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Hotels Roll Out Robotic Room Service

By David K. Gibson 3.5.2018



Courtesy of Savioke

The Relay robot, from California-based Savioke, is designed to make parcel deliveries and mingle with guests.

A robot named YO2D2 has the run of Boston's Yotel, making room deliveries and schmoozing in the lobby.

If you happen to be staying in the high-tech **Yotel Boston** and happen to have forgotten your phone charger, they'll happily send one to your room . . . *from the future*. Delivery duties in the quirky, ultramodern hotel—where rooms are space-age “cabins” with “Technowalls,” and the front desk is “Mission Control”—have been taken over by a robot named YO2D2.

YO2D2 is a rolling robot of the basic trash-can shape, armless and voiceless beyond some beeps, whirrs, and whines. Clad in Yotel's signature purple, he's about the height of a four-year-old human, and he is, in a word, adorable.

“He's an important part of the crew here at Yotel Boston,” says general manager Christopher Hartzell. (YO2D2 is gender-neutral, according to Hartzell, but seems too full of personality to be given a pronoun that applies to furniture.) “The other employees love him since he frees up their time for guest interaction. And it's so much fun watching people step onto elevators, lean over, and say, “Oh, hi!””



Photos by Ben Esakof / Yotel Boston

This is the droid you're looking for: YO2D2 is Yotel Boston's newest employee.

For now, YO2D2 can't reply to those guests and just sort of chirps his way through his day. But he's far from stupid. He's got a full map of the property in his head and talks with the elevators and the phone system through the hotel's Wi-Fi. He knows where to stand so that he's not in anyone's way and parks himself in a charging station when he's low on juice.

And when guests need something delivered (or, not infrequently, just want the experience of having a robot visit their room), they can make a request through the **Yotel app** or via an old-fashioned phone call. Within 15 minutes, items from bottled water to bathrobes will be secreted away in the robot's locked top hatch and delivered to the cabin door. The room phone rings with the message, "Hello, your delivery has arrived. Our robot is waiting outside your door for you to pick it up." Guests usually bring their phones to the door to capture video to send to friends.

Although he's customized for Yotel Boston, YO2D2 was born a **Relay robot by Savioke**. The company has placed robots in 75 properties worldwide, including two—Yolanda and Yoshi—at the Yotel Singapore. There are other robot-augmented hotels, of course, most famously Japan's **Henn-na Hotels**, and the Yotel New York uses an industrial **robot named YOBOT** to store luggage for guests.

Yotel Boston employee Walter Medina is the property's robot wrangler. "We worked with Savioke for five or six months to get everything set up," Medina says, "but once they came on-site in December, we had everything up and running in four days." The rollout has been surprisingly bump free, he reports.

For now, YO2D2's duties are delivery—and dancing. “When he's not busy,” says Hartzell, “we have him in Mingle Mode, shimmying around the club lounge and acting as our Lobby Lizard.” Future upgrades could include voice activation, and perhaps a lovely Boston accent from the robot himself. For now, he performs no security functions or other services. “We're looking at making him able to tell a few jokes,” the GM says, “but the next evolution will be with the food and beverage department, so guests can have a different kind of experience when they need a snack.”

“Though with the weather that's predicted for today,” he laughs, referencing a Nor'easter bearing down on Boston, “we're thinking of teaching him how to shovel.”

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