

Hotel Electronic Distribution Industry Forecasts Technology Trends

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Customer needs remain paramount as industry looks at its future and its history

The Hotel Distribution Industry is embarking on a new stage of its evolution as technologies drive new interactions between vendors and customers. Blogs, mobile phone technologies and the rapid pace of tech trends are all reshaping this important sector of the hospitality industry, according to speakers at the 2007 Hotel Electronic Distribution Network Association (HEDNA) Conference being held 21-22 May 2007 at the Burlington Hotel in Dublin, Ireland.

Dr. Mark Warner, director of graduate programs at New York University, detailed the history of the Hotel Distribution Industry from its start when most marketing was done through travel agents and toll-free phone numbers. With the advent of the Internet and better computing systems, the industry experienced a developmental stage that ran from 1991 (the year HEDNA was founded) and lasting until 2001. Over the last six years, the industry has seen volumes rising as customers became more sophisticated about using technology tools, according to Warner.

What's ahead? Warner says the industry is changing so quickly and dynamically, that it's only possible to look ahead over the next three years. He forecasts that the Hotel Distribution Industry will be embracing a number of technologies such as mobile distribution, the convergence of iPods, phones and PDAs, and WiMAX. Reaching out to customers by using blogs and Web content that's multi-lingual will enable the industry to reach a wider audience. Further, security advances will help customers feel safe in providing personal and transactional data.

Hotel distribution marketing in the digital age rises to the challenge

With customers suffering from advertising overload syndrome and customer trust at an all-time low, the Hotel Distribution Industry must strive to connect with its customers with offerings that are specific to their needs and tastes, notes Geoff Ramsey, co-founder and CEO of eMarketer. More than one-half of all global marketing will be driven by brand marketing, says Ramsey, with video ads becoming a major new medium. Word-of-mouth, or viral marketing, will continue to be an important marketing tool. To keep word-of-mouth recommendations positive, the industry must strive to provide a superior product.

The important communication tool, the telephone is transforming into a digital medium as well with mobile phones capable of offering enhanced marketing opportunities, says Gerald Samuels, founder and executive director of Mobile Travel Technologies Ltd. Geared to the corporate traveler, promotions on mobile phones and PDAs will spur new ways to reach these customers. 'Mobile is all about seek and book' rather than browsing for deals, says Samuels. A corporate traveler who's just had a late night plane flight canceled will be looking to find an available hotel room and booking it on the mobile phone or PDA. This kind of scenario will need targeted search engine optimization for mobile band, fast searches.

What does this mean for the existing Global Distribution System (GDS), composed of Sabre Travel Network, Galileo International, AMADEUS Global Travel Distribution S.A. and WorldSpan. A panel representing those companies found that GDS must reinvent itself to serve the changing marketplace including new booking tools, reaching customers via mobile devices, OTA XML-compliant software and updated functionality.

The 2007 HEDNA Conference concludes on 22 May 2007 with a number of presentations including an analysis of the impact of the Millennial Generation on the Hospitality Industry given by Dr. Lalia Rach, associate dean of the New York University's Tisch Center.

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