Introduction to Electronic Reservations Systems

The purpose of this training program is to provide an educational resource for hotel operations, sales and marketing, and management staff to better understand and use global distribution systems as an effective marketing and distribution tool. Travel agents, wholesalers, tour operators, GDS employees and other travel industry audiences may also benefit from the information provided in this educational series.

Each Module includes several "One Minute Quizzes" where you can check your progress in learning about the GDSs. In addition, suggestions and tips are provided along with definitions of frequently used terms and acronyms. We've tried to make the Modules fun to use as well as informative.

Introduction to this Training Module

This Training Module introduces the global distribution network and is intended for a broad hotel audience including:

- General Managers
- Sales personnel
- Front Desk staff
- Reservation staff

In order to assist you in understanding some of the jargon or technical terms used by the global distribution systems, there is a full glossary at the end of this module. As well, terms are briefly defined in an on-line glossary. Example:

This Training Module is available in three variations:

- Self-guided workbook
- PC-based training and workbook
- Instructor's graphics for group presentations

Other Training Modules in this Educational Kit are:

- "Introduction to Global Distribution Systems" (Module 1)
- "Selling Your Hotel Through the Global Distribution Network" (Module 3)

WHAT IS A GDS?

In Module 1 we learned that the travel marketplace is a global arena, with hundreds of thousands of buyers (travel agents) and sellers (hotels, airlines, car rental companies, etc.)

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		EDITION: *1*
		PAGE *2 OF 21*

working with each other to reserve and deliver products and services to the ultimate buyer -- the traveller.

Increasingly, the "shelves" on which the buyers look for those travel products and services are the world's global distribution systems (GDSs). These systems have become the electronic supermarket that links seller to buyer, allowing the reservation to be made, the "sale" to take place.

> *A __company__ (largely or completely owned by airlines) which operates a computer system for reserving air flights and other travel services.*

And in Module 1 we found that a Global Distribution System can be defined in two different ways.

A GDS is :

> *The __community of users__ — travel agents, airlines, hotels and car rental companies and others — who are linked by that computer system. Together these GDS participants offer products and services and then reserve these products and services on behalf of their clients — the travelling public.*

It is also:

From the huge information base in each GDS, travel agents are able to search, select and instantly book travel products anywhere in the world for their clients, including air flights, rental cars, hotels, cruise packages, tours, theatre tickets and boat charters.

Each GDS company -- remember there are seven primary GDSs -- maintains an inventory of travel products including hotels. Hotel companies and hotel representation companies contract individually with each GDS to be listed and bookable in that system by the travel agents it serves.

GROWTH OF GDS USAGE

Use of global distribution systems has grown dramatically. Today travel agents, and increasingly the general public using online computer services such as CompuServe, America Online and Prodigy, use GDSs to reserve hotel accommodations more than ever before, as illustrated by the following bar graph.

Primary GDSs:
Amadeus
Axess
Galileo/Apollo
SABRE
SAHARA
System One
        Amadeus
Worldspan

In 1995, hotel companies registered more than a 30% increase in GDS bookings over 1994 levels. GDS have taken on a new importance to everyone involved in hotel management, operations and sales.

From a European perspective it is important to note that 80% of European travel agents installed one of the major Global Distribution Systems between 1992 and 1994. In this short period, they have acquired all the capabilities that the U.S. industry had gained over 12 years. The European use of GDSs is poised for massive growth.

Any travel supplier, including hotels, not listed or not accurately listed, in the GDSs risks losing market share to participating competitors. GDS participants who are active in their use of the full range of descriptive and promotional opportunities in these systems will find themselves strongly positioned to capture interest - and reservations - in this electronic marketplace as it continues to expand and mature.

THE GDS RESERVATIONS TEAM

The electronic reservation environment functions because of successful teamwork between many groups and individuals. This module now continues with an examination of the roles of each of these team members.

The GDS Reservations Team Roster:

∖   Travel agents around the world

∖   At the Hotel Chain/Representation Company's Corporate Office:
                Corporate Marketing staff
                Marketing Automation Director

⌟ At the Hotel Chain/Representation Company's Central Reservation Office:
  GDS Update staff
  GDS Help Desk staff
  Technical staff

⌟ At the Hotel
  General Manager
  Sales and Marketing Office
  Reservation Office
  Front Desk

⌟ The GDSs and the Switch Companies

Each team member has a vital role to play if GDSs are to be used to their full potential.

The **Travel Agent** is the hotel's frontline sales contact with the traveller. It is essential that he or she have complete information about your property, and have full confidence in its accuracy. You will want to make your information clear, accurate and appealing.

REMEMBER, more and more travellers are now accessing GDSs directly through their personal computers at home or in the office, connecting to such network services as CompuServe, Prodigy and America On-line. When you prepare your property information, keep all of these readers in mind and make your descriptions sales oriented, simple, clear and interesting.

Corporate Marketing staff develop programs for company-wide use, sometimes on an optional basis. These programs promote your chain's identity, communicate its value and convey the benefits of selecting a hotel in the chain.

The **Marketing Automation Director** oversees the hotel chain's distribution via automation. They work with Corporate Marketing, Travel Industry Sales, GDS Update, Help Desk and Technical staff to co-ordinate development and implementation of the many programs each hotel group presents in the GDSs. They manage the promotional activities, including electronic advertising and electronic directory participation, to ensure effective representation of every hotel in each of the systems. The Marketing Automation Director is also the hotel chain's primary liaison or contact with the travel agency market as it relates to selling the hotel electronically. They also evaluate, recommend and facilitate implementation of GDS system enhancements to best market and merchandise hotels through the GDSs.

GDS Update staff have the challenging task of fitting property information into each of the GDSs. These systems differ from one to another in their structure and flexibility. The GDS

update staff are expert in formatting information to achieve the clear and appealing presentation you seek.

The **GDS Help Desk staff** provides assistance to travel agents as they use the GDSs to book accommodation. Questions about deposit and guarantee policies are frequent, as are inquires about confirmation of special requests and commission payment.

The **Technical staff** maintain the computer hardware and software which provide the efficient reservation processing. They also develop the system enhancements requested by hotel staff,, corporate marketing, management and travel agents. Additionally they manage the communication network linking their systems to the GDSs and to each hotel.

THE ROLE OF THE "HOTEL"

Individual hotels are ultimately responsible for the information displayed in the GDS. Each hotel determines the overall content of their GDS property descriptions and the "demand generators" that are listed as index or reference points which will influence the property's selection by travellers.

A number of different people in the hotel must have GDS awareness and involvement, including the reservations department, the front office, the sales and marketing department and the general manager.

The **Hotel General Manager** (sometimes together with the Director of Sales and Marketing) co-ordinates development of the programs, packages and rates which will be listed for your hotel in the GDS. It is his or her duty to ensure that the strengths of the hotel are communicated in the descriptions, and that all programs and packages are appropriately listed in the GDSs. A common GDS problem with hotels is that low priority is given to understanding and monitoring the information being displayed on GDS terminals. It is the General Manager's responsibility to correct this. It is also the GM's responsibility to ensure the accuracy of the data sent to the GDS Update staff.

The **Hotel Sales and Marketing staff**, together with management, set the rates, both public and negotiated, which will be competitive in the marketplace and at the same time bring profit to the hotel. They use their creative talents to develop programs and packages which will appeal to potential hotel guests, and then write descriptions of those offers that will convince the reader to recommend or select the property. Day to day responsibility for completion of GDS-related questionnaires and data solicitations often falls to the sales staff. It is important that hotel sales and marketing staff learn about GDS system capabilities to ensure their full and effective use. They should strive to become partners with the GDS Update group and with the travel agents who book the property.

The Sales Staff must also ensure that any "negotiated rates" which they arrange for a client are loaded into the GDS systems so that they can be sold by the travel agent. This requires

providing the GDS update staff with the negotiated rate and identifying the travel agents authorised to book it.

The **Hotel Reservation staff** must maintain accurate guest room availability data, and ensure that it is promptly communicated to the GDS update staff. As reservations arrive, the reservation staff review them for special requests and later provide them to the Front Desk staff in preparation for the guest's arrival.

The **Hotel Desk staff** prepare for the guests' arrival and verify that special requests are met whenever possible. Once the guest arrives they again verify the reservation details, including the guest identity, and answer any questions about their rate, and the property's facilities.

Selling a hotel in a GDS is a multi-stage, team effort. When completed thoroughly and professionally, it produces satisfied guests and the best possible production for your hotel by each of the global distribution systems.

Who does what?

While specific roles will vary from one hotel chain to the next, common responsibilities are shown in the following chart.

TASK	HOTEL	CRO	CORPORATE
Develop company-wide programs			Marketing & Marketing Automation Director
Ensure staff understanding of GDS	General Manager/ Director of Sales & Marketing	CRO Management	Marketing Automation Director
Co-ordinate GDS advertising and conference participation			Marketing Automation Director
PMS updating	Front Desk		
CRO updating		CRO Update staff	
GDS updating		GDS Update staff	
Ensure data accuracy	General Manager/ Director of Sales & Marketing	CRO/GDS Update staff	Marketing Automation Director
Assist travel agents with GDS questions		GDS Help Desk	
GDS link maintenance		Technical staff	Technical staff
Set room rates, develop local programs	Sales staff		
Write/review property descriptions	Sales staff		Marketing Automation Director

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Maintain accurate rooms inventory	Reservations		
Review reservations for special requests	Reservations Front Desk		
Prepare for and receive guests	Front Desk		

THE RESERVATION TEAM'S TOOLS

The teamwork needed to present hotels, book reservations and welcome guests requires Cupertino of all team members PLUS a basic understanding of each team member's duties and resources. Corporate and hotel team members will benefit from understanding how hotel information is displayed to travel agents as they use their GDS terminals.

The first display travel agents use in the hotel shopping process is the **Hotel Availability display**. This screen shows several hotels which match the needs the travel agent has specified - location, availability, rates, chain code, proximity to a landmark, etc. Usually more hotels qualify than can fit on a single screen. (Note: Hotels are displayed in random order and will change each time an availability request is made.) The agent will review several of these screens before either selecting one of the hotels, or deciding to look at a more detailed Hotel Description screen for additional information.

Hotel Availability Display:

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[as shown in SABRE]

```
HOTDFW/01NOV-1NT1
QUALIFIERS - C/-USD
HOTELS IN DFW                         LOCATION DIS/DIR/TRAN
     ** RATES DISPLAYED ARE GUIDE FOR COMPARISON ONLY **
     * DC AVAILABILITY  @ DC SELL
     1@FS12132 FOUR SEASONS RESORT A-C IRVING TX    -  7W  0
           245.00 RAC/A1K B1K B2T C1K V1K
     2@WY8183 WYNDHAM LAS COLINAS   -C IRVING TEXAS      -
7E  0
      V      110.00 RAC/A1K A2D
     3*ZG 729 ZG MOCKINGBIRD WEST   -C DALLAS, TX   - 18SE 0
      DAL  67.00 RAC/A1K 2BD B1K B2D C1K C2D, D1D E1D
     4 BH10116 HAWTHORN ARLINGT- C ARLINGTON, TX    -  8S  0
           89.00 RAC/AS2 AS1 BS1
     5 BH12737 HAWTHORN RICHA-   -C.RICHARDSON,TX   - 20E  0
           95.00 RAC/AS2 BS2 A1Q B1Q
     6@AR 8171 FABULOUS HOTEL/DFW  C ARLINGTON, TX      -
8S *L
      V      125.00 RAC/AS2 AS1 A1Q
*
     7@RC31573 RC DALLAS MARKET CENTER-C.DALLAS, TEXAS
15SE*0
           100.00 RAC/A1Q SU1
ENTER HOT* FOR MORE - OR - HOT/RC-CTGRY CODE FOR MORE RATES
```

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RESOURCE LIBRARY
HOTEL OPERATIONS
Rooms - Reservations

CODE: 03.01.013

EDITION: 1

PAGE 9 OF 21

What does it mean?

```
1 2  3   4       5                6       7                  8 9 10  11
6 @ AR 8171 FABULOUS HOTEL/DFW     C ARLINGTON, TX          -  8S  *  L
   V     75.00 RAC/AS2 AS1 A1Q                                      *
   12        13    14    15                                   16
```

1	Line number of Hotel Availability Display
2	(*) indicates Direct Connect Availability participant, (@) indicates Direct Connect Sell participant.
3	Chain code
4	Property number
5	Property name
6	Location (C=city, A=airport, R=resort, S=suburb)
7	City or hotel address
8	Miles from reference point (in this case - DFW Airport)
9	Direction from reference point to hotel
10	Asterisk (*) indicates meal plan is offered
11	Transportation available (L=limo/shuttle, H=courtesy shuttle, O=Other)
12	"V" indicates hotel is displayed in SABREvision
13	Lowest available rate for arrival date
14	Rate codes
15	Room type
16	Asterisk (*) indicating additional room types are available

The **Hotel Description display** provides the agent with extensive information about the rooms, rates, features and services of one hotel.

[as shown in SABRE]

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```
HOD22953
AR22973 THE MAGNIFICENT HOTEL                AIRPORT - FWR
        1212 N. MAIN STREET
        OURTOWN, AZ  95201
        FONE 214-748-0860
        FAX 214-855-5401
** DIRECT CONNECT PARTICIPANT **


RAC A1Q         A2Q        B1K        B2T        D1D        C1Q
RAC D2T


US GOVERNMENT SAFETY/FIRE APPROVED
OPTS-  FAM-Y MEAL-N TAX-12 PCT RM /8PCT SALES/10PCT FOOD

EXTRA FEES-  RA 15.00   RC 15.00   CR 0.00   EX 15.00
VISUAL -     SEE SABREVISION
LOCATION-    A TREASURE IN THE HEART OF CORPORATE COMMUNITY,
   JUST 20 MINUTES FROM OUTTOWN AIRPORT AND 45 MINUTES FROM
   DOWNTOWN.
- CONVENIENTLY LOCATED IN NW SUBURB.  MAJOR COMPANIES AND
   AREA ATTRACTIONS *350 ACRE NATURE PRESURE * ARE JUST
   MINUTES AWAY


TRANSPORTATION -
               SUPER SHUTTLE SERVICE AVAILABLE AT FWR
               AIRPORT /COST APPROX 16.00 USD/ AND KLING FIELD
               /COST APPROX 10.00 USD/.


POLICY -     CHECK-IN 3 PM / CHECK-OUT 12 NOON
             MAXIMUM FOUR GUESTS PER ROOM


FACILITIES
             - 624 GUEST ROOMS INCLUDING 63 SUITES.  HOTEL
               HAS 32 FLOORS.
             - LANDMARK ROOM / ELEGANT 4-STAR DINING
                 LUNCH   MON-FRI 1130AM-230PM
                         SAT-SUN 12N-3PM
                 DINNER  MON-SUN 5PM-1030PM
             - TONY'S GRILL / VARIED MENU.  6AM TO 12AM
             - LANDMARK LOUNGE / NIGHTLY ENTERTAINMENT
             - LOBBY BAR OPEN 9AM-1AM DAILY
             - INDOOR POOL ON 27TH FLOOR
             - PARKING GARAGE WITH IN/OUT PRIVILEGES
                   8.00 PER DAY FOR GUESTS
                   9.00 PER DAY FOR NON-GUESTS
SERVICES -
             - BABYSITTING
             - BEAUTY SHOP
             - LAUNDRY
             - VALET
             - GIFT SHOP
             - 24 HR. ROOM SERVICE
             - BUSINESS CENTER OPEN 6 AM TO 6PM/
```

RESOURCE LIBRARY
HOTEL OPERATIONS
Rooms - Reservations

CODE: 03.01.013

EDITION: 1

PAGE 11 OF 21

```
OTHER          - NO PETS ALLOWED
          - SHUTTLE SERVICE PROVIDED BETWEEN HOTEL AND FINES
                SHOPPING MALL
          - OURTOWN HEALTH CLUB LOCATED TWO BLOCKS FROM HOTEL

GUARANTEE-
          - CERTAIN RATES MAY REQUIRE GUARANTEE.  SEE HRD FOR
                EXACT REQUIREMENTS
          - ALL MAJOR CREDIT CARDS ACCEPTED / SEE HOD*G
          - TRAVEL AGENCY IATA/NAME/ADDRESS ACCEPTED FOR
                    GUARANTEE
          - COMPANY NAME/ADDRESS/TELEPHONE ACCEPTED FOR
GUARANTEE
          - BOOKINGS FOR *CLUB* MEMBERS MUST INCLUDE ID. NO.
IN
                "SI" FIELD

CANCELLATION-
          - SEE HRD FOR DETAILS ON LATEST CANCELLATION TIME TO
                AVOID NO-SHOW CHARGE

ATTRACTIONS-
          DISTANCE FROM MAGNIFICENT HOTEL TO NEARBY
ATTRACTIONS
                FINES DEPARTMENT STORE.................1 BLOCK
                OURTOWN CONVENTION CENTER.............3 BLOCKS
                OURTOWN MUSEUM.......................5 BLOCKS
                COUNTY FAIR GROUNDS...................1.5
MILES
                BIGTIME COMPANY.......................2.4
MILES
                H.S. LARGE AIRFORCE BASE..............5.5
MILES

INDEXES-          C    10NW  L    FWR
                  C     1SE  L    OUR
           AZ C          0    0    OURTOWN
           AC C          0    S    FINES DEPARTMENT STORE
           AZ C          1W   O    OURTOWN CONVENTION
CENTER
           AZ C          1S   0    OURTOWN MUSEUM
           AZ C          1SE  0    COUNTY FAIR GROUNDS
           AZ C          3W   O    BIGTIME COMPANY
           AZ C          5N   0    HS LARGE AIRFORCE BASE
           AZ C          15S  O    PLAYLAND AMUSEMENT
PARK
           AZ C          17N  O    HEADQUARTERS RESEARCH
PARK
```

In this module we refer to "**seamless connectivity**". This is the newest type of link between GDSs and hotel central reservation systems. Using this link, much of the information for the Hotel Description screen, which would until recently have been obtained from the GDS's data base, is now collected from the hotel company's own extensive data base. The result is a more detailed description of property features and rates.

Here are examples of seamless connectivity displays from Apollo Inside Availability and SABRE Direct Connect Availability.

Apollo HOC Display:

```
**HOC INSIDE AVAILABILITY ** WELCOME TO HYATT. . . COME ON IN
REF   USD RATE HY 00998 REGENCY DALLAS
  1       135.00 WEEKEND RATES REGENCY CLUB
                 REGENCY CLUB ACCOMMODATIONS HAVE 1 KING OR 2
                 DOUBLE BEDS AND ARE LOCATED ON 17TH FLOOR.
  2       110.00 WEEKEND RATES HYATT GUEST ROOM
                 SUPERIOR RM W/KING OR 2 DBL BEDS LOCATED ON
                 FLOORS 3-28 WITH VIEW OF THE SKYLINE.
  3       125.00 WEEKEND RATES BUSINESS PLAN
                 DLX RM COMP BKFST COFFEE MAKER IN-ROOM FAX
                 MACHINE  IRON W/BOARD AND BUSINESS CENTER.
  4        62.83 GOVERNMENT RATE HYATT GUEST ROOM ** SEE HOV **
```

```
REF   USD RATE  HY 00998 REGENCY DALLAS
  5        77.83 GOVERNMENT RATE BUSINESS PLAN ** SEE HOV **
  6       139.00 SENIOR CITIZEN HYATT GUEST ROOM ** SEE HOV **
  7       154.00 SENIOR CITIZEN BUSINESS PLAN ** SEE HOV **
```

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HOTEL OPERATIONS
Rooms - Reservations

CODE: 03.01.013

EDITION: 1

PAGE 14 OF 21

Sabre HOD Display:

RESOURCE LIBRARY
HOTEL OPERATIONS
Rooms - Reservations

CODE: 03.01.013

EDITION: 1

PAGE 15 OF 21

```
              ** DIRECT CONNECT AVAILABILITY **
                ** RESIDENCE INNS RESPONSE **
RC31573 RC DALLAS N CENTRAL              AIRPORT -  DFW
       13636 GOLDMARK DR                 ** 30 MAR-1NT1 **
       DALLAS TX 75240                   ** SELL OH#LINENBR **
       FONE 214-669-0478
       FAX 214-644-2632             TAXES - 9 PCT


1  BEST AVAILABLE RATE   93.00 USD  GUAR  /CLX-4P
                                    SEE HRD*1 FOR MORE
BEST AVAILABLE RATE*STUDIO ROOM-1 QUEEN, 1 BATH-FULL KITCHEN*
  LIVING AREA WITH FIREPLACE*INCLUDES BREAKFAST DAILY

2  REGULAR RATE               125.00 USD  GUAR  /CXL-4P
                                    SEE HRD*2 FOR MORE
REGULAR RATE*STUDIO - 1 QUEEN 1 BATH-*LIVING ROOM, FULL
KITCHEN,
  FIREPLACE, *INCLUDES BREAKFAST DAILY

3  REGULAR RATE               135.00 USD  GUAR  /CXL-4P
                                    SEE HRD*3 FOR MORE
REGULAR RATE*KING- 1 KING BED - BATH-*LIVING ROOM W/FIREPLACE,
  FULL KITCHEN*INCLUDES BREAKFAST DAILY

4  REGULAR RATE               150.00 USD  GUAR  /CXL-4P
                                    SEE HRD*4 FOR MORE
REGULAR RATE*PENTHOUSE-1 QUEEN UPSTRS 1-KING DNSTRS 2-BATHS-
  BI-LVL LOFT, KITCHEN, LIVING RM W/FIREPLACE*INCLUDES
BREAKFAST

5  GOVT/MILITARY               76.00 USD  4 PM  /CXL -4P
   LIMITED AVAILABILITY             SEE HRD*5 FOR MORE
GOVT/MILITARY*STUDI ROOM-1-QUEEN, 1 BATH-FULL KITCHEN, LIVING
AREA
  WITH FIREPLACE*INCLUDES BREAKFAST DAILY

6  GOVT/MILITARY              126.00 USD GUAR  /CXL - 4P
   LIMITED AVAILABILITY             SEE HRD*6 FOR MORE
GOVT/MILITARY*PENTHOUSE SUITE-1 KING, 1 QUEEN 2 BATH-LIVING
ROOM
  WITH FIREPLACE, FULL KITCHEN, BI-LEVEL OPEN LOFT*W/BRKFAST

7  AARP                        89.00 USD GUAR  /CXL - 4P
                                    SEE HRD*7 FOR MORE
AARP RATE*STUDIO QUEEN-1 QUEEN-1 BATH-LIVING RM W/FIREPLACE
  FULL KITCHEN*INCLUDES BREAKFAST DAILY.

8  AAA AMERICAN AUTO AS   99.00 USD GUAR  /CXL 4 P
                                    SEE HRD*8 FOR MORE
AAA AMERICAN AUTO ASSN*STUDIO QUEEN-1 QUEEN - 1 BATH-LIVING RM
  W/FIREPLACE*FULL KITCHEN*INCLUDES BREAKFAST DAILY
```

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HOTEL OPERATIONS
Rooms - Reservations

CODE: 03.01.013

EDITION: 1

PAGE   16 OF 21

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Finally, it is useful to look at a typical **hotel reservation message** received by a travel agent for

```
CONF:      843333676-33092
AIRLINE BOOKING-TRANSFER TO AIRLINE SELLS

CUMBERBATCH/RALPHMR
1 33092 B/W HTL PENNSYLVANIA  NEW YORK CITY  (MANHATTAN) NY
  HK     1RM          D1          TUE 22NOV  2 NTS  CXL: TOO LATE
SYSTEM ONE
       109.00 U.S DOLLARS     DEPOSIT TTL IS: 109.00   DUE BY
20NOV
  *** CHLD-12     RLWY-$20     CRIB-N/C     TAX-14.3
2 HOLD-6PM
PHONE-BDA909492-2992
ADRA-STAR TRAVEL AGENCY @35 UNION ST HAMILTON BM
SI-RQST NON-SMOKING LOWER FLOOR
MESSAGE NOTIFICATION FOR: PHX03  FROM: PHXRR BY
FROM-G5MKZJ
NO HISTORY
TRANS#:326-231007  MSG: 0871
```

a booking made from a GDS.

Travel agents sometimes use the "SI" field in a PNR booking segment to make special requests. They correspond to a "remarks" or "comment" line in a Property Management System booking. It is vitally important to fulfil these special requests whenever possible.

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Problems in the Booking Process

Considerable progress has been made in developing ever more sophisticated and reliable global distribution systems and hotel central reservation

> **What's the Solution?**
> The solution is strengthened communication between CRO and the hotel, as well as continual alertness by the Reservation Office and Front Desk staff to spot and correct these duplication situations as soon as they develop.

systems. Similar progress in educating GDS users in correct procedures is being made. Although

occasional problems and misunderstandings will continue to be part of the hotel business for the foreseeable future, educational efforts will reduce them.

These problems will include availability inaccuracies, misquoted rates, slow travel agent commission payment and a lack of travel agent and client trust in hotel reservations. One reason for many of these problems is that the reservation process involves two or three sources of availability information for a hotel -- the hotel PMS, the CRO computer, and the GDS computer (although the GDS availability database should normally be a duplicate of the CRO availability database).

Seamless connectivity will largely eliminate these problems since availability will have only one source (either at the property or at the CRO) from which all systems access reservations information.

If any problem should occur, hotel staff NEVER blame the travel agent or the use of a GDS because it undermines confidence in the electronic booking process. An extra effort should be made to accommodate the guest and then management should be advised of the problem so it can be remedied in the future.

Double Booking

Sometimes a guest will make a reservation through their travel agent and receive a confirmation number, only to phone the hotel later in the day to request a special service and find that the hotel does not have the reservation. Either the reservation has not yet been transmitted to the hotel from the CRO or the hotel reservations department has received the reservation, but has not entered it into the PMS. As a result, the guest loses confidence in all aspects of the travel itinerary (hotel, airline flights and car) booked by the travel agent, and the hotel reservationist may "double book" the guest in the hotel's reservation computer.

The guest blames the travel agent for a "problem" the agent did not cause, while the hotel blames the travel agent, the CRO and the GDS for not properly transmitting the reservation.

Accuracy of Availability

Concerns about the accuracy of room availability information used in booking reservations result from three situations.

1. *Intentional Overbooking* - Hotel staff know from long experience that a proportion of each day's scheduled arrivals will be no-shows. As a result, it is necessary to overbook by an amount equal to the anticipated no-show number in order to reach a full house. A problem arises when the oversell figure has been miscalculated and too many rooms are sold, or due to human error, the count of available rooms is

> **What's the solution?**
> Ensure that bookings and room inventory updates are promptly communicated to the CRO for entry into all reservation computers as soon as possible. Make speedy entry a top priority.

overlooked and an overbooking occurs. Every guest that is "walked" to another property, or asked to sleep on a sofa bed or rollaway, afterward feels a little less confident in that hotel's ability to manage their inventory. Every travel agent who has
booked a client when these problems arise feels equally frustrated.

2. *Update Delays* - Delays occur from time to time in informing the CRO of guest room inventory changes (fewer rooms to sell) resulting from property-direct bookings. Additionally, but rarely, there can be delays in the CRO transmission of availability updates to the GDSs since a small number of hotels still have manual update systems. Generally availability changes

> **What's the solution?**
> Leave inventory open for sale in all GDSs until rooms are sold out at the CRO.

in a hotel CRS system are automatically and immediately communicated to each GDS. In

> **What's the Solution?**
> Maintain accurate reservation and occupancy history records on which to base no-show forecasts. Think carefully about any unusual events or circumstances which could influence the normal no-show pattern. Include all appropriate staff in the occupancy and no-show process.

these manual systems, however, CRO staff type availability updates into each GDS, using a GDS terminal. The result can be bookings by travel agents who must then be informed, through the return of a "UC" code -- Unable to Confirm -- that the availability in the GDS is not entirely accurate and that the reservation cannot be confirmed.

3. *Early GDS Close-outs* - Last, and in many ways, most serious, some hotel companies stop sale of rooms in the GDSs before they are sold out at the CRO or the hotel. The result is that a travel agent may telephone the CRO, or the hotel after seeing the property sold out in the GDS, and find that rooms are still available. The consequence is further loss of confidence in the GDS data.

RESOURCE LIBRARY
HOTEL OPERATIONS
Rooms - Reservations

CODE: 03.01.013

EDITION: 1

PAGE 20 OF 21

This situation is usually the result of a policy decision by the hotel company or hotel representation organization to close out the GDSs when only 95% or 97% of the guestrooms have been sold. As long as these policies continue, travel agents will continue to feel, justifiably, less than full confidence in the GDS availability data.

Accuracy of Rates

Travel agents voice two main concerns about hotel data in global distribution systems. The first is with the accuracy of guest room availability. The second concerns room rates.

In the past some hotel companies, or individual hotel managers, have preferred not to list their lowest rates in the GDSs. While this may be appropriate in special circumstances, such as a local negotiated rate with a major client in the city where the hotel is located, it becomes a problem if any traveller, or their agent, could telephone the hotel and book that rate.

Travel agents are concerned when:

1. They can telephone a hotel and without referring to a special contract or arrangement, reserve a room at a lower rate than any of those listed in the GDSs.

2. Their client is told at check-in that they qualify for a lower rate, the desk clerk makes the rate adjustment and blames the travel   agent or GDS for the mix-up..

Worse still, when making the rate change, the desk clerk sometimes may cancel the booking made by the travel agent and make a new reservation, on which a travel agent commission will not be paid.

Feelings of frustration and doubt by travel agents about hotels are understandable in light of these situations. Both, however, can be corrected by hotel management, if they chose to do so.

Special Requests

Travel agents have the opportunity to request special services in the "Special Information" or "SI" field of the hotel reservation message they create in a GDS. It is important that these special requests be reviewed and responded to quickly and efficiently by the hotel Reservation Office and Front Desk staff. In rare cases it may be necessary to have the CRO send a confirmation or acknowledgement to the travel agent, in most it will be sufficient to provide the service when the guest arrives.

Commission Payment

Travel agents rely on booking commissions. Commissions paid by hotels for reservations are an important part of this income. Timely and accurate payment of commissions, in their local currency if possible, is an important responsibility of each hotel.

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PAGE 21 OF 21

As travel agents increasingly use their GDS computer terminal rather than the telephone for all their reservations, those hotel companies that provide the most accurate and problem-free reservations data and processing will become the hotels of choice. In order for the travel agents to trust the system, hotels must also trust the system and work to correct the few service problems that still exist.