

# Mobility, flexibility are musts for PMS

BY NICOLE CARLINO

ALPHARETTA, GA—Though it won't be available industry-wide until early next year, Agilysys, Inc., based here, used the recent HITEC conference to preview its new rGuest Stay property management system. This is the first application built using the new rGuest Hospitality software program, which was built ground up with mobility and flexibility top of mind.

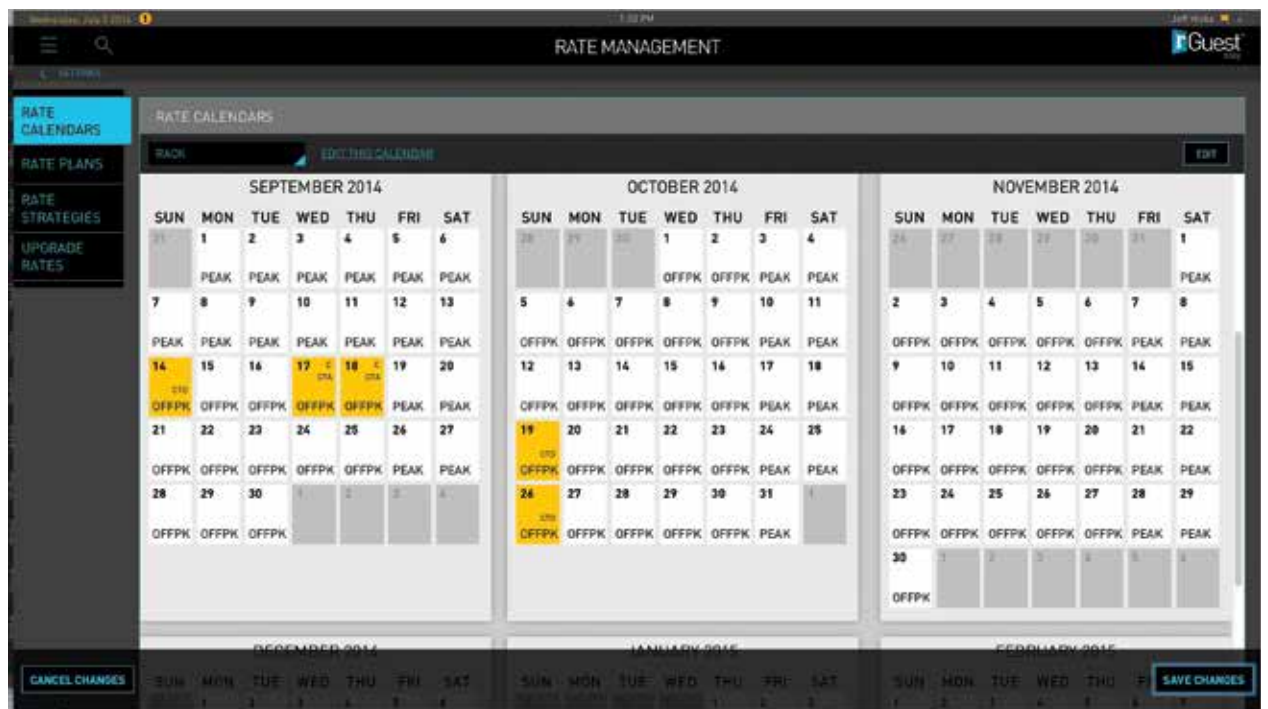
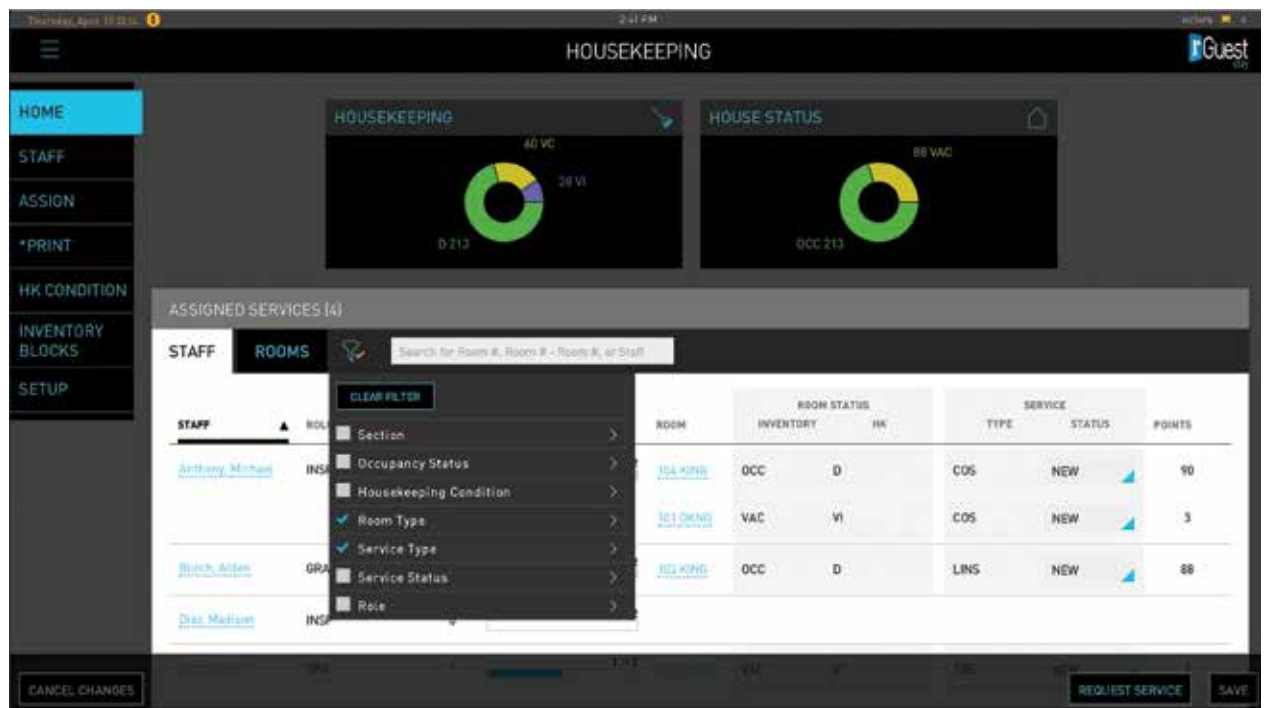
"It can handle what the trends are today, but we also tried to make it so that we could handle tomorrow's innovation," said Rehan Jaddi, VP of engineering, who noted the company has been in active development for some 18 months. "We took the expertise that we had in hospitality property management systems and married that with software experts in the industry."

Jaddi noted that these experts included software engineers from companies like Expedia, Amazon, Disney and Microsoft. In addition, the company used its customer advisory board as a resource. "It's made up of a customer group that both use Agilysys property management systems and those that use competitors, from small properties to luxury resorts up to your largest-scale properties in the world. We meet regularly with each of these groups to review what we're building, how we're building it and making sure we're building something that is both innovative and will meet the needs of that broad spectrum of customer base."

Key features of the rGuest Stay property management system include group room block management; room inventory; flexible rate management; reservations, including interfaces that accept reservations from online travel agencies and the hotel's own website; guest service management, including check-in, check-out and in-house experience management; functionality that presents upsell offers during check-in; guest, company and travel agent profile management; folio management and charge routing; housekeeping; accounts receivable; integrated credit card processing using tokenization and Point-to-Point Encryption (P2PE) technology; and interfaces for telephone, in-room movies, point-of-sale, credit card, door-locking systems, mini-bar and other back-office systems.

Jaddi noted that there are a few trends that a forward-thinking PMS needs to address, starting with mobility—specifically, accessing the system from anywhere on the property, from any type of device. "Mobility wasn't an afterthought for this application," he said, noting that the application can be 100% keyboard-driven or 100% touch-driven. "The world is getting more touch-oriented and we didn't want to be behind the times."

One of the company's engineering principles is leveraging open standards to expose functionality for any type of device. Agilysys did a demo in which the application interacted with Google Glass. "Google Glass wasn't around when we started this effort, but it was a proof point to show that using these open standards, it took only a few hours for one of our architects on the team to integrate it with our system," he said. "This allows for really rich scenarios in the future: Housekeepers will be able to interact with the system, maybe not with Google Glass but with something that suits their needs and will tell them what room to clean next and they can update the status right there.



The rGuest stay platform can be touch- or keyboard-driven, depending on the device. The platform offers real-time data for users.

"I don't know what some kid in a garage is inventing, so we've got to keep our platform open with the right standards so we can allow for those scenarios to be rapidly integrated," he continued. "That's not possible with today's systems without some significant rewrites."

In addition to open standards when it comes to devices, the platform was built to be open with Agilysys' partners. "There are a lot of shared services, and each of our applications can more rapidly innovate because we aren't trying to do things in duplicate," he said. "Agilysys can deliver innovation faster because we're getting better efficiency within ourselves. But what it means to our customers is we're also exposing that framework of services and those open standards to our partners. They're going to be more capable of integrating with us. That will allow for the richest analytics at the end-of-the-day of data, whether it is guest or operational data."

Jaddi noted that when it comes to a PMS, it's easy to just think of guest data, but these systems can also be helpful operationally. "For instance, a lot of times front desk agents will enter credit card numbers in other fields and that really gets them into PCI trouble. What we do is we scan the field as they're entering the information and if they try to populate it with something

like a credit card number, we catch it and pop up an error for them," he said. "When you can tie all this together with rich data behind the scenes, we can pull up reports for our customers to say that we've noticed you've got a high use of users trying to enter credit card information, and we think you need to redo your PCI training among your front desk agents."

Another trend the company incorporated was making sure it was a true cloud-based service so hoteliers are not managing the servers and integrations between the different systems. "They can focus on servicing the guest and leveraging the property management system to access the information to be able to serve the guest better," he said, noting this is a definite benefit for customers with multiple properties. However, he said, if customers do want to run it themselves in their own data centers, that's also possible.

Jaddi noted that the customer advisory board was particularly helpful to the development process. "The nuance of scenarios that the application has to support was very interesting to me," he said. "It really allowed for some rich discussions as we went through the design of the application." He noted that the Agilysys team really tried to drill down to the root of the

problems the industry experts wanted to solve. “Then we’d try to come back with a more creative, innovative approach to delivering that,” he said, noting that he believes this means that there’s not one major feature that makes this solution compelling, but a lot of little things that add up.



**Rehan Jaddi**  
Agilysys, Inc.

For instance, “if their role is the front desk agent, they will have a landing page that’s tailored to their job function,” he said. “One of the things that we found during that questioning is the front desk people are really interrupt driven. They’re at the desk trying to do some other task, and a guest is coming up, and the next guest needs something else. In that kind of model, access to functionality is hugely important. Trying to click through a navigation can be difficult, so we have more of a Google- or Yahoo-driven search paradigm for them to quickly access the guest, the rooms, the groups, profiles information, service request information, so they can really adapt to the needs of the customer standing in front of them.

“With each group, whether it’s the housekeeping manager or the revenue manger, we’ve tailored the design to pick up these unique challenges that come up for them so that they don’t have this application that might be super-functional, but not as easy to navigate and use, and not structured to the common scenarios that they have,” he continued.

Jaddi noted that another example is that most property management systems were built and delivered before rich credit card use by the guest or a lot of integration with online booking systems became ubiquitous. “What that meant was, when you arrived at the front desk, the agent had to capture a lot of information about you. Today,

most bookings come with that information already,” he said. “Instead of having a screen that forces you to enter that information, ours already shows that. It’ll automatically do that room assignment, display the summary information about the guest, so that you can just validate that

they’re staying for the number of nights that they said, and you can click one button and check them in.”

The company is currently conducting beta tests at select properties. “The beta test customers run the gamut, everything from a less-than-50-room properties,

to people that own 5,000-room properties,” said Jaddi, noting that the platform was designed to fit any kind of property.

“The first release of this application will be targeted at the limited-service type properties, something around 100-150 rooms or less, doesn’t have a spa

or golf resort, but is more about just lodging,” he said. “We’re taking a true crawl, walk, run approach to delivering a new technology to the market. We want to start with that core scenario around lodging and then expand out to our casino and resort properties.” **HB**