



SOUND INVESTMENT

Music can be used to enhance the ambience at various spaces in a property
And instantly uplift guests' mood

BY BINDU GOPAL RAO

The role of music in the hospitality industry cannot be overstated. Therefore, audio systems that are used to play music are an essential cog in the wheel as they can control the level and spread of the music across various spaces within a hotel's environs.

Music is being looked at as a form of brand extension today. Hoteliers want guests to experience the local culture and food and music is an important part of this package. All this gains significance when the hotel is located in a culturally rich place. Saddam Zaroo, MD of RK Sarovar, Srinagar, said, "Music is a part of any culture and transcends geographical boundaries. When it comes to our property, we have incorporated music in several places across the hotel as we want to give a traditional feel. We have live Kashmiri instrumental music that is played in the six months when tourism is at its peak. Throughout the day, we have music played in the lobby, common areas and restaurants."

Music forms an integral part of corporate branding for Sheraton Grand Bangalore Hotel and is used to enhance the ambience at various spaces in the property. The audio at the property runs on centralised systems that control, modulate, and select the right music tracks for a specific venue.



Suresh Ankam, chief engineer, The Leela Ambience Convention Hotel, Delhi.

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"Our signature Italian restaurant 'Bene' plays authentic Italian melodies to add to the ambience of the restaurant. The hotel lobby has a mix of modern, classical, and instrumental music and the tempo is also modulated according to the time of day," said Saurabh Bakshi, GM, Sheraton Grand Bangalore Hotel at Brigade Gateway.

Said Rajkumar SN, chief engineer at Howard Johnson Bengaluru Hebbal, "At our hotel, audio systems are installed because sound is integral to our overall guest experience. We have not, however, used music in our communication strategy yet. We ensure a hospitable environment through soft musical notes that we play round the clock for our guests."

NOW TRENDING

There was a time when good service, great location, and a clean space were all that one needed to run a great hotel. Today, the game has moved on. Everything is about enhancing the guest experience.

From beds to pillows, seating to even fragrances—every nuance is finely detailed. "Music, as we now know, directly impacts the brain and, therefore, moods. Music will most certainly contribute in a big way to customer experience," said Neha Gundecha,

director, Hotel Sea Princess and Sea Princess Realty. As a result, investing in the right audio systems has become a priority. The correct implementation of noise-cancellation technology along with wireless speakers will allow guests not only to customise the music they listen to but also enhance and select the ambience according to their mood.

Audio systems for hospitality are getting intricately curated. It is all dependent heavily on programming that is integrated beautifully with the experience in a particular space. "For example, the sound on the pool decks will be different from that in the elevator or an Indian cuisine restaurant," added Gundecha.

MYRIAD FUNCTIONS

Audio systems are no longer solely used for providing in-room entertainment and background music. "These are utilised in our spas as well. Specially selected music helps guests at the Shine Spa for Sheraton relax better. The fitness centre at the hotel, meanwhile, is programmed to play high-energy music. Our associate lounge, too, plays upbeat music," said Bakshi.

Hotels usually use amplifiers and equalisers that help in ensuring uniform coverage of the property. Importantly, the level of music varies with the area. "We use different patterns of music based on the location. The lobby to the reception will have one kind of music whereas the restaurant will have another," said Zaroo.

At Howard Johnson, in-room background music is not provided. "We do play background music at the lobby and F&B outlets round the clock to ensure that it adds to the ambience. Ceiling-mounted surround-sound speakers play music throughout speciality restaurants, the bar lounge, the executive lounge, and banquets," said Rajkumar.

CONTENT CONTROL

A lot of hotels also create customised content for their audio systems. "A hard and soft copy of the audio and music menus containing popular tracks in various languages from around the world are available with our team. This is presented to our guests on request and they can freely pick and choose the tracks they would want to listen to," said Bakshi.

"We have music professionals who consult us from time to time and create pieces according to our requirements. Our management team focuses on music that directly impacts the customer experience. Hence, even though someone else is creating the sets for us, we have full control on the type of instruments being used, their pitch, bass sounds, and so on. We pipe the content through a central control space that distributes it to the spaces that



Neha Gundecha, director, Hotel Sea Princess and Sea Princess Realty.



Saddam Zaroo, MD, RK Sarovar, Srinagar.



2, 3, 4: RK Sarovar Portico, Srinagar.

the pieces have been created for," said Gundecha. Suresh Ankam, chief engineer, The Leela Ambience Convention Hotel, Delhi, added, "The content that we create for each area of the hotel depends on the mood of that area and can be changed according to changing moods. We have individual local controllers that can be used to control individual areas. Apart from that, we also have a centralised web-based control system. As for the technology interface, we use a web-based online music player called Down Load Player." Likewise, at Howard Johnson, the hotel can play customised music via a visual video wall and online music via a laptop set up at their MAREA Bar Lounge.

RIGHT CHOICE

Like with everything in the hospitality space, audio systems are designed to bring luxury and comfort to guests. "Our venues and rooms are equipped with



Saurabh Bakshi, GM, Sheraton Grand Bangalore Hotel at Brigade Gateway

5, 6, 7: Sheraton Grand Bangalore Hotel at Brigade Gateway.

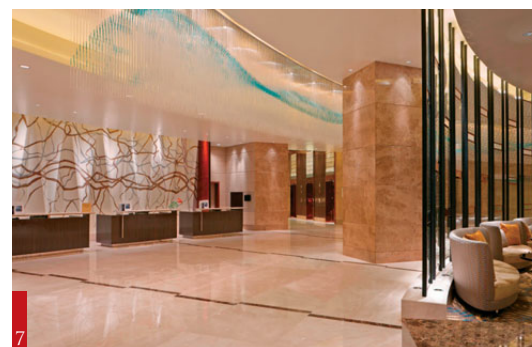
state-of-the-art inbuilt speakers with surround sound capabilities," Bakshi said. Ankam added, "We have a high-end IP-based music set up with local controllers that are also the USP of our audio system. These enable us to make changes and incorporate the choices of our guests in the audio selection."

"We mostly go with audio systems that gel with the décor and interiors of the hotel. The music systems installed are in line with the latest technology as well," said Rajkumar.

TAKING CARE

Another element is to ensure that the audio systems are tamper-proof, especially in public domain areas such as pools, bars, and banquet areas. Usually, the technology team at the hotel is responsible to ensure this kind of safety. All speakers and audio systems are usually monitored and modulated from a central control console. "The speakers at the venue rooms and public areas are built into the structure, making it difficult for anyone to damage the software or the physical body of the console," added Bakshi.

"The audio system that we use is web based and connects the server based in Singapore directly with our hotel. As the system is centrally controlled and no CDs or pen drives are in use, the risk of tampering is nil," said Ankam. "We are working on different environments and are also checking out BOSE audio systems. We have successfully adopted JBL audio systems for our outdoors. Kashmir has really harsh environments with rains and extreme weather, so we have kept them in such a way that they are not an eye sore," said Zaroo.



MAKING CONNECTIONS

Guests these days are particular about what music they listen to. Also, they usually carry their own entertainment and expect an easy connection between the TV screen and their laptop or iPad. "We have installed entertainment systems in all our rooms, allowing guests to play their own music. We plan to install music players with Bluetooth in our newly renovated rooms," stated Zaroo. Most hotels today have LED television sets in each room that provide the possibility of connectivity through multimedia ports such as the HDMI that help interconnect various devices without compromising security. The Teleadapt system, which is a one-point docking system with multiple docking ports for guests to easily connect their devices, is unique to Sheraton Grand Bangalore.

VENDOR MANTRA

The fundamental aspect is to be able to choose suppliers who can provide high-quality music and video content on a number of platforms, including digital TV, IPTV, the internet, mobile devices, and gaming consoles. Availability of a variety of audio and visual equipment and post-purchase and installation service are things that most hoteliers look out for when choosing vendors. "The most important thing in choosing products is to keep in mind is the quality. At the end of the day, it is important to understand that you are running a business and cannot use low-grade products. At the same time, it is important that the product is simple to use and provides all the important features. All guests may not be technologically savvy and, hence, the product must be simple," said Zaroo.

A good system helps create the mood and can set the tone for the guests' experience. "While the FSR 1032 background music system is perfect for hotel audio, it can be used in plenty of other business settings. Clubs and pubs, meanwhile, need a high-power system, such as the JBL STX800/ SRX800, which is capable of delivering powerful sound," opined Rajkumar. The bottom line with making the investment in audio systems in a hospitality environment is that it is guided by the guest's needs as well as the hotel's brand philosophy. With the new wave of digitisation, hotels are all set to make audio an important part of the overall guest experience. ■