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HOTEL Yearbook 2014

FORESIGHT AND INNOVATION IN THE GLOBAL HOTEL INDUSTRY

SPECIAL EDITION ON **TECHNOLOGY**

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A day in the life

by ***Laurent Idrac***

"Any sufficiently advanced technology is indistinguishable from magic" is the Third Law of famed science fiction writer Arthur C. Clarke. Testing whether this "law" holds true for the hotel industry, Laurent Idrac, Group CIO for Accor, imagines how technology might enhance the stay of a hotel guest in the year 2039. He then draws some sensible conclusions for those of us still wondering how 2014 will develop.

As I zoom in on a virtual London map displayed on my countertop to find a good hotel, I remember the old days of the Internet, 25 years ago, when you had to go on multiple web sites to find a place to stay. Way back then, OTA's were kings – like GDS and travel agencies were 25 years before them…

Ah, good! A hotel and a B&B begin to blink on the map based on my needs, filtered out for me considering thousands of parameters, from multiple sources: my preferences, loyalty status, schedule, reason for travelling, the past experiences from people in my social circles, the hotels' global quality ratings, prices, promotions… I choose the ABC Hotel, and now a question pops up asking for my mood. I answer, and the map zooms automatically to a specific room in the hotel. After a quick virtual tour, I touch the window to validate my reservation for tomorrow.

The following morning, driving to work, the price tracker plays the following audio alert through my car stereo: "The ABC Hotel is now doubling loyalty points if you upgrade to an executive room. It costs an extra $15.00. Should I confirm the change?" I answer yes and ask how many more points I need for a free weekend in Venice. Not long now!

Later that day, on my flight to London, the hotel's virtual concierge confirms my check-in and proposes a reservation in their restaurant. It's having a special "Fish & Chips Night" they know I would like. But I decline and ask instead for the room service menu, and pick the special package of pizza, ice cream and a movie. I order for delivery at 8 pm.

Hopping into a taxi at Heathrow, I enter the hotel information into the driver's GPS and push the "geolocalize" button which lets the hotel know when I should arrive.

We pull up at the entrance of the hotel right on time. The Welcomer greets me with a warm "Welcome back, Mr. Idrac! Your room is waiting for you." It still impresses me that he recognizes me… even though I know it is just thanks to some basic technology: the Welcomer's augmented reality glasses have given him all my details, right down to the proper pronunciation of my name.

I open the door of my room with my fingerprint on the lock and yes indeed, the room is waiting for me, just like I like it, with the temperature set to my preference (a display confirms the Fahrenheit reading), and the room's LED lighting set to a calming blue/green tone.

My smartphone suggests I call my wife. I confirm, and ask for a video chat on the wall screen. The 3D image is so crisp that it looks real. I only regret that I have chosen a hotel that doesn't yet offer smell-o-vision. That's becoming a "must have" in some regions of the world.

On the personalized social map displayed on the interactive wall in the room, I can now see that my good friend John is also staying at this hotel. I wave my hand over the desk which brings up a virtual keyboard display, and have a quick text chat with him; we agree to have breakfast together tomorrow.

Laurent Idrac *has been Accor's Group CIO since January 2012. Before that he was SVP, IT for Accor North America based in Dallas, Texas. A French-American citizen, Laurent graduated from a top French business school with a minor in IT. After a short experience as an IT sales rep, he started his career at Accor in 1983, holding several positions in France. He was managing all the reservation call centers worldwide before joining the Corporate IT Department. in 1996.*

I turn the virtual dial to fade the window to black. The I add some Milky Way effects just for fun.

A message line indicates that my pizza is being prepared and will be delivered to my room as scheduled. If I want, I can access the full nutrition information, and my health data will be updated automatically with my calorie intake.

I browse the movie directory by waving my hand in front of the wall screen. Good, they have "Iron Man 25"! It hit the theaters just last week! The room lights dim automatically as the 3D movie starts. A few minutes later, there's a knock at the door – my dinner has arrived – and as it is being delivered and set up, the movie automatically pauses and the room lighting comes back up.

After finishing my dinner, I place the tray outside in the hallway, where sensors alert the room service department for pickup.

Finally the movie comes to an end, and I give it a 4-star rating to let my friends know it's definitely worth the 50 iBucks it cost me to watch it.

Now I walk into the bathroom. Through voice control, I turn on the mirror TV to my hometown's local news and enjoy a shower set at a perfect 97°F (as stored in my profile, based on my past shower history).

I then hop into bed, which is as comfy as I like (my personal firmness comfort is 46) and in no time at all, I fall sound asleep…

The next thing I know, my alarm comes on, and I slowly emerge from this dream… yes, it was indeed just a dream. A friend of mine who is a privacy freak would not call this a dream but his worst nightmare. But none of the technology I've just described is sci-fi. Some of it is already pretty old, in fact.

We do not know what will be mainstream tomorrow, but we can already take three lessons from this vision:

1 We shouldn't raise customers' expectations with a beautiful icing on the cake if we cannot first provide them with an excellent and consistent cake.
2 Keep it simple for the guest.
3 Build strong "foundations" in order to be agile in "interior design".

While keeping an eye on ROI, we nevertheless need to keep dreaming and experimenting to discover what could make a difference tomorrow.

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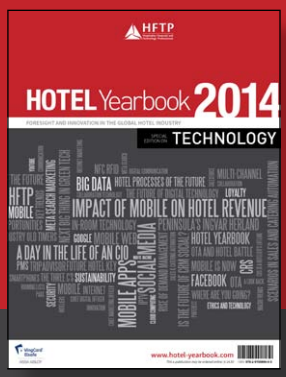

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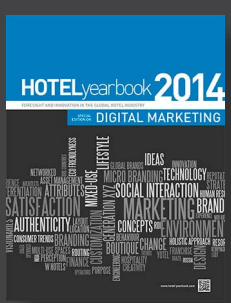

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