**A Fresh Approach to Technology Partnerships in the Hospitality & Leisure Industry**

The hospitality and leisure industry thrives on personal interactions, where the human touch greatly influences guest experiences. However, as we have previously discussed in this blog, the COVID-19 lockdowns have compelled the entire sector to embrace new ways of engaging with guests. By leveraging next-generation smart technology, organisations in the industry have been able to deliver tailored experiences and streamlined access to a wide range of services.

Consequently, the relationships between hospitality and leisure (H&L) organisations and their technology providers have undergone a transformation. Traditionally, these organisations maintained decentralised networks of technology partners, with different providers handling various aspects of their IT infrastructure. For instance, one partner handled guest connectivity, another managed corporate connectivity, and yet another oversaw LAN and Wi-Fi. Although this has met the sector's requirements for many years, the challenges presented by the COVID era have revealed the model’s limitations.

The primary challenge lies in communication and collaboration. Engaging multiple suppliers for different areas of the IT infrastructure necessitates regular coordination among them to ensure seamless integration of all solutions. However, this can often lead to bottlenecks during complex deployments, limiting the flexibility, scalability, and overall visibility of new solutions.

During 2020 and 2021, when organisations had to swiftly adapt to COVID restrictions and significantly overhaul their technology infrastructure, it became evident that this approach was no longer acceptable. In the post-pandemic era, maintaining flexibility is crucial for IT infrastructure to withstand any future landscape shifts of COVID's magnitude, while minimising the impact on guest experiences.

**Introducing a Unified Partnership Model for the Hospitality Sector**

The solution lies in consolidating the fragmented technology partner networks of the past into streamlined and highly agile partnerships. These partnerships involve providers offering a comprehensive range of IT services in bespoke, fully integrated combinations. By delivering these services as managed solutions, internal teams can focus on enhancing the guest experience while complementing their technical expertise with specialised support from dedicated professionals. This approach serves as the foundation for the smart hotels of the future, where automation and data analytics optimise every guest's experience, from pre-arrival to departure.

But what does this partnership look like in practice within the diverse and dynamic H&L sector? There is no one-size-fits-all solution. Each partnership will be unique, tailored to the goals and requirements of the organisation. However, the following elements are anticipated to be essential in the years ahead:

1. **A Holistic Infrastructure View:** Overcoming the traditional challenge of disconnected systems and suppliers, a unified partnership allows for the implementation of a bespoke dashboard that provides a real-time view of performance at both macro and micro levels. This holistic view enables data-driven decision-making at all levels.
2. **Leading-edge Cyber Security:** Given the increasing complexity of the cyber threat landscape, particularly for sectors like H&L that handle substantial volumes of customer data, robust cybersecurity measures are paramount. These measures should incorporate the latest threat intelligence, proactive monitoring, automatic updates, vulnerability identification, and resolution. Additionally, robust disaster recovery and business continuity plans should be in place to mitigate the risk of successful ransomware attacks.
3. **A Vendor-agnostic Approach:** The infrastructure design should revolve around the customer's and guests' requirements, rather than being limited by the provider's solution portfolio. A vendor-agnostic approach allows for the utilisation of multiple technologies, as needed.
4. **Bespoke Cloud Transformation:** The Cloud offers an ideal platform for sophisticated applications that provide various services to guests. It also opens doors for advanced technologies like AI, machine learning, and big data projects. The single-partner model simplifies and streamlines the Cloud transformation process, ensuring successful integration with the wider IT infrastructure. It enables centralised monitoring and management for complete control and visibility.
5. **World-Class Connectivity:** Reliable and high-performance connectivity serves as the foundation for all operations. It should be designed to segregate network traffic for staff and guests, providing the resilience and security required to accommodate peak periods, such as holidays and highly anticipated events.

These partnerships represent just one aspect of the fundamental changes unfolding in the H&L sector. Data management, service delivery, and staff-guest interactions are all evolving. While the future of this journey remains uncertain, the sector is well-prepared to confront these challenges and continue driving innovation. If you would like to explore any of the topics discussed in more detail, please do not hesitate to reach out to us!