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THE PUSH FOR BETTER
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AV IN HOSPITALITY:

THE PUSH FOR BETTER

HOTEL CONNECTIVITY

We live in a world where connectivity has replaced hardware at technology's cutting edge. Google Home and Amazon's Alexa have displaced Wi-Fi and Bluetooth as the new 'must-haves' for the connected human. Our desire for connectivity even extends to 'smart' lights and power switches. Thanks to manufacturers like Philips and TP-link, we can turn on the lights and air-conditioner from the car on our way home, and once inside, we can ask Alexa to play our favourite tune and buy some groceries.

In retail and entertainment hospitality environments, LED displays that stand out even in bright sunlight, 4K screens and content, and VR and AR are changing the way customers interact with products. You can take a ride in a virtual car or see how new furniture will look in your home without leaving your lounge room.

But this AV enhancement of customer experience has not yet reached the hotel industry. In fact, many homes are now more technologically advanced than the most upmarket hotel.

David Di Muzio, Product Manager at Production Audio Video Technology, says he is surprised at the differences in technology offered from one location to the next.

"I can stay in a \$400 a night hotel in Hong Kong and get an HDMI connection on a wall plate and a USB input beside the bed for phone charging," Di Muzio says.

"Then I might go to Europe and the technology is older, there may be no USB charging at all. I still have to carry my laptop power connector, but since there's no global standard power supply yet, that might also be a problem! It's hard for hotels to decide what basics to install, let alone provide more advanced connectivity."

The problem in hospitality is that while everyone wants to provide the best services to their customers, no one is willing to be the guinea pig. To install untested technology is a gamble most hotels are not willing to take.

"Hotels haven't been high priority targets for AV companies," Di Muzio says.

“It's hard for hotels to decide what basics to install, let alone provide more advanced connectivity.”

"While they are high volume sales, they only want low-cost product. Manufacturers need to sell thousands of these low-cost items to get the same return as if they were doing a convention centre space requiring one or two high-end systems."

AV: AN EARLY CASUALTY OF BUDGET CUTS

For refurbishments and new hotels, Di Muzio believes better results are achieved when the AV solutions provider has a chance to consult with the builder and client to make sure the budget is sufficient to provide the experience they would like to offer guests.

Even then, if budget cuts are necessary, AV is often a victim.

“I think AV is often considered secondary. You can impress guests with expensive bathroom fixtures and get away with a regular TV with built-in speakers,” says Di Muzio.

“I hear from the integrators we work with that when the builders have to find another \$200,000, the first thing that goes is the AV.”

“You can impress guests with expensive bathroom fixtures and get away with a regular TV with built-in speakers

Di Muzio describes AV manufacturers as a “slow-turning ship” – they can’t respond fast enough to the changes in technology and consumer-driven demand for instant connectivity for every new device that emerges. The reason for our better-connected lounge rooms is that consumers are satisfying their need for connectivity in the one place they can control: their homes.

“Technology giants like Apple, Google and Amazon have more researchers developing home automation products at lower price points because they’re on a higher volume of product sales compared with the commercial AV manufacturers,” Di Muzio says.

“consumers are satisfying their need for connectivity in the one place they can control: their homes

“Old school” has been seen as the safe way for hotels to go. This means equipment is hard-wired into the infrastructure, isolating the AV system in each room and limiting connectivity. The problem is, how will this approach meet evolving customer expectations, let alone differentiate the hotel?

CONVERGE HUDDLE: AN EXAMPLE OF WHAT’S POSSIBLE

Because a lot of business is conducted in hotel rooms, travelling business people want rooms that connect them to their offices and staff. Di Muzio says AV manufacturers are active in providing solutions.

For example, the Converge Huddle is an audio DSP mixer that allows people to connect on projects. With Huddle, audio and video collaboration applications can be accomplished through a single cable connection to users’ laptops, tablets, and smartphones that run Spontania, Skype and Skype for Business.

“Although not necessarily just a hotel product, it’s perfect for travelling business teams who want to remotely collaborate,” Di Muzio says.

“Through the console it’s also possible to connect to video conferencing through the hotel’s internet and the whole thing runs from a USB cable. It makes use of the speakers, microphones and cameras installed in the room. The beauty of that is I’m using the product of my choosing on my device, it’s not provided by the hotel.”

MOVE OVER, WI-FI - HERE'S LI-FI

Wi-Fi has become a standard of connectivity most people use every day. It uses radio waves to transmit data from appliances to a network.

But a new type of transmission that uses light could be the future of AV connectivity in hospitality. Li-Fi (light fidelity) relies on LED bulbs, which can be switched on and off extremely quickly – 15 million times per second. This flickering is so fast that the human eye doesn't detect it. It can encode and transmit data across space that's received by photoreceivers then converted into streamable content, like music or a movie. The concept is similar to the infrared light beam used in remote controls; in fact, the tiny infrared bulb in the remote is an LED.

“Li-Fi (light fidelity) relies on LED bulbs, which can be switched on and off extremely quickly – 15 million times per second

The good thing about Li-Fi is that to hack into the signal you have to be in the same room, whereas Wi-Fi can be hacked through walls. Given that security is important to business communications, this puts Li-Fi ahead of the game and makes it a candidate for future AV installations in hotels.

A CHALLENGING FUTURE

Di Muzio acknowledges the irony in the fact that it is the speed of technology developments – particularly in connectivity – that is to blame for hotels being unwilling to invest more heavily in AV.

By limiting themselves to hard-wired solutions that have been around for decades, supplemented by basic Bluetooth and W-Fi, hotels are protecting themselves from the risk of obsolescence.

Although our homes often have far superior connectivity than hotels, this is because the cost of installing cutting edge AV tech in one room is dramatically less than installing it in a thousand.

Meanwhile, security risks associated with using hotel Wi-Fi could be a thing of the past if the more secure Li-Fi transmission mode were adopted. This could be the game-changing, connectivity standard for which hotels are eagerly waiting.

This is why hotels still use hard-wired AV connections, even though guests now want the same connectivity they enjoy in their homes and offices. ■

You can learn more about how you can use the power of AV to reach your business potential at Australia's ultimate experience in sight and sound, Integrate, 22-24 August 2018.

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