



HITEC review – three hospitality tech businesses to watch

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HITEC celebrated its 45th birthday this year and its flagship conference, held this year in Toronto, took place a few weeks ago.

While only my sixth year at the conference, I overheard quite a few comments from HITEC regulars that little had changed since the early days: same bland booths, same irritating swag and promotional gifts, same gush around security as the top issue facing CTOs of brand.coms and so on.

NB: This is a viewpoint by Greg Abbott, senior vice president of travel and hospitality at DataArt.

But even though the sector still suffers from accusations that it is comfortable with the technological status quo, there were some truly innovative companies on the exhibitor floor that caught my eye. Plus of course all the innovation and inspiration on show at HITEC's E20X startup competition.

And I also disagree with criticism on the swag – Alice was giving out some rather fabulous fidget spinners!

On a more serious note, here are some of the businesses that caught my eye:

Sevenrooms

This is a New York-based hospitality platform for acquiring, engaging and understanding guests. While most are familiar with the market leader OpenTable and its many reservation/table management clones, the lesser known Sevenrooms is laser-focused on providing a restaurant deep insight into a guest profile. But why is this important?

Most restaurants simply have no access to purchase patterns. They have no idea who are their biggest spenders, what they like or what they have ordered in the past. Even if you've always ordered the "Surf & Turf" in the 27 times you've visited, there is likely no chance a restaurant will know that's your preference. Sevenrooms also offers a table management system, but even if the restaurant is already operating on OpenTable, its system can pull reservations and sync to the guest's profile which, along with its usable and sleek UX/UI is truly its special sauce.

My prediction? Sevenrooms is just enough left and just enough right of the large players in this crowded space to warrant an eventual acquisition.

LockUp

This Spanish business offers mobile key access for guests in addition to the traditional magstripe key. Granted, this is nothing new but the technical leap they appear to have made is offering this feature to hotels without the necessity to change out their existing locks.

The spend required to make the change over to keyless has been a barrier to entry for smaller and lower end chains. LockUp's tiny chip insert as a retrofit

could change the tide, provided they can get the operational side right (such as how the hotel can communicate with a guest who booked via a third party rather than direct).

My prediction? If it's as easy to install as they claim, magstripe may soon be dead, but they have to get the door lock companies on side otherwise they will kill it with exaggerated claims of invalidating warranties.

Hospitality Pulse:

This Californian business enables hotels to optimize and automate the check-in process as well as giving guests the confidence to know they will get the room they booked. While this might not at first seem like an enormous problem, balancing the house is becoming more complex every day.

Wider distribution and rate transparency forces hotels to more frequently adjust room availability and rates according to demand. Onward distribution forces an oversimplification of the room categories or room amenities.

Then it's up to the front desk team at check-in to match bookings to physically available rooms. Housekeeping status only adds to the complexity of room assignment.

Throw in loyalty or other program-based upgrade rules and there is an ongoing operational and customer service problem for front desk staff to cope with, many times a day.

My Prediction? Too early to tell but keep an eye on this space.

It is easy to get conference fatigue, so it is vital to keep an open mind in order to get a fresh perspective on the established norms, while remaining alert to truly innovative ideas.

Original article can be found here:

<https://www.tnooz.com/article/hitec-review-three-hospitality-tech-businesses-to-watch/>