

Integrating new systems requires teamwork

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Story Highlights

Department managers must become familiar with what a system does and how they can configure it to drive improved results.

Systems don't solve anything; they have to be put into productive use if they're going to have any impact.

Choosing a system requires a focus on how the organization itself can be improved rather than knowledge on technology.

This is the second in a three-part series of articles from the International Society of Hospitality Consultants regarding the ever-evolving technological landscape. Read the first part [here](#).

Hoteliers often ask me "What's the best system out there?" but they seldom know what they mean. Many mistakenly believe that simply buying the "best" system available will solve all their problems—a belief that's encouraged by the vendor habit of calling their systems solutions. Systems don't solve anything; they have to be put into productive use if they're going to have any impact.

Hoteliers also say they know nothing about technology, but choosing a new system is seldom a technical issue. Far from requiring arcane technical knowledge, choosing a system requires a real focus on how the organization itself can be improved. Only when you've identified that can you define what tools are needed to support the desired change. Even then it takes real people management skills to make it happen.



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Replacing an obsolete and hard-to-support system with its modern equivalent and using it to do the same things is an exercise in futility. The staff will resent having to lose their hard-won system expertise to learn a new way of doing the same things, and where's the benefit in that?

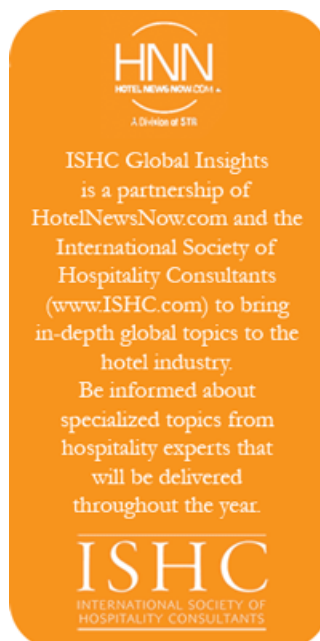
New systems always have new capabilities that can be used to improve the business, and to not take full advantage of them is a massive waste of the investment. For example, replacing an old guest management system with one that has a website booking engine, a better global-distribution system interface and tighter integration with a sales and catering system will save you much manual effort in re-keying data from one system to another, or from faxes. That's great, but what can you do with that saved time and improved data accuracy?

Determining success

Before you start, you have to define what success will look like in terms of improved operational outcomes—50% fewer guest complaints through better service, 20% more repeat business from improved targeted marketing and so on. It's hard enough to implement new technology on time and within budget, but even though it's wholly admirable when you do, it's only an example of project completion, not of project success. Success only comes when the planned results have been demonstrably achieved, and that requires teamwork across all affected areas of the hotel to change the way things are done.

The Information Technology department may be responsible for installing the system, but the department managers must become fully familiar with what it does and how they can configure to drive improved results. They must work as a team to understand and appreciate its impact on all affected departments, not just their own, and cooperatively work out

how to implement it for the most productive operational outcome across the board.



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This may require changing the organizational structure and people's job responsibilities. After all, everyone needs to become competent in their new roles rather than simply being trained to operate the software. It may sometimes require changing the compensation structure, too. Implementing city-wide revenue management across a cluster of five hotels, for example, is likely to be much more effective if the GMs are rewarded for the results of the group rather than for the performance of their individual properties.

Finding leaders

This takes leadership. Managers need to understand that they are all leaders who each happen to be responsible for a particular area at a given time. It doesn't matter that they may not have formal authority to implement something that impacts someone else's area. If they all understand how it benefits the hotel as a whole, they'll make it happen together. Leaders know what has to be done. They take the initiative, work out whose help they'll need and just get on with it.

The pace of technology development is bringing us new capabilities at an astonishing rate, but the technical steps for implementing them often are well defined. For any hotel wanting to take advantage of new systems to become more competitive, it's the "people" part that's difficult. Clearly understood operational goals, good leadership and good teamwork are the keys to success.

Jon Inge is an independent consultant in hotel technology. He has more than 35 years experience with hotel systems, gained through working with both vendor and hotel companies and, for the last sixteen years, through his own consulting practice. He compiles a bi-weekly e-newsletter on hospitality technology, and his articles appear frequently in the trade press. A founder member of the HTNG initiative for greater system inter-operability, he has served on HFTP's HITEC Advisory Committee and the AH&LA Technology Committee, and is a member of the International Society of Hospitality Consultants. In June 2006, he was inducted into the HFTP International Hospitality Technology Hall of Fame.

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