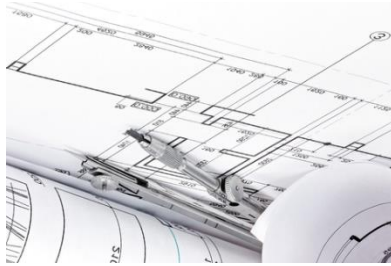




HOTEL MANAGEMENT



Why first responders need your hotel's information

by [Elliott Mest](#) |
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Floor plans are already all over your property, and they should also be in the hands of first responders. Photo credit: Getty Images/Mr_Twister

Is your hotel prepared if the unthinkable happens and disaster strikes? While many businesses have clear plans for emergencies, oftentimes there is a breakdown when it comes to execution, which can lead to mistakes that could endanger the lives of employees or guests.

Stephen Nardi, CEO of Chicago-based mobile software company RealView, said the first thing any hotel employee should do in a situation is call 911, but after that he or she should have a plan to fall back on. His company assists with the process by providing a streamlined way to equip first responders with your hotel's up-to-date floor plans, as well as other considerations.

"We provide a preplan program where we make everything a responder would need available to them ahead of time," Nardi said. "With planning, both employees and responders won't be operating on trial and error but reality."

RealView provides solutions such as digital floor plans, fire protection information, protocol for ingress and egress and any particulars regarding persons in need of special assistance. This information can be accessed using portable tablets or at designated security stations, is updated remotely and is shareable digitally with first responders.

"In the event of an incident, a dispatcher will get that preplan information to first responders so they are prepared before they arrive on the scene," Nardi said. "First responders could range from the fire department, law enforcement, SWAT teams or hazardous-materials teams, and they all benefit from this information because chances are they have never been in your property."



First responders likely have never been in your hotel, so they need to know as much about it as possible before they step inside. Photo credit: Getty Images/BrianAJackson

This information is crucial because it can also protect your hotel from a liability standpoint. Justin Parafinczuk, shareholder at injury, employment and defense law firm Koch, Parafinczuk, Wolf and Susen, said having policies and plans your hotel can

point to after a disaster are only worth mentioning if they were properly executed.

“The front-end policies you have will protect you in the moment and in the end,” Parafinczuk said. “Any break in the chain is a liability. It’s a minefield.”

The greatest barrier to improving a hotel’s security is fear of hampering the guest experience. Nardi said that in Europe it is common to see armed guards in hotels, while metal detectors of every category are largely taboo in U.S. hotels. While security tools like cameras are becoming more common in hospitality, particularly in public areas, Nardi questioned where it is safe to draw the line.

“If you think back as little as five years ago, it was an entirely different world. We are expecting more of this, and accepting more, too,” Nardi said. “There are so many things I didn’t think would happen in hotels that are happening today... it would make sense to have metal detectors in some hotels.”

4 Proactive Safety Tips

Hotel security is an all-encompassing issue of sprawling scope and ever-changing rules. Here are four tips to help hotels stay on top of security issues both large and small:

1. Identify Your Guests

Hotels struggle with tracking guests on property. Resorts or hotels holding events attract a lot of temporary visitors who have no intention on buying a room, and depending on the atmosphere this can open up a hotel to security threats or liability.

The easy answer, according to Parafinczuk, is to supply event attendees with wristbands or badges, but he admits this can hamper the guest experience. Regardless of a hotel’s decision, once one has been made Parafinczuk recommends operators are strict with who goes where.

“If you are a resort hotel, you don’t want to hamper guest movement during spring break, but you also have to look out for their safety,” he said. “You can use roving security, but if you have a conference with a couple thousand attendees you could have a real risk for liability.



Walking the line between safety and security is an eternal struggle for hotels. Photo credit: Getty Images/Creatas

2. Make Information Available

According to Nardi, some hotels are concerned about making floor plans and other information public knowledge because it could give a bad actor the information they need to harm guests or damage property. This is a mistake, he said, because that information is already available to anyone walking through a property.

“Floor plans are on the back of every hotel guestroom door, but it won’t do you any good if you are on the 22nd floor and need assistance from people on the ground,” Nardi said. “First responders need floor plans before they enter a building, and guests should have them, too.”

3. Respond Immediately

Parafinczuk said it took six minutes for authorities to respond to the deadly shooting at Las Vegas’ Mandalay Bay in 2017, and they were hampered by a lack of information on arrival.

“For violent threats, [hotels] should consult law enforcement or someone with a military background to put forth a plan, and then reinforce it,” Parafinczuk said.

4. Document and Report

Even if a hotel follows through with a safety plan and perfectly protects its guests, its operators are still not in the clear until they document and disclose every aspect of the event internally. Parafinczuk said it is common for managers to work with employees during an event only to fail to inform corporate of everything in clear documentation, which is a liability disaster.

“When these things happen, you have to have thorough documentation on what you did about it,” Parafinczuk said. “Make sure you tell your people at corporate. If not, your case is closed.”