



→ Larisa Manali _ Larisa Hotel and Resorts

RESERVE RIGHT

Hospitality reservation systems are moving into the realm of guest-facing technology even as they consolidate room availability positions.

BY BINDU GOPAL RAO

Originally designed and operated by airlines, the reservation system was later extended for use by travel agencies and global distribution systems (GDSs) to book and sell tickets for multiple airlines. With time it got introduced in hotels too. The system now processes online reservations made via the hotel's website and then passes this information to the hotel's backend so that the information can be easily accessed. Bookings are then managed by hotel staff. With the boom of the millennial traveller, now more than 700 million people are expected to book primarily online by 2023, so having an online reservation system is key to reaching a wider audience.

THE SPECIFICS

A hotel reservation system is a simple software tool that helps to compile all booking information in one place, which is required for smooth operations. The system has numerous benefits. They generate an automated flow of reservations through an online channel. They also serve as a comprehensive portal to check room availability and prices at any given time. "We have an integrated system for reservations and payment

process at Nest Jaipur Resort to manage and optimise the process related to bookings. The system contains the hotel's availability, rates, and inventory data and helps the reservation department manage online and offline bookings and guest-related data. PMS is a software that helps us manage all day-to-day operations, including front office, booking, cancellation, payment, and guest relations, while integrated with the CRS (central reservation system). We also use a channel manager to manage online travel agents (OTA's) and our hotel website (rates and inventory). The channel manager links the PMS and all distribution interfaces. It gathers the relevant data and information about the room availability and prices from the CRS and sends that across to multiple channels, such as OTAs, metasearch engine and the hotel's own website," says Manoj Thapa, General Manager, Nest Jaipur Resort.

NEW VISTAS

One of the latest trends in the reservation systems space is the option to create multiple room reservations together. These systems now also allow users to update their profiles and record turn away or denial calls.

Nikhil Kapur, Co-Founder & Director, Atmantan Wellness Centre says, "For our highly consultative sales process, we use a combination of systems that caters to our unique requirement. We are



→ Reservation team keeps updating on the touch points basis the user experience and customer feedback on different times courtesy Larisa Hotels and Resorts



→ Manoj Thapa, General Manager, Nest Jaipur Resort



Most hoteliers integrate their systems with CRM to make it richer and a singular platform to give personalised and curated experiences to their guests.

in the process of launching our new booking system that integrates with the health information module. In today's digital age, reservation systems have evolved into multi-touch points and multi-channel systems to process bookings rapidly. Digital payment is also an integral part of the reservation process. Some of the new ways of customer engagement are done at the reservation level, including booking forms designed for shorter attention spans and enabled with artificial intelligence, clear payment terms, and multiple choice payment methods.

Webapps are changing the face of the website and the brand's interaction with the customer. Using Non-Fungible Tokens (NFTs) is a win-win as the hotels do not need to refund, and the clients also have an option of selling their NFTs if they cannot travel are new aspects."

ADVANTAGE HOSPITALITY

Most hoteliers integrate their systems with CRM to make it richer and a singular platform to give personalised and curated experiences to their guests. Ritesh Mudgal, Resort Manager, Raffles Udaipur, who uses Resaweb (CRS) and Opera (PMS) as reservation systems at the hotel, says, "Reservation systems minimise the time taken to confirm reservations and check their corresponding data. They assist us in ascertaining different memberships and loyalty programs with ease. These systems greatly increase the team's overall efficiency and ensure effective use



Reservations is a two-way interface system and shows live inventory and connects all the OTA's and website in one place courtesy Larisa Hotels and Resorts

of our time and resources."

Ayush Kapoor, Director of Revenue and Distribution, Novotel Mumbai Juhu Beach, adds, "A hotel reservation system helps in effective synchronisation of information. The system accesses the information and provides information on occupancy levels; room rates are also available in real-time. Synchronised data also gives customers a time-saving search tool to refine their preferences according to dates, location, and room type. Artificial Intelligence (AI) is a trend that provides a smooth and effortless user experience by saving time and offering personalised solutions. Sometimes people get so busy that they don't get the chance to browse through different hotels to choose where to stay. This is how AI can help. AI-powered chatbots are transforming the way people book trips."

CONVENIENCE PUSH

A strong, agile reservation system gives a greater sense of control over information and pricing. As the whole process is streamlined, it can establish clear rules for setting room rates, allocating discounts, and either upselling or cross-selling with customers effec-



Abinash Manghani, CEO, WelcomHeritage Hotels



AI, Chatbot, Voice recognition search and cloud IVR enabled and integrated with CRM, PMS and Payment systems are some of the new technologies used courtesy Atmantan Wellness Centre

tively and efficiently, as opposed to traditional booking methods.

Abinash Manghani, CEO, WelcomHeritage Hotels, says, "Increasingly, a mobile-first strategy with automation and no manual intervention in the booking process is being followed as guests shop on their smartphones. Smartphone penetration levels range between 35-60% across the Globe and have boosted the ease of making bookings. The AI tools will enhance the guest experience while making a reservation. Also, the focal points to consider are quick, easy-to-use, and intuitive booking system sans pit stops, a secured payment set-up, and post-booking support. Contactless check-ins are also picking up pace leading Hotel firms to reduce the role of front office departments. Now customers can book, order, and pay online without the need to interact, enhancing efficiency."

LOYALTY CUES

Since many loyalty programs are available to the public, these systems assist majorly by verifying the different membership types. They also take into consideration previous stays while processing reservations. Hotel PMS (Property Management System) does the task of guest profiling. This includes capturing basic information such as contact details, work details, preferences, etc. Once the guest profiling is done, the PMS automatically enrolls the guest in the hotel loyalty program.

The reservation system improves efficiency in a lot of ways. It simplifies the administrative process for you and your staff. It also reduces the risk of overbooking your rooms as the software automatically updates all live rates and availability. It allows you to collect valuable data about guests and directly improves the guest experience at your property. Priya Thakur, Founder, Larisa Hotels and Resorts, says, "There are huge benefits as it can be controlled centrally. It is a two-way interface system that shows live inventory and connects all the OTA's and websites in one place. Hotel loyalty programs help us to collect data and understand consumer behaviour



In today's digital age, the reservation systems have evolved into multi touch points & multi-channel systems to rapidly process the bookings courtesy Atmantan Wellness Centre



The digital payment is also an integral part of the reservation process courtesy Atmantan Wellness Centre

and market trends better. It helps us analyse the season-to-season market trends, travellers' profiles and the likes."

DATA ANALYSIS

The data collected by the reservation systems are helpful for the hotel to analyse and strategise on the way forward. Data such as demographics, segmentation, and calls turned away are used in different ways. Nothing pleases a customer more than the understanding of his or her preferences and offering just "what the doctor has ordered". This is when big data comes to help, as analysing user preferences gives many insights that can help hoteliers personalise the guest experience.

"Without a hotel reservation system, it's hard to know where your guests are coming from, how old they are, their interests, and why they are visiting your destination. The right hotel reservation system will collect this data and compile it into comprehensive reports that allow you to utilise it effectively. It also uses data to create reports related to revenue, guest loyalty, segmentation and the like," says Kapoor. The data collected by the reservation system is very important as it not only indicates potential business numbers but also supports us in developing a strategy to manage revenues.

TECH TALK

AI, chatbot, voice recognition search and cloud IVR enabled and integrated with CRM, PMS and payment systems are some of the new technologies now used in the systems. Reservation system uses computerised systems to store and retrieve information and conduct transactions. The trend is toward web- and cloud-based centralised reservation systems (CRS), which provide unlimited access to maximise exposure to millions of travellers. A well-encrypted reservation system and secured process protect data. A customer retention apparatus has been introduced into the system

to keep track of the daily interactions happening at various touchpoints of our reservation portals through a CRM or Customer data platform (CDP). "The loyalty card members enjoy special rates and inclusions based on their booking pattern and preferences. We are also integrated with the Club ITC rewards and redemption program," adds Manghani.

STAYING RELEVANT

The upgradation of reservation systems is done at a global level at pre-decided, regularly scheduled intervals. There has been a major change in the trend of traveller behaviour after the pandemic. More people have started to travel now; these are now people from different walks of life. Earlier, there was a standard set of influential people who used to plan exotic travels and stay at these resort properties. But now, people are becoming open to exploring new places and properties. Also, due to work-from-home, there is a new trend of staycation. While it has given them flexibility, people can take a break or work while on a break. Due to restrictions on international travel, people started exploring domestic locations, improving the situation in Indian travel destinations.

"In terms of reservations and travel planning, there is a major shift in traveller behaviour. The booking window has come down from advance bookings to short terms or impromptu decisions. Destinations close to metro cities have seen people travelling at last-minute reservations. For example, if there are ten rooms booked in the day, you may end up closing the day at forty or fifty rooms in your hotel," says Thakur.

Reservation systems have revolutionised the hospitality industry. They have streamlined the entire booking process, reduced human error to improve efficiency, and made data collection and rewards management easier. With the advent of technology, using world-class hotel reservation system software is one of the most strategic decisions that independent hoteliers or chains can adopt. ■



Ayush Kapoor, Director of Revenue and Distribution, Novotel Mumbai Juhu Beach



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