Self-Service Check-in at Hotels and Motels

A guide from Kiosk Marketplace

INSIDE: With the proliferation of self-service in the airline/airport industry, guests are looking for a self-service option when they stay at a hotel. When done right, self-service is the way to go. Not only will it please the customers of the hotels, it will even please the staff, as they will be able to do more important tasks such as greeting customers away from the front desk.

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About the sponsor

IBM Corp. is a leader in the development of innovative customer-facing self-service applications, offering integration and consistency across kiosk, Web and wireless channels. The company is a pioneer in hotel/motel check-in. IBM worked with several major hotel chains including Hilton, Starwood and Marriott after the turn of the 21st century to provide self-service solutions to those hotels' customers. More than 8,000 IBM e-access kiosks are installed worldwide. With 17 years in the self-service business, IBM has experience in the travel and transportation, government, utilities, finance and retail industries.

Kiosk Marketplace, owned and operated by Louisville, Ky.-based NetWorld Alliance, is the world's largest online provider of information about and for the kiosk industry. The content, which is updated every business day and read by business and industry professionals throughout the world, is provided free of charge to readers.

Introduction: Self-Service Check-in at Hotels and Motels

The last time I walked into a hotel, the lobby was cluttered with tired tourists and befuddled business travelers. The hotel, at an upscale casino in Las Vegas, looked like a zoo where the zookeeper had gone AWOL.

This hotel's queue line for check-in swerved back and forth, resulting in a minimum 30-minute wait for the many individuals that had just arrived after a day-long plane ride. With change clanking in their pockets, many of them just wanted to hit the slots and black-jack tables. Instead, they were stuck in a procession that seemed to go no-where.

Unfortunately, this scene has been all too commonplace in the hospitality industry. Hotels and motels, small and large, have been congested with guests wanting to check in after long days of travel.

Despite the chaos, these hotels often are competent businesses. They have a capable staff and excellent facilities. But in today's service-first environment, many are missing one important ingredient — self-service kiosks.

It's not too hard to imagine that many of these hotels are fearful of self-service. There have been cries by many that self-service will replace the hard-working individuals that work in the hospitality business. Other critics have said that self-service is really no service at all; therefore, you are paying a high premium to stay at an expensive establishment, but in the end you get very little buck for buck.

But if you talk to the industry experts, and even many business and other savvy travelers who have experience with self-service, they will say, when done right, self-service is the way to go. Not only will it please the customers of the hotels, it will even please the staff, as they will be able to do more important tasks such as greeting customers away from the front desk.

The following research guide will give you insight into hotel/motel check-in self-service. It's designed to give you the five most important things you need to know to have a successful kiosk deployment.

There also will be examples from several hotel chains who have implemented self-service successfully. They even talk about some of the things they
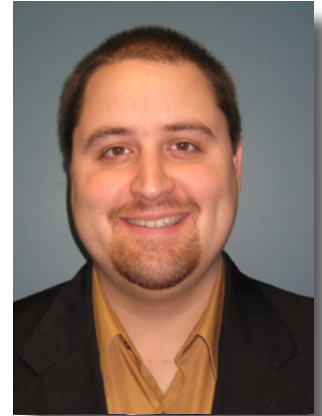
Patrick Avery,
editor of Kiosk Marketplace

When done right, self-service is the way to go. Not only will it please the customers of the hotels, it will even please the staff, as they will be able to do more important tasks such as greeting customers away from the front desk.

did wrong and how they fixed them.

After reading this guide, the basics to deploying a kiosk in the hospitality environment should be clear.

I'd like to thank IBM, whose sponsor-ship of this guide enables us to provide it to you at no charge.

Chapter 1: A short history of hotel self-service

The hotel industry is constantly changing. New hotel brands are emerging to target specific age groups and lifestyles. Boutique hotels focus on high-end brand messaging, luxurious amenities, chic décor and hip cocktail lounges. Extended-stay hotels focus on low cost, business traveler essentials, comfort and security.

Within this changing landscape, hotels are looking to differentiate their brand. Understanding and satisfying guests' needs is at the heart of a great marketing vision. One of the differentiators is self-service. With the proliferation of self-service in the airline/airport industry, guests are looking for a self-service option when they stay at a hotel.

"Many people have already been exposed to it in many forms," said Robert Chan, practice leader for IBM Canada's e-access solutions. "The natural evolution is to extend it to hotel services and give the guest choice and control."

The beginning

Self-service in a hotel is not new. It has been around in the hospitality industry for some time and has shown up in many different forms. In its earliest days, public phones, house phones and vending machines served as self-service devices.

Many argue, however, that the dawn of automated self-service, in general, came at the advent of the automated teller machine. ATMs, which allowed
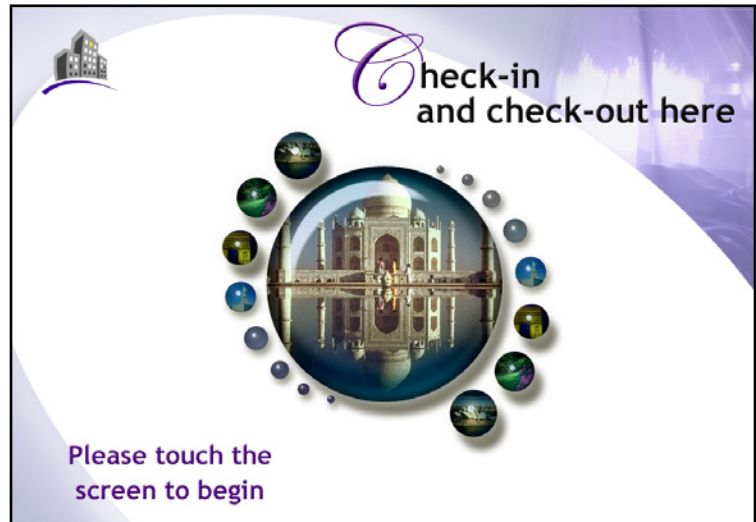
The introductory screen of a hotel check-in kiosk greets customers and tells them to simply touch the screen to begin the transaction. IBM has more than 8,000 IBM kiosks installed or on order at more than 200 locations worldwide.

customers to deposit checks and withdraw significant sums of money, became the defining device for what people called "self-service."

In the mid- to late 1980s, NCR Corp. first delved into the hotel self-service arena, by placing ATMs in the hospitality environment. The ATM, which is what NCR was most known for, had been out only for a short time; therefore, many people were unfamiliar with self-service technology, said Clyde Dishman, NCR's director of hospitality industry marketing.

Back in those days, self-service even frightened people, he said. ATMs were known for taking people's credit cards and "eating them," Dishman said.

"Some people didn't want to use them because they might be traveling and didn't want to lose their credit card. So

we had to change the card reader and make some adjustments there."

So NCR's first involvement with self-service in the hospitality space was not an overwhelming success. However, NCR got involved in it again in 2000, before the airlines and the travel industry really embraced self-service at a high level. But this time, since personal computing and Internet use were at all-time highs, people's ability to use self-service machines and kiosks really took off.

"It just seemed to kind of fit well with what everyone else was doing in the travel area," Dishman said. "It gave hotels the option to give customers better service."

Two powerful solutions for hotel check-in

IBM Corp. also was a pioneer in hotel/motel check-in. IBM worked with several major hotel chains including Hilton, Starwood and Marriott after the turn of the 21st century to begin providing self-service solutions to those hotels' customers.

More than 8,000 IBM e-access kiosks are installed worldwide. With 17 years in the self-service business, IBM has experience in the travel and transportation, government, utilities, finance and retail industries.

IBM's hardware ranges from custom, self-service kiosks for online transaction processing, to wireless, handheld

> **"Delivering multichannel self-service is the future in the hotel industry. Build the business logic once and deliver it across a variety of touch points that suit your guests' needs."**
>
> — Robert Chan,
> practice leader for IBM Canada's e-access solutions

devices. IBM's team has developed a suite of software and hardware products that allows IBM to deploy self-service solutions quickly and reliably. These solutions are both conventional and Web-based.

IBM's S series kiosks were designed specially for the hospitality industry. This particular kiosk runs applications such as hotel check-in/check-out and comp redemption for casinos. Standard devices include motorized card reader and room key encoder and thermal printer. Optional devices include barcode scanner, room key dispenser, signature capture pad and chip and PIN reader.

Servicing the largest customers in the hospitality sector, IBM has delivered solutions across the travel and transportation industry. In the past, IBM has helped lead the development of the International Air Transport Association's Common Use Self Service (CUSS) standard, enabling airlines and airports to enhance the guest experience while helping ensure that its investment with IBM and self-service will have long-term protection. IBM is the

market leader in self-service check-in kiosks for the travel industry, with more than 8,000 IBM kiosks installed or on order worldwide. Large hotel chain Hilton Hotels has been one of IBM's leading deployers. Two hotels, with more than 3,500 rooms between them, were the first stage for Hilton's kiosk implementation.

By inserting a credit card or typing in your HHonors number for identification purposes, guests can follow a set of simple on-screen instructions and use the touchscreen to check in. The kiosk displays the traveler's reservation, selects a room based on the customer's preferences, issues one to four room keys and provides printed room directions and information. At the end of their stay, travelers can check out at the kiosk in the same fashion by reviewing and confirming their bill and printing out a receipt for their records.

The kiosks are tied into Hilton's own technology platform. This gives the kiosks access to real-time information regarding guest preferences and service-recovery alerts and thus provides accurate service to incoming guests.

Self-service kiosks allowed guest service agents to focus on providing value-added services to those guests who preferred or chose it. IBM also provided project management services, developing the self-service user interface and helping define a process model that improves the guest experience.

According to IBM, hotel self-service kiosk solutions can be a powerful addition to a hotel's on-demand strategy. They can enable hotels to offer check-in and check-out capabilities to customers on demand, increasing customer convenience and satisfaction, reducing time spent waiting in queues, improving customer satisfaction and maximizing employees' effectiveness.

For the typical airline, kiosks process approximately 40 percent of check-ins, reducing costs approximately $32 million annually on a baseline of labor costs for check-in of $118 million per year.

The hotel self-service kiosk solution also offers potential revenue uplift. It gives hotels upsell room categories based on availability and guests' buying habits. In addition, as functionality improves hotels can make dynamic one-to-one marketing offers — such as spa, restaurant and local attraction tie-ins — at a critical guest touch point.

One of the products NCR deploys for hotel self-service is the NCR Easy-Point Xpress Check-In. The kiosk was designed to allow travelers to check in and out without staff assistance, which thrills many consumers and positively impacts a customer's bottom line.

NCR says that the EasyPoint kiosk makes a positive impression by providing hotel guests with an easy and contemporary approach to efficient service. Xpress Check-In improves

customer service by providing fast check-in/out and shorter lines. The kiosk also is easy to use. The solution confirms reservations and allows check-in for walk-in guests. It encodes, validates and dispenses the room key and prints the guest's folio in most cases in under a minute.

The kiosk also can be integrated with the hotel's operating system. During the customer interaction, Xpress Check-In communicates with the customer's property management system. The kiosk then completes a series of tasks: encoding and dispensing of an electronic room key, capturing an electronic signature, printing guest stay information and displaying and printing the in-house guest folio.

Travel industry as a whole sees technology use increase

The impact of self-service can be seen across the entire hospitality industry. The following excerpt from a Sept. 27, 2007, USA Today article gives a brief overview of how self-service has impacted those industries, particularly hotels, airports and car rental.

Traveling? Technology shows up everywhere

USA Today
Sept. 27, 2007

The business of travel is notoriously cyclical. So when recession and terrorism in 2001 knocked it flat on its back, it was just a matter of time before it would come back.

Travel in the USA has been resurgent for more than three years. But there's a difference in this particular rebound.

From booking the trip to the cab ride home, technology has changed the travel experience. Today, technology has become the traveler's constant companion. At its best, it eliminates the bottlenecks of the past, reduces stress and saves time. It's a different story when the robot on the other end of the phone insists you're saying Bulgaria, not Baltimore.

Machines today may provide as much or more customer service to airline passengers, hotel guests and rental car customers than humans do. It's now possible to check into a hotel room — or order a drink at the bar — without coming in contact with a hotel employee. It's possible to rent a car without human interaction. And many air passengers reach the jet bridge at the gate before encountering an airline employee — who scans their boarding pass with a machine.

Machines have been taking over from humans in other service industries for years. You can buy a gallon of milk at the market or a gallon of paint at Home Depot without a cashier by using a self-serve device at checkout. Many people are so hooked on ATMs, they never set eyes on a bank teller.

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But customer service technology has taken hold in the travel industry only in the last few years, partly because of strong labor unions and tradition. In the disastrous travel downturn following the Sept. 11 attacks, airlines fighting for financial survival cut 150,000 jobs and replaced many with technology.

Voice-recognition software and travel websites took the place of many airline reservation agents. Some ticket agents were replaced by self-service check-in kiosks at airports. Although the changes cost thousands of jobs, airlines found that many travelers love the impersonal devices that let them zip through the airport.

A look at how technology is changing the travel experience:

Hotels

Self-service kiosks cover most bases

Hyatt Place, a new limited-service hotel chain launched two years ago, shows where hotel technology is heading.

There, guests check in and get their room key from a kiosk in the lobby. They order a snack from the kitchen and pay for it using a touch screen. They have the option to order up a sitcom they just missed on network TV. Before leaving for the airport, guests may stop by the lobby kiosk to print out their boarding pass.

New technology is sweeping through hotels up and down the luxury scale. It's caught on especially with younger travelers, who have grown up with automation. Hilton surveys show more than a third of its customers carry an iPod, 89% carry a cell phone, and 49% have a high-definition TV at home.

"Our guests are coming in with new expectations, because the technology has really arrived," says Hilton Hotels executive Robert Machen.

The hotel industry postponed investing in major remodels after the 9/11 attacks, when travel plummeted. In 2004, when hotels started making money again, technology and customer acceptance had evolved to the point where tech upgrades made sense.

Those self-serve kiosks are popping up in hotel lobbies everywhere. Hyatt has them at 70 hotels. Hilton has them at 412 Hiltons and Embassy Suites. Marriott will have them at 40 hotels by January, and will test them at Courtyard hotels later this year.

Tabletop computers may become common. Sheraton is installing them in lobbies and bars of its biggest hotels. Produced by Microsoft, the touch-controlled, waterproof computers go for $10,000 each. The horizontal screen and controls are flush with the tabletop, so

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they double as ordinary furniture. Guests may use them to order a drink or access the Internet to find directions or the closing time for a nearby museum.

Boutique chain Thompson Hotels will install a James Bond-style security feature at two new sites: a room lock system that reads a guest's fingerprints before opening the door.

They're coming to Thompson Lower East Side in Manhattan, which opens in February, and Thompson Toronto, set to open in early 2009.

Thompson co-owner Stephen Brandman says they're installing the locks in just two hotels initially to make sure they work. Employing the "latest, greatest gadget" can backfire, he says, if guests get confused or a device malfunctions. Not surprisingly, hoteliers are investing most heavily in entertainment, equipping rooms with large, plasma-screen, high-definition TVs. Hilton's research shows that nearly 98% of guests have the set on for more than three hours a day. Guest rooms at all J.W. Marriott, Marriott and Renaissance hotels will have high-definition, flat-panel TVs by the end of 2009.

Technology has even invaded the bathroom. The Westin Chicago River North is testing the Brondell Swash 800, a $1,000 throne that combines a toilet with a bidet. It has a heated, germ-resistant seat, uses warm filtered water to wash,

and a dryer to finish.

Airlines

Paper tickets may go away

The airlines' widespread use of new technology has had at least as much to do with cutting costs as with improving the customer experience. In nearly all cases, the increased use of technology has allowed airlines to reduce the number of employees needed to interact with passengers.

The most noticeable change has come in ticketing. By May, it will be almost impossible to buy a paper ticket from any airline in the world.

That's a big change from 2000, when about 59% of all tickets sold in the USA were "paperless." Last month, that figure was 99%.

In the future, the paper boarding pass could become as rare as a paper ticket. Air Canada said last week that for many of its non-U.S. flights, it's giving travelers the option of getting what essentially is a picture of a boarding pass bar code on their cell phones. To board, a traveler can call it up on the phone's screen and pass it under an electronic reader. The system is also in limited use in Asia. Many travelers have come to appreciate the ability to check in via the Internet before leaving home or the office. Many also like airlines' flight status notifica-

tions sent to cell phones or computers hours in advance of departure time.

But not all travelers think new technology is friendly. Ron Stagner, a regional sales manager who travels about 40 weeks a year on business, hates lengthy voice menus and websites delayed by slow-loading graphics. Dealing with technological overkill "takes a lot of time I don't always have, especially if I'm changing flights," he says.

Fernando Mariano, an international public relations executive from Orlando, says trying to navigate the voice-recognition systems that most airlines now use to answer calls can be daunting for those, such as him, who are not native English speakers.

"When offering voice recognition, airlines should also offer an option to use the keypad," he says. (Hint: Speaking the word "agent" or "representative" usually prompts the system to transfer you to a human.)

Competition is pushing the evolution and expansion of in-flight entertainment technology. When it began flying seven years ago, JetBlue was the only U.S. carrier offering live television programs. Several carriers, including Frontier, Virgin America and, on transcontinental flights, Delta, now offer similar programming. Others are watching consumer reaction to decide on following. Holding them back: costs of retrofitting hundreds

of planes with systems that can cost up to $1 million per plane.

In the meantime, enhanced versions of existing in-flight entertainment technology are moving into airline cabins — especially business class and first class, where airlines can charge higher fares. Most now offer a wider variety of movies, music and TV shows in premier cabins.

The next frontier: in-flight broadband service. In 2006, aerospace giant Boeing shut down its money-losing broadband service, which had been available to passengers on several foreign carriers. But now, airlines and service providers are making a new push to make the service available to passengers. They're working with improved technology that costs less to install and maintain.

Cars

Bypassing the lines

Rental car companies are looking to technology to improve efficiency and save travelers' time.

At three airports, Alamo Rent A Car last year began testing self-service kiosks that allow travelers to avoid lines at rental counters when checking in. The company now has 152 kiosks at 60 airports. Hertz opened its first eight kiosks

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at Orlando's airport this month.

Avis said this month that it has a new online booking tool that will make it easier to make, check or change a reservation with a BlackBerry or other Internet-enabled portable device. In the past, data sent from the Avis website did not fit mobile devices' small screens.

Inside rental cars, upgrades such as improved navigation systems, toll-collection devices and satellite radios make drives more relaxing. The devices also bring in extra revenue for car rental companies. All charge daily fees for the navigation and toll-collection devices, and Hertz charges for satellite radio.

In January, Avis announced a portable device that, for $10.95 per day, provides wireless Internet access. The device plugs into a car's power outlet or uses another plug for any electrical outlet, providing Internet connectivity "anywhere," including hotels and restaurants. Renters can also get wireless Internet at 40 Hertz airport locations for $4.95 daily.

Hertz introduced the first navigation systems in 1994. It now has more than 60,000 NeverLost units in service. Traveler Larry Hotaling, who assists companies entering the Asia market, says Hertz's NeverLost system is great to have in an unfamiliar city.

The seven other major car rental companies also offer navigation systems.

National and Alamo began offering them in January, and Enterprise introduced its Garmin StreetPilot c340 system last year.

Avis last year unveiled a "Where2" system, which, it said, was the first navigation system with "real-time traffic alerts and Bluetooth connectivity." A Garmin navigation system introduced by Dollar Rent A Car and Thrifty Car Rental in July offers traffic information and Bluetooth connectivity. Business traveler Jeff Griffin of Connersville, Ind., likes a navigation system and a satellite radio in his rental cars. "I enjoy having both in the car so I don't have to take mine," says Griffin, who is in the software training business.

Electronic toll payment began appearing in rental cars last year when Avis and Budget installed transponders in vehicles at 117 locations in the New York and Houston areas. The companies expanded the program to all locations in the Northeast, Chicago, Florida, Colorado and Puerto Rico. Renters pay $1.50 to $2 daily, plus tolls.

Hertz offers electronic toll payment for vehicles rented at 10 East Coast airports, its Manhattan locations and in Houston. The cost for renters is $2.50 daily, plus tolls. Dollar and Thrifty offer electronic toll payment in Dallas, Houston and Denver. They charge $8.95 per day, and tolls are included.

But not all frequent travelers are in love

with car rental companies' new widgets. Steve Crawford of Bend, Ore., says the technology varies a lot by car rental company, so there's a "learning curve" that's not always worth the effort.

"The last thing you want to do when you pick up a car is sit in the parking garage and learn a new system," says Crawford, whose company makes military souvenirs.

"Heck, sometimes it's a big enough challenge to find the gas-door release."

As a whole, the travel and hospitality industry is in a self-service pattern. Airlines have been strong with hotel check-in and car-rental kiosks coming up with a solid showing.

IBM has the benefit of living through the airline self-service growth and has used those lessons with the hotel environment.

"We started out with British Airways in the mid-1990s," Chan said. "Since then, we have grown our airline application business in double digits year over year. But IBM is also focused heavily on hotel self-service. Hotels are looking for alternates to maintain and improve customer service while minimizing wait times."

"Delivering multi-channel self service is the future in the hotel industry," he said. "Build the business logic once and deliver it across a variety of touch points that suit your guests' needs."

Dozens of companies are offering self-service in the travel arena with the same or slightly different features and they are ready for deployment. But to receive the benefits of deploying self-service kiosks, there are many strategies to follow, according to industry experts: Make sure the kiosk does what customers want, make sure it works, make it look good, put it in a visible location and train staff to understand what the kiosk does and doesn't do.

Chapter 2: Make sure it does the right thing

Room features:	King Bed, Non-Smoking		Change
Check-out date:	October 7, 2007	4 nights	Change
Rate:	$235.00 plus taxes	(Rate changes apply)	Details
Loyalty card number:	123456789 Gold		Change
Payment card:	Mastercard ************1234		Change

✗ Cancel ✓ Confirm

For guests to embrace a hotel check-in kiosk, the kiosk must give guests an experience better than what they find from a front-desk employee.

Many people find themselves often waiting in lines at grocery stores, re- tails stores, banks and hotels. They get frustrated and impatient. So, if they have a self-service option, they ask themselves if is it better ser- vice or no service.

"In my mind, and to many people, it is better service if I have the option to go (to a kiosk)," said Clyde Dishman, NCR's director of hospitality industry marketing. "Is it better service? I cer- tainly think so in many scenarios."

However, to be successful at giving people a superior alternative, it needs to do everything that a front-desk person could do and, in most cases, it needs to do more. At the beginning of a self-service deployment, NCR looks at what the needs and requirements arre for successfully deploying kiosks in hotels, Dishman said.

Customer attitudes

With an install base of more than 800 hotel check-in/out kiosks in approxi- mately 500 hotel properties, IBM has learned invaluable lessons for suc- cessful rollouts.

"Both guests and staff expect the kiosk to do the right thing. Each group has a different set of expectations," said Robert Chan, practice leader for IBM Canada's e-access solutions. The guest expects the kiosk to perform as well as or better than a staff member person. It should offer the guest con- trol, choice and convenience.

"The bar has been set by the airline check-in success," he said. "Hotel kiosks must take advantage of the many years of airline check-in refinement."

Another important thing for check- in kiosks is that they need to run smoothly, right away. Most people take this step for granted.

"Hotels have a small window of time in which to impress the guest or they will not try the kiosk again," Chan said.

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Much like a new staff member that has undergone training, hotel staffs expect the kiosk to perform efficiently.

"One would assume the kiosk has been trained properly," Chan said. "This means the check-in and check-out success rate needs to be high, with the widest possible acceptance coverage."

There will be some exceptions, such as cash payment or requirement of photo ID. In those cases, the staff needs to understand all the limitations so that the kiosks are looked at in the most positive light versus being deemed a failure.

"The kiosk is their teammate," Chan said. "It is there to help during the busiest times. For simple transactions, the staff should encourage the guest to use the kiosk. For more timely interactions like a customer service issue, staff will deal with guests face to face."

Recent trends

To understand kiosks and self-service, it is helpful to understand some trends about customers and why they use self-service. A recent study commissioned by NCR Corp. explored the attitudes of customers who have to wait.

When asked about waiting for service or waiting in line, most consumers ranked the lack of employees available to assist them as highly frustrating, according to the NCR research study.

Survey participants were asked to estimate how much time they waste standing in line or waiting for service. On average, respondents said they waste about one hour standing in line or waiting for service in a typical week — or more than two days per year. Nearly half (49 percent) of the respondents estimate that they waste between 30 minutes to two hours each week waiting for service. Ten percent of consumers believe that two or more hours of their time is spent waiting for service in a typical week.

That seemingly endless wait in line has caused many people to choose to bypass the lines and use self-service devices, industry experts say.

NCR's survey asked respondents about their level of interest in using a time-saving technology such as kiosks or other self-service devices to reduce their wait in lines. An average of 39 percent of respondents said they would be extremely or very interested in using such technology if it was available to reduce wait times.

When asked where they would be most interested in using a self-service kiosk or device, consumers said they would be extremely or very interested in using self-service technology at the department or division of motor

vehicles (51 percent), followed closely by checking in for an airline flight (46 percent) and making a deposit or a withdrawal at a bank (42 percent). More than one-third (34 percent) said they would use self-service technology to check in at a hotel or motel.

The prospect of greater convenience and time savings ultimately can influence a consumer's decision-making process. More than 43 percent of survey respondents said they have chosen one provider of goods or services over another because it offered the option of using a self-service kiosk or other self-service device to help reduce wait time.

For the hotel industry, the impact of those numbers is becoming more clear. Deployers are working hard to place kiosks in spaces for the customers to use. But they have to ask themselves, what applications should the kiosks provide?

What's in the box?

For much of the hotel industry, kiosks are used strictly for check-in.

"I think that most hotels currently have just hotel check-in kiosks," said Dave McCracken, president of Livewire International. "But many hotels are beginning to add other applications. The combination of check-in and other features are on the cusp of being a key component of hotels."

Potential deployers have to take a look at the hotel and do an honest appraisal of what works and doesn't work, McCracken said. He said you have to ask yourself if it makes sense to have other kiosks with multiple functions.

Livewire International's key self-service device is the eConcierge, which allows users to look up information on retail shops, restaurants and maps of the area. It is conceivable pieces of eConcierge could be implemented to comprehensive check-in information kiosks, McCracken said.

"Initially, we plan to do single-purpose kiosks, but we are interested in looking at multi-purpose kiosks, including the capability of checking in for flights and printing boarding passes," McCracken said. "I think it is just going to take user testing to see if we can make it successful.

"You could even set your kiosks to one function during certain hours, while at other hours it could do a series of different tasks."

One of the products on the market that uses several applications across many travel industries is the NCR Xpress Hotel kiosk.

The NCR Xpress Hotel includes NCR ResortPort kiosk hardware, now enhanced with a compact design that helps enable hotel operators to place the kiosk where it best serves hotel

guests. The NCR ResortPort also is available with an optional integrated bidirectional passport reader and 2-D bar-code imager.

The solution can be equipped with a CheckInHere module, which provides multi-airline check-in, prints boarding passes and delivers other services from any self-service location.

Additionally, NCR Xpress Hotel can include the NCR WayFinder software module, an interactive mapping application that assists guests with locating amenities around a hotel property via maps, including identifying the best route to a guest room, pool, hotel restaurant or other services.

Providing something special

Most of the hotel check-in kiosks today are less capable than their staff counterparts.

To delight the guest and offer more control, hotels are adding new features that are not present at the front desk. Much like how the airlines introduced the seat map, hotels are looking at this control feature to meet guest expectations. Most everyone, at one point in time, has thought of this as they approach the front desk.

Hotel kiosks are not utilized throughout the day. There are peak periods in the morning when check-outs are frequent. Check-ins then become frequent later in the afternoon. So,

for a large percentage of the day, the kiosk is unused. To help recoup the investment cost as well as market their presence, hotels are adding new attractions to the kiosk.

One very successful feature has been airline Web check-in. Leveraging the airline and travel expertise of IBM, the IBM hotel application uses the same Common Use Self Service platform that powers thousands of airline check-in devices in 285 airports worldwide.

"Using the IBM Hotel solution along with IBM NetCDS, hotels have successfully incorporated a much-needed function for hotel lobbies," Chan said. "No longer does a guest have to request their boarding pass to be printed, find a printer in the business center or arrive early at the airport to check-in."

Chapter 3: Make sure it works, all the time

There are three words that should not apply to any kiosk deployment: out of order. Those who already have deployed kiosks will tell you this is one area that will hamper any sort of long-term self-service plan.

"You never want to see a kiosk that says out of order on it," said Dave McCracken, president of Livewire International, a company that provides kiosk software and turnkey self-service kiosk systems and solutions. "That's something that we try to prevent at all costs."

Livewire provides self-service products, highlighted by its eConcierge product, in the hospitality sector. But like many other enterprising businesses, the company is getting into the hotel self-service check-in environment.

Livewire has been working with one of its top hospitality clients as an extension of its IT department, McCracken said. That client has asked Livewire to continue its relationship and provide hotel self-service check-in for its customers. It hasn't been deployed yet, but Livewire is in the process of developing that technology.

"It's just not good publicity although people probably expect it more and more today just because a lot of electronics break and people can understand that," he said. "Almost everyone has a home computer and they realize that at some point, your home computer will break. I suspect that the hotels themselves do not want to see that and that they will keep spares on hand just in case and want to be able to service the kiosks and keep them up and running."

McCracken says he generally recommends to deployers that they have two to four kiosks in a midsize hotel lobby.

"I wouldn't expect many problems with that deployment," he said. "Worst-case scenario is that you still have to use the traditional means of serving hotel guests with hotel clerks."

Robert Chan, practice leader for IBM Canada's e-access solutions, said hotels should take a look at working the kiosk solution into the front-desk process so that guest expectations are met.

"When a guest walks into a hotel lobby, he looks for the front desk,"

There are three words that should not apply to any kiosk deployment: out of order. Those who already have deployed kiosks will tell you this is one area that will hamper any sort of long-term self-service plan.

Chan said. "When he finds the front desk, he looks for the agent. When he finds an available agent, he expects the agent to be able to check him in.

"This needs to be the same for a kiosk; however, it is more challenging," he added. "When a staff is not available, it is obvious to a guest. She is either not at the front desk or is moving around or not making eye contact. For a kiosk, the expectation to be available is higher. If the kiosk is down, the hotel cannot move the kiosk into the back room or put a cover over it."

Chan said the goal for hotels should be to maximize the availability of the kiosk. However, great design and software alone will not achieve maximum availability, he said. Mechanical devices break down and they will need periodic replenishment and maintenance.

Deploying a kiosk is not that different from any other kind of deployment. There is always a learning curve, said Clyde Dishman, NCR's director of hospitality industry marketing.

Even with the more popular self-service devices, there is always someone standing there to help those who are not familiar with the machine.

"You'll see that at hotels as well," Dishman said. "There are always desk clerks that will be able to help a guest."

> "Once you deploy it, you are dependent on it. So it absolutely has to be up and running all the time. Once your guest knows it's there and uses it, they expect it to be there all the time."
>
> — Clyde Dishman, NCR's director of hospitality industry marketing

A number of staff members should be on hand to help, he said. "They are also the ears and eyes for you to make sure there are any usability issues that may have not been discovered during the testing phase. They can pick that up and relay it back in an effort to continually improve the machines and the self-service process.

"Once you deploy it, you are dependent on it," he continued. "So it absolutely has to be up and running all the time. Once your guest knows it's there and uses it, they expect it to be there all the time."

Chapter 4: Give it a face everyone's mother could love

The moment a mother has a child, there is undoubtedly a strong bond with that young one. And no matter what anyone says, to that mother, that child has the prettiest face in the world. But there can't be that many pretty faces roaming around the world.

The softer side of a kiosk solution also needs attention, said Robert Chan, practice leader for IBM Canada's e-access solutions.

After a hotel achieves the expectations of staff and guests, one starts to look at other contributing factors, he said. They can be the softer requirements such as aesthetics and usability. IBM has a whole department dedicated to user interface design, user experience and usability. But it's not just a linear approach.

"A successful experience is not only about getting from Point A to Point B," Chan said. "It is about the journey."

For instance, a hotel stay is not just about a comfortable and clean bed. It also is about the efficient design of the front-desk area, the décor of the lobby and the route to the elevator. If the front desk is difficult to find, the décor is ugly or the elevator location is unclear and poorly located, the guest experience is impacted.

"Hotels understand this very well," Chan said. "There are varying hotel design and experience themes. They

A successful experience is not only about getting from Point A to Point B. It is about the journey."

— Robert Chan, practice leader for IBM Canada's e-access solutions

cater to people of various generations as well as to people's lifestyles and to the goals of their stay."

The same level of attention and consistency in design, experience and usability needs to be applied to the kiosk solution.

"The graphics need to reflect the hotel brand," he said. "The flow of the application needs to be simple and functional. It needs to be a delightful experience. It should offer amenities at the appropriate times.

"It should recognize me as a frequent guest. It should recognize my loyalty. Much like my mom knows me and gives me my due reward, the hotel kiosk should do the same."

"Easy user interface is absolutely important," Dave McCracken, president of Livewire International, said. "An interface like that includes a clean look, not a lot of clutter, helps the person through the process."

He also said clear, precise instructions that guide the person through what to do with limited text and audio prompting can help.

Kiosks should not look like they came from the garbage dump. Usability and aesthetics are important to factor in when placing a kiosk in the hotel environment.

"With a transactional interface, I think it's most important that you try to provide the information to the user about what steps are taking place and give them a clear procedural path through the process," he said.

One of the other important pieces of the user interface is that it should be a part of the hotel's infrastructure, said Clyde Dishman, NCR's director of hospitality industry marketing.

"We have to evolve the interfaces into the property management systems so that it is seamless and as if you were going to the front desk," Dishman said.

"The challenge is to do it so efficiently and consistently that the hotel starts worrying about their front-desk staff," Chan said.

Chapter 5: Put it in the right spot

Hotels, particularly resorts, are dealing with high levels of customers. When you go to Las Vegas, you typically stand in line for long periods of time. You get busloads of people all arriving or leaving at the same time. So the hotels want to be able to process those people quickly, said Dave Mc-Cracken, president of Livewire International.

And in today's world, you have self-service check-in through various stages of the travel process with airlines. The younger generation is getting more accustomed to self-check-in. A lot of people just don't want to deal with other people. They know what to do themselves. You get frequent travelers that know what to do and they want quick service.

But what if they can't find the kiosk to use it?

Location, location, location. It's an old cliché for sure, but it is another necessary step to help companies make the most of their kiosk deployments. If customers cannot find the kiosk, they will continue along in the long lines and remain frustrated.

"The kiosk has got to be close to where the front desk is located so you can redirect people to the kiosks," McCracken said.

Livewire helped a bank in Bermuda
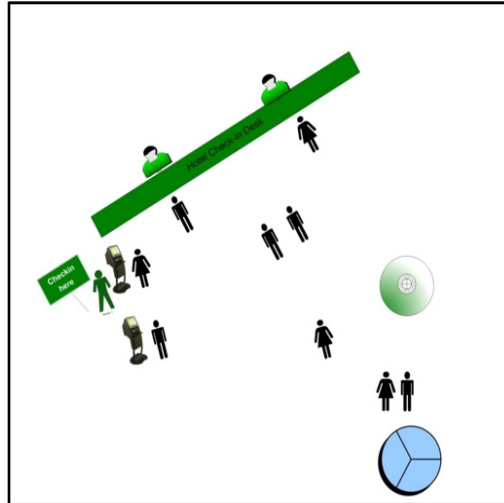
It's important to put a kiosk in a place where it will be seen and won't crowd the front-desk area.

deploy kiosks that were right next to the bank's cashiers.

"The bank just did a great job in deploying those kiosks in terms of having one person right next to the kiosk to help and having another one at the back near the entrance to the line to the manned booths," McCracken said.

"Breaking the herd mentality is a key concept to keep in mind when determining the position of the kiosk and the flow of guests through a hotel lobby," said Robert Chan, practice leader for IBM Canada's e-access solutions.

For the airlines, breaking the herd mentality continues today even with the success rates they have achieved. The changing airport lobby model has fewer check-in desks and more kiosks.

One way to make sure that people

see the kiosk is to put it outside the hotel on the curb. That is what one Starwood resort hotel did.

Opryland Hotel Nashville, part of the Gaylord Entertainment Company, is the largest hotel-convention center under one roof in the world with 2,883 guestrooms, 600,000 square feet of convention space, 9 acres of indoor gardens, a quarter-mile indoor river, retail shops and restaurants. More than 4 million guests stay in the hotel annually.

John Eslick, director of strategic systems development for the Opryland Hotel, said the hotel needed to decentralize its check-in procedures.

"There were two main issues that prompted us to think about mobile check-in points," Eslick said. "Firstly, when you normally think of a 3,000-room property, you think of towers. We have only five floors and our rooms and facilities are spread out over a square mile.

"Secondly, because of the conventions, guest arrival patterns can be quite demanding. We often have a large influx of guests within a short time frame. For some conventions, we may have over 2,000 delegates arriving in the afternoon or evening before. We communicate with the meeting/convention planners about the anticipated arrival time of delegates. That allows us to prepare for

> "Breaking the herd mentality is a key concept to keep in mind when determining the position of the kiosk and the flow of guests through a hotel lobby."
>
> — Robert Chan, practice leader for IBM Canada's e-access solutions

large group arrivals to some degree.

"Traditionally, we have two main desks and, combined, those provide for 24 stationary registration work areas. We would set out stanchion holders that go back and forth to create what is notoriously known as a banking queue, instead of having individual lines behind each 24 stations. Still, with all that planning, on peak arrival days guests may need to queue for 15 minutes before they are checked in."

Opryland created a kiosk solution that allowed them to have roving registration points for both check-in and check-out.

"When large groups of guests check out, you don't want people standing in line," Eslick said. "In fact, there shouldn't be a need for guests to come to the registration desk at all."

To handle the introduction of self-service into its organization, Opryland chose the Lodging Management System as its property management and reservation system, to replace

its internally maintained and customized systems. In addition to having a robust hotel management system, LMS also provided integrated Web reservations and was already well advanced in piloting wireless check-in facilities.

With the LMS Mobile Express, hotel staff can welcome customers throughout the hotel with a handheld, Web-enabled computer from Symbol Technologies that fits into a pocket and weighs 288 grams. Staff can use handwriting and GUI controls to perform a complete check-in and make changes to a reservation, as well as other tasks that are typically performed at a stationary computer at the front desk. A Symbol Portable Encoding Printer strapped around the shoulder or belt gives full mobility to the process with the ability to produce receipts, read credit cards and program room keys.

The handheld devices communicate over Symbol's Wireless LAN to access points located throughout the hotel. The access points on Symbol's 11-megabyte wireless LAN use TCP/IP to connect to Opryland's iSeries that runs the core business LMS system.

"The concept is to have a welcome reception for a group, and walk through to offer check-in registration," Eslick said. "At check-in, the guest's credit card is swiped through the printer/swiper. This triggers a search for the guest's credit card and name in the LMS system. LMS then follows the normal check-in procedures, including finding the appropriate room, verifying its cleanliness and readiness, taking the credit card and going out for authorization."

The result of this self-service system is a unique customer experience.

"We can greet you at the car, assist you with your luggage and at the same time we can check you in," said Tom Xavier, director of front-office operations for the Opryland Hotel. "You don't have to walk to the reception area and stand in a line. We can also meet you nearby your room, or do group check in any of our lobbies or restaurants. Wireless check-in sets a very good first impression."

"We made it easier for our guests to get in and out of our hotel," said Ray Waters, senior vice president and general manager. "This is just one added feature the hotel is providing as we enhance the guest experience and continue our three-year and $80 million renovation of the hotel."

Signage to promote check-in and other hotel amenities

Each year, local political candidates place signs advertising their candidacy around the towns they live in. Their hope, among many, is that local denizens will see their names on

the signs and make a cognitive connection when they make it to the polls in November.

A similar strategy is employed at hotels and motels when promoting self-service check-in, the hotel's event calendar, facility maps and other promotions and advertising. Though many prefer self-service technology, they will not use the kiosks and machines unless they are in clear view or pointed in the right direction with signage.

"Signage, digital or otherwise, is important to the deployment," McCracken said. "But you have to be careful that it doesn't distract from its original purpose of getting people to use the kiosks."

Many hotels and motels have begun to use digital signage as a way to attract guests and customers. The Hyatt Regency Chicago is one of the many hotel chains that have embraced the signage technology.

The Hyatt's installation included 40-inch NEC MultiSync LCD4010 and 32-inch NEC MultiSync LCD3210 displays to cover the public areas and 228,000 square feet of meeting space at the Hyatt.

Each day, thousands of guests visit Hyatt Regency Chicago for conferences, events and meetings. Due to the high-traffic volume, traditional means of directional information, such as easels and printed signs, were not

providing timely updates as information changed, and they also caused clutter. The Hyatt chose Hospitality Partners to integrate a full digital-signage, wayfinding solution to better meet the needs of hotel visitors.

"Not only are the NEC LCD displays and digital signage software functional and beneficial to hotel guests, but they also provide an elegantly pleasing addition to the hotel décor," Martin Kwitschau, chief executive of Hospitality Partners, said in a news release. "The display's sleek frame and the screen quality enable an extremely high-color scheme, which allows images on the display to match each location within the hotel. The displays look great and serve a useful purpose."

The combination of NEC LCD displays and Omnivex software eliminates or decreases the need for guests to read printed signs or consult hotel management for directions to their meeting rooms. The solution can display real-time traffic, forecasted weather or up-to-the-minute flight status. The Omnivex software customizes all the content based on time of day, location and client requests and has the capability to direct individual meeting attendees to the proper meeting room utilizing RFID technology.

"Our goals for implementing this system have been fully achieved,"

said Patrick Donelly, general manager of Hyatt Regency Chicago. "In addition to providing a valuable service, we wanted to impress our guests and clients with the technological capabilities of the system, providing them streamlined information, captivating motion graphics and demonstrating how the hotel is technologically ahead of our competition."

Bottom line, any type of kiosk deployment needs to go where people expect to go to check in, unless you have some other way of attracting people to the self-service devices.

"If it's over by a post where no one can see it, are they ever going to use it? No, and you've probably wasted your time and effort in moving in the self-service direction," said Clyde Dishman, NCR's director of hospitality industry marketing.

Three tips for placing a kiosk
By Robert Chan, practice leader for IBM Canada's e-access solutions

• Line of sight
Put the kiosks in the flow of traffic from the entrance to the front desk.
Don't put them where they are noticed only after the check-in is done. Don't make the position of a flower pot more important than the kiosk. If you have welcome greeters for guests as they arrive into your hotel, do you put them behind a pole or at the end of the counter?

• Position well during wait time
Line of sight and line of flow will help. However, people still will miss the kiosks as they are preoccupied on their journey to the front desk. While waiting in line, guest attention focuses to the task at hand.

A customer's goal usually is to find an available agent. He may be next in line to be serviced or fifth in line. In either situation, the customer is focused on getting to the front desk. But if he sees someone in front of him go to the kiosk, he can be encouraged to walk over and use it. What does he have to lose? He's last in line anyway. Once the first person goes and is successful, the herd mentality kicks in and another person goes. Don't underestimate the power of the herd mentality. It can be a positive and negative contributor.

• Advertise
Use signage to promote awareness. There can be lobby signage or in-room signage. For large hotels, put signage near the convention areas. E-mail notification also is a great way to announce and prepare for guest for arrival.

Chapter 6: Help the staff learn to love it

Hotel bellmen have long been a staple at mid- to upper-class hotels and motels. The bellmen would hold the door open for guests, take their baggage and some would even park the customer's swanky Jaguar or Porsche. But, you can argue, bellmen are at fewer and fewer hotels, even though many hotels still have that same quality customer service.

One of the reasons this is happening revolves around hotel self-service and the appropriation of hotel front-desk clerks and staff.

Deploying a kiosk is all about operating the process efficiently and making it part of the experience the guest has. It's not different, and it's seamless to the whole process, said Clyde Dishman, NCR's director of hospitality industry marketing.

"I think it's most effective at those places that say this is part of the normal process and I'm not going to change things drastically," he said. "I am still going to have someone out there to greet the guests as they come in and have them out there, so that they can offer the self-service option and assist them if they need help."

When a kiosk joins the front-desk team, team members have a lot of questions.

What is it? What does it do? Will it do

> ## "For a kiosk to be an accepted member of the team, it has to function as a team member."
>
> — Robert Chan, practice leader for IBM Canada's e-access solutions

the job right? Will it work? Do I have to know anything about it? Will it replace me?

Even thinking about that last question will make an employee feel threatened.

"For a kiosk to be an accepted member of the team, it has to function as a team member," said Robert Chan, practice leader for IBM Canada's e-access solutions.

Some other questions to consider:

• Is the kiosk pleasant to look at?
Does it meet the hotel brand and lobby design? It is a reflection of the team and it needs to meet the same level of expectation. Therefore, the design of the kiosk needs to fit the lobby. IBM has several models of kiosks from freestanding and counter-top to kiosks designed into the mill-work. Many color options are available to suit any lobby environment.

• Punctual and ready to work?
These are handled by the reliability and robustness of the kiosk solution. As stated earlier in this guide, the kiosk needs to achieve a high level of

The staff at the front desk need to understand that installing kiosks are a way to make their jobs better rather than to take their jobs away.

availability. Of course, this is higher than an agent, but then again the kiosk cannot go home when it is not feeling well.

• Does the job and shares the load?
This is achieved by making sure the kiosk does what is expected. The kiosk must not be a drag on the performance of the front desk. It should help clear queues.

• Does other things than just check-in/out?
The hotel needs to constantly look at what else the kiosk can do during off-peak times. Of course, during the peak times, only the key features should be offered with the others disabled.

• Successful?
Tracking the performance of the kiosk is very important. Hotel management

Chapter 6: Help the staff learn to love it

needs to track its successes and failures. If it does not pull its weight, how can the team love it? They know it is not perfect. Tell them what is wrong and what is being done to improve it. You would expect this if a human team member was underperforming.

• A threat? Most importantly, the kiosk must not threaten the human team members. They must not feel like it could take away their jobs.

The people at the bell stand need to be cognizant of the self-service process because they can be of assistance to guests in the kiosk area, as well. You need to have everyone on board and make sure they understand how to operate a self-service environment properly.

But one of the most important aspects is to make sure the staff understands the purpose of the kiosk's job is not get rid of them.

"The people at the front desk need to understand that this is a way to make their job better rather than taking their job away," Dishman said. "Self-service, in most cases, doesn't really reduce labor. It just allows you to deploy that labor differently. Now I can take someone from behind that front desk who usually has to stand there all day and let them go out and greet people, if that's the kind of personality that they have, and now they can become a revenue-producing employee

instead of standing behind a desk and receiving information and punching it into a computer all day."

The Hyatt Hotels brand is one of the hotel chains that have benefited from self-service and moving staff duties from the front desk to other areas where customer service is needed. Matt Adams, vice president and managing director of the Grand Hyatt New York, said he sees the kiosks as a big step in his company's plan to serve its guests.

The Grand Hyatt, located in the heart of midtown Manhattan, contains 11 check-in kiosks, 10 in the lobby and one on the hotel's club level. The first two were installed in early 2006, with the others coming as guest usage increased steadily.

"In this day and age, the traveler is more sophisticated and they are more self-empowered to use technology to make their travel process easier," Adams said. "We followed the airlines' lead with the check-in kiosks."

There are 211 Hyatt hotels and resorts around the world. Hyatt Hotels Corp. and its subsidiaries operate, manage, franchise or lease 120 hotels and resorts alone in the United States, Canada and the Caribbean, according a news release. In early 2005, the hotel chain added self-service check-in/check-out kiosks to more than 100 of its lobbies in Hyatt

Chapter 6: Help the staff learn to love it

Regency and Grand Hyatt hotels.

"Customers expect quick, easy check-in and check-out processes," Gary Dollens, vice president of product and design for Hyatt Hotels Corporation, said in the release. "Investment in technology such as the kiosks gives Hyatt guests the unique opportunity to control their entire arrival and departure experiences."

Hyatt's self-service kiosks are tied into the company's reservation system, Hyatt officials said. Much like the airport kiosks that travelers have become accustomed to, the kiosks read information on a credit card that a guest swipes to begin both check-in and check-out. Once the system recognizes the name and reservation, upon check-in guests can receive their room key, enter their frequent stay Hyatt Gold Passport number and request an upgrade or room change. While checking out, the kiosk gives guests the ability to pay, print out a complete receipt and receive a folio of their stay.

"In most cases, Hyatt guests can complete their check-in/check-out transactions in under a minute," said Tracy Flynn, vice president of hospitality solutions at NCR. "NCR is excited to be partnering with Hyatt to give travelers a new service that differentiates Hyatt Hotels & Resorts from other hospitality companies."

The proprietary technology installed in NCR's EasyPoint Xpress Check-In kiosks soon will allow customers to choose the newspaper they want delivered to their room, make dinner reservations and select from a variety of activities at Hyatt's resort locations.

The self-service kiosks are a supplement to the personal attention customers receive from employees at Hyatt Hotels & Resorts. For those seeking traditional face-to-face interaction at check-in and check-out, their experiences will not be affected by the addition of the new service to Hyatt lobbies. This is another plus to the kiosks entering the hospitality area, Adams said.

"The front-office staff is now able to focus on offering personalized guest service instead of just checking people in and out," he said.

For the employees themselves, many have embraced the change to self-service. Mike Kiesel is the director of rooms at the Hyatt Regency in Louisville, Ky. He's manned a front desk for 15 years, from the time hotel desks first were automated via computer. Since then, computers have crept slowly to the front of the desk, where customers can now check themselves in via kiosk.

But most hotels still offer the option of having someone at the front desk.

"One thing I've found is, there are always going to be people that don't

want to do it themselves," Kiesel said. "They want someone there to assist them. We are happy if people use it (the kiosk), but we really like that personal interaction so we're always going to have front-desk personnel to assist one-on-one. Our whole purpose is to provide another option for people who want it."

Even though the kiosks are not intended to replace the front desk, "it is possible they will lead to some labor cost savings over time," said Tom Conophy, former chief technical officer at Starwood Hotels & Resorts Worldwide, whose brands include Sheraton, Westin, St. Regis and W Hotels. "It would depend on overall adaptation to the kiosk technology."

If front-desk staffing is cut back, those employees would likely be "repurposed" into serving guests in other ways, Conophy said in a 2005 USA Today article.

Labor has been a growing issue for large U.S. hotels, many of which have faced protracted labor disputes from unions pressing for higher wages, better working conditions, shorter contracts and better health-care benefits.

While union activities have failed to put a damper on a strong profit recovery in the hospitality industry, wage increases are looming as one of the biggest challenges facing hotels in the coming year.

Labor makes up 45 percent of hotel operating expenses, according to the Atlanta office of hospitality consultants PKF Consulting.

Expenses — payrolls, benefits and training — are rising faster than inflation rates, PKF said, with labor costs per available room climbing to an estimated $13,834 in 2004 from $12,540 in 2002.

But the focus, regardless of the bottom line, should remain on customers and their experience at the hotel or motel, Dishman said. That customer focus will later breed loyalty and, furthermore, a bottom line that will not be easily measured.

Chapter 7: Case Study: Hilton Hotels

Hilton Hotels Corp. is a leading global hospitality company, with nearly 2,800 hotels and 500,000 rooms in more than 76 countries. More than 2,300 hotels are owned, managed or franchised in the United States with a portfolio of popular hotel brands including Hilton, Conrad, Doubletree, Embassy Suites Hotels, Hampton Inn, Hampton Inn & Suites, Hilton Garden Inn, Hilton Grand Vacations, Homewood Suites by Hilton and The Waldorf=Astoria Collection.

The Hilton brand features about 500 full-service hotels and resorts in locations throughout the world. Flagship properties include The Waldorf=Astoria and Hilton Hawaiian Village Beach Resort and Spa among others.

More than 500 IBM hotel check-in kiosks, the majority of them IBM Anyplace kiosks, are deployed by the Hilton brand. All of the kiosks are located at Embassy Suites and Hilton hotel locations. Those kiosks have been in deployment since the end of 2004.

The goal of the Hilton kiosk deployments was to provide choice, convenience and control for guests, said David Walpole, director of self-service development for Hilton Hotels. And they've almost gotten there.

"It's been a work in progress, but to a large extent, it has been a success," Walpole said. "But I know we can do even better."

In the large "big box" hotels such as the property at Chicago O'Hare Airport, many of the guests stay for shorter periods of time. At those hotels, the check-in kiosks have been an amazing help, Walpole said.

"They've been able to incorporate the kiosks as team members themselves," he said. "As opposed to reducing staff, and Hilton and Embassy Suites have never seen it as a way to reduce staff, they are increasing the efficiency of getting guests checked in."

Much like a live staff member, the hotels have a daily checklist for the kiosks to make sure they are "groomed" properly.

"Much like you check to see if your staff has their hair combed and their shirt tucked in, you check the kiosk to see if they have paper and if they are working correctly," Walpole said.

One of the more recent features of the Hilton kiosk is its ability to print airline boarding passes.
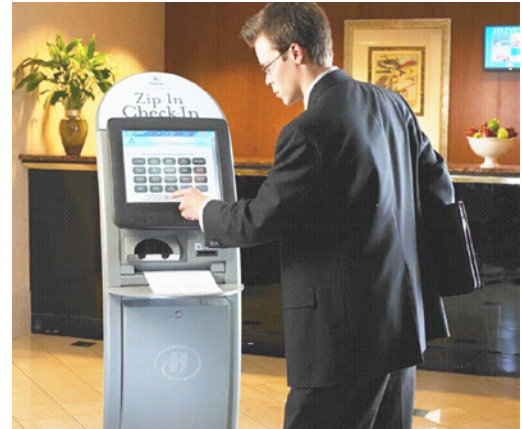
More than 500 IBM hotel check-in kiosks, the majority of them IBM Anyplace kiosks, are deployed by the Hilton brand. All of the kiosks are located at Embassy Suites and Hilton hotel locations.

Chapter 7: Case Study: Hilton Hotels

The technology interfaces with 27 major airlines. To print boarding passes, hotel guests follow the simple step-by-step instructions on the kiosk. Using the airlines' own Web pages, they can check in for their flights, change seats, request upgrades and print their boarding passes at the kiosk. There is no cost to the guest for this service.

Additional existing features of the Hilton check-in kiosks include enabling guests to view their reservation, check in to the hotel, obtain the room key and view pre-arrival messages. At the end of the stay, travelers can check out at a kiosk by reviewing their bill, confirming or changing the payment method and printing or e-mailing a copy of the receipt. Hotel staff is trained to greet guests, answer questions and assist, if needed, at the kiosks. Traditional front-desk services and guest assistance will continue to be available to all customers.

One of Hilton's unique self-service situations is at the Hilton Hawaiian Village Beach Resort & Spa and the Honolulu International Airport. Some of the Honolulu check-in kiosks are located in the airport's baggage claim area so passengers can check in before they arrive at the hotel.

"They have done an amazing job of incorporating the kiosk into their situations," Walpole said.

> ## "Much like you check to see if your staff has their hair combed and their shirt tucked in, you check the kiosk to see if they have paper and if they are working correctly."
>
> — Robert Chan, practice leader for IBM Canada's e-access solutions

The following is a copy of a news release Hilton issued when the kiosks were placed at the Honolulu airport.

HONOLULU, Sept. 8, 2004 — Hilton Hawaiian Village Beach Resort & Spa and the Honolulu International Airport will offer self-service kiosks that will allow Hilton guests to check into the hotel and get their room keys — before they even claim their baggage and leave the airport. Hilton is installing four kiosks at the airport, two each in Baggage Claim areas "G" and "H," which serve United, Continental, Northwest and American Airlines.

The kiosks will be readily identifiable with Hilton signage. Hilton and IBM developed the kiosk hardware and software and began testing it in lobbies of selected hotels on the U.S. mainland in January 2004. Hilton is on target to install 100 kiosks in 45 hotels by the end of 2004. Hilton believes this is the first full-ser-

vice hotel kiosk in an airport. Hilton Hawaiian Village is also installing three kiosks in its Main Lobby to provide guests with an alternative to the high touch service associated with a traditional front-desk check-in. The kiosks may also be used for check-out or as a private check-in solution for large groups.

"We are delighted to work with the team of the Honolulu International Airport and Hawaii Department of Transportation on this important leap forward in the travel and tourism industry," said Peter H. Schall, senior vice president of Hilton Hotels Corporation — Hawaii Region and managing director of Hilton Hawaiian Village. "Cooperative efforts such as this are yet another example of the commitment by the state and the tourism industry to keep Hawaii at the forefront of customer service and technology."

The kiosks function in much the same way as airline self-service kiosks for air travelers using e-tickets. After inserting a credit card for identification purposes, guests can follow a set of simple onscreen instructions and utilize the touchscreens to check into the hotel. The kiosk displays the traveler's reservation information, offers a room based on the customer's known preferences, which the customer can accept or change, issues a room key and provides printed room directions and information. The kiosks can also offer guests the opportunity to upgrade to more premium accommoda-

Hilton Hawaiian Village Beach Resort & Spa and the Honolulu International Airport offer self-service kiosks that allow Hilton guests to check into the hotel and get their room keys before they claim their baggage and leave the airport.

tions than originally reserved, should the guest desire. Hilton guest service agents will be on hand at the airport to answer questions and assist guests in the check-in process.

Hilton's long term commitment to personal service and a warm welcome adds to the convenience, control and efficiency the kiosk check-in provides. Guest service agents will also have access to Hilton's entire technology platform OnQ via Xybernaut Atigo wireless, handheld computers.

Chapter 7: Case Study: Hilton Hotels

At the end of the stay, the traveler can check out at a kiosk in the same fashion by reviewing and confirming their bill and printing out a receipt for their records. At check-out customers can also change their payment credit card, enter HHonors and airline frequent flier account numbers and request an e-mail copy of their receipt.

"This is the trend of the future," said Dieter Huckestein, president of hotel operations, owned and managed, Hilton Hotels Corporation. "Seasoned travelers, whether on business or vacation, value time and convenience. At Hilton, we continue to explore new technologies to meet their needs, and we hope to roll out this technology in other locations around the country in the future."

"These kiosks are an exciting addition to an array of high-tech services we already provide our guests at Hilton Hawaiian Village," said Schall. "With high-speed Internet access scheduled to be in place in all of our of guest rooms by the end of the month, wireless Internet access in many of our meeting and public areas and an impressive array of technology-based services throughout the resort, even the most tech-savvy guest can stay connected at the Village."

APPENDIX: Further reading

Hyatt to lean heavily on self-service

By Bryan Harris

This article originally appeared in January 2006 on SelfServiceWorld.com.

Hyatt Hotels Corp. deployed 100 self-check-in kiosks to its upscale chain in February 2005. Now, the company is expanding its deployment to double that number, and adding more services along the way. Hyatt Hotels vice president of operations Matt Adams explained how kiosks improve service and efficiency.

SSW: How has Hyatt benefited from its self-service check-in kiosks?

MA: As we continue to evolve our kiosks, we see a larger adoption rate. We're also using it for all our back-office applications moving forward. We want the platform to be based on the kiosk. We want the front-desk staff to be less transaction- and more customer-service-oriented and let the kiosk manage the transaction.

SSW: How have Hyatt's guests benefited?

MA: Our guests have benefited from the ease and speed of use, especially in our larger convention hotels. I was at the Hyatt Miami the other day. When cruise ship guests are ready to depart, they don't have to wait in a line or a queue for front-desk staff to handle it.

SSW: Have you seen any demonstrable effects in cost savings?

MA: We'll see that by the end of 2006 for sure as our deployments and roll-outs in hotels increase tremendously. Our goal in converting agents from transactions to customer service will definitely create efficiency. There will be significant cost savings by the time we have them all deployed, moving through this year.

SSW: What features are most popularly used on your kiosks?

MA: The ability of the kiosk to manage room location. They can actually go in and select where their room is located in the building, select by high, medium, low floor, close to the elevator or not. Another thing we've seen good usage on is making sure their frequent traveler programs are loaded properly, so that they're receiving their credit. We have a series of enhancements we're also rolling out in the next phase of our software release to choose food and beverage amenities so they can choose what time they want it delivered and not have to use the phone.

SSW: What have you upgraded so far?

MA: We're at the next phase, which will add the gold passport information. But we're working on some other features, the way that it processes debit cards more efficiently. We're looking

at the kiosk to become the basis for a boarding pass interface, so you can also print out your boarding pass at that time. We want to deploy a Web-based boarding pass check-in product. If you're going to L.A. from New York, you log into the Web site, and before I go to the airport I'm already checked in and have my room number. We think it will be a real benefit to our customers.

SSW: What is your personal favorite hospitality self-service device?

MA: I like the ability to access wireless Internet from a hotel lobby. I don't like having to go someplace to use a computer. It just makes the portability of your workplace so much greater. The other would be the ability to check into the airline and get my boarding pass and bypass the old operation.

SSW: What will the next step in hospitality self-service be?

MA: That's another product we're in the process of developing: the ability to retrieve your guest folio, like you can do now with any of your credit card statements. That way, if I check out, I can call my assistant to process my expense account without waiting for me to get back to the office. I can completely eliminate the check-out process at the hotel. That's the next wave.

Behind the screens: Mike Kiesel, hotel clerk

By Bryan Harris

This article originally appeared in March 2007 in Self-Service World magazine.

Mike Kiesel is the director of rooms at the Hyatt Regency in Louisville, Ky. He's manned a front desk for 15 years, from the time hotel desks were first automated via computer. Since then, computers have slowly crept to the front of the desk, where customers can now check themselves in via kiosk.

SSW: How has the hotel front desk changed since you've been there?

MK: I started maybe a year after Hyatt hotels got a computer system. Before, you had a big board with all the rooms on it and keys on chains. And the housekeeper would come down and tell you what rooms were clean.

SSW: What kinds of things do you talk to customers about?

MK: You hear a lot of things about just people's lives. Sometimes it's like being a bartender. During Derby last year, we had a lady who hit a winning ticket for like $250,000. That's pretty interesting. Of course, in different hotels, (there are) different entertainers and celebrities that you get to talk to. That's probably more exciting for the average employee.

SSW: What kind of customers leave your staff the best tips?

MK: Typically someone who has worked in food and beverage. From a guest services side, really if you give good service, a wealthy person will do well, but I've seen wealthy people who just give an average tip. I've never been in a position to receive tips, but I know they're usually pretty good. I know a lot of football players … are good about it. Most celebrities are very nice.

SSW: What kinds of customers use self-check-in?

MK: I see people in their 40s use it pretty often. Really, it just comes down to different generations might be more comfortable with technology. If someone is technologically savvy, they're more likely to go to it. I have seen people of all ages use it. We have a fast board, also, where you can print out your boarding passes right here in the lobby. I think, maybe, a younger generation might look for it more. But I really haven't seen where there is that much difference. We try to put it in places where everyone can see it.

SSW: Have kiosks changed how the front desk works?

MK: One thing I've found is, there's always going to be people that don't

want to do it themselves. They want someone there to assist them. We are happy if people use it (the kiosk), but we really like that personal inter-action so we're always going to have front desk personnel to assist one-on-one. Our whole purpose is to provide another option for people who want it.

APPENDIX: Further reading

Myth-busting

By Bill Yackey

This article originally appeared in Self-Service World magazine in July 2007.

Somewhere on the Discovery Channel, two eccentric scientists are in a laboratory trying to figure out if an opera singer really can break glass with her voice.

There is no lab here at Self-Service World, but a myth-busting team has been assembled in an effort to demolish some common misconceptions about kiosks and self-service.

With the help of a crack team of super experts, we've identified seven monster myths to examine and expose for the falsehoods they are.

Myth #1: Kiosks will take everyone's jobs

Kiosks do replace jobs. But they usually are of the repetitive kind and are machine-like in nature. The secret to self-service success is one preached by industry experts: redeployment, not unemployment.

The Home Depot's former CEO, Robert Nardelli, fell victim to this myth. Under his direction, the hardware store giant began implementing self-checkout in 2003. Many of its regular check-out lines were eliminated, as well as the cashiers who operated

them. The result was a wave of disgruntled customers who were having trouble checking out 15-foot pieces of plywood with that little barcode scanner and no one around to help. Company growth was stunted, share prices stagnated and Nardelli resigned in January 2007.

The truth is, employees displaced by self-service should be redeployed into customer-service roles. In a store as vast as Home Depot, customers were looking for knowledgeable assistants who also could help carry that plywood.

Peter Snyder, managing director for International Kiosk Group for KIOSK Information Systems, saw this myth busted when one of America's largest quick-service restaurant chains tried its hand at self-service ordering. The chain added seven kiosks per store in several locations to test and get feedback on the performance.

The result of the deployment was a significant increase in customer volume and sales for the stores with kiosks, Snyder said. The restaurants needed the former order-takers in the kitchen to keep up with the extra traffic that was moving through the restaurant.

Rufus Connell, industry research director with Frost & Sullivan, said self-service has the potential of being a "force multiplier." Grocery self-

checkouts usually have one employee per four machines. In a sense, the one employee has become four times more effective. The displaced employees serve in customer-service roles to drive sales from within the store and not just from behind the cash register. "The trick is to make employees more effective, rather than firing them," Connell said.

Myth #2: Elderly people won't use a kiosk

Older people sometimes are stereotyped as technophobes. But, when approached the right way, this demographic provides some of the most loyal and repetitive users of self-service. In this business, age doesn't necessarily define acceptance.

"The airlines continue to do it right," said Frances Mendelsohn, president of Summit Research Associates. "The airlines who took the time — and patience — to show the elderly how to use the kiosks reaped the benefits. American Airlines was particularly effective in being proactive in getting people out of line to check in at the kiosks."

It is a myth that older folks are not big risk-takers with technology. They are not as apt to embrace new technology such as kiosks right away, but they appreciate that kiosks usually provide a faster, easier transaction or service with no jive from the teenage cashier.

Bill Lynch, vice president of self-service for financial and bill-payment kiosk manufacturer Source Technologies, was observing a pilot project of financial kiosks in a bank. As an elderly woman left the kiosk, he asked her why she chose to use the kiosk rather than the teller.

"I always know how long it's going to take me," the woman said. She patted the kiosk and said, "Plus, this thing doesn't have an attitude."

Myth #3: The more features on a machine, the better

Kiosks usually are designed to complete one task, such as checking out of retail stores or checking into a flight at the airport. Imagine if those machines offered a plethora of functions. Suddenly you're waiting to purchase a gift card at a kiosk while the lady in front of you fills out a credit application. More is not always better.

The ATM industry learned this lesson the hard way. In the mid-to late '90s, ATM deployers in the retail space wanted to enhance the cash-dispensing experience by offering services such as coupon dispensing, event ticket and lottery ticket sales — most of which failed miserably.

Why? Tracy Kitten, editor of ATM Marketplace, said ultimately the additional functions failed because consumers didn't want them. "Too many options led to too many choices

and long wait times. What consumers wanted was fast, convenient access to their cash," she said.

The truth is, simpler really is better. Self-service machines that have too many applications and features have the potential to annoy customers more than please them.

"If you put too many applications into a machine, the original intent becomes diluted and convoluted," said Lynch. "Businesses must know why the self-service device is there and stick to deploying applications that meet their objectives."

When introducing self-service, Mendelsohn suggests beginning with a few applications to see how they fly with customers. From there, you can add new applications or take away unnecessary ones.

"Very few kiosks with multiple applications are truly successful," Mendelsohn said. "The killer application will always rise to the top."

If in doubt, ask, "What is this kiosk's original purpose?" Let transactional kiosks handle transactions. Let informational kiosks provide information. The original intent behind many kiosks is to eliminate customer wait times. Flooding the machine with options and excess features lengthens customer use time, as well as customer wait time.

"Technology allows us to do a lot, but just because we can do it, doesn't mean that we always need to do it," Lynch said.

Myth #4: A kiosk will fix everything

Industry experts understand the benefits as well as the limitations of self-service kiosks, but one commonly discussed myth is that kiosks are kryptonite to business problems.

"Nonsense," Mendelsohn said. "Yet there are deployers out there who actually believe it."

Now for the truth: Simply adding a kiosk will not boost your business, increase sales or bring in customers. But integrating self-service into your business model will. A kiosk should be an extension of good customer service, not a replacement function.

Before adding a self-service function, Lynch suggests deployers ask two questions. First, is this kiosk what the customer wants? Second, will the kiosk improve customer service?

The airline industry, where self-service has seen some of its greatest gains, answered yes to both questions. Travelers wanted to bypass the interaction at the check-out counter, which could take up to 15 minutes, exchanging it for a quick, self-controlled process. In this situation, kiosks improved customer service by reducing wait times.

Business rules regarding human interaction are still the same, however: The customer is always right; use the customer's language; keep working until you reach a resolution. These customer-service principles must be in practice whether or not kiosks are present.

Relying completely on self-service kiosks is a real danger, mainly because downtime is unpredictable but also because there will always be a number of customers who prefer human interaction or who simply have a problem the kiosk can't solve.

"Traveling around, I see a lot of kiosks that are never used," Lynch said, "[because] these were just put up with the idea that customers would have more access to service, but they still don't replace some level of human interaction. ... Isn't it interesting that airports are full of check-in kiosks, but still have the retired gentleman sitting at an information counter to help guide visitors around town?"

Myth #5: If you build it, they will come

Not all customers naturally gravitate to self-service the instant it's available. Incorporating self-service into a business requires that employees provide a certain amount of hand-holding for customers.

"You can't plop technology in a store just for the sake of having technol-

ogy," said Brian Ardinger, senior vice president and chief marketing officer for kiosk software developer Nanonation.

Even ATMs didn't catch on right away. Most people found out about the advantages of ATMs when they made it to the bank five minutes after closing time and were forced to use them.

Alamo Rent-a-Car doesn't plan to wait for customers to notice its kiosks. A recent ad campaign features car-rental customers "Al" (a beaver) and "Mo" (a buffalo). In the commercials, the beaver, the smarter of the two, tries to convince the buffalo to master his "herd instinct," get out of line and use the kiosk.

Companies who don't have the budget for a national advertising campaign still can promote their kiosk programs. One of the most effective methods of introducing people to self-service is to have an attendant on hand to walk people through their first interaction.

For a kiosk to take off in popularity, not only must it be reliable and easy to find, but people must recognize the advantage the kiosk will bring them. An effective signage solution draws attention to the machine and gives deployers a chance to notify customers of its purpose. The signage does not have to be digital, but a how-to video is a great way to introduce a kiosk to customers.

"An attract loop can help a great deal," Mendelsohn said. "People have to know what the kiosk is all about before they will lay a finger on it. They are not as adventurous as you think."

Myth #6: Kiosks guarantee upsell

The upsell. Once reserved for tactful sales associates, now machines ask: "Do you want fries with that?"

Kiosks are beginning to show a stronger presence in the quick-serve restaurant sector as self-ordering machines. A common misconception among deployers is that these kiosks will result in more revenue because they upsell each transaction, unerringly pushing more of those value meals with every order.

"Just because you have a kiosk asking the question doesn't mean you will see an increase from it," said Stephen Gregorie, vice president of marketing and customer experience for Pro-Tech. "You can't plug in a kiosk and expect magic; those who believe that and act on the assumption are often disappointed."

For QSRs and any retail kiosk deployment, the art of the upsell still must include a personalized approach to sales that informs customers of the value they can receive. For a kiosk, its ability to remember customers and offer specific suggestions can help upselling.

"Whether the upsell is accepted or not is a personal decision," Snyder said. "With a person, the cashier doing the upsell can react to the customer's acceptance level and then vary his approach."

Myth #7: Kiosks are plug, play and forget

A kiosk is a computer in a box. True, it is made for 24/7 operability, but just like a PC, the kiosk's internal CPU is subject to lock-ups. Once installed, kiosks require regular attention and maintenance from the deployer.

"Sometimes, vendors are guilty of setting unfair expectations for kiosk reliability," said Frost & Sullivan's Connell.

In general, kiosks are made very well. Most often, downtime is caused when expendables — such as paper and ink — run out. With transactional kiosks, it is common to have too much money in the machine, in which case it will jam because it can't accept anymore.

It is important to have a maintenance plan in place so your kiosk printer can continue printing and its cassette can continue accepting money. When devising a plan, start with the lowest common denominator. What is the weakest link? It may be the printer, the money cassette or the CPU.

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The maintenance plan relies on having employees capable of simple maintenance, such as adding paper or ink or removing money. If it is a more serious problem, employees fill the kiosk's role, whether it is a service or transaction.

Nanonation's Ardinger reminds deployers that kiosk software also needs maintenance. "Since the kiosk is part of the environment of the store, deployers have to make sure the content is up-to-date and consistent with the branding," he said. "You have to give customers a reason to keep coming back."