Summer/ Fall 2022

more Guest Time

Guestline

Guestline

One Login	One UI/UX	One API	Central Database

Operations

- PMS
- C&B
- EPoS
- CRS

Guest Experience

- Digital Registration
- Check-in/out Kiosks

Distribution

- Channel Manager
- Direct Booking Manager (DBM)
- DBM Google Connector

Payments

- GuestPay
- Alt. Payment Methods
- PayLink
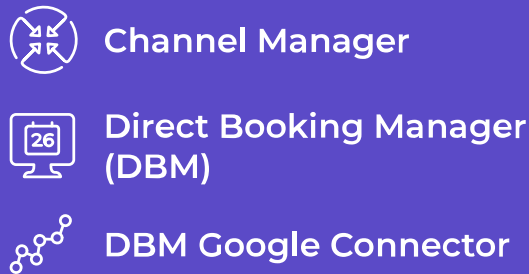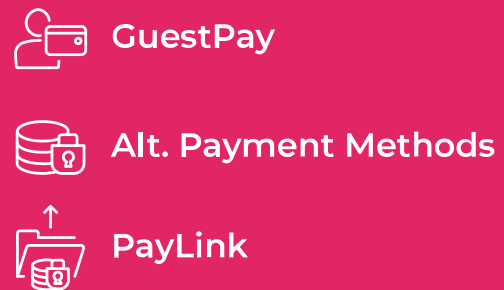
more **GuestTime**

Benefits of Guestline Hospitality Platform:

Increased Occupancy
Enhanced online visibility

More Direct Bookings
Reduced OTA costs

Higher ADR
Sharper rate management

Time Savings
Streamlined operations

Revenue Growth
Delighted guests

A Proven Return
On your investment

Find out more:
guestline.com/products/

Welcome note

Welcome to the first edition of the 'more GuestTime' Magazine. This idea came from an initial desire to curate our most popular content in a handy format for those who had missed it first time round – a combination of thought leadership articles, industry interviews, educational content, and case studies designed to bring you the most up-to-date industry news. The idea evolved over time, and here we are - proud to launch our first edition!

Of course, none of us have been untouched by the events of the last few years. The world has changed, our guest's expectations have changed, and hotels have had to adapt in response. Travel technology companies like ourselves have also had to respond to the challenges hotels are facing. Our products, services, and the way we structure our business have all evolved to help hotels best service the new guest. Given the amount of change we are seeing, this seemed an ideal time to keep our customers up-to-date with easy access to our most popular content.

Not only are we publishing our first magazine, we are also looking forward to attending one of the most important shows of the year for us– the Independent Hotel Show, London. We can't wait to meet our valued clients, prospects and partners at Olympia London on the 4th and 5th October. We are keen to get back to meeting face to face, something that was taken very much for granted until 2020 when overnight, we were all forced to discover the delights of connecting online via Zoom or Teams. It's been a long time, and we can't wait to connect once again in person!

We now more than ever believe staying abreast of industry issues and understanding how technology can support hotel operations is crucial to help drive optimal efficiencies in this challenging period and beyond. Keep reading to find out how Guestline can help.

Wishing you more GuestTime!

Cover photo © The Tawny Hotel

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This magazine was printed on recycled paper
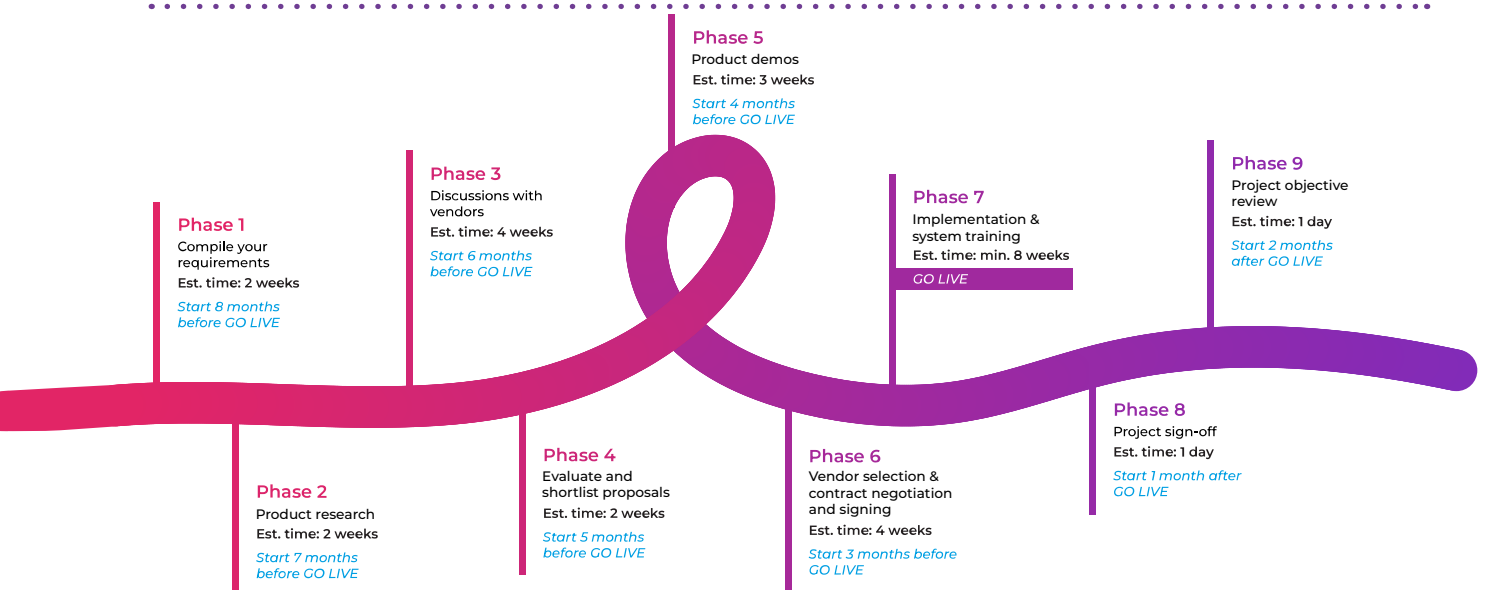
Changing PMS?

Time is of the essence!

If you are one of the many thousands of hotels across Europe who have received notification that their legacy PMS is coming to 'End of Life' over the coming months, you would be forgiven for putting this straight on to the 'to do' pile as something to pick up later in the year. After all, travel is back on, like many hoteliers you may be operating with an overstretched team, and after the chaos of the last two years, it wouldn't be unreasonable to think there are more pressing issues to deal with.

But while there is never an ideal time to embark on a large tech switchover and implementation, when it comes to your PMS, it is critical not to underestimate the time taken to manage a project of this size and scope. Start planning now and it will pay serious dividends further down the line. This is a huge opportunity for your hotel to upgrade and streamline your operations. It really is time to stop 'making do' and embrace the efficiencies and value a cloud-based system can add to your operation.

If you are on the lookout for a new PMS, and wondering where to start, this is the first in a series of articles to support you through your selection and switchover. It's critical to make the right decision for you, your team and your property.

Phase 5
Product demos
Est. time: 3 weeks
Start 4 months before GO LIVE

Phase 3
Discussions with vendors
Est. time: 4 weeks
Start 6 months before GO LIVE

Phase 1
Compile your requirements
Est. time: 2 weeks
Start 8 months before GO LIVE

Phase 7
Implementation & system training
Est. time: min. 8 weeks
GO LIVE

Phase 9
Project objective review
Est. time: 1 day
Start 2 months after GO LIVE

Phase 2
Product research
Est. time: 2 weeks
Start 7 months before GO LIVE

Phase 4
Evaluate and shortlist proposals
Est. time: 2 weeks
Start 5 months before GO LIVE

Phase 6
Vendor selection & contract negotiation and signing
Est. time: 4 weeks
Start 3 months before GO LIVE

Phase 8
Project sign-off
Est. time: 1 day
Start 1 month after GO LIVE

What does system 'End of Life' mean?

The last couple of years have shown the value and flexibility cloud-based systems can bring as hotels looked for more cost-efficient ways to manage operations through the pandemic. As a result, many legacy PMS providers have taken the decision to cease investment in their systems in the near future. But what does this mean in practice? In essence, it means all marketing, selling, and updating of systems will stop – and for existing customers there will be no further (or very limited) technical support, upgrades, bug fixes or security fixes to products. This will of course leave many hoteliers with property hosted systems with little alternative but to look for a new PMS provider.

This may seem daunting – but we are here to help!

When should you start looking?

The sooner the better! A new PMS solution is the most crucial technological investment you will make as a hotelier and integral to the smooth

running of your hotel. A rushed decision could end up being a costly mistake impacting both staff efficiencies and the guest experience. And don't forget – you are one of many hotels who will be impacted by this, all looking for a new PMS solution. The time to act is now to ensure you have adequate time to compile your requirements, research the market, conduct a comprehensive evaluation of available solutions, negotiate and agree terms and conditions, and implement successfully.

To help, we have compiled a step-by-step guide to assist in the planning process. Time really is of the essence – some preparation and planning now will ensure you have enough time to select the right solution for your hotel and make the transition as seamless and stress free as possible.

PMS Switchover Countdown – Step by Step Guide

Phase 1: Compile internal requirements

The first step is to evaluate what you are looking for from your new system. Make a list of all the required functionality. Include aspects of your current system that you like and work well for you – and the shortfalls. Investment in a new system is a great opportunity to put to bed frustrations with your current system and bring efficiencies to your operation. And don't forget this is a team effort. All interested parties need to

be involved -housekeeping, F&B, operations, front office, marketing, conference and banqueting, reservations. Take time to understand from each department what works well with the current solution, what the shortcomings are, and what the ideal would be, and use these to compile your list of requirements.

Remember though, no PMS solution will provide all the functionality required, or at least to your exact specification. Each solution brings with it different strengths (and of course weaknesses). So, rank your properties' requirements in order of importance. Some will be non-negotiable, some will be a 'nice to have.' Ensure you involve your colleagues in this process as well – what doesn't seem to be of importance to you may be crucial to the efficient running of another area of the business.

Don't know where to start with your requirements? We prepared this checklist, which could be a good starting point. **Estimated length of time: 2 Weeks.**

Phase 2: Product research

Now you have a good idea of what you are looking for, it's time to embark on product research! Your PMS is core to the smooth and efficient running of your hotel so it's important to explore a variety of options to understand what functionality is offered and how it can streamline

your operation. We suggest identifying a minimum of 4 to 5 vendors to ensure you have a comprehensive breadth of understanding of what is available in the market. **Estimated length of time: 2 Weeks.**

Phase 3: Initiate vendor discussions

Now you have identified 4 or 5 potential vendors, it's time to engage with them, submit your requirements, and ask for initial quotations. Schedule demos so you can see the product in action. While it may not be practical to involve all interested parties within your team at this stage, it would be helpful to involve a couple of your colleagues on these demos for a second opinion. But don't forget, as with all these processes, the more people that are involved, the longer the time required for the demos to be set up. **Estimated length of time: 4 Weeks.**

Changing PMS?

Time is of the essence!

Phase 4: Evaluate and shortlist proposals

Time to dig deeper and shortlist. Initial quotations received and demos completed, you should be able to shortlist 2 or 3 solutions that are best suited to your business and your budget. Revisit your initial requirements to ensure your shortlisted solutions can deliver against the 'must have' functionality identified by your business.

Estimated length of time: 2 Weeks

Phase 5: Product demos

Once you have shortlisted the options available, now is the time to involve the wider team for more in-depth demos to see the product in action, get their input, and compare and contrast technology available. And don't forget to include your IT team, who are integral to any installation. Remember, the best decision for your hotel, involves the buy in of all.

Estimated length of time: 3 Weeks

This could be quite a lengthy process. Coordinating both the availability of internal teams with the availability of your vendors can be a challenge!

Phase 6: Vendor selection, contract negotiation and contract signing

Having selected your preferred solution, it's time to look at negotiating the contract. This stage may involve both the input of the senior leadership team and legal, both of whose availability may be limited so be prepared for sign off on key issues to take longer than anticipated.

Estimated length of time: 4 Weeks.

**Congratulations!
You now have
a new PMS provider!**

Phase 7: Implementation & system training

This is very much dependent on size of property and specific requirements. While under normal circumstances implementation may take only a few weeks, you are going to be one of many hotels going through this process. It is anticipated demand will create backlogs with vendors so please factor this into your planning. We suggest allowing a minimum of 8 weeks at the very least – although in reality this could be greater.

Your aim is to secure your implementation slot with your provider as soon as you possibly can. Please allow for this in your planning. We cannot emphasise this enough!

Post implementation, there is system training. A thorough and comprehensive understanding of functionality is crucial to optimise the value any new system can bring to your property, so please allow time to ensure all interested parties know not only know how to effectively utilise the new technology but are comfortable using it for go live date.

Estimated length of time: minimum 8 Weeks
Total time: 25 weeks

GO LIVE!

Phase 8 – Project sign off

Post 'Go Live', this is where all vested parties review the initial scope of project to confirm that all aspects of the project and associated deliverables have been completed and nothing is outstanding. Typically, this would involve sales, implementation and training from the provider, and of course the hotel.

Estimated length of time: 1 Day.

Phase 9 Project objective review

A chance for the hotel and provider to come together and review how the technology and partnership is working for them. Is it meeting its objectives? What's working well? Are any problems being encountered? What functionality is not being made use of? Is more training required? Getting the most out of PMS technology requires an ongoing conversation between hotelier and vendor and customer feedback allows for continual product development and does not end on 'Go Live' date.

Estimated length of time: 1 Day.

To assist hoteliers in effective planning and tracking of the PMS change, we created the Switchover Playbook, which explains all details of the process, step by step. To download the Playbook, scan this QR code.

Considerations

- If you are looking forward to a bumper summer, with high occupancy levels, it's unlikely that priority will be given within your team to technology evaluation. You may find that with the best will in the world, more pressing operational issues take over. Again, something to include in the planning process.

- Get one step ahead of the game and go into budget season armed with all the necessary information needed to plan for 2023 by evaluating the market and understanding the cost implications of any investment in technology now! This all helps with the planning and sign off process and will ensure there are no surprises later down the line.

- December can be a challenging month to make progress on projects for many businesses and hotels with public holidays, corporate events, and staff leave. It is not the month you want to add to operational stresses with key deadlines related to your switchover. If you are looking at a switch over in early 2023, aim to have finalised your decision by November at the very latest to mitigate stress and disruption over the festive season.

- And finally...you won't be the only hotel going through this. The coming months will be busy times for vendors as they configure and implement systems to meet hotel deadlines. The earlier you start this process the better so you have the time needed to select the best solution for your property.

Word from CEO

A warm welcome to Guestline's 'more GuestTime' magazine which I hope you will find an insightful read, along with my own thoughts on what the future might hold. In July this year we held our first in person Company Day at our Shrewsbury headquarters. An important time to come together and discuss our future strategy which I also look forward to sharing with you in the months to come. Happy reading!

Andrew McGregor

Time for Cloud

A number of big vendors this year announced the 'end of life' for their legacy Property Management Systems. For many operators this prompted a review of their own PMS. Effective change requires effective planning. At Guestline over the past 3 years we have helped over 500 hotels switch from on premise to cloud solutions and in this issue we share some of our insight on how to think about this important change.

Staff, staff, staff

I firmly believe that whilst the pandemic accelerated the staff challenge, the wheels were already set in motion with Brexit (at least in the UK). As an industry if we are going to meet this challenge, then the focus on recruitment and retention must include equipping team members with the right tools for the job. Technology will be essential to this process.

Check-in

Guests demand for contact-free check-in has seen steady growth since it first appeared and accelerated as a result of safety regulations born from the pandemic. This has caused a shift in expectation of guests, and we now see hotels adopting digital check in solutions to make operations more efficient whilst often enhancing the guest experience. Solutions such as our own GuestStay are firmly established and I look forward to seeing how the advance of check-in kiosks will continue to elevate the guest journey and operations.

Direct with Google

Searching and booking has also seen a shift and the move to direct has been dominated by Google. Whilst I can logically suggest this is influenced by Google free booking links, what I can say for certain is a growing number of our own clients are already reaping the rewards of our Direct Booking Manager integration.

We have been working with hotels for 25 years through a number of good and bad times for the industry. As we navigate the changes brought by COVID and the current economic challenges, we remain here to listen and help through our service and our solutions. Enjoy the read.

Guestline Company Day 2022

GuestPay

Secure & omni-channel payment solution for hotels

ENHANCED EXPERIENCE
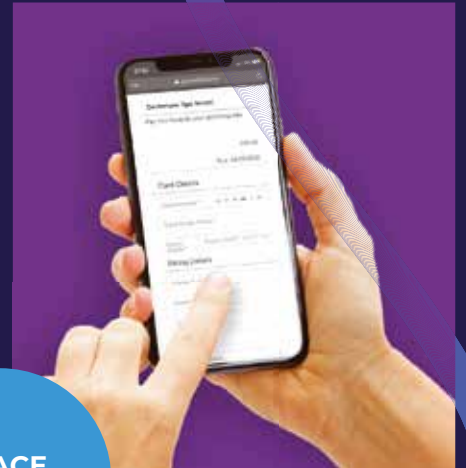
RAPID PROCESS

TRAVOLUTION AWARDS
2021 WINNER
25TH NOVEMBER 2021, HILTON BANKSIDE LONDON

2021
BOUTIQUE HOTELIER
AWARDS
WINNER

AWARD WINNING

PEACE OF MIND

HEALTHIER FINANCIALS

Bancontact · giropay · SOFORT · UnionPay 银联 · PF✚ · iDEAL · WeChat Pay · Apple Pay

One provider for eCommerce, MOTO and Chip & Pin transactions.
Deeply integrated with Guestline Platform:
Property Management System, Direct Booking Manager, GuestStay and EPoS.

## Find out more:
guestline.com/guestpay

Product experience

Direct Booking Manager was built to help hoteliers make the best use of their direct on-line presence. By removing all the constraints, guests can book directly with the hotel, and start a stronglasting relationship from the very beginning.

Google free booking links

PMS

STEP 1
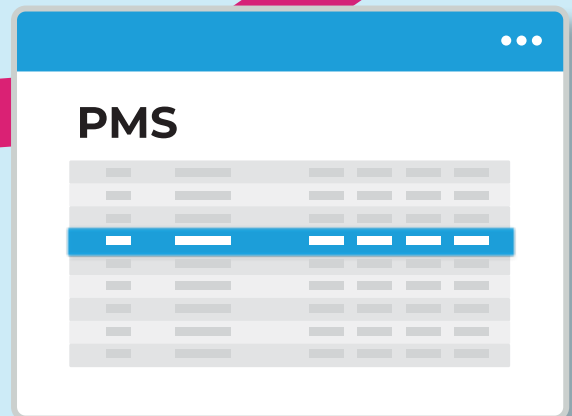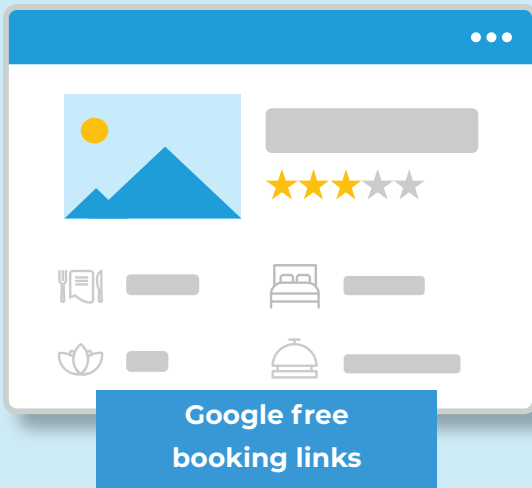
### Live availability, rates, restrictions and content

Smart-search calendar with live PMS availability and restriction for the next 2 months. With data flowing live from the PMS through the distribution platform, there's no need to double-up work to keep DBM synchronised with live inventory and products. It just works, 24 hrs a day, 7 days a week, 365 days a year.

STEP 2
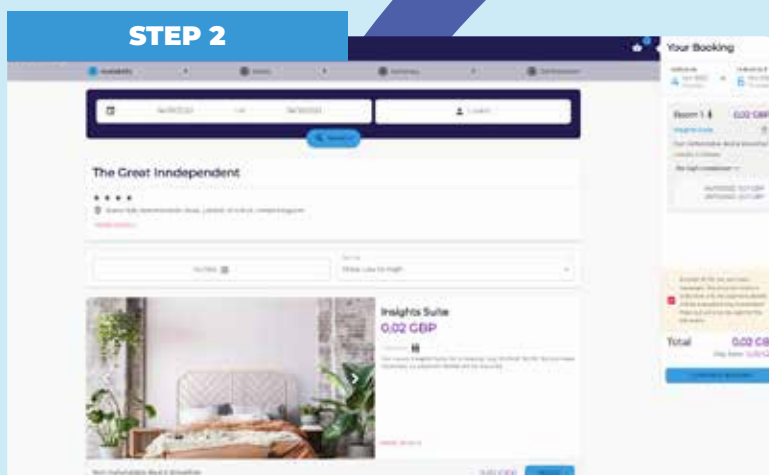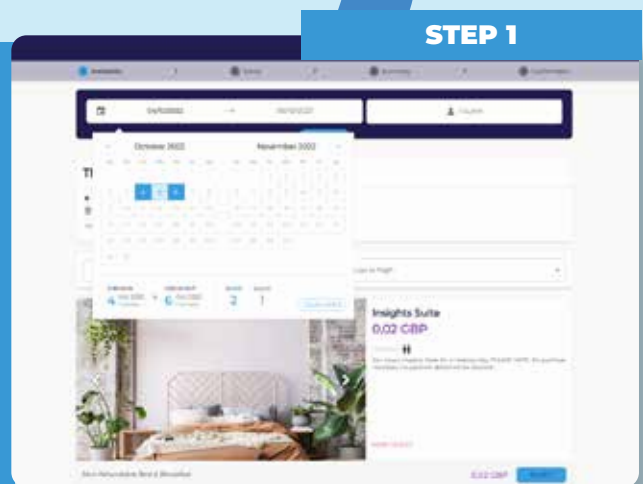
Full control at each step of the process

Easy to browse hotel, room, rate, and policy/ cancellation information. An integrated e-commerce style shopping basket at all stages of the booking clearly shows itinerary, rates, and total pricing

STEP 6
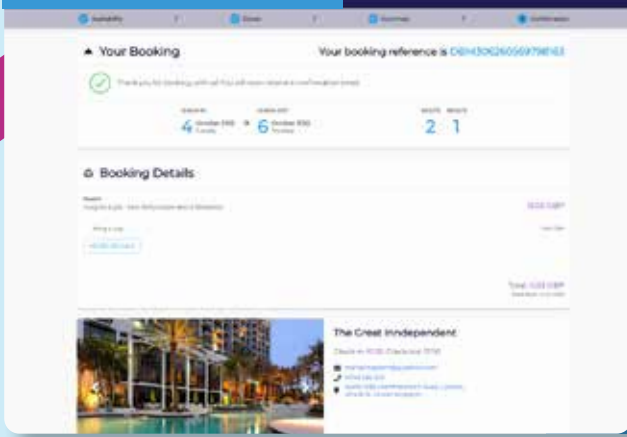
Peace of mind

Automated branded confirmation with full itinerary and details, also delivered in email message from the hotel email address.

Guestline DBM updates PMS in real-time with reservation/cancellation information including GDPR compliant guest profile & preferences, upsells, guarantees and PCI compliant payment/ guarantee tokenisation

STEP 5
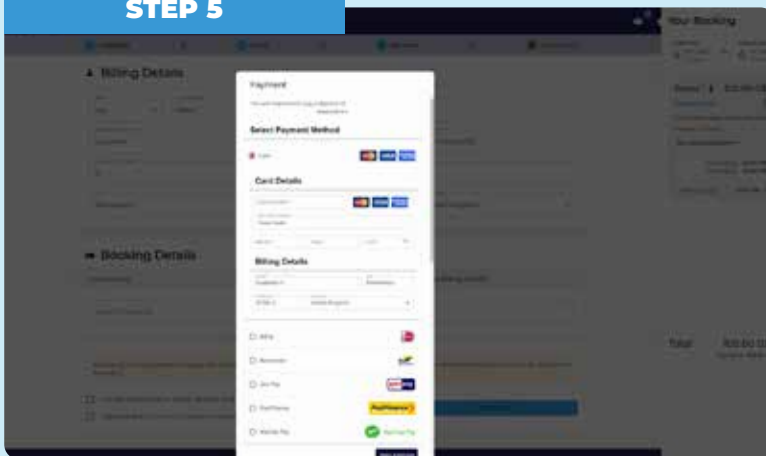
Simple, clear payments/guarantees

DBM has a built-in PCI-compliant payment function to enable guests to use credit/debit cards to guarantee, part-pay, or full pay (depending on the rate plan set up) for their reservation. Tokenised payment delivery with the reservation to PMS ensures all records are up to date.

STEP 4

Clarity

Clear display of privacy policies, cancellation terms, and general terms
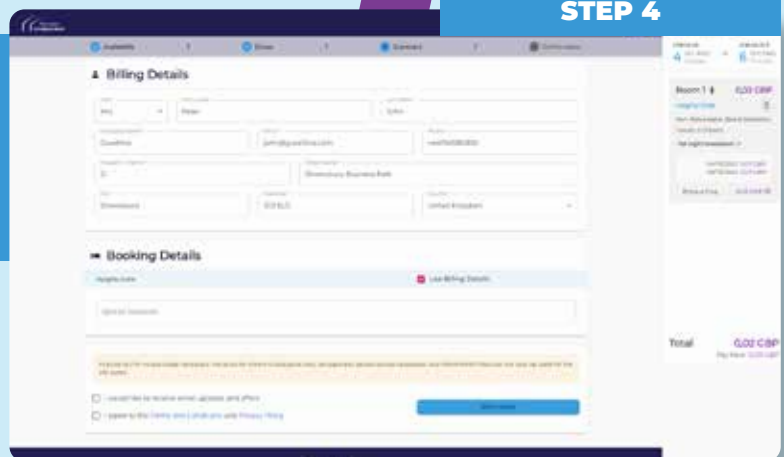
STEP 3

Great conversion rates, upselling is a breeze

With average conversion rates of up to 25%*, DBM helps turn lookers into bookers. With in-line upsells as part of the room booking process, it's also possible to gain higher margins on complementary upsells too.

Case study

Welcome Break Hotels
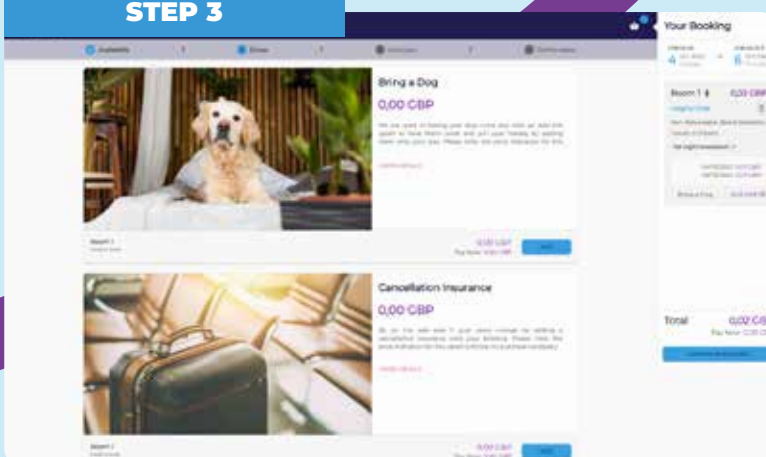
Welcome Break Hotels expand their relationship with Guestline to enhance the guest experience, increase efficiencies, and drive incremental revenue.

Solutions implemented

GuestStay

Guestline's contact free check-in/out solution has transformed the guest arrival and departure procedure for Welcome Break Hotels

Within one month, automation of what was a highly manual process has meant **95% of guests now check in online.** This has not only improved service levels for guests, but without the lengthy queues at front desk, staff are free to focus on more productive tasks.

Welcome Break Hotels operate **31 conveniently located hotels** throughout the UK under the Ramada and Days Inn brands. Designed with motorists in mind, they are positioned in key locations near some of the UK's main roads and motorways. The family and pet friendly hotels all include parking and Wi-Fi with each stay. Eight also offer meeting facilities, and a corporate account programme is available for frequent stays.

A customer of Guestline since 2010, they recently decided to expand their relationship as they looked to **improve the guest check-in/out experience with GuestStay.**

HOTEL CHALLENGES / REQUIREMENTS

There was groupwide recognition that guest check-in/out was time-consuming, manual and complex for both the hotel and guest. The overall objective was to streamline the process, drive efficiencies, and reduce costs.

Immediate requirements included:

- Customer experience improvements - check-in/out cumbersome and highly manual creating delays for customers on arrival. It was far from ideal.
- Improve staff efficiencies-the group required a system that streamlined many of the highly labour-intensive processes such as handwritten check-in slips and manual data entry which were inefficient and open to error
- Seamless integration - it was important that any new system integrated as seamlessly as possible to minimise disruption
- Eco Friendly - there was a desire to be more eco-friendly and reduce unnecessary print outs

Guestline have produced a quick and easy calculator to allow you to visualise the savings GuestStay can make to your business, saving your team time and allowing them to focus on your guests. Imagine having an extra 3 minutes of your guest's attention at check-in? The upsell opportunities are endless!
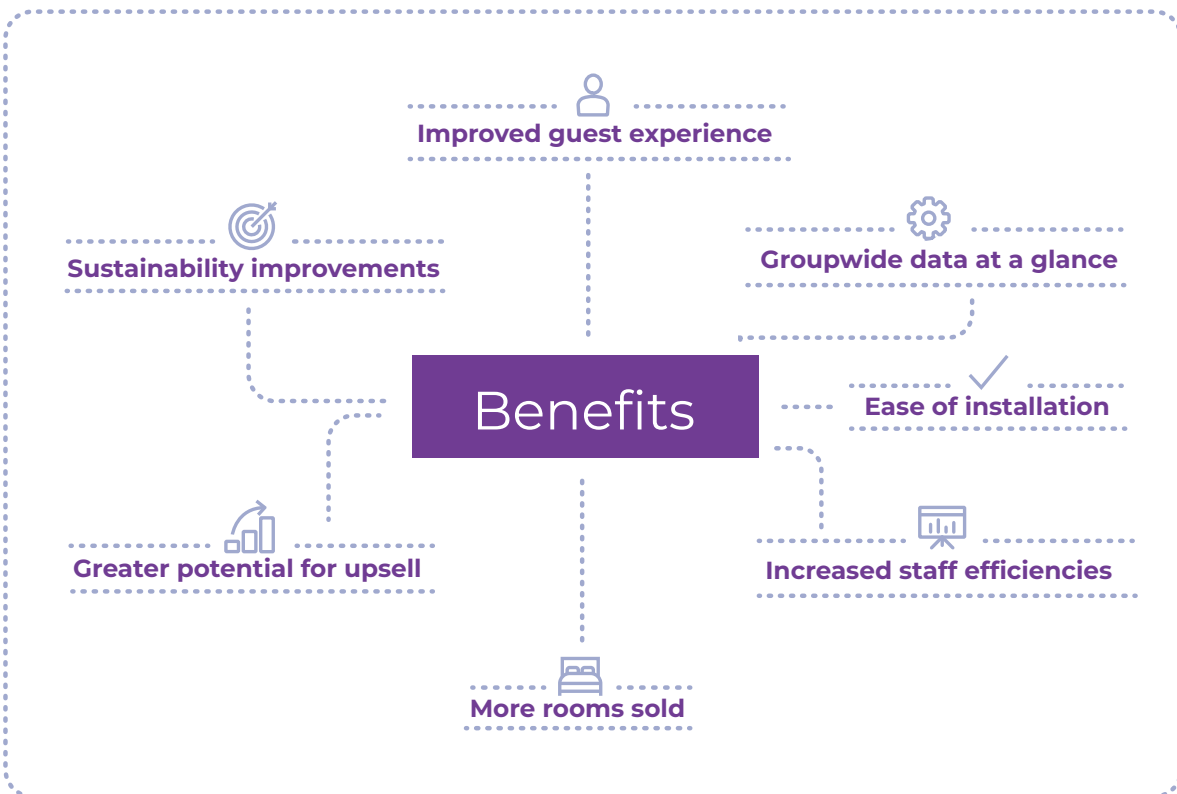
Benefits

- Improved guest experience
- Sustainability improvements
- Groupwide data at a glance
- Ease of installation
- Greater potential for upsell
- Increased staff efficiencies
- More rooms sold

Bridge the recruitment and retention gap with your tech stack

How hoteliers can achieve less staff turnover with more technology

Digital transformation and acceleration in the hospitality industry continues to be a hot topic. Whilst technology companies continue to develop new solutions, hoteliers continue to strive for new ways to meet and exceed guest expectations.

Many of the advances made in recent times have been born out of the ongoing challenges operators face in terms of recruiting and retaining staff. The balance between maintaining operational efficiency and delivering a true experience of hospitality that can only be achieved with a human touch is a fine one.

So what role can technology play in addressing the staffing challenge and what are the opportunities for the two to work together?

To ensure buy-in and a harmonious working relationship between high-tech and high-touch across your team it is important to get it right from the start. When considering what to include as part of your tech-stack, what systems to install or what upgrades to introduce, speaking to heads of department and team members is critical when doing due diligence as part of this process. Team members who are 'at the coal-face' of operations have an innate understanding of what and where the gaps are, including the tools they need to have at their fingertips to make both the staff and guest journey more efficient. Including staff in the technology switchover process is a powerful way to demonstrate that their opinion matters and they have an important role to play. Asking questions like **"What is the perfect scenario for you?"** and **"What are the technology gaps and how do you think we could best fill them?"** is one way to achieve this. Staff will not only feel empowered but you are also more likely to see greater staff retention as they feel valued, that their opinion matters, and their workload is likely to become easier with greater automation. In a similar vein to the buy-in, adoption and return on investment of any new system that is introduced is also likely to be significantly higher if staff are involved throughout the process, implementing sufficient training also broadens their own skillset. A win win.

The same principle applies when future-proofing your workforce and considering where the next generation of staff will be coming from. For many operators this is Gen Z – those born between the mid-late 1990s and early 2010s. Also referred to as 'digital natives' given they are the first generation to grow up with widespread access to the internet and mobile technology. It's therefore fair to suggest that technology is part of their DNA and with this is the expectation that the workplace will deliver in terms of technology experience and training opportunities. The principle of involving all team members in decisions around technology should also apply to, and include, Gen Z in the recruitment, onboarding and training processes. Platforms that offer flexible, online / remote and virtual reality experience learning are all worth considering to ensure technology runs across operations and supports retention of the next generation.

Also, consider with any tech installation (if you don't already have in place) selecting more popular, widely-used and recognised systems. Whether it be a PMS, Channel Manger or Revenue Management System this can increase your chances of attracting the best talent as it is likely they will already know their way around the system. This is preferable to all as there is less time spent learning a brand new system which could otherwise be seen as a deterrent in the decision making process when candidates are considering who their future employer may be.

Bridge the recruitment and retention gap with your tech stack

How hoteliers can achieve less staff turnover with more technology

For many hospitality owners and operators the prospect of introducing new technology or upgrading existing technology is a daunting one. It costs time and money. With this in mind, it is important to take a long term view and recognise that investment in technology now will pay staffing and operational efficiency dividends in the future. Not least because it equips staff to spend less time on the mundane, repetitive tasks that are often time-consuming, as these can now be automated. This alone can make a role and working environment more attractive to a potential or current employee who will be encouraged by the opportunities that are available to meet their own professional goals without the hurdles of administration and reporting.

For many working in, or considering a career in hospitality, technology is an enabler to do more of what they love – providing a great welcome and experience for guests, being able to focus on building a relationship with them so that the guest feels comfortable and encouraged to book again. This pattern is invaluable in driving bookings and revenue. As technology can make a team member more effective and efficient, the same is then true of the impact it can have on a venue's operations and profitability. Staff turnover is costly but can be mitigated if technology is plugged into the recruitment and training process.

Restore confidence & hire on-attitude Guestline gets recruitment guidance and top tips from leading hospitality industry bodies, such as UK Hospitality, Hospitality Action, Northern Ireland Hotel Federation and HOSPA.

Author:

Bethany Phillips

Head of People Operations, Guestline

In the Hot Seat with
Josh Chadwick

Multi award winning General Manager at The Tawny Hotel.

Josh Chadwick MIH
Hotel Manager | Acorn Award Winner 2022
Young Trailblazer - Boutique Hotelier Power List 2022
Delivering Exceptional Hospitality

Why Hospitality?
(How did you get into the industry)

I actually got into the industry just by chance. I wanted a job as soon as I was 16 and my aunty worked in a hotel and got me a job as a housekeeper. Ever since that first day I fell in love with hospitality. I tired every department when I worked at my first hotel, and just knew one day I wanted to run one.

How do you approach challenges?

The industry at the moment has some of it's biggest challenges to date from staffing to price increases. I would say staffing like most hotels is the hardest, the market is very competitive to what it used to be, and with lots of roles out there with not many people available it can be quite the challenge!

Is there anything you'd do differently today, looking at your past career?

I think it's easy for everyone to say I would do this differently, or that differently. But if you do things differently, you probably wouldn't be where you are today, so I would say probably not. Yes, I made mistakes along the way, but without these mistakes you cannot grow, so I'm grateful for everyone lesson.

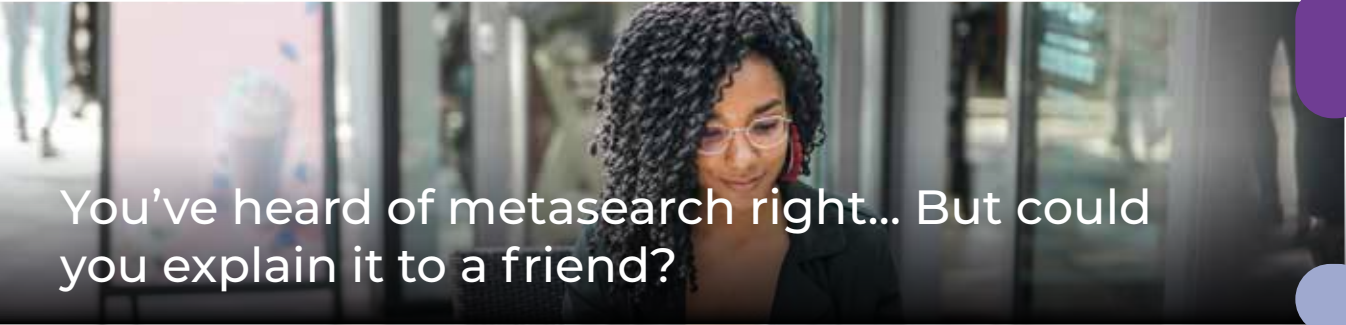## The achievement you are most proud of?

Opening The Tawny Hotel would be my proudest achievement. It's the UK's first deconstructed hotel and multiple rooms spread out across 70 acres certainly had its challenges! We had to think of how we would transport guests, room service and even the housekeepers! It was an incredible time, and we now see occupancy levels of over 90%, which are all direct bookings. The team worked hard during opening, and shone through making one of the us Times Top 100 Hotels!

Why would you recommend Guestline, as the technology platform for hotels?

For me Guestline has all the tools you need, without being over complicated. Some of the big systems out there can be complex and time consuming to train new employees. Guestline is simple software, that can be trained easily to the team and has great training resources such as the mock website. We can take reservations over the phone in minutes, and with add on's such as Guestpay and GuestStay, we can check someone in, in only 2 clicks!

What is ?? metasearch

You've heard of metasearch right... But could you explain it to a friend?

It's one of those things we could probably do with knowing a bit more about and how it could benefit our hotel...in a clear and concise way!

Here's how it could work for your hotel... Although metasearch has been popular for some time now, it looks set to take a more significant position as one of the lead marketing channels available for hoteliers. This is largely due to the fact that is taking an even more prominent position when guests are searching online and booking decisions are governed by price. But how does it work and, more importantly, how can hoteliers utilise it effectively to deliver direct bookings and direct revenue?

What is metasearch?

Put simply, a metasearch engine (as they are more commonly known) is an online price comparison tool that works to combine data (in the case of hotels the data is price and availability) from a number of different distribution channels. What sets metasearch engines apart from other search engines is that they operate without their own database of indexed pages. Instead, they search across a host of different search engines and collate the best results from each into one result

How does it work?

The start of metasearch in travel began with flight deal comparison sites such as Skyscanner and Kayak, closely followed by Google, TripAdvisor and Trivago who focused onhotels. They work across the full distributionspectrum and can collate results from hotel's own direct channel websites as well as the OTAs. The guest can then see at a glance both availability and price comparison in one consolidated list from across the market.

Metasearch engines have gained considerable ground recently and this is partly dueto their popularity amongst guests. Intuitive and straight forward they can search andbook pretty much immediately.

Metasearch- yes, Metabook- not really...

With the increasing importance of mobile, metasearch engines tried to optimise the customer journey by avoiding long lists of channels and multiple screens open before the booking process could begin.

Initiated by Kayak, and followed by most of the players, metasearch platforms introduced the possibility to book directly on hotel's websites, which seemed to be the right answer for the less-optimised hotel booking engines or OTA profiles. Let's bear in mind, that in many cases, the metasearch business model was based on performance - usually converted bookings - which is why it was so important to ensure that the customer journey was smooth from search to payment.

While the idea to give users an easier way to complete the booking was right, people still preferred to book directly, either on hotel's or OTA's websites, which made all the major players shut down this feature.

Why is price parity critical to success?

With price the driving factor at this stage of the customer journey, price parity is key to optimising success with your metasearch strategy. An uncompetitive rate risks losing bookings to third parties so ensure the price on your own website is the same (or better) than that on the OTAs as this will be the price shown on the metasearch sites Fortunately, updating rates in your booking engine automatically updates your metasearch listing, ensuring you are providing live real-time availability and pricing at all times.

Working with an established and experienced technology provider such as Guestline will also enable you to not only integrate and work with major metasearch channels but also capture insightful data to track performance and identify which are delivering bookings and revenues and which might need to be adjusted or even reconsidered.

What are the benefits?

First and foremost, unlike listings on an OTA, metasearch delivers bookings direct to a hotel's own booking engine. As a result, hoteliers can own the guest data and the guest relationship, bolstering the direct channel and building loyalty by offering a more enhanced guest experience. Likewise, a more seamless online booking experience for the guest also means a reduction in abandonment rates.

In addition, given the popularity of metasearch and associated higher conversion rates, they arguably offer better value for money for hoteliers seeking a more direct approach to their online marketing strategies.

As metasearch continues to accelerate now is the time for hoteliers to invest in understanding the operation and benefits metasearch offers so that they can start to integrate it into their online marketing strategies quickly and effectively and ensure they don't get left behind.

Learn more

This editorial is a part of The Ultimate Guide to Digital Commerce for Hotels

Scan to read more

Digital marketing for hospitality. Getting more direct business!

As globally hotels look to combat the cost-of-living crisis by cutting costs and protecting margins, optimising book direct strategies is an obvious way to reduce costs of distribution. A focus on direct distribution is not new but given evolving changing customer behaviours what now underpins its success? What are the best channels for driving direct traffic to your booking engine? What are the characteristics of a highly converting website? And what metrics should hoteliers be looking at when assessing its effectiveness? We recently brought together a panel of four hospitality professionals for a live webinar to unpack what they believe is important in building a direct digital strategy for hotels. Dan Visser, Director of Sales and Marketing, The Langdale Estate; Gordon Cartwright MIH, Executive General Manager, Lumley Castle Hotel, Nadine Schröder, Head of DACH Market, Hotelchamp; and Pete Stevens, Head of Marketing and Operations, Clockwork Marketing, all kindly joined the debate while moderated by our very own Chris Jones, Senior Product Manager.

Know your audience

The first stage in any book direct strategy is to know your customer and your audience – who they are and their behaviours so you can begin to engage and communicate with them in a meaningful way. Pete suggests starting by profiling your guests based on the information stored internally within your PMS and CRM. Digging deep into Google Analytics will uncover much about your website visitors, how they are interacting with your website and who is converting. Pete adds that 'this can be effectively supported with information from tools such as Experian and Mosaic to profile existing customers and understand their behaviours with such data as social status, where they live, and how much money they have to spend.' This depth of understanding of website visitors and hotel guests will allow hoteliers to begin to speak to them in a way that resonates, engages and drives conversion.

The importance of data - 'What gets measured, gets managed'

The importance of data was a key theme in the discussion with Gordon pointing out that although he is a General Manager, at times he feels as though he is a Data Analyst. He is a firm believer that data is at the heart of setting your strategy citing 'What we measure, gets managed. Everything gets logged in the hotel, with easy visibility to see what the trends are and what's moving, and decisions are based around what is happening there.' Having started the process of data collation and management over two years ago, Gordon can see the significant impact this level of insight has had on his business. Keeping on top of trends believes it has been integral to understanding his guest and meeting their needs.

Interestingly, Gordon stated that for him, although there is value in using the data provided by third parties, the real value came when they began to challenge their own real live data. 'We can see the importance generically of external data, but we can't leave the responsibility of the success of our business to algorithms. There is a need to dig deeper and validate it'.

But while all were in agreement as to the importance of data, not all traffic driving activity can be measured and it's important not to overlook this. 'You don't know the value of PR activity until you stop doing it and see what bookings you don't get', says Dan. 'Social media posts can be hugely effective in raising awareness of your brand and driving traffic to your website, but don't always get measured until they hit your website. You have to get an understanding of how the non-measurable activity supports your overall strategy.'

> You have to get an understanding of how the non-measurable activity supports your overall strategy

Digital marketing for hospitality. Getting more direct business!

Driving traffic to your website

Armed with an understanding of your guest, how do you look to attract traffic to your website? Allocate a significant proportion of your direct marketing efforts to SEO activity through content and website updates advises Pete. Google Business Manager is hugely important and constantly being updated. A sustainability feature has been recently launched in response to customer demands and is key to searching He suggests combining this with PPC and Meta where appropriate although it's important to adapt your strategy according to the nature of your property. 'Meta is suited more to city centre hotels where price is more important. Social is great for inspiration, and can be a very effective conversion tool especially for F&B deals. Email, although a smaller pot, is a great way to connect with your already engaged customers.' He also states that referral sites such as Mr and Mrs Smith can be useful for sending traffic to your site.

Dan taps into channels that allow him to create an emotional connection with his guest. He says his experience has shown there is huge value in starting with a story such as a picture of a beautiful sunset or a sundowner at the pool. This may be less importante for cities which are more price driven but for destinations the stories that are told about your property are really important. The guests experience starts when they see the first post. His experience has shown that it is important to test various channels over time. 'This is not an overnight fix. The booking needs to be driven through our own channel but try some good quality content on a variety of channels and give it some time and go on a journey with it. Just because social media channels are free, it doesn't mean you don't need to invest time into them.'

> Not all traffic driving activity can be measured
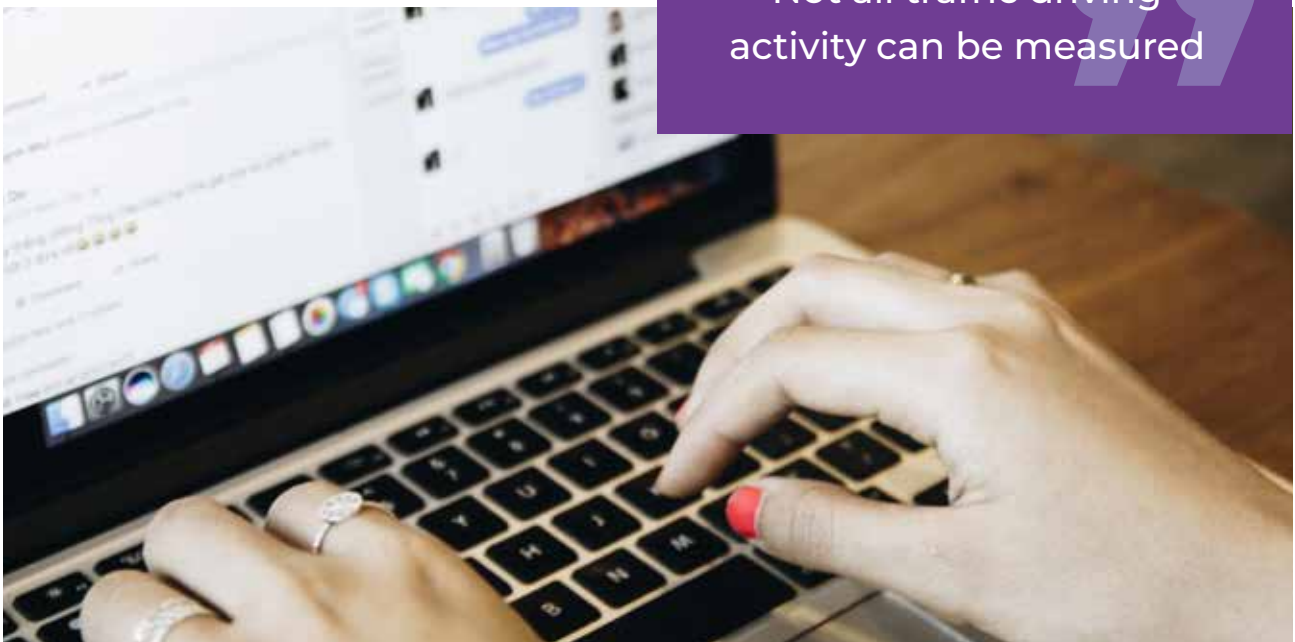
A high converting website

As customer requirements have shifted post pandemic, it's important that your website is updated to reflect what guests are now looking for to optimise conversion. 'Cleanliness and flexible cancellation rates are now really important to guests so make this information easy to find' says Nadine. 'The browser spends on average 8-12 minutes on your website' she continued. 'Dig deeper into how they interact with your website. If they are scrolling up and down, ensure there is a chatbot to help them find the right info, or a contact number if they are struggling to find the information they want. Once you have succeeded in getting them to your website, its important you use all available insights to understand how they interact and improvements that can be made to prevent them leaving without converting.'

Pete emphasised the importance of great content – words, images and videos. You cannot commission enough great images or videos. In addition to this, website non-negotiables to optimise conversion are speed of website, mobile responsiveness, a straightforward and easy to use booking engine, and the importance of continually updating SEO to ensure you appear high in search rankings.

But even the highest spec website will fail to convert if the pricing and packaging are uncompetitive. In Dan's experience, value added packages that are exclusive to direct bookers have proven a useful tool in building his book direct strategy. 'Value adds can include food and beverage offerings, spa incentives, room upgrades. It's important to incentivise the booker and give them a reason to book with you and not via a third party.'

Case Study

JW Lees & Co

JW Lees power direct distribution and reduce monthly commission payments with Guestline's DBM Google Connector.

ABOUT JW LEES & CO

Based in North Manchester, JW Lees & Co is a family run hospitality business founded in 1828. The company comprises of JW Lees Brewery, over 150 pubs, and 13 hotels and inns mainly in the North of England and North Wales.

HOTEL CHALLENGES/ REQUIREMENTS

Within JW Lees & Co, there was groupwide concern about reliance on OTA business. Faced with growing monthly commission payments and third parties dominating Google search returns, the group were looking for ways they could accelerate their direct distribution. It was important that any solution could be implemented easily, and ideally where the impact could be seen quickly.

Solutions implemented = DBM Google Connector

> "Setting up Guestline Google Connector was a no brainer for us. Swift, hassle free implementation, the costs of set up are offset each month with just a handful of direct bookings. Directly we anticipate savings of £20k over the year in reduced OTA commissions, but in addition, we get to build brand awareness, own the guest booking, and have the opportunity to build engagement and loyalty with our guests. We are delighted with how it's gone!"

David Cox, Business Support Manager, Hotels & Inns

BENEFITS

INCREASE IN DIRECT BOOKINGS

With a link to the official JW Lees Website appearing when a guest searches for one of the group's 13 properties through Google search or Google Maps, potential guests can quickly compare prices against the OTAs and then go straight to book direct. This enhanced visibility not only 'steals' bookings from the OTAs but conversion is optimised as potential guests are not distracted by competing properties as seen on OTAs.

REDUCTION IN MONTHLY COMMISSION PAYMENTS

Reduced reliance on OTA's due to more direct bookings it is estimated will result in £20k savings in commission payments over a year.

INCREASED CUSTOMER CONFIDENCE

With brand.com identified on search results as the 'official website', guests have more confidence knowing they are booking direct with the property.

GREATER CUSTOMER ENGAGEMENT

By capturing bookings through their own website that would otherwise go through an OTA, JW Lees has the opportunity to own the relationship with the guest, building greater engagement and optimising the chances of repeat bookings.

SEAMLESS SET UP

The connection is not only reliable, but set up is quick, seamless and with Guestline doing all the work, JW Lees didn't have to do anything to get this live!

TRACKING PERFORMANCE IS EASY

JW Lees can easily monitor the effectiveness of Google Connector in driving traffic and bookings to their website through the Guestline Insights dashboard allowing JW Lees to manage their direct distribution strategy to optimise conversion.

Project Management - PMS Implementation & Training

We speak with Ahmed Seddik,
Senior Project Manager at Guestline
about Planning, Preparation, and Collaboration

With many hotels faced with their existing PMS Solutions coming to their ‚end of life'- meaning technology providers have made the decision not to invest any further in upgrades, bug fixes, or security upgrades- they may be on the lookout for a new cloud-based solution. Here, we catch up with Ahmed Seddik, Senior Project Manager, based in our German office, who gives us an insight not only into his Guestline career, but also how to ensure any PMS switchover is as seamless and successful as possible.

Ahmed, firstly, tell us a bit about your career at Guestline.

I joined Guestline in January 2021 as a System Trainer. I loved the role, working with hotel teams, and educating them about how our PMS and tech solutions can support their hotel strategies and help them achieve their goals.

At the end of last year, I moved to the Project Management department. Here I oversee the implementation, configuration and training once a hotel has selected our PMS. I am the link between the hotel and various internal departments here at Guestline to ensure product installation goes to plan, is delivered to schedule, and the system meets the goals and requirements of the hotel.

Have you always been involved with hotel technology?

Indirectly, yes, but on the client side. I worked within the hotel industry for over 10 years before joining Guestline, in various roles including revenue management, reservations and front office. Many Guestliners come from hospitality backgrounds, meaning we have a solid understanding of the challenges hotels face and are therefore better positioned to work with our customers to help them solve their problems.

> We want to make sure there is minimal disruption during the process

What do you enjoy about your current role?

As a project manager, I am lucky to be involved in the whole implementation process from the moment a Guestline solution is selected, to post installation. The broad scope of this role allows me to utilise and develop a wide variety of skills. I need to be able to motivate teams, analyse processes, identify and overcome challenges, and help develop new and more efficient strategies, all while keeping the end customer's goal top of mind.

How does a PMS changeover work?

Before we do anything, we take time to understand the hotel and its current working practices - what's working well, and where the hotel would like to see efficiencies. This is very much a consultative process, where we identify and recommend how Guestline's PMS, Rezlynx, can best support the operation. Based on these discussions, we create a project plan, with timelines and responsibilities, to support the switchover.

The project plan allows us to plan resources and ensure all involved know what is expected of them and by when. Training, installation, configuration and advising third-parties as to the changeover all form part of the plan.

At Guestline, we are very focused on post-installation support. Firstly, training to ensure hotel teams can use their new system with confidence and get the most out of it. And secondly, post-installation weekly review meetings to ensure the system supports the hotel with the goals it set out to achieve. What's working well? Do they have any questions? What features are they not using? Is more training needed? Customer feedback allows for continuous product development that doesn't end with the, go live' date.

> At Guestline, we
> are very focused on
> post-installation support.

Project Management - PMS Implementation & Training

What can a hotel do to support a smooth and successful switchover?

We are working with a hotel currently who selected Guestline as they needed a system that could streamline their day-to-day processes, both operational and administrative. The General Manager involved the wider team from the onset. As a result, all departments are invested in switchover and are excited about the efficiencies the PMS has brought. Even now, 3 months post go-live, the whole team are delighted with the improvements gained since the switchover.

> Before we do anything, we take time to understand the hotel and its current working practices.

What can a hotel do to support a smooth and successful switchover?

Firstly, hotels should remember that a PMS switchover is a team effort. Investing in the Guestline PMS is a great opportunity to eliminate frustrations with your current system and bring efficiencies to your whole operation. All interested parties need to be involved - housekeeping, F&B, operations, front office, marketing, conference and banquet department, reservations. Take time to learn from each department what works well with the current solution, what the shortcomings are, and what would be the optimal solution, and use this to build your list of requirements.

In addition, we need to have a clear understanding of the hotel's commercial goals so we can plan and configure the system accordingly. Hotels value working with Guestline as our technology doesn't just stop with the PMS – we can advise on the entire hotel management platform. Our suite of technology solutions, combined with our third-party integrations, means we can provide a solution that is the best fit for the business and supports commercial goals. This holistic approach helps to break down departmental silos that can be detrimental to the business.

A robust project plan is required–so everyone knows their responsibilities and deadlines. There needs to be agreement on the best time to transition and what needs to be in place, so there is minimal disruption to the business. To help with this, we provide a step-by-step guide to help hotels through the planning process. Time is of the essence – with the right planning and preparation, we can work together to make the switchover as seamless and stress-free as possible.

Lastly, there needs to be strong collaboration between the hotel and our team. Project success is a team effort so there needs to be clear and regular lines of communication.

How much time should hoteliers allow for a PMS change from vendor selection to go live?

This depends very much on the size of the hotel and the specific requirements. Under normal circumstances, implementing a PMS change can take as little as a few weeks. But given the increasing number of vendors announcing there will be no further investment in their legacy server-based PMS systems, we are seeing the demand for cloud-based systems increasing, and this looks set to continue well into 2023. Given the staff shortages the industry is facing, we anticipate backlogs. This is not a process that should be rushed. We recommend allowing at least 8 to 12 weeks - but in reality, it may take longer.

A PMS switchover can be daunting, especially for teams that are already overstretched. We are here to help! As pioneers of cloud-based technology, our experience over the last 20 years of supporting hotels with PMS switchovers means we are experienced in guiding and supporting hotels through the process to ensure a successful transition.

> Many Guestliners come from hospitality backgrounds, meaning we have a solid understanding of the challenges hotels face and are therefore better positioned to work with our customers to help them solve their problems.

Why Guestline?

We love partnering with Guestline as they share our company culture by supporting the independent hotel sector and recognising the importance of great tech partnerships.

Adrienne Hanna
Founder & CEO
Right Revenue

David Cox
Business
Support Manager,
Hotels & Inns
JW Lees

We love partnering with Guestline as it's a one-stop shop with everything integrated into one system. So, once I change my rates in the PMS, they filter out to the OTAs and all the other different channels, and straight to our booking engine. In addition, it's really simple to manage, if you are struggling with staff and if you're struggling with technology as well.

We love partnering with Guestline as the whole experience that the team can deliver using the Guestline PMS- Rezlynx, is seamless and gives guests a fantastic experience. It's a fantastic tool for everybody, not just Front of House, but Sales, Conference and Banqueting, and Meeting and Events. Since implementing the Guestline Direct Booking Manager, about 50% of all our hotel bookings, and all of our self-catering online comes through the DBM.

Dan Visser
Sales and
Marketing
Director at the
Langdale Estate

Live with Guestline

Hotel Brooklyn - Leicester UK - 191 rooms

Located beside Welford Road Stadium - home of the famous Leicester Tigers Rugby Team.

Ambassador Hotel - Bangkok Thailand - 760 rooms

The Ambassador Hotel Bangkok is a 4-star hotel located in the heart of Bangkok and surrounded by a wealth of shops and with easy access to the city's transportation. Ideal base for exploring the city and discover the exotic delights of this bustling metropolis or when travelling for business.

The Cube Hotel - Birmingham UK - 52 rooms

Reflecting Birmingham's history as a cradle of invention, the Cube Hotel, Birmingham welcomes its guests with sleek styling and handcrafted furniture. They can kick back in indulgent bathrooms or enjoy a cocktail in the rooftop bar.

The Telegraph Hotel - Coventry UK - 88 rooms

Coventry's first boutique hotel is located in the former premises of the Coventry Evening Telegraph newspaper. The hotel invokes the famed mid-century architecture of the city, and reflects the building's former life as a thriving newspaper and print works.

Lakeside Hotel - Lake Windermere UK - 75 rooms

The hotel rests exclusively on the southern shore of Lake Windermere - part of the Lake District World Heritage site - in the most beautiful corner of England.

No 131 The Promenade - Cheltenham UK - 36 rooms

Traditional Georgian architecture combined with eclectic modern design, delicious all-day and signature dining with 131 Terrace and Japanese sushi restaurant YOKU. Not forgetting one of the very best late-night bars in town, Gin & Juice, voted best, Gin Bar in the UK 2022.

People in the Spotlight
Pawel Lubarski
SENIOR DEVELOPER

We speak to Pawel Lubarski, Senior Developer, about life at Guestline

Guestline has always taken pride in its cutting-edge approach to technology, with a focus on continual improvement in response to customer feedback. Key to making this happen is our development team, a team of over 60 people, focused on building innovation into our product suite. We recently took time out to catch up with Pawel Lubarski, Senior Developer, to find out more about life at Guestline.

So, Pawel, why did you decide to become a developer?

I always enjoyed maths at school so engineering and programming appealed to me, I knew it would open the door to lots of career opportunities. I have also always loved problem solving. As a child at school, I was always the magician in roleplays and a programmer was the closest thing to being a magician in real life so it all made sense!

How long have you worked for Guestline?

Just over three years. Throughout my career, I have worked in very innovative environments and Guestline is no exception. I started my career working as a programmer for a drone company. I then worked for a global company on payment systems designed to reduce corruption in developing countries. In between all this, I launched my own start up. I love working in creative, pioneering areas with cutting edge technology.

What attracted you to Guestline?

I loved the company culture. I could see it was innovative with a startup mentality, fast paced, and with an international mindset! It has the stability of a long-established company without the bureaucracy that you usually get. It's dynamic and flexible, which I love.

Guestline own their products so working as a developer for a company like Guestline means we have a say in the development and functionality of the product, which for me is very important.

So Pawel, what's your role?

I am the Technical Team Lead for the Payment Team working on the 'GuestPay' product. We are responsible for building a unified platform for payments within the company. Previously each Guestline product had their own payment program. Now we have a centralised payment team and provide an interface for our various products, but all the processing is handled by our team. I manage a team of 7 but this can vary.

What's your typical day like?

We start the day with a daily stand-up to update one another as to what we are working on or any changes in work schedules. As the team manager, I also have a number of meetings with both my team to support them, and other areas of the business we are working with. The rest of the time, I am working on developing and programming, looking to build technical solutions!

„I love the 'end to end' culture where, as a Developer, we own our product"

What's your favourite part of the role?

I love how dynamic the role is, and how much variety there is. So many challenges and so many opportunities to advance my knowledge. Also, given the nature of the role, there are times when I have to draw on my crisis management skills. Fortunately, not too frequently, but I enjoy coming together with my team to solve problems under pressure.

What have you learnt while in the role?

In addition to managing a team remotely, we operate a policy of continual improvement. We are constantly reflecting on what has gone well, and what we could have done better. This means we are constantly learning and developing both our approach, and our skillset.

Has the pandemic changed your role?

Not so much in terms of how we work, but as many hotels were closed, it gave us an opportunity to review our products and make improvements and upgrades to functionality. We also used the opportunity to look at new products in response to the pandemic such as GuestStay, our contactless check-in and check-out product, which has been very well received by hotels.

What would you recommend for someone who is looking to Guestline for a career as a developer?

Apply! There are great opportunities for learning and development. The Development Team is very advanced, not only in our approach to development but also our DevOps culture. Our infrastructure, customer delivery, and feedback process is forward thinking making for a very progressive environment to work in. Also, location is no barrier with many of the team working remotely and overseas.

What do you enjoy about working for Guestline?

I love the 'end to end' culture where, as a Developer, we own our product, we don't just get involved in the development phase. We are involved in all stages of the process – from speaking to customers when drafting specifications to better understand their requirements, to development of the solution, and then maintaining the product and adapting it in response to feedback and for different markets and workflows. This complete involvement in the product lifecycle is something we encourage with all our developers, so they feel connected to the product and invested in what we are looking to achieve.

What would you be doing if you weren't working as a developer?

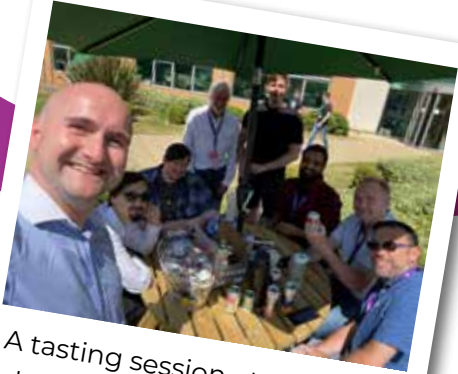Probably a doctor ...or something to do with the stock exchange!

Okay – quick fire. Three words to summarise working for Guestline
Bold. Innovative. Supportive.
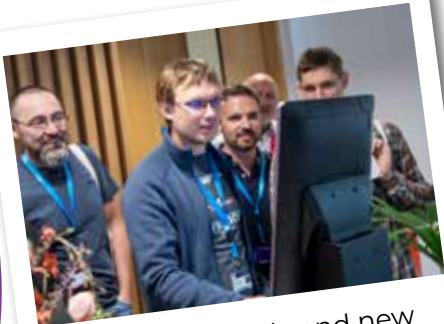
Scan to read full story

Out of office

A tasting session at Guestline head offices in Shrewsbury

Tharin Sethi, Business Development Director APAC sharing valuable insight into one of Guestline's most accelerated markets for growth!

The team getting together for a whole company day 2022!

Trying out our brand new products before they are launched!

Andrew Williams, Guestline Director joins Trust Payments for The Tour De Trust cycling from London to Paris for a total of 276 miles over four days

Dragon Boat Race in Shrewsbury raising money for Severn Hospice

Our vacancies
Join our team

DEVELOPMENT

.NET DEVELOPER	POZNAN
FRONT END DEVELOPER	POZNAN
FRONT END DEVELOPER	LONDON, CITY OF
FRONT END DEVELOPER	BAVARIA
FULL STACK DEVELOPER	LONDON, CITY OF
FULL STACK DEVELOPER	POZNAN
JUNIOR .NET DEVELOPER	POZNAN
SENIOR FRONT END DEVELOPER	POZNAN
SENIOR SOFTWARE ENGINEER	POZNAN
SOFTWARE ENGINEER	LONDON, CITY OF

IMPLEMENTATION

HOTEL SYSTEMS TRAINER	AMSTERDAM, NOORD-HOLLAND
HOTEL SYSTEMS TRAINER	THE HAGUE, SOUTH HOLLAND

IT

IT HELPDESK ANALYST	POZNAN

IMPLEMENTATION

DIGITAL PRODUCT DESIGNER	MÜNCHEN,
DIGITAL PRODUCT DESIGNER	POZNAN
DIGITAL PRODUCT DESIGNER	BIRMINGHAM, WEST MIDLANDS

SALES THAILAND

SENIOR BUSINESS DEVELOPMENT MANAGER	LUMPINI, PATHUWAN

SUPPORT

APPLICATION SUPPORT SPECIALIST	MANCHESTER
APPLICATION SUPPORT SPECIALIST	BIRMINGHAM, WEST MIDLANDS
APPLICATION SUPPORT SPECIALIST	POZNAN
APPLICATION SUPPORT SPECIALIST	TELFORD, SHROPSHIRE
HOTEL SYSTEMS SUPPORT	LUMPINI, PATHUWAN
HOTEL SYSTEMS SUPPORT	BIRMINGHAM, WEST MIDLANDS
HOTEL SYSTEMS SUPPORT	TELFORD, SHROPSHIRE

Take a look at our current vacancies

Make the Guest Journey as seamless as possible with

Guestline Self-Service Kiosks

EXPRESS CHECK-IN FOR MORE GUESTTIME

TRY OUT THE NEW CHECK-IN KIOSK

Check-in

Digital pre-arrival registrations

Key-card cutting

Upselling (coming soon)

Payment

Check-out

Save time

- Reduce or eliminate friction during check-in and check-out by emprowering guests to perform the tasks themselves
- Solve queuing frustration, improve guest satisfaction, free-up staff to delight guests more

Maximise efficiency

- As part of the GuestStay flow, guests can enjoy express check-in by already completing details before they arrive

Find out more:
www.guestline.com/check-in-kiosks

Optimise costs

- The Kiosks are connected to the core PMS, meaning all data and check-ins are performed live - no 3rd party integrations