMI connections will be covering all the bases their guests are likely to require.

Damien Deruniec and Matthew Skene are co-directors at USBsockets, which covers both the New Zealand and Australian markets. Mr Deruniec says a distinction between the two is that in New Zealand, the company's sales are around 90 per cent commercial – "Ski resorts are very popular" whereas in Australia the clients are close to 50/50 residential and commercial.

He says more and more devices are being powered by USB. "It's great for travellers who can access USB ports from their laptops to charge devices such as their electric shavers, electric tooth brushes, and hand-held devices such as mobile phones, tablets and GPS units. But also these days, more and more devices especially for travellers are being

charged via USB, such as electric shavers, electric toothbrushes, power tools and children's toys.

"But what if you don't have your laptop with you but perhaps have a device such as a large tablet? Many USB sockets only have up to 2-amp charge capacity, and many convertors and plug-ins you can buy from such places as convenience stores or travel goods shops at airports, are only 1-amp. Even worse, they might share that 1-amp. It would take forever to charge a device – or it may not even charge at all," Mr Deruniec said.

He says that will not occur with the company's patented wall sockets range that combines an Australian Standard approved dual 240v-power socket with twin USB powered charging outlets.

"Our sockets are a whopping 3.5-amp – a type that used to be installed in the bedroom or kitchen. However, we're seeing a new trend with hotels undergoing refurbishment – putting USB sockets wherever there is a standard power socket.

"The USB 5 volt sockets are perfect for charging any device fitted with a USB connection, including mobile phones, tablets, cameras, electric shavers and more, without the need for bulky adapters. The devices plug straight in to the USB sockets on the power point and leave the two 240v plug sockets free for regular appliance use." ■

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BRANTAS
INTERNATIONAL TECHNOLOGY LTD

09 966 7662

www.brantasinternational.com

Unit B, 156 Bush Road, Albany, Auckland, 0632 E | info@brantasinternational.com