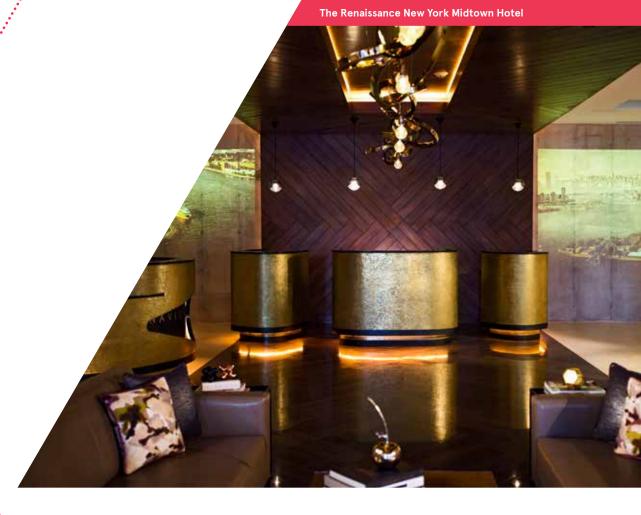# The Power of Integrated AV Experiences in
Hospitality

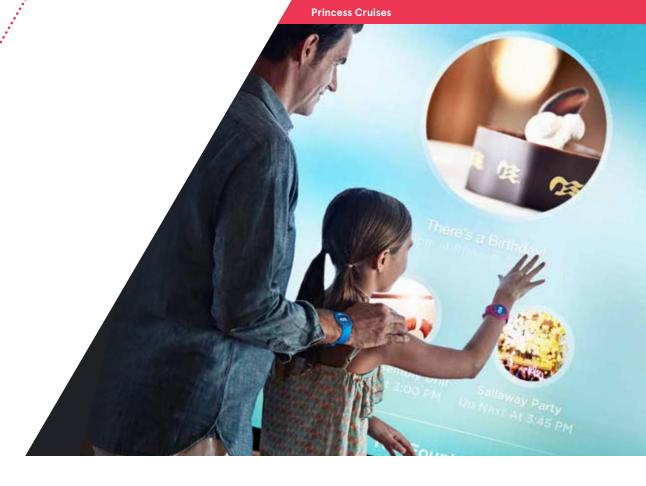# Hospitality Brands Engage Customers Through **Integrated Audiovisual Experiences**

When arriving at the **Renaissance New York Midtown Hotel**, you look up to see a four-story LED clock at the top of the building. Imagery on the clock changes every second, a total of 86,400 images every day. Eclectic shapes and colors bring the hotel to life for all to enjoy.

Once inside, you find yourself immediately interacting with digital artwork, projected along the walls of a corridor that spans an entire city block. The display does not change on its own — it only responds to your movements.

A few steps later you come to the hotel's Discovery Portal, located in an alcove. A large display comes to life when you step onto circles projected on the floor. You become a living search engine for local cuisine, live music, theater, shopping and other hyper-local activities, curated in collaboration with Time Out New York. As you point to your desired interest, gesture-recognition software triggers more in-depth information. And you haven't even entered the lobby.

As you exit the elevator into the lobby located a few floors up, you encounter more dynamic and engaging artworks and environmental graphics projected onto wall surfaces. By the time you check in, you are thoroughly immersed in the Renaissance brand and the attractions of the local neighborhood. If this seems like "business unusual," as Renaissance calls it, it's exactly on-brand for a hotel mindful of millennials and their lifestyles.

"We continue to study audiovisual experiences, such as digitally immersive environments, the Internet of Things, adaptive interfaces and the neuroscience of customer engagement in a digital world," says David Kepron, Vice President of Global Design Strategies at Renaissance parent company Marriott International. "The influence of a digitally-mediated culture on an emerging generation of guests will result in vastly different expectations about their relationships with the brands they love."

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Audiovisual Technology is
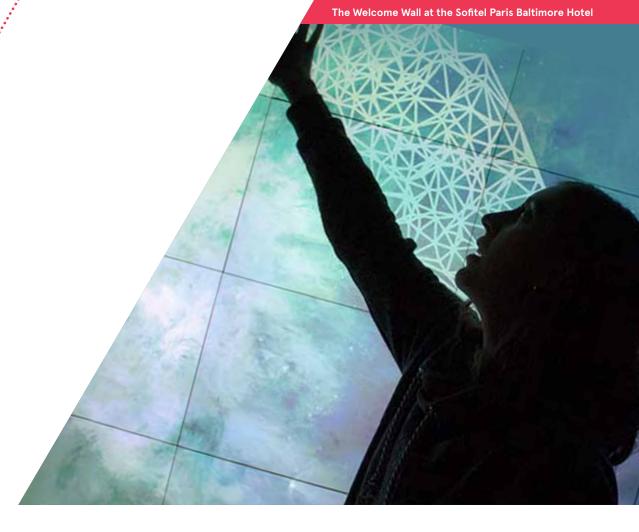# Driving Engagement in Hospitality

Integrated audiovisual experiences are changing the hospitality industry from the ground up. They are not add-ons or afterthoughts, but the result of carefully combined content, space and technology designed to create experiences.

"Hospitality is all about the very human trait of empathy, and businesses need to remember that humans should remain front and center to create incredible experiences, helped — but in no way supplanted — by modern technology," says Jason Clampet, Co-Founder of Skift, a travel intelligence organization. "The hospitality industry can be a huge beneficiary of where the world is culturally right now."

Resorts, cruise lines, hotels and restaurants that embrace integrated AV experiences are reimagining the very idea of travel. They become destinations themselves, attracting guests to the excitement of open areas and the intimacy of secluded alcoves. They transform the guest/brand relationship through immersion. And they connect guests' personal journeys to authentic, local experiences through dynamic, digital content.

Integrated audiovisual experiences help hospitality brands achieve a variety of business outcomes, such as:

- Creating more energized, integrated public spaces. Lobbies are no longer way stations, but places where things are happening. Guests can access information through oversized touch screens or sit at communal tables with power jacks. Separate alcoves welcome individual travelers and small groups who need a little privacy. Marriott worked with MIT researchers to rethink the lobby as a space where guests feel welcome and can connect with each other.

- Appealing to local business people as well as travelers. Hospitality properties also offer facilities for local meetings. The Mandarin Oriental on Columbus Circle in New York City attracts event organizers with an 800-seat multipurpose ballroom space that can be subdivided into five distinct rooms, with five separate zones of audiovisual content. Presenters can control speech, program playback, PA, lighting and much more from a simplified touch panel.

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- Providing easier access to practical information. Customers want to know what is available to them immediately upon arrival, including culture, sports, shopping and local restaurants. They also want that information available in the format most convenient in the moment. Many hotels and resorts are using digital signage, in-room TV, and mobile apps to offer guests more control and convenience for information access.

- Using automation to redefine spaces on the fly. All restaurants use audio, lighting and climate control to set a mood, but many restaurants, such as sports bars, depend on an integrated audiovisual ecosystem to serve a shifting and diverse clientele. Buffalo Wild Wings can create sub-spaces within their main spaces quickly and easily, for groups interested in a particular sport or event.

- Crafting multisensory experiences so travelers can test-drive new destinations. The travel and hospitality industry is beginning to embrace virtual reality (VR) to replicate real travel experiences, and adding the smell and sound of ocean waves, to give guests an appetite for new adventures. Thomas Cook Airlines was one of the first to adopt VR as a way for prospects to fly over Manhattan, to experience lounging in the sun by the pool at a premier hotel in Spain, or to check out a restaurant in Cyprus.

We talked to design visionaries and decision-makers for five hospitality brands to find out how they are using integrated audiovisual experiences to attract and keep customers, to provide memorable stays and journeys, and to distinguish their brands, in an age when innovation is expected and results are required.

Buffalo Wild Wings

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Marriott International:
Energizing Every Moment of the Customer Journey

Marriott International has clearly articulated design strategies for each of the 31 distinct brands in its portfolio. The key principle that drives design for all the brands is the consideration of the full length of the customer journey. For guests, the brand experience starts long before they walk in the door. For the Global Design Strategies team, digital content and audiovisual experiences can make that journey special, from conceptual design to customer engagement.

David Kepron, Vice President, Global Design, explains how virtual reality is integrated into the process of designing a new hotel: "We have a 360-degree viewing environment called Igloo. While you stand in the middle of the 20-foot-diameter viewing space, you are wrapped with digital images, sound and even scents, so that you're no longer trying to get someone to understand what the room environment is like. You're no longer constrained to a view from a single point in that room. Now you can move through space and better understand how it all comes together as part of the design and brand narrative.

"That completely changes the way we design and build, because early in the process of design, we're using these immersive tools to put us in developed places, so we can really begin to look at scale and what people might likely see from a certain vantage point. This is a game changer for us, in both the design of the places and in the representation of those ideas to our owners."

Similarly, the overall guest experience is considered, many times starting with a digital connection through an Internet search, scanning destinations, property photos and surrounding opportunities for excursions. When guests finally arrive on property, their journey is well under way. Kepron notes, "From arrival, to check-in, a ride in an elevator, to the guestroom and back, we consider signature brand moments and how best to engage our guests at each step along the way. And we ask, where are digital and audiovisual experiences appropriate?"

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Marriott Igloo

As an example of a fully realized vision, he cites the entry experience at **Marriott's Renaissance New York Midtown Hotel**, already described in the opening of this report.

"Architecture, design, materials, finishes and furniture make up the physical environment. The digital pieces and the audiovisual overlay must be integrated into the overall design thinking. It is an intricate dance between the brand's expression in the physical environment and how interactive digital media plays a role in enhancing experiences. At one point of interaction, mobile check-in may be the tool. At another location, it may be large-scale digital projections."

With dozens of brands and thousands of locations, the goal is always the same: to engage the senses, to trigger emotions and to foster lasting positive memories. And the question is always, at this point in time and space, will the introduction of digital content improve the experience of our guests?

As part of Marriott's constant push for innovation, they continue to study things like digitally immersive environments, the Internet of Things, adaptive interfaces and the neuroscience of customer engagement in a

digital world, one of Kepron's areas of expertise. Looking ahead, he believes that "the influence of a digitally mediated culture on an emerging generation of guests will result in vastly different expectations about their relationships with the brands they love and how experiences should unfold in a digital future. Providing digitally immersive audiovisual environments can engage and empower guests in making hotel stays more relevant and memorable."

The Renaissance New York Midtown Hotel

Sofitel Paris Baltimore:
Welcome to the Future of Hospitality

The Sofitel Paris Baltimore is a 19th century townhouse hotel located in a lovely traditional neighborhood, not far from the Eiffel Tower. During a recent renovation, management decided to retain the historic charm of the building, but introduce a spectacular new welcome: a 100-square-foot interactive digital wall in the entrance hallway. This Welcome Wall is entertaining, informative and intuitively interactive.

"Because they were renovating the hotel, the owners wanted to create something new and exciting that would make a statement every time a guest returns, and I think the digital Welcome Wall really achieves that goal," says Alexandre Simionescu, Managing Partner and Creative Director of Float4, designers of the Welcome Wall. "It creates a great contrast with the very classic aspect of the hotel — this place that has been around for over a hundred years.

"The Welcome Wall is not something that's subtle. It's meant really to attract your attention and initiate interaction in a way that is not invasive. It's very playful and fun. Once engaged, guests inevitably take the next step. They actually touch the wall once they notice that it's interactive. The Welcome Wall is there to break the ice."

"The owners wanted to create something new and exciting that would make a statement every time a guest returns, and I think the digital Welcome Wall really achieves that goal."

Alexandre Simionescu,
Managing Partner and Creative Director of Float4

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Included on the wall are playful artworks that attract your attention and respond to your movements, a photo booth, and a virtual concierge, where you can explore Paris. The knowledgeable staff can log on to the content management system and help you create a path through Paris that lasts two hours, based on your interests — and you can download the path to your phone and take it with you.

The size of the wall wows guests, and the interactivity keeps them involved. Simionescu thinks this is the beginning of a trend.

"I've seen touchscreens in hotels that are usually kiosks," he says. "To date, I haven't seen anything with this size and with this level of refinement in terms of the content and interactivity. Of course, we have some of those typical elements that you would expect to find, like the news. We want to make some of these elements relatable, because that's part of the user experience, to get them easily comfortable with the technology. So, there are some elements that are more familiar. We want to use that as a starting point, and add features they don't expect to find on their end. Creating those tours is a perfect example. Customized information can be compiled for each traveler. It's a wonderfully creative way to blend information entertainment into a unique brand-building experience."

Float4 has created large, interactive walls for a variety of clients, but hospitality seems like a perfect fit. They've recently completed another Welcome Wall for the Mere Hotel in Winnipeg.

Buffalo Wild Wings:
Always at the Top of Its Game

All restaurants use audio to set a mood, but sports bars depend on a complicated audiovisual ecosystem to generate a high-energy atmosphere that attracts a shifting and diverse clientele. One of the most spectacular users of integrated audiovisual experiences is Buffalo Wild Wings, with more than 1,000 locations in all 50 states. Stephen Sullivan is President of Antsul Group, operators of eight New Jersey "B-Dubs" franchises, with two more in development.

"Compelling AV is the main attraction," Sullivan says. "We're not only competing with every other bar who's got Monday Night Football or a UFC matchup, we're also competing with watching the game at home. We have to offer bigger sound and better picture quality than our competition, as well as your house. We sell Buffalo wings, but we also offer a unique audiovisual experience."

With more than 50 big screens in each location, showing more than a dozen video and audio sources at the same time, simplified control is key. B-Dubs can create sub-zones within their main spaces, to serve groups interested in a particular sport or event, but reconfiguring spaces and changing content must be easy and quick. Automated systems that use tablets and iPhones for simplified user control are helping managers up their game to create many concurrent audiovisual experiences that don't interfere with each other — even for a single customer.

Sullivan notes, "If someone comes in and maybe the Big Game is something they're less interested in, we can change one of the TVs in their proximity and bring a speaker to the table that's synced with the action. This whole process takes, maybe, 90 seconds. Twenty years ago, they'd have wasted most of that customer's meal finding the right remote to change one TV. Dedicated sound wasn't even an option back then."

That kind of micro control is also reflected in Sullivan's macro control. He can check in on any of his restaurants while located at another. "With all of the technology in our restaurants," he says, "it could be overwhelming to try to manage it all, but our control system allows us to make sure we have the happiest customers. After all, keeping our customers happy is the whole point."

Even without their famous dipping sauces, Buffalo Wild Wings delivers the hottest sports bar experiences, through the application of integrated AV.

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Hyatt Hotels: Making Each Stay a Personalized Experience

Much of the activity in hospitality audiovisual experiences focuses on public spaces, but Hyatt Hotels is also looking closely at the in-room experience and giving guests what they need to make their room much more than a place to sleep.

"Our guests are saying that they want to connect their devices," says Mari Balestrazzi, Hyatt Hotels Vice President of Design. "We want all of our televisions and sound systems in guest rooms to connect to your devices so that you can watch your own content and listen to your own music. We need to facilitate you having your own personalized space."

Hyatt made room-dominant 65-inch HDTVs the focal point of their Regency brand and the feedback was phenomenal. "Our guests are loving it," Balestrazzi says. "They like watching whatever they brought with them, along with what's available on cable. It feels like an all-encompassing experience. It makes the stay in the guest room feel a bit more special, with the same high quality image and scale they have at home."

Hyatt is also experimenting with tunable LED lighting, to add another level of personalization to the in-room experience. Adjusting the temperature, and thus the color and quality of white light, can help guests wake up, focus on different activities and wind down. "It's part of the focus on wellness that we have at Hyatt,"
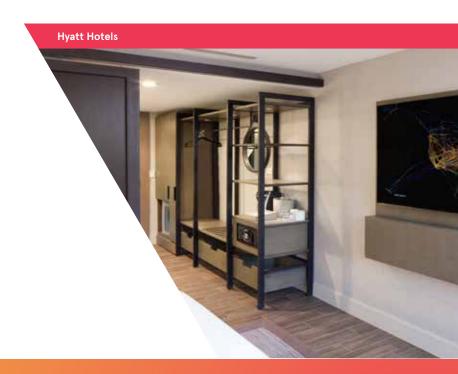
Balestrazzi explains. "We're learning more about how light actually affects jet lag and circadian rhythm and applying what we learn. It can make you feel different and make you feel better.
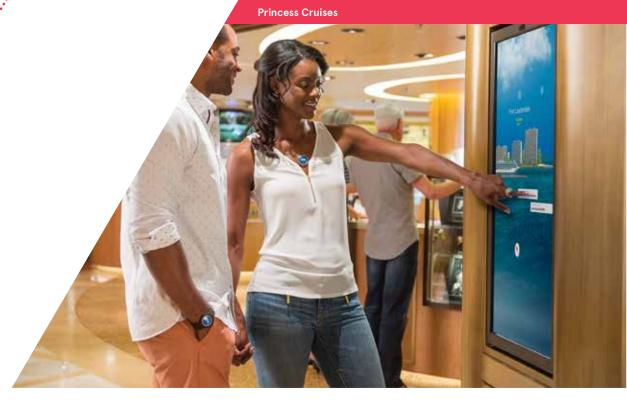
"We're looking into smart-light technology seriously, in terms of how it can affect the overall guest experience and mirror what people are starting to do in their own homes, or be aspirational in terms of what kinds of experiences they want to have in their own homes.

In Hyatt's public spaces, tunable white and color lighting are also on the rise, especially in meeting spaces, whether programmed by the hotel for time of day and event, or adjusted by guests.

"We found that customers really like the ability to change the color of light in large ballrooms and meeting spaces because they can customize the experience for their event," Balestrazzi says. "They can make colors that are on-brand for them."

Balestrazzi believes smart lighting will be a critical factor in a hotel's restaurants as well. "Many of our hotels have just one restaurant, so it's a three-meal restaurant," she notes. "It needs to be bright, and happy, and fresh for breakfast. But the same space needs to be a little bit warmer, a little bit more intimate, for a dinner experience. Lighting can help a space morph over the course of the day. Our business objective is to provide the most appealing experience to our guests, and smart lighting will help."

Hyatt Hotels

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Princess Cruises:
Launching More Seamless Connections

In a world where constant connectivity is the norm, cruise ships are at a disadvantage. They're out at sea and often out of range of traditional high speed internet. Yet, travelers expect the same kinds of digital choices and speeds they enjoy on land.

That's why cruise lines such as **Princess Cruises** are looking to upgrade their internet access and speeds. Derrin Brown, Manager of Entertainment Operations, puts it simply: "The top line for us is catching up with land-based choice."

Brown says Princess Cruises is implementing a new platform, which the company thinks is as a "game changer," for improving the digital experience on ships.
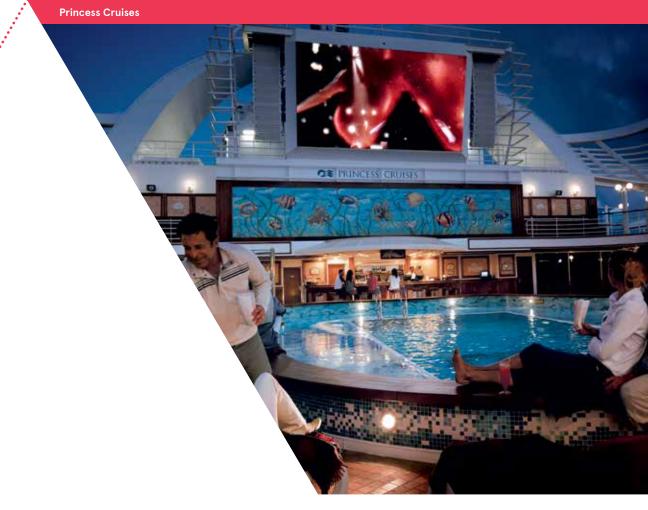

"We're implementing dedicated satellite connections to improve the speed of things and deliver more information about every option that's available for each passenger's leisure within the ship," he says. "And we're rolling that out across the fleet."

Beyond personal devices, a cruise ship is a massive, dynamic platform for ubiquitous audiovisual information and entertainment experiences. "We're constantly trying to catch up with what's happening on land," Brown continues. "What does that mean? It means lots and lots of TVs and video displays everywhere around the ship, within the passenger areas and the cabins, using the latest display technology."

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Derrin Brown
Manager of Entertainment Operations
of Princess Cruises

Throughout each ship, there are dedicated entertainment spaces, with displays, audio systems and lighting. "Theatrical spaces, music venues, movie theaters," Brown says. "Then, of course, we have all the external venues, the pool decks. There, we have the giant displays for movies under the stars."

One trend in on-board sound systems, especially in the large entertainment spaces, is an evolution from a left-right-front presentation, like a traditional music concert, to more immersive 360-degree sound systems, where every listening position is a "good seat."

How do passengers navigate a staggering array of choices? "We need to make them aware of what is available to them, and then provide wayfinding through digital signage and displays, to get them to the venues on time," says Brown. When they arrive, for example, at a dining room, the experience follows them. "We have architectural lighting for each of the different restaurants and venues with multiple settings throughout the day. The audio is specially selected. Everything is integrated and designed for a pleasurable, quality experience. It's a really dynamic, evolving challenge."

Successful Hospitality Companies
Embrace Innovative Audiovisual Solutions

As consumers become more sophisticated about using technology in their professional and personal lives, they expect more from hotels, resorts and restaurants when they travel. In the hospitality world, technology offerings are an important factor in the customer's selection process. Software Advice, in a 2015 survey, found that travelers were 63 percent more likely to choose a hotel with a tech-enabled lobby. People expect lobby touchscreens that provide news, weather, flight updates and local recommendations.

"We're in a maturation process right now," says Brian Dyches, Principal of Rex Digital Group, "where consumers are having so many screens in their lives. Only hotels that actually reach their hands out for a true handshake are the ones that are getting a response."

Savvy hotels are responding to this tech love by integrating audiovisual experiences throughout the facility in different ways. The changes are improving guest satisfaction and making hotels more inviting to younger travelers — the market every hotelier is trying to attract — who see technology as an essential part of their lives.

Waiting in the wings is a new generation of even-more-digital travelers, who have grown up with access and mobility in every facet of their lives.

"I see how my 16-year-old engages technology as part of the way he communicates in the world, and the way he creates his own experiences," says Marriott's Kepron. "When we fully understand the power of technology to empower people to create experiences, to write themselves into the brand narrative because they're engaging in a dialogue in an interactive way, as opposed to simply sitting back and being observers of something, then I think it becomes very interesting."

Travelers and diners have more choices than ever before. Resorts, hotels and restaurants become successful destinations with the right balance of public and private spaces, a combination of human touch and touch screens that offer relevance, a comfortable environment set by climate and lighting, and a thoughtfully curated mix of individual control and information distribution. Leaders in the hospitality industry are embracing the power of integrated audiovisual experiences to optimize the relationship of content, space, and technology and deliver memorable travel experiences every moment of the stay.