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Displays improve in-room entertainment options

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No longer is the large flat-screen display in a hotel just used for watching your favorite “Seinfeld” reruns. Today, hospitality display manufacturers are just as concerned with guests using the monitor as a medium of many other activities, such as listening to music, surfing the Internet, working on documents or playing videogames, to name a few.

In fact, the common term for these electronic devices—the television—is no longer appropriate. Some displays, such as Panasonic’s hospitality models, aren’t even built with a tuner. This allows hoteliers the flexibility to choose which tuner card to install.



“The guest is demanding access to their own content,” said Anthony Fonzo, senior marketing manager at Philips Hospitality. “Some guests will appreciate that you can split the screen and watch the NCAA tournament and do work on your laptop [shown on the screen] at the same time.”

When developing these displays, adding some sort of connectivity is becoming a requirement, said Jim Noecker, director of systems sales engineering for the Panasonic Professional Display Co.

“It’s without a doubt definitely a trend,” he said. “What percent of guests are demanding it I’m not sure, but it’s growing every day.”

The most common applications for a display in a hotel guestroom, aside from watching television, seem to be plugging in an MP3 player to listen to music or connecting a laptop for work or recreational purposes.

“I’ve been hearing that a lot of people are married to their MP3 players,” Noecker said. “Guests are also bringing camcorders to look at their vacation movies at the end of the day and portable DVD players so they can watch movies that they brought themselves. They’re even bringing gaming systems that they want to connect up.”

Noecker said higher-end properties are choosing to add an audio component with external speakers to the in-room entertainment system so music listeners get the best quality, but also noted that speakers in a Panasonic display are satisfactory.

"They're certainly not bad," he said. "You could do a lot worse."

"LG has invisible speakers so that you don't see the speaker grill," said Richard Lewis, SVP of research and technology for LG Electronics. "The amplifiers are actually quite good and, in many cases, are significantly better than iPod docking stations."

As far as connecting a computer, a flat-panel display can provide a much higher quality picture than the laptop itself, and experts say the connectivity is rather seamless.

"Virtually any flat-panel today is high definition," Noecker said. "Most laptops can output HD. But basically, if the PC doesn't match the resolution of the television, it will automatically convert. It's a computer, so everything is going to look pretty crisp."

The future of guestroom televisions will incorporate the Internet and allow downloading content as well as surfing the Web, but experts agree there is much more research to do before that availability emerges in the hospitality space.

"The landscape is changing," Fonzo said. "The model is more challenging now, but there's still a need for hotels with capital situations, especially today, to be able to afford it."