inapub

News

Is the pub sector ready for a tech transformation

Steven Pike

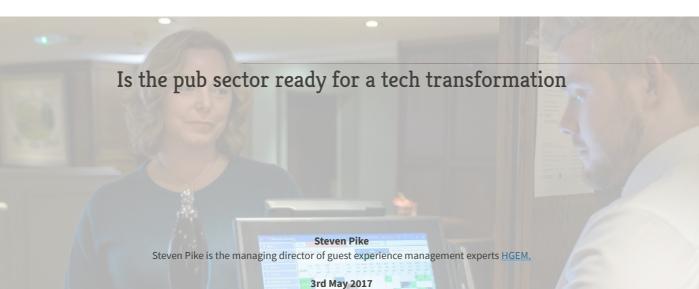Steven Pike is the managing director of guest experience management experts HGEM.

3rd May 2017

In a world of digital-savvy consumers, pressure has never been greater on operators to integrate technology into the guest experience.

In fact, diners are now less likely to trust pubs and restaurants that do not use up to date technology such as websites, contactless or mobile payments.

Yet, while many casual dining brands are leading the way when it comes to digitising the customer journey, are pub operators getting left behind when it comes to a 'tech-transformation'?

2016 was the year that the hospitality sector really started to recognise and utilise the power of tech.

Whether it was gathering priceless data from wireless internet access, integrating wearable technology into day to day operations, or incorporating artificial intelligence into the guest experience, the 'smart disruptors' in our industry were all over this trend.

For example, we saw Henry's Café Bar in Piccadilly trial a Pay @ Pump beer dispenser in partnership with Barclaycard, allowing customers to pour and pay for their own pints in just 60 seconds, meeting consumer demand for contactless beer pumps to speed up service.

And when it came to branded casual dining, Carluccio's gave 50,000 virtual reality glasses to its 100 sites, to transport customers Sicily so they could enjoy the restaurant's new menu by the sea.

But how can pub operators follow in the footsteps of bar and restaurant operators to keep up with this growing trend?

While many of us won't expect a VR experience when we visit our local, we want to know that they've got the basics sorted. Any technology that improves processes and quickens pace is a must. Contactless payment, for example, should be a given, not just a consideration for pub operators.

Customers will use contactless payment at least once per month and one in five will plan to increase their usage throughout this year.

With slow service one of the most disappointing factors of eating out, consumers will actively seek out venues that have faster payment methods, including contactless payments, mobile payments and apps.

19 per cent of diners paid via an app the last time they visited a new casual dining venue, and nine per cent did so when visiting a pub; as consumer expectation of technology increases, it's likely we will see the figures increase in the pub sector too.

It's important to remember that digitising the customer journey puts a myriad of data at operators' fingertips. Whether they're logging into an app to make a payment with their email address, or connecting to your wireless network through their social media accounts, this data can be used to continually improve the guest experience.

For example, marketing collateral can be targeted to specific consumer groups based on their likes and dislikes on social media, or on-site promotions can be tailored to customer behaviour when visiting your pub.

Targeted promotions such as this will set your site apart from the competition, and get people talking about the way you run your pub - after all word of mouth remains the most effective method of referral.

And let's not forget the opportunities social media presents, particularly with the millennial audience.

According to new research by MCA, millennials account for 29 per cent of the UK adult population, but 46 per cent of the visits and 43 per cent of spend in the eating out market.

Pubs that can take control of their social media accounts, particularly those that attract a younger audience such as Snapchat and Instagram, will reap the benefits from this cost-effective promotional tool.

58 per cent of millennials are known to go to a site's social media channels before every visit or ahead of the majority of their visits, presenting real opportunities to immerse this tool as part of the guest experience before, during and after visiting a site.

If we look at what casual dining brands are doing for instance, there's a plethora of opportunities to explore.

Pho, the Vietnamese restaurant group, used Snapchat to increase brand awareness among millennials, specifically to returning University students. Pho used branded geofilters in cities with universities where they also have restaurants, generating more than 57,000 views from Snapchat users across the UK.

This not only increased brand awareness and drove footfall, but put the brand and the restaurant literally in the hands of consumers.

We're urging our pub company clients to think outside the box when it comes to integrating technology into the guest experience.

There's a real opportunity for pubcos to lead the way when it comes to guest experience, so why not challenge the norm?

With Amazon's Alexa becoming part of family life, it may not be long before voice-activated service comes into the hospitality industry. Amazon has already brought this technology to the US, to enable customers to make specific reservations on request, order before visiting the site, and pay through voice activation.

So could this be an opportunity for pubs to make the most of this emerging technology? Or is there really a place for this type of technology in the great British pub?

Friendly, welcoming staff who know how to make your guests feel cared for, comfortable, and listened to are still, and will always be, at the heart of hospitality, particularly in the pub sector.

Steven Pike is the managing director of guest experience management experts HGEM.

Share this: f y
Subscribe today ✉

More reading

/ PLAY

Pub goes viral with politically charged A-board

Bronya Smolen   4th May 2017

One pub has broken the internet (nearly) by using its A-board to make a statement.

Read more

/ BACK BAR

What really happens when someone writes a review about you?

Bronya Smolen   19th April 2017

With 290 pieces of content every minute of every day, how does TripAdvisor deal with each review about your pub? See behind the scenes.

Read more