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Pool Tech

Hyatt Regency Clearwater serves guests with poolside technology.
By John Paul Boukis



Unlike many destinations, the Hyatt Regency Clearwater is a poolcentric property with more than 50 percent of guests using the scenic pool overlooking the Gulf of Mexico.

Thinking of poolside F&B can invoke an image of sipping an umbrella-laden drink from a lounge chair, then squinting through your

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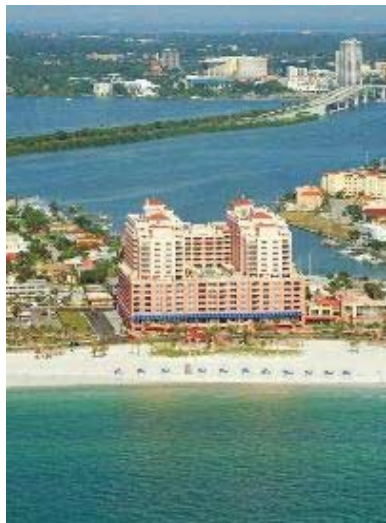
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“On a busy week in summer or Spring Break, we’ll have six cocktail servers and three bartenders serving upwards of 300 people at the pool,” says F&B Director David Powell. He says the efficiency the technology brings to poolside service results in more rounds of drinks and higher sales.

shades for a glimpse of that server to flag down for a refresh. Squint no more. Guests at the Hyatt Regency Clearwater Beach Resort & Spa summon their server using a pager system promoted as waterproof. The tech touch has created a buzz in the area and given guests an extra degree of convenience.

The Hyatt Regency Clearwater, which opened last spring, is the first property to perform a full installation of the technology (a sister hotel had also completed an installation, but significant technical glitches forced its removal). The Clearwater property, with 250 spacious suites, is the centerpiece of the city’s new beachwalk. Unlike many destinations, this is a pool-centric property, with more than 50 percent of guests using the scenic pool overlooking the Gulf of Mexico during their stay. F&B Director David Powell has been working closely with his staff and the vendor to optimize the program.

“Originally, we installed the units on the pool chairs,” he says. “But we found that guests were moving the chairs all over, and then we couldn’t find them. So we changed the process to greeting the guest after they sit down and handing them the pager. That way we can explain it and talk about it. We let them know we’re at the pool deck to serve...just hit the button to summon us.”

When the guest presses the button, it sends a silent page to the server, who wears an alphanumeric pager. If the server doesn’t respond within three minutes, the manager also gets cued. The property benefits from integrating the technology, as Powell definitely sees labor efficiency in the process.

“After the server is called, they can use their handheld Micros for order taking, and the order goes straight to the kitchen. It shoots right back to the bartender or kitchen. And since the units are all numbered, we know how to ring the check and where to run the food. A food runner can send it out. It makes us much more efficient.” And if that efficiency leads to a couple of extra rounds of drinks, it can add up.

And it often adds up due to the busy pool’s Latin vibe at outdoor bar/restaurant Swim, featuring Chef Brad Gillespie’s menu of beef empanadas, fish tacos, quesadillas, burgers, and a focus on specialty frozen drinks, not only for adults but kids too (the kids’ “Tongue Changer” comes in a dual cup with twisty straw and changes the color of your tongue).

Powell believes the technology has made a significant difference in his service scores. “People really appreciate it,” he says. “They like the technology. Technology in general is always a ‘wow’ factor in hotels, and Hyatt is always looking for innovative products and technologies, especially when opening new hotels.” The hotel opened at Spring Break, and the buzz was all around Clearwater Beach. “We had people walk in off the streets and ask about it. The pool area is tough to get good service scores. At this hotel, it has really helped. Our service scores are number five in the company in our first year. I believe these units helped us achieve that.”

Another Hyatt property that attempted a permanent outdoor installation was frustrated by units shorting out and decided not to use them. Powell has also had some problems but has been working with the supplier to improve the units. “They’re water-resistant, but we found water was getting into the battery compartment,” he explains. “So we worked with them. They just sent back all the units with a new enhancement to make them more waterproof.”

Training was fairly basic, primarily involving making the stations efficient for food running. “The company has been very cooperative in helping us maximize what the product does,” Powell says. Another perk that helps is a tech-savvy young staff.

“Our young staff members love to use the technology and play with handheld computers. Also, we’ve been using it since day one. Everyone knows this system. On a busy week in summer or Spring Break, we’ll have six cocktail servers and three bartenders serving upwards of 300 people at the pool.”

Powell would like to see future enhancements, including a button where the guest could directly order another round. In the meantime though, Powell is “really excited about this year’s Spring Break.”

John Paul Boukis helped develop the American Hotel and Lodging Association’s publishing division and is a founding editor of HOTEL F&B. He is based in Tampa.

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