

# Hotels Dazzle Guests With High-Tech Amenities

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*By Teresa Meek*

At Hotel 1000 in downtown Seattle, guests who want to sleep late don't have to hang a "Do Not Disturb" sign on their doorknobs. Each of the hotel's rooms contains an infrared sensor that detects body heat and displays the results to the housekeeping staff on a door panel (unless the guest doesn't want it to). If the sensor shows someone is in the room, the cleaners skip it and move on.



That's just one of the innovative features at the hotel, which also has a "virtual golf club" that lets guests practice their swing in the simulated environment of any of 50 courses from around the world. An infrared tracking system measures the height and speed of their ball as guests hit toward a screen showing the virtual course. They can even book a golf pro at the hotel to help improve their results.

"Before you go to Pebble Beach, you should come and practice with us - the greens fees aren't nearly as high," quips Tawny Paperd, the hotel's director of sales and marketing.



Hotel 1000  
mobile kiosk in  
lobby

Welcome to the world of high-tech hotels, where small boutiques and big chains alike are vying for the business of tech-savvy travelers by providing them with an ever-evolving set of geeky goodies.

Beyond Hotel 1000, here are some other notable examples:

1. Starwood Preferred Guest members will soon be able to download a hotel app on their iPhone, iPad, or Android device that will open the door to their rooms, eliminating worries about lost keys.
2. Boston's Hyatt Regency provides business travelers with an iPad app that lets them select equipment and chairs they want to use in a conference room and visualize the results.
3. At the Upper House Hong Kong, staff check guests in on an iPad, which is also used for concierge services. Guests get an iPod Touch in their rooms.
4. At the Aloft Cupertino in California, guests get Apple TV internet-streaming boxes in their rooms, and in the lobby, they can use tablets to make restaurant reservations, get flight information and print boarding passes.
5. The Mira Hong Kong "clones" a guest's room phone to a smartphone it provides, so they never miss messages while in the city and won't be assessed roaming charges. Like other high-tech hotels, the Mira also allows guests to connect to a concierge through its smartphone with the press of a digital button.

The pervasiveness of mobile technology and devices is pushing hotels to make use of new apps and systems, says Bill Carroll, senior lecturer at Cornell University's School of Hotel Administration. Features like mobile check-in and apps for controlling meeting room set-ups make it easier for guests and conference attendees to manage and monitor activity. And many have come to expect these features.

"It's like a loyalty program. If you don't have a loyalty program, you have a problem," Carroll says.

But hotels should exercise caution before taking random leaps into the world of modern gadgetry. The first consideration must be the customer. Some people may find apps that know what movie they're watching, where they're going or whether they're sleeping to be creepy. Other guests might not like the sight of a lobby full of high-tech devices.

"If I'm a 69-year-old guy, I might want a traditional lobby," Carroll says. "You have to be careful."

But in cities like Seattle, home of Microsoft and Amazon, that's not an issue.

“We’re in a tech-savvy part of the country,” says Paperd of Hotel 1000. Using technology “has been part of our DNA from the beginning. It’s an important part of who we are, and that has always motivated us to put money into it.”

*Teresa Meek is a Seattle-based freelance journalist, writer, and editor whose journalism has appeared in Newsday, the Miami Herald, the St. Petersburg Times, the Baltimore Sun, and other newspapers and magazines.*



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