

Minibars:

Let it B Cool – a responsible choice

AS THOSE OF US WHO HAVE BEEN AROUND THE BLOCK IN THIS INDUSTRY KNOW - IN THE PAST WE HAD TWO CHOICES - WHITEGOOD FRIDGES IN WHITE IN A SMALL SIZE OR CUSTOMISED ABSORPTION MINIBARS WITH A CHOICE OF FINISH.

Most accommodation managers chose absorption. They did this not because of the potential match to décor but to optimise on the fact that absorption minibars are silent. Who wants guests complaining of a lack of sleep during the night owing to a noisy fridge in the confined space of a hotel room?

Absorption (ammonia based) minibars cool via the heating element that provides the energy required to exchange gases and drive the cooling cycle. An absorption refrigerator changes the gas back into a liquid using a method that requires only heat. This process requires no moving parts, thus accounting for the lack of noise while cooling. Because of this, there was a boom in the demand for smaller absorption minibars in the 1960s onwards as the caravanning and hospitality market began to grow.

There are limitations however to this technology no matter how silent the operation. One is that they generate their coolants in a closed cycle, taking longer to cool than the newer technology of compression refrigeration.

The second is that they disperse a lot of heat in the process and this requires good ventilation which, at times, it is very difficult to provide in small hotel rooms.

The third is their cooling process is energy wasteful at a time when everyone – accommodation manager or not – is mindful of their footprint on the global waste of energy.

The fourth is that most absorption minibars on the market cannot cool below 5°C. This is not cool enough for the hotter areas of the Australian market, where guests expect their beer to be very cold.

For a fifth reason (and here it was a problem more than a limitation) the Hilton group is currently in the process of changing over all their absorption minibars to compression minibars. This choice was driven by an incident where ammonia leaked out of one absorption minibar, causing inconvenience to the guest and potential liability to the group.

For the above mentioned reasons in the main, the hotel and recreational industry in Australia is heading towards using compression refrigeration more and more. This is a mature technology that is now used almost everywhere else in the world.

In a nutshell, the main difference between the two types of refrigeration – absorption and compression - is the way the refrigerant is changed from a gas back into a liquid so that the cycle can repeat. It was always seen as a problem in the hospitality industry that compression minibars generated noise and thus were not suitable to be used in guest rooms as this would disturb guests.

To combat this suppliers have employed a new generation compressor that, coupled with unique shock absorbers, is almost silent in operation. In addition, it has the additional feature of four different shift settings of operational time per day (with start and finish time flexible) to fit ensure guest convenience. Yet the most



persuasive element of the new technology's success is that the minibars have extremely low energy consumption; stay at optimum levels of cold longer than the absorption minibars and also cool much more quickly.

Generally the energy consumption of minibars account for 5% – 7% of the total expenditure of the energy bill in an average sized hotel. The compression minibar uses up to 70% less energy signifying a significant overall saving on energy expenses.

The concept of fully automatic minibar systems are growing in popularity worldwide. Rather than being seen as merely a guest convenience (and a hotel inconvenience!) here minibars are seen as revenue producing centres.

Most organisations lose money on manual minibars that are labour intensive, suffer shrinkage and often have problem with stock control. We all know the scenario where the guest checking out denies liability for the use of the minibar and yet two beers and a chocolate bar are reported to have been replenished by the minibar attendant.

Automated minibars automatically bill a guest's account under certain conditions and are able to report on usage, the rotation of stock and other innovative vital information. Hotels are able to reduce staff costs by a reduction in the number of attendants required and they replenish only what has been charged and accounted for using actual information provided by the system. This saves time and overbuying, with informed reports being produced by the system to eliminate wastage from expired stock.

These automated minibar systems can utilise existing cabling in the hotel or – using the latest technology of wireless RF communication that is not dependant on existing hotel networks. There is an electronic tray for dry goods as well that promotes impulse purchases. Case studies show that the installation of automated



minibars increases profitability of between 20% – 50% in the first year of operation.

Because of the initial venture costs involved, some manufacturers have introduced a profit sharing program whereby the cost of setting up an automated minibar system and the total costs of managing and maintaining it from the supply of stock to its replenishment is borne by the supplier. Profits are then shared with the accommodation complex. ■

Gidon Sattinger - Vintech Systems

*The classic gas absorption refrigerator sends liquid ammonia into a hydrogen gas. The liquid ammonia evaporates in the presence of hydrogen gas, providing the cooling. The now-gaseous ammonia is sent into a container holding water, which absorbs the ammonia. The water-ammonia solution is then directed past a heater, that boils ammonia gas out of the water-ammonia solution. The ammonia gas is then condensed into a liquid. The liquid ammonia is then sent back through the hydrogen gas, completing the cycle. - Wikipedia

*A compressor refrigerator uses an electrically-powered compressor to increase the pressure on the gas, and then condenses the hot high pressure gas back to a liquid by heat exchange with a coolant (usually air). Once the high pressure gas has cooled, it passes through a pressure release valve which drops the refrigerant temperature to below freezing. - Wikipedia



SECURE DCS
DIGITAL CODE CREDIT CARD IN - ROOM SAFES

STATE-OF-THE-ART ELECTRONIC
IN-ROOM SAFES



Secure DCS safes are in use in over 20,000 Australian Hotel rooms, 2 million world wide, with over 3 decades of expertise.

Vintech Systems Pty Ltd

Ph: +61 2 9472 2000
Web: www.vintech.com.au

RELIABILITY IS THE KEY



WORLD'S FIRST **CLASS A** ENERGY
EFFICIENT MINIBAR



Rated **CLASS A** by EU Standards
Supplied to over 500,000 rooms
Consumes over 60% less power than standard minibars
Saves up to 7% on total energy bills
Available with wireless central locking device
Remote controlled for ease of access and to shift settings
Available in manual, semi and fully automatic