# Emerging Technologies Can Keep Your Digital Hotel Solidly Booked

*Virtual gathering places for customers benefit from collaborative and immersive apps*

OUR FORWARD-THINKING clients are leveraging private digital communities to foster engagement with their customers. These collaboration communities are built on software such as Telligent, Salesforce, Higher Logic, and others. They integrate tightly with your CRM system and data management platform. We like to think of these communities as a virtual gathering place for your customers, or a "digital hotel."

Building your digital hotel is the best way to deliver outstanding customer experience during COVID-19 and beyond. Digital hotels can deepen customer engagement and inject the voice of the customer into every customer decision you make. They can also achieve the following:

- Increase customer satisfaction and loyalty—Net Promoter Scores (NPS) of 75 are achievable.
- Provide superior customer support from both internal support personnel and from community members.
- Help nurture leads that shorten sales cycles.
- Grow sales: In one of our private communities, customers are buying 40 percent more product, distributors are selling 70 percent more product, and the community reached financial break-even in less than two years.

Once you have constructed your digital hotel foundation, which includes your CRM system containing your robust customer profiles as well as your data management platform, you are ready to raise the customer engagement bar by adding emerging technology throughout the hotel. During this time of COVID-19, we find one of the most popular additions is a widget that allows for online video meetings like those currently offered by Zoom, Go-To-Meeting, Microsoft Teams, and others. This online meeting widget can be installed in three locations in your digital hotel:

- In the digital lounge located on the ground floor of your hotel, where customers meet for virtual drinks, exchange peer-to-peer stories, resolve service or technical issues, pose "Ask the Expert" questions, take surveys, complete polls, and participate in forums.
- In your digital conference rooms located on the second and third floors—e.g., your technical conference room, your customer service conference room, and your employee-only conference room that customers and employees come in and out of to discuss matters, resolve issues, receive training, and more.
- In your private customer rooms—one digital room per customer—which are located on the floors above your conference rooms. In these rooms, you meet with your customers one-on-one to create your annual sales or technical plans, to review these plans on a quarterly basis, or to introduce them to subject matter experts and others to deepen the relationship.

More profound emerging technologies to add to your digital hotel are virtual reality (VR) and augmented reality (AR). VR is about enhancing your training or recreational experience with a customized virtual world created to simulate specific situations for training or entertainment purposes. AR is about adding digital objects to our real-world environment, beginning with simple data visualization and extending to detailed objects, as featured on the popular Pokémon GO game. VR applications and virtual situations can be experienced with cost-effective headsets; AR applications are accessible from smartphones. Both technologies can be applied in many human-targeted situations to add exceptional value for your business. VR/AR technologies offer your customers an exciting way to view your products, receive training, and much more, all from within your digital hotel. To give you an idea of the potential of VR/AR, here are my top 10 categories of business VR/AR applications:

- **E-commerce and retail**: Apps such as the IKEA Reality Kitchen let shoppers explore VR kitchen settings; such apps are in use for automobile shopping, real estate, and more.

> GET READY TO RAISE THE CUSTOMER ENGAGEMENT BAR.

- **Financial**: This includes tutorials that walk customers through complex financial products, including alternative investments, insurance offerings, and more.
- **Manufacturing and engineering**: Applications include new skills training, on-site issue resolution, workforce technical training, repairing broken equipment, and more.
- **Medical and health care**: VR/AR can provide medical situation training, PTSD assistance, patient education, and more.
- **Tourism and travel**: Applications here include virtual tours and virtual museums.
- **Architecture and construction**: Mock architectural and interior designs, construction site walk-throughs, and more are available.
- **Marketing and advertising**: A prominent example surfaced two years ago when National Geographic launched a VR programmatic ad campaign that let consumers explore life on Mars.
- **Communications and collaboration**: Applications include team meetings with customers, internal meetings, site visits, and more.
- **Education and training**: Skills gap training, technical training for customers and employees, occupational safety training, sales rep persuasion skills, and more are available.
- **Leisure**: Gaming, sports, and entertainment are all fertile areas for VR/AR.

The business impact of COVID-19 has changed the way we conduct business now and in the future. Digital hotels can be a game changer for your 2021 customer strategy. Digital hotels play a critical role in creating and enhancing the two-way dialogue all customers currently crave. The investment you make to construct and implement your digital hotel—including emerging technologies such as online video meetings and VR/AR—secures your foothold in the digital future. If your goal is to raise the bar on how you interact digitally with your customers, now is the time to explore how emerging technologies will add meaningful value to your digital hotel. Your customers will love it! ℞

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