

# As business travelers demand more, hotels deliver

JENNIFER LeCLAIRE / CORRESPONDENT

Hotels are upping the ante when it comes to special services for business travelers. No longer are oversized desks, dual phone lines and a copy of USA Today under the door each morning enough to satisfy the needs of this finicky group.

Today's business traveler demands amenities such as wireless Internet access, or wi-fi, in the lobby and high-speed Internet access and more comfortable bedding in the rooms. And the hotel industry is taking the demands of business travelers seriously.

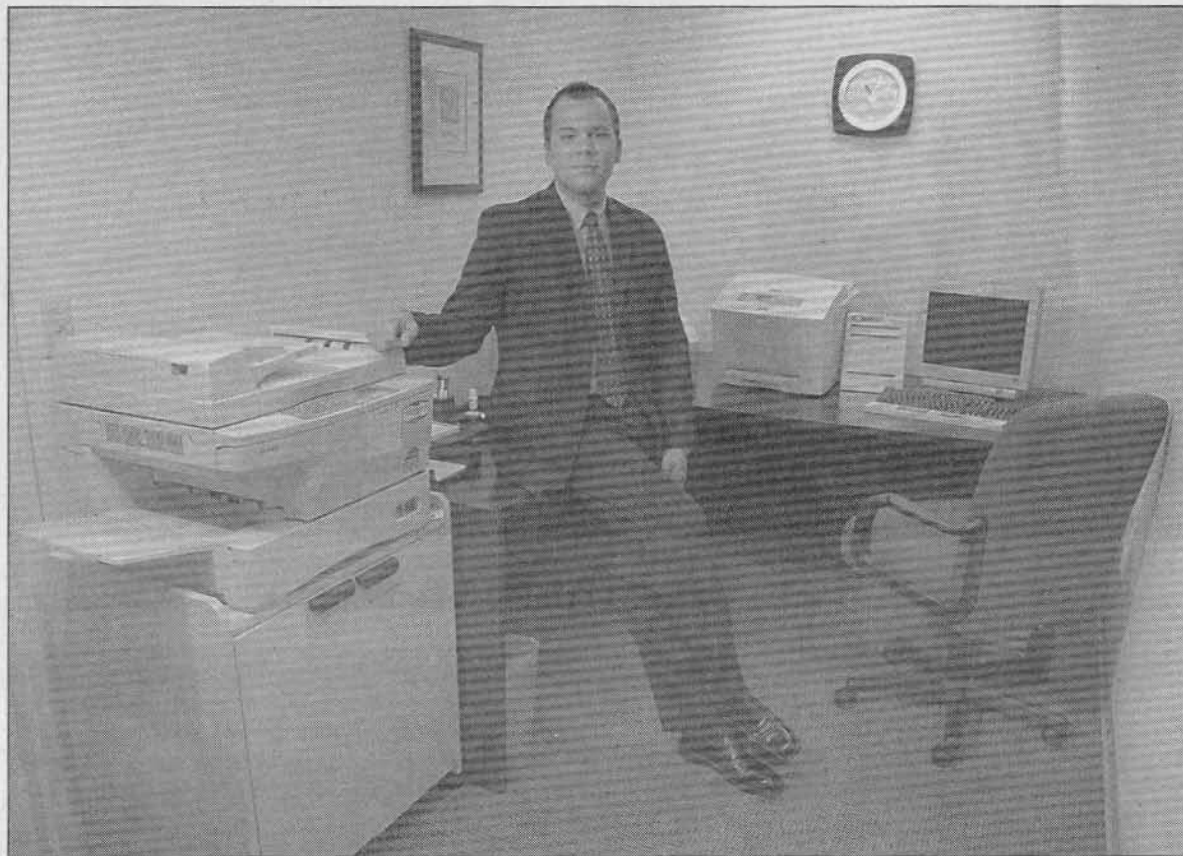
Hotels have been struggling since the travel industry was devastated by the terrorist attacks of Sept. 11, 2001, and by the economic recession that followed. The industry is now counting on business travelers to help drive a full rebound.

But the needs of the busy business traveler have changed in recent years.

"The industry is looking to the business traveler to drive the travel rebound, but we'd be wrong to think that yesterday's corporate traveler has the same profile today," said Amy Ziff, editor-at-large for Travelocity, an Internet-based travel clearinghouse.

Fitness centers, 24-hour room service and concierge services are popular requests from today's harried business traveler, said experts, and valet dry cleaning service, pillow preference programs and in-room mini-bars also rank high on the list.

While business travelers are more vocal and demanding than their leisure-travel counterparts, experts said the fre-



**Ryan MacDonald,** director of sales for Folsom's Larkspur Landing and Hilton Garden Inn, in the business center at the Hilton. Hotel guests come here to pick up documents after printing them from their rooms using a Web-based, wireless printer system

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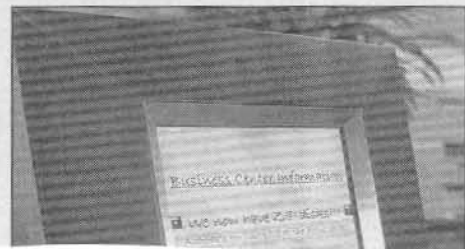
the Web while eating in the on-site restaurant.

"Everybody wants wireless Internet access in the lobby today," said Gary Carr, spokesman for PKF Consulting, a San Francisco-based hospitality consulting firm that tracks performance in the hotel industry.

"And high-speed Internet access in the

Folsom, said its new "Printer On" feature is also a big hit with business travelers.

"Guests can print to our business center with this new Internet-based software without having to leave their room," MacDonald said. "Then they can go down and pick up their documents whenever they are ready. No printer connection is required."



quency of repeat visits makes it a lucrative market.

Hotels are also more willing to cater to the special needs of business travelers since that group demonstrates greater brand loyalty as they seek to rack up rewards points for free nights and other on-site amenities, experts said.

"The most successful travel companies will offer the businessperson service at a good value," Ziff said.

That often means free continental breakfast, free high-speed Internet access, free local calls, free parking, and any other complimentary perk a hotel can think of to offer.

"Good rates are important, but guest comfort and amenities that help the business traveler work more effectively are even more important," said Heather Tanfani, president of events!, a meeting planning firm in Sacramento.

"The more competitive the market gets, the more creative hotel chains get with amenities. Even little things like special menus with low-carb items can attract business travelers," Tanfani said.

**High-speed Internet common:** Business centers are a given in today's competitive environment and travelers still seek them out to fax, copy and print documents.

But experts agree that the hottest business amenity going today is in-room high-speed Internet access that allows business travelers to use their laptops to check e-mail at any time and wireless Internet access that allows them to surf

**'High-speed Internet access in the rooms is becoming almost like air conditioning. It's just expected.'**

**Gary Carr**  
PKF Consulting

rooms is becoming almost like air conditioning. It's just expected," he said.

While hotels have to make a technology investment to provide this particular amenity, experts said it would cost hoteliers more not to offer these services in the long run.

Some properties are still charging \$9.95 per 24-hour period to use this amenity, but that fee is falling by the wayside as the competition thickens.

"It's relatively inexpensive to install Internet services on-property," said Lynn Morthel, vice president of marketing and business development for the California Hotel & Lodging Association. "Hotels with wi-fi or high-speed Internet access offer it for individual guests but not in meeting rooms. Some hotels are recouping part of their investment by charging for access in conference rooms."

Bill Amaral, president of the Sacramento Business Travel Association, the local chapter of the National Business Travel Association, places high-speed Internet access at the top of his list. "I need high-speed Internet access so that I can be productive while I am on the road," he said. "I need an easy log-in so that I don't have to jump through hoops to actually get connected."

Amaral said the competition for business travelers is so stiff these days that most corporations are negotiating high-speed Internet access into their room rates so travelers aren't charged the once-standard \$9.95 a day.

Larkspur Hospitality's Sacramento-area limited-service hotels — Larkspur Landings and franchised Hilton Garden Inns — also have wireless Internet access in the lobby and high-speed Internet access as a customary amenity at no charge. Ryan MacDonald, director of sales for the company's Hilton Garden Inn and Larkspur Landing properties in

MacDonald said the cost is "incremental," noting that these types of amenities are budgeted annually as capital improvements that drive guest loyalty.

**Not all about technology:** While experts tout high-tech amenities like wi-fi as the direction in which the hotel industry is headed, surveys indicate that other amenities outscore these in a survey of business travelers.

A poll of nearly 600 business travelers independently conducted for Travelocity by Synovate Market Research in August 2003 revealed that comfortable bedding tops the list of hotel amenities that matter most, above high-speed Internet access and other important business amenities.

Maybe that's why Larkspur's properties are introducing special Tempurpedic mattresses with pillow tops, higher-grade sheets and three different grades of pillows for weary travelers to choose from.

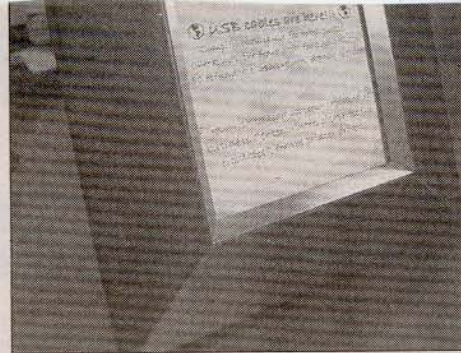
Other in-room amenities that woo business travelers include high-intensity lighting, coffee makers, microwave ovens, clock radios, full-size ironing boards and irons, wall-mounted hair dryers and cable TV.

Greg Hargrave, general manager of the full-service Hilton Sacramento Arden West, said Hilton's "HHonors" rewards system brings business travelers back to his hotel again and again.

HHonors members enjoy a variety of

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**Lynn Morthel**  
California Hotel & Lodging Association



services and amenities, like free in-room movies, free meals, discounted merchandise from well-known brands and vacation getaways, tailored individually for the guest.

"Guests are also looking for name recognition," Hargrave said. "They like to be recognized by the staff when they return."

**Responsive hotels:** With hotels making so many amenities available to business travelers, could they possibly demand anything else? If so, they'll be sure to let hotels know.

"The business traveler is a segment that is most vocal and the hotels generally respond to them quickly," said the California Hotel & Lodging Association's Morthel. "Business travelers will tell you exactly what was wrong with their room and what they want next time. They are on the leading edge."

Hilton's Hargrave said he expects hotels to start offering all-inclusive packages in the near future.

"When you go on a cruise ship you pay one rate and everything is included," he said. "People don't want to be nicked and dimed for this long-distance call and that local call and high-speed Internet access. They don't want to be surprised by the bill."