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Hotel brand standards race: Gotta keep up! - by James O'Connell

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The faster our society moves, the more nimble hotel owners have to be. A reality for hotel owners these days is that they can never stop working to add new items, provide new services and can never stop trying to meet the evolving needs of their customers.

I recently met with a hotelier that was very proud of a 2017 complete renovation of his hotel. It was going to be “Forever Young!” All 142 guestrooms. It had been seven years since his last major renovation. But just as his shoulders got tired from patting himself on the back, he was told he had to rip out the tubs in his bathrooms and install walk-in showers.... In the king bedded rooms. Not in the double queen rooms. Only the 42 king bedded rooms. I asked him how long he thought it was going to be before all the double queen rooms would need walk-in showers?

Hotels need more WiFi capacity. Even though, when the hotel was constructed, 15 years ago, phones came in bags and a “hot breakfast” was a toasted bagel and coffee. Now they are required to have to have “healthy smoothies” and organic pancakes and a Market Place for Grab & Go. No room for a marketplace? Well you have to build one and it has to be directly serviced by the front desk personnel.

Your Fitness Room, you know... the place where dust collected on that all-in-one weight lifting contraption. That's got to go. Now you can watch the dust collect on four Nordic-Trak machines, stretch bands and a Bosu Ball. And be sure to hook those machines up to the integrated entertainment system! Because, that one out of every one hundred guests that uses the fitness room, has to be able to watch TV while they workout. But don't put those machines on tile flooring. It has to be a rubber floor!

You know that “business center” you had to have during the last refresh. It was created so that the guests could print out their boarding passes. But boarding passes come via email and text. Who actually prints out a boarding pass? One brand requires “quiet spaces” where a one-person space is

sound proofed and a person can talk on the phone without being heard by others. Millennial's call them quiet spaces... older hotel guests call them "phone booths."

As our world gets smaller and smaller, and trends become more fleeting, hoteliers have to try to keep up, faster and faster. There is a never-ending quest for more data capacity. How good is the Uber service? Can Grub Hub deliver? Should I save a place for Scoot to park? Do I have space for a roof deck bar? What's my social media status? Who's updating Facebook?

What's trending today? Get rid of the desk in the 150 s/f guestroom because today's guest doesn't want to stay in their guestroom. They want to come down and work in the common area with their laptops and their wireless phone buds.

Holiday Inn's revolutionized the travel industry. Those one and two story hotels that typically sat on +8 acres, off the interstate, where the average guestroom size was 320 s/f. Upon entering, with a room key that fit into your pocket and didn't have to be returned to the front desk, you switched on the swag lamp that hung over the table for two. The lamp hung from the ceiling that was coated with "popcorn" spraytex, which contained asbestos. You turned up the 24" TV because the noise was loud from the Holidome swimming pool. After you lit up your first cigarette and scanned the room for an ashtray, which usually was in the bedside drawer next to the bible, you made your way across shag rug carpeting to the bathroom and set your cigarette on the banjo shaped vanity with the formica top. Noting the cigarette burns from the last guy who stayed in the room. It was time to take off your tie, get changed and go down to the bar before happy hour and two-for-one drinks in the lounge. Before I start drinking, I'll get the operator to place a collect call to my wife, she's got to be feeding the kids about now. I like these foam pillows. I bet a thousand guests can sit on this bed spread and it will never wrinkle. When I dropped my cigarette on it, it didn't even burn! I like this shag carpet. I wonder if we can put it in our home? Where is my next appointment? I left the map in my car. I hope the traffic won't be bad.

I can't wait for the trend that says staying at old Holiday Inn's is "experiential!"

James O'Connell is principal, ISHC at HREC Investment Advisors in Boston. Over the past 25 years, O'Connell has earned a reputation for succeeding on the toughest assignments by assembling all of the moving pieces within a transaction that has stretched to both coasts.

He gained his national contact base while advising workout professionals and managing the ORE hotel portfolio of the Bank of New England/RECOLL Management Corp. O'Connell has represented public companies, private equity funds and high net worth individuals across the country and is known for having completed more hotel transactions in the region than any other broker.

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