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Checking out the guestroom of the future

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By Rob Lovitt

The hotel room of the future may be closer than you think.

In fact, it was in Orlando just last month.

The room, officially called Guestroom 2010, was a major attraction at HITEC, an annual conference for financial and technology professionals in the hospitality industry. Featuring 70 new and near-future technologies, it offered a peek at what lodging may look like in the years to come.

Now in its second year, the project is more about feasible technology than science fiction. Some of the technologies on display are already in production; others are prototypes still in search of a viable market. Each was included because it represented an innovation in design, usability, energy efficiency or environmental protection.

The products and technologies in the exhibit promise to reinvent every aspect of the lodging experience. From PDA-based concierge services to motion-sensitive lighting systems, the ultimate goal is to help travelers make better use of their time. "These should be common things," says Deborah Hansen, president of décorus Worldwide, a Guestroom 2010 participant, "and eventually they will be."

In-room amenities

All bed, no mattress: Developed in the UK, the Ammique bed isn't so much a bed as it is a body suspension system. Instead of a mattress, it features a system of linked rods and small plastic-domed caps that move independently to contour to the natural curves of your body. You can currently test ride it for the price of a night's lodging at the Cotswold House Hotel in Gloucestershire.

Time slips away: Correction: with Clocky, a wheeled alarm clock developed by Nanda LLC, it actually rolls away. Hit the snooze alarm and the unit will roll off the nightstand and wheel around the floor until it finds a place to rest. When the alarm goes off again, you have no choice but to get out of bed and find it. Currently available online and through various retailers, the little devil is ideal for anyone with early-morning meetings - or teenagers.

Checking in

Handheld concierge: Standardized e-mail confirmations are so last year. Currently being developed by Digital Alchemy, Claire is a browser-based program that lets guests access their reservation, plus a wealth of hotel information, direct from their cell phones before, during and after their stay. Expected to go live this fall, the service is designed to display a guest's personal itinerary - travel plans, meetings, recreation options - from pre-arrival to post-check out.

Ring-a-ding room key: Who needs a key card when you can use your cell phone to unlock your door? Using a phone with a contactless IC chip, like the one displayed by NTT DoCoMo USA, you'll eventually be able to open your hotel room simply by swiping your handset across a sensor outside the door. The technology is currently used in Japan for a variety of retail transactions, with discussions underway for future hotel use.