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Mr. Metivier

Mobile Technology

Offering Self-Service Options is Key to Hospitality Loyalty

 By [Pascal Metivier](#), Founder & Chief Executive Officer, OpenWays

For years it was assumed that hotel guests wanted staff interaction at the front desk. Today's reality is clearly different. Findings from a recent [Harvard Business Review](#) survey on Self-Service (conducted in cooperation with the Corporate Executive Board, a leading research and advisory services company) concludes that businesses need to "stop trying to delight [their] customers." Rather than creating more nuisances (disguised as guest services) that require guests to stop by the front desk, the study shows that "customers want [to take]

control over how and when they interact with companies." Anything less, analysts say, can result in "major competitive disadvantages, irreversible brand damage, and a loss of key revenue opportunities."

The 2010 HBR study supports that offering self-service options is a must for hotels to remain competitive. Several branches of the travel industry -- airlines, train/subway/transit, car rental, etc. -- have already embraced this philosophy. Hoteliers, on the other hand, may have dramatically overestimated the extent to which their customers actually want to interact with them.



Based on responses from more than 75,000 B2B and B2C individuals, the HBR study revealed that "self-service is the No. 1 preference for customer service and building loyalty." Therefore a Mobile Key platform (which allows travelers choose between checking themselves in via their mobile phone and bypassing the front desk to go straight to their rooms or standing in line at the front desk to receive personal service) is the ideal solution for hotels targeting today's 'Generation Me' travelers -- a combination of Gen Yers and Gen Xers who grew up with a sense of self.

Providing the ideal customer-service platform to this demographic doesn't mean that they want to do everything on their own all the time. Sometimes their "sense of self" means needing immediate and direct staff interaction to answer a pressing question or resolve an urgent need. Because of this growing "me" mentality, a Mobile Key platform allows travelers to dictate how they want their experience to progress -- noting that it can change several times through the duration of their hotel stay.

Most **Generation Me** travelers are familiar with self check-in at airports and car rentals, and therefore they may find hotel front-desk check-in tedious and invasive. The option to use their mobile phone as a secure room key is welcomed. Once a traveler is in the room, however, he or she may decide that personal concierge service is warranted for a number of specific needs.

Sizing Up Guest Preferences

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It can be difficult to know for certain exactly what each guest wants individually by way of check in, therefore offering "options" is key to future loyalty for **Generation We** -- the combined population of Generation Me travelers. A self-service option for check in and **room key dispensing** on a cell phone means better and faster service to guests. Here are a few differentiating factors between the two options that have a direct impact on guest/employee satisfaction and guest/employee loyalty:

Attended Service: Front Desk Attendants often have their eyes down fixed to a computer screen when a guest approaches at check-in, especially during high-traffic registration times. Because attended check-in is laborious, it is often frustrating for both staff and guests. No guest should be made to feel that providing them service is a burden.

Self Service: A Mobile Key option frees up time for front-desk staff by offering an alternative to the process of traditional PMS-driven front-desk transactions. Automating the process, by allowing guests to use their personal mobile phones as their room key and bypassing the front-desk at check in, empowers Front Desk Attendants to focus on greeting guests with a smile.

Attended Service: When Front Desk Attendants are encumbered with tedious and often repetitive tasks it reflects on their job performance. With today's high service standards, a poor attitude is universally unacceptable.

Self Service: Giving guests a Mobile Key option makes the Front Desk Attendant position far more interesting, valuable and satisfying because each staff member is free to provide more dedicated, one-on-one service to guests who truly want their personal attention and assistance. Removing stress from a job position decreases employee turnover while reducing recruiting and training costs; A Win, Win. It's important to note that self service applies to all industry segments, from economy lodging to luxury hotels. No matter what type of hotel a traveler is staying in, no one likes to wait in line - period. In all hotel environments, travelers will value the convenience of being able to avoid the obligatory front-desk stop and go straight to their room as a true added value service.



Some chains see the Mobile Key platform as an opportunity to transfer staff from the front desk to the concierge desk, directly increasing the opportunity for face-to-face staff/guest interaction. **Self service means overall more service if its implementation is part of guest centric strategy.**

The Bottom Line is this: Providing true hospitality means adapting to what your customers prefer and not forcing a guest to do things your way. From the moment a travel experience begins, the consumer is presented with options to either talk with someone (Attended Service) or engage in transactions on their own (Self-Serve). This choice needs to carry through to the hotel environment, and a Mobile Key platform is the logical self-service extension.

More Options, Channels is Key to Self Service

In an article titled: "Understanding Customer Preferences: No 'One Size Fits All,'" Debbie Braunert, vice president of solutions and product marketing at [SoundBite Communications, Inc.](#), wrote that "anytime, any device, anywhere communications" is key to successful and sustained business practices today. An excerpt from the article surmises: "Consumers lead busy lives, making it more important to reach them at the right time. Provide customers with more options on not only how they can interact, but also when and on which channels. A communications and self-service approach that supports multiple channels—including phone (both agent- and IVR-based), email, and interactive text messaging—opens new opportunities to get closer to customers and increase effectiveness. Furthermore, augmenting outbound communications with a number of inbound options that can consumers can use at their convenience lends itself to even more flexible self-service."

Additionally, a recent 2010 Air Transport World passenger Self-Service Survey conducted by SITA, the world's leading specialist in air transport communications and information technology (IT) solutions, took an in-depth look at the



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By Elie Younes, Associate, HVS International

attitudes and habits of a representative sample of the 287.6 million passengers who use seven leading international airports. According to survey results, the percentage of passengers who stated they had used mobile phone check-in in the past grew from 14% to 23%. Overall, 58% of passengers said they are interested in using mobile check-in.



Cathy Stam, SITA

Portfolio Marketing Director, was quoted as saying: "Almost a quarter of all respondents claimed to have used mobile check-in at least once. However, the survey demonstrates that passengers are increasingly comfortable with using a variety of options whether online, kiosk or mobile check-in. The message from passengers is that airlines should implement a multi-channel approach to direct customer service not just for flights but also for ancillary services such as hotel bookings and car hire."

To offer Relevant Mobile Services, Ubiquity and Interoperability are Essential

With mobile device technology playing such a big self-service role in the travel industry, lodging is the next logical step for adoption -- and the Mobile Key platform is the next generation application that will soon change the way travelers check in or out of a hotel because it works today will all cell phones.

Nothing is more frustrating to a traveler than seeing mobile services available to the cell phone that aren't being offered. Mobile Key success lies in its ability to address 100% of the guests interested in using it regardless of the phone they carry or the carrier they use. This is where the Mobile Key solution is unique and extremely powerful.

Consumers have become dependent on their mobile devices for many reasons. People want to connect and communicate when they want and in a manner they choose. Statistics released from leading industry experts are reporting that today's travelers are trending towards using mobile device technology across the entire travel platform -- from the airport to the hotel. Finding a solution provider that gives hoteliers the opportunity TODAY to quickly and inexpensively deliver a mobile platform to these "Generation Me" travelers that meets their demands while still providing them with a "choice" should their voice change to ever further enhance their stay experience.

Pascal Metivier is widely recognized within the global hospitality industry and the security industry as a specialist in hotel security, responsible for several of the security technology patents now in existence. In 2009 he launched OpenWays as the hospitality industry's first global provider of mobile-based access-management solutions. With 17-plus years of electronic-lock/door hardware and access management expertise, Mr. Metivier developed a way for consumers worldwide to use any of the 5.5 billion cell phones on the market today (any network and any OS standards) as a mobile room key. Mr. Metivier can be contacted at ++ 33 6 85 622 306 or pmetivier@openways.com **Extended Bio...**

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