

WiFi art thou?

That is the question every traveller asks upon check in. What is the WiFi code? Smart hoteliers, like Next Hotel in Brisbane, are removing barriers and making WiFi free for everyone; guests and visitors alike. Others are still locked into legacy contracts that force them to charge for upgraded speed and download amounts. So where do things stand with this eternally contentious issue? **EMMA CASTLE** finds out.

Mclaren Technologies director of technology Marc Jonkers is bang on when he says that ubiquitous high-speed Internet access is fast becoming a requirement in hospitality.

“Like a comfortable bed and a hot shower, guests are expecting reliable, fast, unlimited internet, preferably for free,” said Jonkers.

While the costs of providing WiFi have reduced over the past decade, there is still a significant cost to hoteliers that provide a high-quality, high-speed, reliable WiFi service with good coverage in all parts of the property.

In order to get a return on this investment, Jonkers said that that hoteliers can implement data harvesting.

“By combining data sourced from the Property Management System (PMS), the property’s WiFi infrastructure, guest social media accounts (for example Facebook) and directly from the High Speed Internet Access (HSIA) platform, a property can create a sophisticated picture of guest behaviour,” he said.

“This data can be used to analyse both generic anonymised guest behaviour, as well as highly specific, identifiable guest metrics.

“The generic data can be used for capacity planning, to determine which types of Internet traffic are on the rise (Netflix versus in-house video), to determine guest movements through the property (which areas are busiest when).

“The personalised data can be used to create guest profiles, and link actions to those profiles. The property could determine (based on their Facebook likes and time spent in the hotel gym) that a guest likes to exercise and offer them some sort of incentive around that. Whereas a different guest might be categorised as a ‘foodie’ and as such would be targeted with a different incentive. These

incentives could be offered while the guest is in-house, or at a future date to entice them to return (possibly tailored to coincide with a lower occupancy timeslot),” he said.

Another consideration in the realm of WiFi is the world beyond laptops and phones. Adrian Crouch, co-founder of Procept, a design house that specialises in wearable devices that are Bluetooth and WiFi enable, said that guest health is going to be linked to WiFi capacity.

“The incidence of health-related wearables is on the incline. From productivity monitors like FitBits, to medical devices that monitor back pain or blood sugar levels in the case of diabetics, WiFi is going to be playing a big part in centralising and communicating information,” he said.

“To build WiFi into devices is significantly cheaper than it used to be. Bluetooth was what everyone used to include in their devices because of the price difference but now WiFi has come down, it’s going to be increasingly critical to have WiFi in your property so that these wearable devices work effectively,” Crouch said.

Most health monitoring devices will connect to the local network and automatically publish information like body temperature and heart rate.

Beyond the health implications, Crouch said there are opportunities beyond hotel apps to engage with guests. He said, “It’s about differentiating the experience you offer. You could do that by custom designing a WiFi-enabled wearable that you give to guests to assist them with property navigation, gamification (i.e. Pokemon Go style games for children) or with wellbeing programs (i.e. running maps, an electronic personal trainer).” ■



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