

Think about guest behavior with each product: Can they figure it out? Will they feel secure using it? What is the value of this product vs. the device they brought with them?



Quadriga's Sensiq solution offers content shifting and mirroring on all iOS and Android devices that support it, movies on demand, home from home TV via a customizable UI and mobile pairing, an electronic program guide and flexible internet service.

Tips & Trends

Operationally, consider:
Infrastructure—how will you wire it now and for upgrades?
Content—do you want over-the-top, linear or video on demand?
Mobile/personal data—how can guests use their own content easily?

Staying power and flexibility a must for in-room entertainment

More than any other product segment, technology changes swiftly. Sometimes, the best course of action is to play the waiting game.

"We're on a cusp of a lot of the newer technologies like smart TVs, and I'm not convinced it's going to stick," said Peter Engel, chief technology officer, Marcus Hotels & Resorts, noting that, when it comes to using apps on TVs, security issues—like guests not wanting to use their Netflix password on the TV—come up. "They might not want to invest a lot of time to figure out every smart TV user interface out there. There's a relationship between how hard it is to figure out the interface and how willing the guests are to use it."

Instead, said Engel, he sees a lot more promise in smart solutions that also enable guests to mirror their own devices on the guestroom TV. "That's something that can get some traction: It takes away the security concerns and guests know the interface on their phones and tablets, so there's no learning curve," he said. "I'm waiting for that trend to take hold and have some choice in solutions, and that's one that might be a winner."

Brian Richter, director of hotel systems and technology at the JW Marriott Indianapolis, highlighted the importance of bring your own device (BYOD) and bring your own content (BYOC). "The majority of people have their own devices, so they sign in maybe five devices vs.

the old one device in the past. They're looking for more connectivity," he said. Many of these guests would likely utilize mirroring technology, as Richter noted that requests for an HDMI cable to plug devices into the TVs have increased recently. "The HDMI cable has become a daily request; it used to be a monthly request, so we're looking at just putting it in the guestrooms at this point," he said.

Fabian Ellis, director of OS&E, Canoe Hospitality, noted that, despite changes that may come with smart TVs, they're still the best bet. "Whenever owners ask me about future proofing, when it comes to a TV purchase, we always land on a smart TV. It's the only TV type that crosses the three main areas: infrastructure, content and mobile and personal data." He noted that he really only buys TVs with Pro:Idium, as that gives hotels the flexibility to switch services if they need to.

"I'm also seeing larger TVs," said Ellis, noting he rarely buys televisions in the 30-in range. Most properties buy 42- and 46-in. TVs for the guestroom, with higher-end properties buying 55-in. and larger.

Ellis added that incorporating IP addressable phones and clock/radio solutions that are Bluetooth enabled and have a lot of charging ports are also smart ideas to address guest connectivity and BYOC.

Staying power, said Engel, is the most

important factor in technology decision-making. "It's not like we can invest in this all the time, so you have to pick technologies that look like they have staying power," he said. Added Richter: "Try to look for things that are practical and established vs. trendy and new. Stick to the basics: Things that are flashy and fun seem to fall off. They lose value quickly."

Richter also warned that hotels should stick to items with a lot of flexibility. He said that, a few years ago, many hotels invested in technology that only worked with Apple products, but now Android has increased its market share (and many of those products don't work with newer Apple technologies anyway).

All of the experts agreed that the technology option that has the most staying power is infrastructure. "If we have the bandwidth and the capacity, later you can add on other devices. But, if you don't have the cabling, it becomes an extremely difficult situation," said Richter, noting that it's always a good idea to invest in cabling, wireless and fiber solutions.

"That's one area you can invest where it really is future proofing. It's kind of a sure bet because, then, you can do anything that happens to come up down the road," Engel agreed.

Engel added that, when it comes time to buy, do your research. "Talk to as many vendors as you can and figure out who's ahead at the moment because they leapfrog each other all the time. So, when you're getting ready to buy, find out who is in front and where you think the future is going, so you can get the most mileage out of that investment as you can," he said.

—Nicole Carlino