



HOSPITALITY

Reporter
Ed Sealover

✉ ESEALOVER@BIZJOURNALS.COM

☎ 303-803-9229

🐦 @ESEALOVERDENBIZ

More Denver hotels tap apps

TECH TOOLS GIVE GUESTS INFORMATION, AND ALSO HELP INNKEEPERS

When JoAnn Elston, general manager of the JW Marriott Denver Cherry Creek, sees guests studying a painting in the lobby, she no longer walks up to them to explain it. Rather, she asks them to take out their cell phone, download an app that can be pointed at well-placed “beacons” and go to town learning about all the major art in the hotel.

From late-night concierge service to keyless room entry to downloadable fitness routines, Denver-area hotels more often are investing in ways to connect with guests through technology. Such apps and programs allow guests to know and do more quickly, and they also offer the hotels a storehouse of information about their customers’ preferences.

“It’s really meeting our guests where they’re at,” Elston said. “That’s the traveler today. They’re tech-savvy. They want something unique ... They want it now.”

JW Marriott officials launched into the tech world by working with Denver company Place Global to install the beacons that, when in the range of an app-enabled cell phone, will bring up a page explaining the most-high-profile pieces of art on each floor.

They also expanded the technology to show menus near the hotel’s

restaurant, created a soon-to-launch workout suggestion in the fitness center, and allowed meeting planners to build customized schedules that can be downloaded through the same app during their events.

“Meeting planners are really looking to hotels to drive differences,” said Michael Berk, the JW Marriott director of catering and events. “Whenever we mention this app or this upgraded technology, they are just blown away.”

The Aloft Denver Downtown was one of the first hotels in the state to invest in a keyless entry system in which travelers can download an app and be able to bypass the front desk and enter their room.

The Crawford Hotel inside Denver Union Station, meanwhile, offers in-room iPads to all guests that include an app by which they can communicate directly with the front desk and ask hotel workers to bring up food from any of the restaurants in the station complex.

The program also keeps track of the in-room dining preferences and requests of guests for things like toiletries, allowing operators to learn about their preferences and be ready to serve them better, said Fred Kleisner, the Sage Hospitality area managing director who oversees both the Crawford



JoAnn Elston, general manager at the JW Marriott Denver Cherry Creek, demonstrates how to access information about art in the hotel on her mobile device.

KATHLEEN LAVINE, BUSINESS JOURNAL

and the Oxford Hotel in LoDo.

He believes that if used properly, such technological innovations can attract a few guests but really can boost retention of those who enjoy them.

“Today I think the guests come through and expect an experiential stay,” Kleisner said. “And that iPad in

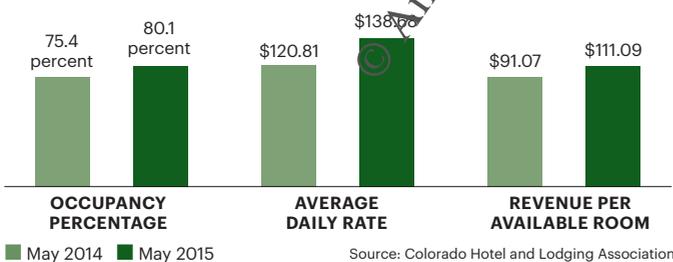
the guest room is something that they haven’t seen before.”

Place Global CEO Alan Johnson, whose company is growing into the hotel space with the JW Marriott program, said he believes apps eventually could push promotions out to guests based on their history.

▶ BY THE NUMBERS

HOTELS SHOW HEALTHY GROWTH

The start of the summer vacation season continued the run of good news for Denver-area hotels, as indicators in all three of the industry’s major statistical categories showed business continues to boom. Here’s a look:



▶ BIG NUMBER

5.1 percent

The rate that Denver restaurant sales grew from May 2014 to May 2015 — the fourth-highest pace of growth among U.S. cities. The metro area saw particularly good sales over the Memorial Day weekend, with 5.3 percent year-over-year growth.



Source: Applied Predictive Technologies

THINKSTOCK

▶ SURVEY SAYS



Chipotle Mexican Grill Inc. ranked second among the 15 limited-service restaurants in the American Customer Satisfaction Index.

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COLO. CHAINS RATE HIGH FOR SATISFACTION

A pair of Colorado-based restaurant chains had differing results in their first year of being measured in the American Customer Satisfaction Index.

Chipotle Mexican Grill Inc. ranked second among the 15 limited-service restaurants in its first year of being a part of the annual report based on a survey of 5,023 customers. With an overall score of 83 on a 100-point scale, it ranked only behind fast-food leader Chick-fil-A, which received an 86.

Meanwhile, Red Robin Gourmet Burgers Inc. entered the rankings of full-service restaurants with a score of 77 — placing it eighth among the 12 chains on which consumers gave their thoughts. Texas Roadhouse is the industry leader in the category with an

83 score on the ACSI survey.

Overall, the index found, customer satisfaction with sit-down restaurants remains high — they ranked sixth out of 43 sectors. However, consumers’ feelings about limited-service restaurants is on the decline, with satisfaction ratings dropping 3.8 percent points from 2014 to their lowest levels in the past five years.

“The fast-casual segment of quick-service restaurants is nicely situated for the confluence of changing consumer tastes and a rebounding economy,” ACSI director David VanAmburg said of restaurants like Chipotle. “Fast-casual outlets offer higher-quality ingredients, freshness and fast service — all at a reasonable price.”