



BUSINESS DAY

## With Better Security Technology, Hotels Shore Up Blind Spots

By JULIE WEED JAN. 27, 2014

At a poker tournament in Barcelona last September, Jens Kyllönen, a professional player, said that his room at Hotel Arts was broken into and malware was installed on his computer to transmit anything he saw on his screen as he played. Despite video camera systems and electronic key card entry logs, no one was caught.

Although he said he discovered the malware in time, he says he is much more careful now about where he stores his belongings and secures his computer. Hotel Arts declined to comment, saying it was a private event.

His case is just one in what has become a technological cat-and-mouse game between hotels and criminals.

Smaller and cheaper cameras, smarter key card systems and communication among hotels add up to a more closely watched environment than in the past. Criminals are also using new technology to foil security measures and execute scams.

Cameras are typically installed in public spaces like lobbies and hallways, said H. Skip Brandt, executive director of the International Lodging Safety and Security Association in Boston, and director of security at a hotel in downtown Boston. The numbers of those monitored public spaces are multiplying as video cameras and systems come down in price and increase in power.

Advanced closed-circuit video systems provide “low-light vision, facial recognition, and movement and color recognition analysis software,” said Tom McElroy, a partner at the Hospitality Security Consulting Group in Reno, Nev. Panoramic lenses can be attached to some existing video surveillance cameras for

a 360-degree view.

Larger cameras used to be mounted primarily in ceilings to get the best view and so they would be less likely to be tampered with, said Tom Waithe, regional director of operations for Kimpton Hotels in the Pacific Northwest. The new equipment, smaller and unobtrusive, is being installed at eye level now, he said, so faces are more visible to police and hotel employees.

Videos can protect hotels as well.

“If a guest says their laptop was stolen from the dining room at a certain time, we review the tapes,” to see what the circumstances were, Mr. Waithe said. “If someone says their car was dented in our parking lot, we can see if that was the case or not.”

The advancements are not contained to video. New card key systems have become increasingly sophisticated and their uses have expanded beyond opening the guest room door.

In some newer systems, Mr. Brandt said, “management can be notified if a key has been tried unsuccessfully multiple times or in multiple rooms, or if a door has been left ajar.”

Employees’ key cards can record which housekeeper, security or maintenance employee has entered a guest room. Hotels like Kimpton’s Hotel Monaco in Seattle require guests to insert their keys into hotel elevators.

While hotel chains can be fiercely competitive, they cooperate in matters of security. In his work with the International Lodging Safety and Security Association, which includes heads of security at local and nationwide hotels along with representatives from law enforcement, Mr. Brandt manages email lists to share information about criminal or suspicious activity at the hotels, as well as police reports and educational materials.

Mr. Brandt said in one instance, a scam artist pretending to be a movie location scout was rooming and eating free at a number of hotels until his picture went out to the hotel security group email list and he was apprehended.

In New Orleans, Mike E. Cahn III, president of the Greater New Orleans Hotel and Lodging Association security network, says he sends surveillance tapes showing criminal activity to other area hotels, and to the police, who sometimes put them on YouTube. Recently a man stole a laptop from a conference room, Mr. Cahn said, and within 24 hours, he was recognized from the distributed video

footage and apprehended.

Criminals are increasing their use of technology as well, said Vijay Dandapani, president of Apple Core Hotels, a group of five boutique hotels in Midtown Manhattan. He has seen hackers create a free Wi-Fi hot spot that looks as if it is offered by the hotel, to record guests' keystrokes and gain access to their data.

Hotel employees will notice the "evil twin" network when it pops up and try to shut it down. "Pickpockets have followed wealthy people for hundreds of years," Mr. Dandapani said. "This is the modern version of it."

Despite the spate of new technology, the human touch remains critical to security, Mr. McElroy said. There's more than one reason employees are trained to greet guests they see throughout the hotel, he said.

"When the maid says good evening in the hallway, or the bellman says hello in the lobby, they are making someone feel like they have been noticed," he said. For a guest this may feel respectful and welcoming, Mr. McElroy said. But "for a criminal, it means a staff member has seen them and might identify them later."

Workers at some hotels are trained to identify other types of "guests." The American Hotel and Lodging Association Educational Institute recently offered a video to help hotel employees identify and help victims of child trafficking and prostitution. The 30-minute online course is part of a group of videos that educate hotel workers on potential criminal activity.

Mr. Waithe says that common sense prevents most petty crimes. He listed some precautions: Don't leave your laptop for a minute. Don't take your eye off your luggage while you are checking in. Don't give out credit card information to someone calling your room who says they are from the front desk. Don't leave your door ajar to go down the hall and get ice. And "always use the chain or extra latch in your hotel room."

He says, "Our video cameras show opportunistic thieves just walking down hallways trying each door, looking for the one that didn't click all the way closed."

***Correction: January 27, 2014***

*An earlier version of a photo caption associated with this article misspelled the surname of the assistant general manager at the Hotel Monaco Seattle. He is Ben Thiele, not Thiel.*

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