

Articles / Whitepapers

Practice: Marketing & Technology

Topic: Distribution

A CRS Where Everyone Knows Your Name!

...the challenges of operating a CRS globally.



By Mark G. Haley

We have touched on topic of localization before. See *Going Global... Locally*, (co-written with Christoph Oberli) and *Globalize Your PMS: By Localizing*. The first article focused on the business drivers and technological strategies to localize hotel company website content. Now we focus on that most global of hotel applications, the central reservations system (CRS).

Creating a Global CRS

The CRS is the heart and vascular system of any meaningful hotel company. It distributes all your rates and availability [products] out to all your

distribution channels, fulfills your revenue management strategies, and ultimately sends booked reservations to your properties. Without it, the business will fail and die. An effectively localized CRS lets the guest dream, shop and share in the language and manner of their choice. It also allows the hotel or travel company associates to interact with their systems and guests in the languages most comfortable to them.

Many observers feel the staff-facing attributes of localization are less relevant than they used to be. Some CRS providers and their clients are more comfortable relying on English-language only usage for field labels, system prompts and help text. We disagree, noting the wild card here is the rise of the Chinese market. Consumer demand in that market is driving requests for system users to interact as they choose to, or are able to. We can't assume the middle-class Chinese call center worker of tomorrow will be fluent in English – today's Chinese middle class is larger than the entire population of the United States. Note the purpose-built, fully localized integrated CRS/PMS/CRM platform H-World, used and sold at the chain level by China's Huazhu Hotels

Group, or the various distribution solutions offered by the Shiji Group.

But let's focus on the guest side, our customers: Outbound travel by Chinese speakers, readers and writers compels usable CRS platforms they can interact with. This isn't just field labels and currency codes. The concept of a last name as Americans know it simply doesn't apply. In Chinese cultures (there are many), the last name comes first. Surname or family name is a better option. Asian and Arabic languages use different character set than the Romanized alphabet we're used to. Arabic is read from right to left.

Putting Information into the CRS

The need for hotels to be flexible when it comes to languages and cultural assumptions extends beyond the CRS. If a CRS can accept input equally well in simplified Chinese from mainland China, traditional Chinese from Taiwan and Farsi from Iran, that's all fine and good. But we must get the reservation to the hotel, and the hotel needs to be able to do something with it. Many PMS interfaces will fail a CRS message containing a character set the local PMS can't interpret. Even if the PMS can accept the character set, that doesn't mean local staff are prepared to work with it and recognize the guest accordingly.

The net impact of globalization for CRS providers, either hotel companies or third parties, is profound and driven by a need for localization. Hotel companies and third-party vendors that succeed in cracking this code locally will survive and thrive in the networked world of today and tomorrow. ■

First Published at Hospitality Upgrade

Mark Haley CHTP+ is a Partner with Prism Hospitality Consulting, a boutique consulting firm servicing the global hospitality industry in technology, distribution and Loyalty strategies. For more information, please visit: www.PrismHospitalityConsulting.com, or call +1 978-521-3600.

- **Language** is the biggest, most expensive and most important aspect of any localization plan:
 - **Unicode (UTF-8)** support is essential to write in Asian and Arabic scripts, some of which are written right-to-left or even vertically instead of the left-to-right orientation followed by languages that use Roman alphabets.
- **Date formats** need to be correct for the reader, especially with something as date driven as hotel reservations: Is the 06/10/2019 reservation in Dallas from Amsterdam on June 10 or October 6?
- **Number formats** are like date formats. Decimal points and commas have opposite usage in currency amounts in the USA versus many other locales.
- **Taxation** is a top priority for governments everywhere, with percentage taxes, flat taxes, head taxes, threshold taxes, hot spring taxes (*Onsen*, in Japan) and more.
- **Local reporting requirements** vary around the world. Some authorities want to know who is staying in what hotel for how long.
- **Paper size** matters for reporting output to paper, or to files that might get printed.
- **Telephone number formats** vary by region.
- **Postal code formats** tend to differ by country.