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## Hotels Get Microsoft's Attention

By Tony Kontzer

Courtesy of [InformationWeek](#)

Even before Microsoft revealed two weeks ago plans to work more closely with hotel CIOs to create "virtual guest information hubs," MGM Mirage was preparing to replace its aging hotel-management system with a more modular one from systems integrator Micros Systems Inc. The new architecture likely will rely heavily on Microsoft's BizTalk server technology to act as a routing center handling XML calls to and from any number of applications.

The casino-resort operator, which claims 20,000 rooms on the Las Vegas strip, will be performing what CIO Glenn Bonner calls the equivalent of a heart transplant. Over the next six months, it will migrate its proprietary property management's credit-card transaction engine and its cross-property room-charging system to a Web-services framework in which those technologies can interact with multiple systems. The new property-management system will be rolled out to all six hotels over the following year and a half.

MGM Mirage considered switching to an open-source architecture with Linux servers at the core, but Bonner decided against it, as that would have meant adding programmers with Linux expertise and retraining his existing staff. After lobbying Microsoft--along with other hospitality CIOs--to pay more attention to the industry, Bonner saw the commitment he was looking for and decided to make Microsoft technologies the centerpiece of his next-generation IT environment. "Microsoft is standing up and saying, 'Hey guys, we think we have a platform or architecture that will allow you to be a better company,'" he says. "Having a strong vendor supporting that is really important."

Microsoft got that message loud and clear from multiple hotel CIOs, says Matt Muta, director and industry manager for Microsoft's retail and hospitality group. After hearing from hotel CIOs that the division paid it little attention, Microsoft created an architectural strategy and rounded up partners committed to building apps for the hospitality industry based on the .Net application-development platform. Now it's taking an equally important step to ensure that it's clear about the industry's needs. "I'm in the process of solidifying an advisory board so we can remain in lockstep with the industry," Muta says.

That kind of effort to understand hotel CIOs' needs is a significant new approach for Microsoft, says Barry Shuler, senior VP of IT strategy for Marriott International Inc. He and Marriott's executive team have held annual meetings with Microsoft to communicate strategic objectives, Shuler says, and at the most recent meeting held in Redmond, Wash., several weeks ago, Microsoft demonstrated that it has a better understanding of the technology challenges facing the industry than ever before. For instance, it was clear to Shuler that the vendor understood the upcoming requirements for hotels to offer TVs loaded with software that will become the interface for guests to do everything from ordering room service and extra pillows to accessing their digital-media libraries remotely.

Marriott has spent "a load" of money with Microsoft, standardizing its 25,000 desktops on Windows and committing to Exchange and Outlook as its E-mail server and client, respectively, Shuler says. But he's open to looking to Microsoft and its partners as potential suppliers of next-generation TVs, digital-media software, and mobile-computing devices, all of which will interconnect with the core hotel system via Web services, provided Microsoft makes good on its promises.

"If they really carry through and don't make this a short-term commitment, there's a better probability that we'll spend a lot more with them," Shuler says. "If you'd asked me a year ago, I'd have said we're spending as much as we're going to spend, and it's going to be relegated to the desktop."



Microsoft's support has helped MGM Mirage, CIO Bonner says.

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