



ILLUSTRATION BY ANDREW BAKER/DEBUT ART

Working together

As technology plays an ever-greater role in hospitality – from in-room entertainment to point of sale and reservations – it's important that the various software and hardware combinations at work in your business don't get in each other's way. **Sara Edlington** looks at solutions

In July last year Hotel Technology – Next Generation (HTNG), a US-based non-profit organisation of technology experts and consultants, released a white paper about technology in the hospitality industry and where it is heading. One of the issues highlighted in the paper was integration – getting various technologies to “talk” to each other.

Trying to get new software to work with existing software or to work with a rival company's software is often a massive headache for hoteliers. But software vendors are aware of the problem and are working on solutions.

Alan O'Riordan, sales and marketing director of Guestline, based in Shrewsbury, explains how its software will work with other

systems. “All of our systems provide an open integration architecture. Currently, we have interfaces with the market-leading systems for the industry, such as EPoS [electronic point of sale], door entry, leisure, interactive television and, of course, PABX [private automatic branch exchange].”

All software needs something to 44 ►



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Matthew Dunn

run on, and having the right computer system is important. Geoff Chapman, senior partner at Hospitality Solutions UK, of Slough, Berkshire, advises: "Before you can install any property management software, you need good-quality hardware to run the system on. This is a vital part of the system, as the software runs all the time. We usually install the

highest-specification hardware that is suited to the application, leaving spare capacity for future expansion."

But which is better – leasing equipment or buying it outright? You can lease equipment over a period of three to five years. Chapman recommends purchasing outright, where possible, rather than leasing, which produces another "fixed overhead".

Mike Gadbury, managing director of Visual One Systems (Europe) in Leatherhead, Surrey, also understands the integration problem. He says: "Although we have an integrated product, hotels may already have other systems installed, and we integrate with all the leading point-of-sale systems, sales and catering systems and golf and accounting systems."



WYBOSTON LAKES

Wyboston Lakes is a conference and training centre with 283 bedrooms in St Neots, Cambridgeshire. It recently bought Visual One's PMS (property management system), Sales & Catering and PoS (point of sale) packages.

Craig Warner, information services manager at the centre, explains how buying Visual One brought about a big change. "We decided to replace everything – both the servers and the 35 users' PCs – firstly because they were so old, but also to give everyone the same hardware, thus making support easier."

As well as having the three modules installed, the hotel will also be linking them in to other systems they have at the hotel.

Warner explains: "Visual One is integrated with Servebase for credit card handling, and in August, when front of house goes live, we'll also be linking to our call-logging software. I don't anticipate any problems."

Brave man. And as training and support is so important, has Visual One lived up to its promises? "We are only live with PoS, so I can only comment on this. The training and support we have received has been second to none, but please note that we are the only UK customer at present, so time will tell."

As the hotel is Visual One's first UK customer, it's a special case, but Warner says it has cost the hotel £100,000 for both the software and the hardware.

How much it will all cost depends on the company, how many software modules you buy, and whether or not you need to upgrade your hardware. For example, the Visual One package includes five modules, with prices from £10,000 to £100,000-plus per module.

Guestline's RezLynx system has four modules. The company says its prices depend on many factors, such as size of hotel, number of staff to be trained, number of software licences required, and so on. Software licensing starts at £2,500 for a single hotel.

Software licensing can be as complicated as the software. Every piece of software you buy comes with a licence – the small print most of us don't read. This tells you what you can and can't do with the software. For example, it may say that you can install it on only one computer. It's important to know exactly what you can do with what you're going to buy.

Another alternative in the integrated software market is "flexible software" from OSG Systems. William Oswald, managing director of OSG, based in Herefordshire, explains the idea: "The system seamlessly covers all commercial areas in an entire hotel or group, everything from front of house to yield management. It can be configured to the exact composition of each business and to the precise needs of each department within that business in all respects – screens, reports, functionality and even scope."

But what of the future? Nigel Allport, marketing director of SoftBrands Hospitality (EMEA) in Woking, Surrey, believes that integrated software is the future for hoteliers. "Buying integrated software allows a hotelier to select software products on a 'best of breed' basis, so a hotel can select PMS (property management system) and CRS (central reservations system) from one and S&C (sales and catering) from another."

And Matthew Dunn, a member of the HTNG group, agrees. He feels that hotels are happy to stick with something that is working. "If it's not working, and they have choices, then they'll move on. Hospitality is too complex to be handled by any single-box solution." ■

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 ■ Copies of the Hotel Technology – Next Generation white paper can be downloaded from www.htng.org.

TOWNHOUSE HOTEL INVESTMENTS

Townhouse Hotel Investments, based in London, has installed OSG Hospitality in two of its properties, the Franklin, a five-star hotel with 50 bedrooms, and Egerton House, a four-star hotel with 30 bedrooms, both in Knightsbridge. A third hotel is having the system installed at present.

Alasdair Hadden-Paton, finance director of Townhouse, explains why

the organisation decided to use OSG Hospitality. "OSG was able to configure OSG Hospitality to our exact requirements, and it is still giving us new amendments as our requirements change."

The hotels decided to change their hardware to prepare for the new software. Although there was no need for the change, it was a good time to

do it. Hadden-Paton says: "We were using a mishmash of different systems, with little effective integration and a great deal of duplication. In some cases, old suppliers had forced us to use special hardware."

The old hardware could have caused notable problems. Hadden-Paton comments: "In particular, the group's telephone system is no longer

made or supported, and it looked as though we might have to replace it at great expense. OSG was able to make it work and link into OSG Hospitality, saving us a large amount of money."

For covering three hotels and head office, OSG charged the group £60,000. OSG also saved the group £125,000 on having to replace the phone system.