



Going GREEN, Satisfying Guests

Hoteliers aim to save money, environment, without diminishing comfort.

By Adam Kirby, Associate Editor

There has always been a kind of quiet conflict in the hospitality industry when it comes to going green. On the one hand, reducing consumption of energy and resources makes good sense from an economic standpoint, to say nothing of the social and environmental responsibility. On the other hand, hotels are in the business of pampering guests first and foremost, and while many of those guests may be happy to do their part to stem global warming, hoteliers are understandably reticent about doing anything that might diminish guests' overall comfort.

That conflict has been a conscious concern for Troy Strand, general manager of the luxury Talbott Hotel in Chicago, ever since the boutique property began seriously exploring green options several years ago. The Talbott purchases carbon offsets from Renewable Choice Energy, it has installed compact fluorescent lighting throughout the property and it has been using Inncom

International's e4 Smart Digital Thermostat for energy management for a couple years. Those steps were helpful in reducing The Talbott's carbon footprint, but it is the hotel's newest eco-friendly initiative that really sets it apart.

In March, the hotel modified its e4 thermostats with Inncom's ecoMode upgrade, which won best-in-show honors at November's International Hotel/Motel &

Restaurant Show. The ecoMode add-on is (literally) a green button on the thermostat that invites guests to opt in to a hotel's conservation program, signaling to housekeeping, for instance, that the guest does not expect daily linen changes. It also triggers a wider range of temperature setbacks to the e4 system, meaning the guestroom heating or air conditioning will go longer than normal without being activated.

Strand was drawn to ecoMode for its convenience of giving guests a simple way to make their stay environmentally friendly while simultaneously giving the hotel an efficient way to track which guests participate. That information can be used by the hotel to market eco-friendly promotions down the road, but more immediately, The Talbott is giving back to participating guests—gift cards worth one month of carbon offset credits for their homes.

"We feel the program is unique to us," Strand says. "The guest is getting something back; they're not losing something by not getting their sheets and their towels changed, and they also feel like they're doing something useful for the environment."

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Adding incentive for participation will likely get more people involved. A 2007 survey by global marketing information firm J.D. Power and Associates found that while 73% of guests would be willing to actively participate in a hotel's green program, the number grows to 86% if there is a reward for doing so.

By getting guests actively involved in the conservation process, ecoMode keeps them consciously aware of their resource consumption throughout their hotel stays. And because it is completely optional, participating guests are not put off if they return to their rooms and the temperature is not exactly as they left it.

"This seemed to fit what we wanted to do," Strand says.

"Many hotels have that process where guests can flip a card over and indicate they don't want their sheets changed and things like that. This goes beyond that."

A Natural Habitat

The 100-key Habitat Suites Hotel in Austin, Texas, strives to be among the greenest hotels around. Until 2005, Habitat had been using energy management technology from Honeywell, but overzealous guests were tampering with the in-room thermostats and unknowingly undoing the temperature setbacks—needlessly increasing the hotel's electricity costs and carbon footprint, says General Manager Natalie Marquis.

The hotel has since installed Telkonet's SmartEnergy system,▶

LED Lights Offer Superior Efficiency, Creativity

Just as the move to compact fluorescent bulbs has gone mainstream, leading-edge hoteliers are transitioning to an even more energy-efficient lighting source: light-emitting diodes, commonly known as LED.

LED lights beat compact fluorescents in both energy efficiency and life expectancy. Fluorescent bulbs typically expire after about 10,000 hours, while LED lights can last for up to 60,000. Incandescent bulbs, by contrast, rarely survive past 2,000 hours. Additionally, LEDs require roughly half as much electricity as compact fluorescents. LED lights are more expensive to install than compact fluorescents, but that cost can even out over the life of the lights, considering less frequent replacement and the reduced energy use.

"LED technology in general offers a lot of promise for the future," says Ray Burger, president of Missouri-based Pineapple Hospitality, which sells eco-friendly products to the hotel industry. "Just about all the applications that compact fluorescents are currently in service for at hotels will eventually be replaced by LEDs."

Widespread implementation of LED lights is about five years off, Burger guesses, as the price comes down and general illumination is perfected. Still, many hotels already have adopted LEDs for small-scale applications, like exit signs. And vendors such as Philips Electronics are offering other LED products, like Philips' Stumble Light, a motion-activated LED system that provides soft lighting for guests who get up in the middle of the night.

Some hotels, like the newly opened InterContinental San Francisco, are installing LEDs in restaurants and meeting rooms to serve as both decoration and effective illumination. The technology is a nice alternative to using bulbs with colored gels for stage lighting, as LEDs can be digitally manipulated, and thus are capable of emitting precise shades of any color in the rainbow at the touch of a button. Hue, intensity and saturation are easily adjustable, and even plain white light can be made to look more natural than light produced by bulbs.

"We're able to hit any spectrum of the color wheel using LED, just by tapping into the computer," says Mary Kehoe, director of sales for PSAV Presentation Services and coordinator of the hotel's LED installation. "It allows more lighting options and is a lot more fun."

The InterContinental is considering adding LED lights in lounges and reception areas as well, Kehoe says. And PSAV engineers are exploring ways to change the appearance of entire walls by manipulating dense collections of LEDs.

"When you have many of them together, you can take any wall and basically turn it into any complete color, faded from one to the next. You can literally paint the wall with LEDs—it's really cool," Kehoe says.

A similar effect is currently in place at the Hyatt Regency Miami, where curtains layered with LEDs enable the customizable display of logos or words.

Search Out Local Rebates

When Investors Hospitality Management (IHM) takes control of a hotel, one of the first calls CEO John DiGuseppe makes is to the local utility company.

The Thousand Oaks, California-based IHM, which touts itself as America's first green third-party management company, makes it a point to leverage business-friendly environmental initiatives at the local level as a way to transform the energy efficiency of newly managed properties.

"When you're dealing with the owners, they think being green is so hard—but it's not," DiGuseppe says. "Pick up the phone and call the utility companies and have them come out and give you an assessment. You'll be surprised at how much you can do that costs very, very little."

Case in point: When IHM began managing The Hotel on Mount Charleston in Las Vegas in December, DiGuseppe had the local electric company, Nevada Power, come out to the property to assess its energy efficiencies. Through Nevada Power's Sure Bet Program, which compensates businesses for eco-friendly facilities upgrades, IHM received discounts and reimbursements for a completely new energy management system. The property-wide system ended up costing IHM about US\$8,300, which DiGuseppe expects to recoup within 13 months by reducing energy use by one-third.

Other localities and utilities have similar programs. Water departments sometimes give away low-flow toilets and faucets. Gas companies may provide discounts to properties that install Energy Star-certified windows. With just a little initiative, resource conservation can become easy and relatively inexpensive, DiGuseppe says.

TECHNOLOGY



Photos: Jody Horton

Habitat Suites Hotel employs Telkonet's SmartEnergy system, which enables it to track usage data while also giving guests efficient rooms with ideal temperatures.

else anyone is doing," she says. "It's very cutting-edge."

The big differentiator for SmartEnergy is its recovery time technology, which takes into consideration external factors affecting room temperature, like outside weather or even the location of the particular room within the hotel. The thermostat frequently samples temperature changes in the room and dynamically calculates the optimal setback temperature to use when the room is unoccupied—thus reducing the length of time it takes to bring the



which has reduced its kilowatt consumption by about 12% annually. The Telkonet system is "dummy-proof," Marquis says. "What Telkonet is doing is far beyond anything

temperature back to a guest's preference. Rather than programming arbitrary setback temperatures, hoteliers instead give the system an ideal recovery time, and the system figures out the optimal vacant-room temperature.

Similar to its competitor eco-Mode, SmartEnergy offers real-time data-logging capabilities, tracking energy usage statistics and overall system performance. Habitat uses the data to identify energy inefficiencies throughout the property, as well as related maintenance needs. Additionally, the hotel has a partnership with Austin Energy, whereby the electric company monitors the hotel's energy use and thus knows exactly how much electricity capacity can be reduced at peak-demand times without adversely impacting guests. In exchange, Habitat gets a discount on its energy bill.

Green As An Amenity

Broomfield, Colorado-based RockResorts recently made a public commitment to being environmentally friendly, and given that most of its properties are located in natural settings, the company believes going green is a sort of guest amenity in and of itself.

RockResorts is cutting back on minor conveniences like turndown service while guests are away, with the hope that customers appreciate and even desire energy conservation. "It's a little thing, but it sends a message about what you are trying to do to green your hotel," says Julie Klein, RockResorts' director of environmental affairs. Motion detectors also are being installed in public areas throughout the group's properties for the automatic turning off of lights and temperature control systems.

The InterContinental Chicago, meanwhile, has a laundry list of little things designed to go unnoticed by guests but which go a long way toward LEED certification. For starters, the hotel uses an Inncom energy management system integrated with Saflok infrared door sensors, but on the other end of the technology spectrum, it also has implemented a guestroom water conservation measure.

Director of Engineering Raymond Kempf bought a bunch of Toilet Tummies—simple rubber pouches filled with air—and placed them in toilet tanks throughout the property. The pouches reduce water use by about 25% and cost just US\$3 each. Also in the bathrooms, the InterContinental uses coreless toilet paper rolls, which have 22% more paper and cost roughly the same amount as regular rolls. And lastly, the hotel has a partnership with the city to donate leftover liquid bath amenities to the needy, rather than disposing of them. "It's low-hanging fruit," Kempf says, "but it makes such a huge difference." ♦

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TECH BRIEFS

Crestron offers Green Light integrated lighting, HVAC and shade control system... **Honeywell** rolls out Cool Control Plus energy-efficiency program at more than 150 hotels and motels in California... **InTown Suites** selects **Telkonet's** SmartEnergy energy management system for 125 U.S. properties... **HEI Hotels & Resorts** replaces HVAC control systems with **Inncom International's** e4 Smart Digital Thermostat at its 29 hotels... **Cophorne Hotel & Resort** Bay of Islands in Waitangi, New Zealand, installs 100 sq. m of solar panels... **American DG Energy** provides on-site cogeneration power to Hotel Indigo Boston-Newton Riverside in Massachusetts... **IdeaS** unveils new consulting division, **IdeaS Advantage**, to help hotels develop efficient revenue optimization cultures... **Pegasus Solutions** and **Leonardo Media** jointly create **ContentHub**, providing a single environment to manage and distribute all online hotel content... **Agilysys** acquires procurement software firm **Eatec Corp.**... **Nexus World Services** launches HotelworX sales force automation system... **Vantage Hospitality Group** names **Inn-Phone** its preferred guestroom phone vendor... **ResortQuest** installs **Kaba Ilco's** Oracode keyless access system at its managed properties... **NxTV** signs comprehensive digital content agreement with NBC Universal for HD movies and on-demand entertainment... **Park Plaza Hotels** installs **VDA's** PowerTV HD interactive high-definition digital TV platform at most of its properties... **Dreampark** and **Hoist Hospitality Group** develop customized version of **Dreamgallery IPTV** middleware... **Hotel Concepts** implements **IDPMS** software at Duane Street Hotel in New York City... **StarCite** renews deal with **Hyatt Hotels & Resorts** for use of **StarCite's** Small Meeting Solution... **Silverton Casino Lodge** in Las Vegas selects **MicroStrategy's** Dynamic Enterprise Dashboards as its business intelligence solution... **Flyte Systems** installs **FlyteBoard** real-time airline information displays at **Doubletree Hotel Seattle Airport** and **Hilton Seattle Airport Hotel and Conference Center**.