MARKET REPORT

HVS Monday Musings: Hotels of the Future – Tech-driven Changes in Hotel Design in the Post-COVID Era

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Hotel design and architecture will undergo significant changes in the post-COVID world. This article discusses how technology will be one of the key factors driving and facilitating these changes.

Since the beginning of the pandemic, the hospitality industry has had to rethink and innovate in order to tackle the growing concern surrounding health, safety, and hygiene. COVID-19 has dramatically affected consumer behavior and preferences. Guests today want open spaces, minimal contact with surfaces, social distancing in communal areas, and home offices in guest rooms, proffering it is imperative for hotels to adopt design changes.

Historically, there has always been a symbiotic relationship between cities, the built environment, and epidemics. It is not the first time in history that hotels are being redesigned in response to unruly global events. In the wake of the 9/11 and 26/11 terrorist attacks, security management became a matter of grave concern in the design of hotels. Walk-through metal detectors, baggage screening, installation of barriers, and bollards have since become standard practice. Similarly, the 2003 SARS outbreak and H1N1 Swine Flu in 2009 highlighted the importance of hotels as the initial contact point in the spread of infectious diseases and their potential role in epidemic preparedness and response. Subsequently, guidelines focusing on the maintenance of hygiene in hotel premises were widely published. Today's reality is not far from these historical examples.

Hotel design and architecture will undergo significant changes in the post-COVID world and technology will be one of the key factors driving these changes.

With the advent of the pandemic, hoteliers started revamping hotel design to facilitate social distancing and hygiene requirements to ensure the safety of their guests and employees. Distanced dining experience with digital menus, self-service technologies, digital concierge services, and keyless entry systems is increasingly being encouraged for hotels to remain relevant with the evolving times.





Source: Freepik

Contactless check-in has become a necessity today to reduce human interaction. As a result, in the post-pandemic era, check-in & reception counters will no longer serve as the first point of contact for a guest and may be redesigned or rendered redundant. From mobile apps and digital keys to self-check-in kiosks, most hotel companies are now evaluating the various options available to them. For example, Marriott is steering the concept of automated kiosks with touch screens that assist in guest check-in and provide room keys, known as contactless arrival kiosks. The kiosks use antimicrobial technology in the touchscreen glass, powered by ultraviolet light to kill viruses and bacteria. Guests can skip the traditional route and opt for these low-contact interactions, avoiding potential health risks.

Embracing digital transformation, top hotel brand companies have launched apps providing guests with the ability to check-in, choose their room, order room service, and communicate with the hotel staff, all from the palm of their hand. Additionally, a digital key is another example of an ideal, contactless solution, keeping customers safe from the viral spread. Going forward, most hotels will be developed with ‘smart’ guest rooms to enhance guest comfort and experience. All guest in-room functions and service requirements from operating the curtains, lights, air conditioning, TV, switching TV channels to even using casting & streaming services will be done through a virtual assistant, leading to an almost contactless stay.

Implementing technological innovations will help the industry regain the trust and confidence of the guests, ensuring their peace of mind, health, and safety. Additionally, it will also help in streamlining processes and improving the profitability of the industry. Despite the disruptive impact of the pandemic on the hospitality industry, it will ultimately speed up the evolutionary process and help the industry to emerge stronger than the pre-pandemic level.

Additional Contributor to this article: ***Kavya Jain****, Intern at HVS ANAROCK*