

# Hotel technology

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## TECH

### HITEC: How technology helped hotels pivot during COVID

By Esther Hertzfeld | Sep 28, 2021



The panel featured (from left): John Burns, president of Hospitality Technology Consulting; Andrew Arthurs, CIO of Aimbridge Hospitality; Carol Beggs, director of technology for Chatham Bars Inn; Dan Kornick, CIO of Loews Hotels & Co.; Michael Levie, COO for citizenM; Mohammed Al Qassim, managing partner at The Manor by JA; Scott Strickland, EVP/CIO of Wyndham Hotels & Resorts; while Frank Wolfe, CEO of HFTP looks on. (Esther Hertzfeld)

DALLAS — While the pandemic created a number of problems for the hotel industry, it also helped hoteliers be more creative and efficient, especially when it came to their technology, according to industry chief information officers who took the stage this morning at HITEC Dallas. During the CIO panel, moderated by Hospitality Technology Consulting President John Burns, senior hospitality executives explored the dynamic technology landscape that has evolved since the beginning of the pandemic.

The panel included Andrew Arthurs, CIO of Aimbridge Hospitality; Carol Beggs, director of technology for Chatham Bars Inn; Dan Kornick, CIO of Loews Hotels & Co.; Michael Levie, COO for citizenM; Mohammed Al Qassim, managing partner at The Manor by JA; and Scott Strickland, EVP/CIO

of Wyndham Hotels & Resorts.

Within the first two months of the pandemic, Strickland’s staff had to be downsized by about 40 percent, making it harder for the team to not only prosper but to survive in that environment. “We had to re-jigger our entire property portfolio for what we should focus on,” he said. “We really focused on our blue-collar business travelers, which we serve often.”

Kornick had a similar experience with staffing reductions of about 30 percent. Loews Hotels relied heavily on its vendors to help survive in those early months of the pandemic by seeing how those vendors can help the company. “We ended up being able to move faster than we did pre-pandemic,” he said. “We can execute faster, too.”

Levie shared a different story about citizenM’s early days of the pandemic. “We really reprioritized our projects—with almost-empty hotels, it is easy to implement new technologies,” he said. “We actually increased our staffing and perfected the agile way of working throughout our organization to pick up speed and efficiency.”

### Remote Workforces

Burns asked the panel how the hotels could take those online Zoom conversations and build a stronger community, especially with staff that might have been hired to be remote and would stay remote.

Al Qassim said that while working remotely wasn’t always the most pleasant experience and took effort, his company continue to schedule events and activities to create camaraderie—all from afar. “We included our staff’s family often, too, since everyone was at home,” he said. “It created a sense of belonging to the company and that we care about you and your family.”

At Chatham Bars Inn, Beggs and her staff were only remote for about a month before they were back on property with a few other departments. (Some departments are still remote to this day.) “That can create tension between those two parties—the work-from-home staff are working longer, odd hours while those on-property are doing more than they ever have before,” she said. “That can lead each group to think they are doing more.”

Arthurs really encouraged empathy among his team to build community, including lots of connecting with individuals one-on-one. “It was a lot of ‘how are you doing?’ ‘How are the kids doing?’” he said. “We wanted to help support them on that strange journey—from a distance and through a video screen. [It’s] all about the human connection and building an authentic connection with your staff.”

While Levie was impressed with the sense of community that was created so quickly in the early stages of the pandemic, he said he was sad that it took the pandemic to bring everyone together like that. “We need to be more support[ive of] each other and evolution is just too slow,” he said. “This should be done faster and this should be normal for all of us.”

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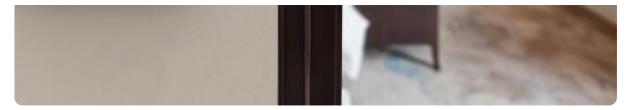
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