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### PMS Market Update

Bradley Schmidt

When it comes to property management systems, new modules and upgrades hit the market on a near monthly basis, making it tough for hotel operators to stay abreast of what's available. To help keep you in the know, HT spoke with operators about what they're doing, including those that are developing new PMS functionality, those that are working with upgraded modules, and one chain that collaborated on a project to create an entirely new PMS.



#### Focus: Consolidating Systems

Prior to installing the Maestro PMS ([www.maestropms.com](http://www.maestropms.com)) to manage operations at its sprawling 5,500 acre property, Pennsylvania's Skytop Lodge & Resort used stand-alone systems including front desk, reservations, sales and catering, and accounting. This resulted in inefficient business processes and prevented Skytop from fully leveraging technology to better serve the guest.

Upon consolidating reservations and PMS functionality through Maestro, Skytop found that interfaces with the point-of-sale and phone systems improved, and the flow of data was greatly streamlined and could be put to more effective use. This aided Skytop immensely when they worked with Maestro to create a first-time-guest program. "We want to make the first-time-guest's stay seamless from the reservation point all the way through to checkout," says Dan Harris, Skytop's lodge operations manager.

In order to do that, Maestro and Skytop worked together to put PMS standards in place to allow front-of-house staff to recognize a first-time-guest, and focus on the things that they would not know about the property having never been there before.

"A first-time guest to a resort is usually in the dark, and for our particular property, there are so many activities going on and so much new information," says Harris. "This program allows us to flag them and give them intricate care through their stay."

#### Focus: Flexibility

Condo and timeshare owners at the Prince Resort at Cherry Grove Pier in North Myrtle Beach, South Carolina can offer a variety of options to their guests (including bedding options and whether to take part in the rental program) and can change which options they choose to offer on a whim. As such, it is important that the property be able to modify existing inventory at a moment's notice to reflect any owner-initiated changes. This requires a PMS system with ample flexibility.

The property leverages Maestro's online Condo and Timeshare Ownership system from Northwind, which allows condo owners to track their unit's availability remotely and make any amenity changes they wish.

To help its users on the training front, Northwind recently introduced the Maestro Web Connection Webinar Series as part of its Diamond Client Service plan. The free webinar series covers different topics each month ranging from spa management, to front desk policy configuration, to yield management.

"Webinars are fantastic for continuing training, especially since Northwind is located in Canada and we're here in the South," says John Roemer, reservation manager for the Prince Resort at Cherry Grove Pier. "Each property acts as a mini beta testing site and helps to work out the bugs. Northwind is really open to our ideas and has never told us, 'No.' They always look at a program to see if they can change things for us."

#### Focus: Integration

When private investment firm The Blackstone Group completed its purchase of La Quinta (totaling 700 corporate and franchised properties) in January 2006, one of the first orders of business was to overhaul La Quinta's central reservations and property management systems. Their goal was to make way for chain-wide expansion.

Vivek Shaiva, now La Quinta's CIO, was part of the Blackstone acquisition team. He indicates that La Quinta's systems were not ready for future growth: the CRS system was an in-house product that would not have been able to handle the coming load. Furthermore, individual properties had free reign to choose their own PMS and house the data on site.

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To remedy this, the company selected Remco's web-based NightVision ([www.remcosoftware.com](http://www.remcosoftware.com)) as the brand standard PMS and tapped Pegasus Solutions ([www.pegas.com](http://www.pegas.com)) to handle central reservations. Together, the two solutions ended the days of the individual properties acting as data centers. Initially, however, the two programs had communication issues.

"At that time, Pegasus and Remco had no interface between their two systems," remembers Shaiva. "As part of the project, Pegasus undertook the task of building out what they call their PMS hub," a proprietary Pegasus product that enables the CRS to communicate with all La Quinta properties.

Having completed the live rollout between April and May of 2007, the system has been in place for nearly one full year and Shaiva says that although the benefits were not immediate, all of the hard work and planning has paid off in the long term.

"The general reliability of the overall solution has been very good. We had our teething problems just like with any transition, but once things stabilized, we have had very good uptime. I think it's the way to go."

#### **Focus: Custom Product Development**

When a hotel company isn't pleased with the functionality of its PMS, most often it will work with its current PMS provider to create new modules or customize existing ones to fit the needs of the organization. If things are hopelessly bad, the hotelier might switch to a competitor within the market. Rarely, however, does a hotel company have the opportunity to be the first on the market to implement a brand new PMS solution.

That was just the case with Phoenix Inn Suites, an 11-property chain operating in Washington, Oregon and Arizona. Frustrated that they were unable to find a PMS with proper inventory and revenue management capabilities for a smaller chain, Aimbridge Hospitality, owner and management company for Phoenix Inn Suites, turned to Centrada Solutions LLC ([www.centrada.com](http://www.centrada.com)) to develop a custom solution: Novexsys PMS.

Novexsys ([www.novexsys.com](http://www.novexsys.com)) was rolled out to Phoenix Inn Suites' Vancouver, Wash. location in February 2007. Cindee Stinton-Brown, general manager, was intimately involved in the beta testing phase of the implementation. "Over the course of a few months, my front desk manager and I worked out all the bugs, added the things we needed and made sure it was customized for us," recalls Stinton-Brown.

Because the system is web-based, guest information is transferred to all Phoenix Inn Suites properties, eliminating the need for a guest to provide information multiple times.

The web-based nature of the PMS also made things easier at the corporate level. All levels of the corporate structure, from accounting to revenue management to executive management, can access the system and use it for their specific needs. Stinton-Brown indicates that Phoenix Inn Suites is currently working to develop PMS tools that will streamline the reporting process for Phoenix's sales team.

"Our sales teams have some really big reports that have to be filled out every month," she says. "Bottom line, they're going to be able to hit a button and off it goes, which is really nice. It will give them back some selling time."



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