

Articles / Whitepapers

Practice: Operations & Technology

Topic: Mobile

The Arrival Experience.

...satisfying the guest on their terms!



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As regular travelers we are all increasingly exposed to a broad array of mobile accessible features and functions associated with our flights, ground transportation, and hotel stays. However, our adoption and ongoing use of these is directly related to the convenience they afford us and their usability respectively.

“Keep it simple” is often a mantra that resonates with software developers and software product managers alike but, as each will tell you, keeping it simple is perhaps the most difficult aspect of delivering any guest-facing mobile service. Within a very short time of embarking on guest-facing technology initiatives, the desire to add more and more features to the mobile experience often overtakes the core relevance, convenience and usability design criteria agreed at the outset. This is evident in hotel mobile experiences that offer far too

many capabilities rather than doing the top five functions exceptionally well.

One of the top functions to do exceptionally well, alongside the Booking Experience, centers on the guest’s Arrival Experience. So, how hard can it be to deliver a relevant, flexible, convenient and usable experience to our guest in support of their overall Arrival Experience? Well, it’s hard. Very hard.

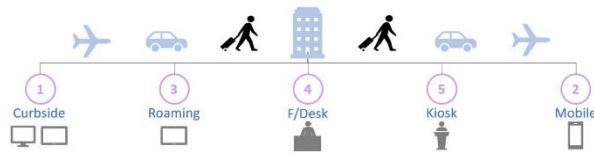
Putting our hotelier hats back on, and to provide an insight into some of the technical challenges and important decision-points we need to identify and address, we’ll use a hypothetical example of a small hotel brand looking to modernize its guest arrival experience by tailoring the check-in process to align with the desire and preference of the guest. Effectively, satisfying the guest on their terms and ensuring a personalized and efficient arrival.

To fulfill this, the hotel brand has decided to provide its residential guests with an elevated Arrival Experience founded on the ability to enjoy self-check-in and other arrival & departure related functions from their mobile devices, and from lobby self-service stations. Further, a Curbside check-in service is also envisaged in support of an expedited check-in.

The five principle Arrival Experience touch-points to be offered are:

1. Curbside – full check-in or pickup of keys following use of self-check in prior to arrival

2. Mobile – Self Check-in/out (with digital Key) using the hotel brand’s existing App
3. Roaming Associate – offering tablet-based check-in by a front-of-house hotel associate
4. Front Desk – Classic check-in method for more complex arrival/departure requirements
5. Pod/Kiosk – Self check-in/out at terminals in the hotel lobby



The Arrival Experience

Each of the five touch-point methods will lend themselves to different guest needs and arrival situations.

Curbside: Highly-engaged guests will have the opportunity to check-in ahead of arrival at the property and receive their room key upon arrival at the hotel or elect to check-in fully at the curbside.

- This will require a degree of coordination and communication between hotel associates and the guest prior to arrival (e.g. mobile messaging) to ensure a seamless transaction

Roaming Associate: Associates will be equipped with tablets and mobile credit card/room key dispensers to facilitate a check-in with the guest anywhere in the hotel.

- If check-in requires advanced modifications, Associate may need to use the fixed check-in desk to complete the check-in

Fixed Check-in Desk: This desk will be used sparingly.

- Primarily for complex check-ins which require modifications to the reservation or during high volume arrival periods when additional Front Desk staff will augment the roaming associates.

Self Service Pods/Kiosks: Guests may stop by a check-in “pod” / “kiosk” within the lobby area to check-in and pick up room key card. Hotel associates will be available to assist if not helping other guests.

- Initially, simple Check-In of pre-confirmed booking, and simple Check-Out

- More complex Upgrade Offers and Room Selection functions in future iterative deployments

Mobile App – w/Digital Key: Guests may use the brand Mobile app to check-in prior to stay and receive a digital room key in advance of arrival. Guests may proceed straight to their room upon arrival without speaking to an associate.

- Guests may choose to meet with an associate to pick up additional room key cards

- Guests may choose to stop by the self-service pod to pick up additional room key cards

Technical Considerations

Methods 1, 3 and 4 can generally be handled by the capabilities of most mainstream hotel PMS products.

However, 2 and 5 are not typically provided by these PMS vendors and necessitates seeking out a technology partner that can integrate with the PMS, and other involved systems (which we will overview later).

To assist the search for a suitable technology partner with which to augment the capabilities of the PMS, several key tenets were drawn up by the brand to use as a guiding framework.

- Risk avoidance via the maturity of product solutions and company’s standing in the space

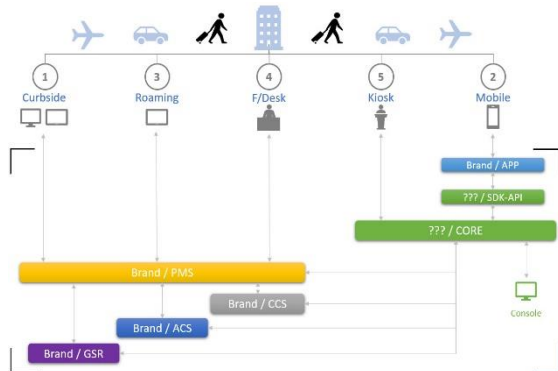
- Minimal technical foot-print via a predominantly Cloud/SaaS delivery model

- Strength of existing current customer base and production deployments

- Existing production connections to the brand’s Property Management Systems (PMS), Key Systems (ACS), Credit Card Systems (CCS), and Guest Service Response Systems (GSR)

- Available Software Developer's Kit (SDK) for mobile App integration
- Digital key capability
- Full Pod/Kiosk offering (with special key pick-up only terminals)
- Minimal manual (staff impacting) workarounds

Given all the above feature/functions and tenets we would suggest the following integration as optimal, covering all five nominated Guest Arrival Experience touch-points the brand is aiming for.



The most important consideration for this type of deployment is that all underlying systems are integrated and operating in real-time. The green items in the diagram represent the needed components to incorporate the Mobile and Kiosk touch-points. This leaves the brand being responsible for embedding the Arrival Experience (and presumably Departure Experience) functions into their branded App using the partner's SDK-API.

Solution Providers

Sourcing a partner to work with for an implementation as described above, and other subtle variations, is much less challenging than it was several years ago, with a healthy collection of production proven candidates to review and evaluate. These solution provider candidates fall into two primary categories: those that can act as a strategic partner offering much if not all requirements; to those that can act as a tactical partner where the brand may

already have one or more of the components they offer.

A cautionary note regarding selection of tactical solution providers. While it may be possible to cherry-pick one partner to enable just the Mobile Key solution, and another to enable your lobby Kiosk solution you will be increasing the complexity and footprint of overall technologies and also introducing the risk of a less than seamless experience for the guest, where incompatibilities between the two partners cannot be overcome.

We note sample candidate vendors for each category. (Space limitations preclude detailed descriptions of each vendor's offerings and points of differentiation).

Strategic Solution Providers

Ariane - <http://www.ariane.com/index.php/en/>

It Just Works - <https://www.ijws.com/>

Stay-n-Touch - <http://www.stayntouch.com/>

Tactical Solution Providers

Intility (KeyPR) - <https://intilitycorp.com/main/>

Monscierge - <https://www.monscierge.com/>

OpenKey - <https://www.openkey.co/>

Zaplox - <https://www.zaplox.com/>

...and most of the locking system (Access Control Systems) vendors.

In Summary

Always put the guest's desires and preferences first when deciding upon any investment in guest-facing technologies. Keep it simple, and bear in mind the need for a simple, intuitive user interface on the app to ensure a great guest arrival experience.

Carefully identify the top five feature/functions your brand's guest wants and do them exceptionally well, rather than offering thirty unexceptional feature/functions.

All guests may not yet be Millennial in their adoption of full self-service options, accordingly, the expectation that you can, for example, simply install a lobby furnished with self-serve kiosks to overcome

the challenges of check-in queues at the front desk is somewhat flawed: The lines don't go away. They just move somewhere else.

Initiatives like this are all about providing a variety of options for your guest to choose from, each resulting in the same: personalized; efficient; consistent arrival and departure experience, all delivered on their terms and according to their preferences. ■

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