



EXECUTIVE BRIEF

Bringing event management into the 21st century

HOSPITALITY

Managing successful events is a vital source of revenue, the potential of which can be significant in an era of data-driven and cloud-based systems. **In some cases, organizations have made events revenue into one of their largest revenue streams.** Success rests on access to mechanisms that can examine the market, collect data, identify and analyze what is most relevant, and then execute a strategy that's often deployed across multiple properties at once.

What are some common building blocks for creating an event management strategy and executing on it? What systems must be in place to deliver great experiences, capture relevant data, and scale operations according to demand to make the most out of resources? Here's a selection of real-world examples that answer these questions and provide a vision for how event management and sales and catering businesses must operate in the 21st century.

“Implementing the [event management] software before we opened our doors allowed us to control exactly what space we were selling and how we booked those events so every function executed was a success.”

WILL RAMSEY

Director of Group Sales for the Georgia Aquarium (Infor Sales & Catering Customer)

The importance of live events in an increasingly online world

Events like meetings, conferences, personal events, and other occasions represent a significant source of revenue to many organizations. Shared experiences are on the rise; the US Bureau of Labor projects that event management as an industry is set to grow by 11% as measured in **the ten-year period between 2016 and 2026**. This trend illustrates the demand for experts in this field. It's also an indication that increasing operational efficiency is an important area of focus to separate those organizations who will be successful at delivering shared experiences through event management and sales and catering, and those who will lag behind them.

What are leading organizations doing to increase sales, revenues, and overall operational efficiencies through event management? What are the barriers to success? What kinds of approaches and solutions are necessary to bring organizations and industries into a more technologically contemporary sphere? The following is a selection of stories from real-world companies seeking to bring their event management and sales and catering operations into the 21st century.

Creating unity across multiple properties and sites: LodgeWorks (Archer Hotels)

LodgeWorks is a privately held hotel management company, with a rich and storied history. LodgeWorks has cultivated strong franchise partnerships with Hyatt Hotels Corporation, developing and operating Hyatt Place® and Hyatt House® projects, as well as with Hilton Hotels and Starwood. LodgeWorks has also a brand innovator for over 30 years, launching Residence Inn®, Summerfield Suites, Hotel Sierra, and AVIA®. The company introduced its boutique hotel brand, Archer®, which LodgeWorks is growing in select US locations.

Managing these various properties required preserving each one's individual identity, while leveraging standardized and unified processes to manage events and leads. With leads generation from all locations coming out of events, LodgeWorks knew that to maximize results across all properties, it needed a unified platform to make that data accessible and actionable in an "above location" capacity, which included tight integrations with its property management solution.

Event management software: Essential characteristics

Investing in the right event management and sales and catering solution is a critical decision. What are the essential characteristics that every technology leader must consider when investing in an event management solution?

Here's a selected list of features and capabilities to use as a starting point:

- Cloud-based
- End-to-end functionality—booking, communications, payment, and follow-up
- Accessible data analysis and shareable custom reporting
- Omni-channel functionality, including mobile
- User-oriented interfaces
- Automated prompts for all stages in the process
- E-payment compatibility that's PCI compliant
- Integration with other solutions, including websites, hotel PMS, table management, food cost solutions, and menu management
- Strong CRM component—histories, discounts, and guest preferences

A standardized process

LodgeWorks needed an enterprise solution so its managers could sell and execute events in a standardized fashion. Allowing the teams to share leads, corporate-approved collateral, company-conforming documents, and guest profile information was a necessity. LodgeWorks also needed to collectively roll-up data for comprehensive corporate reporting from coast to coast.

LodgeWorks wanted to manage all of these processes in one, complete solution, so its teams could manage events end-to-end, from initial inquiry to “thank you.” This “lifecycle” model of event management leads the approach in managing an event and building on the relationships created because of that event. Making all of the data accessible, measurable, and actionable is the cornerstone to making that a reality, particularly in multi-location businesses in the very competitive hospitality industry.

Multiple activities simultaneously in a single venue: Georgia Aquarium

Many of the same principles are applicable to single locations, too. Georgia Aquarium in Atlanta is one of the world’s largest fresh and marine water aquariums. As an event space, it’s in high demand due to its profile as a world-class venue—making event planning a vital aspect to its business, but also a very demanding one. Management’s goal was to streamline the booking process to maximize the facility’s expansive event space, which includes a configurable 16,000 square foot ballroom, pre-function space, and building-wide accommodations. A key element to success was to execute as many events as possible while remaining efficient and profitable.

As prospects request space, it’s important that everyone involved in the booking process understand the guidelines for selling event space, as well as how each area might be configured to meet event requirements. It’s also critical to integrate communications with third parties for catering and other services, and have those factors be a seamless part of the event management process.

Technology does the heavy lifting on event planning and coordination

Georgia Aquarium invested in event planning technology that allowed it to simplify a complex set of factors that multiple and simultaneous events present. With an intelligent software platform, event managers are able to check room availability across the property to prevent double bookings. They can capture room set up and service requirements and guest preferences. They can manage property and event profiles and export and post event notices internally, providing team members with at-a-glance event information. Customized reporting tools to gather and share financial information with donors, volunteers and the public are also built into the process to ensure transparency, and to set benchmarks for future success.

“ I wanted our guests to be able to go to our site, book one of our premiere lanes, and be instantly confirmed without the need for human interaction. Sounds easy, right? Sure, but try finding a platform that integrates with your event management system to prevent double bookings and does both equally well. The struggle is real.”

MICHAEL DOUGLAS

Director of IT, Tavern + Bowl (Infor Sales & Catering customer)

Using daily tracers and process-driven task lists, the software automatically anticipates next steps in the event’s lifecycle and intuitively eliminates logistical oversights in the event planning process. Meanwhile, third-party catering service providers can rely on the software’s food and beverage features, including a menu selector that allows users to instantly create proposals and event orders, calculate costs, and assign equipment on each event. The result is an integrated process that empowers everyone involved, including attendees. This has implications for generating brand momentum, creating potential for repeat business, and engendering a greater capacity for successfully managing multiple events at a single venue in a more scalable, less stressful way.

Securing revenues by reducing no-show rates: Stratus Vineyards

Located on Lake Ontario, Canada, Stratus Vineyards is the first fully LEED-certified winery in the world. This specialized winery holds both social and corporate events as well as regular tastings, tours, and other experiences on a daily basis. With an influx of event bookings that monopolize staff efforts, the winery needed a scalable platform for coordinating events and optimizing resources.

Traditionally, staff at Stratus would alternate between different programs to manage both public and private events. On-premises software solutions—tied to a particular location—limited staff to working solely at the office. These solutions couldn’t scale with demand. They quickly became outdated and unfit for the company’s evolving needs. All the while, the company regularly prepared for event guests who were not confirmed, wasting resources and costs.

Greater visibility and control

To address these challenges, Stratus Vineyards invested in automation and visibility solutions to manage events and keep attendee requests and confirmations in one place. Most importantly, the vineyard invested in a system that placed deposit collection at the center and up front in the bookings process to make it easier for attendees to identify their status in relation to the event, making it far less likely for them to become no-shows. Staff in turn could keep track of each attendee using a web-based interface accessible anywhere, not just in the office.

This change in emphasis from a site-based system to a cloud-based one, and with greater transactional control over deposits, decreased no-show rates that went from an average of 20% to virtually 0%. This is in large part because the sales and catering aspects of their event management solution for tasting events helped them to collect revenues in advance in a more coherent way by using a single platform to keep all relevant customer data visible.

Mobile-friendly and omni-channel applications: Tavern+Bowl

Serving the San Diego and Orange Counties as a premiere bowling and tavern experience, Tavern+Bowl offers corporate, party, and private event needs. With extensive menus, sports packages, bowling lanes, and a fun and upbeat atmosphere, Tavern+Bowl needed an event management and reservations system that could meet a high demand and volume across a spectrum of guest requirements. To compete in the space, the company needed to meet its targeted market where they conduct their buying activities the most: their mobile devices. To do that, integration with an omni-channel platform was imperative to success.

The company invested in a solution that integrated a mobile application into a larger data ecosystem that also included enhanced features, such as digital signature of contracts, web-based event leads, and e-payment and online deposit processing. The platform allows the sales team to book a private event space and then reserve the tables and lanes all at the same time without the need for separate systems. At the same time, guests are empowered to make their own dining and bowling reservations online, with all of that booking data rounded up into the same sphere without the risk of double booking.

Event management best practices summary

Here are some of the event management best practices that we've seen put into action from the examples above.

- Visibility of all activities and data on single and multiple locations
- Standardized processes across all properties that create an end-to-end experience for both guests and staff
- Flexibility for managing no-shows and walk-ins
- Coordination of web-based self-booking and traditional booking
- Scalable CRM component to help inform lead generation, bring communications to the next level, and guest loyalty programs and offers

An overall approach to modern events management includes centralizing operations to make data and processes accessible from anywhere. That creates a more informed strategy, while also empowering management and its teams to do their jobs more efficiently and with less stress.

This has a positive effect on how well an organization can deliver the type of guest experience that new generations of consumers expect.

This booking process is flexible. The technology allows for various kinds of transactions placed on mobile by guests or otherwise by the sales team, while always making sure that those bookings are accounted for in a standardized and unified way for tracking and reporting purposes.

Advanced CRM capacity: Touchstone Golf

Touchstone Golf has built a reputation as one of the country's preeminent firms specializing in golf course management and advisory services. With experience managing every type of golf course property in communities nationwide, from municipal courses to exclusive private and resort clubs, Touchstone Golf takes a fully integrated, highly personalized approach to golf course management. To thrive in its competitive industry, the company needed a strong customer relationship management (CRM) component to create greater sales potential, and to manage better communications with its high-profile customers and prospects. Touchstone needed a platform customized for its use, building in sales and catering functionality with lead generation and membership growth firmly in mind.

Managing relationships with members and prospects requires efforts that go beyond single events, even if keeping the management of those events lean and efficient remains to be an important part of the picture. In a landscape where guests expect the personal touch more and more, a robust CRM component to events management allows the company to get a broader view of guest preferences, spending and events histories, and membership status. This helps make communications more meaningful and relevant, and more conducive to long-term relationships with members and prospects.

Creating meaningful experiences and growth potential

Using an integrated solution, all this information is made visible and accessible to sales staff, which creates more compelling communications with customers, including setting strategies around promotions, related events, and membership upselling efforts.

An event management platform integrated with a strong CRM component allows organizations like Touchstone to have more meaningful conversations with customers and to track how those relationships and interactions develop over time. It helps to inform new strategies around how to plan events around common guest preferences and sensibilities. This has a positive impact in all kinds of areas, including resource management, waste reduction, and campaign planning.

The evolution of event management and sales and catering

In the 21st century, industries engaging in event management are moving faster than ever to serve customers better, learn more about how to communicate with prospects, and to foster greater traction around incoming revenues. Greater visibility on business data, advanced CRM capabilities, and omni-channel functionality are imperative. There are multiple facets to getting this right beyond those, too.

Integrated technology can help organizations create a clearer picture of what's actually happening in single event spaces, a property as a whole, and across an entire brand. As technology continues to change the landscape, the ability to act on real data quickly is paramount, and luckily much easier now than ever. If ever there was a time to transform event management systems—it's now.

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