

Meeting Hotel Guest Wi-Fi Expectations in the Age of Hyper Connectivity and IoT



How hospitality Wi-Fi services must evolve in order to meet today's guest demands for fast, secure and multi-device compatible online connectivity that can provide access to personalized content.

It has often been said that in today's hospitality environment, Wi-Fi as an amenity is as important to guests as running water. In fact, according to USA Today, statistics indicate that 65 percent of hotel guests are using Wi-Fi within seven minutes of arriving on-site.¹ The statistics are hardly surprising, as the global culture is increasingly online, digital and interconnected. With consumers becoming ever more accustomed to instant access to communication, services and information, industries such as the hospitality market have identified the importance of providing Wi-Fi services to their customers. Yet to ensure full satisfaction and not risk damaging a property's or group's reputation, hoteliers must understand what today's guests seek when using a hotel's internet services. They must further understand how guest online behaviors and device preferences continue to evolve in order to meet the latest expectations.

What follows is a detailed analysis of a 2019 HIS survey conducted on more than 670 guests and over 200 hoteliers from around the United States. Such respondents offer critical insight into what is now expected from hospitality's Wi-Fi, security and content streaming capabilities. By comparing results from a similar HIS survey conducted in 2015, this white paper not only demonstrates how demand for online accessibility is becoming more prevalent among guests around the world. Crucially, it reflects how today's guests are raising their expectations in terms of what content, device functionality and safety features are available to them throughout the course of their hotel stay.

More Powerful Devices Need More Powerful Wi-Fi

With the ever-increasing array of online-based content and services that are now available to guests as mainstream consumers, the need for hoteliers to provide a satisfactory Wi-Fi experience is higher than ever before. This has coincided with the fact that guests increasingly travel with multiple high-powered smart devices, often seeking to leverage online connectivity to stream content or access an array of bandwidth-consuming apps. Any hotel Wi-Fi service must therefore be able to keep pace with current guest needs and behaviors in order to maintain satisfaction levels.²

Comparing responses from 2015 to the 2019 survey for instance, the number of guests traveling with smartphones has risen by more than 20 percent and now stands at a staggering total of 98.5 percent who are now equipped with such devices.

Guests traveling with smartphones



1. <https://www.usatoday.com/story/travel/roadwarriorvoices/2016/04/06/hotel-wi-fi-survey/82725742/>

2. <https://www.hotelmanagement.net/tech/how-much-bandwidth-enough>

Similarly, guests traveling with smart watches in 2019 has increased to 17 percent, whereas in 2015 the number only stood at 2 percent. Also of note is that more than 80 percent of hoteliers in 2019 found that tablets were among the most commonly used guest devices. Such trends undoubtedly reflect

an ongoing mass proliferation in the number of devices present at any one hotel at a given time.

This skyrocketing growth is only further compounded by the fact that the number of guests attempting to connect more than one device has risen to 76 percent in 2019, up from 67 percent during 2015's survey.



Know What Your Guests Want When it Comes to Online Content Accessibility

With online content streaming services now firmly entrenched as common household forms of entertainment, guest preferences to access the same personalized and streamed experience continues to grow within the hospitality setting. More than 90 percent of hoteliers responding to the 2019 survey in fact rated content streaming as among the most highly sought after service by guests. Such feedback goes hand-in-hand with the ongoing decline in revenues from video-on-demand sales, a scenario that mirrors the diminishing presence of cable subscriptions in consumer homes.³ These two more traditional modes of content consumption suffer from the same fatal flaw: a lack of flexibility in providing the choice and personalization that consumers have been exposed to and now expect. Both as a result are experiencing a similar fate, and hoteliers must therefore be equipped with the means to successfully evolve and cater to the new online entertainment environment. While shown to enhance the guest experience, streaming can nonetheless represent a considerable drain on network resources, and properties need to ensure that online satisfaction does not turn into frustration.

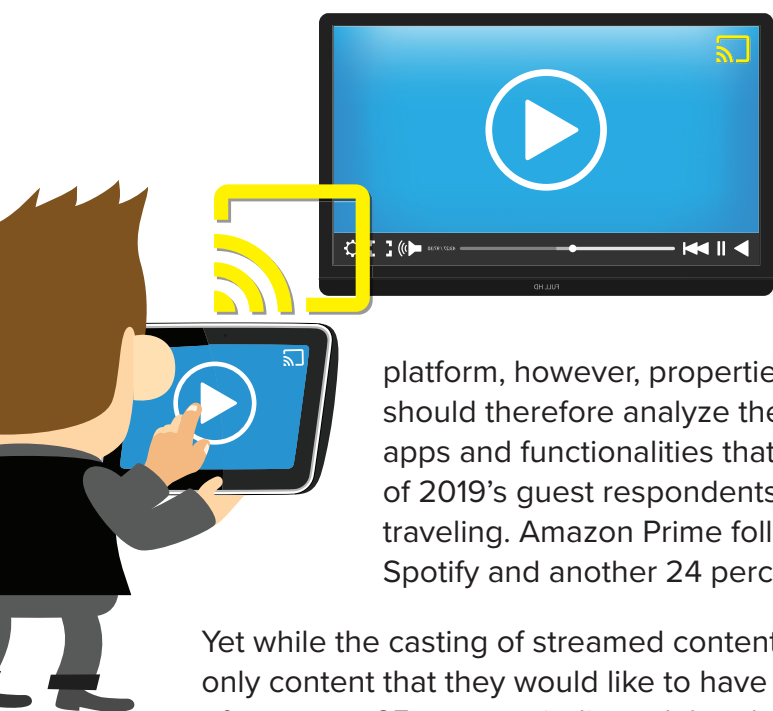
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3. <https://www.nytimes.com/2013/05/01/business/hotel-guests-turn-away-from-tv-and-toward-streaming-media.html>

While guest demands for streaming alone presents hoteliers with a need to update their bandwidth abilities, what should also be taken into account is how guests prefer to access such content when in the guestroom. In consumer homes for example, the explosive popularity of online content streaming has in recent years been paired with the growing preference to wirelessly cast content from mobile devices onto larger television screens. This has seen home-based devices such as Google Chromecast, AppleTV and Amazon's Fire TV continue to experience skyrocketing sales numbers.⁴ With such devices having now been on the market for several years and as consumers have become more accustomed to the benefits, it is unsurprising that such functionality continues to increase in demand among today's guests.

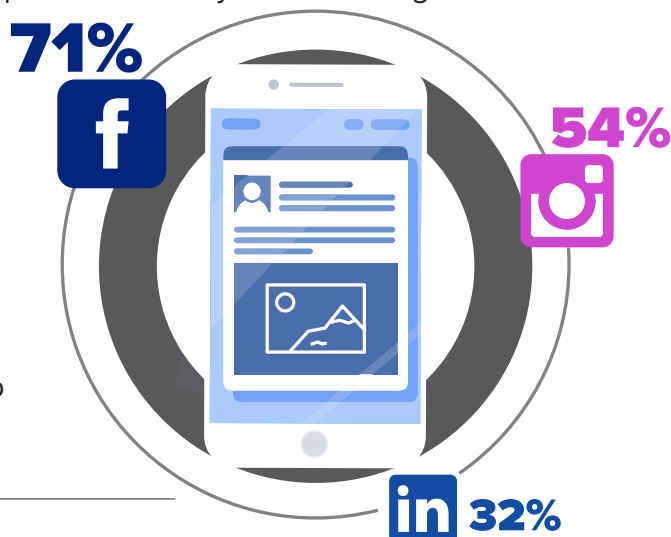
Even during 2015's survey when casting devices were a fairly new platform, 52 percent of guests already expressed a desire to cast their content to guestroom televisions. In 2019, that number has now risen to 65 percent, and will only continue to grow as more consumers become familiar with the conveniences and advantages of casting. Hoteliers for their part, now stand at 84 percent in agreement that casting is an expected in-room amenity that is worthy of investment.



65% of guests indicated that they would prefer the ability to cast such apps to a larger guestroom television screen.

When considering the implementation of a casting platform, however, properties must be aware that no two solutions are alike. They should therefore analyze the abilities of each to see if they are compatible with the apps and functionalities that guests seek out the most. For example, 75 percent of 2019's guest respondents indicated that they desire to access Netflix while traveling. Amazon Prime followed at 45 percent, while 28 percent desired to use Spotify and another 24 percent sought to access Hulu.

Yet while the casting of streamed content remains a popular preference for guests, it is not the only content that they would like to have the ability to cast to guestroom televisions. A majority of guests at 65 percent, indicated that they would prefer the ability to cast a range of other apps onto a larger guestroom television screen versus viewing on their personal devices. These included a desire to access Facebook while traveling, at 71 percent. Another 54 percent disclosed that they access Instagram, while 32 percent accessed LinkedIn. With many guests also seeking out information on their immediate surroundings, apps such as The Weather Channel, at 35 percent, are also of interest to guests during their hotel stay. OpenTable likewise experienced sizable guest use, at 30 percent, while 27 percent of guest respondents also indicated that they use TripAdvisor during their travels.



4. <http://www.weareratio.com/blog/the-5-things-to-know-about-casting/>

Building the Blocks of a Guest Approved Wi-Fi Connection

With so many online features and functionalities expected to be available and able to be seamlessly accessed, it is imperative that hoteliers assess the current state of their Wi-Fi abilities. To ensure guest satisfaction and maintain property reputations, they must work to provide a network that is fast, consistently reliable and always secure.

In 2019's guest survey, more than 90 percent of guests in fact stated that access to a hotel's Wi-Fi service was 'very important.' Furthermore, 58 percent of guests indicated that the quality of a hotel's Wi-Fi would be 'highly-likely' to affect their booking decision. Another 85 percent significantly indicated that Wi-Fi quality would affect their decision to rebook with a specific property or hotel brand. More than 75 percent also indicated that the unavailability of free Wi-Fi would serve as a deal breaker in any booking decision, up from 72 percent in the 2015 survey. Such results echo a 2015 survey conducted by hotels.com, where a majority of travelers indicated Wi-Fi as

the most important deciding factor when selecting a hotel.⁵

Today's hoteliers are now acknowledging the crucial influence that Wi-Fi plays on guest satisfaction scores, booking decisions and loyalty. An overwhelming 94 percent of 2019's hotelier survey respondents in fact consider it to be 'very important.' When compared to other guest amenities such as guestroom televisions or on-site restaurants, hoteliers additionally ranked complimentary Wi-Fi as being most vital to guests, at 95 percent.

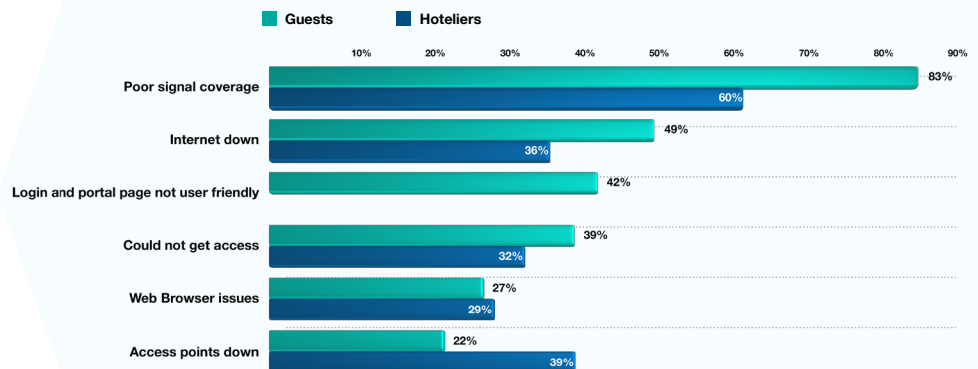
Yet despite hoteliers and guests being in agreement over the importance of providing a satisfactory internet experience, 82 percent of guest survey

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respondents stated that poor signal coverage was often an issue that they encountered. Another 49 percent indicated that they would find a hotel's internet to be out of service, while another 41 percent mentioned difficulty in logging in to a hotel's portal page. Other research indicates that 81 percent of guests have experienced a poor Wi-Fi connection during the past 12 months, along with the fact that 85 to 90 percent of properties suffer from such issues.⁶



5. <https://www.forbes.com/sites/niallmccarthy/2015/08/03/most-travelers-consider-free-wi-fi-the-most-important-factor-in-choosing-a-hotel-infographic/#54ae4f3635cb>

6. <https://www.thestreet.com/story/12793880/1/why-hotel-wifi-sucks-and-what-you-can-do-about-it.html>

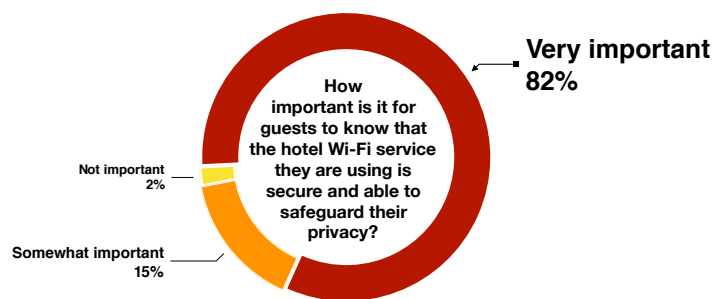
The reasoning behind such disconnect between guest expectations and actual hotel performance can be the result of several factors. These can range from antiquated networks that were originally intended for guests bringing one device per room, to budget or physical structure limitations that challenge hoteliers with being able to implement a more robust upgrade. Regardless of the various difficulties that hoteliers may face, however, such difficulties mean little to guests who expect to find the same quality of connectivity that they find at home, and who will simply take their business to a property that can offer a likewise experience.

Yet despite what may appear to be an unwinnable situation, hospitality professionals should recognize that as technology has advanced to provide guests with evermore powerful devices, so too has it increased the availability of Wi-Fi network solutions that offer enhanced flexibility and affordability. With a little research and by partnering with reputable providers, hoteliers are now capable of implementing enhancements that not only offer precisely what guests seek, but that are customizable and able to address any troubleshooting or cost concerns. As more hotel processes go online and with the growing trend of hoteliers implementing devices such as panic buttons, with the HIS survey revealing that 58 percent plan to do so in the next 24 months, such networks can also ensure the seamless functioning of all operations without sacrificing guest connectivity.

Maximum Security is Just as Important as Enhanced Functionality to Your Guests

It is no secret that the hospitality industry has seen much attention recently focused on online attacks and data theft, with numerous high-profile incidents taking place each year.⁷ With hotels and resorts serving as public spaces, guests are understandably also concerned over data privacy and security in addition to Wi-Fi quality. More than 93 percent of 2019 guest survey respondents consequently indicated such a concern. Over 60 percent further disclosed that they were very concerned that their

sensitive information could be stolen or used inappropriately when connecting to a hotel's online services. Hoteliers likewise understood the priority that guests place on online security, with more than 80 percent stating that they believed guests felt that it is very important.



Such feedback again reflects general consumer anxiety over data privacy and security, with IBM finding that only 20 percent “completely trust” organizations to effectively safeguard their data.⁸ The same findings reveal 75 percent of consumers will not make purchases from a company if they believe their information is at risk. With guests increasingly being presented with

hotel offerings that are available for purchase electronically, it is even more imperative than ever for

7. <http://www.hotelnewsnow.com/Articles/50937/Timeline-The-growing-number-of-hotel-data-b>

8. <https://newsroom.ibm.com/2018-04-16-New-Survey-Finds-Deep-Consumer-Anxiety-over-Data-Privacy-and-Security>

hoteliers to ensure that their networks are able to provide guests with full peace of mind.

Yet even with both guests and hoteliers again in agreement over the importance of online safety features, 62 percent of hotelier respondents disclosed that they felt that their properties could make improvements to security and privacy technology. Hoteliers as a result, must endeavor to work with internet solution providers that can implement networks capable of protecting guest data and devices so that it does not fall into the wrong hands. As with improving network performance, today's market offers several affordable options that can go a long way in securing both guest and property information. These include leveraging alternatives to open source SSL and implementing data traffic

segmentation that prevents guest information from inadvertently being combined with hotel-based sources. Providing each guestroom with its own private network can also prevent unintended cross-room data access. With regards to online content streaming, security considerations may also further explain why platforms that offer wireless content casting abilities are becoming increasingly popular, with 87 percent of survey guest respondents indicating that they would prefer the functionality versus inputting login details into an app located on the guestroom television. Additional options also exist that automatically erase all guest login and browsing data upon check out, or that provide guests with the ability to manually do so at any time during their stay.



One Theme Remains Consistent: No Difference Exists Between What Is Expected From Hoteliers Verses the Mainstream Consumer Market

The results obtained by HIS and other sources continue to demonstrate the same feedback time and again, albeit at an ever-growing rate. As guests find more ways to become connected and benefit from access to online content, they fully expect hoteliers to keep up with the high standards and level of functionality now commonly found in consumer homes. While access to complimentary Wi-Fi continues to play a pivotal role in maintaining guest satisfaction, hospitality professionals must also take into account that quality of service and the ability for guests to access content in a manner that is secure and on their terms, is just as important a factor in today's marketplace when seeking full satisfaction and loyalty.

Although properties have often had to sacrifice guest preferences due to budgetary concerns in previous years, today's Wi-Fi, streaming and casting technology has advanced to a point where hoteliers can now find solutions that are practical in overcoming infrastructural limitations and just as significantly, are cost-effective to their operations. With guests expressing the overwhelming influence that enhanced online connectivity can have on their booking decisions, it is evident that the enhanced Wi-Fi solutions that are much more affordable, are certainly worth the investment.



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