

today's hotelier

FEBRUARY 2023 | todayshotelier.com

Official Publication of AAHOA

THE TECHNOLOGY ISSUE

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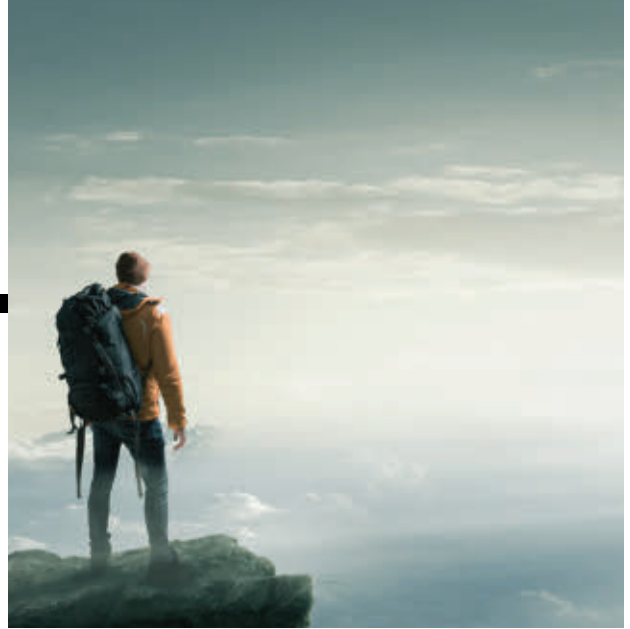
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Today's Hotelier (ISSN 24174062), volume 23, issue 2, is published monthly by Naylor Association Solutions, for AAHOA, 1100 Abernathy Road, Suite 725, Atlanta, GA 30328. Periodicals postage paid at Gainesville, Florida, and at additional mailing offices. Postmaster: Send address changes to Today's Hotelier, 11350 McCormick Rd #1000, Hunt Valley, MD 21031.

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Today's Hotelier
is the official monthly
publication of AAHOA
1100 Abernathy Road, Suite 725
Atlanta, GA 30328
P: (404) 816-5759
info@aahoa.com
www.aahoa.com

AAHOA STAFF CONTRIBUTORS
Laura Lee Blake Esq., President & CEO
Heather Carnes,
EVP, Communications, and Chief Strategy Officer
Sean Grossnickle, Government Affairs Senior Manager
Dean Heyl, SVP, Government Affairs
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Today's Hotelier
is published by
NAYLOR
ASSOCIATION SOLUTIONS
550 SW 2nd Avenue
Gainesville, FL 32601
T: (800) 369-6220
www.naylor.com
todayshotelier@naylor.com

NAYLOR STAFF CONTRIBUTORS
24-7creative, Layout & Design
Alexandra Lewis, Project Administrator
Carter Davis, Managing Editor
David Freeman, Account Manager
Kira Krewson, Project Manager
Chris Zabel, Advertising Director
Shane Holt and Norma Walchuk, Advertising Associates



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PUBLISHED FEBRUARY 2023/AAHOM0223/6801

5 Things to Know About AAHOA This Month

1. HAPPY BLACK HISTORY MONTH!

AAHOA doesn't take for granted the opportunity to continue to be a part of the work to help minority entrepreneurs and small business owners succeed. Over the years, AAHOA has been honored to partner with organizations like the National Association of Black Hotel Owners, Operators, & Developers to advocate for minority hotel ownership and development. On Black History Month, AAHOA celebrates the contributions of Black entrepreneurs in hospitality and across the U.S.



2. NOMINATE AN OUTSTANDING AAHOA MEMBER.

Each year, AAHOA honors hoteliers for their contributions to hospitality, and the challenges of the past year have indeed revealed greatness. Do you know a hotelier who has gone above and beyond in their efforts? Nominate him or her for one of seven awards to be bestowed at AAHOACON23, April 11-14 in Los Angeles, CA. The deadline to nominate is Friday, February 10, 2023. Please note that you do not have to be an AAHOA Member to submit a nomination, but you must be an AAHOA Member to receive an award. Submit your nomination today. AAHOA.com/Awards



3. THE 2023 REGIONAL SEASON IS HERE.

The 2023 Regional Conferences & Trade Show season kicks off on February 9, 2023, in Memphis. The Tri-State Regional Conference & Trade Show will bring hoteliers from the Arkansas Region, Gulf Region, and Mid South Region for an unparalleled industry experience! Join us. AAHOA.com/Regionals



4. AAHOACON23 IS JUST AROUND THE CORNER.

Do you want to spark conversations with numerous hospitality professionals in one place? Are you ready to find the latest products or services at the best price to improve the guest experience? You can achieve this and so much more at AAHOACON23. For more information and to register, visit AAHOACON.com.



5. ARE YOU READY TO SERVE AS AN AAHOA BOARD MEMBER?

If you're interested in becoming an elected member of the 2023-24 Board of Directors and serving America's hotel owners, then consider applying for one of the 10 open Board positions. **The 2023-24 AAHOA Board of Directors candidate nomination period ends on Monday, February 13, 2023.** Don't delay, apply today. AAHOA.com/Candidates





**NISHANT (NEAL) PATEL,
CEO, CHIA**
AAHOA CHAIRMAN (2022-2023)

“

Whether it's the technology itself or the data we're able to capture thanks to improved technology and connectivity, the world has changed. As entrepreneurs, it's up to us to lead the charge.”

The future is now

IT'S NO SECRET THAT TECHNOLOGY CAN ENHANCE THE GUEST EXPERIENCE IN HOTELS.

As hoteliers, we're always trying to improve the guest experience and, with the right technology, we're able to streamline many processes while running a successful hotel.

Labor shortages are a huge problem across many industries, and enabling automation helps make running a business easier, without compromising customers' experiences during these difficult times.

On top of this, we're able to cut costs and maintain, or even increase, revenue – helping our bottom line while keeping our customers satisfied and coming back.

I foresee a fully contactless check-in process across the board in the near future, and simple transactions also will become a fully automated process. Rooms might be cleaned with robots. Keyless check-in will become the norm.

The idea is not to replace workers but actually support them. Whether it's the technology itself or the data we're able to capture thanks to improved technology and connectivity, the world has changed. As entrepreneurs, it's up to us to lead the charge.

With staffing shortages already putting more stress on the employees who are showing up each day, technology can allow those workers to focus their energy elsewhere – helping boost productivity and simplifying hotel operations.

I helped my parents at a young age with their hotel properties thanks to technology. When I look back to those days, the technology we used seems so basic now. But at the time, it was a big deal. And, it worked.

In 10 years, we'll look back and wonder how we ever survived without the technology we'll be using then. It is constantly changing and improving, and if we don't evolve with the times, we will be left behind. That's a fact.

If you're worried that technology will take over human-to-human interaction – the heart of what the hospitality industry is all about – it's just not true.

Think about your everyday life. How often are you on your phone, computer, watching TV, or using some other device? It's probably a lot. People often prefer the option of using what's at their fingertips.

In the event that guests do want to interact with a person, rather than use technology, that alternative isn't only still available, but technology will also allow those people to be more accessible, thanks to having options.

And, the data collected by the increased use of the latest technology will allow us to run better properties, be better employers, exceed guest expectations, and become more savvy business owners.

Data is extremely valuable and we can use it to our advantage. By gathering this type of information, we can predict future trends, gain insight into our customers' behaviors and habits, identify areas of improvement, and assist us when it comes to exploring future opportunities.

All of this together will only help improve business outcomes.

Having certain technology available at your hotels, or any business, isn't only becoming essential but, eventually, it will become a requisite for many guests when determining where to spend their money. ■



LAURA LEE BLAKE, ESQ.
PRESIDENT & CEO

“
With our industry continuing to build a post-pandemic workforce, new technologies can help fill the gap while allocating resources on the things guests notice most.”

Embracing technology to move our industry forward

IN RECENT YEARS, INNOVATIVE TECHNOLOGIES HAVE CHANGED HOW WE HAIL A CAB, how we shop, and how we communicate with friends and family. With their proud heritage dating back centuries, hotels, motels, and inns have not been immune to this phenomenon. Long gone are the days of telephoning a motel as the only way to reserve a room, using a large metal key to open a hotel room door, and physically getting up to change the channels on a large box TV in the guest room.

At AAHOA, we welcome and embrace new technologies that service our guests. Our members have been at the forefront of adopting new tools to enhance guest experiences, from online apps to streamline booking processes to automated processes that efficiently clean rooms. As an organization, AAHOA has pioneered improvements such as developing our own new association management software, launching a new website, and coming soon, a brand-new AAHOA native app.

Just as COVID-19 changed how people work and meet with one another, it will have an enduring impact on the hospitality industry. While hotel and motel guests continue to appreciate the value of personal service, they are not always looking for hands-on involvement at every stage. Hotel owners are experimenting with creative approaches that automate some processes – like hosted kiosk guest check-ins and room cleaning – while ensuring that friendly and knowledgeable staff are on hand to provide top-notch service. With our industry continuing to build a post-pandemic workforce, new technologies can help fill the gap while allocating resources on the things guests notice most.

In this spirit of future innovation, AAHOA is proud to showcase the best ideas that hospitality-focused tech companies will share on the industry's biggest stage at the 2023 AAHOA Convention & Trade Show in Los Angeles, April 11-14. The largest AAHOACON in our organization's history is not only the premier event of the hospitality industry, it is a high-energy trade show for the leading vendors to demonstrate their wares to thousands of hotel owners from around the country who will be making decisions and cultivating deals for the best products and services for their hotels for the upcoming years.

Significantly, AAHOACON is also where AAHOA brings the latest innovations directly to hotel owners and gives tech companies a platform to share how they help hoteliers improve the bottom line. And, for the second time, AAHOA will be hosting our wildly popular “Tech Pitch Competition,” where a panel of esteemed judges with expertise in technology and hospitality will choose the premiere innovative proposal from among several contestants. To date, more than 20 companies have applied for this exciting and cutting-edge competition, and the results are sure to dazzle and amaze attendees. The competition is designed to help identify and elevate companies with ingenious ideas and products that will help the hospitality industry as it adjusts to a post-COVID reality.

Ultimately, it is not about implementing new technologies for their own sake; it is about using technology to help deliver top-notch service to our guests. The future is bright, and AAHOA is again breaking new ground to illuminate inventive ideas for a bold path forward. ■

Get yourself *connected*

Examining the benefits of implementing technology-based solutions

by NUPEN PATEL

YOU DON'T HAVE TO LOOK very hard to see the far-reaching impacts that technology has had on the hospitality industry. On the whole, operations are easier, safer, and more efficient thanks in large part to technological innovations that continue to propel the industry forward.

Thanks to new innovations, every process at a hotel – including organization, coordination, communication, and implementation – is being automated at a dizzying pace. This includes relatively simple back-of-house tasks like workforce scheduling as well as high-stakes guest-facing touch points like the check-in process – all of which are being implemented with the big-picture goals of improving staff services and communication. These solutions create opportunities for greater guest satisfaction and improved employee morale.

For example, some properties are now utilizing digital tipping – also commonly referred to as mobile tipping – which allows guests to leave a tip for hotel staff members using their personal mobile devices. The tips are collected and distributed to the staff members through a secure digital platform. While this makes it easier for guests to tip the staffers, it also increases worker satisfaction because the increased options for tipping make it more likely they'll get tipped in the first place.

However, despite this progress and the promise of continued evolution in this space, there remain some holdouts who aren't comfortable using anything more sophisticated than a calculator and a spreadsheet. While it might be tempting to try and run a property using the simplest methods possible, in the long run, this head-in-the-sand approach to new tech is going to leave those reluctant souls far behind their competitors.

Take, for example, a hotel using a traditional PMS. This property is operating at an enormous disadvantage when compared to a competitor that's using smart technology like a cloud-based PMS that automates their entire hotel operations. The latter property is enjoying greater operational efficiency, which then allows the staff to focus on those matters that a computer-based solution cannot.

PEDAL TO THE METAL

During the pandemic, the hotel industry experienced a seismic shift from “zero vacancy” to “zero occupancy.” As a result, COVID-19 only sped up the already-accelerated rate of industry-wide tech-adoption. While some of this continued growth can be attributed to the natural evolution of the industry, many of these new solutions were born out of immediate necessity. Take, for instance, smart services like self check-in and contactless service, though

once considered unnecessary add-ons, these became crucial offerings in the post-pandemic world. The health and safety risks of the virus, combined with travel restrictions and the economic downturn, have forced every hotelier into one of two realities: inaction and possible bankruptcy or immediate action and continued growth opportunities. Those who have been making aggressive investments and leveraging new technologies to improve and elevate their guest offerings are now in the best position to survive in this post-pandemic environment.

IT'S GO TIME

Though it can be tempting to use periods of industry unrest to sit and wait, these are often the best times in which to assess current operations and identify areas where improvement is desperately needed. Put another way, there is untold potential for growth in every setback, and the hoteliers who used the pandemic as an opportunity to evaluate their operations with an eye to the future are reaping the benefits of that foresight now while the hoteliers who sat on the sideline and waited for more certain economic conditions to return are playing catch-up.

And, if you're somehow still considering technology in the industry as a passing fad, consider that the global smart hospitality industry is expected to be worth nearly

“

There is untold potential for growth in every setback, and the hoteliers who used the pandemic as an opportunity to evaluate their operations with an eye to the future are reaping the benefits of that foresight now while the hoteliers who sat on the sideline and waited for more certain economic conditions to return are playing catch-up.”

\$50 billion by 2027 at a compound annual growth rate of 29.8% during the next four years. In layman’s terms, this means you ain’t seen nothin’ yet with regards to new tech in hotels. From the moment a room is booked until the guest checks out, hospitality service providers can streamline the experience at every touchpoint, and the options for doing so are only getting more robust and easier to use.

Ultimately, the convergence of digital technologies like robots, connectivity solutions, and analytics is culminating into the development of an experience-driven, customer-first ecosystem, and this is being implemented at properties across the world, including at those run by your competition. ■


**Nupen Patel, Owner,
K & K Hotel Group**



Chart your course

Three waypoints to consider
when deciding what
hotel tech to implement

by ADAM and LARRY MOGELONSKY



AS IS NOTED MULTIPLE TIMES throughout this issue, technology is the only way forward for hotels. One way or another, every company will continue to innovate to increase team productivity or improve the guest experience. The problem, though, is that time is an exceedingly rare commodity.



During the past few years, every hotelier has been pressed to the wall. Frontline labor is hard to find and harder to maintain. Managers have limited bandwidth while also having to continually shift their focus amongst an ever-widening series of tasks. Executives are struggling to contend with an uncertain future as the world bounces from one crisis to another. And let's not forget how "The Great Resignation" has left a slew of vacancies in senior positions, hindering decision making. All the while, there are innumerable tech vendors, many with overlapping feature sets, vying for your eyes and ears, together creating a cacophony of digital noise.

This paints a picture of doom and gloom, but market forces at play indicate

the opposite to be true. The future of travel is bright, and the plethora of tech vendors at your disposal simply means there's now a solution for whatever problem you have. It's more a matter of defining your priorities as well as your process for evaluating the resolutions to those priorities.

Even as we navigate the unpredictable and seemingly exhausting landscape of possibilities hoping for budget dollars in 2023, there are nevertheless a handful of principles through which to ground your decision making when it comes to technology implementation.

To keep it concise, here are just three principles that have been applied time and again to any of our "Teams and Tech Audits" or any strategic consulting assignment we undertake. While we have developed these core tenets internally, they have also been shaped and reinforced from an interview with Anil Taneja, managing director of Palm Holdings, an owner and operator group with a diverse portfolio of 25 flagged and independent hotels in the United States, Canada, and the United Kingdom.



principle #1

YOUR TEAM ALWAYS COMES FIRST

For most organizations, whether in the hotel industry or not, the biggest obstacle often is churn. If you constantly have to recruit and train associates or bring new managers up to speed, you won't have time to innovate. Your company will be left spinning, which often leads to a positive feedback loop – overworked and stressed-out teams resulting in even more turnover. This problem also seeps into the IT department where, nowadays, a single team member quitting can delay a full quarter of rollouts.

Hence, you need to fight for your people. Technology can profoundly help in this regard by helping digitalize the repetitive, interruptive, boring, time-consuming, and demoralizing aspects of the job. But, make no mistake, automation doesn't allow you to replace team members with artificial intelligence; it lets you redirect your managers and staff toward more complex tasks and the meaningful work that will keep them engaged.

On this note, Taneja added, “Any technology is as good as the user. We need to make sure our team believes and is capable of using it. The training, follow up, and the user are even more important than the technology itself.”

Innovation with the goal of increasing team retention isn't just for the realm of tech, though. You need good policies in place that create a work environment where people actually want to stick around. Don't think about corporate culture so much as corporate community. Start with good staff meals, since those who eat together stay together. How do you celebrate your team as well as their personal milestones? Do you organize team-building offsite? Are you innovating in the area of employee mental health – a consequence of the pandemic that's just now receiving widespread awareness? How are you helping improve your team's physical health, even if it's something as simple as weekly stretching classes?

Whether or not it expressly involves tech, anything and everything must be considered so you aren't constantly playing catch-up.

“

Hospitality's labor pool will continue to decrease at a faster pace than other industries until we involve our front of the line in more decisions. We have to compete with other industries when it comes to empowering and growing our teams, which is something the hotel industry has always fallen behind in.”

GOLDEN DAYZ/SHUTTERSTOCK.COM

principle #2

DEEPEN EXISTING RELATIONSHIPS WHEREVER POSSIBLE

Having overseen several PMS migrations through our tech consulting assignments for hotels, we can tell you that any large-scale hardware or core software changeover is as difficult as passing a kidney stone. It takes months to evaluate, an equal time to execute, then even more to bring your teams fully up to speed. All told, when you factor in the opportunity costs of lost time, it often isn't worth it.

Moreover, you have two other time-related factors when considering anything new. The first is the strain on your IT team. Every tech vendor has an open API (application programming interface) and can provide an SDK (software development kit) for coding that connection, but this still means that someone on the hotel side is required to block off a half-day chunk, or longer, to complete the work. If your IT professionals are already stretched thin by having to maintain existing systems, this project will lag and you won't have the necessary data connections to make it all seamless.

Secondly is the problem of what we call “zombie platforms.” These are pieces of software that are purchased and onboarded but then no one on your team has time to use on a daily basis because they already have a dozen other windows to look at while at their terminal. As a sidenote, humans are inherently horrible at multitasking – that is, it's time-inefficient, not to mention stress-inducing.

These three issues mean your first move should be to look for ways to better use what you already have. Still, it would also help to establish a set of deal-breakers so you have a proverbial line in the sand for when you know it's time to move on, however painful that move may be.

For any migration, or when opting to deepen your utilization of any existing supplier's features, it's vital to look for vendors that can solve your most salient problems but then also have room to grow. For example, do they offer additional modules or tools that could be onboarded in subsequent business cycles to resolve other challenges you may be facing? Additionally, always look for companies with great technical support because, to restate the first principle, if the vendor is suffering from churn, you'll ultimately end up on the receiving end of their internal grief.

principle #3

LOOK FOR SOFT INNOVATIONS

The very word “innovation” insinuates some ephemeral vision of sweeping transformation and revolutionizing the way people interact. This is malarkey; it never works that way. Technology and process improvements in actuality occur on a gradual basis, rife with workarounds and tradeoffs.

In the moment, it can all feel as if things are progressing at a glacial pace, so it’s important to establish milestones and KPIs to reflect on what’s been done and where the goalpost has been moved. In its own right, the action of designing what to measure can help to focus your teams on what really matters.

This form of innovation isn’t “hard,” in that an executive can point to a specific new software tool or onsite device that’s been deployed. Rather, it’s “soft” because it pertains to the intangibles and to how your teams interact to push the needle forward. Frequently, the soft is more powerful than the hard.

“Labor today is smarter than ever before. They don’t want to process data; they want to influence data,” Taneja said. “They want to be empowered with information and be part of the hotel’s growth. Hospitality’s labor pool will continue to decrease at a faster pace than other industries until we involve our front of the line in more decisions. We have to compete with other industries when it comes to empowering and growing our teams, which is something the hotel industry has always fallen behind in.”

However, when involving front-line employees in decisions, it’s crucial to avoid groupthink within hotel organizations. Do you really need six managers to sit in on a meeting when the only ones talking are the two direct project leads? Moreover, does the meeting even need to happen when an email will suffice? For even more efficiency, why use an email thread when you can compartmentalize tasks and assignees on a collaboration platform like Slack or Asana?

This is all back-of-house time management, which then simultaneously ramps up team productivity and increases morale by reducing the stress of having to multitask across different systems or constantly being interrupted by ongoing email conversations. Next, apply this type of soft empowerment to your guest-facing policies and you undoubtedly will experience tremendous success with whatever tech path you chart in the year ahead.

ALL IN SERVICE TO THE STAKEHOLDERS

The common theme among the three principles discussed here is that no matter the technology being implemented, it always comes down to the people behind the scenes – both those who set up and onboard the tech as well as those using it on a daily basis. Moreover, to round out the whole pie of stakeholders, you must consider not only the IT department and your frontline teams but also any other B2B and B2C relationships that are impacted by technological developments.

Taneja said it best when he added, “At Palm Holdings, as we continue to grow and expand, our commitment remains unchanged. We seek to provide exceptional service to our customers and to value all stakeholders with our business. That commitment has led to us repeating business with everyone we work with. We want to foster all relationships and grow alongside our suppliers and customers. Our success is because of these relationships. They are the pillars holding us up every day through the hard times and the good times.” ■



Together, Adam and Larry Mogelonsky are the world’s most published hospitality writing team, with more than a decade’s worth of material online. As the partners of Hotel Mogel Consulting Ltd., Larry focuses on the hotel operations and marketing, while

Adam specializes in technology and wellness. Their experience encompasses properties around North America and Europe, with a focus on independent properties of all sizes. Their work includes seven books, the latest focused on increasing profits from wine sales in an environment of tight labor markets. You can reach them at adam@hotelmogel.com to discuss your business challenges or to book speaking engagements.

Dive in

Getting to the bottom of hotel tech –
from self-service to overall systems

by FIONA SOLTES

WHEN CLIENTS ASK veteran consultant John Burns what the hotel industry will be like in, say, five to eight years, the answer is an honest and quick “Who knows?”

Now is the time, said Burns, president of Hospitality Technology Consulting, for talking in units of months, rather than years, especially when it comes to technology. Sure, there’s an interest in strategic planning rather than tactical response. “But, the strategic vision is clouded by the fact that you’re trying to do long-term strategy in a fast-changing world.”

Across industries, businesses have spent the recent season in rapid iteration and creative solutioning. For hotels and hoteliers, that means attempting to respond to ever-evolving guest expectations and demands, and improving experiences while remaining competitive. Technologies aimed at reducing contact, eliminating friction, increasing efficiency, strengthening

hygiene, providing virtual reality insight, offering personalization, and making up for reduced staff have become increasingly popular. But, what do guests want to see long-term? How do hotels strike the right balance between high tech and personal touch? And when might it best to hold off rather than dive in?

With cloud-based systems, Burns said, new technologies may be more accessible and affordable than ever. “But, the ability to afford them is tempered by the fact that we don’t have as many staff members to install and operate them,” he said. “Every opportunity comes with a little bit of a dilemma.”

MUST-HAVE OR MAYBE NOT?

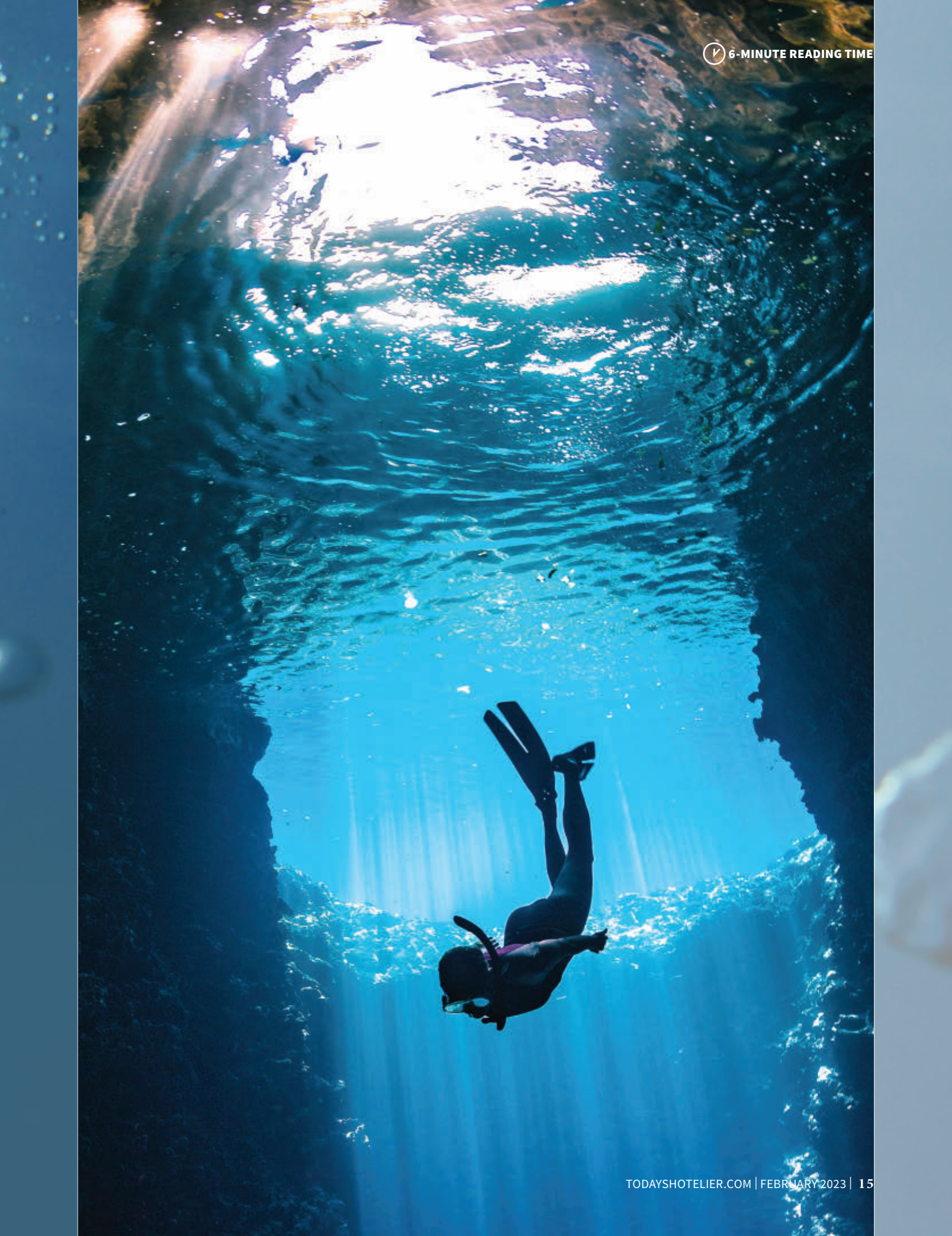
In 2022, Oracle Hospitality and Skift released “Hospitality in 2025: Automated, Intelligent... and More Personal,” a survey of more than 600 hoteliers and 5,000 consumers across the globe. The report admits that tech comes and goes, “and what’s trending and hot today may change by 2025.” But,

the revolution underway is about something bigger.

“Technology isn’t removing humanity from hospitality; it’s allowing hotels to become more hospitable in a holistic sense,” the report states. “That means guest personalization at every stage of the travel journey. It means changing labor models to attract and retain workers by giving them tools that align with their interests and capabilities. And, it means hoteliers are moving away from a one-size-fits-all approach to selling experiences and allowing travelers to choose the size that fits them.”

THE PEOPLE HAVE SPOKEN

In terms of must-have technologies, the report showed that 53.6% of travelers would like to see contactless check-in and checkout be permanently adopted during the next few years. Just under half (49.1%) cited contactless payments as a key offering they want. Other technologies they’d like to see continue to be offered include mobile



guest services (39.3%), work-from-anywhere hotel deals (27.1%), less-frequent room cleaning (17.1%), and work-from-hotel common spaces (16.4%).

As for hotel executives, 34.4% said they were already “heavily invested” in contactless self-service technology to reduce costs, assist guests, and increase operational efficiency. Another 26.6% were just beginning to invest, and still another 14.8% planned to do so within the next year.

Almost 45% of travelers responding to the survey listed on-demand entertainment access as the top must-have for an amazing hotel stay. That was followed by voice controls (43.2%), use of personal devices for hotel access (34.4%), automated comfort controls (25.4%), and smart mirrors/interactive walls to replace TVs (17.6%).

And, there’s evidence that hotel executives recognize these desires. The top-five technologies they’d be most likely to implement by 2025 are the same, though in slightly different order. On-demand entertainment access still tops the list at 45.1%, with guests using their personal devices for access at 41.1%.

DIGGING DEEPER

Meanwhile, the “2022 Hotelier Technology Sentiment Report,” from Stayntouch in partnership with graduate students at NYU School of Professional Studies Tisch Center of Hospitality, showed that the

number of popular hospitality technologies used by hotels increased 31% between the start of the pandemic and the end of 2021. That number was projected to increase by an additional 19% in 2022. Areas expecting growth include contactless experiences like self-service check-in, in-room technology, mobile keys, and digital payments – as well as additions to automation tools, guest messaging and, chatbots. Contactless check-in and check-out increased by 66% during the pandemic, according to the study, and guests expect to see this as an option, even if they don’t intend to use it. Offering this option allows guests to “choose what is appropriate for them.”

But, there’s a catch. According to the report, independent hotels often are more reluctant to implement new technologies than branded properties due to relatively high upfront investment costs, creating “a gap in the ability to deliver guest experiences and meet guest expectations.”

CONSIDERING THE BIGGER PICTURE

Mark Fancourt, founder and principal consultant of TRAVHOTECH, speaks of technology trends beyond self-service and mobility, encompassing overall business operations. He’s seen a recent increase in discussions around ancillary revenue. “There’s a visibility now into wanting to commerce all of the products and services

that a hotel might have to offer, as opposed to just the guest room,” he said. Too often, he added, these things aren’t offered to guests in a cohesive way, which “leaves a lot of money on the table for the industry.”

The industry’s technology has traditionally been siloed, Fancourt said, which exacerbates the problem, and bringing it together as “total commerce” also requires operational focus. For smaller hotels, this might not be as pressing. But the more services offered, the more imperative this becomes.

Coming from a business background, Fancourt said, he has interesting and enjoyable conversations with clients around the bigger picture of technology.

“If I had a dollar for every time someone said to me, ‘I need a new PMS,’ I’d be a very wealthy man,” he said. “But, what I always say to customers that I work with is, ‘Well, do you?’ Maybe you need to look at the way you want to be doing business, and the types of products and services you want to offer to both your customers and your staff. Then we can determine what technology you need. It might be a PMS. It might not be. Let’s find out.”

In general, Fancourt continued, “Our industry is about a very big basket of technologies coming together to deliver the overall experience.” The industry can be self-deprecating in terms of technology, he said, considering itself slow to adopt. “But, that’s not what I find. I’m often pleasantly surprised at the enthusiasm and willingness to try the new thing and to do the new things, and the internal belief of their capability to deliver and execute on it. It’s quite the opposite of what you hear in the mainstream industry-speak.”

When it comes to deciding on technology, Fancourt’s approach is nothing if not pragmatic. “My two key questions are this, he said. “What type of guest experience do you want to provide? And what type of staff experience do you want to provide?” Additionally, a third question that isn’t asked often enough, he said, is “How do I want to look at the future of my manpower models?” The future of technology will drive a whole set of workforce roles that currently can’t even be imagined. “What do you want your future job roles to look like, particularly when you’re challenged for willing employees?” he asked. “These things all drive the toolset.” ■

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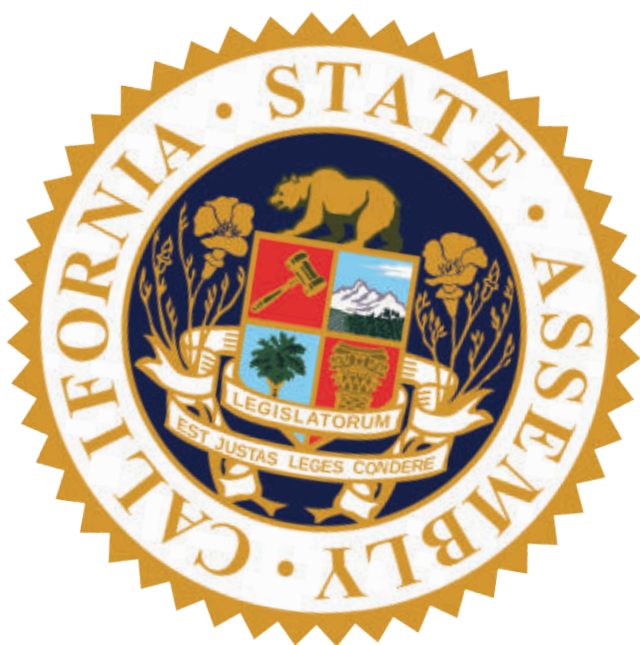
See how it works

Taking a closer look at legislation authored by California State Assemblymember Chris Holden and much more

Franchise-friendly

by KEITH MILLER

Each month, this special feature section explores AAHOA's advocacy efforts, while bringing attention to pro-industry voices, highlighting industry-specific legislation, recapping past AAHOA outreach events, and much more.



AN ONGOING EFFORT TO INTRODUCE

AAHOA Members to champions in government who are making efforts to protect the rights of franchise owners, this month we feature California Assemblymember Chris Holden (D-Pasadena). In 1970, California had the first state franchise law, the California Franchise Investment Law (CFIL), signed into law by then-Governor Ronald Reagan. A decade later, the California Franchise Relations Act (CFRA) followed. These laws remained largely unchanged until 2015, when AB-525, authored by Assemblymember Holden, was signed into law. Then, in 2022, Assemblymember Holden again authored a franchise bill, AB-676, which updated both the CFIL and the CFRA, was signed into law by Governor Newsom, and became effective January 1, 2023. This interview should give you a little more insight into Assemblymember Chris Holden, and why protecting franchisees is important to him.



California Assemblymember
Chris Holden (D-Pasadena)

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Between abdicating responsibilities to franchisees during the COVID-19 pandemic and the revelation of unfair treatment of franchisees of color, time has revealed that more issues need to be addressed.”

YOUR FATHER WAS A POLITICIAN, INCLUDING SERVING IN THE STATE SENATE. DID YOU GROW UP THINKING YOU WOULD GO INTO POLITICS?

Growing up in Pasadena and seeing my father, Nate Holden, serve in the State Senate and on the Los Angeles City Council, showed me how to take initiative and find steps toward implementing change. He modeled what a true public servant does, and his life is a great example for how we can best serve the world around us. I believe that public service does not begin after winning an election but, instead, starts by recognizing the intricate balance between knowing the needs of our community and bridging the gap to create accessibility to resources.

Having played basketball in high school and in college at San Diego State University, I remember being a

young person considering my future. Basketball was impactful for me during my youth, and its benefits carried on far beyond my graduation throughout my personal and professional life.

After graduating college with a degree in business, I had the opportunity to work at a juvenile detention center. This experience inspired me to devote my life to public service and help improve the quality of life for those less fortunate. I decided to run for office and was elected to the Pasadena City Council as the youngest City Councilmember at the age of 28. During my tenure, I also became the second African American mayor and served on the Council for almost 24 years.

I learned life lessons and gained skills that have taught me to listen to the needs of my community. Today, as a legislator in the California State Assembly, my work continues and I remain committed to find solutions that will make positive contributions to society as a whole.

▷▷AAHOA's advocacy on social media



FOR A SHORT TIME, YOU WERE A SUBWAY FRANCHISEE. WHAT WAS YOUR EXPERIENCE AS A FRANCHISEE AND WHAT DID THAT DO TO YOUR OUTLOOK ON THE INDUSTRY?

Often times, franchisees believe they're partnering with a corporation that will work as hard as they do to make the franchise a success. Franchisees invest hundreds of thousands of dollars into their business. Good franchisees invest even more to stay in compliance with the franchisor's demands.

What isn't understood, however, is the amount of power that franchisors wield over the success or failure of the franchisee's business. If they lose their business, they lose their job and the money they spent keeping it alive. If this loss is for minor reasons, it's devastating. When independent, small-business owners lose their businesses, they can sell the equipment and perhaps even the real estate they purchased to recoup some of the losses. When agreements are terminated, franchisees walk away with nothing.

That's why I decided to take on this issue because of my own experience

as a franchisee. I heard stories from current franchisees about people doing their best to run small businesses despite the unfair contracts they find themselves in.

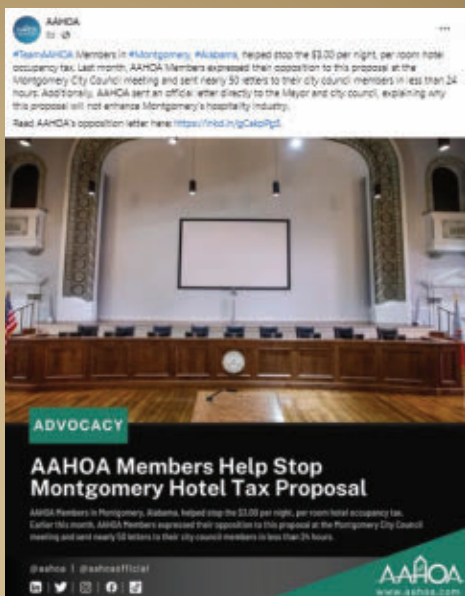
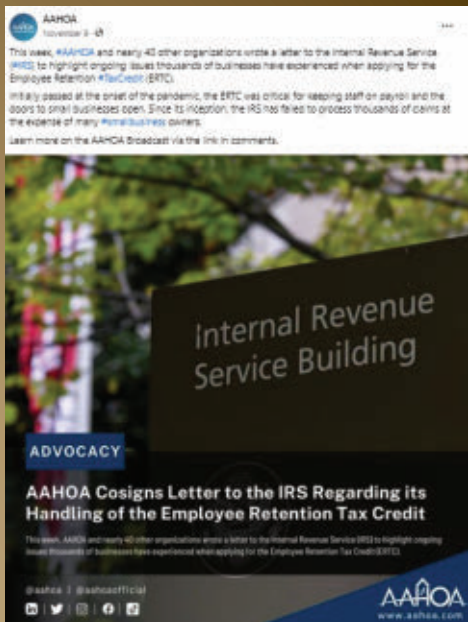
I authored legislation that doesn't change the relationship between franchisees and franchisors but, instead, modernizes it to adapt to a changing industry and maintains the original intention of the law: fairness.

IN 2015, YOU AUTHORED AB 525 TO UPDATE EXISTING FRANCHISE LAW. AFTER SOME COMPROMISE, THE BILL PASSED UNANIMOUSLY AND WAS SIGNED BY GOVERNOR BROWN. YOU HAVE SHOWN YOU AREN'T AFRAID TO TAKE ON TOUGH ISSUES, BUT OFTEN SOFTEN THE RHETORIC AND GET THINGS PASSED. HOW HAVE YOU ACHIEVED THAT BALANCE?

AB 525 marked the end of a multiyear stalemate between the franchisees who own businesses and the corporations that have promised to support

them. The bill stated that a franchisor must purchase from the franchisee all the inventory, equipment, and furnishings from the franchisee at the cost the franchisee paid minus depreciation. This is the amount owed to a franchisee.

One of the goals of this bill was to ensure that franchisors couldn't circumvent California law. AB 525 created several protections for franchisees in the transfer process including providing the current and prospective franchisee the approval standards in writing, establishing a timeline for the approval or disapproval of a transfer, and prohibiting a franchisor from preventing a sale or transfer, if certain conditions are met.



IN 2021, YOU AUTHORED AB 676, AND IT SAILED UNANIMOUSLY THROUGH COMMITTEES IN BOTH THE ASSEMBLY AND SENATE, SIGNED INTO LAW BY GOVERNOR NEWSOM. WHAT LESSONS DOES THIS TEACH US ABOUT ANY FUTURE FRANCHISE LEGISLATION WE WOULD PROPOSE, BOTH IN CALIFORNIA AND OTHER STATES?

Years later, I'm still listening to those voices, and while improvements have been made, there's still more work to do to bring fairness to this system.

Between abdicating responsibilities to franchisees during the COVID-19 pandemic and the revelation of unfair treatment of franchisees of color, time has revealed that more issues need to be addressed.

AB 676 does multiple things to resolve these issues. For example, it explicitly prohibits franchisors from influencing where a franchisee can purchase a franchise based on a protected class, such as race, which has been the subject of ongoing lawsuits against McDonalds by Black franchisees. Some franchisors have used the pandemic as an opportunity to change their liability to transfer burden onto

“

I authored legislation that doesn't change the relationship between franchisees and franchisors but, instead, modernizes it to adapt to a changing industry and maintains the original intention of the law: fairness.”

franchisees in exchange for financial help. The bill prohibits that practice.

Currently, franchisors can unilaterally determine the amount franchisees owe when an agreement is being terminated or non-renewed. AB 676 creates a more fair process where both parties have a say. A transfer buyer of a franchise that was established before 2016 won't receive the protections established by AB 525 even though they're signing a new franchise contract after the law's enactment. The bill enables that.

AB 676 also includes adequate disclosures and ensures that the law covers all franchisors and franchisees in California. I'm pleased that my colleagues in the Legislature and the Governor supported these efforts and recognized the need to keep our economy robust and equitable.

ASIDE FROM YOUR WORK ON BEHALF OF FRANCHISEES, IS THERE ANYTHING ELSE THE PUBLIC MIGHT NOT KNOW ABOUT CHRIS HOLDEN, THE PERSON, THAT YOU WOULD LIKE TO SAY?

My faith is very important to me. I have been serving as an elder at my church for many years. My faith centers me and helps me do the work that I do that's respectful to all people, all opinions, and all points of view. It truly is the anchor and firm foundation that equips me to be the public servant that I am.



AAHOA Central Midwest Regional Director **Arti Patel** Named New Chair of the Oklahoma Hotel & Lodging Association

This month, AAHOA Central Midwest Regional Director Arti Patel has been named the new Chair of the Oklahoma Hotel & Lodging Association. OHLA is Oklahoma's trade association for the hotel and lodging industry representing \$7 billion in state business sales, more than \$7 billion in guest spending, and \$2 billion in hotel industry wages and salaries. Additionally, AAHOA Members represent a significant part of the economy in Oklahoma, owning nearly 90% of the hotels in the state.

Arti Patel got voted in as a Board Member for the OHLA Board nearly six years ago and became the Secretary of OHLA in 2020. Arti grew up in the family hotel business and decided to continue her career in the industry because of her passion for hospitality and serving guests. She currently works as the Chief Operating Officer at Pristine Hospitality and plays an active role in shaping the future of hospitality through her work and various leadership roles.

During her tenure as Chairwoman, Arti plans to strengthen the collaboration between hotel owners and managers and continue the partnership between AAHOA and OHLA. AAHOA congratulates Arti for serving in this new leadership role and for her tireless service to America's hotel owners. ■



“

I'd like to continue to be a part of organizations like AAHOA where I can make an impact for the industry and community. Helping to solve problems and being a part of positive change is rewarding.”

Arti Patel

New horizons

Using insurance companies as lenders

by ANNA SWARTZ-LOPEZ

WHILE COMMERCIAL BANKS PROVIDE THE MOST COMMON FORM OF FINANCING FOR COMMERCIAL REAL estate transactions, insurance company lenders offer another important source of funds. As this lending option remains less well known, it can be helpful to review all its aspects – starting with, why do insurance companies offer mortgages in the first place?

Life insurance companies receive their monthly premiums from their clientele, then must invest those dollars. A number of them choose to allocate a portion of their funds to commercial real estate mortgages.

Commercial real estate and its financing remains an attractive long-term investment option in this country, and those stable returns incentivize certain insurance companies to enter the field.

KNOWLEDGE IS POWER

An important distinction between the typical bank lender and its insurance company counterpart is that while banks often bundle and sell their loans to investors, insurance companies usually keep their loans on book. This means that during periods of market volatility, insurance companies continue lending, while a bank may simply halt its lending programs because of deteriorating market conditions. During an economic downturn, insurance companies become a vital part of the commercial real estate industry, because they continue to provide funds at times when other lenders do not.

The simple act of keeping loans “on book” allows a lender that does it to provide a dramatically different level of flexibility and service. For instance, life company loans are often fully amortizing, meaning no balloon payment, and the borrower can choose the rate reset period. A conventional bank loan is typically three, five, or seven years and then must be refinanced. A life company loan can be 20 or 25 years, with a rate reset every three, five, or seven years – or even longer like 10 or 15. There will be a period of time when the interest rate lock opens, and the rate will reset to market conditions, thus allowing the borrower to avoid refinancing and the costs associated with it.

For instance, a borrower might choose a loan with a 10+10+5/25 structure. This type of loan would be fully amortizing at 25 years, and the rate would be locked for 10 years, then adjust to market conditions and then lock for another 10 years, and then adjust to market conditions and lock again for the final five years. Another borrower might choose a loan where the rate resets every three years. The key point is that insurance company lenders can be incredibly flexible and the terms of a loan can often be negotiated and structured in whatever way the borrower prefers.

OPTIONS ARE KEY

Insurance companies do tend to be more conservative than bank lenders – again, they bear the risk of the loan themselves and don’t pass any of the risk along to investors. Because of this, a borrower should expect a lower loan to value for this type of loan. Between 50% to 60% of the value of the property is the range to expect from this type of lender. If the borrower wants to pay off this type of loan early, there also are pretty significant fees, called yield maintenance. Avoiding yield maintenance is one reason some borrowers

prefer to reset the interest rate every couple of years, rather than locking in one interest rate for a long period, like 10 years or more.

Not only can an insurance company lender provide more flexibility regarding the interest rate and term of the loan, there’s also a pretty dramatic difference between the post-closing covenants required by these lenders versus other lenders. Other lenders may have debt service ratios or loan to value ratios that must be maintained to keep the loan in good standing. This can – and did, during the pandemic – provide obstacles to borrowers with properties that stop performing for one reason or another. It may not be enough to keep making the mortgage payment every month, the lender may decide to call the loan due if certain loan covenants are not maintained for the life of the loan.

BUYER BEWARE

While each insurance lender is different, the aforementioned flexibility and ability to negotiate remains a key advantage as to this aspect of a mortgage. For example, this author’s firm maintains a close relationship with several lenders that don’t require any post-closing covenants. Keeping reporting requirements to a minimum and the ability to structure a loan as the borrower chooses – along with the ability to negotiate with a lender that maintains control over the loan – stands as rather dramatic distinctions between insurance companies and other more conventional lenders.

Insurance companies that issue commercial real estate mortgages essentially outsource the production arm of their investment teams, meaning they rely on mortgage bankers to find their borrowers. Unlike a bank, where a borrower can have a direct relationship with the lender, an investor wishing to pursue this financing route must go through a mortgage banker. When choosing a mortgage banker to work with, consider the length of time that firm has been in business. The best advantage that a mortgage banker can provide to his or her client is the depth and breadth of lender relationships. These carefully cultivated lender relationships allow a mortgage banker to negotiate the best possible outcome for a client. ■



Anna Swartz-Lopez is a commercial mortgage banker with Slatt Capital, providing customized debt solutions across the country. She’s California native who spent years living outside the state, including in such diverse places as Incheon, South Korea, and Moriarty, New Mexico. She can be reached at aswartz-lopez@slatt.com or (925) 478-2271.



The Verridict is in

Technology is key to the short- and long-term success of the independent hotelier

by PINKESH PATEL

IF YOU'VE BEEN PAYING EVEN THE SLIGHTEST BIT OF attention to this column during the past year, you've heard one consistent message from the contributors: Brands have deep pockets and vast resources, and independent properties often must make do with less and get creative when staying competitive.

However – and perhaps this hasn't been mentioned enough – independent hoteliers have a massive resource filling their sails with constant wind. Perhaps you've heard of it. It's a little organization called AAHOA.

By way of the many events AAHOA puts on year in and year out, along with the educational materials the association pushes out into the marketplace (you're reading one right now!), there are plenty of resources to help independent hoteliers make informed decisions to guide their businesses. When it comes to technology, the independent hotelier needs every resource possible to chart the best path forward. With that in mind, here are three key areas of technology every independent hotelier should fully understand. The rabbit hole goes much deeper than these items, however, so treat this as a jumping-off point into deeper research on the topic.



GET SMART

Moving forward, smart appliances will be critical for independent operators for several reasons. First, these devices can help monitor changes in occupancy – not only in rooms but in common spaces, as well. If hoteliers have the capability to accurately and instantly know when a room or space has been vacated, they adequately can deploy resources to those spaces. If an event is concluded and the meeting room is now empty, there’s no need to send a staffer to check on the status of the space. Housekeeping can move in right away and begin cleaning and resetting the space for the next occupant.

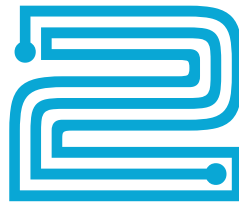
Secondly, and working in tandem with activity-monitoring systems, there are devices that can instantly and automatically adjust the temperature of a vacant space. A guest checked out sooner than expected? Your system can change the temperature of the room on its own, saving you time and money.

When we think of smart devices, there’s a tendency to think of only the ones used by consumers, but your maintenance staff would be well-served by a technology upgrade. There are devices that can automatically alert staff when it’s time to replace an air filter or attend to airflow problems – or to drastically improve efficiency and reduce downtime. For example, are you planning to replace a terribly inefficient water heater? In its place, install a newer hybrid model that can monitor peak usage times and adjust its settings on the fly to reduce energy consumption and save money on your gas bill.

If there’s an electronic item in your hotel, chances are good there’s a version of it that will connect to a smart system, and these can be phased in as old equipment breaks or becomes obsolete. As AAHOA Chairman Neal Patel has frequently stated, researching and adopting new technology should be a major priority for hoteliers. For every innovation already making its way into properties across the world – room-service apps, check-in-kiosks, Bluetooth locks, voice-controlled thermostats, and much more – there are countless more on the horizon.



Independent hoteliers have a massive resource filling their sails with constant wind. Perhaps you’ve heard of it. It’s a little organization called AAHOA.”



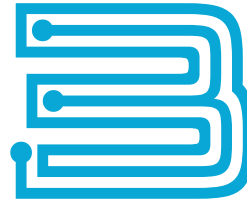
CHARACTER COUNTS

In a constantly changing landscape of guest expectations, customer interactions often are your best bet for understanding what the public wants when staying at your property. They can give you real-time feedback on how your property is performing. No longer relegated to a dusty comment-card box hung on the wall of the lobby, guests can provide feedback via a hotel’s designated app or via SMS text messaging services. This input – especially the unsolicited variety – should play a critical role in your future plans and daily operations.

However, this feedback isn’t restricted solely to internal channels. Your hotel’s reputation can take a beating in the online world if you don’t stay on top of it. Even if your property excels at customer service and routinely delights guests, resulting in numerous positive internally sourced reviews, all it takes is one or two negative online reviews for sentiment to swing. After all, an ounce of criticism often outweighs a pound of praise, and potential guests can be quick to dismiss your property if they see one negative review, whether it’s baseless or not.

Fortunately, managing a hotel’s online reputation can be fairly straightforward and, by taking a proactive approach to your day-to-day operations and actively managing your online reputation, your ADR will increase – and that should be the goal for every hotelier. Simply waiting for happy customers to walk through the doors won’t help your hotel. However,

prompt and professional responses to customer comments and concerns are non-negotiable in today’s hospitality industry. Responding to every customer interaction – across every review website and social network – is important to enhance the overall hospitality experience to build a long-lasting and loyal relationship with your guests.



CONTROL YOUR COSTS

Without exception or overstatement of importance, accurately managing revenue is a must in our industry today. As competition continues to increase, it’s vital that independent hoteliers have the tools necessary to adequately manage revenue in the form of a robust and reliable revenue-management system (RMS).

A stout RMS enables the optimization of your inventories and maximization of revenues, yields, and overall profits using smart tech and data. It also allows you to sell the right room to the right customer at the right time for the right price through the right distribution channel with the optimum cost efficiency.

An RMS also allows you to optimize and handle price modifications in real-time, ensuring you always sell at the best price and maximize hotel revenue. The other benefit of revenue management is that it provides data from your property that can be utilized to assist you in making better decisions. Done right, an AI-based RMS can free up the hotelier to think more strategically and tactically about their hotel’s market positioning, helping to achieve long-term success by creating specific strategies tailored to the needs of your hotel and its customers. ■

Pinkesh Patel is the AAHOA North Carolina Regional Director, a member of the AAHOA Independent Hoteliers Committee, NCRLA Board of Directors, and he’s the president and CEO of Queen City Hotels and Management. He can be reached at pinkesh.patel@aahoa.com or (704) 281-2356.

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How can owners successfully navigate the capital markets when liquidity is shrinking?

by RUSHI SHAH

Exploring uncharted territory

DURING THE PAST 30 TO 40 years of monetary history, the United States has been in an expansionary cycle. The Federal Reserve lowered interest rates and increased liquidity through quantitative easing – basically “printing money.”

By buying up bonds and other fixed-income securities, the Fed was able to flood the market with U.S. dollars. When the pandemic hit, the Fed ramped up this practice to prevent massive economic deterioration. Unfortunately, we all are now experiencing the inevitable aftereffects of the Fed’s strategy, coupled with supply chain issues stemming from pandemic shutdowns in the form of increased inflation. To counter this, the Fed has announced it will try to reverse its quantitative-easing measures by selling the bonds they bought. This will reverse the U.S. dollar flow out of the markets back to the Fed’s balance sheet and drain liquidity from the markets. Known as quantitative tightening, this counter measure is important to business owners, especially commercial real estate owners, because it directly impacts access to liquidity.

PRESSURE FROM BOTH SIDES

The loss of liquidity combined with higher interest rates causes a double whammy in the markets. On one hand, the Fed’s economic tactics are necessary to control

inflation, but they spark unintended consequences. For example, they can limit the availability of cheap capital. Now, construction projects that would have been greenlit for financing in the past, as well as maturing loans that were previously refinancable, aren’t penciling out. As a result, today more than ever, owners and developers seeking debt and equity will need to rely on professionals in the capital markets who have access to the limited liquidity that remains.

THE HIGH COST OF LEVERAGE

Attractive capital is on its way to becoming a priced commodity because, unlike in the past, leverage today is expensive. Debt funds that historically drew on warehouse lines of credit from banks have stopped using them as the price of that money has grown too expensive. This is a good example of shrinking liquidity in the market. Soon there will be an overall repricing of risk vis-à-vis returns available for investors. Lesser-known players – such as credit unions, some local and regional banks, private equity

funds, life insurance companies, and large wire houses – also are likely to step up to provide capital to hotels and other asset classes more than in the past.

HOTELS MAY HAVE AN ADVANTAGE

Looking ahead, hotel financing may be more active than financing for other asset classes, as few other property types can support a higher interest rate loan within the required debt-service coverage-ratio constraints. There simply aren’t very many asset types that can withstand a 7% to 10% interest rate and still maintain a debt service coverage ratio of 1.25x.

Also, one of the biggest tailwinds propelling the hospitality industry forward is a lack of new supply. Due to COVID-19, many



projects have been delayed or shelved, helping the supply equation for hotel rooms in multiple markets. In addition, owners are pulling older and obsolete hotels out of the system and converting them to multifamily to meet a housing shortage. As a result, one of the better plays in a developer's current playbook is to start planning new hotel builds now, so they're online and stabilizing when the economy becomes healthier. Unlike hotels, the office sector is going through a fundamental shift in demand

dynamics and remains a pain point for commercial real estate. Multifamily will face difficulty, especially for the assets whose cheaper priced debt is maturing in this environment.

THE DIFFERENCE-MAKER

With less liquidity in the market and the high cost of leverage, bringing in an experienced capital-markets intermediary now is even more critical for securing financing. Owners who want certainty of execution must wisely choose who they use and be

willing to give the intermediary the necessary control to ensure an efficient transaction and successful result. By signing an exclusive agreement with a real estate debt advisory intermediary, owners can start the process already ahead, because an empowered intermediary can cover a wider market, garner real lender attention, and optimize results.

Within current economic conditions, lenders with balance sheets to fill and equity providers with checks to write, increasingly trust their long-term relationships for deal flow. They are being bombarded with capital requests and start with those opportunities that familiar real estate intermediaries with extensive knowledge and experience and proven track record of closing deals bring to the table. Giving a debt advisor true control is critical. Nothing raises a red flag more for a lender than receiving a loan package from multiple competing sources. When competing intermediaries are working the same transaction, it's always the borrowers who lose. Capital sources will immediately think, "what's wrong with this project, property, or borrower?" They'll perceive the sponsor as amateurish and probably desperate. Lenders don't want to waste their limited time and resources on transactions they feel are less likely to make it to the closing table. In this industry, when no one has true control of the transaction, good deals that could have gotten done, don't. In this backdrop, relationships will become more important than ever before. ■

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Rushi Shah is Principal and CEO of the commercial mortgage and real estate investment banking firm and AAHOA Allied Member Mag Mile Capital. As a

leader in hospitality financing, Shah specializes in structuring and placing high leverage, nonrecourse bridge and permanent debt with cash out for full- and limited-service hotels nationwide. Since joining the firm's predecessor, Aries Capital, in 2015, Shah has structured and closed hundreds of millions in financing for all property types. Shah has held previous positions at Northern Trust and has an MBA from the University of Chicago's Booth School of Business.



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FACE YOUR FEARS

Don't be afraid of automation

by SAM HASSANEIN

TITHI LUADTHONG/SHUTTERSTOCK.COM

WHY DOES AUTOMATION SCARE SOME OF us, particularly when it comes to streamlining processes such as revenue management? It certainly doesn't help that some pundits have claimed that automation in revenue management can be a scary prospect.

The truth is, our entire society has become an automated one. Software-as-a-service (SaaS) providers have worked diligently for years to improve automation capabilities in their products with the goal of enhancing the user experience – whether through mobile apps, dashboards, and/or “single-pane-of-glass” solutions.

Our world has become reliant on automation; regardless of how you feel about it from an existential perspective, it's an integral part of our lives. How many of us are dependent on Lyft or Uber to get us places, order food to be delivered to our homes, or get the widget we want shipped straight to us at the click of a button?

Perhaps, then, it's time to revisit the topic of automation in the hospitality industry.

“

When selecting an RMS, some revenue managers want to maintain control over the system because that seems more comfortable. While this is understandable, they don't understand what that means from an analytical perspective.”

THE UBIQUITY OF AUTOMATION

Cloud computing has changed everything in the past 10-15 years, so much so that it has become pervasive in our daily lives. From a hotelier's perspective, when it comes to selecting a revenue-management system (RMS) some want to maintain control, particularly those who've never used automation to set rates. Others fear the system will take over their decision-making process. Whatever the reason, it's important we clear up some misconceptions.

We're comfortable with automation in some areas of our lives and not others. Let's use the smart car vs. the self-driving car as an example. Most of us aren't comfortable with fully automated cars driving us around. There are a lot of reasons why, but a lack of trust in the system is likely the main one for many of us. But, there is a difference between a smart car and a self-driving car.

A smart car has alerts that such as auto-assist cruise control, lights on mirrors that tell us when someone is in our blind spot, and cameras that show us what's behind us when backing up. These fancy features help us make the right decision along the way. But, they still require a human at the helm. In other words, smart cars have parameters with the goal of notifying the driver about potential hazards, but they aren't self-driving without any intervention.

From a revenue-management perspective, RMS isn't a self-driving car and isn't trying to be. When selecting an RMS, some revenue managers want to maintain control over the system because that seems more comfortable. While this is understandable, they don't understand what that means from an analytical perspective. When you pick and choose what to deploy in a self-learning system, the analytics can't learn whether it's making the right decisions.

TRUST THE PROCESS

When working with an advanced RMS, it's important to understand that a self-learning mechanism creates decisions, deploys them, and monitors changes so it can redeploy new decisions based on that data. This is done in the background and the decisions are based on thousands of computations and algorithms.

An RMS that isn't a self-learning system cannot automatically learn from its environment. Rather, a decision-support system relies on a rules-based approach to dynamic pricing and is only as smart as the users configuring it and the validity of their rules. Regular manual intervention can be difficult to navigate and maintain as market conditions shift – and especially as staffing changes occur.

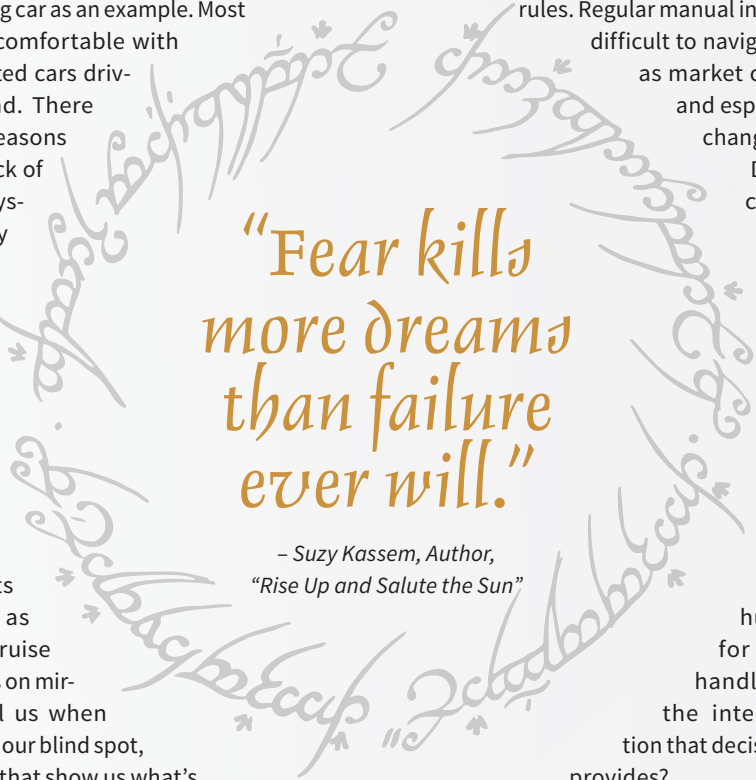
Decision support can help provide analytics to aid infrequent strategic decision-making, but let's not forget all the tactical decisions that also need to be made every minute of every day. How can one human – or team, for that matter – handle it all without the intelligent automation that decision management provides?

For example, a revenue manager can't possibly determine a property's true unconstrained demand at all times or even at any given moment. For a 500-room hotel, for example, the unconstrained demand could be 450, or it could be 600, but only a self-learning, science-based RMS can understand the fluctuating opportunity cost, day-by-day and moment-by-moment, and then select the right rate at the right time.

Some systems require a revenue manager to manually approve price changes. While these systems can be placed on autopilot, they still require intervention. Humans simply cannot do the same number of calculations as an RMS. It's not possible, and we shouldn't expect revenue managers to implement

“Fear kills more dreams than failure ever will.”

– Suzy Kassem, Author, “Rise Up and Salute the Sun”



those decisions. Those revenue managers who continue to manually review rates, even questioning the right price points, likely end up agreeing with the rates the system has presented to them, resulting in wasted time to market.

Revenue managers are a valuable asset. Ideally, if using an advanced system, the RMS should be making pricing decisions for 90% of the days being monitored. The revenue manager should be focused on the other 10%, such as deciding the right rate for upcoming holidays, or sporting or local events taking place in their markets.

By letting the automation do the number-crunching and trusting the system, the revenue manager can then spend time on distribution strategies to maximize profit.

YOU GOTTA HAVE FAITH

A lot of people assume analytics should think the way a human thinks, but that's not true. Humans can take in a world of knowledge, such as gas being more expensive or what competitors are doing, but analytics doesn't think that way because it doesn't always know these nuances.

For instance, you can't have the analytics read the newspaper and then decide to incorporate some of those macroeconomic trends. Instead, analytics can pick up a trend without knowing the real-world scenario that caused it. Humans act in reverse process, seeing a real-world scenario and changing their assumptions based on the new knowledge.

Self-learning revenue management systems automatically create new data points to calibrate. For example, they can recalibrate booking curves every couple of weeks as new trends and patterns occur, or recalculate price sensitivity every couple of weeks by determining when guests are willing to pay more or less than they were in the previous period.

With a range of automated revenue-management solutions and pricing tools on the market to consider, it comes down to rules-based, decision-support tools that provide recommendations vs. analytics-based, decision-management solutions that automatically produce powerful decisions that manage pricing, rate availability, and more.

IF YOU BUILD IT...

In today's volatile and complex shifts in the market, self-learning mechanisms are more important than ever. But, this doesn't mean the system will take over. If you believe in the process, you believe in the outcome. It means having faith that the system will

produce the results based on the input it has been given.

So, is automation a scary word? Perhaps, for some, but savvy, innovative hoteliers are investing in an automated, decision-making RMS that will empower their hotel by enhancing revenue with greater efficiency, long-term stability, and exponential growth. ■



Sam Hassanein is a senior manager with Solutions Engineering. He's a relationship-oriented team leader in the revenue management and hospitality technology industry with significant experience in enterprise sales and

strategic implementation while maintaining the overarching goal of customer satisfaction. Hassanein has provided technical sales guidance for the RFP process for a top-10 global hotel chain (1,000+ properties), as well as many other strategic industry clients.



Light the path Ahead

AAHOA Board Members offer their thoughts on the obstacles and opportunities facing the industry today

by EVELYN HOOVER

NO MATTER WHERE YOU LOOK, THERE ARE COUNTLESS STORIES of optimism, resilience, and positivity in the hospitality industry. Nowhere is that more apparent than among AAHOA Members. In the January issue of this publication, we featured a Q&A with a handful of AAHOA Board Members, gauging their opinions on what the coming year would hold for the industry. Here, we catch up with those same directors to learn a little bit more about their backgrounds, including what they think makes this industry so special.

Arti Patel
Central Midwest Regional Director

Where do you see yourself in 10 years?
What influences your vision?

“I’d like to continue to be a part of organizations like AAHOA where I can make an impact for the industry and community. Helping to solve problems and being a part of positive change is rewarding.”

Can you share a time you offered hotel rooms to a person in need in your community?

“We’ve had the opportunity to help in this way too many times. There was one time we provided rooms during a teacher walkout, as well.”



Bhavik Patel
Young Professional Director

What was your first event with AAHOA?
What do you remember?

“My first event was the annual convention in Philadelphia. I met a lot of new people at that convention. Fast forward to today, and I have a strong relationship with the people I met at that event because I continually see them at other AAHOA events and foster those relationships.”

Can you share any other acts of community service here in the U.S. or abroad?

“I’m a strong believer in giving back and helping the community, and this passion has been instilled in me since high school. I volunteered more than 400 hours at the local recreational center. My activities ranged from cleaning the floors to helping neighborhood children with their class assignments, basketball drills, or just lending them my support. Additionally, I’ve volunteered with various organizations to help with community clean-ups, building houses for unsheltered individuals through Habitat for Humanity, building birdhouses, road clean-ups, monetary donations and supply donations, and many other forms of community service.”

What do you do when not running and/or operating your hotel businesses and participating in organizations such as AAHOA?

“I’m quite diverse and an introverted extrovert. I love to do everything: go out, travel, play any sport (baseball and basketball are my favorites), go mountain biking, zip-lining, white-water rafting, kayaking, and hiking when I travel to mountainous areas. I’ve always liked painting, and wanted to learn music and other miscellaneous hobbies, but I never got around to them. I plan to pursue them as I get older.”





Deepak Patel

**Washington DC Area
Regional Director**

Can you share any acts of community service you've participated in – whether in the U.S. or abroad?

"I'm very active in the local Asian American community in Maryland. With the help of friends and family, I organize all different kinds of community events in the area."

Where do you see yourself in 10 years? What influences your vision?

"I'd like to run for public office. I strongly believe that, to get your voice heard and make a difference, you must stand up and fight."

What do you do when not running and/or operating your hotel businesses and participating in organizations such as AAHOA?

"I like to take time for myself. I do that by working out, reading books, and spending time with family and friends."

Fenil Desai

**South Carolina
Regional Director**

What's the single biggest challenge you face in your business today?

"Challenges come and go, but we're bound to make decisions as situations occur. Today's challenges are tomorrow's success. To me, there is no such thing as a big challenge or a small challenge. All challenges are an opportunity for me to do better than I did yesterday."

Where do you see yourself in 10 years? What influences your vision?

"With the use of the vast networking and educational opportunities, and great trade resources that AAHOA offers, I hope to become a savvy multi-hotel operator in the coming years."

What do you do when not running and/or operating your hotel businesses and participating in organizations such as AAHOA?

"My main priority is my family and, more importantly, my daughter, GiGi. She motivates me to do more for my family and the community each and every day."



Harikrishna (HK) Patel

Mid South Regional Director

Your volunteer leadership role with AAHOA demands a lot of time, talent, and resources. Why do you invest so much in AAHOA and serving its 20,000+ members?

"My understanding is that if we succeed in life, don't leave others behind. By serving as an AAHOA Board Member, I'm helping fellow hoteliers succeed in their business so we can all be successful business owners."

Where do you see yourself in 10 years? What influences your vision?

"I see myself more successful and knowledgeable about the industry because of the resources I have with AAHOA."

What do you do when not running and/or operating your hotel businesses and participating in organizations such as AAHOA?

"I play golf in my spare time and like to do charitable work for BAPS."



Lina Patel

Female Director Eastern Division

Your volunteer leadership role with AAHOA demands a lot of time, talent, and resources. Why do you invest so much in AAHOA and serving its 20,000+ members?

“I have been a Lifetime Member of AAHOA since 2002. Through the years, AAHOA has provided me with a platform to meet experts and practitioners and become a better leader. I have learned the importance of building relationships with elected officials and decision-makers in our local and state governments to ensure they understand our businesses and industry. AAHOA has provided its members a platform to share the story of America’s hotel owners far and wide. Thanks to AAHOA, we can represent the voice of hoteliers at industry conferences across the country and have broadened our networks. When the industry comes together to learn about new trends, examine the market, better understand the changing needs and desires of guests, and find ways to become more efficient or integrate new technology, AAHOA is there!”

“

Thanks to AAHOA, we can represent the voice of hoteliers at industry conferences across the country and have broadened our networks.”

Lina Patel
Female Director Eastern Division



Naresh (ND) Bhakta

Greater Los Angeles Area Regional Director

When did you own your first hotel? Can you share the story?

“I arrived in the U.S. on December 15, 1980, and purchased my first motel on April 1, 1981, in Seiling, OK. When I first started, I handled all the motel operations, including laundry, cleaning,

maintenance, front desk, guest service, and more. It kept me very busy. I lost the motel during the oil crisis of 1983, so I worked in various high school janitor services to earn a livelihood during that time. Thankfully, I never gave up, and I’m proud of the hard work and dedication that got me to where I am today.”

Can you share a time you offered hotel rooms to a person in need in your community?

“Back in 1981, I provided guest rooms during the winter months in Seiling. I’ve also provided free rooms to people in need on various occasions. In 2005, I was a part of a group who started ‘Helping Hands of El Monte.’ The City of El Monte honored us for this initiative with a certificate of appreciation.”



Pinal Patel
Director at Large Eastern Division

What was your first event with AAHOA? What do you remember?

“My first event with AAHOA was Legislative Day on Capitol Hill in 2014. I remember feeling nervous to speak with my elected officials about the hotel industry but also honored to advocate for America’s hotel owners.”

When did you own your first hotel?

Can you share the story?

“My parents bought their first hotel property in 1991. My brother and I took over the family hotel business a few years ago.”



Rahul Patel
Florida Regional Director

What is your most successful property and why?

“All my ventures have been equally highly successful. Different properties have different measures of success and, thankfully, I’ve always had the best experience owning each of my properties.”

Where do you see yourself in 10 years? What influences your vision here?

“In 10 years, I see myself having a clearer voice for my fellow hoteliers. I also see AAHOA becoming an even stronger voice when it comes to industry issues.”



Sanjay M. Patel
Alabama Regional Director

Can you share any acts of community service you’ve participated in – whether in the U.S. or abroad?

“Every year, I donate to the deaf and blind kids’ music program in Bardoli, India. They’re an inspiration to me. No matter the hand you’re dealt, you can take the positives and build from there. I also donate to BAPS monthly, and they do a wonderful job locally and abroad of helping people.”

Many things changed in the world during the pandemic. What do you think will never go back to the way it was before?

“I honestly think we are moving toward a seamless check-in process like mobile check-in, which was in the works, but the pandemic accelerated the need for it with all brands.”

When did you own your first hotel?

Can you share the story?

“Our first property was an EconoLodge in Birmingham, AL. We bought it right after the recession. We were rebuilding after being affected by the 2008 recession. We came out ahead on that property and grew from there and are still growing today!”



Taran Patel

Northwest
Regional Director

What's the single biggest challenge you face in your business today?

"The last three years have had so many up-and-down moments that led to a large exodus of workers in the industry. As hoteliers, we're so focused on recruiting new talent that we lose focus on getting creative on ways to retain and reward those loyal team members."

What do you do when not running and/or operating your hotel businesses and participating in organizations such as AAHOA?

"I enjoy time with friends and family, exploring new restaurants, and staying active."

How many hotels do you own or operate now?

"We currently have 11 properties in our portfolio of owned/managed hotels."

Vik Zaver

Georgia Regional
Director

Your volunteer leadership role with AAHOA demands a lot of time, talent, and resources. Why do you invest so much in AAHOA and serving its 20,000+ members?



"I volunteer and invest into AAHOA because they invest into our business and our community. Without AAHOA, our voices wouldn't be heard on Capitol Hill, within our local community, franchise relations, or charitable organizations. This is why I feel it's my duty to contribute what I can to ensure a brighter future for the next generation."

Where do you see yourself in 10 years?

What influences your vision?

"I see myself building onto my family's business and, hopefully, within the hospitality segment. Real estate is an ever-changing industry, so my goal is to be adaptive and lean into the changes with an open mind."

Vimal Patel

Gulf Regional
Director

What do you think AAHOA could be doing more of?

"I would love to see AAHOA start a charity foundation that gives back to our hotel owners, team members, and the communities where we live and work."



Can you share a time you offered hotel rooms to a person in need in your community?

"We donated 548 rooms to medical personnel and first responders during the pandemic. Having the opportunity to quarantine in a clean place and prevent the virus from spreading in their homes eased the minds of these professionals. While we were unable to accommodate our guests, because people weren't traveling during the height of the pandemic, it meant a lot to accommodate medical personnel and first responders at no cost to them."

When did you own your first hotel?

Can you share the story?

"In 2005, I purchased a closed-down hotel with broken windows, and the doors were absolutely terrible. It was a broken motel. I remodeled it and named it the Royal Inn." ■

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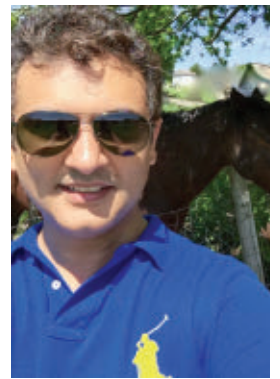


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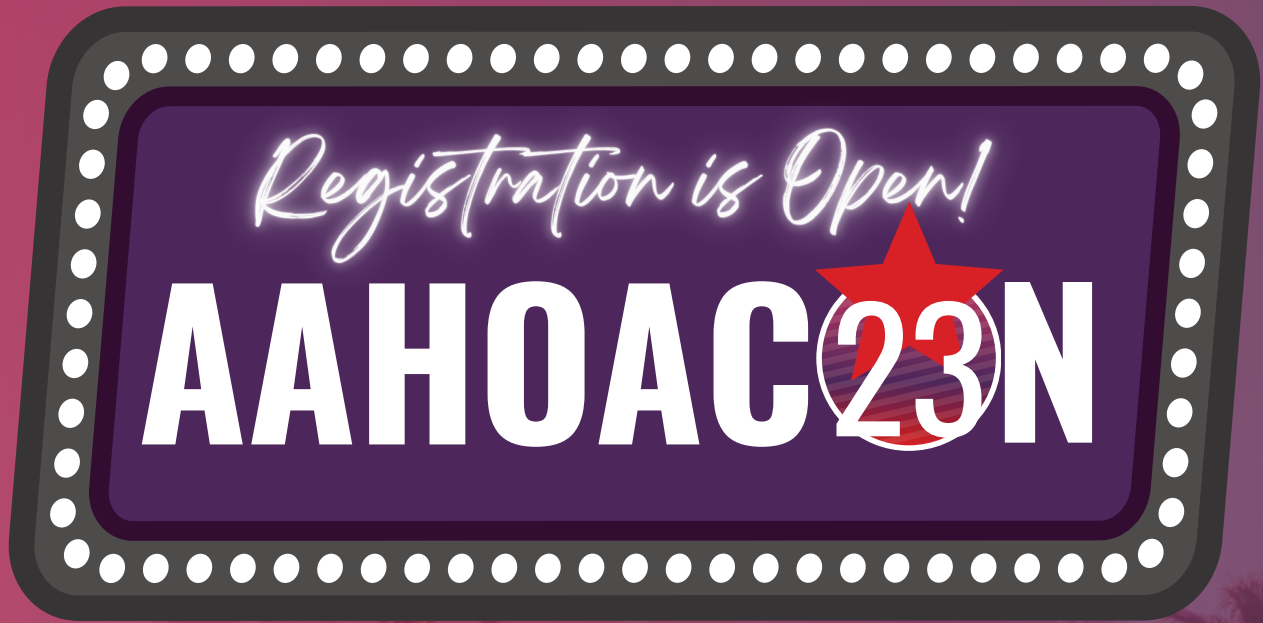
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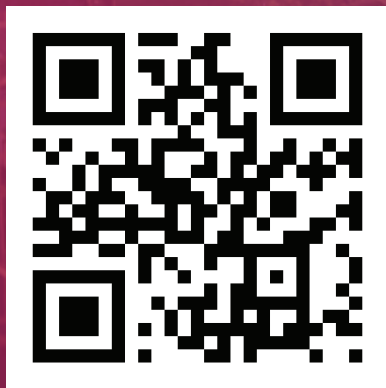
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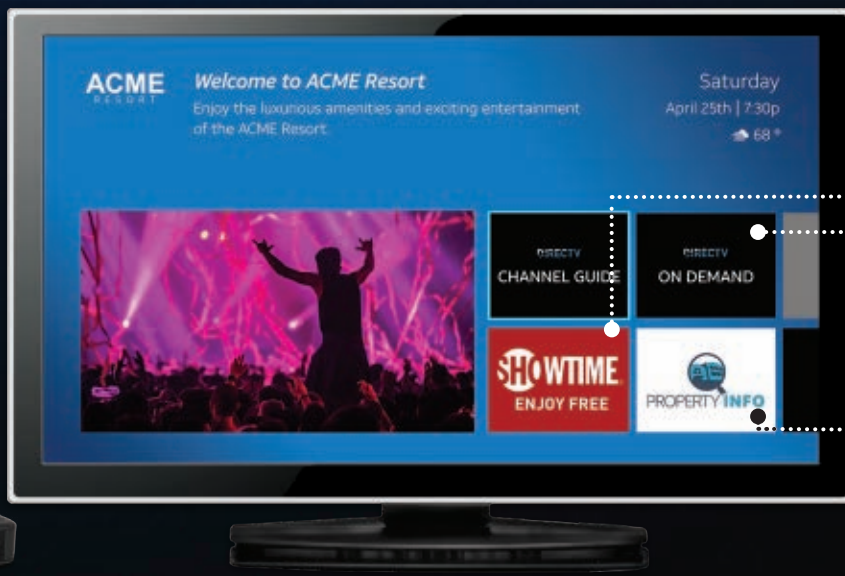
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Example Home Screen pictured for illustrative purposes only.

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-  **Flexible, cloud-delivered updates** to meet changing market needs
-  **Customizable Home Screen** includes a logo, welcome message, background image and more
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Requires a mobile device running Android 8 or later, or iOS 14 or later. Requires download and installation of the DIRECTV Mobile Remote app. Data charges for the app download may apply. Requires acceptance of terms and access to device Bluetooth radio and location information. Device limitations may apply.
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¹Nilson ranking March 2022

²JPMorgan Chase 2020 Annual Report

³Euromoney, September 2020

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