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Putting Connectivity at the Forefront of Digital Personalisation Strategies

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Hauke Lenthe is the Managing Director, EMEA & APAC of Nomadix, Inc., the leader in hotel internet services and guest technologies. He brings more than 25 years of hospitality and international hotel technology experience, spanning from managed internet services to operational PMS and guest-facing software.

As the hospitality industry recovers, it has spent an enormous effort on moving its systems to the cloud and trying to consolidate the guest profile information into a 'single source of truth'. Many refer to it as the PMS, the CRM or a data platform.

Why spend effort into centralising guest profile information?

Amongst things like security, maintenance, software updates and lower cost of ownership, the main reason is that it allows them to know more about their guests and service them better. The industry strives towards personalised offers and direct guest communication, using check-in tools, apps, digital key cards, analytics, AI and many other smart booking systems to achieve this level of service.

If we think about our habits. What's the first thing we typically do when stuck in a long line at a coffee shop? What about waiting to check into a hotel? Or at the airport waiting on a flight? How do you fill the time? My bet is you grab your phone or computer to check email, connect with friends, work on a project due in a few hours, or just be entertained. This is common across generations and geographies. Staying connected to our devices has become almost an extension of ourselves - for good or bad.

What all guests have in common, with few exceptions, is that they carry a mobile device, and a large number of guests connect to the hotel network. They want to connect literally (technically) with the hotel. However, they are confronted with a rather clunky experience with landing pages asking them to enter their room number and last name for authentication. Even as a loyalty member for a larger hotel brand, I have to reconnect every time I stay at a different property.

So, while we spend so much effort consolidating all data in the CRM/PMS, we want to learn from this data and turn it into actionable services; we seem to ignore Wi-Fi as a (first) 'touchpoint'. Imagine digital service opportunities if we could know 'who' is connecting to our hotel network, 'where' and 'when'.
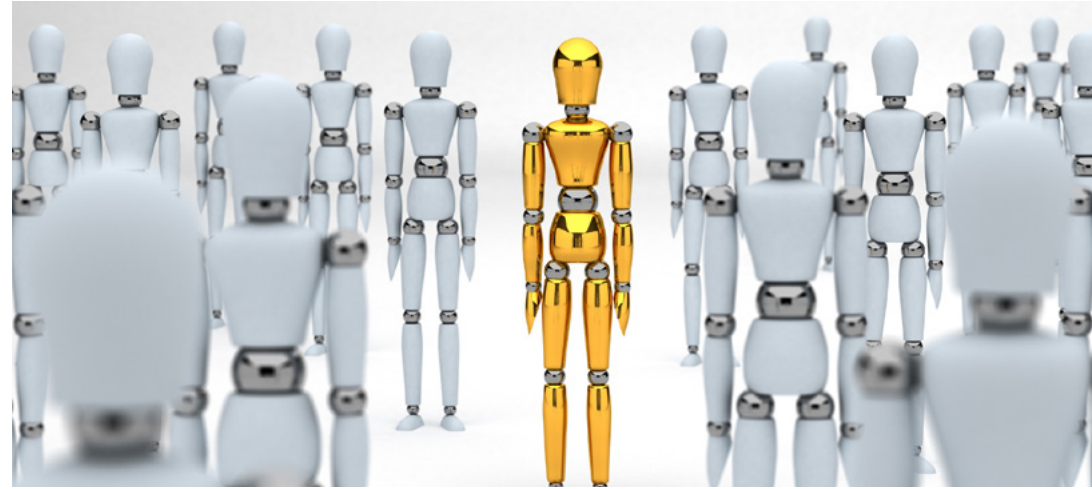
Hotels could engage with guests and build business logic in their systems, depending on who you are, where you are and when you connect.

Is it your first time connecting to the network, or is it the day before you check out? If it's my first connection, is there a reservation due or not? All this intelligence and communication could start to be collected when mobile devices connect to the local hotel network. Based on this information, personalised content and services could be delivered.

By the way, when we receive a text from local carriers when we land at overseas airports, this is already happening in the cellular world. It's why we can seamlessly connect across continents and between different networks. Mobile carriers know who we are and where we are, and use roaming technology to authenticate us across these multiple locations.
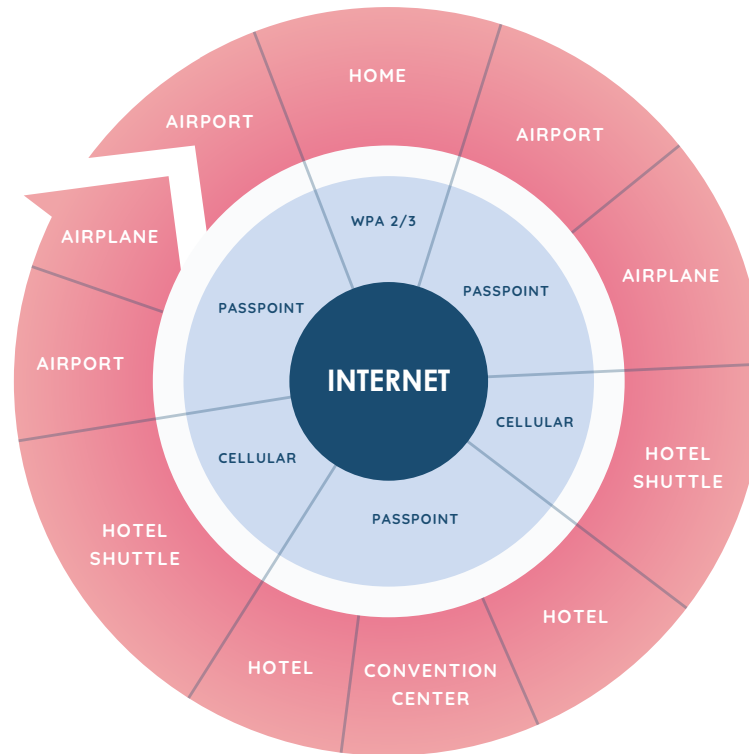
Outside of the hotel industry, other retail brands are beginning to adopt a continuous connectivity approach across their chains. Customers can instantly connect with a profile on their mobile device as soon as they walk into a branch. This gives the brand the benefit of knowing the user is on their property and

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servicing them as an on-site customer. For example, if you're in a coffee shop, this could mean a promotional upsell of breakfast or a pastry.

London Heathrow, Newark Liberty and Eurico de Aguiar Salles already offer this instant connectivity through **Passpoint authentication**. Passpoint is a standard developed by the Wi-Fi Alliance (WFA) that allows Wi-Fi-enabled devices to discover and authenticate to Wi-Fi hotspots instantly. Hotel brands can adopt this technology to enable loyalty guests to securely and automatically connect each time they visit any property within the group.

Travellers will soon experience this as we enable Passpoint for a major global brand. With a Passpoint profile installed on the device, the user will instantly connect across the hotel - and at other networked hotels. If you check into one of the brand's hotels in a new city - you're connected. Expand this throughout the entire guest journey, and it will look something like this:

HOME

AIRPORT

AIRPORT

AIRPLANE

WPA 2/3

AIRPLANE

PASSPOINT

PASSPOINT

AIRPORT

INTERNET

CELLULAR

CELLULAR

PASSPOINT

HOTEL SHUTTLE

HOTEL SHUTTLE

CELLULAR

PASSPOINT

HOTEL

HOTEL

CONVENTION CENTER

Uninterrupted connectivity creates the ultimate opportunity for personalisation. The authenticated person is known, and when they first walk into the hotel lobby, the guest can receive a text with a discount for their favourite appetiser or drink. Or they walk into the coffee shop and get a discount on a breakfast item with the purchase of their commonly-ordered beverage. Up-sell and personalisation are instant and effective.

Taking the Comfort of Continuous Connectivity Throughout The Trip

The possibilities continue when the hotel authentication connects with partnering businesses, like surrounding restaurants, airports or convention centres. The traveller stays online at all those locations, gets personalised experiences and has the access needed throughout the entire trip. The San Jose Convention Center and Morumbi Stadium have already done this. It's a reality, and more hotels should be thinking about how to make connectivity the centre of their experiences.

Passpoint is one technology that can help create the continuous connected experience guests are starting to look for and expect, similar to their in-home experience. With integration with smart in-room assistants, guests can receive information tailored to their buying preferences or offered their favourite music playlists. It's not a foreign concept; this is where hospitality is headed. It starts with connectivity and knowing your guest.

A recent survey out of India commissioned by IHG Hotels & Resorts as part of the "Guest How You Guest" global loyalty campaign revealed how guests enjoy their time at hotels. 93% of guests feel they can completely be themselves while staying at hotels. More connectivity throughout the stay opens doors for offering the comforts that guests want.

For hotels, knowing more about their guests can enable more efficiency while checking in, know what to purchase to satisfy guests, and better targeting personalised deals for the spa, bar or restaurant.

The basis of the digital strategy is the secure authentication and reliable infrastructure to power the apps, IoT devices, and self-service kiosks - all of which create smoother, more efficient and time-saving experiences.

More personalisation and comfortable stays by staying connected will create better experiences and help make people feel at home wherever they travel.