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- 20C HOTEL_ <호텔앤레스토랑> 속 1996년 호텔 다시 보기
- FEATURE_ 호텔-OTA의 공생 위한 동반성장 최제가 아닌 콘텐츠로
- HOTEL ISSUE_ 일반 투숙객과 반려동물 동반 투숙객의 공존법
- TOURISM TOPIC_ 블록체인과 가상화폐
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Robotics & Automation – The Time Has Come!



Labor is always a large challenge to any restaurant or hotel business. Every great brand wants to operate with 100% fully staffed stores with team members who are 100% trained.

Recent trends around the world suggest that this goal is getting harder and harder to achieve. Many young people simply do not want to choose this life as a career. In Asia especially, parents want their children focused on their education and guide them away from any physical labor. In many countries like the USA, wages are simply not high enough to attract skilled workers. While in Japan, there are simply too few workers available given the historical marriage and birth trends. For example, it is very common to see many team members 50 years old and above working at large chains like McDonald's. In some cases, like Australia, with very high minimum wages and social benefits, it is simply not practical to be fully staffed and earn an acceptable financial return.

There is more and more discussion recently about using automation and robotics to ease the labor pains. Is this a

realistic solution for many restaurants and hotels? When one looks around the world at the enormous progress made in technological solutions to both kitchen management and front-line service, I think we can be quite optimistic that these solutions will become more and more adopted by hospitality groups going forward.

I am currently working with an organization based in Los Angeles, wavemaker labs, whose main focus is providing disruptive technologies to companies that rely on operations with many repetitive tasks, that could better be done by machines. One of their companies, Miso Robotics, is providing burger flipping robotic technology to well-known hamburger chains such as White Castle. Another of their companies is developing a vending machine to cook & serve high quality pizza. A further market segment for development is a bubble tea vending machine to take advantage of the growing interest in this beverage category. The vending machines could be widely popular in busy transportation hubs like airports or train stations as well as University food service halls.

Costa Coffee is a leader in the robotics vending category for hot beverages and I recently had the opportunity to experience their kiosk at the airport in Austin, Texas. The Starbucks store had a very long line and a long wait for service, so I simply used the ordering pad next to the machine to buy my beverage of choice and I received in 2 minutes a tasty cup of Americano. I could have done the whole transaction on my smartphone if I was willing to download the Costa Coffee app. I was able to choose the amount of milk (half & half, low fat, or soy) as well as the sweetness level. Costa, now a division of Coca-Cola, is rolling out these robotic solutions globally and the early results are very promising.

Automation is of course nothing new in the foodservice industry in Japan. Many conveyor belt sushi chains have been working with robotics for over 20 years to eliminate back of the house labor and improve efficiency in the sushi making process. They have mostly eliminated the hostess and servers as well. Diners use a touch panel to choose their seats and then order their food from touch panels at their table. The sushi comes by conveyor belt and stops at the appropriate table where the customers take their food. Touchless payment is also very common. Many budget family restaurant chains have also started to use robots as servers to deliver food to seated customers.

Connected Robotics, founded in 2014, with the goal of automating the preparation of Japanese cuisine, is experiencing strong demand for its products. Its first robot was OctoChef, a machine that could prepare and cook up to 96 takoyaki at one time. It has other robots to prepare and cook fried foods, bacon and eggs, and one that automates the entire dishwashing process. There are also chains that have automated the yakitori cooking process to show both some food theatre to their customers as well as cut labor costs.

It must be said that robotics solutions for foodservice is still in the infancy stages but there has been enormous progress and the use of advanced AI shows great promise. AI is best used to automate repetitive processes where human judgment is not required so basic kitchen operations is a segment that could greatly benefit.

Despite the rising interest in robotics, we must all remember that the hospitality industry is all about human contact and the positive impacts of personal connections with a server, Chef or store manager. We are still very much social creatures.

Nevertheless, automation is a clear necessity in the kitchen to help reduce the need for humans to perform mundane repetitive tasks and free them to do more interesting & fulfilling work. I am confident that most large global fast food chains will be using some form of robotics in their operations over the next 10 years. Robotics is definitely here to stay and will become increasingly more important as time goes on. Does your organization have an internal group looking at these opportunities?

