The Hotel Yearbook 2023
The Uncertainty New Normal

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Hotel-tech in overdrive - How to onboard a hotel in a day

Floor Bleeker
Chief Technology Officer (CTO), Accor

Synopsis

Accor, a global hotel company, has set an ambitious goal to become the first hotel company to enable owners to onboard a hotel in 24 hours. The company recognizes the challenges of the traditional onboarding process, including the need for quick technology deployment, reduction of repetitive tasks, cyber security, and easy training for staff. Accor plans to address these challenges by maximizing the use of cloud technology, automation, and establishing a 'zero trust' security environment. The company aims to move all of its applications and assets to the cloud in the next few years for better cost efficiency, security, and streamlining. Automation will also help reduce administrative tasks, and biometrics will simplify the check-in process. The final challenge for Accor is the hiring and retention of staff, which is becoming increasingly difficult in the hospitality industry.

By temperament, tech people are impatient: we love the next exciting possibility and to imagine how tech solutions can make things quicker and easier. Since my first pre-opening over two decades ago, I have been frustrated and fascinated by how long the process of getting a new hotel on board can take from a technology perspective. It's been accepted that preparations can take as long as six months, which today, is simply far too slow.

It only takes 48 hours to become an Uber driver or 30 minutes to become an AirBnB host. For Accor, this realization has helped us define one of our key strategic challenges for the future. **Can we set up a hotel in 24 hours? We believe we will.**

Our ambition to be the first global hotel company to enable owners to onboard a hotel in a day, is not based on wishful thinking. At Accor Tech we know the territory and the challenges we face well. We also know that developing the agility, adaptability and responsiveness needed to succeed in this fast-changing market will effectively set us apart.

Ultimately, this will unlock potential for hoteliers by enabling them to respond quickly to the needs and preferences of their local market. In an uncertain world, the faster hoteliers are able to change and adapt, the more likely they are to thrive.

If you run through the traditional onboarding process for a hotel, it is easy to see some of the challenges we need to tackle. It is not unusual to find over a hundred different touchpoints in any given hospitality tech ecosystem. Many hotels have legacy systems - representing a substantial investment – that are close to end-of-life, and certainly not robust enough to build on for the future.

With the explosion in tech innovation over the past few years, we have countless local and regional hospitality tech solutions that are much loved by hotels, but not necessarily relevant to a global market. In addition, they may not meet the increasingly stringent global security requirements. Our challenge is not just speed and security: maintaining flexibility is vital across our unique wide range of brands: **From eco and mid-range hotels to premium, luxury, and** **lifestyle properties****.**

We have identified four key challenges that need to be addressed to onboard hotels much quicker and I imagine most hoteliers can relate to these:

- How do hotels deploy technology quickly and keep current systems up to date?
- How can hotels benefit from technology that reduces repetitive tasks, and free up valuable staff time to deliver great, personalized service?
- How can we keep systems, data, and users safe from cyber risks?
- How can we make it easy for hotel team members to learn systems quickly and use them effectively?

To address the first issue of deploying solutions quickly and speeding up access to innovation, we know Cloud is the solution and we're committed to maximizing its use to meet our "one hotel in one day" challenge.

Once systems – architecture, infrastructure, operations, security, and back office - are Cloud-based, we open the door to streamlining and standardization as well as greater flexibility and efficiency.

On Cloud, we can deploy systems at the click of a button and introduce exciting new features for hotels to use instantly. This, in turn, optimizes costs for hotels, which is always very welcome news for hoteliers. Taking data off-premise is also a plus, making for more secure operations, better risk management, and more robust compliance.

Our ambition is to move all Accor applications and assets to the Cloud in the next few years. Once that is a reality, hotel onboarding will be much closer to the 'plug and play experience' we have with so many of our own devices today.

It feels like robotics are always 'just beyond the horizon', but at Accor Tech we are starting to see a lot more automation (RPA) being trialed in hotels. **Automation is key to solving our second issue, that of reducing the administrative tasks that take up (expensive) staff time.**

Automation will also be instrumental in the commissioning of systems for a new hotel. Gone will be the days when a hotel needs to wait for 'someone to switch something on' in an office to get hotel tech working. We just need to learn from the way we download and use apps to understand that the old way of onboarding hotels cannot last.

Our third challenge lies with tech security, a complex and high-risk area that lies at the core of Accor's ability to do business. The cyber threats we manage every day are increasingly sophisticated: it is impossible for a local property to establish the level of protection that we provide through our global security service offer.

Again, Cloud and automation are the answer, and establishing a 'zero trust' security environment is fundamental. Put simply, 'zero trust' means we can always reliably verify who is accessing our systems, the device they are using, where they are, and what they are looking at, conducting real-time checks of who is 'live' at any time from any device.

As hotels increasingly adopt biometrics to streamline check-in and access to in-house experiences, 'zero trust' does the heavy lifting behind the scenes.

Accor Tech EXCOM - at the Mgallery Molitor, Paris - December 2022

Put automation into the mix and you have the tools you need to provide a much faster onboarding experience. Security stops being perceived as a barrier to operations and becomes part of the everyday landscape.

Our final 'one hotel in one day' challenge lies in an area that most hoteliers are struggling with in 2023: the hiring and retention of staff. Hospitality has long been a transient industry, and the move to a gig workforce seems inevitable. We need to ensure the fast, effective onboarding of teams by getting rid of complicated screens.

If we want to onboard a hotel in a day, we need to be able to train teams on systems that are simple and intuitive to use.

I think tech teams, more than any other hospitality function, love a 'stretch goal' and the 'one hotel in one day' objective certainly falls into that category. That is what makes it so exciting for us. Ultimately, our hotels and guests are at the core of our ambitions. **Our role is to help Accor hoteliers to thrive by enabling them to respond at speed to the demands of their local market.**

When we can onboard a hotel in a day, we will know for sure that we have perfected the systems and processes that enable all our Accor hotels to change their offer to their guests in just 24 hours.

Floor Bleeker — Chief Technology Officer (CTO), Accor
Floor Bleeker holds a Bachelor's degree in Hotel Administration from Hotelschool The Hague, Netherlands and an MBA from the University of Colorado, USA. Floor has over two decades of multinational experience in the hospitality industry, and a substantial background in IT leadership, strategy development and execution, business analysis and application development. In all his roles, Floor has prioritized team leadership and performance management as fundamental to delivering on the demands of the industry. Prior to joining Accor, Floor was the Chief Information Officer of Mövenpick Hotels & Resorts. In this role he was responsible for IT strategy, program development and implementation across the Group.When Mövenpick Hotels & Resorts joined Accor in November 2018, Floor was appointed Chief Information Officer for the Middle East & Africa and strategic IT programs across the Group. In this position, Floor contributed greatly to the modernization of the IT department and solutions for our hotels in this strategic region for the Group. Floor was appointed Chief Technology Officer in November 2020. At the same time, he joined the Group's Executive Committee until January 2023, when he became member of Accor's Management Board.

Accor — group.accor.com/en
Accor is a world-leading hospitality group consisting of more than 5,000 properties and 10,000 food and beverage venues throughout 110 countries. The group has one of the industry's most diverse and fully-integrated hospitality ecosystems encompassing luxury and premium brands, midscale and economy offerings, unique lifestyle concepts, entertainment and nightlife venues, restaurants and bars, branded private residences, shared accommodation properties, concierge services, co-working spaces and more. Accor also boasts an unrivalled portfolio of distinctive brands and approximately 300,000 team members worldwide. Over 65 million members benefit from the company's comprehensive loyalty program ALL - Accor Live Limitless - a daily lifestyle companion that provides access to a wide variety of rewards, services and experiences.

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