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Best Check-in? No Check-in!

Guest Journey

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It's 2025. You can fly across the Atlantic, binge watch a series at 30,000 feet, call a ride with a tap, and unlock your front door with your phone. But step into many hotels and suddenly it's like the future hit pause at the front desk. The check-in process, still clunky, still manual, still weirdly sacred, somehow remains frozen in time. And the most ironic part? We keep calling it "hospitality."

Imagine you bring a time traveler from 1925 on a journey today: even if they are rich and quite experienced, they would be totally flashed! Cross-Atlantic flight, entertained by Netflix, checking for an Uber after landing, directions on Google Maps, posting a selfie on Instagram in front of the hotel, going to reception – and then, for the very first time, our time-traveler would say: *"Well, this I know, this is a hotel check-in, only the key looks a bit strange."*

How come, now in 2025, this check-in process is still so resistant against change?

Essentially it comes down to complexity, bad execution and a big misconception.

THE MISCONCEPTION

A common argument against a more digital check-in process always was (and often still is): *"We are in the hospitality business. We want to keep it personal."*

Excuse me? This is the reason why you let me wait in line and then make me feel like I'm applying for a loan? Let's sort things out a bit. There are two main, but immensely different aspects of a check-in:

1. **To provide a warm welcome** – like it would be if you invited some distant relative to your home! Being friendly, smiling, showing around, answer questions, giving tips for what to do in the surroundings, offering a drink, helping with the luggage – things like that, aka human hospitality.
2. **To conclude admin tasks** – filling and signing a registration form, depending on the country rules checking ID, making payment/provide a CC, preparing and handing over a keycard ...

Depending on the brand and positioning of the property, the first could be a very important part of the whole experience (eg. most luxury brands) or be almost non-existent (some economy brands, holiday homes).

The second is just a painfully time-wasting nuisance. Unfortunately, it must be done. But, why oh why, by blocking staff members and exactly when I finally arrive at the hotel?

There are so many much better occasions for me to handle the purely admin part of the check-in, either on the way or at the latest (and at least autonomously finalized) at a self-service terminal to receive a key (providing an NFC key into my apple/google wallet would even be better, thank you). And honestly, wasting those ever more expensive (and hard to find) employees' time for tasks adding zero value for the guest is no longer sustainable. Or to put it another way: when have you denied the last well trained and empathetic applicants for reception night shifts? Exactly.

COMPLEXITY AND BAD EXECUTION

To be fair, many hoteliers are very aware of this misconception and would love to remove everything transactional from the welcome experience. The harsh reality is it is damn hard to do.

Booking might be with a third party, regulations for registration vary from country to country, payments options are plentiful, invoices must be split, different PMS systems communicate with different door lock systems to create (and share) keys and sometimes the elevator demands to be integrated as well to bring up the guest to the right floors. Take a small chain with properties with different tech stacks in several countries and you quickly realize why there is no easy solution covering all this. This needs true experience and know how, which fortunately is available in the market. Choose partners with deep domain expertise in connecting systems, who are able to tame the messy beast that is the hotel tech stack. And btw, being flexible in optimizing your own processes doesn't hurt either.

The second challenge is, implementing all this in a truly user-friendly way. Everybody has experienced self-service options in various fields – ATMs, gas stations, pay stations in parking garages, ticket machines, airline check-in, etc. And yes, everybody has experienced almost comically bad executions of such services.

But the thing is, it can also be done in a *"don't make me think"*-like self-explanatory, fast and smooth way. If done so, it gives the guest more control and flexibility while taking away effort from the hotel.

The reality is, the best check-in process is just no check-in, but a pure welcome instead. Living in 2025 I am sure this is possible.





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