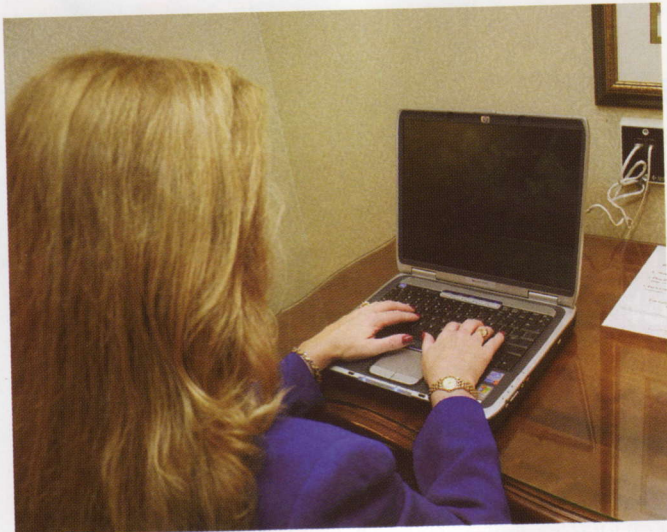


The Cutting Edge

The days when hotels could afford to operate with only a phone and a fax machine are long gone. In our contemporary fast-paced, and highly competitive, market – hoteliers obtain the most success through staying one-up on the competition...

Thankfully, therefore, there are presently a whole host of fresh products available for the hotelier to invest in and some of them are at the cutting edge of new technology. Of course, this still begs the question of what items are worth digging deep into your pockets for. After all, no one wants to spend substantial amounts of money on something that will soon be outdated or, worse, prove to be of only minimal help towards the day-to-day running of a busy establishment. We took a look at some of the merchandise currently jostling for the attention of hotel owners countrywide.



Be Versatile!

BT Versatility is designed for small to medium sized hotels that use between 4 and 32 phone extensions. The product has the advantage of a tailor made hospitality module for check in, check out, call bill information, call rate settings and room status functionality. "The brilliant thing about BT Versatility is that it only needs about a dozen lines and there is also potential for growth," states Sheila Smyth, a product manager at British Telecom. "Other features can be added onto the system as they become available. It is a tiny investment for a small or a medium sized hotel, and it stops them from spending a small fortune for a telephone system to serve their customers."

"There are so many features, including one that allows reception to look and see if a room is ready to use," continues Sheila. "So there is no running up and down the stairs, asking a chambermaid if the room is ready yet. Also, the telephone at reception might otherwise ring and ring if there is no one there to answer it but with BT Versatility the call can be transferred to another extension or even to a mobile phone. The hotel can also have a separate telephone for a taxi service, where the guest can come down to reception and just hit a button to order a taxi."

So far two medium-sized operations – The Abbey Hotel and The Beeches Lodge, both in Norfolk – claim to have saved "£1,200 per year" with the product. The establishments made extensive inroads on telephony running costs, as well as improvements to overall operational performance. The price for a BT Versatility unit "depends on the size of the hotel," as



Sheila clarifies. "For an establishment with 30 to 35 bedrooms, we charge £3430," she states. "Furthermore, Versatility is an analogue system and we offer the customer the use of broadband, which is a very neat step." www.bt.com/

Bringing Broadband Closer

BT's upcoming VROOMService, which should also see the company at the forefront of cutting edge technical developments in the hotel trade, capitalises even further on the demand for a broadband service in hotels. Product manager Laurie Chisnell explains that VROOMService, "Is a way to deliver broadband to hotel rooms - and it does not even require a modem. The product is centrally powered and uses the customer's existing wiring. There is no need to re-wire anything. Hotels can advertise the broadband access and the benefit for them is a quick return on their initial investment, which we estimate will only take about eighteen months."

"Everything indicates that in three or four years hotels will have to offer broadband connection free of charge, but right now they are usually able to charge about £19.99 for the whole stay," maintains Laurie. "VROOMService can be deployed from 10 to 1000 rooms and not even in the same building. Our research has shown that business guests commonly expect broadband access, that is not to say that private users do not want it as well, but business guests usually need fast download to access corporate networks and so on." The price of BT VROOMService is likely to vary in accordance to the size of a hotel, as Laurie explains. "The cost is £220 per room - depending on the size of the hotel. It is a bit more expensive for a smaller hotel to use the product." www.bt.com

Booking Just Became Easier...

Another company seeking to further its grip on the cutting edge of hotel technology is Booking Services International (BSI) a leading pan-European organisation that has been operating since 1984. John MacOmish, BSI's director of business strategy, explains that the company's most recent product, entitled BSI Direct, will be a major boost for those who choose to invest in it.



"For the ad-hoc booker BSI Direct pinpoints a hotel's availability and rates against any given location world-wide by way of geo-coding rather than relying on post or zip codes," says John. "Around 70,000 hotels worldwide are encompassed by the product's search. Moreover, larger companies that have 'preferred' hotel programmes and policy can input their own business rules which BSI Direct will adhere to – for instance, a company may decide that off-policy bookings can never be made or that 'policy compliant or lower' deals are allowed."

The new device also promises to cut down the time spent making a booking. "For all, the system delivers reduced staff time to make a reservation and a low transaction process costs," continues John. "If, for whatever reason, an online booking at a chosen hotel is not possible, the system seamlessly delivers the booking request to an experienced agent in

the BSI call-centre, which is operational twenty-four/ seven. On fulfilment, the confirmation is delivered back via the system to the booker's screen. It can be used for printout and also storage within the system. The booking can also be amended or cancelled on screen."

To date, some companies that have implemented the system have seen a switch to self-bookings of up to 35% of their total needs – and this is within three months. "Companies with a minimum of £50,000 hotel spend will probably experience the most benefit from its policy compliance and management information features," adds John. "So far we have excellent feedback from our clients and high levels of usage. The average take-up of the tool is 30% of all bookings within three months." www.corixa.co.uk



Keep Your Rivals Busy!

One of the most important things for a hotel is, undoubtedly, to remain aware of the competition and maintain economical and reasonable pricing for their target customers. Thanks to Igentica's Hotelmonitor keeping up with the pricing strategy of a rival establishment has never been easier. Nick Kandola, the CEO of Igentico, explains that, "Since the advent of the internet, people are booking their hotel rooms online – and this has resulted in hoteliers looking at the competition, with the result affecting the pricing that they choose for their rooms. However, up until recently the Pricing Manager at The Hilton, for example, would have to manually go onto the competition's web site and price up their rooms against another five star hotel." As Nick goes on to explain, these days are now over with the advent of his company's latest product. "With the Hotelmonitor they can pull information from different web sites and our product will then provide a report," he mentions. "This way the hotelier can find out, very easily, what they are competing against and reduce or increase their pricing as a result. With our technology it is easier to track the competitor's pricing."

Containing a full search engine that can look worldwide, as well as locally, The Hotelmonitor is also devised so that customers can be consistently updated on any price changes that their competitors decide to embark upon. "The Hotelmonitor is updated through a subscription," states Nick. "For instance, The Best Western could have a set up where the item searches all rival hotels once a week, every week – or where it only sends you an email for the hotels that have changed their prices. So, for

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example, you could search late one night for price differences and if a hotel should only change their room costs the next morning, then you will still get an email explaining the sudden alteration." Aimed at medium to large hotels, The Hotelmonitor is designed to give the consumer the very best in value for money. 01895 477770 www.igentica.com

That EZ Touch...

EZ TOUCH is a division of Stewart Roberts Associates Ltd, who are one of the most accomplished and respected EPOS (Electronic Point of Sale) suppliers to the UK hospitality industry. The company's latest product is the Dell Axim X3i PDA, which (as well as being something of a mouthful) is a fully integrated mobile solution aimed at making a waiter or

