BEST PRACTICE GUIDE

Forging supportive hospitality technology partnerships
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Our current era in hospitality demands scalability and a capacity to adapt to sudden change. Recent extraordinary conditions have forced hospitality organizations to quickly gain a sense of unity and focus, gather expertise, and keep measurable outcomes in frame to meet new challenges. Technology continues to play a huge role in these efforts. Yet as we’ve learned, technology is only one factor in the journey your business will take as the decade progresses and as culture and world events shape the course of the hospitality industry.

Forming cohesive technology partnerships has always been a foundational business principle to create success in any era, especially as paradigms shift and times change. The right ones at the right times help your business stay strong and stay on course toward where you know you need to be. Asking the right questions as early as possible is a good start.

How do you ensure that the partnerships you create will truly serve you as your business continues to grow and change? What are some proactive steps you can take to guide your decision-making process? This best practice guide will help you frame that journey toward more supportive and mutually beneficial technology partnerships.

Part 1
Definitions

Let’s start with an essential question; how do you define a supportive partnership? What are the essential factors that bring clarity for you? When seeking out new technology partners, sometimes the best approach before making a shortlist is to determine what matters to your organization. What is it that you’re seeking to be as a brand, beyond given revenue and profitability goals? Who are you as a culture?
To outline those questions, here’s a framework to consider as to what elements will bring some clarity to this initial part of your process to find the right technology partner.

**Delineate your values**

Knowing who you are and what you stand for as a company is vital to success in every area of your business. This can be useful in creating mission statements and brand approaches. Determining identity is also instrumental in aligning your teams when you set out to build practical strategies.

First, consider the kinds of words, phrases, and ideas that best describe the core values of your organization. What do your current customers say about you? What do your staff think of you? What principles help you create and nurture your culture? What do you want to be as an organization and what’s missing?

Before you can outline what a supportive technology partner looks like for you, these questions will help you define what support means when meeting your goals on your own; creating superlative guest experiences, empowering happy employees, and unifying efficient operations across a whole organization. Establishing your identity independently will help you to match your values to those prospective partners and help you to reduce the noise as you find the right ones.

**Designate your internal experts**

After you’ve defined your values as a company and the goals that come out of them, it’s time consider the diverse and valuable points of view from experts in your organization that drive tactics and strategies. The inclusion of varying points of view from a wide scope of departments, disciplines, life experiences, and backgrounds will matter here. From revenue management to business development to IT and beyond, these internal experts will help you paint a clearer picture of what you’re trying to accomplish.

Through the lens of these internal experts across a spectrum of skills and experience, you’ll get a better sense of which goals and directions are achievable and make the most sense. This is also a good area to put those values and culture points into play in a practical way. If you value innovation and collaboration, gathering a diverse team and examining present state with future state in mind is a great way to put your values to work for you. From there, it becomes much easier to create a SWOT (strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, threats) analysis from as many expert points of view as possible, and to develop a list of must-wins. So does setting the tone when it’s time to seek out external partners.

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If you know who you are, what you’re trying to do, and have a sense of scale around how to get to where you want to go, the parameters for choosing a supportive technology partner to help will be a lot easier to establish.
Describe your business objectives

Where do you want to be in a year? What about five years from now? What is the scope of your strategy to achieve your goals? Will you focus on winning a new market, expanding into a new region, or on changing the nature of a guest journey according to emerging cultural and technology trends? It’s important to be specific. From there, you’ll create a more considered and focused roadmap.

With your objectives as well-defined as your company values, it will be easier to filter out distractions. You’ll be in a better position to judge the newest and shiniest technology solutions vaunted in the industry magazines, pitched in vendor webinars, and seen on the trade show floor. Investing in technology and the partners who offer it becomes a lot less noisy.

Clarity on what success looks like as a first step will serve you well. If you know who you are, what you’re trying to do, and have a sense of scale around how to get to where you want to go, the parameters for choosing a supportive technology partner to help will be a lot easier to establish.

Part 2
Engagement

You’ve clearly defined your company values and identity. After that, you’ve established a diverse team of people to put those values into practice when it comes to mapping out a direction. And you’ve decided upon some measurable objectives and a clear definition of what success looks like for your organization. Perhaps during that process, you even identified gaps in how well the organization is able to meet its challenges.

Now, it’s time to consider a technology partner and new solutions to help meet those objectives. How do you do that? Here are some thought-provoking questions to mull over as you review your list for possible partners and engage with them.

The smartest 7 ways to approach a digital transformation process with a tech partner

Digital transformation is more important than ever to navigate the present and anticipate the future. Here are some approaches to help you begin the process in a proactive manner.

1. Understand the advantages of SaaS: instant updates, less maintenance, and lower overhead for starters.
2. Consider the scalability of cloud-based solutions vs on-premises.
3. Pinpoint current elements—solutions, approaches, processes, attitudes—that need to be replaced in favor of newer and more agile options.
4. Examine how a digital transformation process informs your technology roadmap and to what extent.
5. Identify the implications of a digital transformation process across the entire organization and how they relate to your business objectives.
6. Establish the key players in your organization. Always bring them to the decision-making table.
7. Make every technology decision with a competitive advantage and material outcome in mind.

Do they get you?

When you’re working with people, it’s important that you are simpatico with them. If you invested time in the process of examining what’s the most important to you in terms of your values and your goals as a business, finding out whether a prospective partner gets you is much easier. What are other ways you can know?

- A common vocabulary around key industry concepts is one of the signs that two parties are likely to connect over the long-term. A shared lexicon reflects an equally common purpose.
Ask yourselves this when reviewing RFPs and presentations; is the prospect able to express their capabilities in terms of what you need as their potential partner, or are they mostly flooding you with product features and the pedigree of their brand? Beyond that, what’s their vision of the future when it comes to technology, culture, and the hospitality industry? Do you see the merits of that vision? Do you share it? Most importantly, does the prospective technology partner speak to you about value-add to the guest experience, employee empowerment, brand building, or any other of the objectives you’ve identified? Do they apply what they’re selling to real-world challenges that are relevant to your goals? When it comes business objectives, the best prospects are the ones that specifically match what you’ve laid out to the greatest degree of alignment.

Do they speak your language?
Language is another important aspect of your prospective technology partner getting you. A common vocabulary around key industry concepts is one of the signs that two parties are likely to connect over the long-term. A shared lexicon reflects an equally common purpose.

Do they inspire you?
Another sign that a prospective technology partner is going to be supportive is their ability to inspire you and your teams. This isn’t about pitches and promises. The kind of inspiration to look for grows from their willingness to collaborate with you, adjust to meet your needs, and in so doing giving you a new perspective on your own objectives.

When you’re exchanging ideas, discussing your goals, outlining your vision, do they help you focus on what you’re trying to do? Do they describe how their own technology solutions meet those goals, or even more importantly, do they see a way to adapt their offering in a realistic way, adding features, and rolling out new functionality in response to your conversations? Can they explain the practical process to make it happen within measurable timelines?

As in all healthy partnerships of course, inspiration should flow both ways. A supportive environment between provider and customer thrives when the results of your interactions help to move you closer toward your shared objectives. This is what helps to make the hospitality industry better for everyone—when business needs drive technology development, and then circle back into benefits for guests, employees, and brands alike.

Here are some examples. When you’re in talks with prospective partners, do you find yourself having to explain your goals in too much detail? Do you have to unpack too many statements when you’re outlining what success looks like for you? Do they stay focused on what you’re saying about your business goals without veering off track with unrelated product features and benefits? Do they ask you questions that match and further your story?

When it comes to supportive partnerships, clear and concise communications are paramount to success at every stage. Assessing the quality of the communication early on when you’re shortlisting prospective technology partnerships (or reassessing existing ones) is an essential aspect to making sure that you’ll gain the support you need later when new technology is in place.
Part 3
Enhancement

A healthy partnership that’s marked by constructive dialogue is a sure sign that a technology provider is going to support your organization long-term. Yet what does that support look like day to day? Who benefits from the collaboration with your chosen technology partners?

Let’s look at three areas that help illustrate how healthy partnerships can improve your business, remove barriers to success, and what you could accomplish because of them.

Your guests

Talking about how a dedicated focus on the guest experience is the cornerstone of the hospitality industry is a well-worn tale. That’s for good reason. Service is the core of every business in the hospitality spectrum; provide guests what they want in the way that they want it. With that well understood, how do your technology partnerships help you to meet this central mission?

Putting yourself in your guest’s shoes, how do partnerships with your chosen hospitality technology providers make the journey better for them? Are guests empowered to engage with your brand and your locations to use web-based functions and mobility to get what they want? Is the experience intuitive, continuous, and friction-free? Is it easier for them to get personalized services, adapting their experience to their needs and supported by your employees, processes, and systems? What kind of feedback are you getting from guests and how easy is it to respond?

Your technology partnerships should help make all the above easier for your guests. And that should translate into better relationships with your ideal guests to keep them coming back to your locations.

Your employees

Your people comprise another essential group to consider in determining how successful and supportive your technology partnerships are. This includes teams at every level, from individual locations to those at head offices. Your employees make your brand what it is, and teams are often the primary users of the technology in which you’ve invested. Supportive partnerships should allow all your employees to do their jobs with greater efficiency, less stress, and with a better view on how their efforts help realize your overarching business goals.

A healthy technology partnership should keep your employees in mind in terms of product development and features. Keep user interface design, robust and detailed reporting capabilities, data access and analytics, and vital integrations between systems and applications that connect all aspects of doing business in real time across the whole organization at the center of all your conversations.

The 4 ways that cloud solutions for the web and mobile boost your business.

Creating a cloud technology platform that supports web-based UI and mobile is an integral part of a digital transformation journey. Here are the advantages.

1. Allows guests and employees alike to access services and information from across all their devices wherever they are.
2. Offers intuitive experiences on a single platform without app downloads or individual licensing.
3. Grants a wider and more inclusive view of the whole organization for analysis, reporting capabilities, and data-driven strategy within a common environment.
4. Centralizes maintenance, updates, integrations, and security managed by SaaS provider, not by individual locations.

Your employees make your brand what it is, and teams are often the primary users of the technology in which you’ve invested. Supportive partnerships should allow all your employees to do their jobs with greater efficiency, less stress, and with a better view on how their efforts help realize your overarching business goals.
Just like valuing the needs and sensibilities of your guests, your technology and those you partner with to implement it should also enhance the working life of your teams. The resulting benefits should enrich their work and environment. An empowered workforce strengthens your organization for the long term.

Your brand
Just as you’ve worked to enhance conditions for workers and guests, keeping your organization’s identity, values, and focused and specific business objectives in mind when engaging with technology partners should always be in frame. Ultimately, any partnership you enter should achieve the goals you’ve set at the very beginning and be scalable for the next phase, whatever that happens to be.

Do you see a progression from what your brand promised and delivered before the partnership to now? What are the main indicators of that? What are some of the signs that you’re gaining a competitive advantage relative to how the industry is changing? How has your dialogue with your teams, your technology partners, and your guests changed to anticipate the next stage in the life of your organization?

When you take the temperature of where you are and where you’re going as a business, do you feel confident about it? That’s the bottom line for what a supportive technology partnership should deliver.

Confidence and trust between partners
Confidence that’s born from trust is the most powerful outcome of any technology partnership. Everyone involved at the start of any partnership decision—business leaders, technology experts, financial decision-makers—should all agree the organization is headed in the right direction with the right partner.

Staff on every level from there should feel their efforts have an impact on the outcome to serve specific business goals as supported by technology. And the guest should feel confident that their expectations are going to be met, if not frequently exceeded, as they engage with the brand. That’s how you know your partnership is successful.

The variable nature of the hospitality industry connects with emerging technology and cultural trends like a mobius strip that drives change even more. Forge ahead, knowing that your organization will be supported by empathy, expertise, and engagement in continuous alignment to your business goals with solid partnership. This will help you keep your eye on a successful horizon as the present slips into the future.

Let’s talk
Thanks for downloading and reading this guide. We hope it’s been helpful.

We at Infor want to know more about your story. Where have you found success implementing technology and establishing partnerships to enhance your business? What’s worked well? What would you have done differently? What’s your next big step?

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