

Innovations in CX shaping the future of hospitality

The world of hospitality rarely stays still. Fuelled by shifts in customer demand and an ever-evolving world of technology, the business models for hotels, bars, restaurants, and cafes are constantly moving to keep up with the times. But how does this affect the customer experience?

Discover the innovations that are changing the way hospitality businesses interact with their customers in this guide.

What is CX?

CX (or customer experience) refers to how your clients or guests perceive your hospitality business during and after an interaction. What did they take from their time with your brand? How did you make them feel?

These impressions begin the moment they click on your website and can last long after they leave your door. Every detail adds up to create a whole, cohesive image of your business in the customer's eye.

From a business point of view, good CX comes down to engaging positively with your customers and meeting their needs.

By asking yourself how you can shape their perception of your company and

boost the chance of repeat custom, you'll be focusing on a positive customer experience.

Key CX innovation trends in hospitality

Since the turn of the century, technology has played an increasingly prominent role in CX across industries, including hospitality. This isn't slowing anytime soon, either, with 46% of hospitality venues surveyed across the UK at the end of 2023 reporting an expectation that their tech spending will increase over the next year.

But what innovations are worth investing in for your customers? To learn more, we've rounded up the best new technology in CX that's shaping the future of the industry.

Digital POS systems

An innovation that's revolutionised hospitality front-of-house service is the digital POS system. Designed to make communication between your staff and your customers seamless, it's a must-have tool to enhance CX.

Key features of a digital POS system include:

- Taking orders quickly via a digital interface

- Real-time information on bookings and availability

- Table and room management

- Data analytics and insightful reports

- The ability to send information to other staff, including orders to the kitchen

For your customers, a digital POS leads to quicker service, fewer booking errors, and a team of staff who are ready to answer questions using real-time information.

You can also enable personalisations and loyalty rewards through your POS, giving each member of staff useful insights when serving a repeat customer.

It's everything your front-of-house team needs in one sleek interface.

Digital payments

Cash is no longer king. Now, customers expect to be able to choose how they

pay, with contactless options taking over the world of hospitality. This is true even for older target markets, with 80% of people aged between 85 and 95 in the UK now paying with contactless methods.

As a hospitality business, it's crucial you adopt digital payment technology to avoid missing out on sales. From card readers to online payment links, there are plenty of options out there that bring more flexibility to the customer experience and enable you to reach a wider audience.

With fewer people carrying physical cash than ever before, this is one innovation that's become essential.

It could also be worth looking into cryptocurrencies and blockchain for your business. Though not entering the mainstream hospitality industry just yet, there are a vast number of consumers who believe this digital currency is the future of spending.

Self-service innovations

There's no doubt that we're living in the age of self-service. Consumers enjoy taking control of their interactions with your business, and giving them the option to seek independent service is a great way to boost CX.

As a hospitality brand, you'll likely benefit from a self-service kiosk. Restaurants and cafes, for example, can implement kiosks to allow customers to order their food without the need for a waiter. This brings a wealth of benefits, making you more appealing to introverted customers and creating an order process that's quicker, simpler, and more autonomous.

Check-ins can also be made easier with the help of a kiosk. Rather than waiting for a member of staff to carry out this repetitive task, guests can do it themselves by entering their information and being guided to the right room or table. Customers have the choice to skip lengthy queues and your staff can focus on big-picture tasks to improve CX elsewhere. It's a win-win!

Self-service translates to your online presence, too. Chatbots and booking tools can give your customers the ability to answer questions and carry out processes independently, improving their experience with your business.

AI in hospitality

When it comes to innovations in hospitality customer service and CX, it's hard to ignore artificial intelligence (AI). This cutting-edge tech has taken the world by storm, becoming a part of almost every industry and transforming business processes.

A key advantage of AI in the hospitality industry is the ability it offers to better

understand your customers.

By collecting data – including geographical, behavioural, and online data – and running it through clever AI software, you can create insights to improve the customer experience. Reams of numbers are transformed into actionable reports, making it easier to tap into the analytical benefits of the digital world.

You can also implement AI tools for your customers to interact with directly. An AI concierge, for example, can chat with guests about what they need, bringing a friendly voice to your brand that's available 24/7. It can also use customer data to create personalised suggestions, improving CX without the need for more staff.

Robot services

Robots might still feel futuristic, but they're becoming a modern reality in the hospitality industry. With the ability to work around the clock, complete simple tasks, and free up your staff to take on more important work, they're an asset to the world of customer service.

In terms of CX, robots bring a number of benefits. For example, a fleet of cleaning robots that can constantly Hoover your floors creates a more pleasant environment, while robots that deliver pillows or extra water to hotel rooms could speed up the fulfilment of requests for happier customers.

This isn't a far-off daydream, either. Robots are already being integrated into the hospitality sector, with *The Keenbot* delivering food on-site in a Surrey-based office restaurant, and a *Chinese hotel* sending food to rooms via their own bot. Robotic cleaners have also been spotted in shopping malls and airports worldwide, bringing us one step closer to the future of hospitality.

Voice technology

Voice technology is an emerging tech innovation in the hospitality industry designed to enhance and personalise the guest experience. Tying into the digital, contactless experience that's emerged in the post-COVID world, voice assistants allow your customers to manage their time with your business in a hands-free capacity.

In hotels, voice tech is particularly useful. Customers can easily request information, control smart in-room devices, and order room service via a voice-activated assistant or hub (think *Amazon's Alexa* or *Google's Nest*). It brings a contemporary and luxurious edge to the experience, in which the guest's convenience is always prioritised.

Final thoughts

Technology and CX are intrinsically linked in the modern hospitality sector. Whether you're an investor, business owner, or tech enthusiast, stay ahead of the game by keeping up with these tech innovations.

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