

How Technology is Changing the Face of Traditional Hospitality

Tomasz Mloduchowski, CTO at Zerado, opened the session, and invited the panellists to introduce themselves. Ed Lines said that he was an Industry Manager at Google, specialising in the hospitality and tourism subsector. Jo Brennan said she was the Founder and CEO of JamJou, who were focused on 'gamifying' employee relationships. Patience Tagborlo said that she was the Head of Partnership Solutions at Wi-Q, an online platform which allowed customers to order food and drinks using their own devices. She said that there were hurdles to the adoption of tech in the hospitality industry, and that hoteliers often feared what they did not understand.

Ed Lines explained that a lot of his team's work focused on integration of technology, and that they worked with major hotel chains and tourist brands on advertising strategy. There had been a big change in user behaviour related to advertising, as the consistent checking of mobile phones offered an opportunity to exploit new consumer behaviour.

Jo Brennan remarked that JamJou saw a gap in ways of integrating technology for younger employees, to deliver additional forms of communication or training they might need. They had been working on analytics from the gaming sector to help develop staff, and give feedback to management on where staff were struggling.

There was a question on whether having an app for everything was overkill. Patience Tagborlo revealed that Wi-Q had started as an app, but they had realised that that would not work. She felt that some things would be permanent apps, such as the ones consumers used for their banking, but that other services would be taken over by tech such as HTML5. Ed Lines said that it was remarkable how many people said they wished they had come up with an app, without recognising that apps needed to solve a specific problem and were not an end in themselves. Tomasz Mloduchowski said that it was Zerado's belief that consumers would normally make the simplest choice, so it was up to businesses to make sure that that was also the right choice.

There was a question about what innovation meant to the panel. Jo Brennan said that innovation needed to truly address a problem, and that there was a risk of 'overkill' in the use of the word. Patience Tagborlo commented that innovation did not have to be exclusively about technology. In reference to data capture, she said that it was not useful unless it was useful, for example in allowing businesses to customise customer offers. Patience Tagborlo believed that personalisation was the next big thing. Ed Lines added that, from a digital advertising point of view, innovation was about how to develop an effective audience strategy.