



by Tina Stehle

## Selecting the Right Property Management System for Your Hotel

Managing a casino-hotel is challenging in the best of times and even more so in a tough economy. Investing in technology that enables you to streamline operations and enhance guest service has never been more important. In fact, it is essential to beating the competition and increasing profitability.

While every software system you implement is important, perhaps the property management system (PMS) is the most critical to success. After all, it's the core business solution in any casino-hotel, regardless of size, and it can make all the difference between a property that's inefficient and underperforming and one that's thriving and profitable.

With the number of property management systems on the market, how do you find the one that's best suited to your needs? Following is a guide to selecting a PMS that's right for your hotel.

### Designate a Team, Assess Needs

The first step in selecting a property management system is to form an evaluation team that includes managers and staff from various departments throughout the property, such as accounting, front desk, housekeeping, information technology and reservations. The objective is two-fold: first, to make sure the property management system addresses needs throughout the hotel, and second, to ensure departmental cooperation. A longer-term benefit is that the evaluation team can transition into the implementation team later and even provide staff training after the system is in place.

You should also assign a project manager to head up the evaluation team. This person might be the director of information technology, the hotel manager, someone in operations or a technology consultant. He or she will oversee the project and serve as the 'go to' person for the team. If you choose a consultant, resist the temptation to turn over the entire project to that person. Employee ownership is critical to success, so make sure the team stays involved.

Next, determine your budget. Don't waste time evaluating technology that is out of your price range. Focus instead on the property management systems that fulfill your requirements without breaking the bank.

Once the budget is set, the evaluation team should conduct a needs assessment. It's important to clarify all the property's business processes, beginning with reservations and ending with guest follow-up. In between, of course, are numerous functions that, depending on the size of your property and the amenities it offers, can include anything from room service to player rewards programs. Create a flow chart so that the evaluation team can envision the business processes within the hotel.

At this point, it may be helpful to create a list of 'must have' features and a list of 'nice to have' features. The former are basic requirements that must be delivered in order for the project to be successful. The latter are features that are desirable, but optional. Focus on the 'must haves.' Many small to mid-sized gaming properties, in particular, make the mistake of overbuying. Don't pay for bells and whistles you don't need, unless you know you will be expanding in the near future.

### Narrow the Field, Arrange Demos

Next, research the property management systems that meet your requirements and fit your budget. Ask for recommendations from colleagues at similar-sized casino properties and talk with staff. They have likely used a variety of systems over the years and can offer valuable suggestions. Other useful resources include industry publications and the Internet.

### Key Features to Consider

Regardless of your property's size, there are a few key features you should consider when evaluating property management systems. These include:

**1. User-friendly design.** Your new system should have logical and intuitive navigation. This will translate into a shorter learning curve for staff and an enhanced experience for guests.

**2. Flexible reporting.** Your system should be able to generate custom reports and ad-hoc queries. This can give your property an advantage over the competition, enabling you to react quickly to changing market conditions.

**3. Guest-oriented functionality.** Your system should incorporate features that enable you to set up guest profiles and extract that information to provide highly personalized service. Many systems also incorporate intuitive features that predict guest preferences and make recommendations based on previous patterns and purchasing behavior.

**4. Scalability.** Select a property management system that is scalable enough to accommodate future growth. Look for a system with a modular structure that enables you to add components as you need them.

**5. Integration with other systems.** Your PMS should interface with other solutions, such as activities, loyalty and point-of-sale, so that you can gather data from the

various systems and use it to improve guest service.

**6. Self-service check-in.** Although larger casino-hotels realize the greatest benefit from self-service kiosks, there are advantages for properties of all sizes. Kiosks not only help you utilize staff more efficiently, but also enhance the guest experience by shortening lines at the front desk. In addition, kiosks can perform more sophisticated functions, such as printing event schedules and generating special messages as well as running applications that provide comp redemption for the casino.

After you have completed your research, narrow the field to your top two or three property management systems. These are the systems you believe are best suited to your property's needs and that you want to evaluate in greater depth.

Once you have your short list, arrange for system demonstrations with the vendors. A week or two before the meeting, send each vendor a detailed list of needs. This will help ensure that your concerns are addressed during the demo.

Each vendor will showcase its property management system at an on-site meeting or walk you through an online demonstration. Either way, the evaluation team will be able to see the software in action and ask questions about the system.

This is also the time to firm up your budget. Request quotes as you evaluate the systems on your short list. Also obtain references. When contacting them, ask how the vendor responds to problems and find out how they would rate the vendor's training and support. Vendors should provide on-site training and update system documentation regularly. They should also offer 24/7 support as well as guaranteed turnaround times for phone calls and emails.

### Technology Partner

As you make your final selection, keep in mind that the vendor you choose will become your technology partner for many years to come. Property management systems that make your short list should be backed by vendors with solid reputations in the gaming industry. The needs and requirements of casino properties are unique, and your PMS vendor should

understand the nuances of the business.

Competing in the hospitality environment has never been more challenging. But with the right property management system and the right vendor in place, you will be well positioned for success, both now and well into the future. ♣

*Tina Steble is Senior Vice President and Chief Operating Officer at Agilysys. She can be reached by calling (800) 262-3600 or email [tina.steble@agilysys.com](mailto:tina.steble@agilysys.com).*



### Where heaven and earth meet, so can you.

Incredible convention and meeting facilities are only the beginning of your experience at Inn of the Mountain Gods. From full casino action and award-winning dining to championship golf and unparalleled mountain scenery, even your keynote speaker will be speechless.

- > 273 luxury rooms and suites
- > 40,000 sq. ft. of flexible meeting space
- > Championship golf course\*
- > Fine and casual dining
- > Full casino
- > Ski Apache\*
- > Fishing\*
- > Horseback riding\*



Above. Beyond.



InnoftheMountainGods.com  
1-800-545-6040 | Mescalero, NM near Ruidoso  
Booking Info: [jakazhe@innofthemountaingods.com](mailto:jakazhe@innofthemountaingods.com)  
FULL CASINO | CHAMPIONSHIP GOLF

\*Weather permitting. Must be 21 or older to enter casino. The Mescalero Apache Tribe promotes responsible gaming. For assistance, please call 1-800- GAMBLER (1-800-426-2537).