

## BUILDING HOTELS FAST

## Before you read

Would you stay in a hotel made of modified shipping containers?  
Why? /Why not?

## Reading

Read this article from the *Financial Times* and answer the questions.

FT

LEVEL OF DIFFICULTY ● ● ○

# Hotel changes the landscape of building

by Robert Cookson

The biggest hotel to be constructed from shipping containers opens in London this week. Travelodge, the budget hotel chain, imported the containers from China – complete with bathrooms, plastering and air conditioning units – then stacked them into a 300-room hotel near Heathrow in just three weeks. The steel modules are made by Verbus Systems, a London-based company that designs, manufactures and supplies what it calls a ‘Lego kit’ for developers. ‘Our proposition is absolutely unique,’ Paul Rollett, director of Verbus, says. Verbus supplies oversized shipping containers – as much as five metres wide – that are strong enough to build high-rise buildings anywhere in the world. It has provided a developer in Liverpool with two modules that came fully finished, with pillows on the beds.

For medium-sized hotels – those with more than 200 rooms and six storeys – Verbus claims

its modules are up to 20 per cent cheaper and 50 per cent faster than traditional building systems. ‘It cannot be beaten,’ says Mr Rollett. The Heathrow Travelodge took 58 weeks from start to finish – 16 weeks faster than a conventional build would have been. During one evening, an entire floor of 60 rooms was lifted into place in three hours.

Travelodge plans to expand aggressively over the next decade and expects to use containers in many of its larger hotels. The containers can be stacked 17 storeys high without the need for additional support. They can also be recycled. ‘We could unbolt this building, take it down, refurbish the rooms and move it to Sydney,’ Mr Rollett says.

It remains to be seen whether developers will break with convention and adopt steel modules over bricks, concrete and timber en masse. But Mr Rollett argues that containers are

the most reliable option, as well as the cheapest, especially in extreme environments.

He cites Canada, where construction must be rapid because of permafrost; west Africa, ‘where you can’t build timber-frame hotels because the termites eat them’; and the United Arab Emirates, where cities are springing up in the desert.

The future imagined by Mr Rollett, with buildings worldwide made from identical metal blocks, would require a profound shake-up of the established order and, in its most extreme form, would cause nightmares for traditional builders and architects. But as Mr Rollett says, industrialisation is a powerful force. ‘If Henry Ford in 1903 had started making houses and not cars, the world would be a completely different place. I just can’t understand why buildings aren’t made in factories.’

**1 Look through the first four paragraphs and match the figures to the things that they refer to.**

- 1 3 a) the number of rooms in a new Travelodge near Heathrow
- 2 5 b) the number of weeks saved on building the Heathrow Travelodge
- 3 16 c) the number of storeys that can be built without additional support using the system
- 4 17 d) the width in metres of some shipping containers
- 5 20 e) the percentage by which Verbus's buildings can be built faster than others
- 6 50 f) the number of weeks it took to stack the containers to build the Heathrow Travelodge
- 7 60 g) the percentage by which Verbus's building system is cheaper than others
- 8 300 h) the number of rooms on one hotel floor that was lifted into place in one evening

**2 Find the answers to these questions in paragraphs 1 and 2.**

- a) Where are the containers made?
- b) What do they come with?
- c) Is there another supplier for this system?
- d) Are there limits as to where it can be used?
- e) Can they be delivered fully finished and equipped?

**3 Give the infinitive form of verbs in paragraphs 4 and 5 that mean the following.**

- a) start using
- b) make bigger
- c) take from one place to another
- d) use again
- e) improve something to its original state
- f) pile one on another
- g) take apart

**4 Find expressions in paragraphs 5 and 6 to complete these statements.**

- a) Places where the climate is very hot or cold have .....
- b) If you start to doing something in a new way, you .....
- c) If people or organisations start doing something in large numbers, they do it .....
- d) The best way of doing something is .....
- e) If houses or towns start to be built quickly in a place where there were none before, they ..... there.
- f) If it's too early to say definitely if something will happen, you can say .....

**5 Find the answers to these questions in paragraphs 6 and 7. Start your answers with *Because* ...**

- a) Why must buildings go up very quickly in Canada?
- b) Why are wood-frame buildings unsuitable for Africa?
- c) Why is Verbus suitable for the United Arab Emirates?
- d) Why will it not be easy to change traditional building methods around the world?
- e) Why is Paul Rollett optimistic about his vision of for the future?

**Over to you 1**

'If Henry Ford in 1903 had started making houses and not cars, the world would be a completely different place. I just can't understand why buildings aren't made in factories.' Do you agree? Why? / Why not?

**Over to you 2**

Go back to the answer you gave in Before you read on page 118. Would it still be the same? Why? / Why not?

## VIDEOCONFERENCING

## Before you read

Do you consider the environmental effects of travel when planning:

- a) business trips?
- b) private trips and holidays?

Why? / Why not?

## Reading

Read this article from the *Financial Times* and answer the questions.

FT

LEVEL OF DIFFICULTY ● ● ●

## Reluctant users slow to take up videoconferencing

by Danny Bradbury

The public relations executive was enthusiastic on the phone. The IT company he represented had started installing green data centres and energy-efficient computers. Would I like to fly to California to see for myself? That would be a 2,500-mile round trip from my home in midwestern Canada. According to the online calculator from Terapass, the trip would release 1,132 pounds (about 500 kilos) of CO<sub>2</sub> into the atmosphere. 'If you're really into green technology, couldn't we do a videoconference instead?' I asked. 'Sure,' said the PR person. 'We are totally into green issues.' He promised to arrange it. Months later, nothing had happened.

The high-tech industry is quick to praise the benefits of flexible communication, but videoconferencing is one area where things have failed to live up

to the hype. 'Videoconferencing has not significantly displaced travel,' says Frank Modruson, CIO for global technology consulting firm Accenture. As the IT sector continues to push its green values, this mismatch between rhetoric and reality is becoming harder to ignore. So why are relatively few people using videoconferencing?

Andrew Davis, managing partner at online collaboration market research firm Wainhouse, says the technology is let down by usability. For many people, videoconferences are just too difficult to set up. This is why Nortel is emphasising the services side. 'The barrier isn't the technology. It's the services around that technology,' says Dean Fernandes, the company's General Manager of Network Services.

Nortel is one of several companies getting into a relatively new segment of the videoconferencing market called telepresence. Specially equipped rooms enable people to appear as if they are sitting across the table, with life-size video representations of remote colleagues in high-definition video. Customers pay to use Nortel's facilities, which can also handle video filming, enabling the room to double as a production facility for corporate TV, for example. Nortel will also handle post-production tasks such as editing. Accenture, on the other hand, opted for the capital investment route. Mr Modruson said it is installing telepresence systems, creating rooms in Chicago and Frankfurt, and hopes to roll out another 11 cities in the next few months.

**1 Look through the whole article and match the people to their jobs.**

- |                                  |  |
|----------------------------------|--|
| 1 the writer of the article      | a) Chief Information Officer, Accenture            |
| 2 the public relations executive | b) a partner at Wainhouse, a market research firm  |
| 3 Frank Modruson                 | c) a journalist interested in environmental issues |
| 4 Andrew Davis                   | d) someone representing an IT firm                 |

**2 Choose the best summary of the first paragraph, a or b.**

- a) An IT company said it was developing environmentally friendly services. The writer asked its public relations representatives to organise a videoconference in order to talk about its latest services, but nothing happened. Perhaps this was because it was too complicated to arrange.
- b) Videoconferences are good in theory, but it's better to travel to see someone, even if the environmental cost is high, as nothing can replace face-to-face communication.

**3 Look at the expressions in *italic*. True or false?**

If ...

- a) something does not *live up to the hype* (lines 25–26), reality is just as good as what people say about it.
- b) something *displaces* (line 27) something else, they both exist together.
- c) someone *pushes* (line 31) a particular idea, they encourage people to believe in it, use it, etc.
- d) there is a *mismatch between rhetoric and reality* (lines 32–33), people don't do what they say they do.
- e) you are *let down by the usability* (lines 40–41) of something, you can rely on it.
- f) something is *difficult to set up* (line 43), it is hard to arrange.
- g) you *emphasise* (line 44) something, you say that it is important.
- h) there is a *barrier* (line 45) to using something, it is easy to use.

**4 Match the two parts of these expressions from paragraph 4.**

- |                     |                    |
|---------------------|--------------------|
| 1 corporate         | a) representations |
| 2 high-definition   | b) tasks           |
| 3 life-size video   | c) video           |
| 4 post-production   | d) facility        |
| 5 production        | e) colleagues      |
| 6 remote            | f) market          |
| 7 videoconferencing | g) TV              |

**5 Now match the expressions in Exercise 4 to their meanings.**

- i) people in your company who work in another place
- ii) electronic pictures of people that are as big as in real life
- iii) the things that have to be done on a film before it can be shown
- iv) the place where the things in iii, above, are carried out
- v) very high-quality electronic pictures
- vi) the organisations that might use this sort of system and similar systems
- vii) television programmes made and shown within an organisation

**Over to you 1**

Would you like to talk to a life-size video representation of a colleague sitting opposite you across the table instead of going to see them face to face?

Why? / Why not?

**Over to you 2**

Have you tried using a webcam camera and microphone on a PC to talk to friends or colleagues? If so, describe the experience. If not, what do you think it would be like?