

The future is coming to your business

Business and entertainment are the focus of technological advances. The hospitality industry is at the forefront of both. Susan Reynard examines some of the recent strides taken by hoteliers, restaurateurs and suppliers.

Technology impacts on every area of the business of hoteliers and restaurateurs, from front of house to back office. Hardware impresses guests as flat-screen televisions and WiFi become standard features. Software impresses management as reports and realtime information help planning. The various systems work together, software and hardware, to create an easier experience for guests and management, ranging from online booking to guest entertainment.

Travel and hospitality technology veteran James Montgomery of HTI sums up the role of software: "The fact is that strong property management, point of sale and stock control systems lead to streamlined hotel operations. When hotel groups get the structure right in the property, they're well placed to move into a competitive and more outward focused business model. This is the way South Africa is moving – it augurs well for our future on the global market."

Peet van Rooyen, CEO of LG Electronics South Africa, adds: "End-users, IT managers and business decision-makers are increasingly considering new aspects of computing in areas to save on costs that ultimately affect their bottomline."

He notes that businesses want fast, capable and robust hardware that saves money and consumers want style and innovation. Increasingly both groups want energy efficiency and environmentally friendly technology products.

The 2010 FIFA World Cup will have put tremendous pressure on parts of the entire hospitality industry at various times and efficiency levels will have been tested. The many different types of accommodation on offer will have found visitors expecting a streamlined booking and payment system. Glitches in IT have already been seen in the ticketing process.

Large hotel groups prepared well in advance, with refurbishments and new builds including the latest electronic equipment, fixtures and fittings. Flat-screen televisions, WiFi, fully equipped

business centres and conference facilities, a range of international and local plug banks, iPod docking stations, in-room entertainment like DSTV channels, DVD players, interactive televisions, energy saving air conditioning units and digital communication and marketing display systems are just some of the new features now in top hotels.

Conference facilities have been proactive in sourcing the latest equipment. Suppliers have stepped up the quality of products on offer.

LG launched a range of advanced widescreen computer monitors, mobile projectors and optical drives in March, all boasting the latest high tech features as well as "green" credentials.

Michelle Potgieter, marketing director of LG Electronics South Africa, says that the explosion of video content requires technology to be as multi-dimensional as its users. Of particular interest is the incorporation of environmentally friendly features such as power savings and reduction of hazardous materials used in manufacturing.

The new range of LG LED-backlit monitors and projectors have smart features that promise clearer, crisper and more colour accurate images to cater for demanding graphics and video intensive applications. However, the monitors also consume 42% less power than similar monitors, earning the UL Environment's new Sustainable Product Certification for high tech equipment.

Falcon Electronics provides the ATEN complete Media Distribution Solution to send high quality audio and video content over CAT 5 cable to multiple displays from a single input source. It can support thousands of displays located up to 450m from the source device, as well as provide screen controls so that touch-screens can be included in the installation.

The uses of technology like this include public information systems, interactive kiosks, infotainment networks and finance centre displays.

Technology is also playing an increasingly important role in combating crime. The Webcom Group in conjunction with Active Customer

Credibility Scan and Security Alerts (ACSSA) has launched a risk solution for the car rental and hospitality industries.

The solution provides a credibility check on customers and employees as well as registering and monitoring customers who have committed fraud or criminal acts. It works by checking identity documents, including passports, driver's licences, ID books etc online in realtime against a comprehensive database of defaulters and past offenders.

The ACCSA system can be integrated into an organisation's reservation and rental systems. It works with MaxiD, a local company that produces scanning equipment for the domestic and international market.

ACSSA MD Mike Martin says: "The hospitality industry and car rental companies are subject to a range of threats, from fraud and theft to vandalism, property damage, no-shows and so on. The ACCSA system allows information on people who commit these offences to be shared throughout the industry."

The MICE industry has also benefited from conference management software programmes, like Events Pro, that manage online and hardcopy registration, safe payment and delegation interaction directly onto a database. It also allows downloadable statistics on demand.

They also offer next-generation delegate tracking and management systems, including VIP identification and radio frequency identification. Delegates are assigned radio frequency tags, which means registration points require fewer staff, improved event security by ensuring non-transferable registration and also better entry and exit access control, breakaway sessions and even special dietary requirements on record.

MD of Global Conferences Africa Melanie Campbell says of the system: "Our on-line registration system is world class, having processed over 1 900 on-site delegate registrations in one day during SITA GovTech, held at the ICC in Durban."

Advances in every area of technology impacting the hospitality industry are ongoing and this article provides just a few examples.

Go to www.hotelandrestaurant.co.za for regular updates on technological breakthroughs adopted by the hospitality industry. ♦