

## HOTEL TECHNOLOGY FORUM + HTNG NORTH AMERICA

# HT-NEXT

### AUTHENTIC INNOVATION

EXECUTIVES FROM TOP HOTEL AND TECHNOLOGY COMPANIES GATHER TO COLLABORATE AND SHARE SUCCESS STORIES, KEY CHALLENGES AND SOLUTIONS FOR FOUR DAYS OF NETWORKING IN NEW ORLEANS

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**For the third year,** *Hospitality Technology* magazine and HTNG collaborated to host HT-NEXT, which took place April 8-11 at the Hilton Riverside Hotel in New Orleans. With the theme, “Authentic Innovation,” attendees were challenged to flex their creative muscles by opening keynote speaker Lee Kitchen, the former creativity and innovation catalyst for Disney’s in-house creative problem solving agency Creative Inc.

Kitchen got attendees engaged immediately through a series of group exercises where individuals had to role play a honeybee love therapist, an invisible wallpaper salesman and a skydiving elephant instructor. With this exercise, he explained that to be creative problem solvers, one must be open-minded and willing to have fun.

He also told attendees that one of the biggest mistakes companies make is prescribing “creativity” to a certain group of people or sometimes just one person. This practice limits the talent pool and can prevent employers from finding a truly creative solution to a problem.

“Don’t invite only the ‘experts’ into the room for brainstorming,” Kitchen explained. “Always bring someone new in that ‘doesn’t belong.’ Anyone can be creative!”

Later in the day, Kitchen returned to lead a high-energy, interactive innovation workshop. Kitchen told attendees to stop the practice of shouting out words to a single person at the front of the room. Why? First, the person writing down the words often filters them through his own personal judgement and changes the wording or meaning of the idea. Second, the practice of shouting the words caters to extroverts and prevents introverts from being heard, and third, the paper with all the great ideas on it often gets lost after the brainstorming session never to be seen again.



**A.** Former Disney executive Lee Kitchen energized the crowd with his day one opening keynote, followed by an innovation workshop; **B.** Operators and vendors had the chance to network in a variety of ways during the event, including cocktail receptions.

## HT-NEXT LIVE POLL

**How likely are you to use AI to offer personalized content to your guests within the coming 12-18 months?**

- 24%** Already Doing It
- 40%** Highly Likely
- 24%** Somewhat Likely
- 8%** Somewhat Unlikely
- 4%** Highly Unlikely

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**C.** HT magazine presented the Hotel Visionary Awards live at HT-NEXT! **D.** Steve Lee of Aprilli - one of three innovation lab speakers - discussed the possibility of self-driving hotel guestrooms in the near future.

Kitchen also advised attendees to get rid of one-hour brainstorming sessions.

“Creativity needs time,” Kitchen explained. Give it as much time as it needs.”

The day also included lightning-paced mini-sessions highlighting exciting advancements and innovation in the hospitality sector. Topics included: Autonomous Driving Technology and the Future of Hospitality presented by Steve Lee, principal, Aprilli; The Next Generation of Facial Recognition & Authentic Service presented by Yale Goldberg, vice president of Cali Group; and Innovation Starts with the Traveler presented by Sara Pavan, Head of Innovation Partnerships, Amadeus.

Lee described a future where self-driving hotel rooms or autonomous travel suites, complete with bed, bath, television, WiFi and kitchenette would pick up guests at their homes and drive them to destinations anywhere from six to 12 hours away. During the drive, guests could sleep, eat, work or use the in-room entertainment. They could even have food delivered via drone. Once arriving at their destination, these travel suites would dock at a building — turning into a more traditional hotel room — and provide guests with access to hotel amenities such as spas, restaurants, pools, fitness centers and more. While this technology will be heavily dependent on infrastructure improvements, Lee believes we could see this type of technology become widely available as early as 2030.

Goldberg shared perspective on the potential of facial recognition as well as examples of success with the technology — after strategic adjustments — in the restaurant industry at Cali Group’s Cali-Burger locations. After implementing kiosks utilizing facial recognition, the restaurant found that the

technology worked “too well” and could pick up a guest’s face as they walked by on their way to the bathroom — leading guests to think the technology was “creepy.” After scaling back the technology, diners were more amenable to it, and Cali Group expects that facial recognition technology will soon become ubiquitous not only as a means of identification but also for payment technology.

“Facial recognition technology could eliminate the need for loyalty cards, credit cards, even wallets,” Goldberg explained. “But who will step up to create a universal authentication platform? Whoever does will have the same status as Google for internet search and Uber for ride-sharing.”

The day wrapped with a series of breakout sessions and executive roundtables. Breakouts covered topics such as the efficacy and evolution of staff alert technology as well as a deep dive into *Hospitality Technology’s 2019 Lodging Technology Study*.

During the staff alert technology session, hotel executives from White Lodging Services Corp., Sonesta Hotels and Marriott Vacations Worldwide discussed some of the challenges hotels are facing, including false alarms. Some staff members are wearing the buttons in places that allow them to be pushed as they work. Other staff members heard from union representatives that they should regularly push the buttons to ensure they are working correctly, even if there was no emergency. Other challenges include ensuring staff members regularly check the batteries on the panic buttons for sufficient charge and the difference in cost and location accuracy among staff alert solutions.

Meanwhile, operator-exclusive roundtables allowed hotel executives to discuss in detail topics such as innovating for the enterprise, innovating for



**E. Attendees had the opportunity to hear hoteliers discuss tech trends and rollouts F. HTNG workgroup members were able to meet in person to collaborate on guidelines, standards or outputs.**

the guest and the pressure hotels are feeling to offer technology in guestrooms that mimic the smart home experience.

Day two started off with Delta Airlines' Gregory Forbes, director of above wing operations, describing how his company is transforming the airport experience by eliminating friction points so employees can focus on high-quality guest interactions.

According to Forbes, this digital transformation was not just necessary for an improved guest experience but also to help the airline operate efficiently. In a true case of "necessity is the mother of invention," the company realized that the number of air travelers is expected to double in the next few years, but the airline had already reached the limit of what its agents could do. One way the company is solving for this is by streamlining guest check-ins and ID checks with facial recognition.

Following Delta's presentation were a series of concurrent sessions that included a variety of panel discussions on topics such as how to improve loyalty among guests, the facts and myths surrounding hotel networks and cellular infrastructure updates including 5G and CBRS technology, how to get buy-in from franchisees when it comes to implementing innovative technologies, as well as the evolution of guest reservation technologies.

Meanwhile, HTNG workgroups took place throughout the day and allowed hoteliers and vendors to collaborate on guidelines, standards or outputs that hoteliers can put to practical use. The 2019 workgroup topics included: IoT Security and Protocols, Frictionless Check-in from Airport to Hotels, Fiber to the Room and Frictionless Check-in Global Process, Staff Alert Technology, Hospitality

Payments Ecosystem, and Preparing for 5G.

After a networking lunch, attendees returned to the general session room to hear Augustine Fou, Independent Cybersecurity & Ad Fraud Researcher, Marketing Science Consulting Group Inc., discuss the impact digital ad fraud is having on hotel marketing strategies. He defined digital ad fraud as ad impressions caused by bots and not by humans. According to Fou, criminals will set up fake websites that only host ads and have no actual content on them, will purchase fake traffic — bots clicking on their website — and then will sell their websites to companies as legitimate sources for ad views.

"Unlike physical billboards that humans must actually drive past in the real world," Fou explained, "there is a limitless quantity of digital ads that can be created on fake sites that a human will never visit."

Fou gave the example of JP Morgan Chase which publicized its contact with ad fraud in a March 29, 2017, New York Times article. Chase stated that it originally had advertisements appearing on 400,000 websites per month. However, only 12,000 or 3% of the websites were leading to activity beyond an impression. After Chase limited its display ads to 5,000 websites it found that its performance metrics were exactly the same.

How does digital ad fraud affect hotel operators? Fou explained that it not only steals money from the operators — if bots and not humans are seeing/clicking on the ads then hotels are not getting bookings/revenue from their ad spend — it also distorts data/analytics reports so hotel executives have no idea who has actually seen an ad.

The day closed with the HT-NEXT Awards Program. The two-part program, comprised of HTNG's



**G.** Delta Airlines executive Gregory Forbes discussed how his company is streamlining guest check-ins and ID checks with facial recognition **H.** Cybersecurity & Ad Fraud Researcher Augustine Fou helped attendees better understand digital ad fraud and how they are victimized by it.

TechOvation awards and *HT*'s Hotel Visionary Awards, sponsored by Datatrend Technologies (<https://datatrend.com>), kicked off with live presentations of the 2019 TechOvation nominees. After 10 companies each presented its new technologies for four minutes, judges ultimately chose GuestMagic AI by InnSpire as this year's winner. GuestMagic AI is an online AI-driven platform for hoteliers that uses machine learning to anticipate guests next steps and to deliver the right service at the right time. It is device agnostic from smartphone to tablet, to TV, to voice, and beyond. Using the digital guest journey as a footprint to enhance every technical touch-point in the guest's path, the result is a unique guest experience.

During the awards ceremony, *HT* also announced the winners of its 2019 Hotel Visionary Awards. In the Enterprise Innovator category, Choice Hotels was honored for its in-house development of a guest reservation system, and IHG won for its new technology platform IHG Concerto. In the Customer-Facing Innovator category, Hyatt received top honors for its collaboration to offer guests a consistent, uncomplicated path for streaming their content in the hotel guestroom, and The Cosmopolitan of Las Vegas was recognized for the debut of Rose, its quirky chatbot, which not only improved customer satisfaction by 33% but also spent an average of 15% more while on property.

A highlight of the final day of the event was a power-packed IT leadership panel that brought together four executives representing a cross-section of hospitality: Dan Kornick, CIO, Loews Hotels; Page Petry, Chief IT Officer, Americas, Marriott International; Marco Treccroce, SVP & Chief Information Officer, Four Seasons Hotels & Resorts; and

Marcus Wasdin, CIO, Atlanta Hawks & State Farm Arena. During the discussion, the four executives defined their IT strategies, discussed their greatest challenges and gave real-world examples of infrastructure rollouts and more.

According to Petry, one of the greatest disruptors Marriott has had to deal with is finishing a large-scale acquisition. While it can be difficult, she also said it offers "opportunities to clean things up and bring in new technology. It also helps us to look at our tech platforms differently and gives us the opportunity to move platforms forward. Overall the disruption can have positive effects."

Wasdin meanwhile discussed the massive infrastructure renovation he was put in charge of at the Atlanta Hawks & State Farm Arena. During the renovation, three million pounds of concrete and one million pounds of roofing were ripped out and shifted around which resulted in the arena replacing most – if not all – of its technology infrastructure including WiFi, Cellular DAS, POS, Mobile, and more. It took 18 months with \$1 million worth of work happening every day during the off-season. When it came to reinstalling the WiFi infrastructure, Wasdin decided to partner with Comcast, paying a subscription fee for Comcast employees to monitor and fix any issues associated with the WiFi, freeing his own staff from having to spend time on network issues.

Kornick has followed a similar plan of action when it comes to partnering with technology vendors. "I want my guys to focus on what they do best: driving growth. So we rely on our tech partners to do what they do best, managing their solutions. Opera can run its solution for me better than I can and do it more securely." **HT**