

## Keeping the Human Touch

There is no doubt that the business of hospitality and travel is adopting technology at an advanced speed, and organizations as well as travelers are embracing the movement. The personal touch still provides the basis for the reassurance and experience travelers seek, but technology is revolutionizing the way service providers are staying attentive and engaged with their guests. While customer relationship management holds great promise for delivering customized services more efficiently and effectively, “. . . the old-fashion style of customer relations may be the appropriate strategy for many travel and tourism ventures.”<sup>43</sup>

To help reduce labor costs, many tourism-related businesses are automating services that until recently were provided by people. More and more businesses within the industry are making greater use of computer terminals and interactive screens to allow travelers to “do it yourself.” Although this step depersonalizes service, a growing number of travelers prefer speed and efficiency to the more personal interaction with hospitality service employees. Tourism operators, just like other service providers, will find a balance between the power of technology and human interaction. Customers enjoy the freedom of technology but want to know that when needed there is someone available to serve their needs.

With the shrinking number of available workers owing to the aging populations of industrialized nations and competition for workers who have the skills needed to learn and complete more complex tasks, tourism suppliers will offer better pay and benefits to employees. Greater efficiency through the use of technology and employees who can utilize it will partially compensate for these higher human resource costs. Automation and robots will replace human workers in many back-of-the-house operations and some front-line positions. Employees will be seen as the most important asset for delivering high-quality, highly personalized customer service, so service training and employee empowerment will become the norm industry wide.<sup>44</sup>

## The Green Frontier

The coming decades will see the rise of mandatory recycling, water and energy conservation, and use of environmentally friendly building products and supplies. The industry will rise to this challenge by focusing on energy efficiency coupled with new energy technologies such as solar, wind, and geothermal energy. New Zealand serves as a good example of what is to come, as sizable quantities of thermal energy from hot springs are already used throughout the major tourism city of Rotorua. The lodging industry will increasingly build or convert to “smart rooms” that sense and adjust climate conditions and can be cleaned at least in part with robot technology.

### FYI MODULAR HOTELS

They go by many different names—capsule hotels, modular hotels, and pod hotels—but they all have one thing in common: very efficient use of space in a small footprint. The concept of modular hotels was pioneered by the Japanese, but the idea is sweeping across the world. Priced well below most competitors in high-cost real estate markets such as airports and

downtown locations, these small 75- to 100-square-foot rooms don't waste any space. Most modular units include the basics: private bathrooms, beds that are designed for two, flat screen televisions with integrated technologies, and some even have a small work space. Weary travelers looking for nothing more than a place to sleep, especially in airports and high-cost metropolitan

areas, are finding that pods “fit the bill.” Thanks to their sleek design and small footprints, these new hotels are opening up a new subeconomy category of lodging properties. In some locations, for example airport terminals, they can even be rented for stays as short as four hours.

*Sources:* Based on Hornyak, T. Capsule hotels go high style. *New York Times*. 11/20/2011, Vol. 161 Issue 55595, p. 11; and Karmin, C. Hotels think small. *Wall Street Journal* (Online). 11/12/2014, p. 1.