

## Mine host



**There used to be a time when IT departments were concerned with hosting software appropriate to the business's needs, enabling each user to access the required application and then storing the data created by the business's transactions. This is no longer the case.**

**Increasingly hotel and hotel company IT professionals are recognising that data storage and application hosting are best done by specialist professionals outside of the organisation and that the real role of IT is to enable all users to access the best application for each separate business need.**

### IT the enabler

Just as hotel management has evolved from a focus on the product to a focus on service and now increasingly to a focus on experience (for guests, intermediaries and staff), IT has moved from being concerned with the boxes that house the applications to the applications value add.

Now, savvy hotel IT directors are primarily concerned with better enabling the user experience and enhancing revenue. As professionals, we are much more inclined to keep increasing the amounts of corporate data in the internet cloud.

The widespread use of the internet and affordable secure bandwidth has enabled these changes and this is now truly a borderless world (save for the legalities of data protection). There are many examples of businesses making use of applications hosted elsewhere and outside the organisation. Few hotels or hotel companies would today consider owning and operating a payroll application.

Almost everyone will be making use of web browsers to access applications held elsewhere - to open up a file on a new employee, to input the hours worked and to running the payroll. Many employees will go to a web browser to access their pay-slip which is composed of data that is residing on a specialist organisation's hardware behind firewalls.

Security of data and service levels tends to be much better at data centres operated by such external organisations. Far better than any hotel and far better than any hotel company can realistically achieve.

If we can all accept that human resource records (private and personal data) and payroll can be operated using an ASP (application service provider) providing SAAS (software as a service), we have accepted that sensitive data can go outside the organisation and processes can be refined to meet the standard approach defined by the vendor's application.

### Application hosting

So it is that we start to see more business applications being hosted off-premises. Think accounting, procurement, training, knowledge banks - to name a few. Whilst we still hear of major hotels going through the up-front cost and organisational agony of a PMS upgrade, we also know of European, Indian and Chinese organisations that offer the core PMS and POS functionality as an ASP service.

Software giants such as SAP and Business Objects offer, or plan to offer, entire suites of applications on-demand. Most of the UK's restaurant groups have long ago adopted this approach, not only to transactional applications but also to higher value knowledge tools such as decision making applications.

We are increasingly being asked to assist IT departments metamorphose into business partners, charged with ensuring that the right (externally hosting) vendor is providing the right functionality to the right users at the right time with the right speed and the right level of security.

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