

Original Web Source: <http://www.lhonline.com/article/17729/>

## Technologically Together

August, 2007

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No particular gizmo stood out at the 2007 Hospitality Information Technology Exposition & Conference, lodging's premier showcase for all things technological. But, as in the past few HITECs, there was interface, integration and convergence.

The key areas of innovation revolved around entertainment/information delivery—and the guestroom lock. But nothing looked that striking, particularly compared to the Apple iPhone, which debuted the day after HITEC ended.

At this June 25-28 HITEC in Orlando, some of the hottest offerings were inside the bundle, not the bundle itself.

Take NxTV, a 10-year-old company that put a voiceover Internet protocol twist on video on demand to be the first in the IPVOD space. Not only did NxTV have one of the bigger displays in a room full of huge ones, it broadcast content over all kinds of displays (it's monitor-agnostic and not hostage to a specific protocol) and, as is appropriate to its target market of luxury hotels, it features wildly eclectic content, like World Radio, a "station" that can broadcast music from any locale.

With installations in 67 properties representing more than 27,000 rooms and "double that under contract," NxTV is on a roll, says Russ Reeder, president and chief operating officer. "We've got more arrows in our back, and we've survived," he added during the show.

Because it's based on Ethernet cable, rather than coaxial, encryption of content arrives through software rather than on a chip, Reeder says. Now that high-definition TV is virtually mandatory (sales of all analog TV broadcasts will, by law, cease in February 2009), NxTV-enabled TV sets won't require replacement because their encryption chips fail or date, Reeder suggests.

NxTV just earned Hotel Technology Next Generation (HTNG) certification for "single guest itinerary" display functionality. The non-profit HTNG, which had a major presence at HITEC, was formed in 2002 to set standards and facilitate development of fresh technologies.

All the usual monitor makers had wares on display, from LG Electronics to Samsung, from Polaroid to Sharp. All these are competing to broadcast HD content. Eager to meet their needs are NxTV, Wayport, InfoValue Computing, LodgeNet and iBahn, among others.

Not only did iBahn use the occasion to announce it will acquire ETV Interactive, a company involved in singlecable digital TV, entertainment and communications, it also demonstrated Priority One, a digital management services system that acts like a broadband traffic cop.

Offering a related product was InfoValue Computing, which introduced its NextGenTV solution. NextGenTV features an electronic program guide covering timeshifted TV and allows service providers various ways to configure and manage their services, including channel set arrangement and TSTV recording periods.

In related news, Polaroid Hospitality and Commercial and LodgeNet Entertainment Corp. announced that Polaroid's full line of VOD-capable LCD TVs is now compatible with LodgeNet's interactive TV platforms. In addition, Polaroid has adopted the Pro:Idiom content security technology mandatory for hotels that use the LodgeNet solution.

Meanwhile, Wayport announced Entertainment-onDemand, blending free TV via an existing TV feed; VOD over Wayport's IP network; HD for some VOD assets; property management system integration; TV check-in and -out/folio review; end-to-end encryption for content assets; and high-definition media interface (HDMI) connectivity from the set top to the television. Under this Wayport management solution, hotels can customize their in-room entertainment offerings.

Many of these products were invisible, i.e., software. The show proved TV monitors are changing less quickly than the technology that drives them. It also proved convergence doesn't have to mean software alone. It also can mean hardware, like the ZVOX HS series. The Massachusetts firm's single-cabinet audio solutions are designed to upgrade a guestroom by providing a home theater system that doesn't require external speakers, speaker wires, receivers or subwoofers. Streamlining is key to the centrally controlled ZVOX audio systems.

## The Scene

According to HITEC sponsor Hospitality Financial & Technology Professionals, this year's Orange County Convention Center extravaganza was the second-largest in HITEC history, drawing 5,736 attendees and 300-plus exhibiting companies. Anecdotal evidence suggested it was busier than last year's smaller HITEC, held in the far better-scaled Minneapolis Convention Center. The Orange County complex was much too big for HITEC, and the convention center layout made it difficult to get around. Parking, too, could be problematic, largely because some lots were far away from the building.

On the other hand, there was a lot of action, particularly on June 26 and 27. Not only were the walkways packed, the booths, particularly ones in the middle of the show, were pretty busy. Among the busiest: Microsoft, SoftBrands, NxTV, and those of various telephone manufacturers including Teledex, TeleMatrix, and Chinabased Bittel USA, a newcomer to the hospitality field.

Making its second appearance was Guestroom 2010, a specially designed, distinctive exhibit that aims to showcase what one might call a hotel-tech wish list. **Also making its sophomore appearance there was the Ammique bed, a pricy, high-tech sleeping platform not likely to trickle down to the budget segment (its original cost was \$20,000).** Making its debut was a bathroom mirror that doubled as a TV set; talk about picture in picture!

Guestroom 2010 also featured Casio's Voice Recognition Kiosk; MASTOR, from Guestroom 2010 sponsor IBM, a "customer service" technology that helps hotel staff communicate with foreign guests; and First View Security's Digital Door Viewer, which brings the guestroom door display into the YouTube era.

New to HITEC was the FAVE awards, a way for HFTP to recognize its more distinctive exhibitors. The HITEC FAVEs included Agilysys; IdeaS revenue management systems; LG Electronics; Minibar Systems; and Jonas club management software. Among the cool-looking exhibits: Microsoft (with its wares behind glass bead curtains and soft white light, this display evoked an ultra high-end hippie hangout) and a thatched hut courtesy of Digital Alchemy (move over, Jimmy Buffett).

## Among The Rollouts

Here is a sampling of other HITEC rollouts:

—Smart Alerts and Updates are Passkey offerings that automatically deliver key event information via e-mail to Passkey users at critical event milestones. Smart Alerts are triggered by milestones. Updates refine the process.

—JDA Software Group signed a deal with Carlson Hotels Worldwide to implement a revenue optimization program across Carlson's 900-plus properties. The first phase will let Carlson develop strong forecasting capability based on JDA's record with Continental Airlines Cargo and Dollar Thrifty Automotive Group.

On the security front, TimeLox introduced DC On-line, a radio-frequency online electronic locking system for large hotels, casinos and resorts. The wire-free locking solution is tailored to the security needs of large lodging, gaming and resort properties. In other security news:

—VingCard introduced VISIONLINE by VingCard, its version of DC On-line, for conventional hotels. It also introduced Signature RFID by VingCard with near field communication (NFC) compatibility for cell phones. Like SAFLOK's Reggie, it will work in hotels equipped with Signature RFID locks so that prior to arrival, guests can receive a booking confirmation number for the remote check-in they made via their cell phone, and get a room number and encrypted room key access code through the phone's short message system (SMS) application. This allows them upon arrival to go straight to the room they unlock with their phone.

—Kaba Lodging Systems introduced green ILCO and SAFLOK products. These RoHS-compliant product lines follow European rules restricting use of certain hazardous substances, such as excessive lead, mercury and flame retardant, in electrical and electronic equipment.

On the reservations front, Pegasus Solutions introduced its next-generation CRS, RezView. Pegasus says this gives customers consistent views of data through convergence of CRS, PMS and worldwide web functionality. Even as it allows timely extraction of data for reporting, it also reduces complexity—and works quickly. According to Pegasus COO and President Mike Kistner, the new RezView incorporates software and technology from recent Pegasus acquisition GuestClick and offers improved scalability and new, centralized functionality.

Finally, Sabre Travel Network announced its Rate Assured hotel certification program, watchdog software Sabre says is the first of its kind to extensively check rates at the property level to confirm that individual hotels are providing Sabre with the lowest publicly available rates.

There were updates, too, like guest services operations systems software manufacturer GoConcierge.net's new interface with MICROS Systems' OPERA PMS and new Windows Mobile-powered handheld device applications for GuestWare's guest response and housekeeping inspection software and Mintek Mobile Data Solutions' WinTrack preventive maintenance software.

Beginning to tie it all together was Hotel Technology Next Generation, standards-setter for the lodging industry. This summer, HTNG will release the first phase of its Open Data eXchange (ODX) initiative, offering software manufacturers a web service for sharing of information. The aim is to develop an open standard through which any two lodging industry systems can exchange mutually agreed upon data. By late summer, initial versions of the standard should be available, according to Douglas Rice, HTNG executive vice president and CEO.