

Watching Where Hospitality Trends Lead

SPECIAL TO BOARDROOM MAGAZINE

Pictures on page 20, 21 & 22:
Frank Wolfe speaks on current
hotel technology trends at the
2009 Hotel Operations
Technology Conference (HOT).



THE INTEGRATION OF TECHNOLOGY INTO OUR EVERYDAY ROUTINE IS SEAMLESS – USED IN COMMUNICATION, DECISION-MAKING, ENTERTAINMENT AND ORIENTATION.

It's no different in business, where the use of tech tools has become essential to running efficient operations.

In the private club industry, smart use of technology means better delivery of member services, productive revenue management and timely responses. In support of this crucial segment to the hospitality industry is Hospitality Financial and Technology Professionals (HFTP), an association dedicated to offering hospitality finance and technology professionals with networking opportunities, industry-leading certification programs and events, and essential resources for professional growth.

Leading HFTP's efforts is Frank Wolfe, CAE, the HFTP chief executive officer who has been working with the industry for nearly 20 years.

Wolfe joined HFTP in March 1991. He started as the association's director of education, and quickly rose to the chief executive officer's position in 1994, and at that time was one of the youngest association CEOs in North America.

As HFTP's CEO, Wolfe oversees the association's operations, as well as representing the association worldwide at industry events, on industry boards and committees, and via the news media. His goal is to collaborate with industry organizations across the globe to promote a dialog amongst practitioners.

Recently Wolfe had the privilege of working with some of the industry's best technology experts, the HITEC 2010 Education Advisory Council and GUESTROOM 20X Council, learning how to bridge the new trends in technology with the personalized experience signature to the customer service-oriented hospitality industry.

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THE FUTURE OF
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Hotel Operations Technology Conference

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The research was for the new version of GUESTROOM 20X, an exhibit showcasing cutting-edge technology within a model hotel room and pertinent educational sessions for the association. GUESTROOM 20X made its debut recently at the 2010 Hospitality Industry Technology Exposition and Conference (HITEC) in Orlando, Florida, an annual event produced by HFTP.

The exploration process brought forward multiple possibilities for technology use within the hospitality environment. In this interview for BoardRoom, Wolfe talked about some of the group's findings.

BOARDROOM: What are some general hospitality technology trends and how can they be applied to clubs?

FRANK WOLFE: While at HITEC, I was able to talk with a lot of technology experts who are specific to the hospitality industry, as well as walk the show floor to see what the vendors are promoting, including a club technology pavilion with vendor representatives that specialize in club industry solutions.

I noticed a marked emphasis on mobile smart devices used to communicate with customers, as well as employees.

Accommodating for mobile smart devices is inevitable because increasingly people will have a smart device turned on in their pockets, offering a great way to directly deliver messages.

In the club environment, you can take advantage of this by sending text messages to your members reminding them of a tee time, letting them know their table is ready in one of the restaurants or even use a GPS locator within the phone to find a member onsite to deliver a beverage order. This eliminates the need to send personnel on a time consuming hunt for the member and instead allows them apply their personal attention to the other services.

The same mobile communication uses can be applied with staff members, helping to keep tabs on employees' locales and quickly sending and receiving important operations messages.

Along with the idea of "staying connected," there's been a lot of discussion on how to reign in, and in fact, take advantage of the growth of social media. Using avenues such as Facebook and Twitter provide a great way

to send out promotional information in a way that conveys sincerity.

Social media is almost made for clubs, keeping the sense of community fresh for when members are away from the club. Actively creating conversations about upcoming events, capital projects, member news and dining specials build a connection with your members and encourage them to come in more frequently. You could even create concentrated groups based on interests within your club's community, such as for golfers, tennis players, wine enthusiasts or board members.

But with this easy access freeway of messaging, management needs to monitor the club's online presence and be watchful for negative comments and conversations. This does take some extra attention from staff members who need to track what is discussed and respond to criticism quickly and professionally.

The other growing trend is cloud computing, allowing clubs to access a host of computing services over the Internet. Previously known as an ASP (Application Service Provider), new models have now expanded on what can be accessed over the "cloud," including data storage, virtual networks and multiple applications.

This is a benefit to smaller operations such as clubs, because the burden of maintaining the systems is taken offsite and often comes with contracted support from the service provider. Upfront costs are less because there is a smaller investment in hardware.

On the flipside, when outsourcing computer services there are precautions are necessary before entrusting important data and processes offsite. Before committing, review the company's security policies, make sure your Internet bandwidth can handle the increased traffic, and be flexible enough to move the data and/or applications in case there's an issue with the service provider.

BR: What are some HFTP initiatives that support club technology?

FW: HFTP's goal is to be a primary resource for financial and club technology information. We deliver this through educational opportunities, publications and our CHTP certification, as well as maintaining a continuous relationship with club industry associations.

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Pictured left, the 2009-2010 HFTP Global Executive Committee (L - R): Terry L. Price, CHAE, CHTP, CPA; Lisa Funk, CHAE; Jules A. Sieburgh, CHTP; Raman P. Rama, CHA, CHTP, CHAE; Thomas G. Smith, CHAE; Frank Wolfe, CAE

Pictured below, Emily and Frank Wolfe at the 2009 Hotel Operations Technology Conference (HOT)

I think that the proliferation of tablet computers and smart phones, such as the iPad and the Android, are going to change the way clubs do business and can help them become more customer service oriented...Imagine the caddy getting a message from your receptionist that the club president is on his way down for his golf lesson. By the time he gets to the golf shop, his cart is waiting, along with his favorite beverage and an updated real-time course map that showing that day's location of the tee box positions and flag locations.

Over the course of a year we have multiple educational opportunities that include technology-oriented sessions. They range in focus on the current industry interests, such as social networking and wireless technology, to the basics such as Microsoft Office tutorials.

The education program culminates with the annual convention and tradeshow, which this year is October 11-14 in San Diego. The convention has an exclusive technology track, along with four others, including a club track.

Other resources include The Bottomline, HFTP's bi-monthly magazine that features articles written by industry practitioners and experts; online discussion forums; the Hospitality Finance and Technology e-Marketplace, a central guide to industry services; and the HFTP Research Institute, which conducts free industry research for HFTP members. And to help industry professionals demonstrate superior industry performance, HFTP offers the CHTP — Certified Hospitality Technology Professional — designation.

Finally, there is of course the invaluable network of over 4,000 industry professionals who are members of HFTP. Having the opportunity to discuss and share ideas one-on-one with fellow hospitality professionals

helps the industry progress as members build upon each other's ideas and solutions.

BR: What is exciting to you as we look forward to growing integration of club technology?

FW: I think that the proliferation of tablet computers and smart phones, such as the iPad and the Android, are going to change the way clubs do business and can help them become more customer service oriented.

While tablet computers and smart phones have been around for a while now, their use has mushroomed over the last year. These devices are going to allow staff to access member information in real-time and customize their offerings to them based on the member's preferences.

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For more information about HFTP, visit www.hftp.org or contact the HFTP Global office at (800) 646-4387, +1 (512) 249-5333 or membership@hftp.org.

