

MOBILE

Hotels should make tablets more accessible during on-site experience

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Waldorf Astoria Orlando's iPad menu

By JOE MCCARTHY

Many hotel brands are leveraging tablets in useful ways to enhance the guest experience.

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Luxury Daily

From digital lecterns to immersive apps that compel repeated interaction, tablets have broad application for hotel brands, which tend to be more user-friendly than smaller devices. Also, mobile booking is changing how many brands bring consumers to their properties in the first place.

"iPads and other such technology are fantastic additions to a hotel's customer service arsenal, but in no way can they completely replace the personal element," said **Taylor Rains**, Charleston-based luxury brand consultant.

"There's an interesting dichotomy among luxury hotel guests," he said. "While all expect a highly-tailored guest experience, some would rather automate the process while other consider staff interaction to be indicative of a property's attentiveness to their needs.

"Adding iPads in accessible places while still maintaining a highly capable guest relations staff allows the customer to select the most appropriate channel for them."

Finding a balance

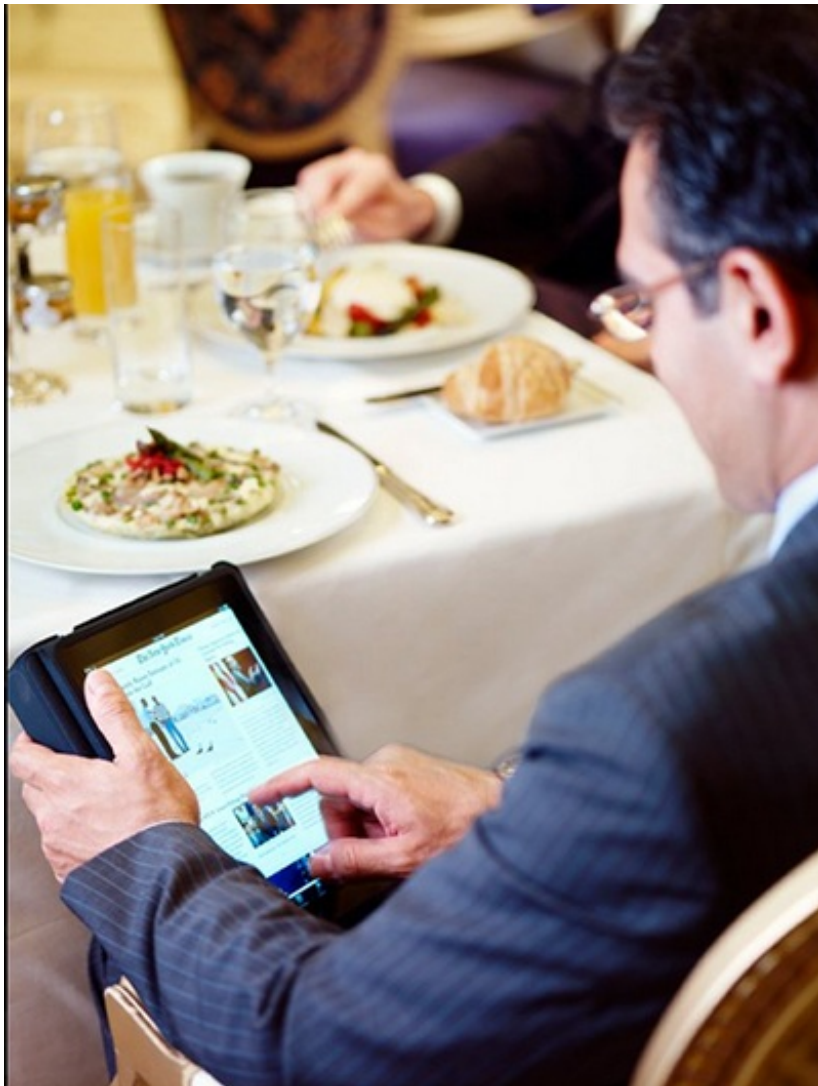
Hotels rightfully take pride in their service teams and sometimes view certain technology as either unnecessary or an encroachment on employee relevance. After all, employees can handle guest issues that arise, are more flexible than technology and can provide a human touch to interactions.

However, studies have shown that many consumers prefer to interact with technology if the option is given.

According to a report by Time Inc. and YouGov, 7 out of 10 affluent consumers are disappointed by the sales and service staff and believe that they do not make positive personal connections during shopping experiences. Affluent consumers have reported that, if possible, they prefer purchasing items online to avoid the in-store staff ([see story](#)).

Regardless of the reasons behind this aversion, it is important to heed consumer preferences.

A sensible middle ground would be to install several digital lecterns in the main lobby and other areas and to equip employees with tablets.



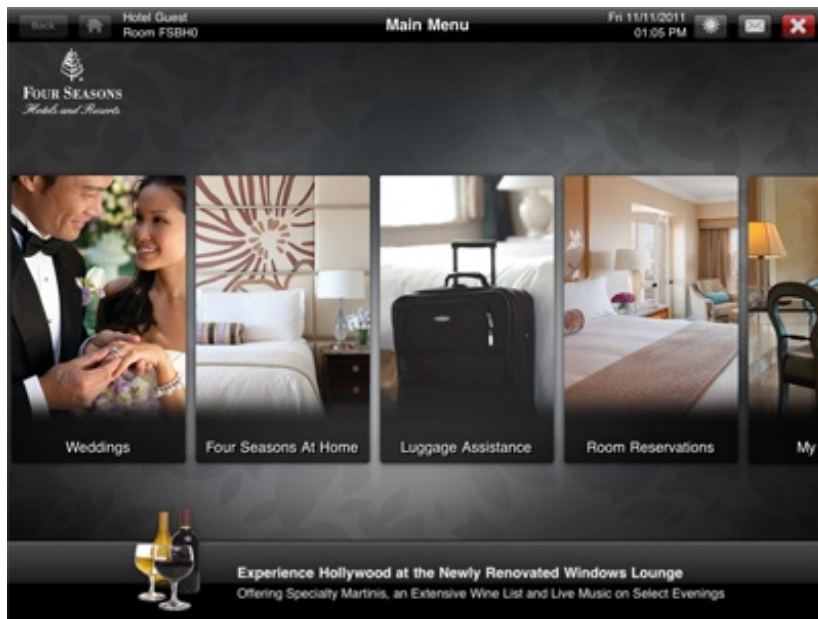
The Plaza Hotel features iPads in rooms

With lecterns, consumers in a rush or just not in the mood to interact can look up relevant information. Guests with time to spare can browse the tablets while waiting.

Employees equipped with tablets can make more informed suggestions and showcase images and videos to support what they say. Also, information provided will be more accurate as it can be verified right there.

Tablets can also be deployed to rooms for guests who want to place orders, look up hotel information and simply browse the Web or use an app.

This is not a groundbreaking idea, but it also has not been adopted on a widespread level. Four Seasons Los Angeles at Beverly Hills installed 285 iPads in its guest rooms and suites. Guests use the in-room iPads to order room-service, make spa appointments and research local attractions ([see story](#)).



Four Seasons Los Angeles iPad app

When tablets are prepopulated with specific apps and content, guests can access a highly curated experience that can then influence the rest of their visit.

Although technology inevitably shrinks the role of service staff, it will not fully usurp them. Indeed, employees will always be on hand to provide background information, personal suggestions and to do whatever it takes to charm guests.

Waldorf Astoria Orlando is providing guests with a better ordering experience at its Bull & Bear restaurant with iPad menus and information guides.

With a more intuitive design and images that are much more detailed than what a standard menu can allow, the new menu will likely be embraced right away. Also, the elimination of paper makes the menus more sustainable in some ways ([see story](#)).

Brands from all sectors are finding that tablets can greatly enhance the consumer experience.

For instance, Audi recruited mobile agency Somo to devise useful interaction tactics.

First, the brand set up digital lecterns all throughout its display area. These iPad lecterns house all the information an attendee would want to know about the cars on display and

the brand overall. Fans can spend a few quiet moments viewing multimedia or just learning about different models before delving into the actual cars ([see story](#)).

Audi then equipped concierge members with iPads to book test drives and follow-up sessions with consumers.

The King of Quattro program also leveraged an iPad app for a driving game. During this program, fans drove along a rugged course in one of the Q models and were graded on their driving performance by the app's speed and movement measuring capabilities ([see story](#)).

Stopping here

Closer to the bottom line, hotels are also discovering that a robust mobile presence is crucial for generating sales.

Luxury hotel brands are ramping up mobile investments to regain sales lost to online travel agencies, according to a report by L2.

According to Business Insider, OTAs account for 64 percent of mobile hotel bookings, and are poised to maintain their advantage. Consumers prefer to book via mobile sites and 50 percent of United States brand mobile sites require six or more clicks to book, a lengthy process that often leads to aborted transactions ([see story](#)).

Final Take

Joe McCarthy, staff writer on Luxury Daily, New York

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