

# Top 10 Post-Covid Technology Solutions Deliver an Exceptional Guest Experience

*If you think its going to be business as usual, then think again! Take a hard look at costs, efficiencies and leverage technology to deliver a great guest experience.*

*By Richard Carruthers*

It was just a little over a year ago when everything in the hospitality space was ticking like a fine Swiss time piece...and then Covid hit. In just a matter of days, the hospitality world was turned upside down, with business and leisure travel coming to a sudden halt. Finally, with the emergence of a vaccine and a massive pent-up demand for travel, there is light at the end of the tunnel. That light can be an opening to a robust recovery, or it could be another obstacle coming your way, it all depends on your post-Covid strategy.

*One thing is clear, there will be a “new normal”.*

There has never been a better time to reassess operations and the guest experience than NOW. Meeting the new normal will require changes on many fronts. Attention must be directed to providing the guest with a safe, germ-free environment, recognizing that Covid has turned the majority of us into modern day germaphobes. Reducing the number of touch-points in a guest room is a priority. In addition, the concept of social distancing will likely have long-term impact with guests opting for self-serve in favor of face-to-face interactions. From the Hoteliers perspective, cost cutting and greater efficiencies without sacrificing the guest experience must be a priority. While cost cutting and greater efficiency is an absolute imperative in the short term, there will be long-term gains and improvement to the bottom line as a reward in the future.

The solution begins in the guest room. Imagine a single device, a command center, that can replace the touch points and deliver world-class communication, enabling self-serve interaction and transactions while reaching 100% of your guests. You might ask, “Why not use the guest’s mobile phone?”...close, but the phone is a passive device. Most of the time it’s dark, not communicating, and often simply out of battery power or turned off (out of power, don’t want to be disturbed, roaming costs, etc.). Don’t expect every guest to download or link to an app. You will never reach critical mass, leaving many of your guests with little access to the services they need and desire. If you were thinking the TV then think again. It is a source of entertainment not a research, communication, and transactional device.

The “command center” in the guest room is a proactive device, always on and communicating and controlling the message. That device is a computer Tablet.

Here are my top 10 technology suggestions to address the “new normal”.



## 10. Virtual Concierge

You may remember those lines in front of the Concierge desk. Guests waiting patiently for restaurant recommendations and reservations, info on tours, spa treatments, golf, and ultimately making reservations. That social interaction pre-Covid was at times pleasant and at other times just annoying...ask any Millennial. Guests still value and seek out the hotel recommendations but given the advances in communication technology today and the limits on face-to-face interaction, it's best to deliver this information directly to the guest. The most effective and safest way to reach 100% of the guests is to make this available in the guest room...on the "command center", the Tablet. Its large screen is ideal to visualize and market the experience, and it's transactional, allowing the guest to reserve, pay or charge.

## 9. Self-Serve Kiosk

The new normal doesn't change the need for guest comfort, but it does change the behavior behind satisfying these needs. Help the guest find what they need on a highly visible and easy to use app on the Tablet. It could be extra towels, a blanket, coffee pods from housekeeping, a reservation at a local restaurant, booking time at the spa or requesting snacks from you "grab-and-go". Help the guest help themselves and minimize the staff support and face to face interaction.

## 8. Remove Paper

A clean room is imperative post-Covid, which means that the paper in the guest room must be eliminated. That includes menus, magazines, brochures and the hotel compendium. How do you replace all of that... put it on the TV? Time and time again the TV has proven to be the last place people will look for such information and statistically it has been a massive disappointment. The solution is to build your compendium and marketing materials on a device that is communicating all day long, the guest room Tablet.

## 7. Elevate the Experience

I know you care about the comfort, safety and well-being of your guests, and this is perhaps more germane in the post-Covid new normal. Now is the time to leverage technology to listen to your guests to ensure they have that great guest experience. Use the in-room Tablet to ask your guests daily, "How is your stay?" Be alert and respond immediately. A guest that recognizes and experiences your support in-stay will reward you on Trip Advisor® and through other social media reviews.

## 6. Alarm Clock

It's time to retire this dust-gathering and generally inaccurate object from the guest room. Integrating the alarm clock on the Tablet removes yet another device from the room. The Tablet will not only keep accurate time it is your Wake-Up call replacement or backup that can be voice activated, consolidated on one device, with minimal or no touch point whatsoever. Reset for the next guest guarantees no unwanted alarms or wake-up calls.

## 5. Room Controls

Turning on the lights and adjusting the room temperature are all touch points in the room. These touch points can be eliminated with room controls on the command center. While this may be an upgrade, it should be, if not already, on your next room renovation plan. If your budget includes remote blinds, this too can be controlled from the same device. You are also a step away from voice control and a true no-touch control space.

## 4. Communicate

Communicating with the guest post-Covid is a challenge but it has never been more important. It's time to leverage technology to reach your guest, and the two best ways to accomplish that are on their mobile and on the Tablet "command center" in the room. The TV?...in a word, NO. The TV is off most of the time, so it fails as a communication tool. Room drops...in the 21<sup>st</sup> century...really? Whether it's a notice of window cleaning, a note from housekeeping, a promotion for the spa, or a warning of heavy rainfall, keeping in touch with the guest is so very important and builds trust, confidence, and loyalty. Take control of the message.

## 3. Attract Group Business



Business travelers will come back but there will be a new normal in play here as well. A lot of business has been done via remote video conferencing over the Covid period, but business is still conducted based on trust and familiarity, which will bring back the need for meetings and conventions. Luring them back to your hotel will require some finesse, and aggressive promotion and technology can accomplish both and help you stand out from the crowd. Branding and communication for the organizer will be essential to attract sponsorship and build brand. There are Tablet applications that will deliver a unique set of screens to meeting attendees, deliver vital meeting communications and provide a highly visible platform for branding and sponsorship.

## 2. Housekeeping

Covid has turned housekeeping upside down. Prior to Covid, guests were asked if they wanted to opt out of housekeeping during their stay and now, thanks to Covid, your room will be untouched during your stay unless you opt in. The question now is, "Do you want your room made up during your stay?" and housekeeping will want to know when the room will be vacant to maintain social distancing. Each day the Tablet will pop up a window asking, "Do you wish to have your room made up tomorrow?" If the answer is yes then the guest is prompted to provide a time when the room will be vacant. A report is sent at the end of the day with a schedule of rooms and times for housekeeping. This is not only a convenience for the guest, but it's also a cost saving schedule support for housekeeping.

## 1. F&B

If your hotel is defined by its great kitchen then it's time to look at digitizing your menu with a cost-saving, revenue generating room service app on a Tablet and available on the guest device. If you are not defined by your outstanding kitchen you may already have entertained the idea of eliminating or replacing room service. Maintaining room service is more often than not a money losing, but necessary, amenity. This might be the perfect time to look at alternatives. The Tablet is the perfect platform to offer meals from a hand-picked selection of the best local cuisine. These hotel recommended dining establishments will deliver directly to the guest room or lobby, and guests can charge it to the room via PMS integration. This is not a solution for the mega meal providers but a partnership between you and HCN with a generous revenue share to make this a no brainer post-Covid solution.



Technology is impacting your guests in every aspect of their daily lives and they are becoming more and more comfortable with the convenience afforded to them. Tablets are now a ubiquitous tool in the household, as are Google Home® and Alexa®. Even the family car is now equipped with a "Tablet" screen with voice controls. It's time to upgrade guest room technology to benefit from lower operating costs, greater efficiencies, shared revenues, and be prepared for the "new normal".



### About the Author

Richard Caruthers is Co-Founder and Chief Operating Officer of Hotel Communication Network (HCN), an Ottawa, Ontario, Canada provider of innovative high-value in-room tablets that keeps each guest connected to their hotel, city and each other.

**About The Hotel Communication Network (HCN)** | Founded in 2008, with headquarters in Ottawa, Ontario, Canada, The Hotel Communication Network has built on years of research and development to provide an innovative high-value guest amenity that keeps each guest connected to their hotel, city and each other. HCN Navigator guestroom tablets are installed in the most prestigious properties in major US metropolitan centers. For more information, visit

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