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Digital and contact-free solutions revealed as hotelier's top priorities for technology and operations ahead of re-opening

New research from Guestline identifies how the pandemic has impacted hotelier's re-opening plans as it announces latest upgrade to its contact-free check-in/out and payments solution GuestStay

As hoteliers prepare to open their doors later this month, new research by the leading hospitality software company **Guestline** released today, reveals the future of operations and guest management is firmly digital and contact-free. Implementing effective digital marketing strategies alongside contactless and online solutions, both for staff and guests, are set to play key roles in re-opening plans in the weeks and months ahead. More specifically, of those hoteliers surveyed across the Guestline customer base in the UK and Ireland, when asked what their priority is in terms of technology and operations for the year ahead, over a quarter (27%) stated it was digital marketing (including enhancing the website and social media presence), whilst a fifth (20%) stated it was overseeing and managing a contact-free guest experience (including a more digital approach to guest communications, upselling, utilising feedback and checking in/out).

Contactless and cloud solutions

The impact of the pandemic, and shift towards a greater adoption of contactless and cloud solutions over the past year, looks set to have a lasting impression. A fifth (20%) of those surveyed confirmed that contactless payments was the technology that saw their biggest investment throughout 2020, followed by contactless check-in / check-out (18%) and a cloud-based property management system (18%). Likewise for those hoteliers planning to invest in technology in 2021, over a third (38%) stated it would be in contactless payments, whilst 18% are planning to invest further in online check-in / check-out software.

Positive response from guests

The survey also revealed guests have responded positively to the innovations and advances in technology across the industry. The technologies that saw the greatest adoption by guests were identified as free Wi-Fi and TV streaming services available in-room (40%), followed by contactless payments (20%) and online check-in / check-out (18%). Encouragingly, across the board, over half (56%) of hoteliers also revealed guests have responded positively to the wider implementation of technology, whilst over two-thirds (68%) stated staff have had a positive response. Looking longer term, when asked how guest relations will change post-Covid, nearly half (42%) said they expected there will be an equal balance between technology and human / face-to-face interaction whilst over a third (38%) expected a greater shift towards the use of contactless / low-touch technology.

The results come as Guestline announces an upgrade to its online check-in solution **GuestStay** to include check-out and payments (available from 17th May). Built to offer hoteliers and their guests a frictionless experience, GuestStay delivers an online check-in and check-out process with the added benefits of reduced queues, more efficient administration and more sophisticated compliance against a host of regulations including GDPR and PSD2.

Guests will not only be able to check-in online but also digitally register key data including car registration, passport number, estimated time of arrival and any particular preferences as well as secure proof of residency, all in advance of arrival. Likewise, ahead of departure and working in conjunction with Guestline's online payment solution GuestPay, guests can also review their itemised balance against items such as room service, drinks and spa treatments, with the option to pay their bill ahead of departure for a quicker, more efficient check-out.

Smarter and safe guest experiences

Andrew Metcalfe, Chief Technical Officer at Guestline comments: "The last 12 months have necessitated the need for smarter and safer guest experiences. One of the lasting legacies of the pandemic will no doubt be the development of new technologies and platforms to achieve this, which are set to pave the way for recovery as hoteliers finally prepare to re-open and welcome guests back.

"Certainly the contactless experience, whether that be check-in, check-out or payments has been one of the defining developments of the past year. It is encouraging to see that both hoteliers and their guests recognise the benefits that this technology offers and have been keen to adopt it. Likewise, delivering a positive guest experience is at the heart of any decision for a hotelier in terms of operations, service and functions. Contactless software has been, and will continue to be, critical to achieving that as we now look forward. Ensuring we are delivering both a positive guest and hotelier experience was critical in the thinking and development of GuestStay. Guests can benefit from more time devoted to enjoying their stay rather than its administration, whilst hoteliers can enjoy the benefit of more time to devote to guests, the guest experience and building revenues, all important factors for what we sincerely hope are brighter days ahead."

Outside of technology, the other main areas that hoteliers confirmed in the survey they would be focusing their budget on in 2021, are refurbishments and upgrades of leisure facilities, rooms and their F&B areas (36%) and property maintenance (26%).

In addition, when taking a retrospective view and hoteliers were asked what data they didn't have available which would have proved beneficial in light of the pandemic, cancellations data (18%), competitor data (13%) and business performance data (13%) were listed as the top three areas.

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About Guestline

Established 29 years ago, Guestline provides innovative property management, guest engagement and distribution software to the hospitality industry. Founded on cloud technology, Guestline's revenue generating solutions enable independents of all sizes and hotel groups to achieve maximum occupancy at the most profitable rate.

With offices in the UK, Germany, The Netherlands, Belgium, Ireland and Thailand, Guestline's property management software is currently growing revenues in businesses in 25 countries across five continents. The range of solutions include Guestline PMS, CRS, C&B, Channel Manager, EPoS, IBE and GuestPay. Additionally, Guestline's PMS can be integrated with nearly 200 third-party solutions via an API.

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