

HITEC GUESTROOM 2010

Back to the Future

As CEO of Hospitality Financial and Technology Professionals, Frank Wolfe gets to help select products for the group's pet project, Guestroom 2010. The hotel room prototype showcases existing, cutting-edge, and future technologies as by members and nonmembers alike. The group asked for technology that would make hotel rooms more pleasing to customers and make running hotels more economical for owners. The group's first exhibit at HITEC in 2006 wowed visitors and the press. "The response has been beyond our wildest imagination," Wolfe says. "We get requests all over the world to show it and talk about it. I was in China a couple weeks ago to meet with people who were building a new hotel, and they very interested in talking about the project."

At press time, Wolfe was preparing for Guestroom 2010's second incarnation at HITEC 2007. Although he couldn't tell us about everything the room's features, he did give us a glimpse into what convention goers could expect at HITEC.

What are some of the exciting technologies in this year's room?

There are some things that you might not think of as technology—such as the Ammique bed, which has no mattress. Instead, you're sleeping on 20,000 parts, including 8,000 pistons. Some of the advantages are that it's clean, it never wears out, and it doesn't have to be rotated. That helps reduce workers compensation costs for housekeepers. In addition, we have Internet-enabled technology that adjusts the lighting to help guests overcome jet lag.

How many technologies will be featured in this year's exhibit?

We have 60 or 70 items that we'll be featuring, but we're still making the selections. Some new items this year are

green technologies, such as carpet made from corn that has nanotechnology coatings to prevent stains. There's an energy-saving, oxygen-infused showerhead that saves water. It has a continuous flow head, so that the flow remains the same even if pressure drops. Motion sensors can also be utilized in the room to turn things on and off and save energy.

Another new technology uses RFID to alert the food service staff when a guest places a room service tray in the hallway.

What's the biggest trend you're seeing in hotel technology?

It's really all over the charts. There is a voice-recognition kiosk that recognizes you when you approach it. If it has talked to you before, it will recognize you. You can ask where the pool is, and it will give detailed directions from where you are standing.

We also have a universal simultaneous translator from IBM, called MASTOR. It was originally developed for use by the army. If you speak in English and you're in Germany, it would respond in English. In addition, there's a safe that will run off thumbprints instead of keys.

Another trend is that everything is designed around the guest and in one location, so that they can run the television, lights, stereo from one remote.



Frank Wolfe is CEO of Hospitality Financial and Technology Professionals

One amusing thing that has really intrigued everyone is Clocky, the alarm clock that runs and hides. If you hit the snooze button, it jumps off the nightstand and hides somewhere in the room, so when it rings again, the guest is forced to get up and find the clock to turn it off.

Are hotel rooms becoming too high tech? Can guests handle all the technology?

The old paradigm for a hotel room was the idea that you went because it was cool; guests were excited to watch the color television and have cable. Now, in some ways, we're behind the curve, because more people have high-def, flat-screen television at home. To stay ahead of the curve, it needs to be better than what the guest has at home. At the same time, it needs to be simple enough that they can understand how to use it.

One fun technology is the coffeepot, which has a wireless weather forecaster, so that when you pour your first cup of coffee, you can see whether it will rain today or not.



Bring Your Own _____

A typical item in the Guestroom 2010 is LG Electronics' new Auto-Sensing Remote Jack Pack (RJP-101M), an all-in-one hub providing guests with multiple

audio/video inputs to interface with the television and external portable devices such as DVD/CD players, laptop PCs, MP3 players, among others. It also includes four AC outlets, so guests can recharge their cell phone or laptop. We think this is a much better solution than finding a hard-to-reach outlet behind the nightstand. The test will be if there are fewer cell phone chargers in resorts' lost-and-found bins.