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Are You Ready to Embrace Hyperconnected Guests?

Christina Volpe

The world is made up of millions and millions of subcultures and as the diffusion of technology becomes more and prevalent across society, an emerging subculture is beginning to gain more and more power internationally: one that many people do not even realize they are a part of, and one that the hospitality industry needs to start catering to in order to increase profits. The subculture that I am referring to is the hyperconnected subculture.

The hyper...who?

Who is part of this subculture you ask? It's me, it's the average business traveler, it's the teenager on his Sidekick, it may even be you. The hyperconnected are the people in society who are passionate about the spread of all types of information be it visual, verbal, or audio. But the key differentiation between this group and many others is the means through which they share this information. The hyperconnected rely on multiple forms of technology to spread information, such as the Internet, voice-over-Internet-protocol, social networking, streaming video or radio, Wi-Fi networks, or Web conferencing, just to name a few. If you have ever witnessed a colleague accessing their email, the Internet, or getting directions to a location on their iPhone while taking a call, then you have met a member of the hyperconnected community.



A recent study conducted by IDC of workers in 17 different countries found that 16 percent of business travelers use multiple technological devices to communicate, with a minimum of seven devices for work and nine for personal use. The number of the hyperconnected is even expected to rise to 40 percent within a few years.

What do these numbers mean to the hospitality industry? These numbers represent a new and upcoming demographic that hotel and restaurant owners can cater to in order to increase their sales and ultimate profits. When building or renovating a location, why not turn it into a wi-fi hotspot? When creating a website why not include a social networking feature along with streaming video? By giving this growing population the technology they demand, the hospitality industry can extend their reach on both the marketing and physical fronts to generate more sales.

"I think what people have to realize is that technology is becoming part of everyone DNA," says Daniel Connolly, associate professor at the University of Denver's School of Hotel, Restaurant, and Tourism Management and Department of Information Technology and Electronic Commerce. "People need to be connected all of the time they cannot turn it off. As technology gets cheaper smaller and more capable, neat things can happen but it means that people are always going to be plugged on."

Hotels take hold

Catering to this group of tech savvy travelers is not something new. Many hotels have already begun to restructure their establishments to include new and exciting technological features. [Trump Entertainment Resorts'](#) three Atlantic City properties are among those and is taking steps to cater to them through the re-launch of a media rich website, mobile SMS text messaging applications, and a partnership with [TravelClick](#) to promote social networking with guest reviews.

"If you want to get customers you want to hit every touch point to attract business especially in today's economy," says Jayson Smith, director of e-commerce at Trump Entertainment Resorts, Atlantic City. "We want to acquire and retain customers by cultivating relations and really getting the customers involved. It is about creating loyalty. Online, mobile and email is about timely disseminating messages to customers and driving business."

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The [InterContinental San Francisco](#) hotel, which opened late in February of this year, is one of two establishments that rely on solutions from [Nortel](#). Their unified communications platform allows guests to use color touchscreen VoIP phones to get weather updates or contact the concierge or housekeeping with requests. And it just takes one touch to get what you want. The [MotorCity Casino, Hotel](#) features such amenities as pre-programmed room temperature, a mini-bar that tracks your favorite snacks, and room keycards that double as player's club cards for using casino dollars.

The possibilities of using technology to cater to this group are endless.

"In hotels or restaurants [this technology can tell guests] that your room isn't ready or your table wasn't ready, but now it is. It [can be] sending special coupons or a location based service with concierge type functionality," says Connolly. "And especially now, you have people who are glued to these [gadgets] and are willing to ask questions of these devices to get answers."



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