Unlocking the future

ACCESS & DOOR FURNISHINGS

With connectivity paramount to today's society, even the simplest of hotel functions are undergoing a tech evolution.

Words: Ben Thomas

Considering smartphones have developed into social companions, it comes as no surprise that hotel operators are exploring ways to maximise integrated connectivity. With traditional access features evolving, door furnishings could soon shed their physical form altogether, ushering in a new era of hotel entry that aims to eradicate lengthy queues at check-in.

According to mobile entry brand Openkey, 85% of hotel guests use their mobile devices when travelling, while E-marketer estimates that in 2017, 40% of all digital travel sales in the US were made on mobile devices. With connectivity and travel becoming increasingly interlinked, how, then, to effectively utilise this within the hotel? Operators from Holiday Inn Express to Yotel have invested in keyless technology to improve the arrival experience, with the former commissioning Openkey – a mobile application granting keyless access and check-in – as its experience-focused technology platform, whilst the latter partnered with Dormakaba to integrate IOS and Android-compatible RFID locking systems at its Boston property.

"Guests need no longer anticipate being slowed down at the start of their stay with a lengthy check-in process at the front desk," says Ravi Godhwani, General Manager of Holiday Inn Express Spring Hill. "Times are changing and we appreciate the guest desire for an arrival experience that is truly seamless."

Today's traveller requires an intuitive network of services to be truly satisfied with their stay, meaning operators and designers need to keep a finger on the pulse of the next technological trend that enhances the guest experience and meets reshaping standards.

DITIGAL DEMOGRAPHIC
At the core of keyless mobile entry is a quality radio-frequency identification system, or RFID. Hoteliers turned their attention to the electromagnetic tags soon after the digitalisation of locking systems, sprucing up the arrival experience with a hi-tech framework that brought in new levels of convenience.

VingCard's Signature RFID – a contactless electronic locking system installed at Sheraton Grand Hotel in Edinburgh – was introduced back in 2010 and has since developed mobile compatibility at properties such as Skye Hotel Suites Parramatta in Sydney under new owners Assa Abloy Hospitality, while Onity launched its DirectKey mobile access solution at The Hotel Show 2015 in Dubai, allowing guests to securely download room keys to their smartphone through hotel loyalty apps.

In a bid to capture the next generation of guest, the entire hotel spectrum has invested heavily in integrating digital key systems into their brand, with Hilton Worldwide looking to its Honors programme to entice guests with keyless access to rooms, elevators, fitness centres and even parking facilities. Likewise, electronic
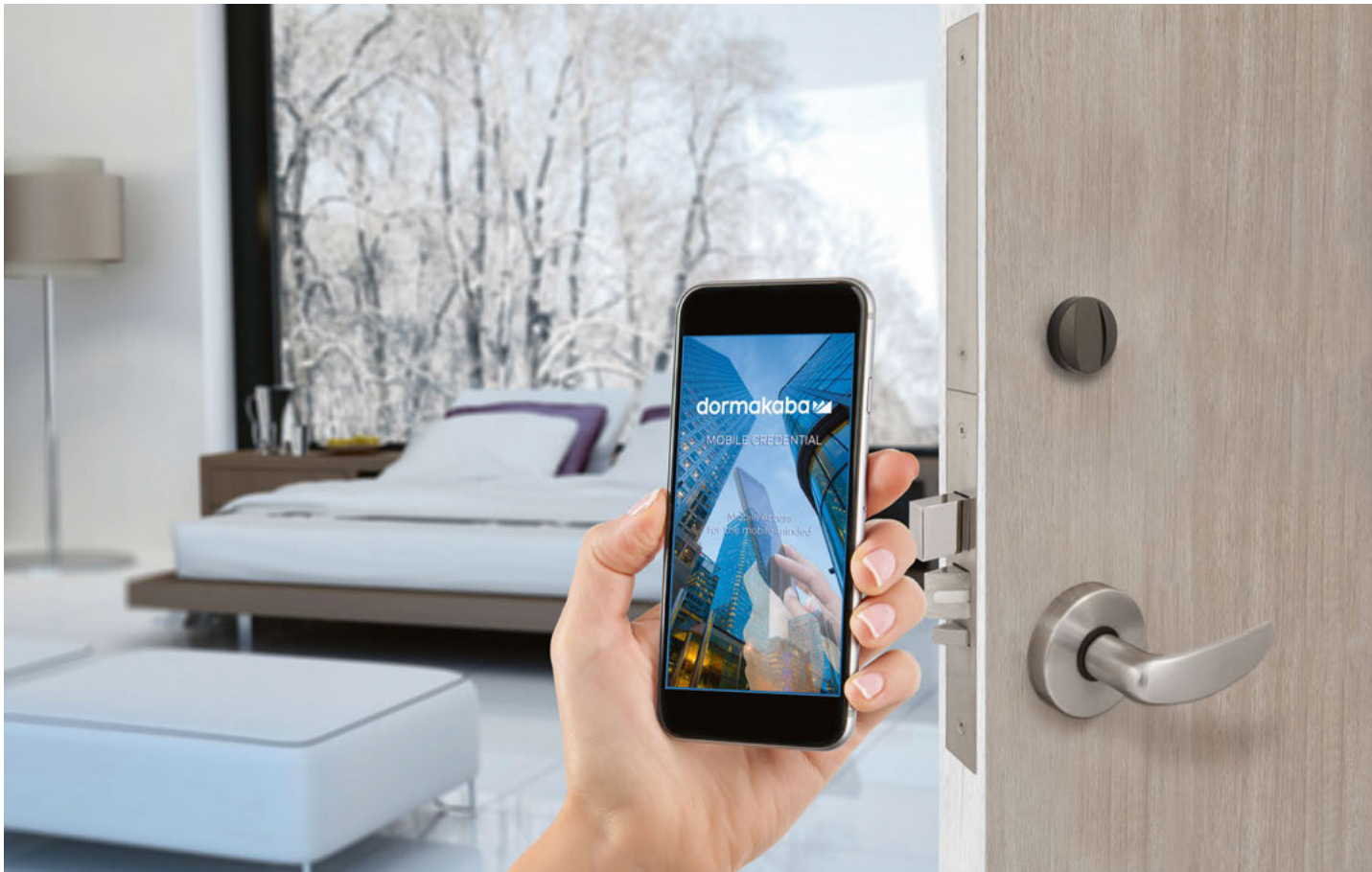
Above: Quantum Pixel – part of Dormakaba's Smart Design Access technology – is compatible with the RFID electronic locking systems at Yotel Boston

locking solutions brands such as Salto are seizing the opportunity to work with hospitality heavyweights, designing an increased level of cloud-based access controls. XS4 One, for example, integrates wireless real-time Bluenet technology, while the Salto JustIn mobile app enables guests to receive their room key online, anytime and anywhere. And for the guest who is conscious of sustainability, the upsurge of connectivity will result in less plastic, and therefore less waste for operators.

CUSTOMISABLE CONTROL
Individualisation and functionality have become driving forces in the hotel guestroom, particularly in the context of technology. The pervasiveness of mobile devices has relegated conventional hotel room features, demanding that the entire guestroom experience be controlled from one central hub.

Jung's Key Card Switch, for example, incorporates KNX technology that can control atmospheric lighting and acclimatisation while creating optimum energy efficiency for operators. Working with RFID cards, the switch features both a shut-off delay and specific light functions, enabling guests to customise the ambience of their space to provide convenience and aesthetics in equal measure.

Natural light however, is also primary a consideration within public spaces in particular, essential in reconnecting hotel guests with the outside world. North 4 Design's range of single glazed vision panels, including Uno, characterise this idea, bringing additional visibility to doors and interiors. Offering a streamlined contemporary aesthetic, the portholes can feature in guestrooms, restaurants and lobbies and shed light onto whether tech-controlled artificial ambiance will ever live up the real thing.

CYBERSECURITY CONUNDRUM
The proliferation of keyless technology has nonetheless triggered debate on cyber security, as well as concerns over escalating data intrusion. With hospitality one of the top five industries subject to network breaches, hotel operators must understand the security risks of mobile keys prior to making large investments, as well as developing contingency plans for system failures. While technological advancements often make life easier for consumers, hotel operators could be plagued with potential setbacks, forcing them to weigh up whether traditional styles would better suit their interiors.

Carrson International's Sun Valley Bronze collection – featuring the Lift series, designed in collaboration with Carney Logan Burke Architects – embodies these traditions, using the textural qualities of bronze to bridge the gap between rustic and modern sensibilities. Further, its slender and curved silhouette pairs effortlessly with the simple aesthetic of its organic material.
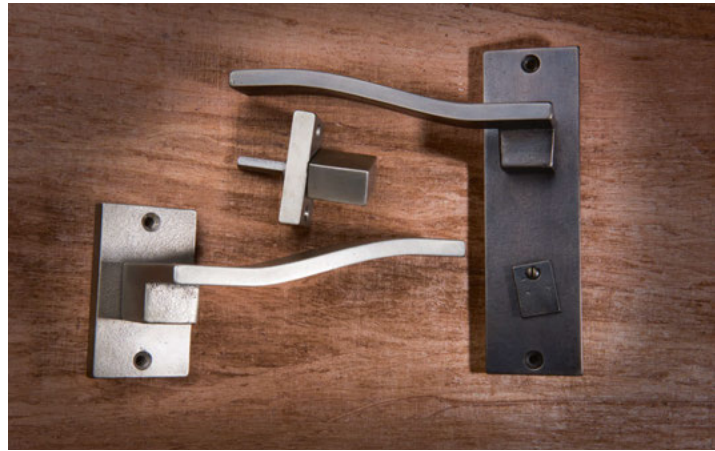
Above Left: Rocky Mountain Hardware's Edge model marries minimalism with unique textures to create a tactile furnishing for doors
Above Right: Carrson's Lift collection and North 4 Design's Uno series bridge the gap between rustic and modern interiors

The role of materials has arguably become more prominent in the door furnishings sector, with Turnstyle Designs amongst an abundance of ironmongery companies nodding towards tactile craftsmanship and quality finishes rather than intergrated technology. The Stitch finishes for example, use soft leather to encase various handle shapes, adding a feeling of luxury at every touchpoint.

Rocky Mountain Hardware also produces handle sets that venture further than just aesthetics. The Edge series – a narrow escutcheon launched for contemporary interiors – brings two textured finishes including Wire, a tactile tangle of lines enwrapping the surface, and Moonscape, a bronze handle exuding fluidity. Reflecting a minimalist aesthetic, both collections provide a sharp finish, embodying a 'less is more' design principle to place materials as paramount.

Likewise, Oliver Knights has featured textured finishes on a number of its recent collections, including incorporating leather and varying metals into its bespoke designs. Its Brastius series, presented by SDS London at 100% Design in 2017, is manufactured from solid brass and features a ringed surface to add further dimension the ironmongery offering. Meanwhile, the Industrial collection mirrors the rejuvenation of 19th-century design styles within hospitality, and can be tailored to the taste of designers and hotel operators with ten finishes to suit a plethora of interiors.

Despite all of its plaudits, technology continues to be the biggest challenge for the hotel industry. It comes as no surprise that tech-heavy guestrooms continue to divide travellers, with some preferring simplicities in an age saturated with the latest gadgets. However, forward-thinking companies are looking to bridge the gap by integrating technology within existing locking systems, retaining original design styles whilst creating a seamless arrival experience for guests.

With much of the keyless technology still in its infancy, the global hotel industry must strive to invest in connectivity at every angle and increase capabilities. Irrespective of who amalgamates the technology first, it will be operators offering a truly connected experience – from arrival to departure – that attract and retain the all-important loyalty of the next generation.

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>
> *Ravi Godhwani, Holiday Inn Express*