

Front of house: Will new technology result in the demise of the human receptionist?

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Insight from Sentinel Group Security (SGS) projects director Rob Whiffing

Front of house plays a vital role in delivering the first impression of a business. Up until now, it's been the norm that clients and visitors are greeted by a friendly receptionist, who makes them feel welcome, directs them where to go and offers them a cup of tea or coffee.

But as we all adapt to self-service systems, like the checkouts at the supermarket, or the passport scanners at airports, will we see more organisations opting for visitor management systems in place of a human receptionist?

What is a visitor management system?

Let's start with what we mean by the visitor management system. You can think of it as your electronic meet-and-greet.

As your client arrives in the car park, the system greets them personally and directs them to the parking space reserved specifically for them.

When the client makes their way to reception, they type in the name of the person they want to see, and the host is notified of their arrival. The system takes a photo of the visitor for ID purposes, and prints a temporary pass. Those passes can be wiped and reused at the end of the day.

Technology vs the human touch

This technology can create a slick, welcoming sign-in experience for your clients. With a personalised greeting and their own parking bay, they know they are expected. The whole experience creates a first impression that your business is modern, well-organised and innovative.

If it all works flawlessly...

The problems arise if your team isn't comfortable with using the system. The personalised welcome relies on the hosts inputting the correct information ahead of time. Then there's an element of user-error from the visitor. If they are not particularly tech-savvy, it can cause some confusion and possibly frustration.

On the other hand, a human receptionist can deal with any problems as they arise. They greet your clients with a friendly smile and they can put them at ease as they wait for their meeting. Good receptionists will always and reliably give a great first impression of your business.

Which organisations opt for tech?

The businesses that have embraced visitor management systems tend to fall into two categories. The first is those organisations that pride themselves on adopting futuristic technology. Those are likely to be tech firms, or innovative start-ups.

The second category is those premises who have always had a receptionist, but they don't really need one, and perhaps they don't get lots of visitors. For example, businesses in the manufacturing and industrial sectors.

But for those organisations who rely on the strength of their personal relationships to win and retain business, nothing beats a friendly human welcome at the front desk. Those tend to be high-end businesses like the larger law firms and other professional services.

Conclusion

So will technology cause the demise of human receptionists? Yes, possibly... eventually. We are all becoming more accustomed to this sort of tech in our daily lives, and it won't be long until visitor management systems are commonplace.

But businesses will think carefully about the first impression they want to create in the minds of their clients before they replace their receptionists completely. For some businesses, the impression of a tech-savvy, efficient, forward-thinking organisation is the one they want to create. For others, computer check-ins appear cold and impersonal, and prone to user-error.

It's all about the experience you want to give your clients, and how that first impression reflects on your business.