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by

**Bruce Grant-Braham, FHCIMA
Senior Lecturer, Bournemouth University**

BOOK HOTELS IN REAL-TIME FROM YOUR MOBILE

The long awaited mobile ability to be able to reserve ahead from a mobile phone has at last arrived with Reporo and Active Hotels launching their new UK service.

Business and leisure travellers can now find and book up to the minute accommodation on the move with the launch of the UK's first real-time hotel booking service via mobile.

Mobile shopping service Reporo has teamed up with Active Hotels, one of Europe's leading online hotel reservation providers, to offer this service to mobile users on the move. From rural B&Bs to five star city centre corporate hotels, users will have a choice of over 3,500 hotels across the UK. Furthermore, Active Hotels' complete European inventory of over 11,000 hotels is set to be made available in the near future.

The Reporo service is aimed as a solution for time-pressed business travellers and those taking spontaneous breaks and unscheduled overnight stays. The search function allows such users either to find a wide selection of hotels within a specified radius of their chosen location or to simply search by hotel name. Once located on the system full hotel information is displayed, including a photo of the hotel, a description of amenities and maps to help find the hotel.

Booking is said to be easy, secure and completed within minutes. To enable this, Reporo links directly with the live database on the Active Hotels server. This then responds by only displaying hotels where rooms are actually available.

The service is said to be fast, convenient and secure and can be used across multiple operator networks, including O2, Orange, T-Mobile, Virgin and Vodafone. This means that anyone with a Reporo-enabled GPRS phone can use the service, regardless of which network provides them with their mobile phone access.

Travellers don't have to be highly technical to use the service as all they need is a GPRS enabled mobile phone. In order to activate the service, users simply visit Reporo's web site to register their details and follow the simple instructions to access Reporo from their mobile phone. During the initial registration process credit card details are input once online and any subsequent purchases via mobile is authorised by a personal four-digit PIN which is known only to the user.

Within seconds of completing registration, users receive a text message containing the Reporo software, and once downloaded they can use the service immediately.

Business and leisure travellers will soon wonder how they ever lived without such a facility, which will hopefully help to make spur of the moment travel a fun and stress-free experience.

CONCERN OVER IDENTITY THEFT ADDRESSED

Worldwide there is increasing concern over the potential for identity theft and the USA is no exception. The hotel industry there is experiencing heightened guest sensitivity over the personal security of their private details and the American Hotel & Lodging Association (AH&LA) has therefore been prompted into taking action.

The AH&LA has strenuously denied the rumour that is doing the rounds that magnetic-strip hotel room key cards contain guests' personal information and are therefore open to copying and fraud.

The AH&LA says that, "While many members of the lodging industry employ magnetic-strip hotel room key cards, they do not supply a guests' personal information such as credit card numbers, home address, or e-mail addresses".

According to the manufacturers of these devices, room key cards typically capture information through three embedded and encrypted tracks. Most hoteliers use track "three," which contains locked information that usually lists the guest's room number and check in/out dates. The remaining tracks ("one" and "two") — if supplied by the hotel's property management system — also provide additional, limited guest information.

"The issue of identity theft is a public concern that is reported to affect many Americans," said AH&LA President and CEO Joseph A. McInerney. "We're doing everything in our power to inform guests that this is a myth and that this is not in anyway, affecting their personal safety.

The significance of the AH&LA is that it is a 95-year-old dual membership association of state and city partner lodging associations throughout the United States with some ten thousand members nationwide, representing more than 1.3 million guest bedrooms.

ON-LINE BOOKINGS ON THE UP

Still not taking reservations over the Internet? If you are in that situation then you could be seriously missing out if the example of NH Hoteles is typical.

The number of visits in the latest quarter to that hotel group's web site was up by more than fifty per cent over the previous quarter with nearly 500,000 hits being recorded every month. This is particularly remarkable as the site was only launched last June. Part of the increased usage of online reservations has been credited to the fact that the new web site is both more useful and provides more information with shorter download times than was previously the case.

NH Hoteles has nearly tripled its internet sales compared to last year's figures, after expanding and improving the services of its web site, which first came online in 2004. To make customer access easier, a more personalised page has been set up according to each customer's profile and the access routes have also been simplified

The NH-Hoteles web site has more information and a larger number of images. New features include virtual views of the hotels, a promotion search engine, personalised on-line booking service, based on user preferences, and searches using interactive maps and hotel lists.

One of the most noteworthy new applications is the Client Page, designed for corporate customers, in particular for small businesses, which enables bookings to be made at the prices negotiated with each customer. These bookings can involve discounts of up to twenty-five per cent. Customers can also use this page to access personalised promotions online, as well as being able to access an activity and productivity report.

NH Hoteles has also created the Trade Page for travel agencies that aims to facilitate and automate all their trading relations with NH Hoteles. The Trade Page offers customers a different, personalised service. Travel agencies can find all the information and services they need to manage their relations more efficiently, transparently and on an ongoing basis.

As for future prospects, in 2006 sales are expected to demonstrate triple-digit growth.

Links:

American Hotel and Lodging Association: www.ahla.com

NH Hoteles Group: <http://www.nh-hotels.com>

Reporo: www.reporo.com

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