

# A digital key to open your hotel door

South Africa's leading hotels are expected to digitally change the way in which guests can check in to hotels in the near future.



Nikki Forster

New programmes and technologies will help speed up and may even do away with the check-in process, says PwC's Hospitality & Gaming Industry.

"Hotel business models are increasingly undergoing change in the advent of the digital era. Consumers are choosing when, where and how they want to interact with hotels, using an array of technological devices," says Nikki Forster, PwC Leader of Hospitality & Gaming Industry for Southern Africa.

Technology is making it easier and more efficient for guests to access hotels whenever and wherever they want. This is done by way of technological devices that usually involve strategically designed and free smartphone apps and Bluetooth technologies, says Veneta Eftychis, PwC Senior Manager, Hospitality & Gaming Industry.

On installation of an app, guests can do an array of things such as selecting their hotel rooms, as well as making reservations and payment. They can also check in online and have direct access to their rooms on arrival. Ultimately, with apps and Bluetooth technologies, guests' phones become their room keys for the duration of their stay - "they need not stop at the reception," says Eftychis.

In addition, apps allow guests control in-room electronics, such as air conditioners, TV sets, curtains and blinds. They can even order room service and make reservations for restaurants and spa treatments.

Once guests have checked out of hotels, the apps delete the NFC (Near Field Communications) or Bluetooth code for the room.

Eftychis says according to research carried out in the hotel industry, hoteliers believe the technology will make their guests much happier. "It also makes for more streamlined and efficient running operations," she adds. In addition, the technology will provide hoteliers with more marketing and branding opportunities.

"Hotel guests can expect their experiences to be very different in the near future from that of the traditional hotel. Many hotels still have a long way to go and need to instill a culture of innovation within a business model that can adapt to the opportunities that the digital age can bring. Truly innovative hotel brands will seek to exploit the digital wave to further grow increased loyalties and revenue," concludes Eftychis.

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