Relay Hospitality Report

2024

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Table of Contents

Introduction
WHY WE DID THIS REPORT

Over the past few years, Relay has experienced tremendous growth, now supporting over 5,000 customers.

A significant portion of our customer base comes from the hospitality industry. We now serve such a substantial amount of the U.S. hospitality industry that it makes sense to examine aggregate usage of our products and services across the industry. The unprecedented insights we've collected, alongside qualitative data from surveys we conduct regularly, has given us a rich repository of information on hospitality trends and best practices. It also enables us to predict where the industry is headed next.

We created this report to pass along our findings to anyone in the hospitality industry that wants data-driven information to support them in doing what they do best: providing incredible guest and team experiences. We hope that this report prepares you for the future and helps you make more informed decisions, driving further innovation in the hospitality industry.
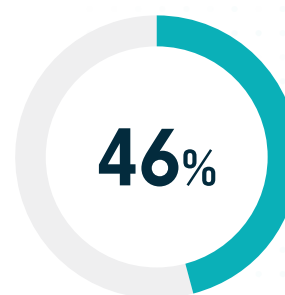
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Where does the data come from?

We surveyed 100+ hospitality professionals across the U.S. from properties of all sizes and levels of service.

95%
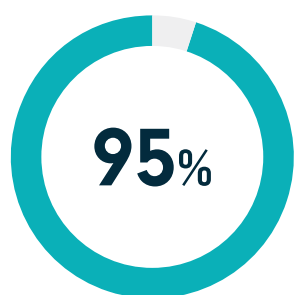
95% of survey respondents work at properties with more than 10 employees.

41%
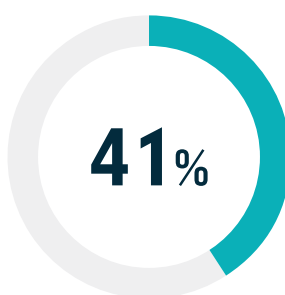
41% of survey respondents work at properties with more than 50 employees.

46%

46% of survey respondents were general managers.

41%
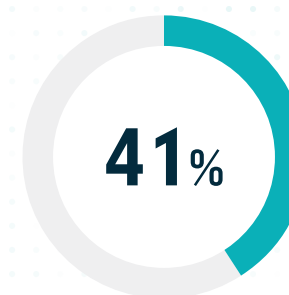
41% have been in the industry for more than 20 years.

We estimate that there is more than 1,400 years of collective hospitality wisdom in the qualitative survey data we collected.

In addition to survey data, we analyzed aggregated and anonymized data trends across our thousands of customers to inform this report. This comprehensive approach allows us to validate survey responses with real-world usage patterns, providing a robust and nuanced view of the industry's current state.

Major Hospitality Trends

The hospitality industry is no stranger to rapid change and evolving trends, with various factors such as technology advancements, shifting consumer behaviors, and global events continuously reshaping the landscape.

As we share our findings, we aim to provide insights that help operators stay ahead of the curve. By understanding these trends, professionals in the hospitality sector can better anticipate guest needs, streamline operations, and enhance overall service delivery.

This section will explore the most critical trends impacting the industry today, offering both challenges and opportunities for growth and innovation. To attract and retain customers, properties cannot be stagnant and have to make changes and investments that align with the needs of their guests, employees and property.

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Personalized Guest Experiences

The survey data has revealed several impactful trends that are shaping the future of the hospitality industry. When asked, "What are the trends you see having the biggest impact on the hospitality industry in the next 18 months?" **Personalized guest experiences was by far the highest priority, selected by 75% of respondents.** Hotel professionals recognize that providing tailored services can significantly enhance guest satisfaction and loyalty. This trend is driven by the desire to create memorable experiences that cater to individual preferences and needs, making guests feel valued and understood.

Contactless Tech & AI

Following closely is the adoption of contactless technology and AI, in which over 50% of survey respondents were concerned about. These trends indicate a shift towards more efficient operations. AI, in particular, is poised to play a pivotal role in revolutionizing hotel management and guest interactions. While personalization remains the most influential trend, AI's capabilities in data analysis, translation and automation are expected to transform service delivery, making behind the scenes operations smoother and more intuitive.

Automated Guest Systems

When asked "Which of the following technologies are you or your organization currently prioritizing?" **More than 50% of survey respondents chose payment or check-in systems.** These upgrades are essential for meeting the growing expectations of tech-savvy guests who prefer seamless and touch-less interactions.

75% of respondents stated
their highest priority
is personalized guest experiences

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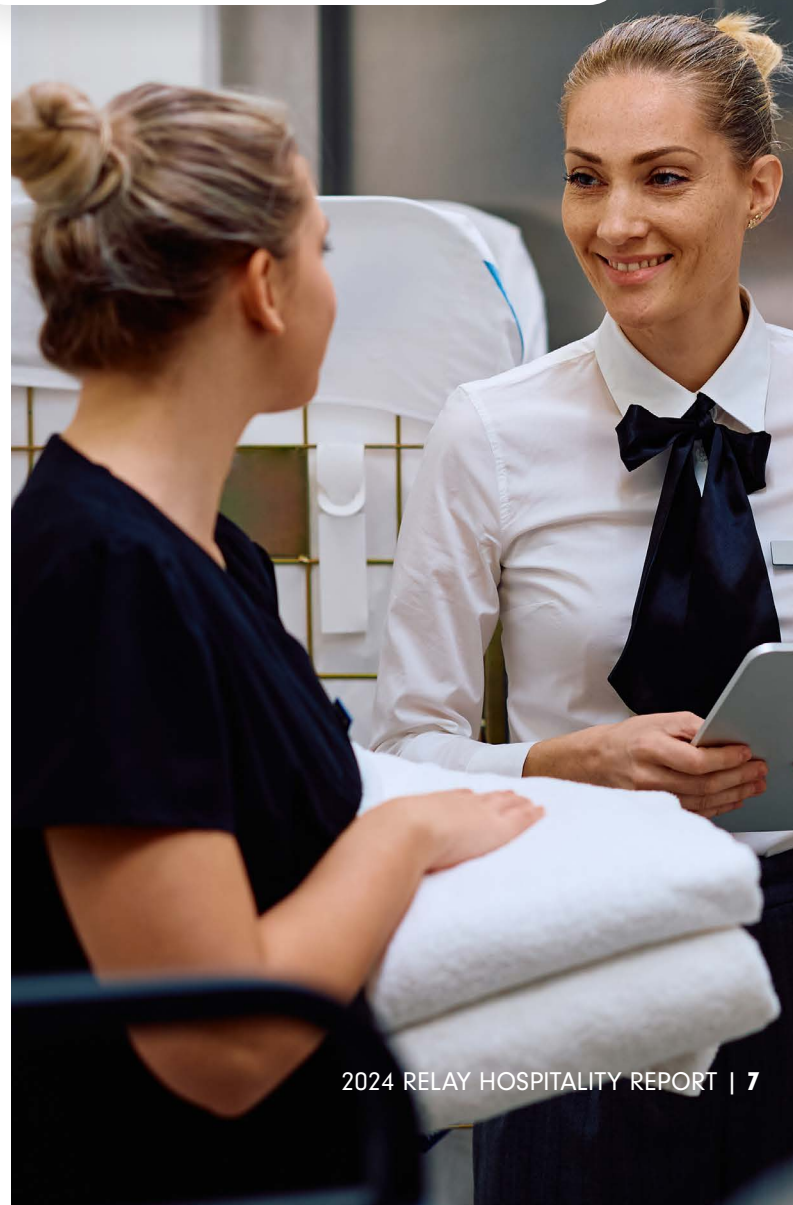
Modern Communication

More than 50% of respondents are also prioritizing communication devices. It's becoming increasingly clear that effective communication is the cornerstone of a remarkable guest experience, making it understandable why hotels are prioritizing upgrades to their communication systems. Many of the current systems in place are outdated and create unnecessary communication barriers, hindering the ability to deliver personalized and efficient service.

By investing in modern communication tools, hotels can streamline interactions between staff and guests, ensure quicker responses to inquiries, and foster a more connected environment. These improvements not only enhance operational efficiency but also significantly contribute to guest satisfaction, as seamless communication is key to addressing needs promptly and creating a welcoming atmosphere.

Effective communication is the cornerstone of a remarkable guest experience.

Security Technology

Additionally, security continues to be a top priority, with hotels implementing robust measures to ensure a safe and secure environment for both guests and staff. Many hotels are investing in advanced technologies such as high-definition security cameras, which offer real-time monitoring and recording to deter and respond to any suspicious activities. **Panic buttons are now being given to all employees that can report your location in an emergency down to the room level.** Biometric access control systems are also becoming more common, allowing for secure entry to restricted areas.

Furthermore, some hotels are integrating AI-driven security systems capable of detecting unusual behaviors and alerting the security team in real time. These investments not only enhance safety but also provide peace of mind to everyone on the premises.

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Safety Trends and Investments

It seems like there's a constant barrage of headlines and stories shared on social media showcasing guests behaving badly towards frontline workers.

From heated verbal confrontations to physical altercations, the hospitality industry is increasingly grappling with challenges related to safety. In our survey we wanted to cut through the noise and hear directly from hospitality professionals on their biggest safety concerns for employees and guests.

Biggest Concerns for Employee and Guest Safety*

Top 4 biggest concerns
for employee safety are...

63% slips and falls

39% equipment handling injury

24% chemical injury

21% severe weather

Top 4 biggest concerns
for guest safety are...

64% slips and falls

36% food safety

32% severe weather

19% fire

Respondents could choose up to 3 options.

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A Deeper Dive on Hotel Safety Concerns

Slips and falls as well as severe weather are top safety concerns for both guest and employee safety, while physical violence didn't make the top 4.

Slips and Falls

For both employees and guests, slips and falls are the number one concern. **This doesn't come as a surprise since slips and falls are** the most frequently occurring non-fatal accidents **in the hospitality industry.** Slippery or wet floors, foot traffic, debris, and damaged flooring create significant risk for properties so staff needs to be well trained to identify these potential hazards.

Severe Weather

Severe weather is a major safety concern in the hospitality industry, as it can significantly impact the well-being of guests and staff. Especially, for properties with outdoor amenities such as golf courses and pools. Over the years, extreme weather has become more frequent and more severe. Hotels and resorts must be prepared for extreme conditions such as hurricanes, tornadoes, and heavy snowfall, which can lead to power outages, flooding, and structural damage. Ensuring robust emergency plans, effective communication systems, and regular safety drills are in place is crucial to protect everyone on the premises. Also, providing timely updates and guidance to employees can help mitigate the risks associated with severe weather, ensuring a safe and secure environment even during the most challenging conditions.

Physical Violence

On the other hand, **physical violence, was only cited as a biggest safety concern for employees by 19% of respondents.** While physical violence might make the most headlines, practically speaking it is less of a concern. It does seem to be driving a lot of industry changes regardless, as worker safety device mandates are continuing to pop up and 44% of survey respondents say their property is investing in panic buttons.
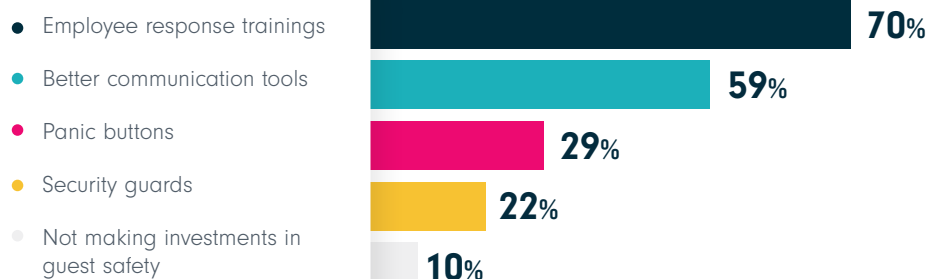
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Biggest Investments for Employee and Guest Safety

It's one thing to be concerned, but it's another to be actively investing to address potential staff and guest safety problems. In our survey, we asked respondents where they are making the biggest investments and found that the top areas are very similar.

Investments for employee safety are:

- ● Employee response trainings — **68**%
- ● Better communication tools — **62**%
- ● Panic buttons — **44**%
- ● Security guards — **21**%
- ● Not making investments in employee safety — **8**%
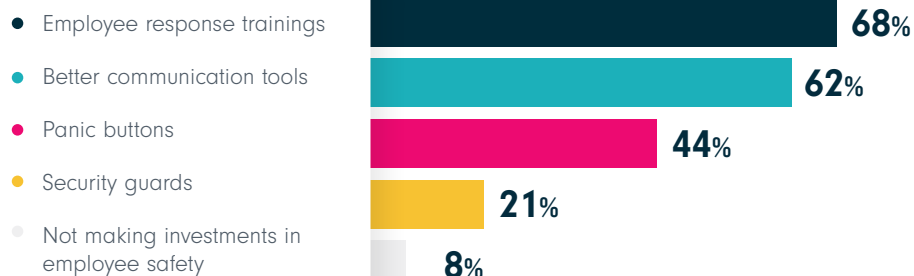
Investments for guest safety are:

- ● Employee response trainings — **70**%
- ● Better communication tools — **59**%
- ● Panic buttons — **29**%
- ● Security guards — **22**%
- ● Not making investments in guest safety — **10**%

As shown in the graphs above, the majority of respondents' properties are investing in employee and guest safety, and slightly more properties are investing in employee safety than guest safety.

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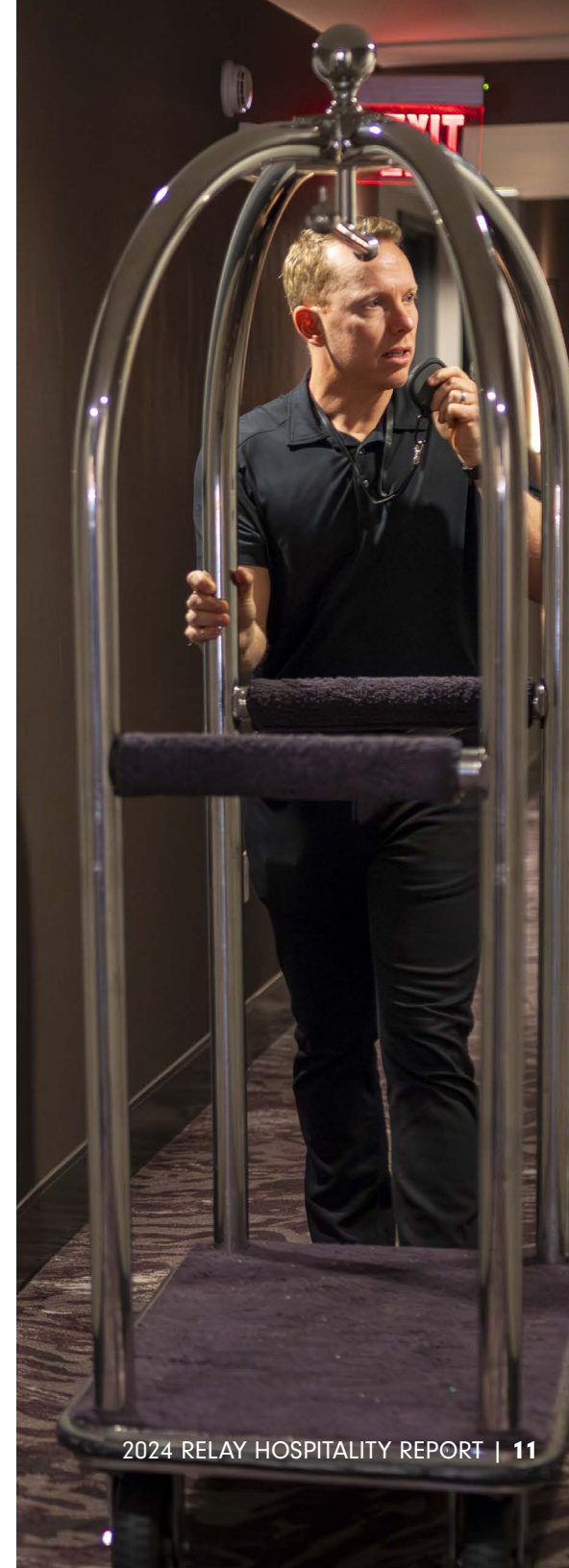
A Deeper Dive on Hotel Safety Investments

While the top safety concerns vary between guests and staff,
the investments hospitality professionals are making are the same.

Employee Response Training

Crucial for ensuring exceptional guest experiences and maintaining a strong reputation, employee response training equips staff with the skills to handle a wide range of situations. From routine guest inquiries to emergency scenarios, employees will feel more confident and competent to handle any challenge set before them, efficiently and professionally. By fostering a culture of preparedness and responsiveness, properties can enhance customer satisfaction, increase safety, and minimize potential risks.

Better Communication Tools

In almost every situation, effective communication is going to improve your ability to prevent and address safety concerns. For too long, the hospitality industry has been limited and constrained by their communication systems, but it seems that this is now at a tipping point. We're seeing more innovative solutions hit the market and greater investments being made in modern, best-in-class communication systems.

Panic Buttons

As awareness in the safety of frontline workers in the hospitality industry has continued to accelerate over the past few years, panic buttons have become a key tool for hotel staff to quickly address safety issues and give confidence that help is always nearby. This heightened awareness has driven significant changes across multiple levels, including corporate mandates, union advocacy, and legislative actions at city and state levels requiring employers provide a panic button solution for their staff. For example, Marriott International announced it would equip all housekeepers with safety alert devices in 2018 and in 2019 the state of New Jersey started requiring hotels with more than 100 rooms to provide staff with panic buttons. As these efforts continue to gain traction, it is evident that the hospitality industry is collectively moving towards a world where a panic button for every employee will be as ubiquitous as fire alarms.

Language Barriers and Opportunities

Non-native speakers present a significant opportunity and challenge in the hospitality industry.

Non-native speakers present a significant opportunity and challenge in the hospitality industry. From the survey, **we learned that a whopping 73.5% of properties employ non-native English speakers.** A diverse workforce brings diverse skills and perspectives, but language barriers left unchecked can lead to misunderstandings, miscommunications, and potentially negatively impact both employee performance and guest satisfaction. If you have the resources to implement technology that can bridge language gaps, you'll find yourself at an advantage when it comes to hiring and retaining staff.

According to AHLA, 76% of hotels are experiencing staffing shortages. Our survey found that hotel professionals noted significant hiring challenges with 78% selecting lack of qualified applicants as a top concern. The increasing demand for higher pay and lack of applicants in general were also noted as a top three hiring challenge by over 50% of respondents. Tapping into larger or new pools of qualified applicants is important, as is empowering hiring managers to offer higher pay to remain competitive. The talent pool of non-native English speakers is an attractive one as it brings other experiences, skills and a broader hiring range.
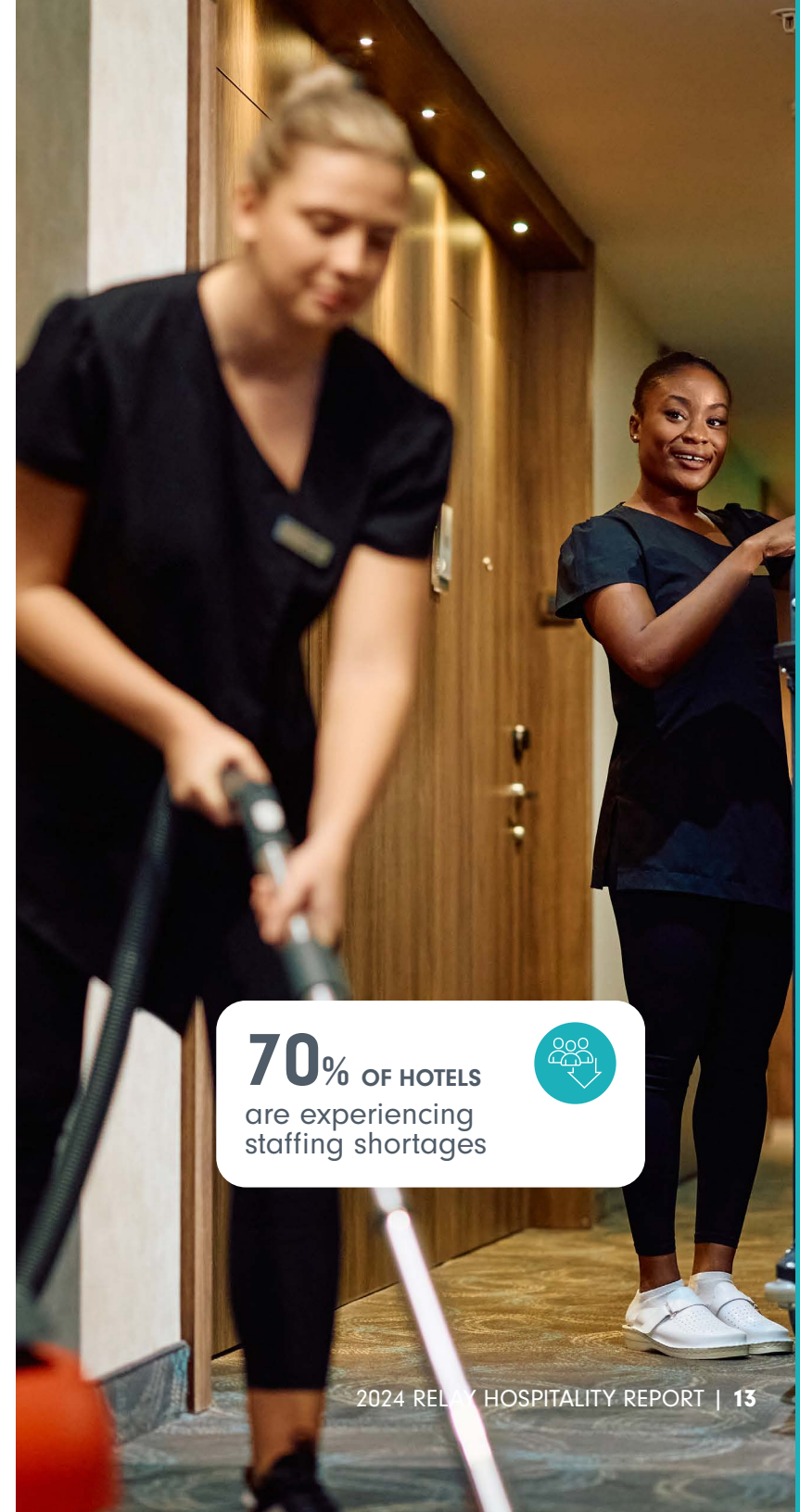
70% **OF HOTELS** are experiencing staffing shortages

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Best in Class Communication

Throughout our study, one theme was clear: communication and the tools hotels use to communicate can have a material impact on guest experience and employee satisfaction.

It's one thing to be concerned, but it's another to be actively investing to address potential staff and guest safety problems. In our survey, we asked respondents where they are making the biggest investments and found that the top areas are very similar. That's why we delved into our data to uncover what best-in-class communication looks like.

We focused not just on how hotels structured their communication systems but also on the differences between sub-segments of the hospitality industry that can provide insights into what creates the best guest experience. By examining these best practices, we aim to highlight effective strategies that can be adopted to enhance both guest interactions and staff coordination, ultimately leading to a more cohesive and satisfying environment for everyone involved. One area we want to look at is what communication channels were named and which ones were being used the most. This is a window into which teams are collaborating the most and how you might want to structure your teams.

Most Common Communication Channels

The most common communication channels identified across various hotels were the main channel, housekeeping, engineering, and front desk. Larger hotels, however, tended to have a dedicated channel for their security team to ensure a swift and efficient response to security issues. Furthermore, luxury hotels often featured guest services as one of the most common channels, emphasizing the importance of personalized and curated experiences for their clientele. By having specialized communication channels tailored to different departments, hotels streamline operations, enhance coordination, and ultimately provide a higher standard of service.

Best in class communication had the largest impact on guest and client satisfaction
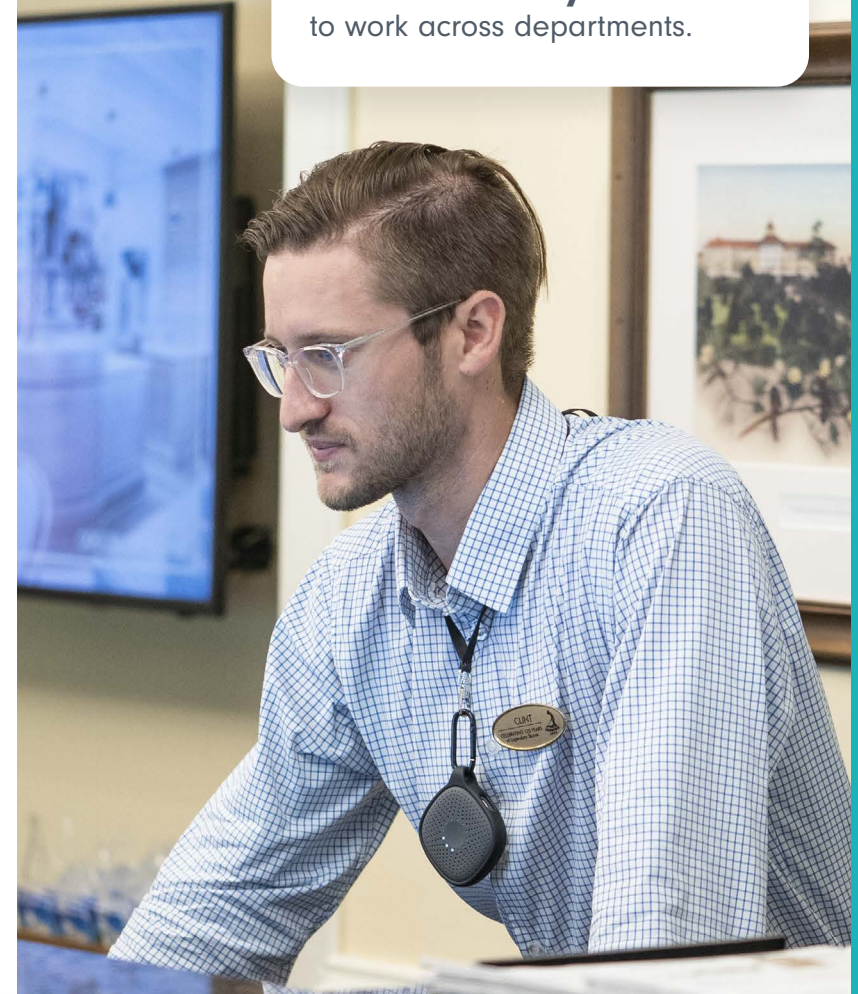
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Lots of Collaboration Required

On average, across hospitality, 20% of hotels will switch communication channels daily, indicating working with a different department or team to communicate. For larger properties, 89% are working across departments every day, showcasing the collaboration needed in larger establishments. **Luxury hotels are 3x more likely to work across departments, while the largest hotels are 4x more likely to do so.**

We analyzed the communication channels with the highest usage and found that housekeeping topped the list. As the heart of the house, housekeeping is critical to ensuring a positive guest experience. Additionally, in large and luxury hotels, security and engineering also ranked high in communication usage, reflecting their crucial roles in maintaining safety and operational excellence.

It's important to note that it's not just about which channels are most common, but also about the overall communication volume and timing across different types of properties. Ultra-luxury hotels, for instance, send 54.41% more messages on average compared to general hospitality, while large hotels send 40% more messages on average than standard hospitality establishments. Large hotels send on average 15,000+ messages a week. This heightened communication activity translates directly to a better guest experience, as it ensures timely, coordinated responses to guest needs and operational tasks. Effective communication can indeed be the key to creating a superior hospitality experience, bridging the gap between guests' expectations and the service they receive.

Luxury hotels are
3x more likely
to work across departments.

The largest hotels are
4x more likely
to work across departments.

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Relay in Hospitality
WHAT DROVE A CHANGE

To understand the reasoning behind the switch to Relay, we asked customers what drove their decisions: almost 40% of hotels cited Relay's superior connectivity as a primary factor.

Another significant reason was its advanced safety and panic features, providing reliable communication tools with easy-to-access panic buttons for emergencies. This capability ensures quick alerts to the security team, enhancing safety for both employees and guests. Relay's location tracking also played a crucial role, allowing managers to efficiently assign tasks and ensure team members are where they need to be. This is especially valuable in large properties where staff coordination is critical. Finally, cost considerations were a decisive factor. Relay offers a cost-effective communication solution without compromising essential features. Hotels noted that switching to Relay provided a budget-friendly option while enhancing their communication capabilities, leading to a higher return on investment. By addressing these key areas, Relay has proven invaluable for hotels seeking to improve communication, enhance safety, and streamline operations.

What were some of the **pain points** that led you or your organization to switching to Relay?

38% connectivity

38% safety/panic abilities

34% lack of location tracking

34% cost

31% reliability

34% other

Respondents could choose multiple options.

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The Operational Impact

Relay has yielded significant improvements in various aspects of hotel operations. One of the most notable benefits is the expedited service times, with our data we have learned that **each guest request is being fulfilled 5 minutes faster on average.** This improvement in response time not only enhances guest satisfaction but also streamlines operations, allowing staff to manage their time more efficiently.

Moreover, addressing safety issues has become considerably quicker, **with a reduction of 6 minutes on average per incident.** This increased speed in handling safety concerns provides a safer and more secure environment for both guests and staff, contributing to the overall well being within the hotel.

From an IT perspective, the use of Relays offers notable efficiency gains, **saving IT departments an average of 6 hours per week.** With legacy radio systems a significant amount of time was spent managing the infrastructure. Even non technical frontline managers can manage their teams from the Relay dashboard without assistance from IT. This time can be redirected towards other crucial tasks, improving the overall productivity and effectiveness of the IT support team.

Employee feedback further underscores the advantages of Relays, **with 78% of employees expressing a preference for wearing Relays over traditional radios.** This preference likely stems from the ease of use, small size, discrete design and improved communication clarity provided by the Relay devices.

Furthermore, 84% of the customers reported increased operational efficiency after implementing Relays. The reduction in connectivity issues and the improved reliability of communication channels contribute significantly to this increase in efficiency. Relay also ensures workers are not glued to their phones, which can be a distraction and make them less available and approachable to their guests. More engaged, focused and heads up employees positively impact operations and guest satisfaction scores.

A remarkable **93.75% of hotel professionals reported greater peace of mind** knowing the precise locations of their employees. This capability not only enhances safety but also aids in better coordination and management of staff.

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Connecting Remotely for On-Property Communication

Nearly 100% of Relay customers are seamlessly communicating with their on-property staff through the mobile app or web-based dashboard, even when they are off-property. This flexibility ensures that managers and key staff members are not limited by their physical presence, which has a massive impact on guest experience and continuity of service. Not to mention, making employees feel more at ease that they can reach a manager at any time. By staying connected regardless of location, teams can address issues in real-time, make informed decisions quickly, and maintain a high level of coordination. This constant connectivity enhances operational efficiency and ensures that guests receive consistent and exceptional service at all times. This ability to stay connected can be a strategic advantage, enabling businesses to outperform competitors by maintaining high standards and responsiveness.

Learn how Fairfield and TownePlace Suites of Norfolk's General Manager, Sara Dahlkoetter, helped resolve a medical emergency from home after getting a panic alert from the Relay app.

The adoption of modern communication tools like Relays has brought about substantial improvements in response times, safety issue resolution, IT efficiency, employee satisfaction, operational efficiency, connectivity, and overall peace of mind within the hospitality industry.

Learn about
Sara Dahlkoetter's
story with Relay.

About Relay

Relay is a cloud-based technology platform that helps frontline teams improve communications, increase employee safety, and improve their productivity.

Relay helps frontline teams digitally transform their operations with the modern tools which supports actionable real-time data needed to track performance and improve their operations. Software has not yet transformed the frontline world, and Relay is on a mission to change that.

→ **For more information, visit www.relaypro.com.**