

Technology changes look, use of hotel lobbies

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The first floor of the Renaissance New York Midtown has a digital display by the entrance with information on nearby events, restaurants, shopping venues and shows. Photo credit: Marriott International

Technology and new usage demands have changed the way hotel lobbies look and operate.

Hotels, said Bob Gobind, president and CEO of Apex Hotel Source, are installing digital signage in lobbies to quickly share information with guests. Specifically, he said, marketing boards help hoteliers control the content guests see and set the narrative for what they want the property's narrative to be.


Digital signage in a lobby has several advantages over traditional signage, added Jim Krawczyk, national accounts manager at Apex. "It's bright, it's very well placed, it's eye-catching," he said. And because much of the signage is interactive, guests can touch the screens to learn more about the hotel and its surrounding area, from restaurants and stores to upcoming events. "And you're seeing video walls everywhere now, and that is also considered digital signage," added Gobind.

To install these elements, Gobind said, a hotel only needs a power source and an internet connection. "After that, we work with the hotel on the type of content they want to display, whether we have to create it or whether they have it through their marketing or corporate [teams]," Krawczyk said. When the company developed digital signage for Best Western hotels, it shipped monitors to each property with a dedicated bracket designed just for the brand and a template for mounting. "Once


they find the center studs to hold the unit up, [they can] use the template to drill the holes, attach the mount and then put the monitor onto the mount—easy to do. And then turn it on and call us to hit them with a signal and all the information is preloaded.” The monitors can be wireless, but Krawczyk noted that wireless signals are easier to hack than wired connections and also are slower to download new content.

Digital Displays

In Manhattan, the Renaissance New York Midtown provides a high-tech experience from the moment guests walk in the door.

“The client wanted to bring in some interactive video elements to [share] information but also to entertain the guests while they're waiting to go off to the main lobby on the sixth floor,” recalled Michael Pandolfi, principal and design director at Jeffrey Beers International. Pandolfi worked on the hotel when it was developed in 2016. Marriott’s International’s Renaissance brand, he noted, creates a “storyline” for its hotels, which becomes the so-called DNA for each property. Because this hotel was in the city’s fashion district, the Jeffrey Beers team developed graphic patterns of fabrics and stitching that could be projected onto the walls to give guests an immediate sense of place. To keep guests updated on what is happening in the area, the team also added a digital display by the entrance with information on nearby events, restaurants, shopping venues and shows. 

Lobby Layouts

While new technology may help guests find information on their own, Pandolfi still sees a great value in keeping concierges on staff. “You always need to have a concierge just to have that personal interaction with the guests,” he said. Still, he added, hotels may soon scrap the traditional concierge desk in favor of something more open. Freed from a desk, he said, a concierge can move a lobby and talk with guests to help determine their needs, using mobile technology to find solutions. “It's not as formal as going up to a desk.” 

Every hotel project that JBI is developing now involves a conversation about the necessity of a lobby having a dedicated reception desk or a dedicated concierge desk, Pandolfi said. “Lately, though, they still want to keep the desks for now and the goal is in the future to not even have them, to have everything mobile, but for now they're keeping the desks.” 