

# Dawn of the Robots

ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE, ROBOTS ARE NEXT BIG THINGS FOR HOSPITALITY

**I**t's been one of those Las Vegas nights that turned into morning before you were ready, and as sunlight streams in through your curtains, there's only thing on your mind: coffee, and quick.

Time to consider your options. You could throw on some clothes (probably from last night) and sleepwalk down to the coffee shop, or you could make something that resembles coffee in that in-room percolator you've been too scared to touch.

But what if you could simply summon coffee, without seeing anyone or having to put a brush through your hair? Ha! That would take a robot. Why would someone program a robot to deliver coffee? Well ... why not?

Welcome to the future of hospitality. It's not only possible, but it's happening now. Vdara Hotel & Spa, situated on the Las Vegas Strip, is on the leading edge of a trend in high-end, experiential hospitality that employs robots to serve guests. The EMC2 boutique hotel in Chicago even has robots that will deliver towels.

Fortunately, the AV industry is inherently linked to this new frontier. As the technology experts in audio and visual communications systems, everything from the tablet used to place an in-room order to the control system and even the robots are within the scope of opportunity for integrators who embrace the soon-to-be new normal.

"The landscape has changed in just the last two and a half years," said Megan Zeller, business development director, Peerless-AV. "There are so many amazing things that AV is now integrated in."

And it's not just robots. Artificial intelligence in the form of voice-controlled devices like Amazon Alexa is nudging into the hospitality space as well. Zeller noted that Wynn Properties have incorporated Alexa in their guest rooms, and Peerless-AV has developed a desktop mount for the Amazon Echo Dot, a smaller AI voice device.

These hotels are providing entertainment to guests, she said. Zeller explained that with Roomcast, a guest entertainment solution powered by Google Chromecast, guests are able to "stream directly off their device without typing in all of their passwords and all of that information."

Jeff Gray, executive account manager in gaming and hospitality at Samsung Electronics America, said that along with tablets, high-end hotels are integrating smart speakers into rooms and giving guests a central hub for environmental room controls such as temperature and lighting.

"In the guest room, technology has evolved



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from just one component—the television—to an immersive, holistic experience," said Gray. "From smart televisions that display personalized messages to tablets and smart speakers equipped with room controls, guests have endless technology at their fingertips."

The trend extends beyond smart TVs in some cases, noted Zeller. Select hotels under the Marriott umbrella have begun using set-top boxes to deliver the streaming content their guests enjoy at home. Guests can log into Netflix or Hulu and access their favorite entertainment, while the properties save on display replacement costs.

Hotels "can stay up to date with technology," she said. "Instead of replacing the TV when the technology is out of date, they can just then replace the set-top box."

But technology, especially consumer electronics, rolls forward nonetheless—and those displays, a major bread-and-butter item for hospitality integrators, continue to get larger. Two or three years ago, the standard guest room TV was 49 inches. Now that's the entry point, Zeller said. For high-end hotels today, it's about 65 inches. While the technology used to deliver entertainment evolves, displays remain a stable part of the integrator's potential income.

"What that means for the integrators is that all of those displays have to be wall-mounted, because it's not safe to leave anything above 55 [inches] on a desktop," she added. "That's opening up the door for additional services."

Keeping guests comfortable in their rooms is essential. But for many hotels, the guest experience is now focused on getting guests into public spaces, where they can eat, drink, and socialize.

"Getting everyone to go to that public space versus spending time in the guestroom, that is now the new goal of the property," Zeller said. "It's a different hotel experience. You obviously want to incorporate as much technology as possible to keep people in that public space, spending money on food and beverage."

The main AV attraction in public spaces, the large-format digital display, is being deployed in all-weather environments such as poolside bars and cabanas for dynamic messaging, sports entertainment, and more. Rotational mounts increase the versatility of the displays, making them more important than ever.

"During the day it can be artwork or something like that, and then the display can be turned at night to also have games or something on in the public space," said Zeller. "It is a huge, huge thing for properties