

# HAWAII *hospitality*

FOODSERVICE | MAY/JUNE 2018

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ADJUST TO HAWAII

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# Apps Lead to Better Guest Service

## Hotels can craft an improved visitor experience via technology

BY BRANDON BOSWORTH

Embracing new technologies is helping Hawaii's hotels and resorts serve guests better and faster.

One example is Four Seasons Chat. Launched by Four Seasons Hotels and Resorts in late 2017, the app enables guests to send and receive instant



Oweita Gundaker

Four Seasons Resort Oahu at Ko Olina. "Anything they can do through the phone or email they can do through

messages with property teams before, throughout and after their stay.

"The app gives guests an easier way to communicate with us," says Oweita Gundaker, a manager at

the app. Guests can check in, check out, or order food and drinks from the pool. Service is quicker and more efficient. We aim for a response time of 90 seconds." The industry average response time is 12 minutes.

Four Seasons Chat can translate more than 100 languages in real time. "One thing we struggle with is that our guests speak so many different languages," Gundaker says. "The Chat app automatically recognizes and translates text messages. It has broken many language barriers and become very useful."

Gundaker says Four Seasons Chat can help hotel staff create the best possible experience for guests. "We can start to up-sell before guests even get here," she says. "It's a great tool to further personalize guests' stay."

At Sheraton Waikiki, Deputy General Manager Tomo Kuriyama says "the two

major guest-impacting technical projects at Sheraton Waikiki would be the GPON or Gigabit-capable Passive Optical Networks and Guest Room Entertainment initiatives."



Tomo Kuriyama

which will allow them to control and distribute data services to each guest room. "This will replace our legacy copper wiring and allow for extremely fast speeds that are required to deliver premium internet speeds and high definition television services."

Sheraton parent company Marriott also has its own apps, such as Marriott Mobile App. This is part of Marriott's Mobile Guest Services bundle along with Mobile Check-In/Check-Out, Mobile Key, Mobile Places and

## Five Tech Trends to Watch

Industry website [hoteltechnologynews.com](http://hoteltechnologynews.com) recently highlighted the five technology trends most impacting the travel industry in 2018:

### 1. Drone Photography

By showing their audience a bird's-eye-view, travel industry leaders are showing them a viewpoint they could not possibly see themselves, and that is the selling point. Travelers are inherently looking for an experience beyond the accommodations, and drone footage entices them, ushering them through the booking process and bringing them one step closer to finalizing their stay.

### 2. Alternative Payments

Blockchain, a decentralized ledger and public record keeping device, has the ability to transform the travel industry. In the near future, travel industry leaders will begin building their own blockchain to group into their current offerings, tackling current shortcomings within the tradi-

tional infrastructure. Through blockchain technology, travel industry leaders can help travelers avoid international exchange rates, instrumenting a singular currency that allows them to purchase their services from anywhere on the globe. Adopters will escape transaction fees and the crippling costs associated with physical coinage.

### 3. The Internet of Things (IoT)

Travel industry leaders are likely to see the IoT take off in the hotel landscape in particular, offering hotels the data required to completely personalize guest experience. Hotels are tapping into IoT through in-room tablets that connect to various elements within the hotel room and the surrounding facilities. In connecting smart devices to a network of controls, guests can manipulate their experience according to their specific needs.

### 4. Mobile Engagement

In conjunction with the IoT, the industry

is also witnessing an adoption of mobile keycards and boarding passes, passes delivered directly to the guest's phone and stored in the phone's wallet. From the mobile wallet travelers unlock hotel rooms and board flights by scanning their devices to a NFC (Near Field Communication) reader, making physical keycards and the tedious task of printing boarding passes obsolete.

### 5. Artificial Intelligence

This is by far one of the most promising technologies to hit the travel industry, reducing overhead for all sectors by cutting out human capital and replacing these resources with artificial intelligence. Chatbots, offshoots of artificial intelligence, have infiltrated customer service, programmed to resolve simple issues that previously required a real-life agent to mitigate.

These AI bots are capable of organizing travel plans and troubleshooting, transferring customers to actual agents when the conversation supersedes their capabilities.





Four Seasons Chat allows guests to send and receive instant messages with hotel staff.

COURTESY FOUR SEASONS HOTELS AND RESORTS

Mobile Requests and SPG (Starwood Preferred Guest) Keyless. Kuriyama says "the Marriott Mobile App makes managing Marriott Rewards accounts and reservations, stays and booking with Marriott easier than ever."

By activating Mobile Check-In/Check-Out, eligible guests will be able to check in to their room, receive a notification when their room is ready and check out using the SPG App.



Dennis Maher

"This enables a consistent check in and check-out experience for all brands across our portfolio (excluding SPG Keyless Hotels and Design Hotels)," Kuriyama says, "and increases guest satisfaction, especially among millennials, business travelers and frequent mobile-device users."

Tools such as Four Seasons Chat,

*"Mobile-responsive websites are designed to deliver a simplified shopping experience."*

— Matt Bailey

SPG App and Marriott Mobile App are available for download on the company websites. Guests are also informed about the apps at check-in.

Technology is helping to keep guests safer in ways besides upgraded surveillance systems.

"RFID (radio-frequency identification) locks have been a good tech advance for us," says Dennis Maher, CHFE, director of facilities and security at Trump International Hotel Waikiki.

"They are harder to duplicate than a magnetic strip. We can deactivate a lost key from the front desk and ensure someone can't get into the room."

Websites continue to play a big part in the hospitality industry. "Mobile-re-

sponsive websites are designed to deliver a simplified shopping experience, and a parametric search option provides even easier navigation through a site," says Matt Bailey, president and CEO of Aqua-Aston Hospitality.



Matt Bailey

"Thanks to the many price-comparison sites, shoppers booking travel are able to lock in the best rates for their trip relatively easily. But," Bailey adds, "knowing whether you've selected a hotel that matches the type of travel experience you seek can be more time-consuming and complicated."

"We know that some guests prefer the ability to book a specific unit, so they know exactly what they are going to get. We consider websites like Airbnb, VRBO and HomeAway just to be another distribution channel for us."

## Aqua-Aston Names Port CDO

Aqua-Aston Hospitality has appointed **Chris Port** to chief development officer.



**Chris Port**

He is responsible for the expansion of Aqua-Aston Hospitality by optimizing the potential of its existing portfolio of hotels and resorts, and identifying new markets. He reports to **Kelvin Bloom**, chief executive officer, Aqua-Aston Hospitality.

Most recently, Port served as a development leader for Kimpton Hotels & Restaurants, where he headed up expansion efforts across the western United States, Canada and Mexico.



**Alexander Dale**

**Alexander Dale** is the new executive chef at Aqua Kauai Beach Resort on Kauai.

The resort introduced Dale during a commemorative Chefs' Collaborative Dinner Event on April 20 in partnership with Chef Ed Kenney.

Dale recently was at Turtle Bay Resort. He is a graduate of Le Cordon Bleu College of Culinary Arts in Los Angeles.

## Nasser Promoted at DoubleTree

**Cheryl Lynn Nasser** has been promoted to director of sales, marketing and revenue at DoubleTree by Hilton Alana Waikiki Beach. Previously she was director of revenue management.

In addition to achieving budgeted room revenue, RevPAR and RevPAR index goals, she will oversee sales activities for the hotel, including leisure, business and group room bookings, special events and catering. She will oversee all marketing initiatives,



**Cheryl Nasser**

including advertising, promotions and public relations. Nasser served as assistant director of revenue management at Hilton Hawaiian Village and Grand Wailea, A Waldorf Astoria Resort, both DoubleTree by Hilton Alana sister properties. She also held executive and management positions at Hyatt properties in California.



## Williams to Oversee Highgate Properties

**Cheryl Williams** has been named regional vice president of sales and marketing in Hawaii for Highgate, a real estate investment and hospitality management company.



**Cheryl Williams**

Williams recently was general manager of The Royal Hawaiian. Previously she was vice president of sales and marketing for Starwood Hotels & Resorts in Hawaii and French Polynesia.

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