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How to Make a Green Comeback in 2010
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The lodging industry's commitment to sustainability may have been side-lined for the most part in 2009, as was the case with so many other initiatives that were forced to take a back seat with much of the industry in financial survival mode. But in 2010, "green" projects are poised for a comeback. According to recent research from Hospitality Technology, hotels identify green initiatives to be an important part of their development and innovation efforts in the year ahead. But in lieu of new builds, hotels are bringing green practices to the forefront in the form of property retrofits and technological innovations; a combined strategy that is designed to not only conserve costs and resources, but to align with growing consumer sentiments. *HT* spoke with a number of operators to learn about the strategies that are working for them, and to gain some insight into future eco-friendly innovations.



"I definitely see it [green technology] as a growing best practice," says Renee Swoger, manager of energy efficiency & environmental services for Accor North America (www.accor-na.com).

Last October, the growing buzz surrounding Accor's new energy-efficient building design, the "Phoenix" prototype, came to a crescendo with the opening of its Motel 6 Northlake-Speedway property in Texas. Designed to conserve 20 percent more energy than its sister properties, the Phoenix prototype relies on a variety of technological innovations to make that happen, including high-efficiency PTAC units (packaged terminal air conditioners from General Electric, www.ge.com) with occupancy-sensing thermostats (Verdant Thermostat, www.verdantthermostat.com), thermal-solar water heating (Hobbs Air Conditioning), a high-tech irrigation controller that works in

tandem with weather data via the Internet (Hydropoint, www.Hydropoint.com), and more. "Twenty percent [in energy savings] translates to \$20,000 on an annual basis when you are talking about water, electricity and gas," says Swoger who notes that the thermal solar water heating system is one of the more exciting technologies in the Phoenix prototype because it supplements gas-fired heating. "It is something we never tested before and the technology is new."

The PTAC units have occupancy-sensing wireless thermostats and can adjust guestroom temperature settings based on movement, helping to reduce costs associated with heating and cooling the rooms. Plus, should a PTAC unit fail, the unit in the room next door will alert management of the problem so that it can be fixed before there is a guest complaint. "Not only is it energy efficient, but it lets us know there is a problem," says Swoger.

Although the Motel 6 Northlake-Speedway location is currently the only Phoenix new-build, Swoger notes that they are invested in a program in which they retrofit existing properties, called the Phoenix Package. "There are three different ones that a hotel may receive. Last year we did 23 retrofits and in 2010 we plan on doing 26," says Swoger. "We are also going to be doing the same thing with Studio 6. We will do a couple in 2010 and carry that into 2011."

Smart room management

One of the most efficient technology tactics that hotels can follow in their sustainability pursuits is to interface their property management system (PMS) with their energy management system. That's exactly what the Canadian-based Vintage Hotels (www.vintage-hotels.com) did. Three of Vintage's six properties, the Queen's Landing, Price Post, and Pillar & Post, are utilizing an interface that connects their NORTHWIND-Maestro PMS (www.maestropms.com) to the WiSuite energy management system (www.wisuite.com). The end result: room temperature settings are able to be adjusted upon guest check-in/-out for the combined three-property total of 376 rooms.

"What drove the interface was to automate the whole process of controlling the temperature through check-in and check-out. The interface talks to the energy system to hit a certain temperature whether it is summer or winter," says Tommaso Lorenzo, IT manager for Vintage Hotels. "From a cost perspective it has allowed us to save on the energy bills."

Thermostat control isn't the only area where the opportunity to automate can help to control costs. "What we would like is the ability to control the actual lighting system," says Lorenzo. "We have these lights that are on and they are not serving any purpose. You can start controlling the lighting system in the next couple of years. If a guest comes in and leaves the light on, they can shut off those lights."

Like Vintage Hotels, the Bardessono hotel, operated by MTM Luxury Lodging (www.bardessono.com; www.mtmluxurylodging.com) has its own energy management interface via PAR-Springer Miller Systems' (www.springermiller.com) SMS|Host and Inncom (www.inncom.com). Through this interface, the hotel has control over all of the environmental controls in the room upon guest check-in/out and room occupancy.

"We are a very eco-friendly hotel so we developed everything with the environment in mind," says Adam Maurer, Bardessono's rooms division manager. "When a guest leaves a room, after 20 minutes the solar shades [on the windows] are going to lower to block the sunlight. When the sunlight hits the window, it heats up the room causing more energy to be used to cool down the room. We also have the lights turn off at that time. And the air conditioning or the heat will fluctuate and only turn on when it [the room temperature] goes up or down."

In addition to the interface, Bardessono's rooms also feature **personal device media hubs via GuestLINK** (www.guestlink-cii.com) that are on a timer and shut down after 30 minutes of inactivity. "We are also currently developing a way to turn the TV on and off," says Maurer.

A different sustainability direction

One important point operators should be aware of: sustainability efforts do not need to be limited solely to the guestroom. The Peppermill Resort Casino (www.peppermillreno.com) in Reno, Nevada is tackling sustainability from a different direction with the use of Agilysys' (www.agilysys.com) DataMagine document management solutions in their human resources department.

"We are virtually almost 100% paperless," says Kamerine Tangaro, the employee event coordinator for Peppermill Wendover Hotel Casino. The document management solution allows the property to file, retrieve and route electronic forms for managerial approval through a number of modules, unless using a hard copy cannot be avoided.

"Since we turned off our green bar printers, we have saved over 60 percent of our paper costs from July to December," says Tangaro. "There is no need to print anything, no need to pay for storage units. We have everything at our fingertips."