



## Ring for the bell bot

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YOU'D never think it based on BA's massive computer meltdown in May but travel is fast becoming one of the most innovative industries, as work-weary travellers crave more digital solutions to pep up their holidays. That was the general consensus at July's annual Question Time event (hosted by global technology consultancy DataArt), at any rate.

It saw leading figures from the travel and technology industries come together to discuss digital transformation in the travel industry.

You only need to look at the rise of in-room automation, self-service check-in kiosks and app services for today's hyper-connected global traveller to realise how the travel industry is finding exciting new ways to enrich the holiday experience.

But this is only the beginning...

### **AIRPORT**

At the recent Air Transport IT Summit in Brussels, SITA Lab, which explores the future of technology in air travel, introduced the world to Kate, an intelligent check-in kiosk that uses geolocation and obstacle avoidance tech to move autonomously around airports. By monitoring data such as flight and passenger flow Kate can identify where additional check-in kiosks are required to help reduce lengthy queues.

LG has big plans for robots too, with Airbot, a cross between Pixar's Eva and a Dalek that guides befuddled travellers in the airport. It provides info on its display and will even walk you through the terminal if lost. It will help passengers at South Korea's Incheon airport later this year.

As part of this growing trend for self-service, we may soon be swapping manual passport and boarding pass checks for face checks. That's the reality for JetBlue customers in the US, who will soon have their photo taken and checked on the

customs and border protection database alongside passport, visa or immigration photos, making it the first airline to use biometric facial recognition tech. Elsewhere, Air New Zealand and Delta have begun rolling out biometric tech at airports to speed up bag checking.

At the bizarre end of the tech spectrum, BA has patented what can only be described as the modern equivalent of a mood ring.

A series of ingestible sensors will monitor temperature, sleep and heart rates to check a passenger's physiological state throughout a flight, and monitor stomach acidity levels to change in-flight dining options accordingly. Its aim is a smoother journey for premium passengers. That's if they make it on the flight at all, obviously.

## **NEVER LOSE YOUR KEY**

Those infuriating credit card-sized hotel keys may not be disappearing any time soon but keyless entry systems that conveniently provide room access via a smartphone app are on the up. This week Hilton announced the launch of Digital Key in ten UK hotels.

As well as room access, it allows members to check-in early and select their room, bypassing awkward small talk at the front desk. Hilton plans to implement the service in 100 more hotels by the end of the year and half its 5,000 hotels globally by 2018.

There's huge innovation on cruise ships too, with Carnival equipping guests with a wearable smart tag-cum-digital butler on three of its ships by 2018. The Bluetooth-enabled Ocean Medallion lets guests connect to on-board facilities, pay for purchases, order poolside drinks and unlock cabins. It even allows parents to track their kids.

## **View room on VR**

Expedia will soon offer VR versions of its listings to allow customers to step into a hotel room before signing up. That certainly beats browsing via a website or brochure...

## **ROOM SERVICE!**

You've heard of robot butlers delivering room service. Now Aloft Hotels in Boston and Santa Clara offer fully voice-activated rooms. So instead of getting up to adjust the air con, say, guests can get Siri to do it using in-room iPads loaded with the Aloft app. In addition, the chain's robot butler, Botlr, has just arrived at its Dallas Love Field branch.

Aloft takes its cue from other robot-centric hotels, like Japan's Henn-na Hotel. Following the opening of its second android-staffed accommodation in March, the company behind this geeky gaff revealed plans to launch 100 more worldwide in the next five years, which would see even more front-of-house staff replaced with a multilingual velociraptor — yes, really — dressed as a bellhop and an eerily lifelike fembot.

Finally, if robots don't get you hot under the collar, what about LAN parties? Amsterdam's Arcade Hotel will soon upgrade its 43 rooms with retro games consoles such as Nintendo Entertainment Systems, N64s and PlayStations as well as rentable games. Other additions include a games room with VR headsets and the latest consoles. Game on.

Original article can be found here:

<https://www.metro.news/ring-for-the-bell-bot/673797/>