Hospitality TECHNOLOGY

SEARCH

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PMS Peer Review
Lisa Terry

There is no one, best property management system (PMS). There is only the one that's best for a property's own unique needs. In our second annual informal peer review, Hospitality Technology talks to hospitality operators about the specific challenges they faced, how they matched those to the right PMS, and what it's done for their operations.

The Castle at Glen Eyrie
Core Needs: Strong group functionality, custom reporting
Location: Single property in Colorado Springs
Vendor: Megasys (www.megasyshms.com)
Product: PortfolioHMS
As a Christian conference center nestled in the Rocky Mountains, The Castle at Glen Eyrie (www.gleneyrie.org) faces some unique management challenges. Managers serve both groups and individual guests through a retreat center, bed and breakfast, teahouse and tours, as well as a food and beverage facility with half of the needed capacity. Powerful group functionality is essential to properly allocate resources, capture details including group audio-visual needs, make mass bookings, and repeat group data from year to year.

A consultant hired by a coalition of similar facilities recommended Megasys. The ability to use a single database across types of accommodations was among the attractions, says Tim Wilson, database administrator, as were integration with Peoplesoft accounting and ease of training and use. "We also like their willingness to work with us to develop new features. I've been working with them for more than a year on a group module that will cut data entry time in half," and the Castle is beta-testing a camper management module.

The PMS, in place for about three years, means the Castle staff "is able to get data quicker and the data is more accurate, so check-ins go a lot faster," says Wilson.

Xanterra Parks & Resorts
Core Needs: standardized PMS, activity booking
Locations: 22 properties
Vendor: Micros (www.micros.com)
Product: Opera
Xanterra (www.xanterra.com) is the nation's largest operator of national park-based hotels, restaurants and stores. Acquisition of park sites over time meant eight different PMS systems and a myriad of processes to book activities, which range from trains to buses to over-snow vehicles, for both groups and individuals.

"We wanted to standardize systems across properties and find a system to support current and future needs," says Richard Rabinoff, director of hospitality systems for Xanterra. "There were definitely efficiencies to be gained and money to be saved."

After a lengthy RFP process that included rigorous demos with no advance scripts, Xanterra selected Micros' Opera for its stable and robust database platform, ease of use, strong CRS and Internet booking engine, beginning its deployment in November 2006. But after a third-party's attempt to create an activities module for Opera proved overly complex, Xanterra decided to co-develop one with Micros and its own third-party developer.

"We leveraged the existing Web services that Opera uses for kiosk interfaces and Internet booking engines" to create a simple, POS-like interface, Rabinoff explains. The Activities Module, which went live in October 2008, allows end users to do queries, book inventory and sell services via a simple interface, and on the back-end Opera treats it as it would any reservation, creating a single itinerary. The system helps Xanterra closely manage inventories, a 'must' for remote locations such as the bottom of the Grand Canyon, and includes extensive reporting and forecasting.

Opera "has really allowed us to rethink a lot of what we do and apply standards across the property," says Rabinoff. "We provide a better face to the guest."
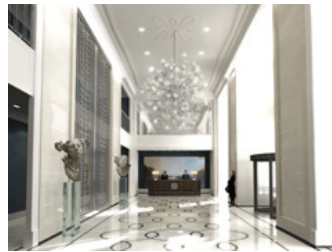
Prism Hotels & Resorts
Core Needs: Robust PMS, rapid rollout, low cost
Location: 3 InnPlace properties
Vendor: NOVEXSYS (www.novexsys.com)
Product: NOVEXSYS PMS
When it switched from a franchise banner to Prism's (www.prismhotels.com) new InnPlace

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brand, InnPlace Hotel Brunswick went from a brand-specified PMS to no PMS. So the hotel needed new software that could be implemented quickly and inexpensively while delivering robust functionality such as integrated POS, food and beverage and group modules.

Prism had used NOVEXSYS at one property and had an existing relationship with its parent company, Centrada Solutions, and selected its hosted PMS software for the New Brunswick and two additional locations. "It's the best value for the cost," says Kyle Green, senior VP, investments for Prism.

 "Working manually is a nightmare," says Karen Bass, general manager of InnPlace New Brunswick. With the Web-based PMS, "it's so quick to install and easy to access. Most folks are comfortable working with the Internet." The InnPlace New Brunswick's database was built within a few days, and Bass was trained on the phone and online in a few hours, with the system going live that same night. "I immediately had accurate front-office detail," she adds.

Accuracy and accountability were priorities for Bass. In some PMS systems, unless someone requests a month-end report, that snapshot becomes unavailable, since data is continually updated. With NOVEXSYS, "the full report still resides in the database back-end." Bass can easily backtrack to trace errors, "and we have the ability to look ahead at a glance." Corporate can also easily access the hotel's data.

All Seasons Resort & Lodging
Core Needs: User friendly, flexible ownership features
Locations: 13 properties
Vendor: Springer-Miller (www.springermiller.com)
Product: SMS Host
As All Seasons (www.allseasonsresortlodging.com) added to its portfolio of hotels, the need to standardize on a single property management system with ownership-friendly features became increasingly apparent. Operators at its reservations center had to be trained on multiple PMS systems, and some systems were unfriendly to users, offered only default ownership statements, and lacked accounting functionality.

So All Seasons is expanding SMS Host to all 13 properties and upgrading to v17, in April 2009. That move will get end users onto a friendlier, Windows-based PMS, easing training for both hotels and reservations agents, and will contain both front- and back-of-house functions, says Tom Overson, vice president.

It will also transition All Seasons from paper-based to automated maintenance requests, a key requirement. "If there was a maintenance issue, it was like the stone age: you fill out a paper in triplicate; that sits in an out-box for three to four hours before the engineer even gets it, and if he loses that paper we can't charge the owner," says Overson. "Now with the work order module you can dial into the person's unit, create a work order, email it to the engineer and he can complete and close it, and it moves over to the ownership statement."

Overson also likes the robust reporting, as well as the flexibility to create a custom ownership statement. A key capability is a notes field, so if, say, the management gave a guest a discount for a maintenance issue the reason can be noted. "Without the ability to write notes, it creates mistrust in the owner."

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