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The Experience Economy

ADDRESSING CONSUMER ENGAGEMENT IN THE HOSPITALITY MARKET

BY JIM BEAUGEZ



Consumers today live in an age of experiences. It's often not enough for businesses to tout quality, features, value, or even that lowest of common denominators: price. Increasingly, the emotional investment is king.

Every computer and mobile device is a gateway to a galaxy of choices accessed through the internet and apps that embrace interactivity. With an ever increasing portion of people worldwide using smartphones, the expectation of engagement is a global phenomenon.

The AV market has driven the high-end experiential economy with engaging digital signage and audio in brick-and-mortar consumer establishments. Now, integrators have the opportunity to lead once again as the

According to Rich Ventura, VP of business development and solutions at NEC Display Solutions, "Successful deployments of technology in the hospitality space are becoming more personal and geared toward their intended audience."

virtual domain of smartphones merges with these physical environments in verticals such as hospitality.

"Engagement is key," said Rich Ventura, VP of business development and solutions at NEC Display Solutions. "Successful deployments of technology in the hospitality space are becoming more personal and geared toward their intended audience."

Across the hospitality market, from accommodations to food and beverage, and beyond, manufacturers are looking to technologies that enable interactive experiences for consumers and marketers.

"We are seeing organizations being smarter with their signage," Ventura said.

"They are delivering more meaningful content and capturing data on the audience that allow for better understanding of who their demographics are."

Smart digital signage that involves creating engagement with target audiences is replacing standard kiosks with new technologies that can drive data analytics, such as facial detection, beacons, and radio frequency identification (RFID).

"We are seeing companies deploy RFID as ways to track guests, ignite content, and create stronger engagement with the guests," said Ventura. Along with RFID, facial detection technology commonly associated with the security market can also be used to



target guests with messages on screens.

Beacons, which send push notifications via Bluetooth protocol, are a natural fit for retail and hospitality applications. Apple uses its iBeacon to transmit information to customers in its entire fleet of U.S. stores, while Google's open-source beacon platform Eddystone can be used in the same way to deliver context-aware content.

"Beacons are a one-way communication platform," said Ventura, "so hospitality [venues are] able to push information about events, services, and facilities on the property."

Paired with smart digital signage, beacons can deliver time-limited deals to a consumer's mobile device while supporting messaging plays on a video wall. That content can be tailored to a specific area, such as men's clothing in a retail environment, or a certain exhibit in a museum.

Augmented reality is another area where smart devices can integrate with

The expectation of engagement is a global phenomenon.

traditional AV technologies. In the tourism market, visitors can use wayfinding kiosks to send mapping information to a smart device that helps connect them to their destinations. This connection, Ventura said, can also supply data that can be used for targeted marketing, as well as to capture valuable behavioral insights and other analytics from the visitors' activities.

Not all consumers will respond to push notifications though or engage with other technologies that seek to grab their attention. That's why the old standby menu board is still holding ground in markets like food and beverage.

"Digital menu boards have become a standard expectation when dining in a casual-style restaurant or bar. Travelers want simple and not complex. In many cases though, you have people who just want to engage and move off to their room as soon as possible, having complexity to this prevents this."

However, the strategies and content used to attract consumers through digital menu boards continues to evolve, with dynamic content driving sales and information to customers.

AV manufacturers in the audio sector are also using technology to engage consumers

in new ways. Williams Sound, which has participated in the hospitality market for years in the hearing-assistance sector, is now also focusing on ways of enriching the experience for all audiences.

The company's Hearing HotSpot takes advantage of the BYOD lifestyle by providing



AUDIO ON TAP

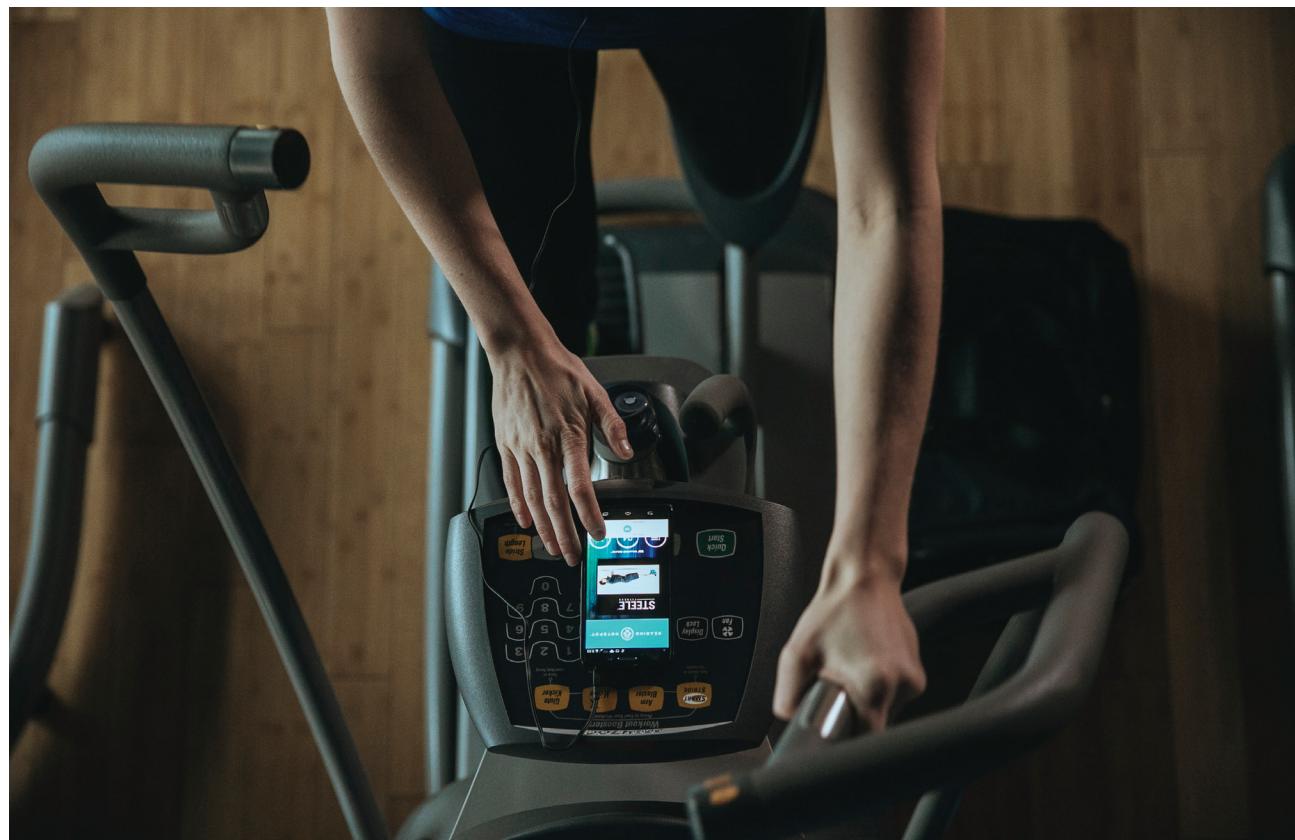


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business trends

a way for businesses to communicate with consumers through an app that connects them to live or broadcast audio feeds, often tied to digital signage. The product's applications span hospitality venues such as sports bars to fitness centers, allowing customers to choose from the venue's display monitors and sources.

"I think what's attractive to these venues, across marketplaces, is that these tools are looking at new ways to draw the audience in, giving them new information or an enhanced experience they didn't have before," said Tony Braun, VP of U.S. sales at Williams



Williams Sound's Hearing Hotspot takes advantage of the BYOD lifestyle by providing a way for businesses to communicate with consumers through an app that connects them to live or broadcast audio feeds, often tied to digital signage. The product's applications span hospitality venues such as sports bars to fitness centers, allowing customers to choose from the venue's display monitors and sources.

Sound. "Once they're in the venue, it's keeping them more engaged because they can deliver a much more personalized experience for that individual."

Making this possible is broadband technology that can deliver audio in under 50ms, making the combined viewing and listening experience in live and broadcast media effectively a real-time event. It's easy to see how this technology is useful in venues like casinos, where players can absorb content on the fly between games.

While most inquiries on Hearing HotSpot begin with supporting audio for video walls or multiple monitors, inevitably, the conversation turns to monetizing the medium. The app can be customized with a

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venue's branding, and configured to deliver marketing messages and content such as a restaurant menu.

Also in the audio category, Listen Technologies offers Listen WiFi, which allows venues such as sports bars, hotel lobbies, cafes, and fitness centers to stream audio to patrons' smartphones via a free app for Apple or Android.

"If your patrons can stream audio from around the world, why can't they get your audio content from just a few feet away?" asked Carrie Keele, corporate marketing manager at Listen Technologies.

Keele's rhetorical bottom line provides all the guidance AV integrators need to understand the experiential economy. "Why not?" is the answer to consumers and clients alike.

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