

HTNG Annual Conference Highlights Major Progress in Systems Interoperability

2008-03-03

Progress in systems integration and interoperability was the dominant theme this week at the fourth annual Hotel Technology Next Generation (HTNG) Members' Meeting and Conference. More than 350 senior technology executives from hotels, vendors, and consulting groups travelled from 18 countries across four continents to gather at the Westin Seattle Hotel for the two-day conference.

Recapping the event at the closing ceremony, HTNG President Barry Shuler, who also serves as Senior Vice President and Chief Technology Officer of Marriott International and Chief Information Officer of the Ritz-Carlton Hotel Company, commented on HTNG's increased maturity, noting that this year's conference 'had a real sense of collegial cooperation and collaboration, with just an incredible amount of goodwill going back and forth between industry partners and hoteliers, coming together at a meeting place to try to make things happen for our industry.' Shuler also noted that this year's conference showcased much more maturity from HTNG's workgroup efforts, with 'more progress and more concrete deliverables than we have ever had before, with an incredible amount of progress in the last year.'

Workgroup Progress

Conference sessions highlighted the progress of HTNG's six workgroups, in which more than 400 industry leaders and specialists are now participating on an ongoing basis. HTNG's workgroups identify practical problems facing hotels, which can be solved through cooperative design, open standards, and vendor commitment to implementation. Just a few of the workgroups' accomplishments that were cited from the past year include:

Adoption of version 2.1 of the HTNG Web Services Framework, which provides robust, seamless plug-and-play connectivity between any two systems using a consistent implementation of standards from the World Wide Web Consortium (W3C).

Completion of the standard for the HTNG Open Data eXchange (ODX) protocol, which enables the transfer of data between any two systems using the HTNG Web Services Framework. ODX supports the migration of legacy interfaces into the most up-to-date web-services technologies, which can ensure high reliability, redundancy, and third-party monitoring of even legacy-system interface performance.

The first release of the HTNG back office integration standard, which connects property management and outlet point-of-sale systems to back-office accounting systems.

The second major release of the HTNG distribution specification, supporting reservations delivery, rate and availability updates, yield controls, and statistical extracts. Among other improvements, the new release incorporates logic for shares, group blocks, and best available rate (BAR) handling. The HTNG specification is a constrained version of the widely supported OpenTravel Alliance standards, requiring adherence to specified ways of implementing those standards to achieve rapid integration.

The first release of the HTNG digital signage interface, allowing plug-and-play connectivity between sales and catering systems and digital signage systems to ensure real-time or near-real-time updates of digital displays based on group, meeting, and event programming.

The first reference implementation of the HTNG identity management specification, which enables centralized monitoring of user rights across multiple systems and greatly reduces the burden of regulatory compliance.

Preliminary approval of the first HTNG specification for set-top boxes, to provide a neutral platform for deployment of guest room entertainment systems that support off-the air broadcast, cable, pay-per-view, Internet, and custom programming.

Preliminary approval of the HTNG auxiliary panel specification, which describes the minimum requirements for a connection panel that enables hotel guests to connect to the in-room audio and video technologies and use a variety of mobile devices such as laptop computers, PDAs, MP3 players and cameras.

Preliminary completion of the HTNG distribution content management specification, enabling the consistent and timely delivery of rich descriptive content from hotels into distribution channels, including intermediaries and online travel agencies.

Initial directions of a new HTNG workgroup to vastly reduce the burden of regulatory compliance with the Payment Card Industry Data Security Standard through a methodology that reduces or eliminates the need to store sensitive credit card information in multiple systems.

The first release of a reference architecture for hotel technology, describing the key business processes and interactions among systems. The reference architecture is expected to ultimately serve as a repository for all HTNG specifications, ensuring consistency and version control, and allowing hotels and vendors alike to use the same language when describing the capabilities of their systems.

Thought Leadership Presentations

The conference kicked off with a keynote presentation from David Margulius, Principal Analyst with Enterprise Insight, who frequently moderates CIO roundtables and is a regular contributor to InfoWorld. Margulius shared his insights on the thinking of CIOs from across the spectrum of the technology world, and focused on what hotel technologists could learn from disruptive innovators and consumers.

Two thought leadership presentations also highlighted practical examples of common deployment and management of complex systems provided by multiple vendors. One session, led by Gustaaf Schrijs, Vice President of InterContinental Hotels Group (IHG), and Raul Arce, Vice President of Travel & Transportation for IBM Corporation, described the 'Hotel-in-a-Box' program that IHG and IBM are deploying in limited-service IHG properties in North America, where one vendor provides total support for deployment, configuration, training, and management of all of the critical systems needed to run a hotel.

The second session on this theme, led by Edward Goldman, Vice President of IT Strategy for Marriott International, with the participation of a Marriott franchisee and four vendors, described three distinct approaches to coordinated management of network services being used in various Marriott hotels in the United States and Asia. The session highlighted the challenges of ensuring that all network users within a hotel - staff, guests, internal systems, guestroom systems, and transient visitors - get the bandwidth they should, while ensuring appropriate authentication, network security, and regulatory compliance.

Yet another thought leadership session highlighted the emerging world of unified communications, with a presentation by Eric Swift, senior director of the Unified Communications Group at Microsoft, on the evolution and future of unified communications and implications for hotel staff and guests.

Rosemary Jay, who is one of the world's most recognized experts on data privacy law, presented an overview of data privacy requirements and the ways in which hotels can ensure that sensitive guest data is used in ways that are consistent with the evolving legal standards around the world. Jay is Partner and head of the Information Law group at UK-based Pinsent Masons law firm.

Leadership Awards

HTNG also recognized the leadership of key individuals from the hotel and vendor community, who have been instrumental in the progress of HTNG's working groups. Top honors went to three individuals who received the Directors' Leadership Award, in recognition of outstanding contribution to the success of HTNG and to the entire hotel technology industry. The Directors' Leadership Award is bestowed annually based on a vote of the Directors of HTNG, who are comprised of CIOs, CTOs, and other senior technology officers from a dozen recognized hotel companies. It is awarded to one hotelier and one person from the vendor community. For 2007, the vote for the hotelier ended in a tie, resulting in three individuals receiving the Award:

T. Paul Armstrong, Executive Vice President and Chief Technology Officer for MICROS Systems, was recognized for his commitment to supporting HTNG integration efforts through the contribution of existing interface specifications, and the deployment of very significant staff resources to aid in the modification and documentation to achieve standards that were ratified by a broad spectrum of hotels and vendors.

Natasha Nelson, Corporate Director of Information Systems for Four Seasons Hotels and Resorts, was honored for her leadership of the HTNG Property Web Services workgroup and successful implementation of the HTNG Single Guest Itinerary specification in hotels.

Monika Nerger, Vice President of Information Technology for the Americas for Mandarin Oriental Hotel Group, for her leadership as co-chair of the HTNG In-Room Technology Workgroup and use of workgroup-developed solutions in hotels.

In addition to the Directors' Leadership Awards, several individuals were recognized by their peers for their leadership in various HTNG workgroup efforts, including:

John Bell, Enterprise Architect for Marriott International, for his contribution to the Architecture Workgroup

Dave Blancard, Architect for Distribution Technology for Fairmont Raffles Hotels International, for his leadership of the Property/Distribution Solution Workgroup

Stephen Burke, Vice President, Product Management for Knowcross Solutions Pvt. Ltd., for his leadership as chair of the Architecture Workgroup

Chris Farrar, President of Percipia, for his leadership as chair of the IP Telephony Team of the In-Room Technology Workgroup

Thomas Gresham, Development Manager for MICROS Systems, Inc., for his contribution to the Property Web Services Workgroup

Natasha Nelson, Corporate Director of Information Systems for Four Seasons Hotels & Resorts, for her leadership as co-chair of the Property Web Services Workgroups

Monika Nerger, Vice President of Technology-The Americas for Mandarin Oriental Hotel Group, for her leadership as co-chair of the In-Room Technology Workgroup

Francesca Pasetti, Senior Product Manager for Interfaces for Trust International Hotel Reservation Services GmbH, for her leadership of the Message Definition Team within the Property/Distribution Solution Workgroup

Victor Robison, Chief Technology Officer of VFM Interactive, for his leadership as chair of the Distribution Content Management workgroup

About Hotel Technology Next Generation

The premier technology solutions association in the hospitality industry, HTNG is a self-funded, non-profit organization with members from hotel and hospitality companies, technology vendors to hospitality, and other industry members including consultants, media, and academic experts. HTNG's members participate in focused workgroups to bring to market open solution sets addressing specific business problems. HTNG fosters the selection and adoption of existing open standards. Where necessary, it also develops new open standards to meet the needs of the global hospitality industry.

Membership in HTNG is open to hotel and hospitality companies, technology vendors to hospitality, consultants, academics, press and others. Currently nearly 375 corporate and individual members from across this spectrum, including most of the world's leading hotel companies and technology vendors, are active HTNG participants. Workgroup proceedings, drafts, and specifications are published for all HTNG members as soon as they are created, encouraging rapid and broad adoption. Specifications are released to the public domain as they are ratified by the workgroup. For more information, visit www.htng.org.

This article comes from Hotel News Resource

<http://www.hotelnewsresource.com>

The URL for this story is:

<http://www.hotelnewsresource.com/article31407.html>

© 1998 - 2008 Nevistas and the author.

Brought to you by Hotel News Resource

Distribute your news on our Network

See what all the buzz is about at:

http://www.hotelnewsresource.com/Info-news_account_info.html