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Japan, a global leader in technology; yet not in the hospitality industry.

From Daniel Tschudy

What is the first thing today's international businessmen do when checking into their hotel room? Not testing the bed, for sure, and very likely not taking a shower either. Priority has the immediate instalment of the personalised communication-, information- and data-access. Every international business traveller, individual or as part of a conference, will first check emails and news relevant to him or her (politics, economics, sports, etc.). And then they recharge smartphones and laptops; and then only, they start unpacking. In order to do so, hotels now-a-days need to provide updated, powerful and effective e- and IT-system.

Surprisingly, in Japan's hotel industry, that new international standard is seldom available. Surprising, because Japan is still among the world's technology leader; both in know-how and production. Home to Sony, Fujitsu, Nikon and many more, Japan is more than the pioneer in IT and e-tools. And yet, many of even the very best hotels in Tokyo and Osaka, lack a modern e- and IT-environment. New smaller boutique hotels built after 2005 or so, sometimes include those new needs in their overall budget. But most of the leading properties still lack one or several of these services.

4 major tools

What then is required by today's international business community? Number 1: a strong and complimentary wireless-internet access. Around the world, the hospitality industry – hotels, restaurants and venues – begin to understand that free-Wifi is no longer "nice to have" but a fundamental basic infrastructure. More and more hotels, even in China, offer this service free of charge. Japan should adjust or else risks frustrated international clients right from the moment of their check-in.

Two. Those old, sometimes heavy room-key-holders are outdated too. Electronic room-keys allow mobility for the client (not needing to visit each time the front-desk) plus the hotel obtains a simple security tool for restricting elevator-access to hotel guests only. Other facilities can be made accessible to a client according to reservations and bookings; for example entry to an executive lounge or a fitness centre.



Next, future-oriented hotels should install multi-purpose sockets. They offer PC audio, HDMI- and VGA-connectors, as well as access to personal video/audio devices to watch own movies and pictures. They also feature a 5V power socket, they can recharge iPhones and iPads and they supply 220V for major global shapes. That how one of the brands look like:



And as a 4th issue, in-house entertainment in Japan's hotels is mostly outdated too. In the land of the world's best television producers (Panasonic, JVC Kenwood, Sony), often old 'boxy' TV-sets feature a couple of Japanese channels, maybe one NHK-English language station, plus always CNN. This is not up to standard anymore. One target audience must be the neighbouring key markets (China, Australia) with several channels from those countries (i.e. CNCC, Star Hong Kong, ABC Australia). Another element is that CNN no longer has that 'need-to-have' position it held until the 90ies. Nowadays, international news producers such as Sky UK, BBC or Al Jazeera English offer a far more global and neutral point-of-view. In fact, European and Asian travellers hardly tune to CNN anymore. In other Asian countries, hotels sometimes also offer a leading French-speaking channel (TV 5 Monde) and even one in German (DW).

Akihabara in every room

Obviously, the above list represents the perfect infrastructure. But, why not offer such a perfect e- and IT-infrastructure? E-needs have become as important as a friendly hospitality-attitude. Hotel managers and owners should be aware of those new trends and invest accordingly. In a matter of speaking, "Akihabara" should be available in every room – in line with Japan's position as still one of the world's most successful producers of electronic tools.