

# Developing Your Digital Guest Strategy

December 24, 2014



By [David Tossell](#), Vice President, DataArt

*Part 2 of a series of 5 articles on the digital guest experience*

There are apps that have been stealing revenue for years from hotels - Foursquare, Urban Spoon, Yelp, and similar apps. (See my earlier article [5 Apps That Look to Steal Revenue From Your Hotel](#)). Enabling this reality is that the majority of customers show up on hotels' doorsteps with their mobile devices in hand loaded with these types of apps. While there will always be guests who return to your property at the end of the day, those guests who might be tempted to explore outside your property are relying more and more on apps offering location and contextually driven. However, you can fight back with a "Digital Guest Experience" strategy.

## **Recent Developments in Digital Guest Experience**

Since Part 1 of this article was written, the new product introductions impacting the digital guest experience have been remarkable:

- Starwood (Sheraton, Westin, aloft, element and "W" hotel chains), has enabled over 30,000 room locks in more than 150 hotels so they can be unlocked with the SPG app. <http://www.fodors.com/news/starwood-launches-keyless-room-access-11039.html>



- Hilton has committed to having the majority of its 650,000 hotel rooms enabled with guests being able to use their smartphone as their room key by the end of 2016. Plus, by the end of 2014, digital check-in and room selection will be available at more than 4,000 Hilton Worldwide properties across 11 brands in 80-plus countries. Digital checkout is currently available at all US hotels and will be rolled-out globally by end of 2016. <http://news.hiltonworldwide.com/index.cfm/newsroom/detail/27192>
- HotelTonight CEO Sam Shank presented a vision at the 2014 Phocuswright conference in which their app integrates Lyft, Spotify, keyless entry technology and Grubhub. <http://www.tnooz.com/article/hoteltonight-looks-tomorrows-hotel-guest-experience/>
- Nor1 eReach platform was the runner-up at the Phocuswright Travel Innovation Summit. eReach enables hotels, airlines and third-party sources to actively merchandise services that increases revenue and enhances the customer experience. Nor1 has signed-up Sabre's TripCase (an itinerary management app) that will push contextually relevant offers to users as they travel. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XOLlgNPDQXo>

One truth is certainly clear – the pace of development in the digital guest experience only continues to accelerate. And, without finding a way to leverage technology, hoteliers run the risk of further losing control of their guest and seeing increased revenue erosion as apps promote off-property options.

#### **Fight Back! 4 Companies That Can Jump Start Your Digital Guest Experience**

1. **Fingi** ([www.fingi.com](http://www.fingi.com)) is a branded, white-label application and platform that allows guests to use a smartphone to control every aspect of their stay—from all in-room elements and instant ordering of hotel services to direct communication with the hotel and the outside world.

In a white paper case study provided by Fingi they claimed that "Data showed that, on average, each guest clicked on their Fingi app over 200 times, using it for room controls, hotel services, and social networking." Furthermore, "Fingi rooms generated \$80K in additional revenue for the hotel, showing that guests not only engage more with the hotel when using Fingi, but spend more too."

Customers: Viceroy Dubai Palm Jumeirah - UAE, Aloft - Bangkok, Next Hotel – Brisbane, Viceroy New York, L'Ermitage - Beverly Hills

2. **iRiS** ([www.irisapps](http://www.irisapps)) provides a range of highly tailored apps for multiple aspects of the guest experience. Not only does iRiS provide an app for guests' digital guest experience (iRiS Mobile Valet), they provide apps for the spa (iRiS Spa), restaurant (iRiS F&B Classic) and digital concierge (iRiS Lobby).

One unique product of iRiS is iRiS Guest Valet. iRiS Guest Valet uses a hotel provided tablet that replaces the traditional guest welcome pack with an up-to-date, live destination guide and even flight arrival / departure information. Furthermore it is highly customizable and benefits the hotel by enabling e-commerce via in-room dining ordering, shopping for hotel branded products, booking spa treatments, interacting with room systems such as the TV.

Customers: iRiS is in over 200 hotels worldwide, including, Kempinski, Mandarin Oriental, Orient Express, Starwood, Hilton, Accor, Swire, as well as in a number of independent and boutique hotels.

3. **Monscierge's** ([www.monscierge.com](http://www.monscierge.com)) Connect Platform allows hotels to showcase property amenities, events, menus, transportation and booking details as well as highlight local area recommendations. The Platform supports customer mobile devices (Connect Mobile), desktop/laptop/tablet web browsers (Connect Web) and lobby kiosk platforms (Connect Lobby). Monscierge even features a mobile application that empowers hotel staff (Connect Staff) that allows hotel staff to manage and respond to requests in real-time.

Customers: iRiS's Connect Platform can be found in select Hyatt, Accor, NYLO and IHG hotels.

4. **Cloud 9 Mobility's** approach to the digital guest experience is to focus on guest needs. It is a platform that focuses on fulfilling guest requests from requesting turn down service to ordering food poolside. An elegant guest interface combined with a easy to use back office functionality makes for a compelling offering. Furthermore, Cloud 9 Mobility leverages push messaging and advanced geo-fencing technology to tailor messages and promotions to fit guests' needs and preferences.

Customers: Bacara Resort & Spa

## **Conclusions**

### **1) The Digital Guest Experience is Here to Stay**

The perception is changing amongst hoteliers in that consumers are likely to be influenced almost equally by whether there is a Starbucks in the lobby vs. does the hotel offer the ability to order room service via their iPad. Forward-thinking hoteliers are considering the "digital guest experience" as part of their capital investment strategy. Look at loyalty apps being offered by Starwood and Hilton – keyless entry and digital checkin and checkout are only the beginning of what they are likely to offer in the coming years. Unless you believe that the iPhone is "just a fad", the digital guest experience is moving quickly toward the mainstream as an integral part of the hospitality industry.

### **2) Getting Started With Digital Guest Experience Apps Is Easier Than You Think**

Between Fingi, iRiS, Monscierge and Cloud 9 Mobility, each has a different approach to how they and come in at various price points to get started. Depending on the level of integration you are seeking and budget constraints you might have, each vendor has options that fit smaller budgets and can be upgraded over time. As you might be considering swapping out various components of your properties technology stack (property management system, restaurant management system, etc.) in the coming years, you might prefer to hold off on activating modules offered by Fingi, iRiS, Monscierge and Cloud 9 Mobility that require integration with these systems in your property. So, just because you are contemplating a change in one of those systems doesn't mean you have to wait to launch an app for your hotel.

### **3) Inaction = Revenue Erosion**

As stated in Part 1 of this article, Foursquare, Urban Spoon, Yelp, and similar apps have been around and driving spend away from full service hotels – especially those where dining and entertainment options are easy for the guest to get to. And while it is difficult to quantify the lost revenue at the hands of these apps, it is safe to assume that as app adoption increases and more apps come to market, the revenue erosion will continue. Hence, there may be no better time than adding to your 2015 plans to deliver a digital guest experience that begins to recapture that lost revenue.

David Tossell started in the mailroom of his family's travel agency 20+ years ago and made his way across the industry working for companies such as Sabre, Travelocity and Virtuoso. David joined DataArt in 2014 as Vice President, Travel & Hospitality Practice, having most recently served as Vice President of Marketing for WMPH Vacations / iCruise.com. Mr. Tossell is a serial entrepreneur, with experience ranging from global product marketing & development, to marketing promotions, business operations, SEO/SEM, and email marketing. Over the course of his career, he led many start-up businesses, including the Sabre Rewards travel agent loyalty program, and APInet, the travel distribution industry's first extranet. Most recently, Mr. Tossell oversaw the creation of TimeshareAdvisor – a review website for timeshare owners. Mr. Tossell can be contacted at [Extended Bio...](#)

*HotelExecutive.com retains the copyright to the articles published in the Hotel Business Review. Articles cannot be republished without prior written consent by HotelExecutive.com.*