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In-Room Facilities:

Coping with the BYO phenomenon

GUESTS ARE NOW MOVING TO BYO. WHAT IMPACT DOES THIS HAVE ON YOUR GUEST ROOM OFFERING?

We are all familiar with the term BYO (bring your own) that emerged in the 1970s in relation to restaurants and meant that you could bring your own alcohol. Guests are now taking this a step further and two new acronyms have emerged; BYOD (bring your own device) and BYOC (bring your own content).

As a larger and larger percentage of the population now own some kind of smart device (phone or tablet) it's only logical that they will bring it with them when they come to stay at your property. More importantly, they expect to be able to use their device at your property as they do at home. This is where the challenge lies and below we will look at some of the issues that this BYOD and BYOC revolution are creating.

Whilst on the topic on acronyms, lets introduce another; FAQ – frequently asked questions. Here are the top FAQs that I address on a daily basis when it comes to the implications of BYOD or BYOC.

Wireless

Why are more of my guests demanding wireless?

The portable devices that your guests are bringing are dependent on wireless for Internet connectivity as they don't have an ethernet port. This means that there is a greater demand for wireless at your property. It also means a greater demand for property-wide wireless. Guests now expect wireless to be available everywhere on your property, in the guest rooms, restaurants and also areas such as by the pool.

Why are guests complaining about my wireless coverage?

Wireless antennae on tablets and smart phones are weaker than those on laptops. This may mean that your existing wireless infrastructure (which was probably designed to support laptops) does not provide adequate coverage for portable devices. As a result, guests may not be able to access the wireless from certain locations; this is what we call a *black spot*. Generally additional wireless access points need to be added to the network to address this.



“...40% of guests have two or more wi-fi devices and 25% have three or more...”

Internet access

Why has my bandwidth consumption grown so much?

Tablets (iPads/ Samsung Galaxy etc) are having an impact on the demand for bandwidth as they are very video centric devices and video content uses a lot more bandwidth than text based content such as email. As a result, accommodation providers have seen bandwidth consumption by guests double year-on-year over the last couple of years. This trend is not only likely to continue but we will probably see bandwidth requirements accelerate even faster.

Why are my guests complaining about our internet service?

Guests are now checking in with multiple devices. Some 40% of guests have two or more wi-fi devices and 25% have three or more wi-fi devices. This has two implications - first, greater bandwidth is required and secondly, your Internet service needs to allow for guests to connect multiple devices simultaneously. Many guest Internet services I have seen only allow you to connect one device per subscription. If this is the case, you will probably face quite a few complaints.

In addition, when it comes to the quality of the Internet service you provide to your guests, they expect it to be just as good as they have at home, if not better and if they have a bad experience they may not return to your property.

So both factors – more devices per guest and the increased demand for bandwidth due to the video-centric nature of what they access has put a lot of pressure on your available bandwidth.

Should Internet access be free?

This is a whole topic in its own right. However, in my opinion with the increasing demand for more bandwidth along with demand for better wireless coverage it is going to be difficult for accommodation providers to offer an unlimited Internet service for free. Instead, I believe that a tiered

In-Room Facilities:

◀ service will be the most common way forward for guest Internet access.

Under a tiered solution there could be an entry level service for free or at a very nominal fee that is mainly for emails and web browsing and then a higher level offer that is user pays. There could even be a couple of levels of service that provide differing levels of bandwidth/download and allow for more devices to be simultaneously connected.

By example, a business traveller may need to access emails and do a little web research – they would select a service offering at the lower end of the scale. Another business traveller may have three devices (a laptop, an iPad, a smartphone) and they may want all three of them connected. In addition, this person may be doing some video conferencing which is bandwidth intensive so they would choose a plan at the higher end of the tiered structure which is appropriate to meet their requirements.

How do I offer a tiered Internet access service?

If you are offering a tiered service, I believe it is imperative that your bandwidth be segregated or compartmentalised so that those guests that are paying for the better service actually get it. To give you an example, let's say you have a 6Mb connection into your property so via the server that provides guest Internet you may allocate 1Mb to the free service, 2Mb to the first tier chargeable service and 3Mb to the second tier chargeable service. This will ensure that those paying for the premium service receive a premium service and those that have

“...A connectivity panel allows guests to plug into the panel and watch what is, say on their laptop or iPad, on the In-Room TV...”

another and not against skirting boards or desks. As a good example, I was at a property recently, they had done a wonderful job in refurbishing the rooms. They had four power outlets available at the desk for the guest, however they were installed too close to the desk and you couldn't fit your iPhone charger into the power socket and use it. There are now also power points with additional USB sockets built into them that will overcome that problem. Given that USB charging is becoming the default standard these power sockets make perfect sense.

Connectivity to TV

Why do guests keep fiddling with my TV?

Many guests want to stream or play content that they have on their devices on the TV that you have so kindly provided. BYOC means that guests may have their own movies, TV shows, music or other items they want to play back. The other option, is they access TV shows they missed via the Internet. Basically, they want to watch it on a big screen not their phone or tablet so they try to connect their devices to your TV.

How can I let guests connect to my TV?

The key thing here is to make sure they can easily connect to the TV without damaging it or impacting the next guest to occupy the room. You need to make sure the TV ports are accessible to the guest (on the front or side, not the back). You also need to consider things like the length of the antenna cable, so that when the guest swivels the TV it will not get ripped out the socket or damage the TV. I have spoken with a number of owners and managers that have had their TVs damaged by guests as they get behind them with the repair cost per TV being between \$85 to \$100.

What are connectivity panels and what do they do?

A connectivity panel allows guests to plug into the panel and watch what is, say on their laptop or iPad, on the In-Room TV. Many



the lower end service receive that and cannot impact on the premium service offering.

Power outlets

How many power outlets should I provide?

Of course, the other impact that all of these devices is bringing with them is an increased demand for power outlets, all of these devices need to be charged. I believe that there should be at least two free power outlets beside the bed for the guest and up to four at the desk. Ideally these are at desk height so guests aren't crawling around on the floor.

Are all power outlets the same?

No, there are useful and useless power outlets. These days, power outlets need to be transformer friendly, basically spaced apart from one

properties are now looking at installing a connectivity panel simply because they allow the guest to plug their device into it without the need for the guest to tamper with the TV. Connectivity panels are now available for less than \$100.

What is the impact of BYOD and BYOC?

Increasingly, technology is less about what accommodation complexes provide and more about accommodating what guests are bringing. Your guests will arrive at your property and BYOD and BYOC, they will want to use these devices during their stay, just as they do at home and at the office. The key for Hotels is to provide them with the infrastructure and the bandwidth to achieve this. ■

By Brendon Granger – Technology 4 Hotels