

## **Empowering Visually Impaired Guests: A Case of Hilton**



Source: Unsplash (2019)

### **Background**

While traveling and staying at a hotel often marks the start of a memorable journey, it can be very challenging for people with disabilities. For guests who are blind or have low vision, navigating hotel facilities or the layout of their room can present difficulties that may affect their overall experience (Be My Eyes, 2024). As these obstacles often create stressful situations, it is critical for hospitality services to emphasize accessibility (Forbes, 2024).

To create a more inclusive environment for blind and low vision guests, Hilton has partnered with Be My Eyes, a free mobile application that connects visually impaired users with sighted volunteers and companies to assist with daily life through live video and AI virtual assistance (Hilton, 2024). This partnership builds on Hilton and Be My Eyes' previous collaboration in 2023, when Hilton helped train the OpenAI-powered GPT language model that powers the app to better recognize objects and navigate hotel rooms (Hotel Technology News, 2024).

Through this partnership, an extensive listing of Hilton hotels in the US and Canada will be added to the Service Directory within the app (Be My Eyes, 2024). After selecting the corresponding hotel, users will be directly connected to dedicated Hilton reservations and customer support agents, who have received specialized training to assist visually impaired guests throughout their stay (Hotel Technology News, 2024). By turning on their smartphone cameras to show their surroundings over a live video call, users can receive step-by-step guidance from Hilton's customer support agents, assisting them in navigating the hotel—from locating the front desk and exploring various facilities to identifying and using in-room amenities (Hilton, 2024).

## **Challenges**

Despite the inclusiveness and convenience offered by Hilton's partnership with Be My Eyes, the adoption of such technology faces several challenges. In terms of feasibility, the app relies on a stable internet connection, meaning assistance may be interrupted in areas with poor connectivity. Moreover, older guests may experience frustration if they are not familiar with using smartphones or the technology. Additionally, some visually impaired individuals may feel hesitant or embarrassed about seeking help, which could prevent them from fully utilizing the service.

## **Discussion Questions**

1. What are the main barriers faced by blind and low vision guests when staying at hotels?
2. What are the potential benefits and drawbacks of relying on technology to improve accessibility in hospitality services?
3. How can the use of Be My Eyes be promoted among Hilton's customer group, especially older guests?
4. In what ways can Hilton and Be My Eyes eliminate the potential embarrassment or hesitation some visually impaired individuals might feel when seeking help?
5. What other technologies could further enhance accessibility in hospitality?

## **References**

Be My Eyes. (2024). Be My Eyes and Hilton Sign Industry-First Partnership to Create a More Accessible Hotel Stay. Retrieved from <https://www.bemyeyes.com/blog/be-my-eyes-and-hilton-sign-industry-first-partnership>

Forbes. (2024). Be My Eyes, Hilton Executives Talk 'World-First' Partnership In New Interview. Retrieved from <https://www.forbes.com/sites/stevenaquino/2024/11/19/be-my-eyes-hilton-executives-talk-world-first-partnership-in-new-interview>

Hilton. (2024). Accessible Travel: Be My Eyes Partners with Hilton (with Audio Description). YouTube. Retrieved from <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=L2M7gWogzfA&t=290s>

Hilton. (2024). Hilton and Be My Eyes Launch Industry-First Partnership to Enhance the Hilton Stay for Guests who are Blind or Low Vision. Retrieved from <https://stories.hilton.com/releases/hilton-and-be-my-eyes-launch-industry-first-partnership>

Hotel Technology News. (2024). Hilton Harnesses the Power of Technology to Improve Accessibility for Blind and Low Vision Guests. Retrieved from <https://hoteltechnologynews.com/2024/10/hilton-harnesses-the-power-of-technology-to-improve-accessibility-for-blind-and-low-vision-guests/>

Unsplash (2019). Hallway with lights turned on. Retrieved from <https://unsplash.com/photos/hallway-with-lights-turned-on-NaTD1k8z78s>

**Keywords**

- Hotel
- Accessibility
- Inclusivity
- Assistive technology
- Mobile application
- Artificial Intelligence (AI)