



An Andaz host consults with a guest in the lounge at Andaz Wall Street.

the modern concierge

Behind the desk or in front of it, technology is changing the way concierges interact with guests.

By Dani Friedland, assistant editor

Just the word “concierge” probably conjures up an image of a solid, dignified desk made of dark wood. But as technology evolves, some concierges are coming out from behind that desk to interact with guests.

At Hyatt’s Andaz Hotels, there isn’t a typical check-in desk. Instead, a “host” fills reception and concierge duties in settings like a table in the lounge. “We believe in providing options and removing barriers,” Brand Director Tristan Dowell says. “We like guests to feel they’re going into somebody’s home.”

Between four and seven hosts

generally staff the lounge, Dowell says, and any one of them can sit with a guest and a tablet PC to talk about everything from restaurants to museums and local attractions.

When guests ask him if he’s a concierge, Geoffrey Holloway at Renaissance New York Hotel 57 replies, “Yes, I’m a concierge Navigator.” Holloway, a Renaissance Navigator, says it’s like being a “concierge plus plus,” and Lauren Levine, director of lifestyle brands for Marriott International, says Navigators take the concierge concept to a new level.

Navigators are “plugged in” to restaurants and tourist attractions from a “pod” designed by Chicago architect Jordan Mozer. While Navigators are educated about a city as a whole, they focus on a “micro-local” level. The Navigator information is available to consumers in a variety of formats, including a piece called “In the Know,” available printed at the front desk or emailed to the guest as part of a pre-arrival reminder. For groups, In the Know can be customized, and it also can be seen on the hotel’s website and Internet access landing page as well as as an application for iPhones, iPods and iPads.

“We heard from our guests that they are looking for this information on the web before they arrive,” Levine says. Instead of browsing message boards, for example, guests can download the app to see recommendations, or visit the mobile-friendly website. The goal is for it to be seamless, with information available everywhere, so the formats will keep up with the

technology. Levine says Renaissance is currently exploring the idea of a Droid interface.

What the guest wants

Even for concierges who sit behind more traditional desks, evolving technologies are changing guest interactions. At The Kimberly Hotel in New York City, Chef Concierge Peter Johnson puts a weekly attraction on the hotel’s Facebook page. “Peter’s Pick” helps future visitors decide what they might want to do before they arrive. “Social media is just so important today,” Director of Sales and Marketing Marcia James says, and other Facebook users can ask questions and get responses on the Facebook page. Offline, people stop by the concierge desk now to tell Johnson they saw his pick and booked it.

“We think people want to talk to someone,” James says, but for those who don’t, The Kimberly also has an iPad-like touchscreen in every guest-room. The screens can perform some concierge functions, with menus for the restaurants (and for room service, which James says makes updating them to reflect seasonal changes much easier), information about museums,

access to a weather forecast and the ability to print a boarding pass.

“The demand is so much stronger for technology,” James says, and the in-room touchscreens are a good option for techno-savvy guests who don’t necessarily want to leave their room to interact with the concierge. “We are bridging both worlds.”

The Trump Hotel Collection also bridges both worlds. The Trump Attaché program uses technology to provide very personalized service. Suzie Mills, general manager of the Trump International Hotel & Tower in New York, says the service begins before the guest arrives, with a phone call or email intended to “extract as much information from them prior to arrival as possible and proactively anticipate what their needs will be.”

Whether it’s an in-suite refrigerator already stocked with the guest’s emailed shopping list or full-on holiday decorations complete with a Christmas tree, Mills says the hotel tries to make the service as personalized as possible. All of this information goes into a database — edited by the Attaché staff to make sure it’s concise and ready to be instantly transmitted to another Trump property, if needed.



Renaissance Navigators interact with guests from a “pod” designed by Chicago architect Jordan Mozer.

Additional database information comes from guest-preference forms housekeeping teams fill out. For instance, if a housekeeper notices that the bottle of champagne the hotel sent up remains closed but the garbage can is full of Diet Coke cans, the hotel can make that available instead for the guest’s next stay, Mills says.

That’s not to say that all front-of-house concierge functions at Trump are face-to-face. After guests book, they can reserve a car, request flowers or champagne, specify a pillow or arrange other upgrades online.

For restaurant reservations and theater, though, “they really do want to hear the opinions of the concierges and the Attaché team,” Mills says, and the concierges’ own relationships with hot restaurants and other vendors mean they can get a sought-after reservation. “That is really based upon personal relationships and something that you’ll never be able to succeed with if everything is online,” Mills says.

It all comes back to what the guest wants. Tech-savvy, young travelers might like having a touchscreen in their rooms, but, Mills says, “at the 5-star level of hotels, your guests are always going to want to have that desk in the lobby.” But even if the guest is standing in front of a desk, the concierge can, say, pull out an iPad to show a map and give walking directions instead of unfolding a big paper map. It’s about giving concierges technology to help them to do their job efficiently, Mills says.



At Hilton Surfers Paradise on Australia’s Gold Coast, Anthony Appel (right) — a local surfer himself — and his team blend professionalism with energetic personalities to provide local expertise and personalized attention to guests.