

How Mobile Technology Can Transform a Travellers’ Experience

**Singapore (September 29, 2014)** - HSMAI’s 10th Annual AsiaConnect Conference was held in Singapore on September 3, 2014. Ani Bhalekar, mobility solutions expert at Accenture Digital who delivered a keynote on ‘Tapping the Growth of the Mobility Marketplace’ to help hospitality professionals stay ahead of the curve and be profitable. He walked delegates through the following journey.

Imagine this: you are a highly mobile, always connected traveller.

You arrive at your destination airport at peak hour. While you sit in traffic to get to your hotel, you are not idle. You check in to your hotel via your mobile phone, you preorder the services you need – laundry, room service, your pillow preference – and when you arrive, you bypass the front desk all together as the room key is delivered to you on smart device as you enter the hotel lobby.

Later, as you work your way around the hotel property, perhaps going to the gym, you receive location based prompts, say a discount to the spa during a lull period while you are in the gym. You can use your loyalty points on the mobile device to book and pay for ancillary services like products or meals, or utilize digital coupons.

Each time you leave the hotel, you typically lose your WIFI connectivity, but not with this hotel. They’ve sorted things out with the top Wi-Fi providers around town to provide you with the same high speed reliable connectivity that you get in the hotel at the museum / art gallery / restaurant / theatre that you may visit.

Is this scenario feasible?

Absolutely, according to Bhalekar, who told participants how he is currently working with hotels in the region to deliver such seamless experiences.

Mobile offers hotels many opportunities to engage and interact with their guests beyond the hotel stay.

But why should hotels make the effort? It’s all about revenue generation, customer loyalty and of course, rave reviews.

In a presentation at AsiaConnect by Pin Tsin Go, Territory Manager for Southeast Asia at TripAdvisor for Business, said that TripAdvisor had found that if hotels can increase the positivity of reviews by 1point, evidence is that they can increase room rates by up to 11.2% while maintaining occupancy, which shows how positive customer reviews increases digital marketing ROI.

By 2017, Accenture projects that there will be 9 billion connected devices in the Asian region – 1.2 billion of which will be mobile phones for a projected population of 4.1 billion people.

Mobile enables the generation of demand. Currently, in the USA alone, there are 40 million users using mobile devices for travel that spend $25 billion on mobile travel bookings, annually.

Yes, there are challenges for hotel property operators and owners to overcome when implementing mobile enabled technology.

* The hotel business strategy needs to be clear. The path to achieve bookings and ancillary revenue, the best feature set for mobility and ROI objectives need to be defined clearly.
* Fragmented technology needs to be overcome. For example, multiple front end and backend platforms, networks and devices all need to be able to talk to each other or they will become a nuisance.
* The time to market is high. There are also different enterprise and consumer-based solutions to tackle and there are no standards which enable innovation and bringing onboard relevant third parties applications.

A good approach is to stay technology agnostic and focus instead on a customer’s unmet needs. An example of a traveller’s unmet need is constant connectivity. WIFI is the singular most important need of hotel guests today. It is routinely rated more important than location and more satisfying than comfort.

End users are choosing hotels that have the best WIFI and download speeds. There are apps that analyze and recommend the best hotels based on WIFI speed and cost.

Underpinning this behavior is the users need for stable, fast connectivity – either for leisure or productivity. As soon as the user steps out of the location they enter a black box of connectivity. They either have to buy a data plan, or use someone else’s WIFI.

As connectivity adds real value to the end users stay, Bhalekar believes hotels should partner with technology providers to offer WIFI hotspots that their guests can connect around the city or destination location. For example, popular cafes, or a museum or a shopping mall.

Bhalekar said “Innovations create a differentiator experience for hotels that drives loyalty. But don't put technology before your business goals. Identify what needs to be solved first, develop the strategies and then apply technology to deliver solutions.”

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