

Behind the Screens

Never considered renting television equipment for your establishment? Forbes Hotel TV's Kevin Herring might just change your mind



Tell us a little bit about Forbes' background...

Established since 1926, ours is a family-run business that began life in a small store in south London renting televisions and electrical products within the domestic market. During the 1970s, we grew rapidly with those customers to the point where we became the largest independent rental company in the UK. Rather than putting a lot of investment into shops, we looked instead at creating a network of distribution centres and now have ones in Swindon, Derby, Wigan and Red Hill, as well as depots in Glasgow and Devon.

This low-cost infrastructure has allowed us to have a good operation nationwide and the last ten years have seen us focus on rental for the hotel market. Having worked with care homes that had arisen through our domestic model, we looked at branching out into hospitality and so set up a division that could do just that.

We were fairly confident in making that move because we had built our background on customer service and so knew that was a very strong area for us. This is, of course, one of the key concerns of hoteliers so it put us in a good position to begin with.

What is the main ethos behind the company?

Unrivalled customer service and providing the latest technology at a competitive price. We firmly believe that client needs are at the heart of our business and strive to build long-term relationships with them and our partners.

If you look at what rental is all about, you will see that one overriding factor is service. Where retail is essentially just one transaction, rental is a lasting commitment to the customer and, ultimately, we are only as good as the service we provide.

What makes the business unique?

We offer a complete solution for the hotelier, from a dedicated client manager who will project manage and support the hotel through the life of the contract to our own professional installation engineers who will install the television and fit TV brackets. We also have a network of specialist service workshops throughout the UK, all of which are manned by our highly-skilled field and workshop engineers who have many years of experience of television and technology repair and support.

Because we are operating in such a specialised field, it has been



important for us not to subcontract. The products are ours and we have to be able to understand them fully in order to deliver on our promises.

We are able to say to customers that if something goes wrong with anything we have supplied, we will quickly repair it or, if that is not possible, swap it over. All the resources we have allow us the opportunity to offer same day service to our hotel clients and I think that is where we are truly unique.

What benefits are there for hoteliers using your services?

The hotel owner is safe in the knowledge that any technical issue with a television will be resolved promptly, normally on the same day, enabling their guest room to be operational again quickly and therefore earning money.

Rental allows the hotelier to spread the cost of the TVs and, with fixed cost, allows for more precise budgeting. They can then use their capital expenditure on services or facilities that will produce a return on investment. Taking this option also offers tax advantages as payments are 100% allowable against corporation tax and, of course, one thing about these types of products is that they depreciate. We want business owners to ask themselves the question of why should they invest in a fast depreciating asset.

To help hoteliers make an informed decision, we offer a free consultation service without any obligation and also work closely with Digital UK, enabling us to fully advise establishments on how they can manage the switchover to digital. Finally, we can bring a team of expertise from different services and project



manage in-room technology solutions for new-build hotels and refurbishment programmes.

What televisions should hoteliers be providing to guests?

With the digital switchover and the need for establishments to keep pace with customer expectations, it is without question premium-branded, hotel-enabled slim LCDs with built-in Freeview TV. There is also growing demand for our bespoke information TV channel, which is ideal for any hotel owner who does not want the costs of video-on-demand systems, but wishes to be able to communicate with their guests.

Another benefit of distributing a dedicated channel is that it allows businesses to advertise and drive revenues from additional services, such as restaurants, bars and leisure facilities. Capable of being branded, as it can operate

over multi-site operations, it allows hotel chains to centralise all of their advertising.

How has the market changed in recent years?

Due to the current economic climate, we have seen hotel budgets and capex be constrained, which has seen properties, large and small, that have traditionally purchased, now consider the rental option as an opportunity to avoid tying up precious financial resources. This in turn, has seen Forbes Hotel TV have its best year.

Customer expectations have also been raised, but are not always being fulfilled. The very least guests expect when staying in a hotel is to have access to what they would find at home, but while CRTs are long gone within most houses, having been replaced by flatscreens, we still see them in establishments, even some of the branded ones.

What has been the biggest challenge facing Forbes?

Going through the digital switchover process has presented a few hurdles. So far, we have had three large switchover areas; Granada/South and South West, with Central and Anglia due in 2011. On each occasion, we have been able to focus our field resources in the given location to ensure our affected hoteliers are operational during the two-stage process. We have also been on hand, where needed, to carry out full hotel retunes in order to deliver the maximum benefit that Digital TV provides.

One difficulty we have come across is that not every establishment is truly aware of the implications of changing to digital. Looking back to when the process began in Granada, we found that quite a few hoteliers waited until just before, and even during, the switchover. Nothing had been done to prepare their properties for the fact that they wouldn't be able to provide guests with a basic and vital service: television.

What would you say have been the company's greatest successes?

First of all, we are the trusted partner of a spectrum of establishments from the small independent to the leading brands and are very proud that they have chosen us as their technology partner as their businesses have expanded. Our customer retention is also a highlight and we have a large number of existing clients who have upgraded and continue to enjoy the full benefits of our rental service.

Do you have any final words of advice for hoteliers?

The best advice we can offer is to keep in-room technology simple – hotel customers should not be guinea pigs for IT prototypes and this is, unfortunately, what can happen. It is important to remember that guests simply want a home-from-home experience with equipment that is easy to operate.



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