

# INDUSTRY REQUIRES QUALITY TECHNOLOGY

Michael Komodromou looks at the use of technology in the region's travel trade industry

The travel trade industry in the Middle East is benefiting from its increased awareness in the latest advancements in technology and travel-related products.

Dometic, formerly known as Electrolux, manufactures hotel electrical devices such as minibars and minisafes. The company has had an office in the Middle East for 13 years.

"The Middle East is a priority to us. It is a fast growing tourism region with a lot of potential. It is also a region where high quality tourism is promoted a lot and that suits our products very well, since our target market is represented by the four- and five-star hotel segment," said Dubai-based regional manager, Dometic, Christoffer Lund.

Dometic launched a range of automatic minibars in the Middle East recently, installing 674

units at the new Grand Hyatt Dubai. The minibar works with an infrared sensor to detect if and what items have been consumed.

"The automatic minibar allows the hotel to know which guests have used the minibar, so you don't have to visit all the rooms. This saves the hotel time and manpower. The minibar system also keeps records and has endless reporting facilities," Lund added.

Onity is another company which offers innovative technological solutions and services for the hospitality industry, including electronic locks, related smart card technology, in-room safes, closed-circuit television security surveillance and energy management systems (EMS).

Onity's EMS SensorStat thermostat maintains room temperature and humidity outside the mould-spore growth range, while providing significant energy



savings when rooms are unoccupied.

"SensorStat and Onity management systems have only just been launched in the Middle East market and, although we are still at the early stages, they have created a very high expectation. The market has welcomed the idea with great interest, as it is the ideal solution for this area, where high levels of energy

are needed to compensate for the extreme weather conditions," said international marketing manager, Onity, Leire Iriberry.

## Distribution system

Another new technological product that was recently launched in the Middle East is Galaxy Travel Distribution System (TDS). The system enables travel professionals worldwide to immediately access, book and settle payments online. It gives access to a wide range of ground services, such as accommodation, transportation and sightseeing.

"Just as global distribution systems revolutionised the air reservation and ticketing business, so too does Galaxy TDS revolutionise everything else in the non-air travel world," said president, Galaxy Distribution System, Paul Casey.

Galaxy sees the Middle East as an important market with strong potential. The system has about 180 users in the Middle East and North Africa, 60 suppliers and 120 retail travel agents.

"Galaxy is committed to developing and supporting a strong presence in the Middle East and North Africa. The establishment of a physical presence, through our partnership with Global Holidays, in the UAE, Bahrain, Egypt, Jordan, Kuwait, Saudi Arabia and Syria is clear evidence.

"We are also planning to expand our direct presence to include other countries, like Iran, Iraq, Libya, Algeria, Tunisia, Morocco and Lebanon," said corporate director of sales, Galaxy, Marco Gorin.

## Online bookings

The Internet has also

grown to new levels in the Middle East, offering more online booking services. Mytravelchannel.com, which was launched this year, provides immediate access to over 500 airlines, 50,000 hotels, thousands of holidays and three-quarters of a million car hire options in English and Arabic.

It receives about 5.5 million hits each month, mainly from the UAE, Saudi Arabia, Egypt and Jordan. However, the industry still has a long way to go to be in line with other regions, according to general manager, Mytravelchannel.com, Simon Lewis: "The online travel industry in the Middle East is trailing the online travel industry in Europe and the US, but it is fast catching up."

"Seven years ago in the

## Electronic brochures

Electronic brochures are another new online avenue for the travel industry. "The overriding feature is that brochure content can be delivered electronically, usually over the Internet, and can be delivered immediately.

"E-brochures can take several forms. They might be Adobe Acrobat files, scanned images of printed pages, or they could be web pages built from images and text," stated senior partner, Genesys Travel Technology Consultancy, Paul Richer.

"Content of e-brochures can be easily updated and always reflect the latest product information. They can provide just the information that the person requesting the brochure needs. Why give a cus-



tom an expensive 300-page brochure when they only needed 30 of those pages?" Richer added.

E-brochures also allow tour operators to adjust pricing and content without having to reprint, saving time and costs. Travel trade and hospitality industries can learn more about technology in their field and have the chance to interact and exchange ideas with others around the world at the International Federation for IT and Travel & Tourism (IFITT) ENTER 2004 conference.

IFITT was established in 1994 and promotes practice in IT by bringing together decision-makers from the travel and tourism, technology, media and telecommunications sector in a series of seminars, debates and networking events. ENTER 2004 will be held in Cairo on January 26 to 28. The event is expected to have a positive affect on Egypt's travel and tourism industry and attract regional participants.

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Fineline/RIP/03