The Future of Hotel Guest Engagement

HOW AN ADVANCED PROPERTY MANAGEMENT SYSTEM ENHANCES THE GUEST EXPERIENCE, ACCORDING TO THE LATEST BEST PRACTICES IT MARKET RESEARCH
The research findings featured in this study are derived from an online survey conducted by Starfleet Research in Q3 2018 on Hotel Property Management Systems and Q1 2019 on Hotel Guest Experience Management. The survey was completed by more than 580 qualified respondents across multiple job titles, hotel property sizes and categories and geographic regions.
Data-driven Guest Engagement
From standalone software components to a centralized and integrated system that encompasses all hotel functions.

From manual management to automated management of hotel operations.

From rudimentary data analysis to robust analysis that yields actionable insights and provides a real-time view of hotel performance.

Such is the migration taking place today to next-generation technology capabilities at top-performing hotels and resorts. According to the latest research, 23 percent of hoteliers who have not upgraded their property management system (PMS) within the past three years plan to do so in the next 12 months. The reasons for this rush to deploy a state-of-the-art PMS are clear. Beyond streamlining hotel operations and automating functions across the property (or properties, as the case may be), a centralized integrated PMS is key to enhancing the quality of the guest experience today and in the future.

Of course, hoteliers — particularly, luxury and full-service hotel operators — have always had an unwavering focus on catering to guests’ wants and needs. They have always worked tirelessly to deliver a superior level of guest service. They have always known that, more than just showering guests with the latest perks and amenities, improving guest satisfaction and engendering loyalty means better, more personalized guest engagement.

Better and more personalized guest engagement continues to be the name of the game. And now this singularity of focus is being turbocharged by data-driven technology. It may be humans interacting with guests at the front desk and across the property (with guest-facing mobile apps, in-room digital displays and voice-activated devices powered by artificial intelligence also playing a role), but behind the scenes is sophisticated technology.

“Beyond streamlining hotel operations and automating functions across the property (or properties, as the case may be), a centralized integrated PMS is key to enhancing the quality of the guest experience today and in the future.”
This sophisticated technology exists in the form of an advanced, fully-integrated PMS. The best of these systems have evolved to the point that virtually all day-to-day operations can run automatically and nearly flawlessly. Importantly, a state-of-the-art PMS allows hoteliers to interact with guests in more relevant and personalized ways than ever before.

The reason for this has a lot to do with the fact that an advanced PMS is engineered in such a way that data captured across all parts of the property can be seamlessly shared across all departments and guest touch points. The data, which includes the history of virtually every guest transaction and interaction, flows from all of the PMS modules into a centralized repository. From there it becomes readily accessible to hotel management and staff, whenever and wherever it may be needed, including via a tablet-based interface.

If ever there was a case of the whole being greater than the sum of its parts, this is it. By eliminating standalone function- and department-specific solutions and disparate data silos, a fully-integrated PMS makes the system as a whole a lot smarter. Importantly, seamless data integration removes not only operational inefficiencies; it also removes “friction” from guest interactions. These interactions span all parts of the property (and beyond) and all touchpoints, both physical and digital.

“Seamless data integration removes not only operational inefficiencies; it also removes ‘friction’ from guest interactions.”

Percent of hoteliers at large, full service properties that say that upgrading their PMS capabilities within the past 3 years has enabled them to improve the overall quality of the guest experience by a “significant” or “dramatic” measure.
The result is vast improvements in both the quantity and quality of human interaction. Guest preferences can be recognized — and even anticipated in advance. Hotel staff can engage with guests in a highly relevant and personalized manner while guests have more options for how they engage with the hotel. Even guests who may normally like to interact with hotel staff are often happy to augment those interactions with technology options.

Mobility is an important part of the equation when it comes to empowering hotel service staff and achieving this high level of guest engagement. The best of today’s systems offer a tablet-based user interface. By allowing staff on the go to gain access to all of the key features enabled by a PMS, hotels can enhance the guest experience in very significant ways.

Obvious examples involve the housekeeping and maintenance staff. By being able to access information and communicate with the front desk in real time via a tablet, they can know when rooms are ready to be cleaned or when a service or maintenance request needs to be fulfilled, and then track progress accordingly. PMS access via an easy to use, intuitive and responsive interface design for employees moving around the property, sitting with guests in a lounge or working remotely, can reduce guest wait times, improve response time to guest inquiries and minimize guest inconveniences by a large measure.

PMS mobile enablement extends to functions like check-ins, allowing hotel staff to greet guests at the front desk and expedite the process of getting them to their rooms. Historically, the front desk has often been a barrier to interacting with guests, and a major source of customer dissatisfaction. Mobility, which includes the advent and rapid evolution of self-service apps, helps hotels remove that physical impediment. It allows them to service guests without constraints and to be able to better accommodate their wants and needs, and in a more timely manner.
Integrating for Success
Enabling guest service management. Facilitating guest-facing activities. Generating actionable insights about unmet guest wants and needs. These are just some of the ways an advanced PMS can drive ever-higher levels of guest satisfaction and enhance the overall guest experience. Even the performance of such core operational functions as managing reservations and rates, facilitating housekeeping assignments, checking guests in and out of the property, assigning rooms, and handling billing requirements are bound to have a pivotal impact on the quality of the guest experience.

How some advanced features can influence the guest experience may be less obvious at first glance. A good example is a document management system. The best of these systems makes communications with guests and sales prospects easily retrievable from within the PMS profile in the central data repository. This feature ensures that front office staff have access to relevant information about guests, making them more informed and allowing them to proactively deliver better guest and group services.

As the technology backbone for virtually all hotel functions that touch the guest, either directly or indirectly, in one way or another, the PMS is the key driver of guest engagement and overall satisfaction. A state-of-the-art system comes with upwards of two dozen fully-integrated modules on a single-image database. These modules encompass everything needed to make a hotel run like a well-greased machine while playing an instrumental role in influencing the guest experience in ways both large and small.

The integrated modules enable everything from sales and catering management to work order management to housekeeping management to spa and activities management to sales and marketing campaign management to guest loyalty and rewards management. A next-generation PMS also seamlessly integrates with other technologies and data sources, including restaurant and retail point-of-sale (POS) systems, in-room systems and online channel distribution that are the lifeblood of the hotel or resort.

“As the technology backbone for all virtually all hotel functions that touch the guest, either directly or indirectly, in one way or another, the PMS is the key driver of guest engagement and overall satisfaction.”
Each PMS module is an essential piece of the puzzle when it comes to ensuring a high level of personalized service and positive guest experiences across all parts of the property (and, in many cases, across multiple properties). The following are brief descriptions of some of these modules.

**Booking Engine**

Direct website booking is more important than ever. This is particularly true in the case of independent hoteliers, who are under more pressure than ever to market themselves, increase occupancy, and control booking costs. An integrated booking engine gives operators real-time direct website booking and customized control of rates and availability across online channels to maximize profitability. Guests and groups self-serve over the web, book amenities and activities and personalize their stay before they arrive at the property.

Integrating a state-of-the-art booking engine into the hotel website to complement third party distribution channels can help an independent hotelier better compete with the big hotel chains. The booking engine can boost reservations, reduce costs, and enhance guest loyalty. Guest-centric features offer guests options to personalize their stay with online booking of activities and amenities such as spa, dining, real-time online activity booking for theatre tickets, tee-times, loyalty signups, account access, guest preferences, and more.

An advanced booking engine provides streamlined functionality, including seamless customization with the hotel website’s look and feel for brand continuity, guest-centric easy step-by-step booking process and online merchandising capabilities such as hotel descriptions, visually rich images, videos and links. A “parameter passing” capability enables a custom portable booking/availability link that enables the hotel to create a link to a specific promotion or room type for a specific date.

“Integrating a state-of-the-art booking engine into the hotel website to complement third party distribution channels can help an independent hotelier better compete with the big hotel chains.”
**Sales & Catering Module**

An advanced sales and catering module maintains a tabulation of function spaces along with the booking of group guest rooms across a hotel’s property or properties. The best of these modules combine the comprehensive group sales contact database with the guest data repository. This allows sales staff to access information about all groups across all properties as well as individual guest spend on activities and reservations.

The module should track expected event revenue, margins and final consumption based on customizable revenue types, leading to continuous performance improvement in group sales activities. Beyond supporting group sales and marketing efforts, the sales and catering module should provide the catering department with the ability to manage all aspects of event and conference planning and scheduling, helping to ensure the event planning process goes smoothly and the event meets guest expectations.

**Dynamic Yield Management Module**

Hoteliers operate in a dynamic market characterized by endless fluctuations in demand for guest rooms. There are continuous variations in how much travelers are willing to pay for rooms at any given point in time. Sometimes an upsurge in demand can be anticipated in advance. In most cases, hoteliers need to rely on historic and real-time data.

A next-generation PMS should capture data related to everything from occupancy rates, ADR and booking pace to lengths of stay, booking channels and guest segments. This vast data repository provides the basis for identifying patterns and predicting future demand in guest room occupancy. The PMS should include a range of real-time yield and rate management features, including seasonal pricing, day-of-week pricing, time-of-day pricing, premium and discount rates and packages, and daily override functionality, enabling hoteliers to respond immediately to both predicted and unpredicted fluctuations in guest demand.

“Beyond supporting group sales and marketing efforts, the sales and catering module should provide the catering department with the ability to manage all aspects of event and conference planning and scheduling.”
**Spa and Activities Module**

Many travelers plan their getaway months in advance and spend hours thinking about what it will be like to finally relax and how their time will be spent when they finally check in. Anticipation surrounds the final weeks before they catch the plane; they daydream of where they will be every minute of the day when they get to their destination. They expect their tennis lessons, tee times, and yoga classes to be scheduled accurately and with the instructors they reserved. How well a property delivers on these guest expectations is bound to determine the likelihood of repeat business while also influencing the all-important word-of-mouth referrals.

An advanced spa and activities module is a sophisticated scheduling and billing application designed to make any club or spa operation more efficient and profitable. The system should fully integrate with the PMS, utilizing a single-image database architecture to manage every type and size of facility without limit. It should link guests’ activity schedules, spa treatment program appointments, and other amenity requests all on the guest’s profile, forever, to boost service and guest satisfaction, and facilitate ongoing marketing campaigns. As with other modules, the system should be very easy to learn and use so staff can focus on pampering guests and ensuring they are receiving the high-touch personal service they expect.

“How well a property delivers on these guest expectations is bound to determine the likelihood of repeat business while also influencing the all-important word-of-mouth referrals.”

Percent of hoteliers who “strongly” or “very strongly” agree that employees at all levels and across all parts of the property require mobile access to be most effective in their day-to-day activities and help ensure a high level of guest satisfaction.
Housekeeping Matters
Housekeeping may be the most time-sensitive function of a hotel. It is also a function that may have the greatest potential to have a negative impact on guest satisfaction. After all, long check-in lines and suboptimal service at the front desk are often caused by a backlog of rooms not yet prepared for arriving guests. Anything a hotel can do to optimize productivity in this area is imperative. The good news is that a best-of-breed PMS boasts a housekeeping module that streamlines the daily room attendant process and can make a world of difference when it comes to guest room readiness.

Gone are the days when housekeeping assignments are communicated via two-way radios and logged using clipboards with paper charts. A next-generation housekeeping module is a fully integrated component of the PMS, connecting supervisors with their room attendants. The module is designed to optimize daily room assignments, track rush room requests, manage do not disturb requests and handle service notifications in an automated and real-time fashion.

An advanced housekeeping module helps ensure that rooms are cleaned effectively, in a timely manner, and based on the wants and needs (e.g., hypoallergenic pillows, non-fragrant soap) — and even the value — of guests. It handles everything from scheduling and accountability to request management and inventory control.

Again, the fact that the housekeeping function touches on one of the other biggest areas of opportunity for improvement in guest services — namely, the check-in experience — reinforces the need to optimize this function. Instead of an attendant relying on a paper chart, typically printed early in the morning, a next-generation solution automatically balances room attendant assignments based on stayovers vs. check-outs, room type considerations, the number of registered guests, expected arrival time of guests with pre-assigned rooms and multiple other factors, even taking room-to-room travel time into account.

“Gone are the days when housekeeping assignments are communicated via two-way radios and logged using clipboards with paper charts. A next-generation housekeeping module is a fully integrated component of the PMS, connecting supervisors with their room attendants.”
The ability to reschedule and reprioritize housekeeping tasks in order to accommodate the needs of a waiting guest, versus a guest who has not yet arrived at the hotel, is a good example of why the housekeeping function needs to be part of the PMS. An advanced, integrated module enables hotel staff to enter and track information that is required to manage the housekeeping function in a highly efficient and effective manner. The module should allow the housekeeping department to:

- Assign staff to rooms and track their productivity
- Maintain a current housekeeping status for each room
- Use mobile devices to manually update the housekeeping status of individual or multiple rooms
- Automatically update rooms’ housekeeping status using the guest telephone (if not using a mobile solution)
- View the housekeeping history for a room
- Confirm the front desk inventory of available and occupied rooms
- Create reports listing housekeeping information for all or selected rooms, housekeeping assignments, status discrepancies, and off-market rooms

The following are just a few key components of an advanced module:

**Housekeeping Status Codes.** Housekeeping statuses indicate whether or not a room is clean and available for assignment to an incoming guest and are used for assigning, reporting, and managing room cleaning.

**Housekeeping Staff.** When creating housekeeping assignments, the property selects the housekeepers who are available on a particular day from a list of all housekeepers.

**Housekeeping Cleaning Assignment.** It should be easy to create room cleaning assignment lists for all available housekeepers based on the number of rooms that need to be cleaned, the number of staff available, and the maximum workload for a housekeeper.
Guests have always expected star treatment. They have always wanted to be treated like celebrities. This is particularly true of hotels and resorts in upscale categories that compete in large part on the quality of guest services. Today those guest expectations are through the roof. Guests now expect superior service, frictionless interactions, and personalized experiences throughout their stay, and anything less will simply not do.

For hoteliers, this means streamlining operations, from check-in to housekeeping, and delivering fast and accurate responses to guest inquiries. It means ensuring that requests for service — when guests place an order with room service, for example, or book a reservation through the concierge — are immediately fulfilled. It means ensuring that every guest receives the hotel’s undivided attention, no matter that the guest may be one of hundreds staying at the hotel.

Because of this need to lavish guests with personalized attention and pamper them with relevant services, hoteliers are becoming increasingly focused on data-driven personalization strategies and enabling technologies. Guest personalization is a function of capturing and leveraging a vast ocean of guest profile information. Ideally, this information should include hundreds or thousands of data points gleaned about a guest’s activities, from hotel booking to hotel checkout and everything in between. All of the booking data, geo-demographic data, transaction data and behavioral data should reside in a centralized data repository.

The repository should also include the complete folio history of charges incurred and payments made by an individual guest during a stay across all of the hotel group’s properties. Every detail, from the food and drinks a guest orders to their usage of various hotel services and in-room amenities, to every interaction, transaction and documented experience that takes place between the guest and hotel can help paint a more robust portrait of the guest and better inform how a hotel can serve them best.
In addition to upgrading the PMS, hoteliers are beginning to embrace AI-enabled devices to drive personalization. Already, in many hotels, AI is improving guest service inquiry response and fulfillment time while decreasing problem resolution time. It can also enhance the in-room experience, by seamlessly integrating technology-enabled amenities. Some major hotel groups are exploring opportunities to utilize guest data captured during previous hotel stays to automatically set up a guest room with a level of precision that would elude human efforts. Devices will update the room with personalized music, temperature and lighting settings, anticipate the need for room service and predict which hotel services or outside activities would likely be of interest.

To be sure, the future success of many hotels and resorts, at least those operating in certain categories where service quality ranks as a key point of competitive differentiation, will rest squarely on how well they can gain a deep understanding of their guests and then execute on that understanding to improve the overall quality of the guest experience. With the right technology foundation in place, a hotel can understand a guest’s personal preferences, interests and behaviors at a granular level. It can facilitate relevant interactions and recommendations. It can deliver superior delivered services. It can take any number of other types of actions based on a guest’s stated and inferred preferences, interests and behaviors, to make the guest feel special and appreciated — in short, to make them feel like a celebrity.

“The future success of many hotels and resorts, at least those operating in certain categories where service quality ranks as a key point of competitive differentiation, will rest squarely on how well they can gain a deep understanding of their guests.”

Percent of hoteliers who “agree” or “strongly agree” that targeted personalization – i.e., presenting guests with highly relevant messages, offers and services at the right time – is one of the most effective ways to improve the guest experience
Leveraging Data Analytics
When it comes to data, most hoteliers have an embarrassment of riches. There is no shortage of data relating to guests, rooms, facilities, employees and various operational and financial aspects of the hotel. With the evolution of PMS capabilities, and the integration of data across all parts of the hotel, hoteliers also now have the tools they need for analyzing the data and turning it into actionable insights.

PMS data reporting and analytics modules are becoming increasingly flexible, sophisticated and powerful, even mirroring robust business intelligence solutions in terms of features and functionality. The insights gained from the tools can have benefits that range from improving marketing, sales and customer service effectiveness to generating competitive intelligence. Key revenue stakeholders can monitor hotel occupancy trends, market position, and channel profitability.

In the past, answering even basic hotel performance questions often required time-consuming research and manual calculations. By contrast, next-generation solutions come with robust data analysis and diagnostic tools for performing year-over-year evaluations, identifying emerging market trends, and analyzing guest demographics and behaviors. The best of today’s PMS reporting and data analytics modules come equipped with a large number — in some cases, dozens — of standard dashboards and reports that should meet most hoteliers’ day-to-day performance management requirements and inform the decisions made in multiple departments and functions across the organization, including those related to guest experience management.

Given the capacity to gain a unified view of how guests are engaging across all parts of the property, the tools are essential for mapping, analyzing and enhancing the overall guest experience. Transaction history can be especially important. Analysis of guest spending patterns can help create advanced segmentation schemes that can help improve guest satisfaction — for example, by offering complimentary package and amenity upgrades during service delivery.

“PMS data reporting and analytics modules are becoming increasingly flexible, sophisticated and powerful, even mirroring robust business intelligence solutions in terms of features and functionality.”
Anyone at any business or technical skill level across the organization should be able to explore using the analytics tool to access large volumes of summarized data with sub-second response times. The tool’s rich graphical formatting should enable the creation of dynamic and high-impact reports and dashboards.

Some reports are simple and straightforward. A good example is a housekeeping report. The report should provide housekeeping information about rooms including date last cleaned, occupancy and housekeeping statuses, and, for reserved and occupied rooms, information about guests such as reservation number, arrival date, departure date and time, and number of guests. This report should also list rooms selected by room type, building, availability, status, and type and within a range of rooms.

Of course, hoteliers may have special reporting needs on occasion. Reporting needs that cannot be anticipated in advance may make use of nonstandard data sets and may have customized dashboard settings and other requirements. For that reason, the best of today’s data analytics modules include capabilities that allow for ad-hoc queries that allow hoteliers to set new data parameters and generate custom reports and dashboards on the fly. In the process, hoteliers can gain new insights into business operations and guest engagement that can help drive continuous performance improvement.

“The best of today’s data analytics modules include capabilities that allow for ad-hoc queries that allow hoteliers to set new data parameters and generate custom reports and dashboards on the fly.”

---

Percent of hoteliers at large and full-service hotels who indicate that recent upgrades to their technology capabilities has enabled them to be either “successful” or “very successful” in improving the overall quality of the guest experience.

87
About Starfleet Research
Starfleet Research, the IT market research arm of Starfleet Media, provides in-depth perspectives and insights about topics related to hospitality technology. Each year, Starfleet Research, benchmarks best practices in technology-enabled business initiatives across thousands of hotels and resorts. Tens of thousands of senior executives read our premium content assets to gain actionable insights and make smarter business decisions.

Contact Starfleet Research
6650 Northwest Highway, Suite 213
Chicago, IL 60631

www.starfleetresearch.com
research@starfleetmedia.com

About Maestro
Maestro is the proven hospitality property management system preferred by the industry’s most successful multi-property groups, independent hotels, luxury resorts, conference centers, retreats, and condominium properties. With over 20 integrated modules on a single database, Maestro was developed from the ground up as a true enterprise system adaptable to any environment or application.

Contact Maestro
65 Allstate Parkway, Suite 100
Markham, Ontario L3R 9X1 Canada

1-888-667-8488
www.maestropms.com
info@maestropms.com