

Serving Up Total Guest Experiences in Hospitality

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Five predictions for the future of the industry

Welcome to the new era of hospitality. After a transformative few years, which saw the entire industry adopt critical technology solutions in order to survive, hotels, venues and more are now offering seamless connected, digital-first services to their guests.

But while this is an exciting time for innovation, this reliance on digital technology could also be a challenge to an industry that is largely built around in-person, human-to-human experiences.

Hospitality companies must find a new recipe for success – one that perfectly strikes the balance between the digital and physical worlds, empowers employees to provide extra-human service in a high-tech environment, and delivers the total experience for guests.

Working with global trends agency, **Foresight Factory**, Aruba has compiled five predictions for how hospitality experiences will evolve over the next five to ten years.

PREDICTION #1:

Hospitality companies will be serving up presence-free options

NOW: The 'contactless' options adopted during the pandemic, like digital check-in and ticketing, ordering via apps, and mobile and even biometric payment methods, are here to stay.

In fact, we will begin seeing even more sophisticated technology like delivery robots in use, freeing up employees for more value-additive customer services and interactions.

NEXT: In the near future, hospitality companies will be able to welcome guests that are not present at their venue at all, using innovative technologies such as augmented reality (AR), virtual reality (VR) and the metaverse to offer presence-free experiences to guests anywhere in the world.

CASE STUDY: During the performance of electronic artist Flume at [Coachella 2022](#), festival organizers used AR to create a unique digital experience specifically for at-home viewers. With online audiences growing exponentially, organizers recognized the need to ensure that the online event was distinctive and desirable in its own right.

PREDICTION #2:

The guest experience will start well before they arrive and continue long after they leave

NOW: Would you book a hotel room without looking at the photos? Make reservations at a restaurant without perusing the menu? Or buy tickets to a festival without seeing the set list?

Getting the party started well before anyone sets foot in their venue – described by Foresight Factory as ‘pretainment’ – has become a key part of the extended guest experience. To this end, we are seeing more and more brands creating digital content to engage and convert potential guests during the research and exploration phase.

CASE STUDY: In May 2022, Google announced [Immersive View](#), which takes Street View to a whole new level. The new feature uses neural rendering of billions of photos to provide a rotating 3D view of cities from the air, as well as giving viewers the ability to walk around neighbourhoods, peer into restaurants, and explore landmarks.

NEXT: Forget looking at photos or scanning the menu. In the future, guests will no longer do anything without first trying out the fully interactive, immersive digital option.

As the virtual experience becomes a non-negotiable precursor to the real event, companies will begin to offer more creative, elaborate and personalized pretainment options.

‘Post-stay’ services will also be available, rounding out the total experience. No longer will personalized thank you notes suffice – instead, guests will receive digital content that is tailor-made to help them relive specific moments from their stay or visit.

PREDICTION #3:

The guest experience will have become a community undertaking

NOW: The customer experience is being broadened, as well as lengthened, with hospitality companies now able to connect with other businesses that complement their core offering. This could be as straightforward as giving guests the ability to make reservations at partnering restaurants, or book discounted tickets to local businesses, through a venue’s own app. Or it could be an environment powered by m-commerce tools, where everything is shoppable, from the artwork on the walls to the linens on the beds.

NEXT: The evolution of this shoppable world will be a fully connected community of businesses, all powered by the same network to deliver a streamlined, total guest experience. For example, guests could soon be able to charge all local store purchases and meals to their hotel rooms.

But it is the ability to share data that will be the biggest advantage of a connected community. Venues would be able to provide food and drink recommendations based on what guests have ordered in other locations, or recommend local activities and then automatically confirm availability. Community wayfinding and location services could even eliminate inconveniences like wait times, by giving venues the ability to accurately track arrival and offer ‘virtual’ queuing.

CASE STUDY: [Disney’s MagicBands](#), which are plastic, waterproof bracelets with integrated RFID radios, enable guests to have a seamless connected experience throughout the entire Walt Disney World Resort. Through the MagicBands, guests can access park tickets and hotel room keys, make food and merchandise, store photos taken around the park, and even unlock personalized experiences.

PREDICTION #4:

Hospitality companies will cater to how guests feel, not just what they say

NOW: Getting to know your customer, and providing more individualized services, is easier than ever. Thanks to a highly digital, expanded customer journey, as well as more advanced loyalty programs, hospitality venues now have access to a wealth of data that can be combined with AI technology to generate insights and create tailored experiences.

These insights can also help empower employees, equipping them with the information they need to provide top-quality, personalized service and preempt requests. As face-to-face interactions become fewer and farther between, giving staff what they need to provide 'extra-human' service will help brands to stand out and make the total experience even more meaningful.

CASE STUDY: The [Royal Botanical Gardens in Madrid](#) attracts 400,000 visitors a year. Using Aruba technology, such as location beacons, Wi-Fi network and a mobile app, the Gardens allows its visitors to customize their visit, creating an itinerary that suits their available time, age range, interests and accessibility needs. The app can also automatically identify the user's home language, assist with wayfinding and provide alerts on nearby store or café promotions.

NEXT: The best customer service involves giving customers what they want, before they even know they want it. But how can hospitality companies do this without reading minds?

Soon, automated on-site systems and biometric data will allow hospitality venues to read and react to physical signals. Imagine being able to manage guests' moods by adjusting the music, lighting and scent to suit either how the guest is feeling at that exact moment, or how you want them to feel. Or being able to cater to the earliest signs of hunger or frustration, thanks to predictive AI.

PREDICTION #5:

Data has become a two-way street, with hospitality companies expected to feed insights back to guests

NOW: Data-driven brands, meet data-driven customers. Consumers increasingly want to gather data on their own health, spending, impact on the environment, and much more thanks to the array of apps and smart devices on offer. Some hospitality brands have begun experimenting with returning the data-sharing favour, offering up information that helps guests make choices that better align with their values.

NEXT: Soon, this will be the norm. Just as companies no longer do anything that's not backed up by data, customers will be the same way. As guests become both more concerned about making the right choices (with a particular focus on travel), and more empowered to do so with technology, hospitality venues must be ready to share data to help inform their decisions. Additionally, they must be prepared to offer more options that cater to the eco-, health- and ethics-conscious, or risk losing business to more forthcoming and considerate competitors.

CASE STUDY: We are already increasingly seeing nutritional information printed on restaurant menus. Soon, we could expect to see the environmental cost printed alongside this information as standard, such as what was seen on the menus at [COP26](#).

What does this mean for hospitality companies?

While it's clear that the next few years will bring about many exciting new developments, consistency remains the watchword of the industry. Throughout the entire journey, guests will continue to demand consistently well-designed, personalized, comfortable and engaging experiences, no matter when, where or how they choose to engage. And regardless of how technology evolves, the human factor will always play a critical role in hospitality.

Enabling both the business and employees to meet these expectations requires making sense of collected data quickly and responding accordingly, which is why simply deploying Wi-Fi solutions for connectivity alone is no longer enough.

Hospitality companies must ensure that they are set up with [a high-performing, secure, reliable and automated network](#) that can facilitate both current and coming digital innovations, and deliver total guest experiences that continue to surprise and delight – whatever the future brings.

For more stories about how Aruba is empowering hospitality organizations to evolve guest experiences, visit [here](#).

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