

EXCEEDING GUEST WI-FI EXPECTATIONS IN THE HOSPITALITY TECHNOLOGY GOLD RUSH

How hotels are adapting to a world where Wi-Fi has become a necessary utility, and guest devices take center stage at every aspect of the hotel experience

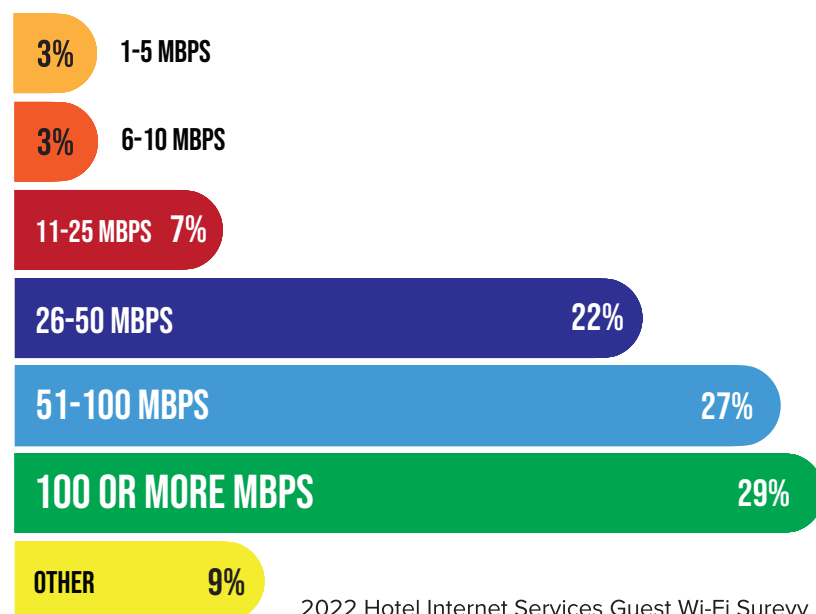


INTRODUCTION

Over the past two years, perceptions about the value and purpose of technology have changed on both sides of the hotel front desk, but the value of fast, reliable internet accessibility remains a rising constant. With the continued [rise of the digital nomad traveler¹](#) amidst a backdrop of the proliferation of remote work across every corner of U.S. industry, it's easy to see how hospitality is poised for success throughout the next business cycle—as long as it can provide a network framework capable of meeting guest expectations.

Hotel guests, on average, believe hotels should offer internet speeds of 100 megabytes per second in each guestroom in order for the service to be acceptable. Additionally, the variety of video streaming content providers has grown exponentially since prior to the pandemic, as has guest expectations for video quality and download speeds. Casting guest entertainment onto the guestroom TV is an aspirational solution often due to connectivity limitations that must be inevitably addressed. While hotels could once provide access to Netflix and 720p connections, guests may desire access to services from Paramount+ to HBO. In a world where the emergence of a new subscription service can [garner 10 million users in a single day²](#), how can hoteliers keep pace with the availability of these services?

What internet speed do you think is sufficient for a hotel to provide?



2022 Hotel Internet Services Guest Wi-Fi Survey

In order to adapt to these needs, hotels have taken on a variety of strategies, from ever-more-sophisticated over-the-top solutions to temporary password login schemes entered on the TV, each with a varying degree of success. The most impactful method to meet guest entertainment expectations is to directly interface with travelers' personal devices using a property's internet network.

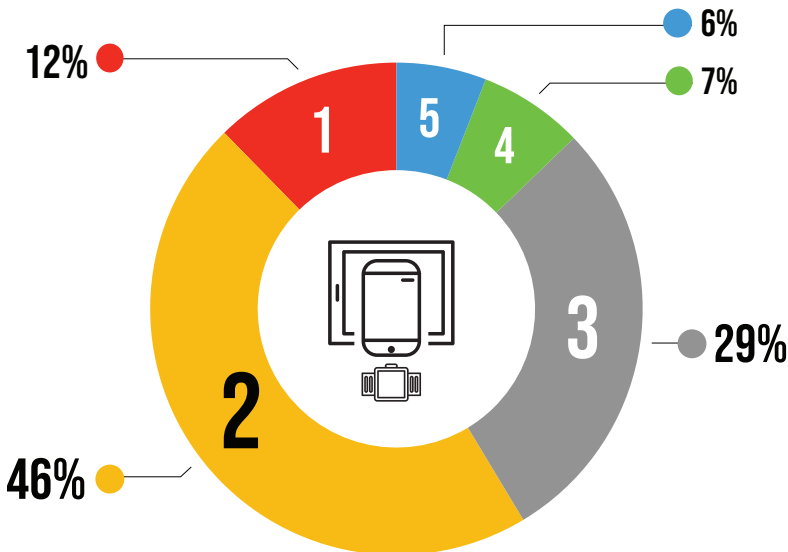
Yet hotel Wi-Fi is often treated as [something to be finessed or worked around³](#) in order for guests to have a satisfactory experience. These considerations go beyond connectivity, and include security concerns as well as ways to improve ease-of-use and addressing the impracticality of entering passwords at the beginning of every stay simply to access the hotel's network.

What follows is a detailed analysis of a 2022 HIS survey conducted on more than 200 guests and nearly 100 hoteliers from around the United States. These respondents were able to provide critical insight into the emerging trends surrounding hospitality's Wi-Fi, security and content streaming capabilities. This report compares and contrasts results from a similar HIS survey conducted in 2019, demonstrating not only how demand for high-speed connectivity is a crucial component of a positive guest experience, but how travelers' preferences for digital content continue to change. Most importantly, these trends are occurring at a time of technological innovation taking place within the hotel industry that is allowing hotels to solve the guestroom entertainment puzzle, once and for all.

MOBILE TAKEOVER

It's impossible to talk about hotel Wi-Fi without acknowledging the exponential growth of the mobile market. With smartphones reaching nearly critical mass across the U.S., not much has changed between HIS' 2019 report and today, with both groups of guest respondents professing 98 percent travel with smartphones. However, tablets' role in hospitality has seemingly been displaced, leading some hoteliers to overestimate the number of devices guests are bringing with them each stay.

How many devices do you bring with you when traveling?



This year's survey results show the vast majority of guests are bringing just two devices on the road (46%), with a much smaller segment of guests connecting three devices to hotel networks (29%) and a nearly insignificant figure connecting more devices than that. Since mobile phones are the device of choice for the majority of travelers, hoteliers would benefit from understanding the other ways guests are interfacing with their property, and how they have changed over time.

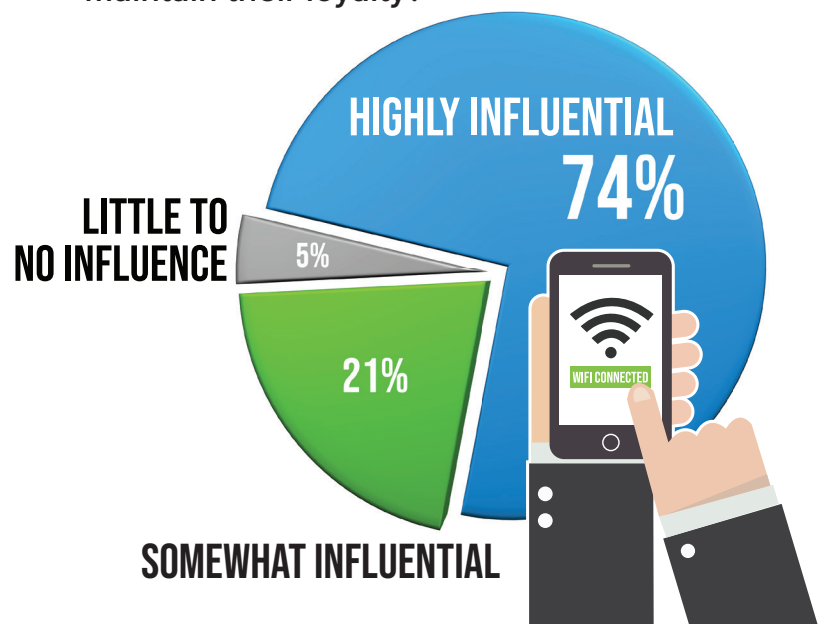
In 2019, hoteliers anticipated that 80 percent of guests were traveling with tablets, a number equaled in the 2022 survey (83%).

However, only 38% of guests surveyed said they were still bringing tablets with them on the road. Despite this, the number of guests bringing laptops on the road is on the rise, with 70.9% of guest respondents in the 2022 survey reporting they are bringing the devices with them. These trends correspond with the rise in remote work that is taking place across the country, which is having a varied impact on business and leisure travel.

While travelers are bringing fewer devices on the road with them, the type and variety of content they are engaging with requires greater bandwidth and more reliable connectivity than ever before. A growing number of travelers have premium subscriptions providing high-quality streams that require more bandwidth than typical downloads. Additionally, mobile streaming channels [have surpassed TV in growth⁴](#) as they become the preferred video medium for users across the U.S. Meanwhile, the percentage of Americans with access to cable TV [dropped from 76% to 56% by 2021⁵](#), with few who have cut the cord willing to bring the service back.

Survey results show hotels are aware of how necessary Wi-Fi is to guest satisfaction. Only 5% of hoteliers surveyed showed a belief

How much of an influence do you think Wi-Fi quality has on the ability to attract guests and maintain their loyalty?



that Wi-Fi had little to no difference on a hotel’s ability to attract guests and maintain their loyalty. Additionally, hoteliers were aligned with guests in anticipating that 100Mbps of connectivity speed are a necessity for maintaining a sufficient experience today.

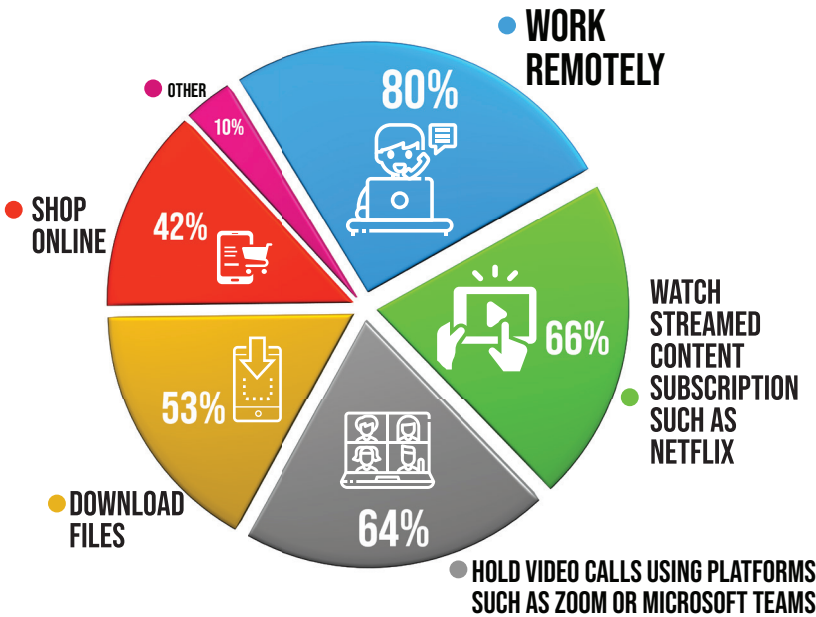
While these results show hoteliers are aligned with guests in understanding the degree to which their networks will be taxed by new technology, there remains a disconnect over which tools and technology will be returning to the guestroom. It will be important for hoteliers to clarify the return of tablets and other devices in order to maintain parity of their digital presence across all channels. This remains an emerging trend that will require continued observation.

REMOTE WORK RENAISSANCE

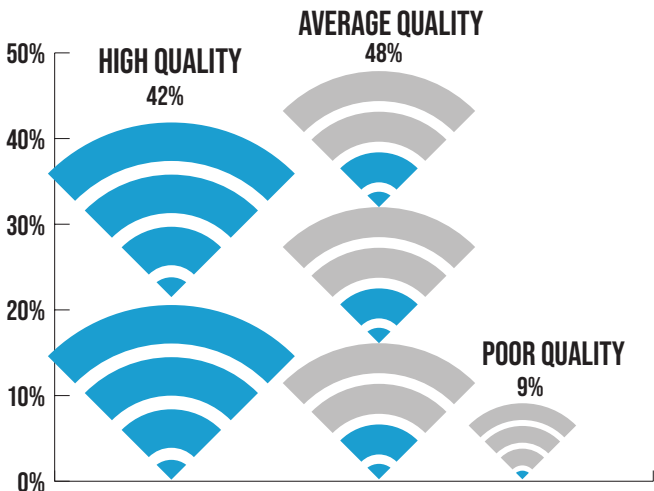
Hospitality has largely embraced the rise in adoption of mobile phones across the workforce, enabling workers to be more efficient and offer new ways to interact with guests even while providing contactless service. These innovations necessitate a robust internal network to remain consistently operational. Just as hotels are finding new and innovative ways to leverage their Wi-Fi for operations, travelers are putting these connections to work on a professional level as well. All of these factors are culminating in a push for greater levels of connectivity for both businesses and consumers.

Nearly half of companies polled in a recent survey said they are [providing permanent, full-time remote positions](#)⁶, with an additional 42 percent saying it may be an opportunity in the future. While HIS’ 2019 report seldom discusses remote work, this year’s report shows the

What are some activities you typically like to use a Hotel’s Wi-Fi for?



How would you rate the quality of Wi-Fi service that your hotel currently offers?



vast majority of guests (80%) are using hotel Wi-Fi to work remotely. Remote work necessitates different technology than video streaming, where lapses in connectivity can be forgiven as a video buffers. However, professionals working out of hotel rooms cannot afford lapses in connectivity during video conferences or uploading important files.

The hotel industry has traditionally struggled with providing an appropriate network infrastructure for guest connectivity, and this must change as more guests use hotel Wi-Fi for work. Internet access is currently treated as a luxury, but for

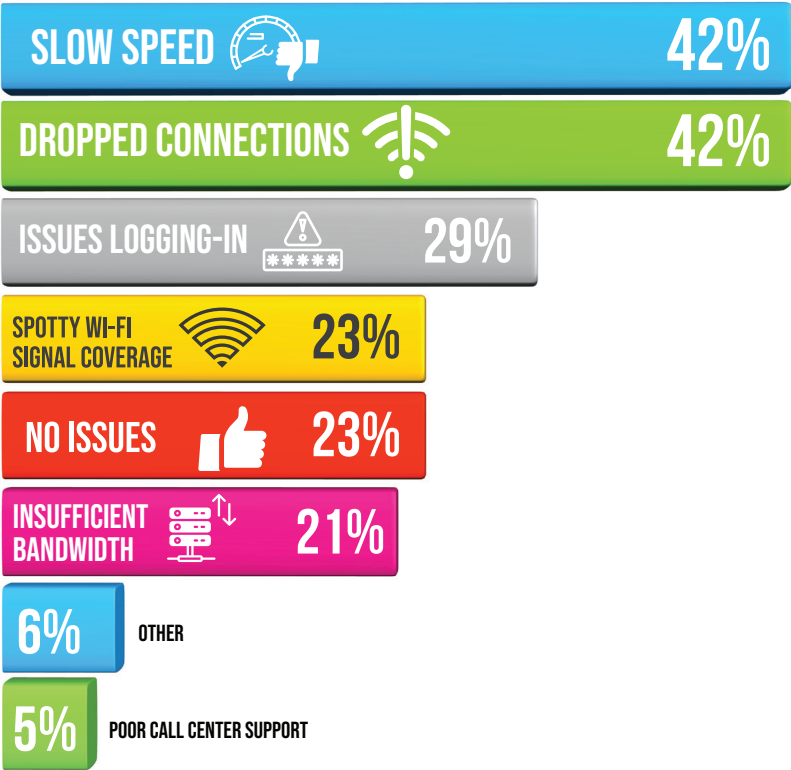
several years now consumers have treated internet accessibility with the same level of importance as other utilities such as water and electricity. Hotel companies must come to grasp the long-term value presented by a strong network infrastructure, particularly in light of current work and travel trends.

This year’s HIS survey showed both hoteliers and guests consider hotel network Wi-Fi to be of an “average” quality. This report will examine the various root causes at work behind this score in the next section, but the mutual understanding from both guests and hoteliers that their Wi-Fi capabilities have room for improvement is an important distinction to make. Hoteliers should not underestimate how Wi-Fi has become intrinsically linked to the core components of the guest experience in hospitality, and what must be done in order to satisfy these needs in the coming years.

DEFINING A SATISFACTORY HOTEL WI-FI EXPERIENCE

In many ways, travelers have been facing the same issues with their hotel Wi-Fi experience for years, and their patience is wearing thin. There is a growing tendency in today’s consumer to move on from one service or business to another if the experience becomes too cumbersome, or lacks consistency. To that end, more than half of the guest respondents to HIS’ 2022 report said they would be unlikely to return to a hotel if the Wi-Fi fails to meet their expectations (53%).

What are some of the biggest Wi-Fi issues that your guests encounter?



According to surveyed hoteliers, the main issues facing successful hotel Wi-Fi deployments come in the form of dropped connections and slow speeds (42%). These issues can be bothersome for guests attempting to stream video content, but they are incredibly disruptive for those who are working. Finding ways to create consistency in this area is going to be one of the major challenges facing the industry this cycle.

Another issue faced by guests is the ongoing challenge of creating a smooth yet secure login environment. The last thing guests want to do after getting to their room and dropping their bags is take five minutes to log into the hotel Wi-Fi, and this issue is exacerbated when guests hit a snag and are unable to connect to the network. Finding ways to get guests

onto your property’s Wi-Fi in an expedient fashion, while protecting their personal data, should be a priority for all hotels looking to improve guest satisfaction in 2022.

Safety and accessibility often seem at odds when it comes to digital technology, but hotel operators who are willing to work with technology providers to overcome this challenge will have a key competitive advantage as the hospitality and travel industries continue to recover. Guests surveyed

72% OF GUESTS PREFER TO CAST



in HIS' 2022 report found hotel Wi-Fi to be the most important technology overall, but streaming to the guestroom TV and cybersecurity shared a close second. This shows an increased desire to improve security alongside accessibility.

In an ideal world, hotels would not be stewards of travelers' personal passwords, and instead would implement technology capable of casting guests' devices directly to guestroom entertainment. Guests have expressed interest in this technology since HIS' 2019 survey, where 72% of guests indicated they would prefer the ability

to cast entertainment from personal devices to the guestroom TV. The pervasive interest in this technology reflects not only a desire for new ways to interface with guestroom entertainment, but also a willingness to adapt to new technology. This solution helps to smoothly allow guests to use their devices and subscriptions for entertainment without creating unnecessary security risks.

SECURITY AND ACCESSIBILITY IN EQUAL MEASURE

Data security has become a major topic of interest among guests, with only 10% of respondents claiming they have little to no concern about data security and privacy while on a hotel's network. This level of interest shows an awareness of the problem of cybersecurity in hotels, which is a problem that is going to only grow in importance over time. Hoteliers are fortunately aware of the issue, with 80% of respondents agreeing it is highly important to offer a Wi-Fi service that is able to defend operators and guests from malware, viruses and illegal downloads while on the hotel's network.

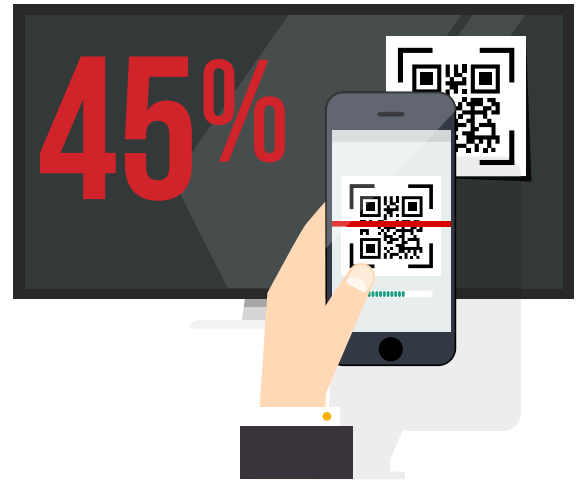
80% OF HOTELIERS ARE AWARE THAT CYBER SECURITY IS HIGHLY IMPORTANT



The focus on security is important, particularly as guests are using technology more and more to interact with guestrooms and hotel services in new ways. Of guests surveyed for HIS' 2022 report, 85 percent said they see value in being offered the ability to use their personal devices to control aspects of their stay. Providing security to these guests will be of the utmost importance as they will be directly connected to hotel services. However, first these services must be more widely offered with just under half of hotel respondents (48%) claiming to currently offer these guest-facing amenities.

DATA ANALYTICS PROVIDE PROGRESSIVE INSIGHT INTO GROWING TRENDS

It's not enough to offer these capabilities to guests, hotels need to know what guests value most. In order to separate the wheat from the chaff, 63% of hotelier respondents told HIS they are interested in using data analytics to gain insights into guest usage on connected devices. It's very important during times of rapid innovation to understand which trends retain value and which are a flash in the pan. For example, currently, 45% of hotelier respondents said they believe it is highly important for guests to know whether or not a hotel offers contactless compatible services, such as QR code scanning, in order to reduce the spread of disease. This trend is one that is worth watching very closely as it stems from recent events, and recent shifts in mask mandates will provide potential data on guest preferences regarding these and other services going forward.



Data analytics will also be useful for understanding the drivers at work behind persistent trends, which hoteliers can then take advantage of. Nearly 20% of guests surveyed stated contactless services remain “highly important” to their satisfaction, while nearly 50% find these services to be “somewhat important.” These experiences were clearly desired by guests prior to the pandemic, and are unlikely to abate even as mask mandates and other requirements gradually subside. It will be important to understand why guests may choose contactless experiences in some cases over others, and this process can only be aided by data analytics.

CONCLUSION

The trends reported on in HIS’ 2022 survey shows an acceleration of several trends that were already on an upward trajectory prior to the pandemic, including a growing acceptance of remote work, the establishment of mobile technology as a constant within American society, and the need for better connectivity options in addition to more robust security. These trends are taking place alongside a greater overall push for better operating practices within hospitality, as well as a renewed interest in technology and automation as a means for improving operations and revenue. Technology’s place within the hospitality framework has never been more clear, and it is operators’ responsibility to provide a Wi-Fi infrastructure that is capable of supporting it.

Today’s travelers have a greater attachment to their own technology than ever before, and hotels are in a position to benefit from this attachment by improving the guest experience and operations simultaneously. Hotels can better position themselves in 2022 by embracing technology that expands on the capabilities of guests’ personal devices through contactless experiences, digital services, and guestroom entertainment. And with just 48% of hotelier respondents claiming their properties currently offer guests the ability to interact with hotel services through mobile channels, there is an opportunity for differentiation by catering to these needs. As hospitality becomes ever more competitive, it will be hotels’ relationship with technology, and guests’ technology, that will lay the groundwork for future success.



Sources:

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