



## HTNG targets system interoperability

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Getting hospitality vendors to design hotel systems that work together seamlessly is a goal of Hospitality Technology Next Generation, a 3-year-old organization designed to facilitate the development of customer-centric technology.

HTNG has three work groups—in-room technology, property Web services and property distribution—consisting of about 60 or 70 hotel companies and vendors working on solutions to meet the needs of the global hotel community, said Doug Rice, executive director of HTNG.

"When a hotel company acquires a property or when a hotel switches brands, they are faced with huge switching costs every time they want to change their technology," Rice said. "Not only do they need to acquire a new property-management system and central-reservation system to be consistent with the new brand, they also have to change 10 or 15 interfaces, which will cost a couple of hundred thousand dollars."

The work groups are trying to create a base level of interoperability to use Open Travel Alliance specifications to facilitate the free flow of information between the PMS, CRS and revenue-management system.

The interoperability standards would allow a hotel to refresh pieces of technology without pulling out and replacing major elements, such as the PMS, said Glenn Bonner, chief information officer and corporate v.p. of MGM Mirage.

"As a hotel technology buyer and operator of hotels, it will reduce our costs and time of implementation, which relates to shareholder value," said Bonner, who is a founding director of HTNG. "If your hotel's PMS does not support kiosks, which are becoming widespread today, you have to do a 'heart transplant' to allow kiosks, or you can add an integration to allow them to interface to the PMS. That's a lot cheaper than a new PMS, which can cost from \$50 [per room] to \$250 per room."



Bennett GINN

But writing countless integrations between disparate systems is not the answer because it is too expensive and time-consuming.

"With today's open Web services specification, there is a lot more opportunity for interoperability, which is seamless," Bonner said. "Hotel systems in the future will not run from a single core brain, but will be made up of many pieces that work together."

Open Web services specifications allow business transactions to happen in a secure environment through an open connection, such as the Internet. This allows hotels to add new pieces to a hotel's PMS seamlessly.

"We got involved with HTNG to influence product coming to market that is written to comply with an agreed upon interoperability standard," said Barry Shuler, senior v.p. and chief technology officer of Marriot International. "With standardized products, you will be able to plug a new system into your own portfolio and it will integrate with existing systems and technology."

Some of those standards exist and others will emerge from HTNG and the OTA, said Shuler, who also is director and v.p. of HTNG.

Hospitality technology veteran Bob Bennett, now chief information officer of Ginn Clubs and Resorts, is a member of HTNG's in-room technology work group.

"We want one [Internet protocol] converged network in the room instead of three or four networks," said Bennett.

Many hotels have coaxial cable for televisions, Cat 3 wiring for the phone system, a Cat 5 network for in-room Internet access and a low-voltage system for temperature control or door-locking systems.

"We want all that to run on one IP network so you don't need four or five separate wiring schemes," he said.

Another item on Bennett's to-do list is the television set-top box. Some hotel rooms have a box for pay per view, another for high-definition TV, stereos and DVD players, yet no way for guests to play their digital music.

"We want one thing that looks good, that is easy to use and that supports the Internet and other controls," Bennett said. "From the guest's point of view, we'd like to see all the various systems—the phone, TV, Internet and messaging systems—integrated and working together."

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For more information go to [www.htng.org](http://www.htng.org).