

Hotel News Now



Straight-to-room is coming ... and I can't wait

25 November 2015

By George Jordan

HNN columnist

george.jordan@ohrllc.com

If I have to change another password today, I think I'll lose it.

Between the hard keys to the house, car, padlocks and the keycards to the hotels, to the passkeys to enter the building, to the multitude of online passwords, the PIN for just about everything, the chip and PIN, and the tap fobs for the garage, life has become one giant jumble of encryption. I think the janitor, nay "custodial engineer," with a ring of 70 hard keys had it better. Total salvation might be on the far horizon.

But just over the hill, straight-to-room technology in hotels is truly going to revolutionize hotel stays. One can only hope the technology spreads to the rest of our encrypted lives.

Hotel News Now **KEY TAKEAWAY**
INDEPENDENT INSIGHTS

Keyless technology will free the front-desk staff for additional tasks and appeal to frequent travelers.

To have this type of content sent directly to your inbox via the Independent InsightS newsletter, sign up here. <<

For the uninitiated, straight-to-room keyless entry allows guests to check-in to their hotel, select a room and receive an encrypted passkey that is sent to their smartphone. Knowing that you've selected room 666 at Hotel Diablo (yes, I wrote this around Halloween) and your credit card has been authorized, Hotel Diablo's PMS generates the passkey and emails it to your device.

With either Bluetooth or NFC enabled, you simply approach the door to Room 666 with your device in hand (or pocket), and, spookily, the door unlocks and you enter the room. No fumbling for the hard key. No figuring out which way to stick the magnetic strip into the lock. No tapping a key to the lock. Just approach and enter.

This application is being implemented in various stages at large chains, brands and independent hotels. Various retrofits to existing locks also are being rolled out.

Effect on operations

Assuming the kinks are worked out during this first phase of implementation, the day is coming where we can bypass the desk completely. For me, that is a dream to end the check-in nightmare. I look forward to the day when I can skip the idle banter and chit chat with a desk agent and instead just land at the airport, get in the cab, check-in, arrive to hotel, go to my room and go to bed. Wonderful.

Not all travelers will be as enamored with this feature as I am. Infrequent travelers certainly will want to check-in at the desk and hear the information about Wi-Fi, fitness center hours, etc. Resort operations too might be a slightly different animal, And certainly, attempting to get a complimentary upgrade via “straight to room” is a non-starter.

The good news though is that the desk and traditional check-in will still be there, open 24 hours a day, at least for the next couple of decades.

In terms of hotel operations, one also can see staff payroll costs at the desk decreasing significantly, owing to the fact that fewer associates will be needed to handle peak check-in periods. Technology has made the PBX operator nearly obsolete; check-out is already just a walk out the door.

Will the day come when the front desk disappears completely? Yes, it will come ... as we manage our lives through the power of “the device.”

Some might find this a bit too Orwellian for comfort. As for me, I hope I live to see the day when all keys are obsolete, to be replaced by my mere arrival and presence in the room.

George Jordan is senior vice president – operations for Oxford Hotels & Resorts, overseeing a cluster of three-, four-, and 4 ½ -star hotels, both operating and under development. Mr. Jordan has worked in hotels for over 30 years including the Arizona Biltmore, The St. Paul, The Marquette, The Drake, Raffaello Hotel, Hotel Felix, and most recently The Godfrey Hotel Chicago. New openings currently orchestrated by Mr. Jordan include the Godfrey Hotel Boston, and LondonHouse Chicago. Mr. Jordan rose through the ranks while attending college at University of Southern California and Arizona State University, where he obtained a B.S. in finance. George has served as area food and beverage director for Hilton International, based out of the Drake Hotel Chicago, and also as hotel manager at the Drake. George joined the Oxford team in 2009 as area general manager; he was promoted to senior vice president in 2012. His daily duties include oversight of Hotel Felix, Hotel Cass, Godfrey Hotel, and contributes his operational and marketing expertise to acquisition activities. George is a well-respected leader and a member of many Chicago civic organizations including The Magnificent Mile Association, CCTB, DLC and serves on the board of directors for Lawson House YMCA and on the advisory council of De Paul University's School of Hospitality. Mr. Jordan writes a quarterly column for Hotel News Now and is slated to be a cast member in an upcoming reality TV series.

The opinions expressed in this column do not necessarily reflect the opinions of Hotel News Now or its parent company, STR and its affiliated companies. Columnists published on this site are given the freedom to express views that may be controversial, but our goal is to provoke thought and constructive discussion within our reader community. Please feel free to comment or contact an editor with any questions or concerns.