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THE ACCOMMODATION MANAGER'S GUIDE

Issue 16
SPRING 2006
Aus \$15 (inc GST)

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HITEC 2006:

A look into the guestroom of 2010

WITHOUT DOUBT THE HIGHLIGHT OF MY YEAR IS ATTENDING HITEC, THE WORLD'S LEADING HOSPITALITY TECHNOLOGY CONFERENCE AND EXHIBITION HELD EVERY YEAR IN JUNE IN USA.

This year's event, my 18th in succession, was held in Minneapolis the capital of Minnesota and was a great success with more than 600 booths and 4475 attendees from all over the world. The venue was fantastic and Minneapolis turned on wonderful weather and great hospitality as the major bars and restaurants were within walking distance from the convention centre and my hotel.

One of the highlights this year was the organiser HFTP's decision to incorporate *Guestroom 2010* as a key part of the exhibition and it featured 56 different technologies. Without doubt guestroom technology has changed dramatically over the last few years and being able to view a range of new products laid in a unique space design was very revealing.

HFTP surveyed many frequent travellers to get an insight into what they believed should constitute guestroom 2010 and some of their suggestions were incorporated in both the design of the room and the eventual products chosen. Key points noted were as follows:

- Frequent travellers did not like hotel delivery staff (room service and bellman) passing by their bathroom when they entered the room so as a result the bathroom was placed at the back of the room
- Those surveyed also expressed their preference for natural light in the bathroom making it easier to wake up and adjust to jet lag – as a result the guestroom had large curtain free windows while still offering privacy.
- Female road warriors told HFTP that they did not like hotel personnel could see into their living quarters, so *Guestroom 2010* features a wall full of light that blocks the view.

In *Guestroom 2010*, the most striking products included the following:

- Amnique, a \$20,000 British bed featuring a variegated body suspension array with a sleeping system that adjusts to the contours of the body; www.amnique.com
- A portable fabric freshener from Whirlpool designed to eliminate the need for dry cleaning while on the road. www.whirlpool.com
- Polytronix glass that can change a panel from translucent to transparent at the flick of a switch. www.polytronix.com
- Nethrone, a "personal digital entertainment environment" consisting of an adjustable chair facing a keyboard and computer monitor of one's choice. www.nethrone.com
- Roomba - an intelligent and effective vacuuming robot for both carpeted and hard floors or Scooba a floor washing robot that preps, washes, scrubs and dries floors all by itself. www.irobot.com
- Aquavision waterproof LCD TV - these units are designed for bathrooms and feature heated screen areas to prevent the front from misting up in humid conditions. The unit resembles a mirror when the screen is turned off. www.waterprooftv.ca
- Mediahub that allows for simple relocation of most common audio/video connection ports to a more convenient area. www.teleadapt.com
- Cstar's vending genie - Cstar Technologies has collaborated with a leading PMS and electronic door lock vendor to showcase cashless vending. Guests use keycards to buy goods, eliminating cash in the machine and wirelessly approving and posting transactions to the

guest folio for payment at checkout. www.cstartech.com

Several other European companies made their debut at this HITEC, like Powerdesk, a British firm that builds furniture in which the technology is embedded, giving hotelier's choice in both style and hardware.

Other components in *Guestroom 2010* were the following

- startlingly high-definition TVs,
- a self-cleaning shower stall, www.i-c-p-inc.com
- a Brookstone massage chair that kneads your tired muscles to music from a built-in CD player, www.brookstone.com
- The Luxhad, a HDTV look-alike that changes display to fit the viewer's mood. www.luxart.us
- high tech toilet seat - this toilet seat from Brondell includes a warm water wash, adjustable heater seat, warm air dryer, power saver function and remote control device www.brondell.com

The themes of *Guestroom 2010* were interactivity, functionality and aesthetics. Making it so hands-on and edgy was smart of HFTP, which aims to freshen it up every year. The showroom floor contained all the major technology vendors but what stood out was collaborative efforts, announcements of software alliances or hardware upgrades that put companies, some of which had been competitive, together.

If last year was the year of high-speed Internet access (HSIA), this was the year of HDTV. Not only were industry stalwarts like LG Electronics, LodgeNet and On Command highly visible, so were NXTV, DirecTV and Extenway Solutions. The giant TV over which On Command broadcast the *World Cup* was a consistent draw, plus LG and Sharp had new offerings.

Another surging technology was Internet protocol telephony. Teledex showcased *Iphone* models, one with voiceover Internet protocol technology exclusively, the other a hybrid that could be upgraded to VoIPexclusive technology later. It also announced new digital enhanced cordless telecommunications phones, which it claims provide worldwide compatibility with various region-by-region cordless telephone frequency requirements. Telematrix, which merged with Scitec this spring, unveiled new models of its *Marquis* and *Trimline* phones. The merger took place so supplier Telematrix could leverage Scitec's phones and VoIP solutions.

Newmarket International unveiled new features for its *MeetingBroker* web-based lead management software. Tested with Starwood, it's now scalable and widely available and features enhanced reporting and business functions.

LodgeNet announced development of a guest connectivity centre to help hotel patrons link their portable media devices to high-definition displays. It also announced a new agreement that enables Panasonic displays to offer LodgeNet's content-secure, high-definition, free-to-guest and video-on-demand services. LodgeNet also unveiled *Entertainment 2Go*, enabling guests to download movies from an onsite digital server to their laptops.

Here's a sampling of other news:

- Tangerine Global, which targets upper-upscale with its HDTV programming, announced its selection by Peninsula Hotels
- Multi-Systems Inc debuted a web-booking engine that enables hoteliers to capture online reservations on their websites with real-time inventory control. MSI also used *Guestroom 2010* to showcase its self-service *Place Point* point-of-sale solution and *Pocket Concierge*, a remote check in/out handheld PDA