



Guestroom Technology: The benefits of improving your TV system

Background

With the digital switchover, the way in which we receive and process TV signals has changed. This means that changes have to be made to hotel TV systems in order to continue watching terrestrial television.

Different options are available and which you choose will depend on the needs of your guests and how you want to use technology to position and help deliver your Brand.

So what has changed?

The TV signals now travel through the airways in a digital rather than analogue format which means that they either need to be 'decoded' back to analogue information using a 'digi box' to view them on existing TVs or new digital TVs need to be purchased which can read digital code.

RF (radio frequency) is the normal way of wiring and distributing TV signals within most buildings; signals travel through the airways and are detected by an aerial and pass via coaxial cable through amplifiers and splitters to your TVs.

With the digital change over, RF distribution can still be used to carry the new digital signals, but as stated above, either free view boxes or decoders are required for each television set, or new digital televisions need to be purchased which can interpret the digital information directly.

The digital signal carries more information than the old analogue system so it passes down the coax in groups or 'muxes', typically you would have five to six muxes to receive all the standard UK free view signals, but again no cabling changes are required to enable this to happen.

The other option for delivering TV to guest rooms is via IPTV (internet protocol). Here the signal travels over very cheap CAT5 cable in the style of a computer network. This in turn creates a platform from which you can deliver all previous forms of television and radio through one coherent TV channel list, (analogue, digital, free view, satellite, international, FM DAB & internet), whilst still supporting on demand films to your guests. IP technology can be customised by room and also enables you to market to your guests through the television and can be linked to your hotel's website, PMS and booking facilities.

Hybrids of IPTV and RF distribution are also available where IPTV can either be delivered over coaxial cable or your guests can use their wi fi to deliver the interactive content and the coaxial cable can be used to deliver basic channels and terrestrial TV.

Specialist sound, light & video systems integrators

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What about Satellite TV?

Satellite TV and Sky is normally just an input into an RF or IPTV system, it is not a system in its own right unless you budget to wire and place a sky decoder in every guestroom. The use of Sky+ boxes in each guestroom also has to be considered very carefully as Sky+ does not delete content between guest stays so this system can breach copyright laws.

What kind of TV system do I need?

In order to answer this question you will need to understand who your customers are and what they want from your technology offering.

Each hotel has different customers with different requirements and it is very hard to design a TV system until these are quantified and the management have agreed what they want to supply to their customers to satisfy, exceed or change their technology expectations.

The requirements of a venue with predominantly single male business clients will be very different from a family hotel with lots of child guests, which will in turn differ from a gastro hotel where the main attraction is the restaurant and food, where little time is spent in the rooms.

In a recent online survey carried out by CGA Integration, guests said they would expect to have more TV channels on their hotel TV than they have at home and many had in excess of 100 there. Having said this, it is probably better to offer less (say 20) well picked channels targeted at your specific customers, rather than expected them to wade through reams of irrelevant channels to find something suitable to watch.

If you want to offer your customers movies on demand (adult or otherwise), you will probably need CAT5 cabling or wi fi to stream or supply the movies to the guest rooms and provide a mechanism for billing these. This will in turn determine which kind of TV system you will require as either IPTV or a hybrid system will be needed to enable this to happen. However, if your customers do not require this kind of service, you may be able to improve your current TV offering by just tidying up your TV systems rack or 'Head End'.

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Refurbishment vs. Refit

If you are managing a new build or a complete refurbishment of a venue it is advisable to take this opportunity to run CAT5 and good quality coaxial cable to each TV location. By doing this, all options are open to you and if you wish to change your offering moving forward all the hardware is in place to enable you to do this easily.

If, however you are refitting a trading venue you are more likely to be limited to TV options you can deliver over existing coaxial cable, either with or without the inclusion of wi fi. However it is prudent to include the addition of CAT5 cabling to all TV locations as part of your room refit programme, as this will open up future options for your venue.

What are the benefits of tidying up my Head End?

The 'Head End' is the term used to describe your TV system rack where your aerials, sky boxes, amplifiers and controllers all join up and then send signals out to your rooms or to sub distribution points in certain wings, floors or areas of your hotel.

A well designed head end will take in all of the inputs from these different sources and set them up so that you can define what is visible to your customers in their rooms and what will not be available e.g. you may choose to remove adult or shopping channels that might not be appropriate for your customer profile. It should also allow you to group and rename inputs such that similar channels can appear together e.g. all sport channels or all news channels appear in one location.

If the Head End has been set up properly all you will need to do in your guest rooms is put your TV into 'auto tune' and the TV will put all the channels exactly where you want them.

You may also want to add your own channels to your TV system; this might be a promotional video of your venue's facilities or a marketing video to promote a sister hotel. This is very easy to do with IPTV as most will allow you to record or transfer footage onto the hard drives for playback. Even with an RF and Free view system you can still insert channels created on video playback devices or DVD players and fed them into your Head End.

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Do I need a special TV?

Generally the answer to this question is no. IPTV generally uses your in room TV as a monitor so no special functionality is required if you decide on this route and equally if you carry out all the channel selection and tuning in the Head End of your RF and free view system, this in turn can be played through your existing guest room TVs as well.

If you are choosing new TVs it is always prudent to choose models with hospitality functionality; a special remote or button press sequence which will allow you to:

1. Lock out the setup menus,
2. Set the maximum volume
3. Preset the 'turn on ' channel

Models that carry this feature do not need to be expensive; most Samsung TVs for example have this functionality built in, even if you buy them on the high street. You may just need to ask the engineer who sets up your Head End to show you how to operate this function or purchase a remote from them to enable you to carry this out for yourself.

Next Steps

Once you have identified what you want to offer your customers, contact CGA Integration and we can discuss how we can best deliver the options available for your venue and your budget.

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