

HOTELS

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WHAT'S HOT TECHNOLOGY

Automation and self-service are among the hot hotel technologies this summer.

By Adam Kirby, contributing editor



LUGGAGE-HANDLING ROBOT

Hoteliers like to talk about technology being a showpiece, but rarely is it quite so literally on display as at YOTEL Times Square West in New York City. YOTEL's glass storefront is a showcase for Yobot, a variation of a machine normally built for automobile manufacturing that instead serves as an automated luggage handler.

YOTEL guests place their items on a tray inside a computer kiosk in the lobby, swiping their keycards to virtually "tag" the bags. Yobot then uses its metal arms to transfer the tray into one of 127 bins. And when the roughly 10-foot (3-m)-tall Yobot isn't working, he entertains onlookers with a robot dance. "We wanted to have a

showpiece, but also something very practical," says Nigel Buchanan, operations director for London-based YOTEL Ltd.

Yobot is a natural fit for the YOTEL brand, which evolved from the Yo! Sushi chain that gained fame for using conveyor belts to deliver raw fish to diners. During its first weekend of operation, Yobot's

storage units were filled. Perhaps even more promising were the dozens of spectators who stopped to watch Yobot. YOTEL executives hope some of those passersby take the time to learn more about the hotel brand and eventually book some rooms. "He or she — we're not sure which — is already proving to be very popular," Buchanan says.