

Integration Before AI

Artificial Intelligence (AI) gets the headlines, but for most hotels the real bottleneck is far less glamorous: getting systems to talk to each other.

By Bindu Gopal Rao



Hotels need a strong digital foundation where all core systems are connected

AI may be dominating industry conversations, but system integration is the more immediate priority for most hotels.

Making the Connection

AI is only as good as the data it receives. If a hotel's systems don't communicate with each other, the data becomes fragmented or outdated, making AI far less effective. Before hotels invest heavily in AI, they need a strong digital foundation where all core systems are connected.

"When systems work together seamlessly, hotels can automate routine tasks, personalise guest experiences, improve operational efficiency, and make faster, data-driven decisions. In many ways, integration isn't competing with AI; it's what makes AI successful," says Ravichandra Kn, IT Manager at Shangri-La Bengaluru.

Information comes from multiple touchpoints, including the PMS, POS, CRM, booking platforms, and guest feedback systems. If these operate in silos, it becomes difficult to gain a complete understanding of guest preferences or deliver truly personalised experiences.

Investing in Integration

A hotel can have world-class AI tools for revenue forecasting or

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guest personalisation, but if that AI is sitting on top of a PMS that doesn't sync in real time with the booking engine, CRM, or POS, the intelligence never reaches the guest or the operation. Integration is the plumbing that AI depends on — without it, AI becomes an isolated dashboard rather than something that changes how the hotel runs day to day.

"In our experience, the toughest combination is the legacy PMS with newer, cloud-native platforms — particularly channel managers, loyalty systems, and guest messaging tools. Many PMS platforms were built on older architecture with limited or rigid APIs, which makes two-way, real-time data flow difficult. Housekeeping and engineering systems are often the most neglected in integration planning, since they're seen as 'operational' rather than 'guest-facing', even though delays there directly affect the guest experience," says Tulshi Naik, General Manager, Hilton Garden Inn Surat, City Centre.

Guest Impact

When hotel systems aren't well integrated, the guest experience is often the first to be affected. It can lead to longer check-in and check-out times because staff must verify information manually.

"Delays in communication between housekeeping and the front office can also mean rooms aren't ready when expected.



Ravichandra Kn, IT Manager at Shangri-La Bengaluru



Tulshi Naik, General Manager, Hilton Garden Inn Surat, City Centre



Anant Leekha, General Manager at Novotel Pune, Nagar Road

Poor integration can also result in billing discrepancies if charges from restaurants, bars, or banquets aren't synced correctly. It becomes harder to recognise returning guests and their preferences consistently, making personalised service more difficult to deliver. Overall, teams end up relying more on manual processes, which slows down operations and impacts the overall guest experience," says Anant Leekha, General Manager at Novotel Pune, Nagar Road.

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Challenges Galore

To say that it is difficult to standardise technology across a portfolio that includes luxury, business, resort, and budget properties is an understatement.

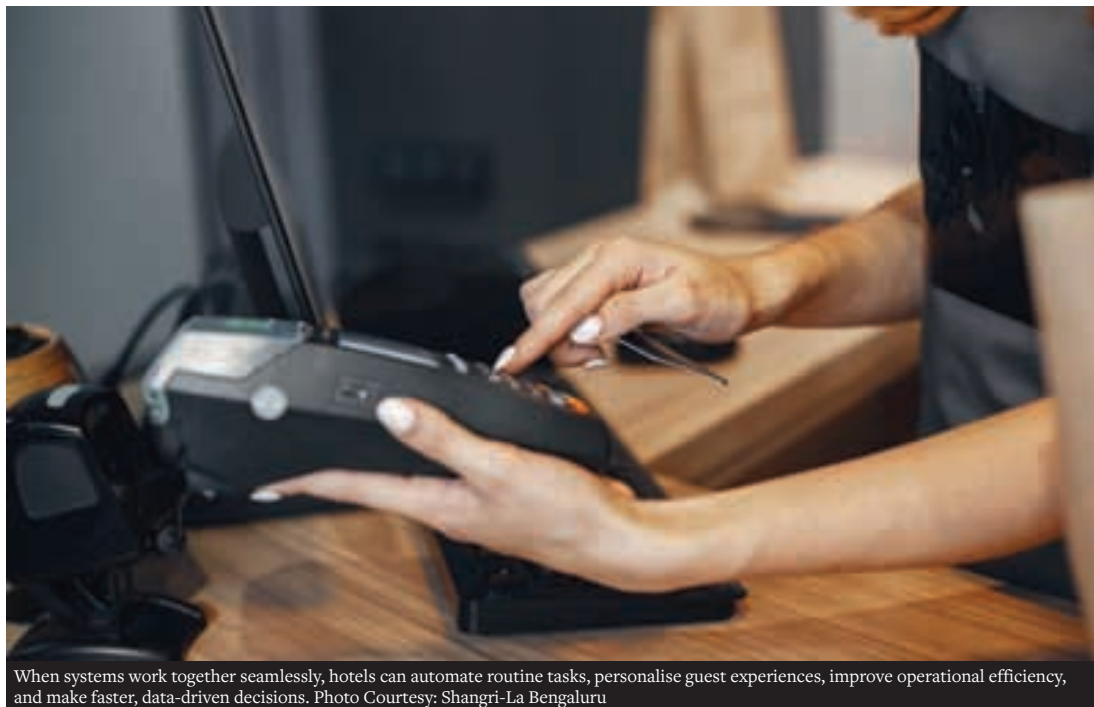
Junaid Saifi, IT Manager, JW Marriott Kolkata, explains, "It is an operational nightmare because user journeys differ wildly across segments. A luxury resort requires deep POS integration for experiential activities and spa packages, while a budget select-service hotel requires a lean, frictionless mobile-check-in architecture. To overcome this, hoteliers must focus on standardising the core data schema and integration middleware rather than the front-end applications themselves. This ensures that whether a property uses a lightweight or heavyweight tech stack, the data rolls up to corporate headquarters in the exact same format."

Standardising technology across a diverse hotel portfolio is not always straightforward. While the core technology systems can be standardised across all properties, guest expectations vary significantly from one segment to another.

"For example, luxury hotels often require more advanced personalisation tools to deliver bespoke experiences, whereas business hotels place greater emphasis on speed, convenience, and efficiency. The real



AI in Hospitality; courtesy Hilton Garden Inn Surat City Centre



When systems work together seamlessly, hotels can automate routine tasks, personalise guest experiences, improve operational efficiency, and make faster, data-driven decisions. Photo Courtesy: Shangri-La Bengaluru

challenge is finding the right balance between maintaining a consistent technology framework across the brands while allowing enough flexibility to meet the unique service needs of each property,” adds Leekha.

Brand-level standards provide a strong foundation, but local customisation remains equally important to ensure every hotel can deliver the experience its guests expect.

The Extra Edge

Seamless integration benefits every department, but the biggest impact is seen across front office, housekeeping and revenue management because these functions directly influence both guest satisfaction and profitability.

“Real-time integration between housekeeping and the PMS enables faster room readiness and improved inventory management. Revenue management benefits from accurate operational data to optimise pricing and maximise RevPAR, while front office teams can deliver quicker, more informed guest interactions. Ultimately, integration improves coordination across the entire hotel rather than benefiting one department in isolation,” says Sumeet Suri, General Manager, The Westin Mumbai Garden City.

The key is standardising the underlying digital architecture, data platforms, cybersecurity, and integration frameworks—while allowing flexibility in guest-facing technologies that reflect each brand’s positioning. Standardisation should create consistency without compromising the unique identity of each hotel.

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- Sumeet Suri

Online Safety

Cybersecurity becomes more complex as systems become interconnected. Hotels are balancing connectivity with security and compliance. As systems interconnect, the attack surface expands exponentially. A vulnerability in a third-party guest messaging app can serve as a backdoor entry into the PMS’s credit card vaults. Hoteliers balance this by adopting zero-trust architectures and strict tokenisation at the point of entry.

“Tokenisation ensures that sensitive data—like credit card information or personally identifiable information (PII)—is replaced with a non-sensitive equivalent before it ever traverses the integration layer. This maintains open system connectivity without exposing the hotel to massive compliance liabilities under PCI-DSS or data privacy regulations,” says Saifi.

As hotels become increasingly digital, cybersecurity has become a business priority rather than simply an IT function. Connected systems undoubtedly improve efficiency, but they also increase the importance of protecting guest data and maintaining regulatory compliance. “Hotels are investing in robust cybersecurity frameworks that include Zero Trust security principles, continuous monitoring, multi-factor authentication, encryption, and regular vulnerability assessments. At the same time, governance around AI and data privacy ensures that innovation is implemented responsibly while maintaining guest trust,” adds Suri.

Looking Ahead

Over the next five years, successful hotel technology will be



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built around connected, cloud-based platforms that share information in real time. The biggest differentiator will be a single guest profile that connects every interaction—from reservations and check-in to dining, spa, loyalty programmes and guest services.

“This will allow hotels to deliver highly personalised experiences, anticipate guest needs, automate routine tasks, make faster, data-driven decisions, and strengthen cybersecurity and compliance. In the future, the hotels that stand out won’t necessarily be those with the most technology—they’ll be the ones whose technology works together seamlessly. That’s what will drive exceptional guest experiences and long-term business success,” says Ravichandra.

The future ecosystem will be defined by microservices and universal data standards such as the widespread adoption of HTNG/OpenTravel standards. Looking ahead, the most successful hotels will operate on unified, intelligent platforms where technology works seamlessly in the background to enhance both guest experience and operational excellence. Most importantly, technology will become virtually invisible to the guest—creating experiences that feel intuitive, personalised, and effortless. ■



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