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EXECUTIVE TRAVEL TECHNOLOGY

Hotels Apps Promise to Upgrade Your Stay

by Christopher Null

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Christopher Null has been a technology journalist for more than 20 years. He was the founding editor of "Mobile PC" magazine and has written about technology for outlets such as Yahoo!, Wired and PC World.

The hotel business is finally getting in on the mobile app craze—all the way in.

Hotel operators may have come late to the smartphone app party, but it's starting to look like they'll be the last to leave. If hotel companies have their way, you'll soon be able to interact with booking, with onsite staff, and even with your room directly through your phone—and with far more capabilities than ever before.

“While the hotel industry is one that has historically been slow to adapt to new technologies—we can all remember metal room keys—the speed of technological adoption has recently gained momentum,” says Frederick Becker, associate professor of hospitality management at York College of Pennsylvania.

“Hotels seem to be getting the message that to appeal to a younger market, they need to have more than just a sophisticated web page; they need to use mobile technology to interact with the guest before, during, and after their hotel stay.”

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ALICE Stays Everywhere

Nowhere is hotel app revolution more apparent than at the concierge desk. A new breed of apps like **ALICE** are designed to provide pampering guest services not with a single property but with every hotel in which you stay. Dinner reservations, spa services, room service, and other hotel amenities are all available directly through the app—and because ALICE has deals with hundreds of individual properties, you won't have to go hunting through your smartphone to find the specific app for the hotel at which you're staying.

“Starwood seems to be winning the application race with its **Starwood Preferred Guest** app, which can also turn your smartphone into your roomkey says Becker. The technology isn't complicated.

Guests install the SPG app on their phone. When near the door, they just tap on the screen or physically turn the phone as if opening a lock. The phone talks to a wireless sensor inside the door to unlock it and allow admittance.

First Pick

Over at Hilton, the company says it is upgrading its **mobile app** to allow customers not just to check in and out digitally throughout its 4,000 properties, but also to select the specific room in which they want to stay when they book a reservation. The system allows travelers to pick out a room from a graphical floor plan the day before they are set to arrive, as well as order upgrades and amenities on the spot. Hilton says it is also rolling out phone-based door keys in 2016—which means one less piece of plastic to keep track of