PANDEMIC ACCELERATED COMMUNICATIONS REVOLUTION

If 2020 pushed us in a single direction, it might have been to re-evaluate how we communicate and what all we touch. In this article, we explore the second revolution in hotel-guest communication and the seamless handoff of everything inside the hotel room to a guest's personal device – including how that might happen and what that means for the guest.

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Delivering Beyond

Contactless Experiences

The Pandemic Accelerated Communication Revolution inside Hotel Rooms

If 2020 pushed us in a single direction, it might have been to re-evaluate how we communicate and what all we touch. In this article, we explore the second revolution in hotel communication and the seamless handoff of everything inside the hotel room to a guest's personal device, including how that might happen and what that means for the guest.

Communication preferences have changed a lot over the past 15 years. Today, we are building hotel products across multiple categories (for instance- mobile, web, Wi-Fi login, in-room phone, IPTV and texting), but when we first entered the market 20 years ago, on property PABX was the communication product for hotels. At the time, the telephone was the focus of in-room technology and we've witnessed the evolution of the space since then. I recall the countless design hours we spent perfecting the hotel logo for a 240-pixel screen on a landline IP phone. After a 20% drop in product use each year after 2013, it became clear that the hotel guest did not want to interact with the in-room phone any more than they absolutely had to. Mobile phones took precedence very quickly.

Fast forward to today, the trends from before were magnified by the pandemic as worries loomed over touching yet another surface. In fact, the US Center of Disease Control (CDC) classifies the in-room telephone as a "High Touch Surface" and an infection hazard. Other high touch surfaces inside hotel rooms are "knobs, light switches and remote controls", each carrying increased federally recommended disinfecting schedules and risk to a hotel room occupant. It's fair to say that in case you were on the fence before, the time to re-think about in-room communication is now.

So, what will the new hotel room look like? Well, we believe that the single preferred point of interaction for a hotel guest still remains their smart phone. We've seen this with early adopters who've launched beta products enabling a TV remote on personal devices or an app that can open the hotel room door. While these are steps in the right direction, our opinion is that the efforts have been somewhat limited in scope, as individual technology providers -while successfully able to develop smart control for their own specific product lines- lack the single point of interaction the guest needs for ALL the pieces of the technology in the room. This is a big limitation as each contactless product only covers a very specific guest functional need and necessitates guest to use multiple contactless products to interact with the multiple pieces of technology and guest services that are available to them. Our data suggests that this is viewed more troublesome than it's worth, as at some point it becomes easier to just pick up the TV remote instead of having to load "one more app".

You might be asking, what does a "complete" product look like? From our research, we find that a hotel guest expects a single, mobile friendly, technology platform from which they can do everything they need to during their hotel stay. One which allows them to control the lights just as easily as ordering a sandwich from room service. Below is a categorized list of guest needs from both the guest's and the hotelier's perspective:

Guest Perspective:
⊗ Option to have virtual check-in/out and payment interactions and avoid face-to-face.
⊗ Browse and order from a room service menu without having to pick up a physical menu.
⊗ Casting their own entertainment content (e.g., Netflix) onto in-room TVs.
⊗ Contactless operations for lights, TV remotes, door unlock and so on
⊗ Easily accessible interface without having to download a new app for each hotel they visit.

Hotelier & Management Perspective:

◎ Direct reach to the customer during and pre/post stay.

◎ Enable mobility and reach their guest even when they are outside the room (via call, text or push notification), currently incoming messages are typically left on in-room voicemail boxes that are often overlooked by guests.

◎ Remove in-room booklets and compendium to reduce touch points and reduce operational overhead of updating menus

◎ Operational savings from offering increased guest services without incremental staffing.

Furthermore, we've found that 85% of surveyed hotels guests responded that they would be pleased if they did not have to pick up the in-room telephone to call the front desk and could communicate in a more user-friendly way.

But is this list really feasible? And can one product encompass so many interactions with multiple pieces of in-room hardware and software from different vendors? We're happy to say that 'YES', Nevotek is the only vendor in today's hotel tech marketplace who has built the product and integration breadth necessary to encompass all of these requirements into a simple browser-based UI.

QR Code

WiFi Login

GUEST CONTROL SCREEN

Controls → ✕ No-touch Phone

Controls → ✕ No-touch TV Remote

Room Environment Controls

Property Management System Interface

Room Service

Grace Text Assistant
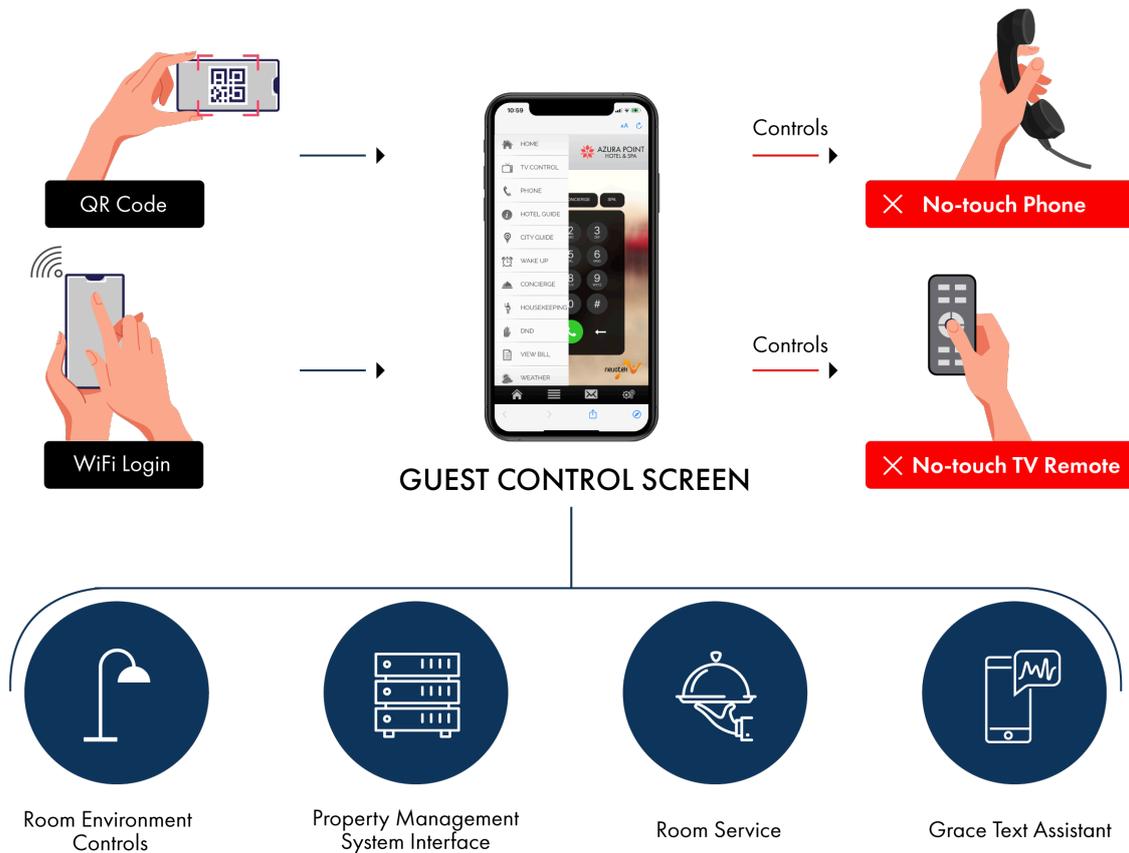
Using this technology, we hope to usher in a new communication revolution by providing your hotel guests an experience of mobility and contactless product experience like never before. We hope its use will make them feel safe and keep them coming back both during and after this pandemic.

In order to explain what this new guest experience looks like; we need to break the pieces of this puzzle one category at a time. So, let's start with the in-room phone. Nevotek sits on the hotel PBX, routing phone calls coming into the room to a web app-based softphone on the guest's personal device. What this means is that the guest is now free to move around the hotel and make a call to the front desk just as easily from the pool as from the room using the browser on their smart phone. On the other hand, calling the hotel guest has never been easier for the hotel as the guest can be reached anywhere. Currently, we are the only hotel technology provider who is offering this in a production environment.

The next piece is the hotel TV. Nevotek's touchless and Netflix/Hulu casting enabled IPTV is similar to a few other companies in the market – in that they work on the same LG/Samsung smart TVs without needing additional hardware. However, the differences are in contactless guest control, because as mentioned before- the competitors' products are limited to control only the in-room TV, whereas Nevotek integrates with everything. So, unless these IPTV tech providers pivot their business model in order to build the integrations with hotel POS systems, environmental room controls, Wi-Fi systems, door locking systems, PBX and so on – their touchless UI will remain simply a web-based TV remote.

Let us move on to the wireless, which is also our most used product. When a guest logs in to the hotel Wi-Fi network using their room number and last name, we automatically redirect them to the Guest Control Screen, the browser page from where they can control everything available in their hotel room.
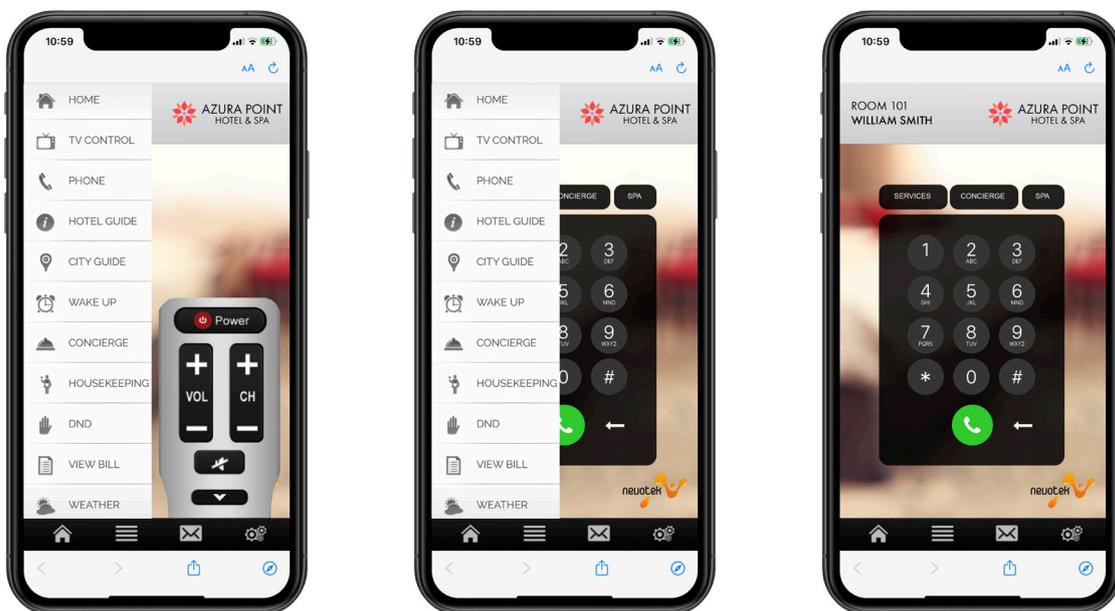
The lights, curtains, AC, TV remote, room service, dining or checkout requests, everything is right there on one screen. Instructions to log in to this page for guests who do not log in to Wi-Fi would be to scan a QR code in their room or welcome packet which would open their browser to this page, allowing them to stay out of network if they so wish. A point to be mentioned here is that in addition to authentication and redirection, the wireless product we've built also offers intelligence on network use for guest devices in a way that is respectful of current data privacy laws and is equipped to handle the recent changes related to MAC address randomization from Apple and Android.

The final piece of communication to wrap up the pieces of mobility and communication is the inclusion of texting-based communication. Communication via SMS is nothing new and texting providers have existed across industries for several years now, but what makes Nevotek different is its hotel focus and integration with the local Property Management System (PMS). When a text is received from a guest, Nevotek is able to identify the guest by the check-in records. The AI powered tool also responds to frequently asked questions automatically and redirects specific guest requests. For example, housekeeping and dining orders to relevant POS and Hotel Operation Systems or print the request. Since we are extremely focused on hospitality, our AI interprets guests' requests better than any other generic texting algorithms.

To summarize; we believe that this is the direction for future hotel-guest communications and is why we've devoted years of effort to build a product comprehensive enough to meet these needs. While it is always tedious to build products that integrate across the various Property Management Systems and other technology platforms –we believe that this new wave of communication and mobility depends on one platform to handle all of the guest needs. Nevotek believes in this vision and has invested 20 years of technology development and product partnerships to making this a seamless transition for a hotel – regardless of which PMS they use, or which technology infrastructure they sit on.

About Nevotek

Nevotek is an all-in-one guest technology platform that encompasses all the pieces of in-room technology. This includes in-room phone, IPTV and personal device casting, Wi-Fi login, mobile apps, virtual texting assistant and a range of guest services, environmental controls and ordering functionality from a single system. The firm has been in the hospitality industry since 2001 and has over 2000 hotels using their products worldwide.