

Hotels are alive with sound of (hip) music

It's Louder too, as chains cater to younger clients

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Get ready for louder, hipper music at hotels. In the latest bid for a new generation of travelers, hotel chains are paying more attention to music in their lobbies, shops and restaurants.

They're playing it louder, making it more consistent across their hotels and turning more to contemporary tunes.

"It's really foreground music. It's meant to be heard," says Stephen Rosenstock of Omni, which launched its new music program late last year.

With more people traveling, hotel chains are trying to outdo each other in providing a "more memorable experience," says Alan Benjamin, a hospitality consultant. "They are trying to make travel more of a personal experience. Not just (having guests say) that I

checked in, went to bed, shaved and checked out."

Part of that, says Rob Kwortnik, a marketing professor at Cornell University, is catering to a rising number of younger customers who are more comfortable with louder music.

Omni's program, which features about 1,500 songs, plays its music at a louder volume than before, but people can still have conversations without raising their voice.

What the chains are doing:

▶ **Centralizing.** Traditionally, the chains let hotel managers pick their own music, creating something of a musical mishmash. Hyatt and Omni have contracted with Muzak, the music programming company, for centralized song lists. Muzak transmits songs to hotels via satellite.

At Marriott, which is also working with a music programmer, 80% of the music will be from the centralized play list, and hotels can individually select the rest.

▶ **Changing through the day**

They're also changing music throughout the day to fit the mood.

In the morning and afternoon, Omni plays "motivational" music — adult pop, soul and traditional vocal jazz with more horn and percussion sounds. Ex-amples: Chris Isaak, Miles Davis and Annie Lennox. After 5 p.m., mellower, more instrumental jazz play: John Beltran and Sarah Vaughan, for example.

Marriott's program, which is being introduced this month, will play some "European new age" and classical music in the morning. As the day progresses, it will give way to light jazz, contemporary pop and latin guitar, followed in the evening by faster-tempo music and remixes of old pop and soul songs.

▶ **Getting creative.** Muzak has programmed Hyatt hotels to play songs that match the flavor of the hotel's location: local bands in Austin, Hawaiian music in Honolulu urban music in Chicago.

InterContinental's program, which will be launched early next year, calls for hiring regional composers for original music.