

## **MODERN TECHNOLOGY CENTRAL TO SILVERDOOR'S GROWTH IN A WORLD OF ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE, PERSONALISATION AND AUTOMATION**

Technological advances are at the core of many modern, progressive businesses from the way people interact in an office to the systems and software we use to perform our jobs. With the direction the world is moving in, it's anticipated that robots will replace humans in many respects, but to what extent does automation pose a threat?

The travel industry, like many, has seen its fair share of digital disruption - some good, some bad -, and from it has emerged opportunities for growth and expansion. As a serviced apartment agent and business travel expert, SilverDoor has made considerable strides in terms of its tech presence, with a central aim to improving customer service and process efficiency.

In 2015, a drive on automation led to the introduction of in-house software to help our Account Managers dispatch quotes quicker. Meanwhile, by integrating our website with a global distribution platform, we've been able to deliver live availability on the properties we oversee at the click of a button.

To supplement the work of our Account Managers, and keep up with the rise of self-booking tools, users have the freedom to confirm a stay in an apartment without having to pick up the phone initially. Looking ahead, work is underway to implement machine learning capabilities to the SilverDoor website, in effort to generate more tailored results when users search for properties. We are also in the process of updating our mobile app, as an add-on to the existing desktop site. Features will include apartment information, along with a list of recommended bars, restaurants and attractions.

Such developments come at a time when travel tech is a hot topic. In a conference entitled 'Smart travel: the impact of the fourth industrial revolution' at last month's Business Travel Show, Wade Jones, Interim President for the Sabre Travel Network, maintained that better travel experiences must be offered if we're to meet the needs of consumers who depend increasingly on the internet of things.

The current computer age is fast moving, explained Wade. Rapidly expanding technologies have led to a more compressed timeline, by comparison to previous industrial revolutions, while connected devices have dramatically changed the world as we know it. A better understanding of the data driving such devices is crucial if travel managers are to make a relevant offer to consumers, he added.

By 2020, it's said that 85% of customer interactions will be managed without a human. Casting our mind back to the late 60s, Wade recalled that the very same fear existed with ATM machines. However, rather than simply just replace staff with a telecommunication device, banks responded by incorporating ATMs as part of a new strategy.

Even Wade's own home has felt the influence of technology taking its hold in temperature monitoring and modern alarm systems. "When I get in my car it automatically thinks I'm going," he said.

Central to our understanding of smart travel are artificial intelligence, personalisation and automation, each of which received equal attention by Wade. Consumers need to feel like they're connecting with a brand and receiving special treatment, he said. Travellers are individuals, and judging them all by the same set standard simply won't do. If anything, automation "enhances interaction" he added, by enabling people to be more productive and creative in their lives.

In an effort to cater for a digital savvy audience, travel agencies, he argued, face the tough prospect of getting staff to grips with modern technology. "I would imagine it's quite difficult for agencies to hire new people and tell them they need to learn a load of code-based interactions."

Example interactions include Facebook's facial recognition app, which has potential to drastically improve airport check-ins, and chat bots. "Chat bots will play a critical role in travel" he argued, as evidenced in the rise of self-booking tools. Elsewhere, driverless cars are set to take ground transportation to radical new heights, while pre-loaded devices like iPads and Kindles are gradually replacing in-flight entertainment as we know it.

However which way you look at it, technology is a reality we need to face up to. Wade sympathises with the fear we share of being replaced by robots, but maintains that there will always be a need for humans to make sense of them. For SilverDoor, it's business as usual for now.