

HOTEL TECHNOLOGY FORUM + HTNG NORTH AMERICA

HT-NEXT

PRODUCED BY HOSPITALITY TECHNOLOGY

2017

BE FRICTIONLESS.

INAUGURAL HT-NEXT FOCUSES ON THE FRICTIONLESS FUTURE FOR HOTELS

This recap of HT-NEXT offers highlights from the first conference in partnership with HTNG and HT magazine.

Michal Christine Escobar, Managing Editor

In April of 2016, *Hospitality Technology* magazine and Hotel Technology Next Generation (HTNG; www.htng.org) announced that they would combine HT's Hotel Technology Forum (HTF) and HTNG North America, to create a new event called HT-NEXT. With the theme: "Be Frictionless," the conference took place April 10-13 in Orlando, Fla. at the Rosen Shingle Creek. The event drew hotelier attendance that was a 150% increase more than each event alone!

On arrival day, hoteliers and vendor members were able to take part in HTNG workgroups, a hallmark of HTNG North America. The HTNG workgroups bring hoteliers and vendors together to collaborate on guidelines, standards or outputs that hoteliers can put to practical use. Workgroup topics included: Payments, Door Lock Security, Centralized Authentication, Scalable Cellular Technologies, and Hotel System Dashboards.

The day concluded with an excursion to the Rosen College of Hospitality Management at the University of Central Florida. There, attendees had the opportunity to hear updates and overviews from Workgroup Chairs during what was themed, "Briefs & BINGO." The "briefs" offered a glimpse into the exciting and challenging work HTNG has been facilitating through the workgroups. The "BINGO" component came into play as attendees were challenged to listen to the presentations for keywords that were printed on BINGO game

boards. Winners walked away with HTNG swag. Afterwards, attendees visited the new Innovation Center at the college. It will be used as a test lab for vendor-contributed technology and HTNG standards so students can impact new technologies as they take shape.

Day two was comprised of a multi-track morning where attendees could choose between participating in HTNG workgroups or several different breakout sessions. Workgroups were comprised of: Renovations, Internet of Things, Cloud Communications, Fiber to the Room, and Next Generation Distribution Messaging.

Breakout sessions included a multitude of different topics and formats. There were panel discussions including Emerging Technology: What's Hype, What's Hot, What's Next, where panelists discussed which guest-facing technology is worth the investment; and Future-Ready Network Infrastructure, where panelists honed in on how hotel brands need to think ahead to accommodate the always-connected mobile guest as well as IoT strategies. An HTNG Consortium, featuring hoteliers and vendor members, discussed Modern Messaging & New Ways to Integrate Systems. This session, led by HTNG vendor members and Jai Govindani, CTO of Red Planet Hotels, offered attendees an in-depth look at how systems need to talk to each other. Talking About Payments with the People Who Know, featured two segments. The first, discussed the benefits, challenges and misconceptions around PCI compliance



and the second focused on why PCI compliance is not a cure-all advising hoteliers to install firewalls in order to protect data properly.

The conference got its official kickoff with a rousing keynote presentation from best-selling author Erik Qualman. Qualman called on hotels to recognize that today's hotel guests are constantly dropping digital hints via their social media posts. Today, the technology is available to hoteliers to turn those small pieces of data into valuable insights, but hoteliers must first be willing to implement the technology.

The day concluded with the HT-NEXT Awards Program, sponsored by Datatrend Technologies (www.datatrend.com) and comprised of HT's Hotel Visionary Awards and HTNG's TechOvation Awards. Angie Hospitality was named the 2017 HTNG TechOvation Award winner and Hyatt, NH Hotel Group, La Quinta Inns & Suites and Watermark Luxe Waterfront Cottages were honored as the 2017 Hotel Visionary Award winners. (More information on the TechOvation awards is on page 20 and Hotel Visionary Award winners are profiled in the cover story starting on page 10.)

Chris Ruff, president, Driven Growth, opened the event on day three with his presentation on how virtual and augmented reality will change loyalty and engagement for hospitality. He discussed the different ways virtual reality can and should be utilized to create one-of-a-kind experiences for hotel guests that goes beyond "fun" and marketing. For instance, trans-

A) HT-NEXT Award Program sponsor Datatrend (Rob Graves, far left) joins the 2017 Hotel Visionary Award winners. B) Angie Hospitality CEO Ted Helvey (center) is flanked by John Burns, President, Hospitality Technology Consulting & Datatrend's Rob Graves and HTNG CEO, Michael Blake and HT's editor, Dorothy Creamer. C) Hotelier participation for HT-NEXT outpaced historic numbers for both HTF and HTNG North America. D) Richard Wagner of Marriott co-facilitated a roundtable on guest-facing technologies; E) Ted Harrington, Independent Security Evaluators, presents on "Hacking the Connected Hotel."

lating signs instead of printing them in multiple languages; allowing event planners to "see" a hotel space without having to physically visit the property; or even food menus where common dietary allergies "jump off the page" to catch consumers' attention. He was followed by Ted Harrington, executive partner, Independent Security Evaluators, who discussed key security concerns hoteliers are facing as not only guests, but hotel rooms become connected. He offered insights into how adversaries attack and provided guidance on how executives and security officers need to work together to combat them.

Prior to lunch, attendees were able to attend two rounds of "HT-NEXT Lightning Chats." The 20-minute presentations discussed a wide variety of topics including, EMV compliance, using the guestroom television to increase engagement, how G6 Hospitality is using data



and structured analytics to grow demand, and a case study of St Giles Hotels and its use of virtual reality to engage customers. The day wrapped up with detailed analysis and findings from the *2017 Lodging Technology Study* by Dorothy Creamer, editor of *HT* and co-analyst, Gaurav Pant, chief insights officer, Incisiv. Key findings from the study aligned with the event's theme of "Be Frictionless," revealing that hotels will be prioritizing enhancing digital customer engagement and investing in technologies to create seamless, omnixperiences.

The final day of HT-NEXT took attendees "back to the future," with an '80s themed presentation from Kelly McGuire, vice president of advanced analytics, Wyndham Destination Network detailing how "everything hoteliers need to know about data analytics can be learned from an '80s movie." Using examples from *Star Wars* to *The Breakfast Club*, McGuire explained how "the competitive landscape has quickly transitioned to finding a way to best use data to drive strategy and performance."

One point she stressed was that many hoteliers feel they'll need to hire data scientists to "get it right." But data scientists are rare and expensive. Instead, she recommended that hoteliers first look within their organization to find employees that have some of the skills required to manipulate and analyze data. Then the hotel can put together a team and unleash them

F) Keynote and best-selling author, Erik Qualman, engages the audience with his advice on digital leadership. G) Lenny Jachimowicz, VP, Global Operation, Engineering & Guest Experience for Marriott, talks about optimizing the in-room experience through the TV. H) Roundtables offered hoteliers valuable time to work through problems and share solutions with peers. I) Chris Ruff, Driven Growth, details how VR and AR will change loyalty and engagement for hotels. J) Networking breaks offered opportunities for invaluable idea-sharing.

on the "low hanging fruit." However, she ended her presentation with a warning.

"Be careful how you use data," she cautioned. "Exercise some discipline and test how it might be useful first before analyzing it. Some data is just noise and not worth evaluating."

The day concluded with an IT leadership panel consisting of Todd Davis, CIO, Choice Hotels, Bruce Hoffmeister, global CIO, Marriott International, Laurent J. Idrac, Group CIO, Accor Hotels and Monika Neger, Global CIO, Mandarin Oriental Hotel Group and moderated by *HT*'s Editor Dorothy Creamer. After recalling their own personal best travel and hotel experiences, the technology leaders and hotel heavyweights shared insights into how they are blending the guest perspective with the business perspective. "Be careful not to overly rely on technology to create memorable guest experiences," Neger cautioned. **HT**



Jan Larsen, Senior Director of Product Management and Strategy, Agilysys

DATA & MOBILITY ENABLE THE FRICTIONLESS HOTEL EXPERIENCE

The theme of this year's show was "Be Frictionless."

What should hotels ask or expect of technology partners to achieve this?

LARSEN: Hotel operators today are relying on their technology partners in more ways than ever. Guests want to have choices – and the need for innovative options that reduce guest friction has never been greater for areas that include guest Wi-Fi, digital conferencing, kiosks, mobile point-of-sale, mobile check-in, payment alternatives (NFC), IR sensors, smart room keys, in-room entertainment, mobile housekeeping, social reviews, guest text messaging, SaaS (Software as a Service) and systems integration capabilities. This is just scratching the surface. Hotels should start by prioritizing the new technologies that will best serve their specific guest demographic.

Mobility has become increasingly important to offer frictionless, omni-experiences to guests. How do you think hotels should be leveraging mobility on the employee-facing side?

LARSEN: Hotels win guest loyalty when they make it easier for guests to do anything they want, whenever they want. With the advent of next-generation, mobile technology, servers are freed from waiting in a queue trying to enter guest orders and instead spending their time being more attentive, catering to the needs of guests. POS mobility gives them the tools to provide highly-personalized service that helps build relationships on behalf of the brand.

Improving customer engagement will be a top focus for hotels in 2017. What do you think hotels need to have success in this and drive revenue and loyalty?

LARSEN: Hotels should work with their technology partners to support guest data analytics. Not just capturing and storing the data, but using algorithms that help operators analyze the data in

ways that drive personalized guest service. Studies show that guests are likely to spend more when staff recommendations are based on historical selections and preferences. This personal touch goes a long way to inspire loyalty.

A holistic view of data is imperative to make smart business decisions. Where have hotels lagged in harnessing data to yield actionable insights?

LARSEN: It's easy to confuse reporting for analysis. Operators have taken strategic initiatives to capture more data from across the enterprise, but data in the form of reports isn't the same as finding insights and acting upon them. First, make sure that the insights sought are aligned with the business requirements or KPIs. Start by working on one relatively small problem. Build a story and socialize it with the areas where KPIs are affected. It's easier to find success when bringing in supporters who appreciate the value of the insights, and when starting with smaller actions.

As mobile POS and mobile payment become more widespread, what must hotels keep in mind to ensure PCI compliance and overall payment data security?

LARSEN: New technologies will continue to challenge the balance between data security, transaction fraud risk and guest experience. A PCI-validated P2PE gateway secures card data with no impact to the transaction flow. Knowing how the card data is secured can help avoid the risk of a data breach without impacting guest experience.

For online transactions, ensuring the data is secure and PCI compliant from the browser to the payment gateway is critical. The cost of authorizing the card and the friction created when requiring a CVV number, for example, may be important when selling a gift card, but may not make sense for holding a dinner reservation.

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