



LYCar Company Project

Report on the digital readiness of Hospitality SMEs in The Netherlands

Prepared for: Mr. Villanueva and Mr. Govender

Block: 2023 D

Campus: The Hague

Date submitted: 07/05/2023

Word count: 10978



Marija Paulavičiūtė

791105

Preface

There are three elements that make up the last step of Hotelschool The Hague's programme, Launching your Career: an internship, a Company Project in the form of a Bachelor Thesis, and a Career Portfolio. This Company Project was written for the Hotelschool The Hague's research department with the aim of analysing the linkage of digital technology and hospitality industry in The Netherlands by going through the five steps of the Design Based Research cycle.

My motivation for undertaking the project of analysing the digital readiness of Hospitality SMEs in The Netherlands stems from the increasing significance of digital technology in the hospitality industry. In a world that is rapidly advancing technologically, it is essential to understand the current state of digital adoption and its impact on the success of small and medium-sized enterprises in the hospitality sector. Being an aspiring hotelier, I believe that no business in hospitality industry will be able to survive without adopting some form of digital technology in the upcoming years. Therefore, my study aims to provide valuable insights into the digital transformation journey of hospitality SMEs in the Netherlands.

I would like to extend my gratitude to all the stakeholders who have been involved in this project especially my coach, Mr. Villanueva, and the commissioner, Dr. Schmidt. Their invaluable contributions and support have made this research possible. I am also especially thankful to the managers of hospitality SMEs and industry experts who took the time to participate in my interviews and survey. Their insights have provided all of us with a comprehensive understanding of the current state of digital readiness in the Dutch hospitality industry.

I hope that the findings of this study contribute to the improvement of digital readiness in the hospitality sector, not only in The Netherlands but also globally. By sharing the results of this research with relevant stakeholders, I aim to promote the importance of digital technology in the hospitality industry and encourage its adoption by SMEs. I believe that by working together, we can help SMEs overcome the challenges of digital transformation and achieve their full potential in the digital era.

Best regards,

Marija Paulavičiūtė

List of abbreviations

LYCar	Launching Your Career
SME	Small and Medium Sized Enterprise
MRQ	Main Research Question
SRQ	Sub Research Question

Executive summary

Small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) in the hospitality industry have been facing numerous challenges in recent years, including rising competition, changing customer expectations, labour shortages and, most importantly, the impact of digital technologies. The COVID-19 pandemic has only exacerbated these challenges, as it has disrupted traditional business models and accelerated the shift towards digital channels even more.

Digital readiness, or the ability of a business to effectively use digital technologies to achieve its goals, has therefore become a crucial factor for the survival and success of hospitality SMEs. However, preliminary research has shown that many Dutch SMEs in the hospitality industry struggle with digital readiness, due to a lack of resources, skills, and knowledge. As a consequence, the main research question of this report has arisen: **How can the digital readiness of Hospitality SMEs in The Netherlands be increased?**

The significance of this topic lies in the fact that the hospitality industry plays a crucial role in the Dutch economy, and the success of SMEs in this sector is vital for the overall health of the industry and the country. Hospitality SMEs represent 14% of all the SMEs in The Netherlands and constitute 4% of the total Dutch workforce. Furthermore, 2% of the Dutch GDP is comprised from the mentioned Hospitality SMEs. Therefore, by understanding the digital readiness of these businesses, policymakers and industry stakeholders can develop targeted strategies and interventions to support their digital transformation and enhance their competitiveness.

This bachelor thesis consequently aims to firstly explore the digital readiness of hospitality SMEs in The Netherlands, with a focus on identifying the main barriers and enablers of digital adoption as well as, most importantly, finding ways to improve the current level of digital readiness. The mentioned research also examines the impact of digital readiness on the performance and competitiveness of these businesses.

The research has been conducted through a combination of secondary data analysis and primary research, using a mixed-methods approach.

Upon conducting an extensive literature review, topics of technology use and adoption, digital presence, and driving digital innovation within the sector have been covered. According to the literature, there is broad agreement among researchers regarding the advantages of using digital tools, and hospitality SMEs having to strengthen their digital capabilities. A supportive workplace culture, training and development efforts, and experiential learning were all mentioned as helpful approaches to help SMEs build a variety of digital capabilities. However, there were differing opinions regarding the industry's use of digital tools at this time and the key difficulties and obstacles that lie ahead. Overall, while there is a significant body of scientific literature on the digitalisation of hospitality SMEs, there is a perceived lack of sources evaluating the current state of the industry regarding digital readiness and suggesting best practices for driving digital adoption, especially within the context of recent trends and The Netherlands. Therefore, this has led to identification of sub-research questions and further quantitative and qualitative research.

With the help of interviews with various general managers of SMEs in The Netherlands as well as a survey, different degrees of technological advancement were seen. The extent of the use of digital technology mainly depended on the size of the facilities and level of service provided. Nonetheless, the importance of having at least some kind of digital technology was agreed among all the participants of the interviews and was mainly pertaining to the need of either being more cost efficient or the reviews of the customers. The barriers to adoption identified in the research include lack of financing, lack of skills and expertise, and resistance to change. Successful strategies included focus on collaboration with external experts, implementing training programs, motivating all employees, preparing a cost-benefit analysis and establishing a detailed plan.

Therefore, it was determined that the focus of the solution should be on offering a thorough framework for digital readiness that incorporates cooperation, training, experimentation, and consistency.

After the analysis, the main findings and the possible solution has been disseminated on LinkedIn as well as to the interviewees and the client in order to gather feedback and make sure the chosen solution has grounds.

Based on research conclusions and dissemination feedback, a digital readiness framework was created to help SMEs adapt and utilise digital technology. The framework has a number of important elements, including an assessment of the company's present level of digital readiness, the identification of digital opportunities and problems, the development of a digital strategy, involving and motivating relevant stakeholders, and the implementation as well as evaluation of digital solutions in order to ensure the success of the framework. The framework offers a thorough method for adopting and implementing digital technology while simultaneously being adjustable and flexible enough to meet the unique demands and features of each SME. As the framework is based on a renowned change management model, it should be trusted by SMEs due to its long-standing reputation and successful examples across the world.

Hopefully, the findings of this study will contribute to the existing literature on digital readiness in the hospitality industry, which is currently limited, and provide valuable insights for policymakers, relevant stakeholders, and SMEs seeking to enhance their digital capabilities. Lastly, it is hoped that this work will encourage further research in the area, as the topic remains both highly relevant and constantly evolving.

Table of contents

Preface	2
List of abbreviations	3
Executive summary	4
1. Problem definition	9
1.1 Research context.....	9
1.1.1 Population.....	9
1.1.2 Reasons for research.....	9
1.2 Research question	11
1.3 Introduction of related concepts	11
1.3.1 Business model innovation	12
1.3.2 Change management	12
2. Analysis and diagnosis	14
2.1 Literature review	14
2.1.1 Introduction	14
2.1.2 Literature review	14
2.1.3 Findings and sub-research questions.....	16
2.2 Methodology	17
2.2.1 Survey	17
2.2.2 Semi-structured interviews	18
2.2.3 Ethical data management considerations	18
2.2.4 Limitations.....	18
2.3 Survey findings	19
2.4 Semi-structured interviews findings	20
2.5 Conclusion	22
3. Solution design	25
3.1 Framework for improving the digital readiness of Hospitality SMEs.....	25
3.2 Stakeholders and dissemination	28
4. Implementation.....	29
4.1 Resources needed.....	29
4.2 Implementation steps	29
5. Evaluation	31
6. Conclusion and academic reflection.....	34
6.1 Reflection on the solution	34
6.2 Limitations of the solution.....	34
6.3 Advice for future research.....	35
Appendices.....	37

Appendix 1: Data consent forms	37
Appendix 2: Survey questions	38
Appendix 3: Semi-structured interview questions	43
Appendix 4: Semi-structured interviews	44
Interview #1 – boutique hotel general manager	44
Interview #2 – hotel general manager	50
Interview #3 – industry expert	51
Interview #4 – head of HQ of a small chain	57
Interview #5 – general manager of a big chain hotel	64
Interview #6 – general manager of family owned hotel	72
Interview #7 – industry expert	79
Interview #8 – industry expert	86
Interview #9 – conference centre director	93
Interview #10 – industry expert	102
Appendix 5: Assessment and feedback form - LYCar Proposal	109
Appendix 6: SPSS outputs – survey	112
Appendix 7: Dissemination acts – infographic	115
Appendix 8: Dissemination acts – messages and presentations to interviewees	118
Appendix 9: Data upload confirmation	121
Appendix 10: Client evaluation form	123
Appendix 11: Word count	126
List of references	127

1. Problem definition

1.1 Research context

1.1.1 Population

The Netherlands is home to a thriving hospitality industry, with a wide range of small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) operating in sectors such as hotels, restaurants, cafes, and event venues. These companies are essential to the economy of the nation because they create jobs, promote economic expansion, and raise the allure of the nation as a travel destination (Chong et al., 2019).

According to data from the Dutch Central Bureau of Statistics (CBS), as of 2021:

- There were approximately 70,000 SMEs in the hospitality industry in The Netherlands, representing 14% of all SMEs in the country.
- These SMEs employed around 370,000 people, or 4% of the total workforce in The Netherlands.
- The hospitality industry contributed approximately €20 billion to the Dutch economy in 2021, or approximately 2% of the country's gross domestic product (GDP).
- The most common challenges faced by hospitality SMEs in The Netherlands are competition, labour shortages, and regulation. In 2022, The Netherlands had a record-high labour shortage with a 3.5% unemployment rate and more available vacancies than unemployed individuals (Vérité, 2022).
- The most common opportunities for hospitality SMEs in The Netherlands are innovation, digitalisation, and sustainability (CBS, 2021).

1.1.2 Reasons for research

Although the hospitality sector has long been renowned for its capacity to adjust to shifting market conditions, recent hardships have forced it to undergo a more profound transition than ever (Shen et al., 2022). With the development of technology and the move towards an economy that is more experience-driven, the emphasis on customization, innovation, and sustainability has increased in the sector (Ukpabi and Karjaluoto, 2017). In addition, the rise of social media and internet platforms has changed how consumers plan and evaluate their travel experiences, resulting in a greater emphasis on reputation management and client interaction (Vieira et al., 2023).

The COVID-19 epidemic has also had a significant influence on the hospitality sector, forcing many firms to adjust to shifting consumer habits, deal with shortage of employees, new health and safety laws, and unpredictable economic conditions (Kim et al., 2021). In particular, it has sped up the adoption of digital technology, with many companies turning to online platforms and contactless solutions to serve clients and

lower the danger of infection (Zeng et al., 2020). Therefore, many hospitality SMEs had to innovate their business models in order to survive (Ludin et al., 2022).

The hospitality sector has therefore begun adjusting to the sudden changes to suit these new digital needs and wants.

Firstly, the pandemic has increased the demand for a frictionless experience in the hospitality sector for those businesses that stayed open (Shapoval et al., 2021). To reduce contact with the staff and other guests, 73% of customers say they are more likely to stay at a hotel that offers self-service technologies (Editors, 2022). During the pandemic, businesses that were able to provide their clients a secure and convenient experience were able to keep their businesses open (Sharma et al., 2021). For instance, mobile ordering, virtual concierge services and payment methods have lessened the need for face-to-face interactions (Bonfanti et al., 2021). Self-check-in kiosks have enhanced the customer experience by reducing the need for interaction with employees (Cobanoglu et al., 2011).

Furthermore, together with the difficulties brought by the epidemic, competition from new entrants, bigger, more established companies and shifting consumer expectations have been plaguing The Netherlands' SMEs in the hospitality industry (Dignon, 2023). Incorporating innovative technologies for staff members, according to 65% of hoteliers, best reflects their approach to coping with labour shortages and attracting fresh talent (Bonte, 2022). SMEs who do not adopt digital technologies run the danger of falling behind (Ruel and Njoku, 2020). Therefore, businesses utilise digital technology to set themselves apart from rivals (Papadopoulos et al., 2020).

Moreover, as more customers use digital channels to research, book, and review hospitality services, SMEs must have a strong online presence and offer digital services to remain competitive (Venkatesh et al., 2012). This includes using websites optimized for search engines and mobile devices, as well as social media to engage with customers and increase brand awareness (Aydin, 2020). SMEs can also target specific customer segments using digital marketing channels such as email marketing and paid advertising (Shaik et al., 2018).

Besides, digital technology is increasingly being used to give SMEs insightful data on customer behaviour, preferences, and feedback (Tussyadiah, 2020). The usage of this data can enhance business processes, marketing plans, and consumer interaction (Lau, 2020). Customer information, for instance, can be used to tailor offers and promotions, and consumer feedback can help enhance the quality of services (Momani et al., 2022). SMEs can also spot patterns and decide on future investments based on data analysis of customer behaviour (Tong-On et al., 2021).

Lastly, digital technology may also improve productivity and streamline procedures in SMEs in the hospitality industry, saving money and enhancing customer satisfaction (Muller, 2010). Online booking systems can automate the booking process, lowering the need for manual input and the possibility of mistakes (Bemile et al., 2014). Digital menus can simplify ordering and lighten the effort for personnel, while automated check-in procedures can save waiting times and enhance the client experience (Torres, 2016).

Additionally, the initial interviews with hospitality business owners and managers made it even more apparent that SMEs in the hospitality industry are finding it harder and harder to operate without utilising digital technologies. "If they are not informed, or if they are not aware, then the step between not adopting and technology is evolving. That gap

becomes bigger and bigger.” Overall, it is becoming increasingly obvious that digital technology is necessary for the survival and success of SMEs within the hotel sector as the sector continues to develop. Gaining more digital readiness is the answer to all of these companies' problems. “It is incredibly important and increasingly important”.

Therefore, as a result of the present trends and challenges, it appears that these organisations must be digitally ready, or able to employ digital technologies to their full potential, to remain competitive in this climate.

1.2 Research question

After conducting preliminary secondary research on the Dutch hospitality sector, it became clear that digital technology has taken a crucial role in the sector. Digital technology use by hospitality SMEs increases their chances of long-term success and competitiveness (Kansakar et al., 2019).

Unfortunately, a lot of SMEs in the hospitality industry still find it difficult to comprehend the potential advantages of digital technology and how to successfully incorporate it into their operations (Car et al., 2019). In addition, many SMEs in the sector encounter difficulties implementing digital technology due to a lack of resources, a lack of knowledge, change management skills and ambiguity regarding the advantages of making an investment in technology (OECD, 2021).

Specific research is therefore required to determine the best methods for enhancing these companies' digital readiness as well as to comprehend the variables that affect their achievement.

The main research question (MRQ) of this thesis is consequently:

**How can the digital readiness of
Hospitality SMEs in The Netherlands
be increased?**

1.3 Introduction of related concepts

Before diving into the research on how to improve the digital preparedness of hospitality SMEs, it is crucial to explain some fundamental ideas. Understanding how hospitality SMEs can adjust to the digital age requires an awareness of relevant concepts including business model innovation and change management. For SMEs, business model innovation is a critical process since it enables them to develop fresh, cutting-edge business models that will help them to stay competitive (Müller, 2019). Whereas, change management is crucial to introduce those new tactics and technology and maintain employee motivation and engagement, which in turn determines the success of the

change (Esposito, 2017). These ideas are interconnected and essential to the digital transformation of SMEs in the hospitality industry.

1.3.1 Business model innovation

Business model innovation is the process of designing and implementing new and improved ways of creating, delivering, and capturing value in the hospitality industry (Landry, 2020). It involves identifying new opportunities, testing and refining new approaches, and implementing and scaling successful innovations (Valsamidis et al., 2019). In the context of SMEs in the hospitality industry, business model innovation can be particularly important for driving growth, differentiation, and competitiveness (Souto, 2015).

There are several ways that hospitality SMEs can approach business model innovation. One approach is to focus on enhancing the customer experience (Breier et al., 2021). This may entail the addition of new features, services, or technologies to enhance the convenience, comfort, or satisfaction of guests' stays. For instance, an SME may launch a mobile app that lets customers reserve rooms, make reservations at restaurants, and access deals and recommendations that are unique to them.

Another approach to business model innovation in the hospitality industry is to focus on optimizing operational efficiency (Bharwani et al., 2019). This can involve using data analytics and technology to streamline processes, reduce costs, and improve the guest experience. For example, a hotel might implement a system for automating the check-in process, reducing the need for staff interaction and freeing up staff to focus on higher-value tasks.

Besides that, there are many other potential ways that hospitality SMEs can innovate their business models, depending on their specific goals and resources (Grant Thornton UK, 2019).

In conclusion, developing innovative business models is essential for success in the hospitality sector, especially for SMEs. SMEs in the hospitality industry may set themselves apart, spur growth, and maintain competitiveness in a market that is changing quickly by always seeking out new and better methods to create, deliver, and collect value.

1.3.2 Change management

Change management is a structured approach to transitioning individuals, teams, and organisations from a current state to a desired future state (Trepanier, 2021). In the context of a business in the hospitality industry trying to become more digital, change management would involve implementing new digital technologies and processes in a way that minimises resistance, maximises adoption, and ensures that the organisation is able to realize the full benefits of the change (Lee, 2008).

One key aspect of change management in this context is communication (Epsilon, 2023). It is important to communicate the reasons for the change, the benefits of the change, and how the change will be implemented to all stakeholders, including employees, customers, and partners (Alecú, 2013). This can help to build buy-in and support for the change, and to minimise resistance.

Another important aspect of change management in the context of a business in the hospitality industry becoming more digital is training and development (Ali and Anwar, 2021). Giving employees the abilities and information they require to use cutting-edge digital technology and procedures efficiently is crucial. This can entail conducting training courses, providing on-the-job assistance, and promoting cooperation and knowledge exchange.

In addition to communication and training, change management in this context may also involve organisational redesign (Ogbonna and Harris, 2002). This might involve changing reporting structures, redefining job roles and responsibilities, and introducing new business processes to support the digital transformation.

Overall, change management is crucial as businesses in the hospitality sector move towards greater digitalisation since it ensures that the organisation will be able to fully benefit from the change while reducing disruption and opposition (Tabrizi et al., 2019). Businesses in the hospitality sector may successfully traverse the obstacles of digital transformation and put themselves in a position for long-term success by using a systematic change management approach.

2. Analysis and diagnosis

2.1 Literature review

2.1.1 Introduction

This review analyses the existing literature to determine the current practices when it comes to digital technology among hospitality SMEs around the world as well as in the Netherlands and to identify further potential research topics. It explores the topics of technology use and its adoption, digital presence of businesses and driving digital innovation within the sector, identifies the gaps in knowledge, compares, and contrasts relevant research findings.

2.1.2 Literature review

A study by Lam and Law (2019) investigated the impact of technology on the hospitality industry and found that SMEs recognise the importance of technology, especially when it comes to improving customer experience and increasing operational efficiency (Lam and Law, 2019). The study also found that SMEs are investing in various digital technologies, such as mobile apps, online booking systems, and social media, to enhance customer engagement and marketing efforts.

Similarly, research by Klein and Todesco (2021) found that the majority of Dutch hotels are adopting various digital technologies, such as online booking systems, revenue management systems, and guest management systems, to improve their operations and enhance customer experiences (Klein and Todesco, 2021). Furthermore, it was found that hotels are focusing on developing their digital marketing skills and using social media to interact with customers.

Hertog et al. (2011) aimed to assess the digital readiness of SMEs in the hospitality industry in The Netherlands (Hertog et al., 2011). The study included a sample of over 600 SMEs, and assessed their use of digital technologies such as websites, social media, online booking systems, and e-commerce. The survey's findings revealed that while the majority of SMEs in the industry had websites and used social media to advertise their businesses, many had trouble utilising more sophisticated digital technologies, such as e-commerce and online reservation systems.

The study called "Information Technology and Innovation in Small and Medium-Sized Enterprises" found that small firms' adoption of advanced technologies is influenced by their prior experience with technology, the perceived benefits of technology, and the perceived barriers to adoption (Dierckx and Stroeken, 1999). They also find that the availability of technical assistance and the presence of competitors who have adopted technology are important factors that influence the adoption of technology. The study highlights the importance of understanding the determinants of technology adoption in SMEs and the need for policymakers to provide the necessary support for SMEs to adopt advanced technologies.

In his study "Dynamic capabilities and business model innovation in the Dutch hospitality industry," Hovenier (2021) explored the drivers and barriers of business model

innovation in the Dutch hospitality industry, and the impact of business model innovation on firm performance (Hovenier, 2021). The study was based on a survey of hospitality firms in the Netherlands, as well as in-depth interviews with managers and owners of hospitality firms. The study concluded that the need to increase efficiency, the need to stand out from competitors, and the need to adapt to shifting market conditions were the key forces for business model innovation in the Dutch hospitality industry.

However, despite the growing adoption of digital technologies, a study by Christ-Brendemühl (2022) found that many Hospitality SMEs still face challenges in adopting and implementing technology effectively (Christ-Brendemühl, 2022). These challenges include a lack of technical expertise, information, resistance to change, and concerns about the cost and time of implementing new technologies. Other researchers have also identified lack of support, motivation, and understanding as factors that prevent widespread use of digital technology (Lam et al., 2007).

Another study also discovered that while SMEs in the industry are generally aware of the significance of digitalisation, more support and direction are required to help these companies improve their digital capabilities (Nikopoulou et al., 2023). To solve the identified barriers and help the digital transformation of the hospitality sector, the authors advise the creation of specialised programmes and initiatives. The report also made clear the need for further assistance and direction to help these companies improve their digital capacities.

Besides that, there are several other strategies that have been identified as usually effective for improving digital readiness among Hospitality SMEs in the Netherlands.

Firstly, training and education programs have been shown to be effective in improving digital readiness among SMEs in various industries. These programs can provide SMEs with the knowledge and skills they need to effectively adopt and use digital technologies in their operations. In a study by Bucciarelli et al. (2010), it was found that the provision of training and education programs would lead to a successful implementation of e-commerce technologies by SMEs (Bucciarelli et al., 2010).

Secondly, collaboration between SMEs and other stakeholders, such as technology providers and government agencies, has been identified as a key factor in improving digital readiness. Collaboration can provide SMEs with access to resources and expertise that they may not have on their own. Hilkenmeier et al. (2021) has found that collaboration between SMEs and technology providers was positively associated with the successful adoption of technologies (Hilkenmeier et al., 2021).

Finally, it has been determined that one of the best methods for enhancing digital preparedness among hospitality SMEs is the implementation of cutting-edge technologies like cloud computing, mobile applications, and social media. These tools can aid SMEs in streamlining company processes, improving customer satisfaction, and raising overall performance. The usage of online review platforms was found to be favourably correlated with the reputation and financial success of SMEs in the restaurant industry. (Ham et al., 2005).

Furthermore, there is growing recognition that to effectively leverage digital technologies, Hospitality SMEs need to develop specific skills and competencies (Carlisle et al., 2021).

A study by Yu (2020) identified several key digital competencies that are crucial for the successful adoption and use of digital technologies in the business (Yu, 2020). These include digital literacy, digital mind-set, creativity, communication, collaboration, digital customer experience management, and data analysis.

In addition to these specific competencies, there are several broader skills that are also important for the effective use of digital technologies in the hospitality industry. For example, Spencer et al. (2012) identified the importance of leadership, strategic thinking, innovation, and collaboration skills (Spencer et al., 2012).

So how can these skills and competencies be acquired? The literature suggests that a combination of training and development programs, experiential learning, and a supportive organisational culture are key to building digital competencies within organisations. For example, Yu (2020) recommend that organisations provide ongoing training and development programs that focus on building digital competencies (Yu, 2020). This can include both formal training programs, such as workshops and courses, as well as informal learning opportunities, such as job rotations and mentorship programs.

Experiential learning, or learning via doing, is another crucial element of developing digital competences (Trongtorsk et al., 2021). This can involve giving staff members the chance to work on digital initiatives and projects as well as the regular application of digital technologies. The development of digital abilities also requires a supportive company culture that promotes experimentation, risk-taking, and continual learning. This may entail giving staff members chances for feedback and acknowledgment as well as developing a climate of open dialogue and cooperation.

2.1.3 Findings and sub-research questions

As can be seen, the main topics of literature around digital readiness of hospitality SMEs are technology use and its adoption, digital presence of businesses and driving digital innovation within the sector.

Most sources identify numerous benefits of digital tool adoption and agree on the need for them. They suggest broadly similar ways of improving digital capabilities of hospitality SMEs like the use of automation and data analysis software, increased social media presence, as well as employee training and education programs.

The research indicates that hospitality SMEs must develop a variety of digital competences and broader abilities to effectively exploit digital technologies. A supportive workplace culture, training and development initiatives, and experiential learning are effective ways to do this.

However, there is a difference of opinion on the current level of digital tool adoption within hospitality SMEs and the main hurdles and challenges for going forward. While some sources identify lack of technical expertise, information, resistance to change, and concerns about the cost and time of implementing new technologies as the main barriers for improvement in this area, others suggest that changes to the legal framework and more government agency support are needed to drive the sector forward.

Overall, even though there is a significant body of scientific literature focusing on the digitalisation of hospitality SMEs, its benefits and ways of improvement, there is a perceived lack of sources evaluating the current state of the industry regarding digital

readiness, discussing the whole lifecycle benefits to businesses, as well as assessing and suggesting best practices for driving digital adoption, especially within the context of recent trends and, most importantly, when it comes to The Netherlands.

Therefore, the main research question remains the same:

How can the digital readiness of Hospitality SMEs in The Netherlands be increased?

Based on the main topics and identified knowledge gaps within existing literature, the following sub-research questions (SRQ) have been identified.

SRQ 1: What are the existing digital capabilities of Dutch SMEs in the hospitality industry?

SRQ 2: What are the main obstacles to digital adoption in the Netherlands for SMEs in the hospitality industry?

SRQ 3: What are the most important abilities and competencies that SMEs in the hospitality industry in the Netherlands should develop, and how can they do so?

SRQ 4: What are the main factors influencing digital adoption in the hospitality industry in the Netherlands, and how do SMEs in this sector perceive the advantages of digital technologies?

SRQ 5: What efforts are Dutch SMEs in the hospitality industry taking to get ready for these developments, and how do they see the future of technology affecting their industry?

2.2 Methodology

To get better insights on the established research questions, a mixed methods approach has been chosen. Both qualitative and quantitative offer distinctive insights that support one another.

Quantitative research may reveal patterns and trends across a broad sample of firms as well as provide quantifiable data on the prevalence and extent of the use of digital technology (Verhoef and Casebeer, 1997). This kind of research can aid in determining the scope of this problem and give an overall impression of the industry's level of digital readiness (Hoover, 2021).

On the other hand, qualitative research can offer more nuanced information on the challenges and opportunities that particular businesses are facing (Carol, 2016). Knowing the precise organisational and cultural elements that may be helping or hindering progress in digital adoption might be helpful (Mander, 2022). Additionally, qualitative research might aid in the discovery of innovative concepts that quantitative data would otherwise miss (McGinley et al., 2021).

2.2.1 Survey

A survey has been used to assess the digital readiness of Hospitality SMEs in The Netherlands more in depth and included the following steps:

1. Due to limited time resources, a representative sample of SMEs in the Dutch hospitality industry was chosen, as it was not possible to test the entire population of SMEs in this sector.
2. A questionnaire was developed to collect data on the SMEs' digital readiness. The questionnaire included questions about the SMEs' use of technology, their digital capabilities, and their current digital strategy. The questions can be found in Appendix 2: Survey questions.
3. The survey was distributed to the selected SMEs, either online or through mail.
4. The collected data was analysed with SPSS to determine the digital readiness of the SMEs and make a conclusion about the population. This included calculating descriptive statistics, such as means and standard deviations, and conducting inferential statistical analysis, such as regression analysis, to determine any significant differences or relations in digital readiness among the SMEs.

2.2.2 Semi-structured interviews

Ten 30-minute semi-structured interviews have been done prior to developing a solution. They have initially allowed to identify the ongoing trends and practices in the digital revolution and later to further validate or triangulate the findings of the subsequent quantitative survey leading to a more relevant solution.

The interviews have been conducted with managers and owners of hospitality businesses as well as industry experts who work with implementing digital technology specifically in the hospitality industry. This has allowed the researcher to gain a broader overview from different perspectives. The interviews transcripts can be found in the Appendices.

Interview questions were based on sub-research questions using a semi-structured approach, allowing for adaptability and exploration of topics in greater depth, including unforeseen comments. This has resulted in deeper and more complex insights regarding the SMEs approach to digital transformation. Colour scheme was later used to analyse the responses based on the pre-established themes based on the SRQ. The interview questions along with the coding themes may be found in Appendix 3: Semi-structured interview questions. Appendix 3: Semi-structured interview questions

2.2.3 Ethical data management considerations

The data collected from the surveys and interviews has been securely stored using best practices for data security and privacy. This includes limiting access to other people, and adherence to data protection regulations such as GDPR. Additionally, measures have been taken to ensure that data is stored in a way that maintains its confidentiality and integrity, such as using secure cloud-based storage with multi-factor authentication. It has been stored under a research code of *2023-121*.

2.2.4 Limitations

Some possible limitations of the survey and interviews have to be taken into consideration before looking at the findings.

Since a significant proportion of SMEs selected to participate in the research did not respond, the results could lead to an inaccurate representation of the population and limited generalisability of the findings. However, within those who have participated in the research, various business branches and positions within the industry have been covered.

The survey relies on self-reported data from the SMEs, which could be biased or inaccurate if respondents over- or under-report their digital readiness. This has been mitigated to some extent by comparing the survey and interview findings.

The survey may not capture all aspects of digital readiness, which could limit the accuracy of the findings. However, it encompassed the scope of both the main and the sub research questions allowing to gather the most relevant information related to this research. Furthermore, the semi-structured interviews have allowed to touch upon on more aspects of digital readiness due to their nature.

The survey and interviews may become outdated quickly as digital technologies and trends continue to evolve, limiting the relevance and usefulness of the findings over time. It is therefore important to mind that this research has been done starting in Q4 2022 and finished in Q2 2023.

2.3 Survey findings

The mean age of the participating businesses was 15.28 years, indicating that the participating hospitality SMEs in the Netherlands have a significant level of experience in the field. The average number of Full-Time Equivalents employed by these businesses was 106.34, with 35.06 employees working on average per shift. This suggests that the research sample has a sizable workforce, which could have an impact on their digital readiness and ability to adopt new technologies.

Based on the provided answers, it appears that the most commonly used digital technologies were Internet of Things connected devices, social media, mobile apps, and own websites. Additionally, digital payment options were among the most utilised. These technologies were mentioned in a majority of the responses with 29 out of 35 respondents including at least one of them in their answers. On the other hand, some technologies were mentioned less frequently, including robots, virtual reality/augmented reality, and face recognition. The lower usage of them suggests that there is still some hesitation or uncertainty among SMEs about these emerging technologies.

Overall, the survey reveals a few important determinants of a successful digital transformation.

Firstly, the outcomes of the SPSS data analysis show a correlation between a company's perceived ability to integrate current knowledge with fresh perspectives and its ability to adopt new technologies more successfully. This result demonstrates how combining new knowledge with current skills can result in a more successful digital transformation.

The research also shows a link between a company's use of industry-specific information sources and its perceived ability to use new technologies more successfully. This underlines how essential industry-specific skills and knowledge are for the successful adoption of new technologies. This might include information about customer service, sales and marketing, revenue management and others.

Overall, these findings highlight the necessity for businesses to actively seek out new information, trends and knowledge sources to remain competitive in a technology environment that is always evolving.

Furthermore, the survey results show a significant correlation between having existing knowledge and being able to work more effectively with new technologies. This suggests that hospitality SMEs should prioritize training and upskilling their staff to ensure they have the necessary knowledge to effectively adopt and utilise digital technologies.

Moreover, the survey results indicate a positive correlation between seeking advice from digital consultants and the ability to effectively adopt new technologies. This implies that SMEs in the hospitality industry can benefit from seeking external support and guidance to enhance their digital readiness, especially in cases where internal expertise and resources are limited.

Lastly, the survey shows that employees who are aware of the goals of the company are more likely to work effectively with digital technologies leading to a more successful adoption and implementation of new technologies in the workplace. This highlights the importance of clear communication of the company's goals and vision to employees, particularly when introducing new technologies. It is important for SMEs in the hospitality industry to ensure that their employees have a clear understanding of the company's goals and how digital technologies can help achieve them.

2.4 Semi-structured interviews findings

All interviewees have reconfirmed the significance of digital technology in the hospitality sector mentioning that overall The Netherlands is more advanced than other countries. "Dutch market is a tech savvy market." Nowadays, interviewees see digital technology as a crucial instrument in both front and back of the house operations for developing and maintaining customer interactions, increasing operational effectiveness, and attracting and retaining customers in the hospitality sector. However, the scope and amount of digital technology used varied from boutique hotels to larger restaurants. The interviews revealed that larger hotels tend to use more advanced and complex digital technologies, while smaller boutique hotels tend to focus on more basic systems. "As we are a small hotel, it is one thing at a time."

The four main driving forces cited in the interviews for integrating technology were a lack of skilled labour, importance of sustainability, the COVID-19 epidemic, and growing competition. "These hotels are in an area where around them, everybody is adopting technology. So you need to adopt technology in order to at least even start to be competitive within the market". "Those are the kind of changes that were unthinkable prior to COVID. And now it is actually quite normal to offer it." "Because if the good people leave or they are sick or whatever, then there is nothing left. So I think the core processes and the infrastructure, they have to be really good so that they do not rely on people so much."

The interviews revealed that guest feedback and cost effectiveness are the two key justifications for implementing digital technologies in the first place. "But I think especially in these times of inflation and the increasing wage costs, people do not realise that service actually costs a lot of money. So we choose to work really efficiently with as little stuff as possible." The ability to book reservations or make purchases online are just two examples of the digital services that customers increasingly expect businesses to offer. "It is more in efficiency and guest satisfaction way of looking at it and less hassle for the staff." Without these qualities, hospitality SMEs can find it difficult to draw in and keep consumers.

When selecting a digital technology provider, the interviews revealed that reputation and client feedback were key factors in the decision-making process. "I did the same trick with two other hotels before. I knew when I started here that Mews was the go to." By relying on past experiences and word-of-mouth recommendations, businesses can make informed decisions about which providers are best suited to their needs. Additionally,

many businesses conduct extensive research before making a decision, looking at factors such as pricing, customer support, and product features.

While adopting digital technology necessitates a large financial outlay, SMEs can make well-informed judgements about which products to employ by conducting a thorough cost-benefit analysis. "If somebody has a good idea, we look at it and we see what is the cost is, what is possible positive effect on the organisation or on the people and then we buy it."

A benefit that SMEs seem to possess when compared to big corporate companies is that they can make decisions quicker and start the implementation sooner. "If they are their franchises, they cannot say everything for themselves, the systems etc. are dictated by for example, Marriott. That means that you cannot just approach them without the approval of the chain itself. So it is easier to talk to SMEs." "You have a lot of freedom. To do whatever you want."

Nonetheless, a number of factors have been highlighted as to why certain SMEs in the hospitality sector may decide not to use digital technology, hence giving an idea on why some companies may be lagging behind others. The cost of implementing digital technology can be high, especially for SMEs with constrained funding. "They do not use all the tools that we have because all the tools are quite expensive. Especially if you are a smaller hotel." This may be a significant obstacle to adoption. Furthermore, some digital technologies can be complicated and may call for substantial system and business process adjustments. In addition, many SMEs might lack the technical expertise required to install and maintain digital technologies successfully. "It is more just kind of like educating them. A little bit about like: Hey, this is actually how your hotel should be functioning." Finally, some SMEs, particularly the staff who will actually use the implemented technology, do not see the value in adopting digital technology, either due to lack of awareness or a belief that benefits are not worth the cost and effort. "Then after switching day, they might be a little bit scared like this is very technology forward and something that we are not used to and they are not very good at adapting to that new technology."

It is interesting to note that the general managers whose opinions were sought did not consider the adoption of new technologies to be a difficult procedure. "You know, in the end, especially in a small team, that is easily overcome, because it is a very personal approach to everything. It is that the lines are very short. To talk about it or get some assistance."

Whereas industry experts note that implementation typically involves working with front-line employees who usually lack the necessary knowledge, leading to longer implementation processes. "They have been doing it in a way that like, does not make sense for the last 30 years." Therefore, adopting digital technology can change the organisational culture of hospitality SMEs, affecting the way employees work and interact with customers. As a result, the interviewees believe adequate training is critical to ensure staff are comfortable using the technology and adapting their work processes. "I always think you have to make a schedule on how you are going to implement things and make sure that you train at least two people." "Staffing and training is getting more important." "That is why I always invest in training people to it is not like dumping the system and then it will be alright."

It was also underlined that, despite the significance of digital technology, personal touch and service cannot entirely be substituted, especially at more luxury businesses. As a

result, it is crucial to strike a balance between adding too many new digital conveniences and confusing the client experience. "I think the more human connection there is, the higher the level of service can be." "I believe that you cannot make a perfect five star experience with only technology." "We decided to not implement some technologies because you lose the human contact." Furthermore, adoption of digital technology also strongly depends on the type of clientele that is being served. "We want to make people feel at home and how do we create this experience is by making feel really within the community."

2.5 Conclusion

SRQ 1: Existing digital capabilities

Although there is little research on the current level of digital readiness of hospitality SMEs particularly in The Netherlands, the studies that are available indicate that there is still much space for development and that it is increasingly important to go digital. With the help of survey and interviews, it was discovered that Dutch SMEs in the hospitality industry have varied degrees of digital skills. While some have invested in more cutting-edge technologies like virtual reality for customer experiences, majority have mostly only implemented digital booking systems and payment options. Overall, the research points to tremendous space for development in fundamental areas like online booking and e-commerce, even if many hospitality firms in The Netherlands seem to already have a basic online presence. Both the survey and interviews have shown that the most used technology in SMEs is rather simple, focusing mostly on making sure the business does not fall behind. However, some companies are more advanced with ambitious goals in mind. This is why it is important to create a flexible solution that could be adjusted to any level of digital readiness or work with different goals.

SRQ 2: Main obstacles to digital adoption

It was discovered that a lack of funding and technological expertise, as well as a fear of change were the biggest barriers to digital adoption for SMEs in the Dutch hospitality sector. The expense of implementing digital technology was cited as a major obstacle by many SMEs, with some of them unable to pay the up-front expenditures or continuing maintenance and support fees, however, doing a cost-benefit analysis seemed like an appropriate step to visualising the future benefits that would in most cases strongly outweigh the initial costs. It was also noted that several SMEs lacked the expertise and understanding needed to choose and employ digital technology successfully. That is why proper training is crucial before implementing any technology. Therefore, the solution has to include identifying the financial outcomes of each option and making sure all employees have a good understanding of the importance of digitalisation.

SRQ 3: Developing abilities and competencies

The literature emphasises the importance of empowering staff with key skills and understanding to properly use digital technology, including digital literacy, data management, and customer experience design. To aid in the development of these abilities, additional specialised training programmes and instructional materials are required. While some interviewees and survey respondents mentioned that they pay much attention to empowering their staff and increasing the intrinsic digital knowledge off the company, the experts from digital technology companies state that most

companies actually overstate their knowledge. Furthermore, the survey shows that new knowledge is not always shared with all employees in the company. Empowering your staff with the needed digital skills and knowledge is critical to ensure a successful implementation of a certain technology, since those employees will usually be the ones using it on a daily basis. This is why the solution should focus on integrating workshops and seminars, online courses, hiring qualified professionals and sharing the ideas and goals among everyone in the company. Furthermore, a culture of innovation and experimentation, which includes a readiness to take chances, fail quickly, and learn from errors, should be fostered by SMEs for them to become more digitally ready.

SRQ 4: Factors influencing digital adoption and perceived advantages of digital technologies

The size, age, and initial degree of digital readiness of the company are the main factors influencing digital adoption in the hospitality sector in the Netherlands. SMEs perceive the benefits of digital technologies as increased productivity, improved communication, and better customer experience. Despite the advantages, many SMEs in the industry are still hesitant to completely adopt digital technology due to a variety of reasons. Overall, the results emphasise the need of giving SMEs the tools and support they need to overcome these obstacles and fully embrace digital technology to be competitive in today's business climate. However, a number of other variables, such as organisational culture, leadership, and resources, also affect how well these strategies work. While some state that SMEs have the benefit of being less controlled, less spread out and therefore more flexible when it comes to change, others say that SMEs are lacking when it comes to being less scared of change. Therefore, the solution should focus on the best change management practices to ensure a smooth transition and avoidance of resistance.

SRQ 5: Efforts and future outlook

The research suggests that Dutch SMEs in the hospitality industry are aware of the role that technology will play in their industry's future and are making preparations for these changes. However, to ensure that they stay competitive in a market that is changing quickly, more proactive and strategic approaches to digital transformation are needed. On the other hand, it was also noted that SMEs should remain mindful of the importance of human touch and personal interaction in the hospitality sector, and strive to strike a balance between technology and personal touch. This, however, can be mitigated by only using digital technology for the back of the house to make the operations more efficient. Consequently, the solution has to include moments of evaluation to make sure that the digital change is bringing the desired outcomes as well as is embedded into the culture of the company.

Conclusion:

Based on the answers to the SRQ, it is evident that digital adoption among SMEs in the hospitality industry in the Netherlands is a complex issue with a range of contributing factors. A number of variables influence the effectiveness of these tactics, thus SMEs may need to take into account their particular situation when choosing which strategies to use.

According to the performed research, the majority of Dutch hospitality SMEs appear to lack a consistent method to identifying, improving and tracking their level of digital readiness, which seems to be one of the main causes of such a varying distribution of

digital readiness in The Netherlands. To help them become more digitally ready, a comprehensive digital readiness framework should be created with a focus on collaboration, training, experimentation and consistency.

By providing a roadmap for digital readiness, this framework could help SMEs in the hospitality industry in the Netherlands to stay competitive in a rapidly changing environment and ensure they are well-equipped to navigate the digital landscape. In the end, such a framework would make it possible for SMEs to advance their business further and adapt to the digital age.

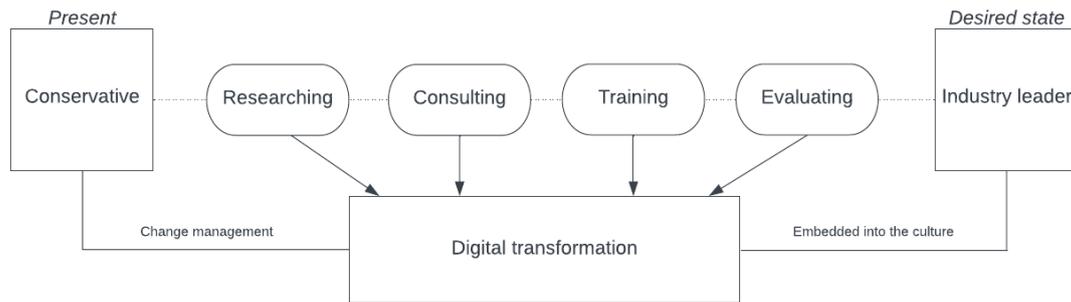


Figure 1: Conceptual framework for digital transformation (18 words)

involvement, can reveal areas that require improvement to enhance the digital experience for visitors.

- Digital skills and training: Determining where further training or upskilling is required to make the enterprise more digitally ready can be done by evaluating the amount of digital skills and training currently held by staff.

Once the initial evaluation is done, the enterprise could rank themselves based on the following scale and start striving towards a higher maturity level. An example of the scale can be found below. This scale is taken from Ireland’s Innovation Value Institute and has been used by businesses in various sectors in Ireland as a first step on their digital journey. It is considered to be a good example of a digital self-assessment form as it helps identify gaps in digital readiness and formulate the urgency for improvement in different areas.

Maturity			
Maturity levels	High	5	Digital is at the heart of the operational strategy, adding value throughout the business, “go-digital” culture is strong
		4	Processes across the enterprise are being converted to digital, tangible benefits and efficiencies being achieved
		3	Digital ICT is valued as a business tool, specific targets and reporting are in place, champions are emerging
		2	Limited resources are allocated to supporting a basic customer-facing digital presence, basic expertise in place
	Low	1	No digital strategy, no resources in place, no targets set or metrics used, no understanding of best practice

Picture 1: Maturity levels of digital readiness (89 words) (O’Hea, 2011)

Once the current state of digital readiness has been evaluated, it is important to set clear goals for future digital adoption and improvement. By setting clear digital readiness goals, the SME can and should build a coalition of stakeholders who are invested in achieving those goals. Goals could include:

- Implementing a new online booking system to streamline the reservation process in the next 6 months and increase efficiency by at least 30%.
- Creating a social media marketing plan with 10 steps within 1 month to increase brand awareness and customer engagement.

- Create in-house employee digital training programs to improve the business's overall digital skills and expertise. Run 4 training sessions in the next 4 months.

Setting other specific, measurable, achievable, relevant, and time-bound (SMART) goals can help guide the business's digital readiness efforts and track progress over time. They would depend on the current level of digital readiness and the digital gaps within the business ranging from small short-term adjustments to major long-term changes.

With goals in place, the next step is to develop a comprehensive digital transformation plan. By creating a comprehensive plan, the SME can establish a clear vision for digital transformation and a strategy for achieving it. This should include:

- Identifying key stakeholders who will be responsible for implementing the plan and ensuring accountability.
- Outlining the specific steps and actions required to achieve the digital readiness goals, such as the ones mentioned above.
- Research the available options. For example, if a new booking system was to be implemented, a cost-benefit analysis would be required to figure out which option is the most cost-effective.
- Setting a timeline for implementation, including regular check-ins and milestones to monitor progress along the way. These are further described in the Evaluation chapter.
- Allocating resources, such as budget and staffing, to support the plan's implementation. When it comes to staffing, initially it might be beneficial to outsource temporary IT staff and then form an in-house IT department as the level of digitalisation would increase.

With a plan in place, it is then time to implement the necessary actions to achieve the digital readiness goals. By implementing the necessary actions to achieve the digital readiness goals, the SME can communicate the vision for digital transformation and empower employees to act on that vision. This could involve:

- Upgrading the firm's technology infrastructure, such as installing new Wi-Fi routers or investing in a new customer relationship management (CRM) system.
- Training employees on digital tools and technologies. Those working directly with the new technology should be trained first.
- Improving the company's online presence, such as updating the website or creating new social media profiles.

The final step towards becoming more digital is to regularly monitor and evaluate progress. By regularly reviewing and adapting the assessment process, SMEs can ensure that they are keeping up with the evolving digital landscape and can continue to make progress towards their goals. The progress should be shared within the company to motivate everyone to keep on working. This can also help to identify areas where additional resources or support may be needed to achieve the wanted level of digital readiness. This could involve:

- Tracking key performance indicators (KPIs), such as website traffic, online booking conversion rates, or customer satisfaction ratings, to assess the effectiveness of the digital readiness plan.
- Conducting regular check-ins with stakeholders to discuss progress and identify areas that need further attention or improvement.
- Adapting the digital readiness plan as needed to ensure it remains relevant and effective.

The monitoring procedure should then be followed by the ongoing improvement of digital capabilities for it to become a reiterative process integral to the company.

The digital strategy must be continually reviewed and updated, new technology and tools must be purchased when needed and corporate operations must be modified to take advantage of emerging opportunities and trends. A firm might, for instance, invest in new technologies like chatbots or voice assistants to enhance visitor interaction and customer care, or it might update its website frequently to enhance its functionality and user experience provided the need for it and its benefits are identified. The modifications can be maintained over time and the hospitality SME can become a market leader or even a pioneer by routinely adjusting the digital readiness plan and integrating digital capabilities into the SME's culture.

This framework will help hospitality SMEs become more digitally ready and better prepare themselves to cater to changing trends and upcoming challenges in an increasingly digital world. If the above steps are continuously followed with involvement of all the relevant stakeholders, businesses might see many of the earlier mentioned benefits as well as embed the digital thinking into their culture.

3.2 Stakeholders and dissemination

After conducting both secondary and primary research and analysing the results, it was crucial to disseminate the findings and share the solution with key stakeholders of this research, such as the client, hospitality digital technology experts and managers of Hospitality SMEs, including those who were already interviewed.

To facilitate effective communication and collaboration, virtual meetings were scheduled with the stakeholders to discuss the ongoing research and share the results. During these meetings, the findings from the research were presented allowing for an open and constructive dialogue.

This exchange of information and ideas ultimately improved the overall quality of the research and provided an opportunity for feedback and further insights. Incorporating this feedback allowed the research to be adjusted to ensure more accurate and reliable solution design, enhancing the validity and credibility of the overall research.

Lastly, a LinkedIn post in a form of infographic was also written to further share the gathered knowledge with the community. The infographic along may be found in Appendix 7: Dissemination acts – infographic.

By sharing the results with stakeholders and the wider community, the research could have a greater impact and contribute to the ongoing efforts to improve the digital readiness of Hospitality SMEs in The Netherlands.

As a result of discussion with SME managers and owners, sections with regards to the resources needed and limitations of the solution have been expanded in their scope to add the topic of leadership to the research. Furthermore, ethical and social implications have been added to the future considerations to address feedback received by digital technology experts, which pointed out that this is a crucial step in making the best use of digital technology.

4. Implementation

4.1 Resources needed

A combination of financial, human, and technological resources, as well as successful leadership techniques would be needed to implement the digital readiness improvement framework for a hospitality SME and ensure the successful adoption and integration of digital technologies.

First, employees will need opportunities to receive education and training to advance their digital skills and knowledge. This could entail adding more personnel with digital competence or offering current staff workshops or training sessions to advance their knowledge of topics like social media marketing, digital analytics, and online reservation systems.

Secondly, funding will be needed to support technological advancements, training initiatives, and other investments necessary for the implementation of a digital readiness improvement framework. To support these projects, it is critical to create a budget, prove the cost-benefit to relevant stakeholders and secure financing.

Furthermore, it will take a lot of time and labour from staff members across the organisation to adopt a digital improvement framework. It is crucial to allocate enough employees and funds to support the framework's execution.

Strong leadership and good change management techniques will also be needed for the framework for improving digital preparedness to be implemented successfully. To ensure the effort's success, organisational leaders must be dedicated to it and prepared to invest the necessary time and resources. Additionally, they must be equipped to deal with opposition to change and convince all organisational stakeholders of the advantages of digital preparedness.

Finally yet importantly, it can be required to work with outside specialists to support implementation depending on the scale and extent of the digital readiness improvement activities. To assist the company in reaching its objectives, this can involve engaging consultants with knowledge of digital trends, change management, or technology deployment.

4.2 Implementation steps

The implementation of the process for increasing the digital readiness of SMEs in the hospitality industry can be broken down into several steps:



First stage involves gathering the necessary data and resources, as well as identifying the specific needs and goals of the assessment. This may involve reaching out to

relevant stakeholders, such as industry experts and other SME owners, and gathering information on their current technology usage and trends. The business can then have a clear understanding of the importance of digital readiness for the expansion and success of their own company by embracing it.

The actual assessment process will vary depending on the specific tools and methods used, but it typically involves evaluating the technology infrastructure and processes of the SMEs, as well as the skills and knowledge of their staff. It would usually involve seeking guidance and advice from digital experts. This can include digital consultants or technology vendors, who can provide a more in-depth assessment of the business's digital capabilities and identify areas for improvement. They may use a range of tools and methods such as interviews, surveys, and analysis of data to evaluate the business's digital readiness. Businesses can and should also compare their digital readiness to industry benchmarks or best practices. This helps to assess progress and identify areas for improvement while keeping an eye on competition at all times. For example, a hospitality SME could compare its website traffic or online booking conversion rates to those of similar businesses in the same geographic area or industry sector. This external perspective can be invaluable in identifying blind spots and providing guidance on how to improve.

Once the data has been collected, it has to be analysed to determine the strengths and weaknesses of the SMEs' technology infrastructure, processes, and staff. The results of the analysis would be used to create a comprehensive report on the current digital readiness of the particular SMEs that would then serve as a basis for future comparison.

Based on the results of the analysis, recommendations and goals should be established on how the SMEs can improve their digital readiness, including specific actions they can take to enhance their technology infrastructure and processes, as well as training and development opportunities for their staff.

With the recommendations and objectives in hand, the SMEs will begin the process of implementing the set out changes by following the above mentioned framework.

Overall, the implementation process will be an iterative one, with regular assessments, analysis, and recommendations being made to help the SMEs continually improve their digital readiness and stay ahead of the competition in the digital age. Its duration will depend on many variables such as the size of the company, previous experience with technology, extent of the goals as well as financial capabilities.

As the process is initiated, the main objectives should be kept in mind at all times. Those include, yet are not limited to, the following - improving operational efficiency, enhancing customer experience, increasing competitiveness, expanding market reach and, most importantly, fostering innovation.

5. Evaluation

Regular check-ins should be conducted to track progress to guarantee that a hospitality SME's digital readiness is continuously improved and that methods of assessing it are reliable.

To track advancement over time, it is first essential to establish an initial baseline for the SME's digital preparedness. This could entail making a list of the business's existing digital technology usage, examining the number of reviews that might criticise the absence of technology, benchmarking with competitors or even having an external company perform an extensive audit of the enterprise's digital capabilities. Once the baseline has been established, it can be used as a standard against which to measure advancement and spot problems that require more attention.

The digital readiness program can stay on track by scheduling frequent check-ins with key stakeholders, including senior management, digital consultants, and technology vendors. Depending on the particular needs of the SME, these check-ins may be conducted on a monthly, quarterly, or annual basis. How frequently you check in should depend on how quickly you need to make progress. For instance, more regular check-ins can be necessary if the SME operates in a market with fierce competition (Amsterdam versus a smaller town, for example).

Documenting any changes or advancements in the SME's digital readiness over time is crucial for tracking progress. In addition to motivating workers by recognising achievements, this can assist in identifying areas that require additional attention. Examples of KPIs that could be used include the following:

- **Online Booking Conversion Rate:** this KPI calculates the proportion of website visitors that execute an online reservation. Enterprises may determine whether changes to their website, such as better user experience, better design, and more thorough descriptions, are having a beneficial influence on their digital preparedness by monitoring this statistic over time. To determine how competitive they are, they can also evaluate their performance in relation to that of their rivals.
- **Customer Feedback Score:** this KPI measures the level of satisfaction expressed by guests through online reviews or surveys. A high customer feedback score indicates that the business is providing a positive guest experience, which is essential in today's digital age. By monitoring this metric, SMEs can identify areas that need improvement and take action to address them.
- **Social Media Engagement:** this KPI measures the level of engagement that the SME's social media posts generate. By tracking metrics such as likes, comments, shares, and followers, SMEs can identify whether their social media strategy is engaging their target audience effectively. This can help them to build brand awareness and increase customer loyalty.
- **Mobile Responsiveness:** this KPI measures the SME's website's ability to adapt to different screen sizes and devices. With more and more people using mobile devices to book hotels or restaurants and other services, a website that is not mobile responsive can negatively impact the SME's digital readiness. By monitoring this metric, SMEs can ensure that their website is accessible and user-friendly on all devices.
- **Average Time on Site:** this KPI measures how long website visitors spend on the SME's website. A longer average time on site can indicate that the website's content is engaging and useful to the visitors. By monitoring this metric, SMEs

can identify whether their website's content is resonating with their target audience and adjust their content strategy accordingly.

Furthermore, engaging relevant stakeholders, such as employees, customers, and suppliers, in the assessment process can provide valuable insights into areas that need improvement. For example, employees can provide feedback on their experiences using digital tools, while customers can provide insights into their preferences for online booking and payment options. Suppliers can also provide insights into new technologies and trends that could be relevant to the SME based on their experience with other customers.

Regularly reviewing and adapting the assessment process is crucial to ensure that it remains relevant and effective. As technology evolves, new tools and methods may need to be added to the assessment process to keep up with the changing digital landscape. For instance, the assessment process may need to be updated to include new social media platforms or mobile technologies that have become popular among customers. Regularly reviewing and adapting the assessment process can help to ensure that the SME's digital readiness remains relevant and effective over time.

By following these steps, SMEs can ensure that their maturity level is consistently improving and that the ways of assessing it are effective. These steps can also help to ensure that the SME is keeping up with the latest digital trends and technologies, allowing it to stay ahead of the competition and better serve its customers.

6. Conclusion and academic reflection

6.1 Reflection on the solution

Even though the solution is based on a well-known model that has been adopted by many organisations around the world, the hospitality business is extremely competitive, and SMEs might not have the means to fully commit to a long-term digital transformation plan. In these circumstances, a more gradual strategy that emphasises immediate successes and short-term gains can be more suitable. This is also the reason why testing this solution within the research timeline is quite challenging. As such, it is reasonable to state that theoretically, based on a variety of different successful applications around the world, the solution should work, but there is currently no way to demonstrate this.

Despite this drawback, the framework for assessing digital readiness offers a useful place for hospitality firms to start if they want to increase their digital skills and competitiveness, particularly if they have little to no experience with digital technology. Businesses can find gaps and chances for improvement by evaluating their present degree of digital readiness across key areas like strategy, culture, infrastructure, and customer experience.

Businesses can improve their capacity to adjust to shifting market conditions and satisfy growing customer expectations by taking a methodical approach to deploying digital technologies and encouraging a culture of innovation and learning. What will ultimately determine if the framework is applicable is the ability of each firm to adopt and sustain long-term digital transformation efforts, as well as its unique objectives and goals.

6.2 Limitations of the solution

Although the solution has shown to be successful in solving a variety of issues, some limitations must be acknowledged in this research's context. Understanding these constraints is crucial for the framework's ongoing success.

Firstly, not all SMEs may be able to apply the model because it was originally intended to be employed in a hierarchical, top-down organisational structure. SMEs frequently have less defined structures, less hierarchy, and less codified decision-making procedures (Lazarević-Moravčević et al., 2014). As a result, the model might need to be tweaked or adjusted to account for the specific characteristics of SMEs.

Secondly, the model assumes a linear, sequential approach to change management, which might not be appropriate given how quickly and dynamically digital technology is developing (Auguste, 2013). Change frequently occurs iteratively and nonlinearly in the digital age, necessitating a more flexible and adaptable strategy.

Thirdly, although it is crucial in the context of digital readiness, the model does not clearly address the role of leadership in digital transformation (Hotho and Champion, 2011). Leaders are essential in fostering and accelerating the cultural and cognitive changes that are frequently required by digital transformation.

Fourth, the model makes the assumption that change is something that can be managed and controlled, which may not be the case in the context of digital transformation

(Auguste, 2013). To find the most successful digital solutions, it may be necessary to embrace experimentation and trial-and-error methods because digital transformation frequently involves a significant degree of uncertainty.

Lastly, external factors such as changes in the regulatory environment, economic conditions, or technological advancements may also influence the effectiveness of the change management framework. Therefore, it may be necessary to regularly update the framework to ensure its relevance and effectiveness over time.

Overall, while the Kotter's 8-step model offers a helpful framework for comprehending and managing change, it is important to be aware of its shortcomings and take into account alternate strategies that might be more appropriate for the particular situation. Even though the researcher has selected it as one of the more well-known methods, other conceptual frameworks could have been acknowledged as well if there had not been a time or word limit.

6.3 Advice for future research

First and foremost, future studies ought to expand on business in the hospitality sector independently – hotels, restaurants, cafés etc., and reflect the quickening pace of technological development. Although the established solution is a good starting point for the hospitality industry enterprises in general, various company models will have varied priorities and possibilities when it comes to integrating digital technologies.

Furthermore, it is crucial to stay up to date with the most recent research and market trends in the field of digital preparedness in the hospitality sector and to recognise that there is no definitive solution to this unending question.

Additionally, a complex interaction of factors, including technology, business models, organisational culture, and consumer behaviour, is also involved in ensuring digital preparedness in the hotel sector. It is therefore crucial to adopt a multidisciplinary approach to comprehend these elements, drawing on even more theories and methodologies from disciplines including management, marketing, information systems, and psychology.

Lastly, the ethical and social implications of the adoption of digital technology in the hotel sector should also be studied in future research. This covers concerns with data security, privacy, and social responsibility. In order to ensure that the advantages of technology are balanced with ethical and social considerations, it is critical to take these issues into account while establishing strategies for the use of digital technology.

Appendices

Appendix 1: Data consent forms

Data consent form interview:

Dear _____,

Thank you for accepting my invitation to connect. I was very impressed with your LinkedIn profile especially since I want to become a business owner one day as well.

My name is Marija and I am a student at Hotelschool The Hague, currently working on my bachelor thesis. The topic of my thesis is focused on digital readiness of Hospitality SMEs in The Netherlands and I am reaching out to gather insights and perspectives from industry professionals like yourself.

I would like to invite you to participate in a short interview (approximately 30 minutes) to discuss your experience with technology in your hotel and any issues or challenges you may have encountered. Your input would be greatly valued and would contribute greatly to my research. The collected data will be stored securely and presented in a confidential manner.

The interview can be conducted via phone or video call at your convenience. Please let me know a date and time that works for you and I will make sure to accommodate your schedule.

Thank you for considering my request. I look forward to hearing back from you.

Best regards,

Marija

Data consent form survey:

Hello,

I am currently researching whether small to medium-sized Dutch hospitality firms are prepared for the digital era as part of my bachelor's thesis. I am involved in a study that examines how prepared Dutch Firms in the hospitality industry are for the digital age.

Please complete the survey at the link below if you work for, run, or own a small to medium-sized Dutch hotel in the Randstad region. The results will help my fellow researchers and I determine whether your company is prepared for the digital era and to use digital technologies to enhance your operations.

Please be aware that, as a survey respondent, you acknowledge that your participation in this survey is optional and that you are free to revoke your consent at any time. Your responses will not be used in any way that would allow you to be identified based on the information you submit; it will only be used for the research.

At Hotelschool The Hague, all data will be archived in accordance with data protection standards.

Kind regards,

Marija

Appendix 2: Survey questions

1. In which sector(s) does your business operate?

- a) Hotels and similar accommodation
- b) Holiday and other short-stay accommodation
- c) Camping grounds, recreational vehicle parks and trailer parks
- d) Restaurants and mobile food service activities (including cafeteria's, lunchrooms, snackbars, etc.)
- e) Event catering and other food service activities
- f) Beverage serving activities

2. Which statement(s) fit(s) most with your business?

- a) My business is independent.
- b) My business is part of a chain.
- c) Other (fill in)

3. How old is your business (in years)?

4. How many employees does your business employ? (full time equivalents, FTE)

5. How many employees work during an average shift? (full time equivalents, FTE)

6. Which role(s) describe(s) you the best?

- a) Founder
- b) Owner
- c) Manager
- d) Shift leader
- e) Employee
- f) Other (fill in)

7. When we (want to) experiment with digital technologies

	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neither disagree nor agree	Agree	Strongly agree
..., we have sufficient financial resources .	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
..., we have the right (technical) equipment .	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
..., we have the right knowledge .	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

8. When discussing the innovation potential of digital technologies

	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neither disagree nor agree	Agree	Strongly agree
..., we regularly share ideas amongst employees.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
..., we involve all employees .	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
..., we discuss advantages as well as disadvantages .	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

9. Regarding our strategy for innovating with digital technologies

	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neither disagree nor agree	Agree	Strongly agree
..., we have set clear goals.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
..., we have set relevant goals.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
..., our employees are aware of the set goals.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

10. When it comes to experimenting with digital technologies

	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neither disagree nor agree	Agree	Strongly agree
..., our employees have the right attitude .	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
..., our employees are motivated .	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
..., we empower our employees .	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

11. We have good relationships with...

	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neither disagree nor agree	Agree	Strongly agree
..., technology providers to access digital technologies.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
..., consultants to discuss digital technologies.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
..., other suppliers to discuss digital technologies.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

12. Considering the implementation of digital technologies,...

	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neither disagree nor agree	Agree	Strongly agree
...we are generally doing a good job .	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
...we are doing enough to stay competitive .	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
...we realized most of our ideas.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

13. Which digital technologies do you use in your business?

- a) Internet of Things (connecting devices via internet)
- b) Robots
- c) Face recognition
- d) Virtual reality / Augmented reality
- e) Chatbots
- f) Artificial intelligence
- g) Mobile Apps
- h) Social Media
- i) Own website
- j) Digital payment options (e.g., tikkie)
- k) None
- l) Other (fill in)

14. Since we have implemented digital technologies,

	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neither disagree nor agree	Agree	Strongly agree
...our customers have changed.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
...our services & products have changed.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
...our market positioning has changed.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

15. Since we have implemented digital technologies,

	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neither disagree nor agree	Agree	Strongly agree
...our competences & resources have changed.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
...our internal processes have changed.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
...our partnerships with externals have changed.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
...our distribution channels have changed.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

16. Since we have implemented digital technologies,

	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neither disagree nor agree	Agree	Strongly agree
...our revenue streams have changed.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
...our cost structures have changed.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
...our revenue logic has changed.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

17. External information sources (e.g., personal networks, internet, journals, market reports)

	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neither disagree nor agree	Agree	Strongly agree
We search for relevant information about our industry on a daily basis.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
We use information sources within our industry.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
We deal with information beyond our industry.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

18. Communication structure

	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neither disagree nor agree	Agree	Strongly agree
We discuss ideas as a team.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
We solve problems as a team.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
We have a quick information flow in our team.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
We regularly exchange ideas, problems, and achievements in our team.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

19. Knowledge processing

	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neither disagree nor agree	Agree	Strongly agree
We have the ability to organize and use new knowledge.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
We access new knowledge and prepare it, so that knowledge is accessible for everyone in our business.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
We successfully link existing knowledge with new insights.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
We are able to apply new knowledge in daily operations.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

20. Commercial exploitation of new knowledge

	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neither disagree nor agree	Agree	Strongly agree
We regularly develop prototypes or early concepts.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
We regularly reconsider technologies based on new knowledge.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
We have the ability to work more effectively by adopting new technologies.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Appendix 3: Semi-structured interview questions

Sub-research question	Hospitality business owner/manager/employee	Digital technology expert
Existing digital capabilities	What digital technology do you currently apply in your business?	Do you think the businesses you work with are technologically advanced?
	Do you also know what your competitors use?	What type of digital technology does your business offer?
	How would you define your level of digital readiness compared to your competitors/in The Netherlands overall?	Have you noticed anything particular in terms of technology adoption when comparing The Netherlands to other countries?
Main obstacles to digital adoption	What are some of the common challenges that SMEs in the hospitality industry face when implementing digital technology, and how do you address these challenges?	What are some of the common challenges that SMEs in the hospitality industry face when implementing digital technology, and how do you address these challenges?
	Do you think it is easier to implement technology in SMEs or corporate/chain companies? Why?	Do you think it is easier to implement technology in SMEs or corporate/chain companies? Why?
Developing abilities and competencies	What skills do you think would help you to become even more technologically advanced?	What skills do you see missing in your clients?
	How do you think the digital readiness of hospitality SMEs can be improved?	How do you think the digital readiness of hospitality SMEs can be improved?
Factors influencing digital adoption and	In your opinion, what are the key benefits of implementing digital technology in the hospitality industry?	Do you think using digital technology is important? Why?

perceived advantages of digital technologies	What do you look for in a new software/digital appliance?	What are the advantages of using your system?
Efforts and future outlook	Do you think a business can survive without the use of digital technology?	Do you think a business can survive without the use of digital technology?
	What plans in terms of digital technology do you have for the future?	In your experience, what are some of the key trends in digital technology adoption in the hospitality industry, and how can SMEs stay ahead of the curve?

Appendix 4: Semi-structured interviews

Interview #1 – boutique hotel general manager

Marija

Firstly, I am really thankful that you actually accepted to have this talk. So thank you for agreeing to do it.

Unknown Speaker

I went to school the entire process, like art myself as well so I know how valuable feedback can be.

Marija

And then I saw that you got the chance to be the general manager, like straight away after graduating. How was that?

Unknown Speaker

Very cool. Of course, you know, just out of school. And then you'll get to be in charge of a large hotel. It is a great honour and also overwhelming but it was very nice to do. It was very fun to do. And it gave me it gave me a bit of a kick-start sort of thing.

Marija

So maybe just a small introduction from my side. Well, so as you understand, I am trying to graduate and my thesis is actually for the research department of Hotelschool. And they are just trying to figure out what's the digital readiness of hospitality SMEs in the Netherlands? And, well, what I am doing now is simply research and just trying to reach out to hospitality SMEs, and seeing how digital are they, what type of technologies they use, and just, yeah, basically gather, you know, as many different points of view as possible. And so now, I was looking at the hotel where you're working now, and it is

really interesting for me to hear your perspective as well. Because from what I understand, it is a really small hotel, like, well, a boutique hotel, right?

Unknown Speaker

It is a boutique hotel. Yeah, that is right. Yeah. So what I what I did after my experience with the general manager traineeship is that I found out that I really like to be involved with smaller hotels that are going through a phase of change. So meaning they are just opening so it is a new hotel, a hotel that is been renovating so they basically to reposition it. And that is also why I got involved with this hotel so yeah, it is indeed a small boutique hotel. The rooms are in the city centre of the Hague, alright. Yeah, so the previous owner used to have like six rooms, one bed and breakfast. He had the opportunity to buy extra real estate right adjacent to the property and basically transform that into 12 additional hotel rooms.

Marija

And when did this happen?

Unknown speaker

Just like basically this summer in June.

Marija

And you basically came like right before the transformation?

Unknown Speaker

Officially, yes. But I've been involved with a few months earlier. To assist in the basically the preparation period and that is when I started. We are currently positioned as a the sales mix is going to be considered like leisure and business. Currently, maybe 50/50. But in high season, it is 70 leisure / 30 business. So it is a nice mix. We are exploring MICE markets, so that we can offer to various guests also meeting events. So that is what we're currently accredited became doing currently setting up.

Marija

But that is also quite interesting. I do not think I see like many boutique hotels trying to, I mean, usually they are way more focused on leisure and not business, or at least that is how I would see it. So how is it like, let's say whenever there is a company that wants to host a meeting at your hotel, I guess they will not usually stay at your hotel. I mean, because you do not have as many rooms or how does it happen?

Unknown Speaker

The Hague is a city where the Dutch government has a lot of its departments. And that is why also a lot of the business guests stay in The Hague are on government business. Oh, they are consultancy firm. They are lawyers, or they are hired by the government to assist on a case or project. So you'll see that the largest part of the business market consists of people related to the government. So we have there for no smaller and smaller events and also there is like our guests want to stay with of course, a larger number of rooms. We can host them up to up to 18 rooms, which is still a fair amount of rooms, especially if we're getting in at times of course, do this for them. So it is a bit small, but the marketing behave is also not the usual for conferences. And there are hotels that are that are focusing on conferences at the World Trade Centre, and the World Forum. But that is not our that is not our markets.

Marija

And can you maybe tell me how many employees are there at your hotel?

Unknown Speaker

16

Marija

Oh, wow. Alright. Well, actually, I am not sure if that is a proportionally a lot or not, but seems like yeah, personally, it is a lot.

Unknown Speaker

That has to do with service quality. Yeah, I mean, the general surface perception we want to we want to establish.

Marija

So now what's really interesting for me, because when I was well, getting ready for the interview and looking at your hotel I just thought that it is interesting to hear. If digital technology is an enemy of your hotel, especially because you're a boutique hotel and service is the most important part. So you have to be close to the guests and not have like technology in between of you. Or do you actually let's say use a lot of it? And I mean, it can be anywhere like any department, any type of digital technology, whatever comes to your mind.

Unknown Speaker

I mean, I guess technology is very broad. Where do we draw the line of what technologies for example, technology. I am guessing your premise would be like systems and software Yeah, **so it is incredibly important and increasingly important**. I would definitely not say that it is different for sure. But it is really is the amount of interaction that the guest has with technology. I think that also determines the service level. **I think the more human connection there is, the higher the level of service can be.** Yeah, exactly. **I believe that you cannot make a perfect five star experience with only technology. I think there is always pros always seems to be a good balance. But you can, for example, have a wonderful experience in a mistress or two budget range hotel, relying solely or largely on technology.** It really, really depends on the level of service you're in to your needs provide.

Unknown Speaker

Technology can be I mean for the employees, great support tool, in the sense that you can know the guest says preferences you know, when they arrive you know, what they like, you know, what the preview state, so it can be can be greatly beneficial, but not in the face of the guests. And they say you know, like, with an online check in or with with, like a kiosk where we see a lot of hotels, nowadays working more with like a check in kiosk, for example, which is great, but not for certain types of levels of service if you want it that is your investable.

Marija

Interesting to hear your perspective on it. And do you have like an IT department at your hotel or is it all outsourced?

Unknown Speaker

We outsource it.

Marija

So then, would you say that every department in your hotel has something to do with technology like they use some types of source software?

Unknown Speaker

Yeah, absolutely.

Marija

And just out of curiosity, let's say what type of PMS system do you use at your hotel?

Unknown Speaker

From the first of February's and a few days, we are going to transfer our current system into Mews. I mean, if your thesis is about technology, you must have heard of him and it is the next big thing. We want to be part of it and we, we think that our current PMS is not providing the same technological features as Mews is able to provide. So that is why we we're going to switch

Marija

Alright, so is it you who is mostly responsible for implementing it or how does it work as like this is a really good example because it how of how recent that is?

Unknown Speaker

Mainly me and a colleague who are into implementation configuration and training.

Marija

Alright, so will everyone at the company be trained on how to use it?

Unknown Speaker

Absolutely.

Marija

And how will this happen? I mean, again, like how would you imagine this, this training happening?

Unknown Speaker

So, the beautiful thing about us is that it is very, both for the for the guests and for the for the end user. It is very intuitive, very nice system. And Mews has a function which is called news University, and use universities basically. Well, an online course on how to use the system. And users get a training by the system on how to use the system, which is very efficient and works beautifully. Basically, people are training themselves with Mews to learn how it works.

Marija

Did you find them yourself or, I mean, did you have like any other options or did you know straight away that is the company you wanted to go for?

Unknown Speaker

No, I didn't know because I did the same trick with two other hotels before. I knew when I started here that Mews was the go to. So yeah, that is it was for me evidence.

Marija

All right. So you are using technology that is good to know. Do you have any plans for the future again, like in terms of technology, of even let's say robots or virtual reality. So something crazy in the sense?

Unknown Speaker

We are quite a conservative as a company that is in that perspective. You know, we were not going to incorporate VR or AI or whatever into our business. I think the most exciting piece of software that will that we're maybe planning to incorporate is like for example OKY, which is an emailing system.

Marija

Alright, what is it? I have never heard of it.

Unknown Speaker

Alright, it is, OKY. It is a system that integrates with Mews seamlessly so that it sends emails. It is like an email marketing tool is connected to your PMS and therefore is able to offer upgrades and upsell and cross sell various packages or add ons to get in their pre arrival phase. And what they also do is a post say survey. Like it is connected to the PMS. So it is very convenient and easily traceable. So that is, that is nice.

Marija

Yeah, yeah. Well, sounds again, really interesting. But so what was it kind of mandatory in the way for you to get the system like is Mews approved by the owner?

Unknown Speaker

This is really my experience with the system that I would like to have this again. But it is, you know, as we're a small hotel, you know, it is one thing at a time. So first, we focus on the integration of the new PMS. And afterwards, we'll maybe revisit some items. Like alright, all right.

Marija

And how, I mean, how do you think this will impact the experience of the guests? Will they see much of a difference when the new systems are in place?

Unknown Speaker

In the end, it is all gonna get better. They are gonna have more interactions, more touch points. So hopefully that will be beneficial for both the guests because they see more of our hotel and see more of what we have to offer, people's own pre arrival and also for us, because it generates more additional revenue. So and so for example, additional revenue will come from the fact that you will be upselling.

Marija

And well since I mean, it is not a big team that you have. Are there ever people that like find it hard to adjust to the new technology? Have there been people who were against it that and I don't know, like, do we find it easy? Explaining to your company, that there will be a new system, you will have to learn again and just how to use it?

Unknown Speaker

There is always there always be resistance, you know, if you have MCH, I believe it is called the course about change management. I don't know what it is called now. It is about every change as a resistance. There is always whether it is an owner whether it is the end user, whether it is well, whatever is involved, there will always be some form of reluctance. You know, in the end, in the end, especially in a small team, that is easily overcome, you know, because it is a very personal approach to everything. Sorry, there is a team member, there is someone in the entire process that is not getting comfortable, or has trouble. It is that the lines are very short. To talk about it or get some assistance. In a larger organisation, of course, this will be different but you know, for us, resistance is easily dealt with.

Marija

So overall, it is interesting to hear your perspective, do you think it is easier to implement, like, some sort of new technology in the smaller hotel or in a bigger hotel? Second of all, right. So for example, you said it is easier to explain it to your employees, what would be another thing that that comes up in your mind? Why why did you say so? Surely.

Unknown Speaker

Because there is way more room and space for explanation to for dialogue. In a larger organisation, there is no dialogue there is, you know, in general, very, very much in general. Not any case specific but you know, there is a top down approach. So management decides, there will be new system, the housekeeper at the site, there will be new system management of course, and because housekeeping, housekeeping, is not in direct contact with the decision maker. There can be friction of course, but as the decision maker aka me, I am in direct contact with all of the people who are going to work with it. So if there is any hesitation or reluctance or doubts or insecurity about a change or the system. It is immediately dealt with.

Marija

Alright, alright, that is good to hear. All right. Um, let us see if I have anything else on the list. This is again, maybe just to know more about the size of your hotel. Do you know how many F&B covers Do you have? I mean, or just restaurant seats.

Unknown Speaker

40 covers.

Marija

All right. Um, yeah, I think for sure, you know, quite a lot, especially about your competitors. So, probably other boutique hotels and in The Hague, how would you say you compare to them and again, in terms of technology, do you know if they are using maybe something drastically different, maybe more technology or less like, how would you say. Are you digitally ready? Overall?

Unknown Speaker

The difficult question because, you know, I don't know what software everyone's using, of course. What I do know I used to work at hotels for quite some time. And I think it is a very interesting case for you as well. Maybe I am afraid love the source or in our in Dutch, but it is a beautiful case study for you. Because it tells a really aimed and that is not a direct competitor of ours, but it is an example that I know of industry that has perfectly incorporate AI into their reservation system. All right. Alright. So, Dallas is a

hotel that or hotel chain that is mainly focusing on mice and the AI assistants in there for basically quotation process, the offerings process with potential clients. So whenever a client's or company or whoever wants to make requires a meeting room or space or an event space, sends an email to the general email address. AI software picks out this email puts all the elements in a system with the respective cases and then within an hour, it can make a quotation and send it back with a company or a company email. The quotation basically this AI assistant has totally changed. The way of working for some internal salespeople. We're normally like old age just putting in putting in the numbers and sending the offers and now it is all digitalised and or made with AI and when I left the company, they were also implementing that for individual reservations via email. So this is I mean, they, they wrote a lot about it and they have articles and they have you know that they are really trying to pioneer on this field. And they wrote a white paper as well. So it might be interesting to look into this for you.

Marija

Thank you for bringing it up. I actually found even on the Mews website. There is a because as I understand they are the customer of Mews as well. So there is like a lot of information about this whole project. It is very interesting.

Unknown Speaker

Alright, perfect.

Marija

Well, yeah, I will not be taking any more time from you. Just as we agreed, so under 30 minutes, but I do think I have enough for me to continue with my thesis. So yeah, I am just really thankful that you helped out. It is always nice to talk someone who graduated and knows the pain of going through this.

Unknown Speaker

If you need any help, after or just send me an email.

Marija

Thank you. Yeah. Just one small last thing, from what I understand I have to send you a form which is a data ethics form, just allowing me to use basically this information in my thesis. So would you be fine if I send it I think I can. I can even do it for LinkedIn. And I think it just requires your signature. Be it just a technical thing that I have to show to my coach.

Unknown Speaker

Alright.

Marija

Thank you very much. So yeah, once again, thank you for taking the time and was really interesting talking to you.

Interview #2 – hotel general manager

Unfortunately, the transcribing application did not work at the time of the interview.



Interview #3 – industry expert

Marija

So the reason for why I contacted you was of course because you work at Mews and as I was doing interviews with other people and like some, for example, GM of the hotels they actually mentioned Oh, you know, what I we've been using Mews and it is great and it is basically a really good company to work with.

Unknown Speaker

Because your research project is based on SMEs? And what is your definition or the definition that you have come across in your research? Where the gap between small medium enterprises and larger enterprises where's that?

Marija

Yeah. So we're focusing on preferably not a chain hotel because we don't think like a chain hotel can be an SME. And then for example, in terms of employees, it is up to 250. So that is why my main focus is just actually reaching out to super small hotels like boutique hotels. And also, I mean, I am talking about the hospitality industry in general. So also at restaurants cafes and yeah, so the cut off is 250 employees, but it is, I tend to like look at this at the smaller side as well.

Unknown Speaker

Yeah. Alright. Cool. And is it a research project that you have started yourself or is it something that the research department does?

Marija

Exactly, exactly. So my commissioner is someone from the research department. Yeah.

Unknown Speaker

Yeah. Alright, cool.

Marija

So, can you would you maybe be able to tell me more about what you do at Mews exactly, and what region do you cover? And then we can see where we can take it from there.

Unknown Speaker

Yep, perfect. So at Mews I am responsible for the business development area for the Benelux and partly the Nordics. Business development is a very wide area, but within us that specifically means that you are targeting hotels that are not currently using the Muse platform, and that you are encouraging them to take a look at the system so that they can start the buyer journey with the sales team. So with that I am responsible for both in your case, SMEs, as well as larger mid market deals, but that totally depends on for example, as you mentioned, the chain that they are part of because how it works is you cannot just go ahead and approach a Marriott property. That is not how it works, because it is a very top down organisation. So that, you know, even though if they are their franchises, so they can say everything for themselves, the systems etc, are dictated by for example, Marriott as a whole. So that means that you cannot just approach them without the approval of the chain itself. So it is easier to talk to SMEs. So independent hoteliers because they are a lot more flexible, when it comes to choosing the technology that they that they use, compared to the larger chains, but in my job, I take care of both the small, medium, independent hotels as well as the chains, but then on a, let's say, larger level C suite conversations with them.

Marija

All right. So you're kind of advertising Mews, you're calling them and offering the services?

Unknown Speaker

Yeah, so business development is the first part of the sales process where we, indeed, make sure that we advocate for Mews itself. But as business development, we're not talking about Mews to be very honest. We're talking about the industry. What are the challenges in the industry? What are the challenges that can arise if you're using certain technology? And what is the impact on that and just see, like, what are they how are they experiencing that challenge and you know, do we have a solution to overcome that challenge? And, you know, because only then, if we have a solution that can overcome the challenge that they have, it would make sense to make such a big change because the property management system as you know is the heart of any hospitality organisation, mainly hotels, but it is the main system that every single hotel uses. So, like a change has not taken to be very likely. So that means that there should be a challenge at heart. Yeah, that can be changed. And that is the moment where it makes sense to take a look at alternatives.

Marija

Alright. And so is it difficult to actually like, persuade them to take on like additional systems and is it difficult to explain, for example, to small independent hotels that you have to become more digital? How long does the process take to first like, actually invite them to use Mews?

Unknown Speaker

Yeah, I mean, that totally depends because there are SMEs that I've been talking to for, let's say six months, and they are still, let's say, trying to see like, hey, like, where does it fit in? I still need to talk to this person about it. I need to like, yeah, these are very long processes. But like, sometimes it is just like this. You can get it within a five minute conversation, there is a big variety in instances where some people see the value immediately, and some people don't. I think the advantage that we have in the Benelux market, and especially in the Netherlands, is that we have a very high technology adoption rate compared to for example, especially the French speaking part of Belgium, for example. You know, that the hotels in the Netherlands are, in general, a little bit more tech driven, compared to their Belgian, especially French speaking Belgian counterparts.

Marija

Alright, and how do you measure that how would you measure the technological the level of technological adoption? Like how would you know now, for example, that the Netherlands is more driven?

Unknown Speaker

That is mainly it is two sided in my opinion, because one, the Netherlands is within Europe, the markets with the highest percentage of branded rooms. That means that that means that it is in Hospitality Management, if you want to put that into your research. I can send you the link maybe afterwards as well. But what you see is that the large majority of the hotels in the Netherlands are part of a chain by then change or in general are a little bit more technology forward, compared to small medium enterprises. And then within small medium enterprises, there can also be the distinction between really specifically family run hotels, where we see that the adoption rate is generally a little bit lower compared to let's say, I am not saying that they are not professional, but where you have owners and you have people that just want the best for the business, right? So they have a lot less concerns when it comes to spending money on technology, compared to a family run hotel. They are in the belief that technology will select counter their family orientation or their day. They feel like if they use technology, that the guests will not feel like they have been staying in a very family run hotel. It is hard to express that in data, to be honest.

Marija

Yeah, exactly. Yeah, that is also a struggle I am finding with like doing the research before doing my own research. There is not much about this topic. So it makes it more difficult basically.

Unknown Speaker

Yeah. And, yeah, you know, especially because your research is focused on them. On the Netherlands. I mean, I am speaking to at least like 20 different hotels a day and this is main, sort of like distinction that I have been seeing in the market for the past year. So yeah.

Marija

Is there also a difference like now that I think about it, would you say there is a difference about for example, bigger cities, so hotels in bigger cities and then like smaller villages? Because I would think that in bigger cities again, the adoption rate is bigger.

Unknown Speaker

Yeah, yeah, definitely. And that is mainly because, you know, these hotels are in an area where around them, everybody is adopting technology. The visibility of technology is a lot higher and especially in an area where there is a lot of natural competitiveness because of the density of hotels. For example, here in Amsterdam, if you're not technology driven and if you're not available on your organic websites, if that is not a good one, if you're not on booking.com, Expedia or whatever, your visibility is just so low. So you need to adopt technology in order to at least even start to be competitive within the market because there is just so many hotels. But if you're in a very small village, and people will just search hotel in small village x, then there will be either one or two options there. And they have the choice between those two. And you will come up organically anyway. Yeah, so I would say there is a big difference between the adoption of technology and city hotels compared to hotels that are a little bit more rural. Or country situated. Yeah.

Marija

Alright. Perfect. Makes sense. I've looked at the Mews website, and it says that in your system, you have over 3200 Hotels right now, like all around the world. Do you maybe know what percentage is only in the Netherlands? From that number?

Unknown Speaker

That is a very good question. That is something I can perhaps share with you a little bit later on because I am not sure about the exact percentage but what I do know is that within the Netherlands specifically, there we have a 21% market share of the hotel rooms in the Netherlands. So let's say 21% of all the hotel rooms in the Netherlands are being run on the Mews PMS,

Marija

Alright. What are the other competitors? Is it opera?

Unknown Speaker

There is Opera. Exactly. They are mainly the ones that are serving the chains. Still. Yeah. And then next to that you have also a Dutch PMS system is called room Rakuen. They are specifically targeting these 20 room and less room hotels in the Netherlands. They are very good at that they are more of an all in one solution. So including a channel management solution. Are you familiar with the channel management solution?

Marija

Is that where you sell your hotel rooms? Have you have those reservations come in? Or is that not it?

Unknown Speaker

So you have booking.com and Expedia and all these online travel agencies, right. And you have your hotel. So the general management is the technology that is in between the online travel agencies and your hotel. Alright, so if somebody books a hotel room booking.com the channel management solution is the one that connects the two, but also make sure that if a room is booked, that the availability on all online travel agencies are being updated automatically, as well as the rates, everything. So they have this solution included within their PMS and we don't. So there are some differences between PMS systems but as far as other competitors go then there is for example, there is a clock still. There is Oprah cloud, there is FIPS VIPs. Yeah, there is several competitors out here in the market. Definitely. But that is really natural and good, right.

Marija

I mean, then 20% is still quite a quite a big part of the market. So that is nice.

Unknown Speaker

Exactly. And if you look at it from an international point of view, for Mews, the Benelux and then the Netherlands in specific is the country with the highest where we have the highest market share.

Marija

Alright, perfect. And does Mews not offer the channel management product as a separate one? I thought I saw it online.

Unknown Speaker

Yeah, so we have been founded with the philosophy, that hoteliers that they have the option themselves to build the technology stack that they prefer, and not something that is dictated by a technology provider. Right. So Mews has said alright, we're going to focus on building the best property management system in the world. But if you're going to diversify your efforts in also building the best general management in the world, also building the best point of sale system in the world, also building the best accounting system in the world. That doesn't make sense, right? Yeah. So what we have said is alright, we're going to focus on building the best BMS in the world. And then we're going to make sure that every single hotel has the opportunity to connect with other leaders in the in their industry. So that there is a free connection between Mews and specialized general management solutions, Mews and specialized point of sale solutions. So for that we have, let's say, an app store, it is called the marketplace, and people can just click on the connections between which systems they want to make.

Marija

Wow, alright, so seems like you've made it easy for other hotels.

Unknown Speaker

It is easy for them to connect with the technology partners that they want to work with. Right? Because, you know, something might not be the best fit for a hotel. But for them to have the choice between between 10 partners. It will make a lot of sense because you're not dictating what they are going to use. They can just choose themselves.

Marija

Alright. And then how does it work when you're implementing the Mews PMS system? Can you maybe explain like some of the steps and how long is the process and then how do you teach the your customer to actually use the system?

Unknown Speaker

Yeah, good question. So our process from let's say, contract signatory, so when the customer agrees, alright, we're going to use Mews to the implementation that generally takes between four to six weeks, because there needs to be a lot of let's say, Jack's bank registrations and know your customer. There is a lot of formality that needs to be done in that meantime. And we are dedicating their very own onboarding manager to the to the case where they are dedicated to making sure that the system is set up in the way that they want it to be set up. And so they are basically guiding new customers from alright, this is the whole back end of us. These are the settings that we need to make sure that are right for the way that you want to operate. And that process takes about

four to six weeks in total and then the hotel should be up and running. And when it comes to the training part so how do we make sure that everybody that will use Mews is using it correctly. We have set up the Mews University, alright, so this is basically a course dedicated to the function that someone is going to be in in the hotel. So we have a very specific front office. We have a housekeeping area, we have accounting areas we have, like every single Learning Path is dedicated to a function within the hotel and the administrator. So the one responsible for Mews within the hotel is the one that is assigning which learning path you're going to take. And this is an online like through video guidance to where all the users will formalize them with Mews. And this takes about three, four hours and then you should be up and running.

Marija

Alright. Alright. Wow.

Unknown Speaker

Which is which is very which is very short for hospitality. Or especially PMS solutions.

Marija

But so is it just like one day suddenly instead of the old PMS system, people come to work and they start using muse or do you try to do it kind of step by step and maybe have one on one computer? On the other computer.

Unknown Speaker

It is a good question. But that is not advised to have two PMS. It is running at the same time. So what we do within that onboarding process, all the data from their previous PMS is being transferred to us. And especially the future reservations, and all that data that is assigned to that is all being transferred to the new PMS. So it should be that from the moment they receive their login details for the new PMS. That they should be running it on news rather than the old PMS.

Marija

Alright, perfect. Has it ever happened that the hotel just didn't like Mews in the end and they switched back or had any issues like it took them long to actually adjust to the system? I am not sure if you keep touch with them like after but just would be interesting to know.

Unknown Speaker

I mean, first personally, I don't speak to hotels after they have been on boarded. So I am sure there are cases where hotels are like, Well, yeah, this is not something that we have foreseen or, but I think that could be two sided either, sort of they did see the value in the conversations before switching. Then after switching day, they might be a little bit scared like alright, well, this this is very technology forward and something that we're not used to and they are not very good at adapting to that new technology. Or secondly is like it, it could also be the case where we're hotels, they just prefer to do several things manually rather than having to technology taking care of that for them. Right. That is just the nature of their business. It is just the nature of how they want to operate things. And if it is something that alright, well, this is this is not something how I would have seen it, or I would have preferred it. That could certainly be the case and I am sure that there are there is a handful of hotels that have experienced that. But it is not in my role to speak to current customers. So I've personally not experienced that, but I am sure that there are stories like that.

Marija

Yeah, that is understandable. So, basically will like the final thing that I am trying to do with my research is to actually come up with a solution that would help the hotels to become more digital. So would you have anything on your mind that for example, essentially? I am trying to just to develop like a framework, so kind of a step by step what the hotel should, should do in order to like, accept technology easier and become more, more digital. So is there anything that you have maybe in mind from your experience especially you know, what those small hotels like you mentioned, where they don't even sell their rooms online where you cannot even find them on Google. So what can they do to not be as scared of technology and start using it more?

Unknown Speaker

Personally, I feel that almost all the time, it is all about awareness. So when people are scared of technology or not open to adopting technology within their within their SME hospitality business. You see that? **They are not aware of what technology can mean for them. What it can bring them.** Alright, so I think awareness is the part where you know, there should be a natural flow of information towards them to make sure that they are not afraid of hey, like look, this this is what technology can bring to your hotel. **If they are not informed, or if they are not aware, then the step between not adopting and technology that is always evolving. That gap becomes bigger and bigger and bigger.** So if the only way to close that gap is when technology is just adopting a way like that, that is going like this. **But the way to close that gap is if people become like much more informed about what it can bring them up to the point that they are totally up to date, because hey, this is the latest technology that can be used in order to accomplish things that I want.** So I feel that the biggest win that is to be made. Not just in the Netherlands in specific but especially worldwide. **There is people becoming informed or hoteliers becoming informed with what's technologically possible within the industry nowadays.** In order to see hey, does it make sense for me or does it totally not make sense?

Marija

Alright, yeah, perfect. Makes sense. All right. Yeah. I mean, I think that kind of sums up my questions and really helps, especially with some data facts that you have mentioned. So if there is anything that you can share, like with actual numbers about the Netherlands market, I would I would love to look at it. I am not sure how much you can actually share but would be really helpful.

Unknown Speaker

I mean, from in company, things I am looking for there. They are leaving a lot of databases that I don't know where they are, because there is just so much data. That is just everywhere. But I do know, let me just quickly see, probably if I've Googled it, then I get it very quickly. For example, I saw that Marija actually shares like some case studies of the hotels they worked with and then they share like actually numbers. There are data dives. That is generalized data of all the hotels that have adopted with news. Alright, that would also do some links through LinkedIn.

Marija

Perfect. Sure. I'll probably just dive into that a little bit later on. I really appreciate you taking the time to talk to me today. Thank you and bye.

Interview #4 – head of HQ of a small chain

Marija

Hello. Could you start with just telling me a bit more about what Conscious hotels are. I mean, I have read about them, but just to know more, how many are there? Maybe as well like, for example, how many people work in all of the hotels if you know? That would be really useful to know.

Unknown Speaker

Alright, so I'll start with a little bit about myself and then I'll move over to Conscious hotels. So I started actually 13 years ago at Conscious hotels as an intern. At that time, I was a student of the Hotelschool The Hague in the Amsterdam branch. And it really wasn't my intention to stay here for 13 years and I didn't even really like the hotel industry anymore at that time, because I was a bit fed up with the subjects. The lectures at the hotelschool, they were all a bit dated at the time. So it was a really traditional view on hospitality and my experiences in the training companies where I worked, basically they weren't the same. So they were companies with a lot of hierarchy. You were only there to work basically. And shut up. And so when I started my internship, all my friends were going to nice tropical places really far away. And I was like, No, I am just going to finish this 20 weeks in Amsterdam at a company nobody knows. And then I am out of here, never going to work again. That didn't work. So the reason was that I actually found a completely different type of Hotel Company, which was Conscious hotels at the time, and it was really small because we only had one really small hotel and there were only about four people working there. But the fun thing was that I got to do so much. And basically every time when I raised my hand and I said listen, I have an idea. They said, Go have fun, so knock yourself out. So I started looking into the E commerce part of this, of Conscious hotels basically and it really wasn't there at the time. So it was the transition from the fax machine to the OTAs basically, with really shitty internet connections. So then I found out I was like handy with computers. So they gave me it and then I was successful at revenue. So I got that. And so 13 years later, I am the head of headquarters at Conscious hotels. Right leads sick sixth back office department. So revenue marketing, IT projects, HR and reservations. And we have four hotels, all based in Amsterdam at the moment in total 318 rooms. We have two organic restaurants. We now have about 130 people working here. Not all full time but out of the 130 approximately 30 work at the back office makes up the rest of work in the front office or the restaurants. And we outsourced the housekeeping so if you would add that and it would be a lot more. The conscious hotels itself it is based on three pillars so the Eco sexy and big smiles. The Eco being the sustainability view that we started in 2009. At that time, we really had to be apologetic, like we are sustainable, but you will notice it is alright. Because people were afraid of it. And now the whole perception obviously changed and it is becoming more and more of a pro for us actually. We take a really broad approach to sustainability. So we use the lifecycle assessment LCA study. And the pillars to really add to everything we do. So it goes from the buildings that we lease to the furniture and the installations that we buy to the daily operation. So that basically everything we do everything we touch. We are 100% Vegetarian, we are 100% organic. And we really try to minimise our footprint in terms of land use body use and toxins. Yeah, I could go on and on. Then, the sexy so the second pillar it came from combining sustainability with design, which at the time was not very common, basically. So we tried to make sustainability look really nice and attractive, because we believe that we it is not doesn't make any sense if 1% of the people does everything right. We need to have 100% doing 1% or 2%. Right so we wanted to seduce everyone to join our cause. And the last part is the big smiles part. And that is really where we try to invest in people. I was able to get my master's degrees with the help of punches while I was working here and we've done that with a lot of other colleagues do. We work with people

like physically impaired people, alright. We plant a lot of trees. So we really try to and basically toward our guests. We are quite informal, so no ties, no suit, no steady storylines at check in. That was something that I don't like and the owners don't like either. So we want it to be real. And then it is more fun, basically. So that is the introduction.

Marija

Very nice story. Yeah, thank you very much. So just to pick up the call on like a few points that you've mentioned, the 130 people that is also including the headquarters, so including yourself. Alright. So technically you are like a small and medium sized enterprise. Is that how you see yourself as well? Well, you mentioned briefly to me that you're looking to expand is that are you actually now. Do you have a few hotels in the pipeline? Are you planning anything in the near future?

Unknown Speaker

Yes, I do think we are an SME. So we set the goal to grow to 2500 keys by 2030. 318 right now, so that is quite a big growth for us. And we are in the process of growing basically, I can't say much about it. We, we hope to, to grow quite soon, actually. So this year, and we are looking to four regions in Europe that we park with. So hopefully, good news.

Marija

Yeah, nice. I think of like how you started with just one hotel and now you've been with the company and you'll probably see it grow even more but super exciting. For sure.

Unknown Speaker

It is yeah, it is nice. Yeah.

Marija

Yeah. All right. And then how has like have you seen the recently a very big change? Because like you mentioned in the past, being ecological wasn't that popular? And you had to say sorry about it. But now have you seen a very big change in like demand hotels?

Unknown Speaker

I think the majority of the travellers still are not ready basically to actually pay for this. So it is always sensitive. But if all else is equal then most people will pick the more sustainable option. But especially when looking at NGOs, for instance, they are really sensitive and you know they have to be or they want to buy sustainably and we also see it in the business market. So there are a lot of companies now that have top down instructions to be more sustainable and then they also think of travels so it will come our way I think and on the other end there is also more competition coming up more brands focusing and labeling themselves as sustainable. So but yeah, that is only good news in our mission, basically.

Marija

All right, all right. Perfect. And just to check is so is it just one person who owns all the four hotels or are there different?

Unknown Speaker

No. So there used to be two owners, just private owners. One of them left the company last year and he sold his shares to an investment fund called NEPA. NEPA capital. And together with NEPA, we are trying to grow so it is now NEPA and our CEO, Marco Lammers, they own the company together.

Marija

Alright. All right, but at least not like every hotel still. Every hotel doesn't have different people owning it.

Unknown Speaker

It is all part of one holding that owns the whole company. Yeah.

Marija

All right, perfect. So now maybe to look a bit more into the technological part. What can you tell me about your approach when it comes to technology and how much is there of it in your hotels? Because I think that there is quite a close relation between like adding in more technology and becoming more sustainable. You can really use it well in that sense?

Unknown Speaker

I have never really looked at it from the perspective, actually, but we were when we started, we basically only had one choice to pick our PMS and it was opera, like the most common and we really hated it. **Because it dictates how you have to do your process is basically so yeah, there is only one way to do it because you have to click the button and you have to look at your screen and then back in the days it would automatically print and then you would give it to a guest and he would have to fill in the data that he already gave you when he booked it.** So we really hated that. And still if you go to a hotel that uses that operating system, you will be queuing up and there will be a receptionist looking at a screen rather than looking at you basically. And he will get through this paper to sign and it is really annoying. So in 2016 we decided to go to a different PMS and it was stay in touch and it allowed us to do an assisted self service check in so with a kiosk etc. And it was really quite a big step. And there are some more traditional guests that especially at the time they were like yeah, that is not a service for me. **We think giving control to the guest is the best type of service especially for the younger generations.** So we really had something quite unique as not really unique because there are there were some hotels doing it. But then obviously COVID happens and everyone switched to having some kind of online or self service check in so in general I think hotel companies they use a lot of software, it is crazy. So to support the guest journey from orientation to booking to pre stay to check into during stay to post stay. That is it. It is a chain of about 20 applications that all serve like a really small part of it. And, yeah, I think it is still there is not really a real a good company that nails it all basically so you can streamline it. So yeah, it is tech heavy in a weird way, but it is improving. **So we are 100% cloud based now.** Everything you don't have anything on press and it really helps us to run our operation efficiently but the liquid sustainability I am curious to hear from you how you see that.

Marija

So for example, I was thinking how some hotels have like let's say in the room you have trackers and when it comes to heating for example the room and so digital technology which helps for example for you to reduce the heating levels, maybe again track the water usage and things like that that are related to sustainability. So not sure if you have any solutions like this one?

Unknown Speaker

No, not really, actually. So we did. We had a pilot like 10 years ago with a flow monitor that we build ourselves to put it on the water pipes basically. But the weird thing is if you look at the total energy consumption of a hotel, about 90% is not guest related. So it really comes from the core installations of the building. And then the amount of water you use, for instance, it is really negligible compared to the total fee that so we when we did that or we developed it. Our idea was alright, we will reward you if you don't use a lot of water or if you turn up eating but it was really marginal. So there was not a lot to give back basically.

Marija

Yeah, wow. The 90% is wow. Surprising. Surprising. Yeah. Alright, so and then I will do you feel like you are technologically advanced, do you compare yourself to others in the area as well?

Unknown Speaker

I think we are well integrated. So we have a solution basically for everything we do. But I wouldn't call it advanced but I would call it like normal modern. Probably if you look on a whole we are we are part of the 30% of hotels that have these kinds of tools basically for everything from accounting to revenue management to analytics to so there is a there is a lot of layers, and all our payments, for instance are integrated in and so yes, that is advanced. But is it really like? Advanced I am not sure it is for me it still feels a bit old fashioned in a way and I think there is a lot to gain.

Marija

And how do you know that you're part of the 30%?

Unknown Speaker

That is my gifts. I think there are a lot of traditional, really small hotels, like single standalone or parties. And my guess is that they don't use all the tools that we have because all the tools are quite expensive. Especially if you're a smaller hotel. I think you are more likely to do everything in Excel and to have the big tools telling you what to do.

Marija

Yeah, for sure. For sure. Yeah, but you still have an in house IT department, right?

Unknown Speaker

Yeah. We do. Yeah, but so it there is the network part basically as a physical ID, all the devices that we use the Wi Fi the phone networks, payment terminals. The point of sale so there is a lot of hardware basically but that is our it. It is more like a system administrator in that part. But then there is also this whole landscape of applications software and it is really it is about 60 applications that we use and all the applications they have owners in the company. So the main user basically and they are also in control of the setup and configuration of the touch. Because it is really hard for even an AI team and an IT manager to understand completely what everyone is doing with every tool that they use and to manage it for them. They should think so.

Marija

All right. Alright. Yeah, for sure. Makes sense. So when you mentioned in 2016, you have the switch in the PMS system, right? Would you say that was the most recent new thing that you have implemented a new technological thing?

Unknown Speaker

No, I don't think it was the most recent because there are also a lot of improvements when it comes for instance, to applicant tracking systems for a recruitment center. So we especially in the back office, I think we changed a lot but really just facing I think the most recent one was ordering with a QR codes, all right during COVID as well, but those are the kind of changes that were unthinkable prior to COVID. And now it is actually quite normal to offer it. So but I think the impacts of the self check in or the assist itself check in that was really big, because before we used to have receptionists and they had to really you know, manage everything. They had to really understand the whole PMS, they picked up the phone, they send out emails they did everything and now or after the implementation of the new PMS. We made them hosts and the core responsibility was to be welcoming and assist basically, rather than being this command center of communication. We centralize all the guests communication to the reservations team are the customer service team. So it was any that allowed us to onboard new employees in days instead of weeks. The impact was really huge.

Marija

And how was it? How was the whole implementation process? Did you see a lot of resistance in it?

Unknown Speaker

So yes and no, because the PMS or it wasn't as complete as Opera was so once you start using it, you see what you miss basically said, like, ah, we cannot do this anymore. We have to rethink how we used to do this. But over time, the product develops and I think in general, people are happy with it idea, but then there is always room for improvement. So every time some freak incidents comes up and they add the end users they are like, Yeah, we need to do everything different but they really focus on the exception rather than the rule.

Marija

And do you do you ever look at your guest reviews? Do they say anything about if, if they are happy with the digital level of your hotel or if there may be missing anything in in the room?

Unknown Speaker

So still it doesn't always go right. So there are user cases where you are not able to check yourself in because of whatever reason and then it can become really a frustrating process. It is like speaking to a chatbot that doesn't help you and will not connect you through to an employee. So that that still happens. And then I think, for the when it does function properly. It is a matter of taste whether people like to be serviced by employees or not. But I think especially in these times of inflation and the increasing wage costs, people don't realize that that service actually costs a lot of money. So we choose to work really efficiently with as little stuff as possible basically. And then in the end we are able to offer the rooms for less but people don't always realize this connection. Pretend people at the reception Yeah, your room will be more expensive than when we asked you to do part of the administration yourself.

Marija

Was there actually some sort of connection when you implemented the self check in and what the room rate would be? Or do you maybe actually know just like in general, how much you saved in terms of cost?

Unknown Speaker

I think so. Roughly speaking, we used to work with two people per shift. And that was one, basically, yeah. So it was actually one and a half. So we used to have like early, midday and late shift and there was overlap, and now we won't have the middle shift because we don't need it. And so if that is 365 days, a year, eight hours work for four hotels, so it is a lot and the tools are not cheap. So it is not one, one on one cost saving but of course, the tools have cost but in the end, I rather rely on good tools than on good people. Because if the good people leave or they are, they are sick or whatever, then there is nothing left. So I think the core processes and the infrastructure, they have to be really good so that they don't rely on people so much.

Marija

Yeah. All right. So would it be fair to say that for you one of the most important things when it comes to new implementing something new in your hotel would be to make it more efficient and to save costs as well?

Unknown Speaker

Yeah, so more efficient more and also, I think the more controllable. Because if we design a process that is supported by ID, then we make sure that every guest has the same journey and this offense with the same information with the same digital smile. We don't rely on people as they can forget parts or can have a bad day or so yeah, we it is really about making How do you call it like a unifies checkout flow, checkout flow.

Marija

All right. Alright, and then what do you think would help other hotels to be less scared of of technology? And for example, like you mentioned, sometimes things don't go right. And then maybe that is what scares like other hotels to actually have a better PMS system or I don't know use booking channels and things like that.

Unknown Speaker

I think one of the biggest problem problems there is, is legacy, and so we always used to do it this way. And we statements like our guests want this basically, without actually asking guests. So I think there is it would be really healthy for every company to have some people that are not involved in the day to day to look at what is happening. What do I see here? Because it is really hard if you are doing something every day to go to change your mindset and your thoughts about how things could be done basically. So taking this more distance approach and really zooming out and rethinking it or starting over with a blank piece of paper. That is actually something I did when we were with Opera, and I didn't like it at the time. But our CEO told me like, yeah, just maybe you can just make a design of how you would want the PMS to look like what the fuck you know, I am not a designer or I don't, but in the end, it was really it is really funny. It looks shit. So if I look back on it, but the basic idea is actually what we found in the end. So I took the other way around. I didn't start with looking at what's there, but I was, I started with what do we really need? How would it be good for me? And then we start with checking out alright, and I would show everyone there is really crappy PowerPoint presentation where I said, this is what I wanted. Everyone was like, not sure, but I am sure we can solve parts of it.

Marija

So you still have a presentation?

Unknown Speaker

Yeah, think I do somewhere.

Marija

Wow. All right. Oh, even on your computer. I mean, it is it just out of curiosity.

Unknown Speaker

I am starting to wonder. No, actually.

Marija

I mean, don't worry, but if you will find it and you're willing to share would be really interesting to see. All right, but yeah, well, what you're saying are fair points. Yeah. Especially looking at what the customers say and also maybe like involving experts from not your hotel, but actually like people who understand technology or work with implementing it would be helpful.

Unknown Speaker

Yeah, so and I am while I am saying this, I am also aware that I am actually the same now so I am already caught up in the day to day I know how difficult it is to change parts, parts of the puzzle basically. So even for me now it would be really helpful with all these new technology coming up, for instance, the GPP or other to start using them.

Marija

This is what the hospitality looked like, wow. It is interesting to actually hear someone, not be scared of it and willing to, like use it.

Unknown Speaker

If you, especially in Western countries where stuff is increasingly expensive, where people are less willing also to take service jobs, that will only become less and less and less. I think there is no other option to be able to compete with other countries where wages are maybe lower or living this or lower. So to stay attractive as destination, I think we really have to become more efficient and rethink how we do things.

Marija

Yeah, perfect.

Unknown Speaker

I even have three robot vacuums at home. So one for every one for every floor. I mean, first, and for me, that is it is like, I can't imagine picking up a vacuum cleaner myself anymore. It is so convenient.

Unknown Speaker

So yeah, I think there is a lot to gain still in the in the hotels. Alright, but that is a nice conclusion. Yeah, I mean, I think I have all the answers I needed. So Thank you very much for being so honest and transparent about what you do at your hotel. Good luck and bye.

Interview #5 – general manager of a big chain hotel

Marija

Yeah, so I am in my final year and basically what I am doing now is an internship and I am writing my bachelor thesis at the same time. So the internship is actually in London. So this is where I am calling you from and I will be done. With my internship tomorrow. Actually, it is my final day. And then I am submitting my thesis beginning of May and when I am done, hopefully, yeah. But what I am really interested in is actually figuring out the digital level of the small and medium enterprises in the hospitality industry in the Netherlands in particular, and then, you know, just figuring out what the level is currently, and then maybe how can it be improved? And I think you might have a lot of things to share, especially because you work well in the chain hotel, so you might have a different perspective. And I think that there can be a lot of things that can be learned from chain hotels for like individual and standalone hotels, and I even saw that you have a virtual reality in your hotel, which is I haven't heard about this from anyone I've interviewed so far. So whatever you can share with me what your approaches would be really interesting for me. Can you maybe tell me in general what is the what digital technology do you have in your hotel? And I mean, I understand that hotels do you have to have for example, PMS systems, and this is the basis but is there anything interesting so for example, that virtual reality and something else that you can tell me about?

Unknown Speaker

What I personally have been, we're always a little bit behind you know, if you compare it to the airline industry, for instance, you know, or some Baltic tech raises, even the grocery stores nowadays, you know, you there are several ways you can pay I think we very traditional, maybe to talk to handle this piece a little bit. And I think still we will have PMS and we work with Opera, you know, it sounds always very great because it is in the clouds, but again, there is nothing. It doesn't do anything more than that before when it was just on the server, you know, so maybe, yes, I can now work at home, I can see how many people have checked in but alright, that is not really what I need. That is not what I think is technology is helping our guests to have a better experience, you know, and even the complexity sometimes I think of a chain hotel is that we have to comply to all the core standards. But also, I think sometimes hold you back. I think we could move much faster than I know there are some hotels that are much more further with automated check in and things like that. And although a core and that is this also the downside of being also our core and when you see our website, it talks about you know, online checking a lot. But alright, we have to manage that in the hotels, and especially the online checking in here. What it has helps enforce the more information the guest provides. We less have to ask, you know, when they walk into the hotel, the people have to come by the reception and yeah, receptionist himself, he always had to check a password of ID you know, so I think this process that we should think still there is a lot to gain in depth. I think there are people too much in our going to the reception or spending too much time there. But it is also funny that it also has to do with the How can I say thanks if you disobey our guests, but you know, we have a lot of people from the river cruises. And you know, I always make a joke to people are 18 years without, you know, but, you know, I am surprised how people are you know, not even knowing about things or still think it is difficult to do one very simple thing. You know, we have much discretion about debit cards and credit cards. So you would think like, well, that is, that is an easy one, but we still have complaints discussions where people take the debit card put a you know, we put a deposit and then they you know, and they and then we have to put a deposit back and then takes a while because depends on the bank. And then they are blaming us, is it dead? No, they stole my money, you know? They said, Yeah, you get a debit card, and then people say, Oh, I've travelled all over the world. And I say, Well, if you travel all over the world, you have a credit card, or at least I mean, you know, come on. But again, it is not it is not in my position to judge my guest. But it is funny that sometimes certain solutions and we got to buy a new one that is why

cue that is actually it is a QR code so it is not really new. But also this one is funny. Because when the company came with all those guys completely interface no problem. You know, the guest goes into the room, he orders the food, it goes straightaway to the kitchen. There is one guy just waiting there to get you in and bring some food to the room and it is all done. Within six weeks, we are now about four months further and they said yard interface difficult. So now alright, we're going to start with next week. But don't be wondering how is this going to work in our organisation with also our guests reacting to that you know, because you know, the old one, pick up the phone and they said I want a hamburger? I don't want onions, how are you going to put that on a digital? No, because they have to use QR code that made it and also the payment that was what I surprised of. It turned out that yeah, we did we get a check. And we still have to put it manually a hopper up and go like, why? You know, I mean, this is where you talk about automation this way, abort your system to the AI are we working on a solution for that? So sometimes it sounds it sounds nice because the number of people who were approached me on LinkedIn with a QR codes is tremendous. But you know they on it or not are going to be known as being the people who want to sell me this system. In our day, that you have two salespeople calling me every week, like oh, you want this one that you know now in the end, we choose one and then you know, this guy was also checked by a courier you know, so I think Greg and it should be good to do that. So if we did that is this maybe if you felt something was different than the other things with what we have to be missing out a thing. Then there would be something, something maybe a little bit more different, but again, a lot of bars and restaurants and all of the FAQ, but I don't know if you notice that yourself, you know, I lost them.

Marija

And what about the metaverse application in your hotel?

Unknown Speaker

However, the end I did that really I am really disappointed to say the way they came to came to us. It is called metaverse. I looked up on Google first and there was a company is looking for the guy and the guy lives in Brighton or something. He invented this. And a previous sales manager from us who worked here at sales at the hotel, he worked for that company to do sales. And so he gave to us said, Alright, we want to find people who want to test this and are you interested to read this? Alright, show me what it is. And we do it. And yet they build it our meeting space. And, you know, the I was really amazed, you know, because you put in your real glasses. And it is like a little bit like a video game. And in the beginning, of course it feels like you're in a video game. But due to the fact you speak to the persons it becomes really bad. The renderings are really good, you know, so you really like you're in the meeting room, talking to a sales manager. So we did this together with the guy and the guy in Brighton. We were the three of us in the room. And then you can show yeah, this is a meeting room. But you know, by pressing the button you can change the setting in Cabaret style or you know a theater style and things like that. So, we were doing that and you could also open the walls, you know, so we have one meeting room to go to boardrooms. And so he showed me this this is all at that time. That is all set. Alright. We'll do something with this because we think it is new because the idea behind it is that somebody alone for instance, let's say you want to see my medium rooms, you know, I take you along I get in and I show you so you have a kind of more feeling different than from a picture and to be here. And of course later on. Of course you always want to see its life. So come to the hotel and discuss maybe all sorts of details. But then your first impression, especially for sign faces, you know, gives you an idea of how does the meeting rooms look like and what isn't. So, they created that and then at that point actually we need to launch and that was when when we did

also the press thing. And alright, we discussed about the Bridgette because you know these guys are not cheap. So I said to him, Alright, I like to do the whole meeting space. I want you to lobby and I want to do you a bedroom, you know, but so that we can really take somebody through the lobby to make space and short also one of the bedrooms. And so yeah, now you know, when we start calling them and say like, alright, yeah, we're busy with their ads and all that and I don't know what their problem is because we asked them, but they have they have like engineers problems, things like that. And, and because I thought it was a very nice thing to do. And also really, you know, workable, I mean, it was not like some things against it, you know, but it is a thought because we do, especially now meeting space. We do a lot of you know from UK from the US and people they are going to visit normally you know they come Samsung is four or five hotels but to get the first impression you know it would be good to do this. So I am a little disappointed with that because the survey just didn't get back to you on the budget. Yeah, I don't hear anything from anymore but we were supposed to pay this amount. And the initial thought, yeah, maybe wait, well, let's not pay because I tried to get in touch with the guy and you don't hear anything from anymore, you know, and so I don't know it is, it is still pending.

Marija

Alright. So for example, what if the client wants to actually see the meeting rooms with the VR he still has to come to the hotel, or how do you make it work?

Unknown Speaker

The idea is that I can send you real VR goggles, you know? So you're in London, I sent you that or maybe you put them on, I put one. And then we go, we go into the next version. It is like, you know, like, video games. And then you see an avatar, you know, you see I see you as an avatar and then the idea was, of course later on to really personalize these avatars. You can choose that you're standing in a room, and you can you can turn around and I can like talk to you it is only Yeah, it is more like an avatar. I was impressed with the with the sounds because it felt like you know, you put the goggles on but you're really like you're in the room. And then I am talking to you like we talking right now. There was hardly no delay, you know, you would expect the one of these things that there would be a kind of delay, but the guy in Brighton was you know, we were really having a conversation and say alright, we can do this. So I was the same, the same thing. What you can do, there is a cheaper version. That is like a paper. It is like a paper format you get put on and then you take your smartphone, and you get a good British smartphone you get in front of it. You know what then do you have a special mode that you have two things and it looks like it is also good. With the real one of course much more you're into that or if you have to do that. But the iPhone one or we know is doing a great job as well. Therefore, so that was the idea. You know, you said that to them. And then or maybe if they have one of these, you know that just download the app and then you go into the metaverse and that is it.

Marija

I assume before implementing an item like this one, especially if it costs a lot you do some sort of cost and benefit analysis?

Unknown Speaker

To be honest, it is more as a marketing tool. However to understand that we do meetings here for two or 3000 euros so you know in the end that is when you know when we did the test and I was really impressed. That is where I want to spend the money and of course you can go as wild as you want you know when but in this case,

alright, you got to give me this idea. Alright, they offered me like 15,000 euros to build all media space. And if you look at it in our you know in EDI of our revenue, alright, this is a very reasonable amount. But if you want to do professional that means you have to train the people, the amount of hidden costs, you know, you need to you need to go balls to send to people and because if you do that normally like 35-40 euros a piece you know. So I would say you have to send that but I mean if you want to come like a professional or you want to do something new, you know love something different than the others. Yeah, you want to differentiate yourself from the competition and it is meant to be I thought it was a handy semi marketing tool, you know, to do this.

Marija

Alright, yeah, but because, so far with who the people that I've talked, they said that their main focus is to decrease the costs and make it more efficient, the operations make them more efficient with the digital technology. So this one focuses on another benefit on just marketing your hotel?

Unknown Speaker

In this case, yeah, it is more sales because you try to get people in to do a show around so it is like a good way of doing a show around. If you talk about let's say the QR codes, then you really look at cost saving because you don't need somebody on the phone that thinks that first of all, you know, we do not have complete rooms if we're room service department, we have one person with phone. And so when the guys would have phone and then other guys rings, you know, he can pick up the phone. So some people can decide to do something different, you know, nowadays, even in hotels, you can you could call takeaway.com or you know, things like that. So, the point is with the with the app that everybody can order, there is no real deadlines not engaged. Second thing yet one person because you know the guy has to take the order is to put it in is bring into the kitchen that now he just waits for the order and brings it upstairs so there is more. It is more efficiency and that you hope that you can catch more revenue. It is not that I can say now I don't need a guy from roof servers, you know, that is but it could be more it is more efficient towards the kitchen and towards staffing and to understand the force that because it is always like oh, we ever seen structure fee but where these guys are always aiming on us. Yeah, of course you only one euro 20 per room per month. And it sounds like Well, that is cheap. You know, but alright. It is 600 euros per month times 12 months that is 6000 7000 euros, you know? And that is the money they get just, you know, because that is what you all the time see that people sign a contract for three years, something like that, you know, because they say we had to do the investment that is most time that the volume it is like it sounds like small amounts, but the volume for them is most interesting too. That is their business model. And of course, you know, they have to do the development and everything like that. But sometimes is that the point? Because once you have it and then they call you up said yeah, 120 is not possible make it to 20 you know. There is always room for it.

Marija

And so for example, when you want to implement the QR when you want it to do it before, so to implement QR codes or the VR you have to ask for the permission from Accor or do they tell you that oh, this is what you have to do. How does it work with the with the chain hotels?

Unknown Speaker

A lot has changed in chain hotels. That has to do with the actual flight model. I don't know if are you familiar with that. You know, awkward of course switch to natural light

bulb that means that they have hotels or a franchise or management contracts. Once it is a management, by the way, so now we have a franchise contract with by a German owner who bought dog tails actually from UK war at that time. So there is this little slight move a big it is actually a Swiss brand originally and Accor acquired Movenpick 18 hotels at the end of 2018. And their purpose was more to have more in the premium brands, more hotels and also a more premium brand to have more hotels and to be leased by that effort break was not that big. So they acquired that hotel chain but in all the let's say hotels in the release that were that were already managed. However, the hotels in Europe who still owns by move big so not the building, but the operations and you know so and at that time, Accor bought it but they said they put it all down for sales straightaway and they said alright, we like to have a management contract. And yet they found an older HR group. They took the management contract but then grown a game and so they want to switch to a franchise contract so they have more freedom. **So if I want to implement these now that I discussed that before brand, why should we have our core but Accor is quite flexible as long as not hurting the brand. And but I have to discuss it with the owner of the hotel chains or my boss or something like alright, we want to do this investment.** I think it is sort of a kind of valuable thing to do. Something is difficult to measure all the times in, in these technology is that same desire, you know, more checking or you know, to make the efficiency if people are more happy now that you get the return or yoga that gets returned, you know that the guest loyalty is very hard to calculate in return on investments. Yeah. You know, so it is just so far I didn't see like a lot of technology that really said like, well, we you know, we have less so much less staff or something or a conflict or something we just introduced this what is alright to technology more an app is more like you know, if you're an Amsterdam you want to store in suitcase? Yeah, if you don't stay in a hotel you know, you don't you know, it is allowed to stay long. Story suitcase but you want to go you know, you're still there. You want to go for a couple of hours to town and you want to leave your suitcase there. There is its called Bounds. You know, it is a new one that is brought by Accor. **And there is a model so you pay let's say five euros to me for a suitcase to store it for today.** And then we receive an amount and Bounds receives an amount you know, and then we store it in our in our hotel. And it is more for guests that are not related to the hotel so they are outside, you know, so they can use these apps. But it is not helping us on a different way. But it is a funny and another thing that we were going to get what I think is you know, it is been 25 years of general manager you know, you would not even think about it. Sometimes I think I would have would have thought I should have thought about it, you know it is called Drip Drop that umbrellas. And normally, we always buy a lot of umbrellas and we hand them out and we look at deposits and then nine or 10 people don't bring it back or you know are they but they don't want to have dealt with eventually a wall to deposit bank because it was not their mistake or the Umbrella was broken. And there'll be that won't point the law and this guy event to drip rope and it is like a stent is a Braille is quite so as the Grella and it is like a bicycle. **You know, you take your phone, you pay, you take the umbrella, where you come back, you put it back and then you get your deposit back here by a little amount for the rent. And if you want to keep it alright, they charge like 20 euro for the umbrella.** So this once again, I will put these stands it will all be Yeah, it is not that I can say well, I need one staff member less Yeah, yeah. You know all the all the staff members hand out before all the umbrellas you know, so that sometimes with technology they think well it is good idea. **It is more in efficiency and guest satisfaction way of looking at it and less hassle for the staff.** Then I really can say I save a lot of money on staff cost or that level.

Marija

So also the umbrellas is something you have in the hotel?

Unknown Speaker

Will they should be delivered. You know what I always do with these guests you I check always with my colleagues. Because helping startups is nice, but like you see with rollovers, at what point they are in there in themselves in the metaverse. You know, I don't see him anymore. So some people disappear. So I checked this with the GM of the Novotel was 600 room hotel and he was very happy so I said, Alright, let's give it a try. He said yeah, it is really good stuff. And so you know that that is supposed to be it I think next week or the week after, and then also fighting you know, they come with this trip rope and they tell me is very good news. Alright, can we afford it? Yeah, six months waiting time because they have to be produced in it somewhere. Far away. Yeah.

Marija

Alright, to me sounds, at least from all the other people that I've talked to that your hotel Remi has way more digital solutions compared to others, and some really interesting things that you have mentioned. So I am not sure if that is what you're trying to do. But yeah, just I am impressed.

Unknown Speaker

That one other thing we have and it is also a test. So let's say we have I know Accor tried to do that with Novotel to have a screen in the lobby with gives you more digital information like you know, like of course shares but nowadays of course you to grow now when things change. The old days all the concierge they were selling tours so you want to go to the battlefield you want to go to rec V and you want to go to. But nowadays freeze right and see and what Anna Frank House, they work with time slots you know, so if you want to choose time slot, you're gonna say Alright, give me a ticket at 10 o'clock or something and you have to pay most Now, where's your credit card? So in the old days, what happened was that the guests paid us and we paid then the companies and, of course was a COVID commission involved but nowadays, we have all the time slots where you can do a lot of things online, but people sometimes think it is difficult to come from the States. So we have we have the screen in the lobby. And there you can. Yeah, for whole refugee from the elbows. You know, you can take him by there, you can buy your tickets. And once again, you know, that helps and negotiation most times you have to help because sometimes people come in and they say like alright, um, I want to help you, you know, were they going to do that? And they said alright, we're going to help you there you know so there is nothing again that you that you really say alright, I don't need to go cherish anymore. But the good thing is, you know, before we had a concierge lot of times to 11 o'clock in the evening and yeah, we leave now. You know about seven eight when the rush is over and people went for dinner. You know, and we don't spend people in order reception or the machine has to do the job, you know, so that

Marija

Yeah. Yeah. Yeah, seems like it still helps. I mean, you're saving on employees and then on costs in the end. Yeah. So well, I am conscious of time, because we're I told you it would only be 30 minutes. So maybe as the last thing, what would you think? For example, what the small and medium enterprises or like individual hotels could do to become more digital? Because in most cases, for example, they don't have the funding that comes from the chain and maybe they are scared of technology. And again, in the chain you for example, you can see other hotels and how they are doing and like you said you looked at Novotel and now you're kind of doing what they are doing. So maybe as the last thing is there anything that comes to your mind like how to make hotels digital what why should they do it? What could be the initial steps?

Unknown Speaker

Sometimes it can be it can also be easier when your individual until now. It is reasons to take over our you know, feed at Opera system. I remember when Accor decided to go from overbeek it saved a lot of money on that on that deal because our board made a deal for 5000 hotels worldwide, you know, so yeah you have the buying power, of course. On the other hand, what is not that good is for instance, this is a 480 room hotel, but I am also in charge of towards hotels wanting to get boss and one in Danang and it is a Saturday two room hotel and then we have the whole the whole full monty of opera. And I think if you have to do with motel you can get away with a much easier system, cheaper system smaller system. More advanced because to be honest, adult tell don't tell the Oracle people this but to me Opera is still built on an old fashioned system what they what does it is now alright, it is now in the cloud and it is lower and it looks better. But the philosophy behind it is still quite efficient, you know, and what they tried to do is they built a system. I think this is quite an order that we have smaller bill by system that suits your hotel the best because the system that I have here is good. But his let's say far too much. Or let's say Don't tell him that he you know, the possibilities. And they develop these systems like they do over the years. Because the hotel says oh, I want a model like this and I want a model like that and they build it all because they make money on that you know. But the whole system gets more and more and more bigger and bigger and complex, you know. So I think the cost is you know, you could save cost in a small room and you know, tell because you don't need all the sheets at all. Maybe you know that that is and what I think is, you know, that is why I always tell people build a network. I mean, you know, I am chairman of two luxury hotels in Amsterdam, and we have some individual hotels and I am sometimes surprised of these guys are not using the network you know, because what I did freeze with the umbrella. You know what I do when I when I started out when I came in GM here or my previous job as GM of the grants you know, I visited all my competitors. I call them, I see what's going on, and I keep contact with them, you know, and by doing this for instance, the idea we were in the grant. We were doing a renovation I walked by, that was a sales guy in game and he says he had a very good espresso machine machine for 25,000 euros. It also is quite an investment. So I said to him, alright, where's another machine? Because yeah, the salesperson will tell me that it is a great machine and it works fantastic, you know? And I said, but where we're going to see it and he said. Well, it is one hotel, it was cold was a very good hotel. So I called the gym I said, can we combine and have a look at it, you know? So it is also why I want to say building a network. There are a lot of new companies on the market. They can do sometimes the same things are cheaper and efficient for your kind of hotel, you know, that is because we are also Accor is also a big monster and the good thing is that they they had a you know on safety. You know like our systems the same as my Outlook you know, it is very well you know, they spam all the shit out you know, all the so you know, so in this case is I think that is what I would advise somebody individual to make sure you get your whole pack of the house in order so nobody can come here, no phishing, things like that. You know, we have a whole department of course, we have Accor, who's looking at it on a daily basis, you know, and filters out I have a button on my computer which says fishing then they check this mail, if it is good, you know, and of course in a small company, you cannot afford to do these things but then then you have to be but still clever.

Marija

Yes, completely makes sense.

Unknown Speaker

I think that is the most advice you can do. You know, look at Citizen M. Now they are quite big and they started with this whole automation we don't if you spoke with SNAP, but you know, I am still impressed. Because I worked at time for I worked for I wish I was just like Bucha Brent and we had all those ideas you know, in your rooms through things much more with gadgets with and, you know, we went to see his name actually all the ideas we had they integrated in their rooms. But they started you know, but they started with one hotel. And the problem at that time is it was had already 700 hotels. So if you start to introduce a certain thing on TV or then you have to renovate it, sometimes you need the wiring to the room where you need the access points and all these things and that is investment you know, if you own until you can do much easier make these investments. It is not any cheaper but you know, you don't have these brains burden or your bank that you have to be the same with all the people all the time. You know who's going to say this is this is good and who has bad perception is that what.

Marija

Exactly, yeah, makes sense. Alright, so that really summarizes my questions. I don't want to I don't want to keep you here for too long. But once again, we appreciate the time that you took to talk to me and also sharing what your hotel does. It is really interesting. And I'll share the outcome of my research with you if you're interested, although with only most likely will apply mostly to small and intermediate sized hotels, still.

Unknown Speaker

Helps and I want to wish you all the best with your study and while it is your last day if you need to share but for sure that you can finish and then now find a nice job. You want to stay in London or you want to move around? Where are you from originally from?

Marija

Lithuania. So I want to stay in London for like two or three more years to get my visa and then move somewhere but overall I really want to move around the world. So that is also why hospitality industry I like a lot.

Unknown Speaker

Well, maybe we meet again, yeah, somewhere.

Marija

Thank you very much and good luck to your hotel. Hope it comes back to the levels.

Unknown Speaker

Thank you. Bye.

Interview #6 – general manager of family owned hotel

Marija

I've mentioned quickly I am writing a thesis about how digital the hospitality industry is right now in the Netherlands. And how can we maybe make it even more digital? And I am focusing on the small and medium enterprises mostly. So not well, not the chain hotels, I would say and I know that at least looking from your LinkedIn, you come from a chain hotel, but it is really interesting to see maybe what's the difference between how technology is used and implemented in bigger hotels compared to individual hotels for example. So essentially, I would really appreciate anything that you can share with me,

what is the technology that you use in your hotel currently? How is it implemented and what are the benefits, disadvantages that you see and so on? So we'll just go step by step. I'll ask you questions as we go, but maybe you can just tell me a bit more about yourself and the hotel that you're working in right now. And just and then we can see where we go from there.

Unknown Speaker

Alright, well, as you might have seen, the hotel I am working in is a family owned hotel. I grew up in it working with a pencil and paper. All right, and writing in the reservations. Yeah. So whenever somebody changed his reservation, we had to call it labor changes. Alright, yes, change it. Yeah. Wipe it out, and then write it again. All right. So when I when I was on graduation, I chose to be part of a chose to do apprenticeship in a newly opened hotels for over a year. Yeah. And implement there a computer system. So ASP 400 I learned to program and I learned to make a link between what the hotel needs and what the computer can do and can't do because something's you shouldn't leave to computers. Something just should not leave to people. Yeah. So that was my first encounter with the automation of hotel industry. And in my time, we have one hour per week in talking about automation in the industry. That was, I was there from 82 to 87. So in the last 30 years, we saw an immense progress. And not always for the better, I must say. Anyway, so I worked with a self build system by Germans on the as 400 IBM machine Yeah, it is like a like a, like a train. Once it goes, it goes and then then I started working for my father in 1990. I think and then we still work with that computer system and somewhere I don't know somewhere 95 or something. We decided to change to a system based on base based on which was working with another source, alright. And working with Microsoft and excel and you know, going to the mainstream, mainstream programs. By that time, we also had a computer for the customer for the cash register and that is because you know, the former times that was also by him. Yeah. And once the system calls out, nobody can do a head caps. Yeah. That is why I am saying it is not always for the best. Brain is getting very stupid. And then of course, we saw different technologies coming by and we are part of the Golden tulip chain since 1962. All right, since it started. Yep. It started in Amsterdam, Rotterdam, The Hague. My father joined after three months. Because it is easier to achieve goals together than alone.

Marija

So your father had the hotel and that hotel became a part of the chain?

Unknown Speaker

Yes. And golden tulip has always been a soft brand. So you have a lot of freedom. To do whatever you want. And they were working on marketing and sales working on after a while working on yield. And now think about five years ago or seven years ago. Go to first of all to the was bought by an H All right. In Spain, then they didn't do anything to develop the brand. And then it was bought back by the marketing manager we had at that time. Hans Kennedy. He really made the brand big, but he didn't do very much about technology. But did a lot about marketing and making the brand big and supporting the hotels in trying to get their sales in order but he didn't know the difference between sales and profit. So he decided to move the head office from Amsterdam to Switzerland and he thought he was making 9 million profit but he was making 9 million sales. Anyway, I joined the Council in that period and I asked them how many times is this going to cost? Maybe one day in two months he said. Yeah, I was on it every day... Approximately three months later, the brand was bankrupt. So it was bought by a Chinese. Well, it was bought by a French brand Louvre because the counsellor who was doing the bankruptcy thought it would be a better deal than going

with a Dutch brand that was on also interested. Anyway, Louvre had one five star hotel and a lot of one star and two star hotels. Then he said Well, that would be great for the integration. Yeah. Little did he know about French and Dutch people working together.

Marija

Is it not working out?

Unknown Speaker

Well, in the end, Louvre has been bought by Chinese Jin Jiang, a very big brand. They are second and you know Marriott has the most hotels. The only difference being the Chinese cannot develop a loyalty program. Because a lot of people don't want their things going to go into China. **So there you are in a in a world where data is very important.** Yeah. So what we did is we always tried to get our information from our own system. So we started off with, you know, reports looking at was preparing demos and organizing things for that. Having our own loyalty program in a very small scale. Having pre-arrival meals and post arrival meals through a small company called frankly view. We joined a review club you know taking care of where are your scores. I don't remember their names. But now the last couple of years. **Louvre is picking up on the technology and other things that you need. So they now have a university. All right, where we were in the past always went to different educators to get our staff trained.** Yeah. We can now use the University to make people grow.

Unknown Speaker

How long ago did they come up with this?

Unknown Speaker

Well, the genius is already a program that works for four years now.

Unknown Speaker

But it is the problem is that people have to be to be stimulated to train and to get you have to get them to grow. Yeah. Personally, Corona did change a lot. On that subject. So staffing and training is getting more important. So that is, that is the education part. Then we have the now we use trust you to do the reviews. All right. So that is another digital change, because you have to share and inform your guests.

Marija

How does it work the system? I've never heard of it.

Unknown Speaker

Trust you as it collects the reviews of guests whether they make them on Google or booking or wherever. And you get the chance to react. If people not only give a number, but if they elaborate in some way. So there is one person responsible for answering all the reviews and making sure that the reviews or making usually I do that making sure that we do something with the information you get from the reviews.

Marija

So like, just essentially instead of going on every different website to look at the reviews, it has them all together?

Unknown Speaker

Yes. All right. So the same is for social media. So you use one platform to serve all the social media and then we have of course all the information you get from your cash register. Use a system that can tell you how much you sell at a certain moment from your menu. And then on the back end, you can enter we do that. We enter how much a product cost. So we have a menu you know you have menu in engineering and you have a system where you can I add alright, but I have those ingredients it takes so much time. So my cost price should be that all right. But that is a system that we use, which is digital which is you know, you have to make sure that people can work with that as well. So that is purchase that we have a system Luca Euro that is for trading people more in service to be host and how to be that is staffing again. And we used to have a system called I hate it so much I forget it. Hopefully we have a system for staff or personnel.

Unknown Speaker

Yeah. Scheduling you mean?

Unknown Speaker

No, we have we have that too. That is called Nasca. Bamas. All right. That is first schedule. That is very good. Anyway, you can do anything with it. But it was so complicated. We didn't you know, that is, that is a typical mistake you make if you're small, and you have only one person who is in charge of the system, and no one else understands it. And no one else understands it. And you have to use something that is easy to understand. For instance, Apple, yeah. Every idiot can use it. Yeah, I mean, but that is the truth. Microsoft is, is a lot more difficult you need some training. And we did have talking about the implementation. **I always think you have to make a schedule on how you're going to implement things and make sure that you train at least two people that really know how it works.** If not, it will fit.

Marija

And now already with all the systems that you mentioned, well, to me, it sounds like there is a lot of them. How do they work together? Are they well integrated?

Unknown Speaker

That is what I used to work for Marriott. And I remember that reservations was integrated with the with the PMS. Of course we have a PMS to this. We have FIPS which is integrated with our cash register until it is another system and yet it is difficult to give an integration of everything because it is every hotel is different in their combination or what is important for us. The PMS Phipps looked very interested. Interesting because we have a big Brasserie and we saw that the connection with young until was one of the most important thing a little bit we know that reservations in rooms is not so good, as it said. All right. **So getting your finger behind what a program really can do and can't do. I always make a wish list no need to have.** Nice to have that and optionals but it is very important to think about that before you start because they are telling you fairy tales. And every guy's to say no, that is really anyway. So in this PMS we of course have a digital connection with smart Hotel. Smart hotel, again is the program that collects information from gold dress, which is the reservation system from Golden tulip. All right. So people have to know how that works.

Marija

Is there someone in house like an IT department?

Unknown Speaker

So we have one guy by administrator who is very good on all these. Not all of them but some of them. Like Nostradamus and Phipps and we have a system to pay the wages. And that is now linked with the HR system, which is now New, which we can use. Some of the events will resonate. Anyway, so the HR system works with baseus together to get the wages paid to see when our contracts stopping and when do we need to inform a government that somebody is leaving or you know, end of contract or whatever?

Marija

So far, it seems that a lot of these have to deal with the back office, or I mean the while employees mostly work with this technology. Is there anything in particular for the guests?

Unknown Speaker

So we try to make it as easy for the guests as possible. All right. We don't have any keys anymore. We have this cards system, which is also one of the digital things you have to learn. Yeah. We tried we have a beautiful Penthouse and I thought it would be great to have one button to turn off the lights. Yeah. Turned out that the guest didn't know how to work, how it works. And it turned out that the system wasn't working well. Yeah. So we now we have buttons again. Yeah, it is for the guest. We don't have like, you know what you see in some airports or push here if you're satisfied. You don't do that. All right, because we don't believe we believe more in looking around ourselves. That it is clean and it is it is some things you can decide for yourself.

Marija

Then can I assume that what you're seeking from technology in your hotel is just the cost reduction and efficiency of the processes mostly. What else would you be looking at?

Unknown Speaker

Well also, I didn't mention it yet. We have OTA in our hotel, compared to compares the pricing of the other hotels. And then we have STR Yeah, to see what results we are actually booking Yeah. So you know, we do we not only try to reduce cost, we also try to increase sales. And that is of course also why you do the analysing of the menu of your sales, you know, what are you selling? One of the big questions now is after Corona, what are people looking for? What is what is the perfect bed combination that we should? So it is helping to get more insight?

Marija

Yes. All right. Perfect. How do employees react whenever there is a new system? Is there resistance to change and how do you tell them that this is necessary? Well, it is for the good essentially, how do you how do you make them believe it?

Unknown Speaker

We try and convince them and convince them and show them and we have now a new telephone system, which is which is not only based on telephones. It is also based on your computer. I hate it. Anyway. My young nephew who's 35 is now in the company and taking care of all the systems so well, not all of them. I am taking care of the HR systems and the sale systems but all the rest he is he's taking care he's in charge of that. All right. Then is more if of course you will get more training in school you get more they are more used to it

Marija

But then initially, is it you who decides Oh, we should implement the system. What type of hierarchy is there? When it comes to really implementing something new?

Unknown Speaker

Well, it is an open organisation. If somebody has a good idea that we look at it and we see what is the cost what is possible positive effect on the organisation or on the people and then we buy it, and then we make we make a schedule on. We're going to do this like that.

Marija

Do you also do some financial analysis as well? What costs are there going to be what would be the benefits? Yeah,

Unknown Speaker

Definitely. Where that is also always more positive. The sales people or the system always tell you more positive things and it is really it is always the dark 25% do the calculation again.

Marija

Well as one of the final questions, how do you think are you in a better position, let's say compared to individual and smaller hotels, or how are they in a better position, especially when it comes to digital technology?

Unknown Speaker

Well, you really need we're kind of in the middle. You know, we are to listen to people say we are too big for the servant and to swallow. For the table class. We have 125 rooms. You need to have an HR system and you want to do better on it, but that you cannot afford that. But that is quite a credit struggle. And especially golden tulip is not really helping you with all the different items. They focus mainly on revenue. But that is also our choice. To be part of a chain that is that is more sauce branded. I mean, it is easier if you're a part of Hilton. You just have to do what they have learned they tell you to do but then again we are or athletics raise strong headed or say, Yeah, we know better. So then you have to you have to sit on the eggs and try it yourself. Yeah. Alright. So I think every chain has got its advantages and disadvantages. We, we look every three years approximately at what chain would fit us better Oh, all right, because we're too we're too small to do it on our own. That is my conviction. But in every evaluation, we come up with the same answer to, the golden tulip is like it is not a really big chain anymore in Holland, which is really a shame. There used to be a lot of golden tulips and the best time there were 55 Golden tulips. But they became Fletcher or they were sold or it is a pity, but then again, they deliver part of what we want, we need you here that we're not so mainly enthusiastic, but I haven't found a better alternative. It is different the problem all right. So which which hotels are you interviewing

Marija

For example, I've talked to a person from the conscious hotel chain, not sure if you know them the conscious hotels, they so far they only have four hotels in the Netherlands I think. And they really focus on being sustainable. That is their main focus, essentially. And then I talked to someone, someone there yesterday from Movenpick as well, but they are part of Accore. So again, that is not really an SME. And then a few weeks ago, I talked to as well a few people from hotel school who are now GMs and boutique like very small, standalone hotels. And yeah, I am just trying to get as many interviews as I can,

and also talking to people who actually work from the other side. So for example, work in the PMS system, maybe you have heard about Mews, so I was talking to someone from the Mews company to see how it is for them to implement the technology in the hotels. So trying to talk to both sides.

Unknown Speaker

Yeah, yeah. So what does Mews have, for instance, say?

Marija

Well, so it has a PMS system. And essentially, their main goal is to be the best PMS system in the world and to make it as easy as possible. And actually some people that I've talked to from the hotels, they have mentioned that oh, we are using news we have implemented news after seeing it somewhere else. So apparently it is very easy to understand and just very self explanatory they make they allow you to generate a lot of reports and just makes your life more simple. That is what they say. I don't know. I've never tried to. So yes, but then once you have the system, you have some sort of training plan and again, the Mews university, but you can use to actually learn how to use the system. So yeah, they are trying to be more and more out there. And in the Netherlands, apparently, they have like a 21% market share. So which is big? Yeah. So I am not advertising them. I don't know if they are, if they are good, but that is, that is what I've gathered so far.

Unknown Speaker

Yeah. Yeah, it is digital. Making something digital makes. It holds. **You have to train people. And the easier the system works like Apple, the better use people make.** I mean, we used to have billions. And when they was in the last months we just we discovered that things were a lot easier than we always did. You know, that is a pity. Pity. **So, that is why I always invest in training people to it is not like dumping the system and then it'll be alright.**

Marija

Exactly. Yeah, no way. Alright. Alright, perfect. Well, then, yeah, thank you for taking the time. Once again, it really answers my questions. So, again, I really appreciate you replying to me and understanding the struggle.

Unknown Speaker

Alright, and then you're finished.

Marija

Yeah, yeah. Exactly. Yeah, I just have to submit my thesis beginning of May and then defend it and have me and that is it.

Unknown Speaker

Alright, so good luck.

Marija

Thank you very much. I wish you good luck, as well. And yeah, enjoy your week. I'll see you sometime. Thank you.

Unknown Speaker

I hope so. Yeah. Thank you.

Interview #7 – industry expert

Marija

Hello, it is very nice to meet you. I was referred to you as a as an implementation expert. Essentially what my thesis is about is trying to first identify the level of digital readiness of hospitality SMEs in the Netherlands, and then to try and see how can we maybe create a solution that kind of increases their level, so for them to maybe be less scared of technology and to have like, some consistent approach to how to track it and improve it. Essentially, that is what I am trying to do somehow. There is not much research about it if I am being honest. So that is why I am just interested to hear what your company does what you do in your company, and then maybe, you know what, whatever you can tell me about small and medium sized enterprises and hospitality businesses.

Unknown Speaker

Yeah, sure. Alright. Um, well, so I do not know if you have like looked up Revinate at all, but we do a few things. It is like a CRM marketing provider and then we also do post a review management. We are kind of focused on like medium to larger scale like groups obviously not like the big boys not like the Marriott and but more like mid-scale. Then of course, like independent hotels. We are based like all over the world. Our headquarters are in San Francisco. We have a huge market share in North America. We have the office here in Amsterdam, and then one in Singapore. So I've had a few different roles and revenue over the years I've been with the company for about five years and tell industry so was like really in reservations and revenue management before joining. And, yeah, so like really kind of started more on like the marketing strategy side. So like really kind of like a consulting role. So like consulting for the hotel, to really use the product to its fullest. And that was definitely like always a struggle, right? **Because you are really trying to get them to like, adopt all the feature. And trying to make them understand that, you know, by investing a little time now, it is going to save you a lot of time down the line later by using automation and like using all of the features that you have, and I think that that is such a struggle with hoteliers.** I have worked, you know, in my first roles. I was in North America and we are there. In the last few years, I have really focused on like implementations and implementing our hotels in Asia Pacific region, and now I cover both EMEA and APAC. So it is very interesting also to just see like across the world, the different mind-set of like how willing they are to adopt technology. Of course, by the time the hotelier is working with me they've already gone through a full sales cycle and you know, they closed so they've you know, decided to purchase and my role now within implementations is then to get everything set up. So I partner with the hotel, to you know, like, ask them for like deliverables that they need to provide you all of the technical backend set up and then help them through like the integration which is really taking the property management system data and getting that pulled into Revinate. I work with like an even more technical team who really does that connection. But like it is my job to kind of get all of the details that team needs and manage everybody's expectations through like that piece of the project. I also work with the hotel and like getting, you know, getting a few basic things already done like send your first marketing campaign or get your survey set up and everything is kind of on working functioning. We've done all of like the basics, to get it set up that I would kind of hand them over at that point to our customer success team or to our support team and then they would kind of continue to work with that. Like, let us do more, you know, let us get more things set up and more things go. So I am really just kind of in this like in between piece where the deal is closed, we're going to get a few things. We are going to get the product functioning, we're going to get connected, or get everything up and running. And then the next piece is then like kind of on the hotel to continue using the product

and get more and more involved. So that is kind of Yeah, the basic overview of what the company is doing and what I am doing

Marija

And do you deal with training the employees as well?

Industry expert

So training is all through our on demand, like Help Desk, all right, in previous roles with Revinat like when I first started I like created a lot of those videos that are still on the Help Desk and stuff so like yeah, I am always like, you know, watch me learn all about you know, these years. So we are involved in training in the sense that like, if they don't know where to go on the helpdesk, we'll kind of point them in the right direction. We provide a lot of resources, you know, where it is like, you know, we we've got kind of a flow of the implementation right, so kind of kicking off getting the customer recapping that call. Yeah. And, you know, working on the integration, confirming the integration is done, and then kind of pushing them to send their first campaign, let's say, implementation and then and then we're done right that way. And throughout all of those kinds of touch points, we're, of course, pushing them to hey, you know, this is where you'll find the training material that is relevant. And now since we've done this, this is where you'll find training material that would be helpful at this stage. Kind of Yeah, help them along in that like training journey, but we're not necessarily the ones that are getting on the phone with them and like walk. We all can, but we just don't have the time.

Unknown Speaker

I mean, makes sense. So how long does it take for you to implement the a certain system?

Unknown Speaker

Of course, it depends on what the hotel is purchased. But we basically have like three tracks right now. So if they've purchased like just guest feedback, which is just like setting up surveys, they get 30 days, and if they purchase marketing, but like a lower package, so they don't have like all the bells and whistles. It would be 45 days. And then so yeah, like six weeks and then if they purchase like everything, including like, you know, guest feedback, marketing, transactional emails, so those are like the confirmation modification email, that is like all other debacle. But if they even purchase all of that, then they would get an eight week implementation and kind of depend like if they, if it is like a larger group. So if we're talking like seven properties or more, like give them a little more time. And all of that said, we rarely really stick to those, you know, timelines just because there is you know, we're working with third parties, the hotel was ready to do the work. You know, their PMS isn't installed or needs an upgrade, or, you know, like all kinds of things. During implementations. We were just like, wow, this would have been nice to know before we started.

Marija

And so do you deal much with because you mentioned you kind of start at the medium sized properties and then larger size more?

Unknown Speaker

Yeah, small medium, small as well. Not large in terms of like number of rooms, sure, but I guess when I mean like small, medium, large, I kind of mean more just like with with

groups, you know, like. Alright, do like a large group where we're talking like, you know, 75 properties in it or something, you know, we might, but you wouldn't have to kind of split that up over a few months. That maybe like 10 - 12 properties, no problem. Alright. Like one property, you know, that would be that a lot of just like individual properties as well.

Unknown Speaker

And well, do you have many clients in the Netherlands?

Unknown Speaker

Yeah, we do. We do. I don't know how many percent exactly. Like, if I cannot really like share who exactly yeah, we definitely do have some customers in the Netherlands. We have like a bunch in Amsterdam. We also like just, we are in like long discussions with Van der Valk, for example about getting all of their properties moved over, which is a lot of hotels. That is kind of it is not like happening 100%. It is kind of more like, you know, they'll sign up individually, being like, mandated from their headquarters, which sometimes happens. But yeah, we do have quite a number of customers here in the Netherlands. Yeah.

Marija

Alright. And have you have you seen any difference with how, I don't know, the properties in the Netherlands or compared to maybe any other countries? If you have noticed noticed anything in particular.

Unknown Speaker

So I have a girl on my team who speaks Dutch. So she would, of course, do implementations for any customers in the Netherlands just to kind of make that you know, like a smooth easy thing for them. But like, I guess I can just Yeah, from like what I've heard from her I wouldn't say there is like a vast difference between like the hotels in the Netherlands versus like, the rest of Europe. I don't know. You can definitely say there is like a difference with like the dark market like the, you know, there may be a little bit more challenging to deal with, then let's say that I am lucky because like, a lot of the time it is like older hoteliers that we're trying, you know, we're trying to kind of like drag them along on this journey. Alright, we're not going to use your fax machine anymore. We're going to move a little bit beyond that. So I would say like that market is definitely an interesting one and can be quite challenging to work with in terms of like getting them to like adopt the technology or like understand what we're doing it with lenses and, you know, it really like depends. I know that like what I've heard from. **Leanne is like, what she's been dealing a lot recently with, like Dutch hotels that she's working with where she's dealing with, like really young office managers or like people who have like, just joined the team and they are the ones that are getting tasked with kind of like setting this up for her. It is more just kind of like educating them. A little bit about like, Hey, this is actually how your hotel should be functioning.** You know, I feel like that happens a lot with us where because we all kind of came from the industry like, you know, we're all kind of that background so a lot of the time and I find myself doing this with like a pack customers with me a customer I have to tell them like, hey, you know, if I was you in reservations, this is how I would be setting up my raincoats. This is how I would be setting up, you know, processes so that this functionality that we're providing can work really, really well you know.

Marija

So they kind of have the mindset for the for implementing the technology, but they just they don't know much about hotels in general?

Unknown Speaker

Sometimes. Yeah, we're like or like they are, they've been doing it for it is either like they don't know because they are haven't been in it long enough. Or they have their way or they are set in their ways. And like, they don't want to change and they've been doing it in a way that like, doesn't make sense for the last 30 years. You don't when you're just like wow, you guys survived this long. You know, working very confused. Alright, yeah. I would say those are kind of like the two extremes.

Marija

So how do you persuade them to actually like, use the technology that you're offering? What are some of the benefits, even if you know, sorry, if even if you know like some percentages, let's say you know, you tell them the cost will decrease by this much or something like that?

Unknown Speaker

So I like once it is in the implementation phase, like we don't really, you know, like the pricing is set like we're not, we're not negotiating and, like, for us, it is really just about like getting somebody who's engaged and willing to now like do the work to set it up. And what we try to make very clear up front is like this is how long you have an implementation. And like, believe me, you don't want to be stuck doing this with the support team because they have you know, just too much to do to dedicate like to get you implemented. So like, you really need to work with us while you have us set up everything. And like I said, like, sometimes there is unforeseen things like you know, like the PMS wasn't installed properly or it wasn't installed yet. You know, the data that we get from our PMS isn't like matching the expectations of the hotel, and it is like, well, you know, we'll try to work with them through that. Yeah, I guess it is, yeah, it is our constant struggle. Or like, how do we get them to do the things we need them so that we can move them off? Daily issue? If you have a magic solution after doing this research, please let me know because like, what we ended up doing is like, you know, we just try to, like every week or send a follow up kind of regardless of where they like, hey, you know, here are the things I still need these good, you know, and like, also, again, because we all came from the hotel industry, we understand that like, this might not be their absolute number one priority, you know, guests standing in front of them. They've got like, some guy this week told me he can't do anything that I've asked because he's moving offices, like, alright, alright. Like I understand. So we try to be somewhat like flexible and understanding and also we try to be flexible with our time like I said, like those timelines don't always adhere to them. And then we also of course, like have the option of like, hey, you know, we've gone over our set time that was communicated to you like there is nothing on our side that is been like delayed like it, it is clear in the contract that if they go over that there'll be charged, alright. So like, right now, what it is like they are charged by our for additional implementation support. That doesn't really make sense to be honest, because we can't really track because, you know, like, we'll have like 50 or 60 individual projects that we're working on at the same time. Limitation person, so we have a lot going on at once. And if you go over like it is hard for us them to be like, Oh, I spent 30 minutes dealing with, you know, this email and then I spent 30 minutes dealing with the, you know, we're not going to do that. I think it would make a lot more sense if we just kind of were like, hey, you know, you had your eight weeks and billing is now just kick in every week. That you go for, you'll

be charged like, whatever 1000 You know, whatever it is, will be something that would just make a lot more sense to make those rules.

Marija

Alright, well, so has it ever happened that maybe you've implemented the system and then they actually came back to you and they said, actually, this is not working for us or have there been any issues?

Unknown Speaker

Yeah, sure. It can definitely happen. Especially because like with, with PMS data like basically like, we work with a lot of different property management system providers, right. And each one of them will have a different integration. So for one, we might be able to get certain data, whereas we would not get it for another one. Alright. So that is probably the thing that like comes up the most and, and that is something that we should really be solving as much as possible during implementation. But sometimes this will pop up later where they didn't realize, you know, like we do, we do a lot to be like, hey, you know, like, check these in these in these fields. Yeah, sure. That looks good. **If it looks good, then we can move on that sometimes they just, you know, don't get back to you or they are like, well, it is fine, but they didn't check.** So and like we don't have access to their PMS, so we can't know you know, they have with us on it. So yeah, so like things like that can sometimes pop up later and that is when like our support team would get involved. They are also like, quite technical as well. So they would if they needed to like involve our integration team again, they would do that. If they need to, like ask us what happened, you know, then of course, with go back and look into it. And sure there can be customer too. You know, feel like they were misled. Like we try to avoid that as much as possible for us. But like, I feel like those instances are usually caught during the implementation and then we manage that you know, like if, if the customer thinks that like, you know, the product was supposed to, I don't know, like, do something they think it was supposed to like yeah, generate like new guests for them. Alright. No, like we're just taking your PMS and you can, you know, you can do a lot of cool stuff with it. But like, that is not a thing that it does. And that is like a very random example that nobody ever thinks but still, like, you can find little things here or if they think that they were supposed to have a feature that they didn't contract that time. And then you're just like, alright, like, go back to your sales manager, and they can contract it or make a decision about like, how we want to move forward. So where they'll be like, Oh, but I thought we were supposed to have like, a group account, for example, but they didn't contract it. Or pay for it. Alright, let's talk to sales. And if that is that up, then I am happy to like enable that functionality for you.

Marija

So you can even personalize the systems to a certain extent?

Unknown Speaker

Yeah, so like, there is let's say, certain packages, it includes each package like includes certain functionality, and then we have a lot of like add on features. So within our guest feedback solution and within our marketing solution, both have a lot of different features that you could turn on if they are paying for it. So yeah.

Unknown Speaker

Alright. And then in the hotels, do you work mostly with the IT department of the hotel?

Unknown Speaker

Yeah. Again, it depends on the product. For the integration piece, which is like, hugely important, if we, you know, we'll usually ask immediately, like when we send our first kind of kickoff email, like, Hey, who's going to work with us on the integration? And we'll also tell them like, depending on their PMS, it is like, Hey, this is the information we need, put me in contact with your IT team who are directly with the PMS, or you know, whoever is has access to this and this within your PMS system. So like we'll kind of try to point them in the right direction does it need to be. It doesn't need to be the PMS provider directly. And we'll tell them like all the details we need upfront. And then yeah, usually on our kickoff call, like if they have it join then we will like direct all of those questions to them and like then usually kind of have a separate thread that goes with them. Our integrations team to kind of finalize that piece of it simultaneously, we would be working directly with again, depending on the products but like, if it is guest feedback, it is probably more of the operations team. Somebody in front office or Yeah, or like the, like hotel manager or somebody like that. Or if it is the marketing side, obviously, we're usually working more with like the marketing team, maybe the revenue team, whoever is sending out those like email marketing communications.

Marija

Alright. Yeah, makes sense. Yeah. And do you see that whenever you work with these random people that some of them have, like more knowledge about digital technology?

Unknown Speaker

Yeah, definitely. It really depends. Like every hotel is different. Sometimes you get somebody on the phone and you're just like, they know what they are doing. They know what they are talking about. Sometimes you really have to be like, hey, you know, do you know what like GDPR is or like, you know, have like, no, like, Do you have a list of unsubscribe from like a previous provider and they are just like crickets and you're like, Alright, so if you have, like a really needed very important, or, yeah, it really depends. And sometimes it is like, oh, you know, like, I would suggest setting up a marketing calendar. So you know, kind of when you want to send campaigns and, you know, like kind of, they are just a lot of pieces where somebody might not be super aware and I feel like most part you really are having to kind of explain at a pretty basic level, like you know, for like email deliverability. And this is how like email service providers kind of work and this is what you need to be aware of, and, like check those things. And so there is like a lot of trying to kind of coach them through to some degree of like, yeah, things they need to be aware of things they need to think about how they can use the platform. Make a marketing calendar set, make sure you are sending you know, like what is insane to me is sometimes people buy the product, we spend all this time implementing it. And you know, like, think about them a year later, whatever and go look it up and it is the kind of thing we're going to be doing. You know, like there is a lot that you can do with it. I would love to be a hotelier again, and have this and set it all up the way I would want it to work, because there is a lot that you could do. But then we also have customers who are like, Yeah, super users who have like really thought very, very like strategically about how they want to automate things, how they want to send campaigns to guess, like the segmentation feature that we have is my favorite thing to do. It is very cool, because, like, when I was in reservations, I was like, the only person in the hotel who knew how to build pivot tables. And so like, yeah, and then somebody would come and like break my pivot table. Yeah, so like, and what our segmentation does is essentially like, pivot tables, I mean, but much cleaner and prettier and nicer. Put, you know, you are just kind of like, hey, I want to know, who spent more than 500 euros on a room in the last year. And here's your list. And then if you want to send an email to those people, you can do it or if you want to, like find things like I wanted to

spend 500 euros on a room and you know who, who was in a suite or who was in like, a basic room type or? Yeah, like, what rate code they were on or by state aid. Here is like a lot of different ways. To kind of slice and dice the data even look at like by location. Alright, I want to see everybody who's like from Amsterdam who stayed in a suite last year, let's reach out to them because I want like to do a locals only package or whatever. So yeah, so there is like a lot of cool ways to think about it and look at it and sometimes you see hotels just don't and sometimes I was like really put like the time and effort. Like and also that is like, then I am also like I love working with the hotels that are thinking that way because then you're like, this is cool. Great you know, and it gives, you know, it also kind of like can inspire the rest of us to be like, ah, let's tell our customers to like, think of it that way or maybe.

Marija

Alright, perfect. It is super interesting to hear. Yeah. And then well, I am conscious of time, so maybe just one last question. Have you noticed maybe any difference between the smaller and like, let's say stand alone hotels and then bigger chain hotels, again, when it comes to implementing technology, and just maybe it will smaller hotels, some sort have some sort of advantages and disadvantages anything that you can share from your experience?

Unknown Speaker

Um, I mean, of course there is going to be advantages and disadvantages to both like the small hotel they can just like make decisions and like yeah, not be tied to any like branding or any, like Sister properties. Like structure or anything like that. So, there can definitely be advantages to just like doing your own thing and being but there are also advantages to being you know, a group for example, like the, just like on the market baiting side, you could if you're part of a group, like all of that data feeds up into a group account, so you can cross promotion, promotional campaigns like to the entire database. So you like say, hey, you know, here are three hotels and send that out to everybody, people. Who have one property for example. So there is like ways to kind of do that. Also, like at the if you're part of a group like it can be easier to like, share campaigns across the group, in terms of just like the work of designed and put together nicely, that can make things easier. And then just like from a hotel level and working with people like the independent properties, yeah, it can be like, sometimes maybe a little bit of a crapshoot. You never know. How like savvy they are in terms of being or surveys or like, you know, what they want to do sometimes at the group level, or when you're dealing with Yeah, like, for example, I've set up like a ton of like IHG properties in Australia, for example. And like, when you get somebody there, it is they are usually just like, Cool. Yep, let's do this. This is great. And it is sometimes a little bit like, smoother because oh, how they operate before a lot or you just know that there is like a baseline understanding of, you know, this is how email marketing systems and then we can kind of just get off to the races a bit sooner than sometimes having to maybe explain a little bit more. Yeah. To somebody who is more of an independent property.

Marija

Alright, perfect.

Thank you. It was super nice talking to you, once again. Really appreciate you taking the time. And yeah, I'll get back to you when I have the perfect solution.

Unknown Speaker

Bye. Bye.

Interview #8 – industry expert

Marija

So can you maybe tell me a bit more about what you do currently in life and because I am not sure if I understand it correctly, but you basically do kind of two businesses at once. Is that correct?

Unknown Speaker

Yeah, I have like my main concern is Hoteliers which is it is a software as a service, hospitality tech company. And then next to it aside, I have a bed and breakfast in Amsterdam. So it is more like a lab for us like to test things and to see what's possible and also to be in touch with hospitality and with guests here arriving in Amsterdam, but without any hours. It is why we started a company like around 17 years ago, and we provide hotels, ecommerce distribution and digital marketing products to basically increase their direct business and to provide all systems they need for it. So and our company is based in the north of Amsterdam. Where we're 25. And, now, I know a lot about the technology within the hotels, because we're it is my daily thing, actually. And the target group we are focusing on are mostly independent and smaller chain hotels from 10 until about 200 rooms.

Marija

Perfect, alright, that is exactly the scope of my research. So can you maybe tell me more about how do you find your customers or how do they approach you and is there anything specific that you noticed about the thinking about the independent hotels have and maybe, you know, like, how is it different from like, bigger and chain hotels?

Unknown Speaker

Yeah, yeah, there is always a lot to tell about a topic like this. What we see is that hotels in general are quite focused, short term, so they are not really focused long term. And this has to do I think with the nature of the hotel industry. If a room is not booked tonight, you will not sell them in the future. So they are really focusing on fitting rooms and having the best price for it. But also based on this short term focus, it has a lot has some characteristics. I think like in general, independent hotels, there are exceptions. Of course, but they are not really innovation focused. They are like focusing often on hospitality guest satisfaction. They like this, you know, like to have the contact with the guests. But in terms of technology, most of the time they need to evolve and good suppliers, to advise them and to so that they can gain more knowledge. We see like, of course, Corona times was like a time to reflect and to see if there is more innovation was possible. Also, because of the staff problems. A lot of hotels have they are more driven to optimize things with self checking apps. I guess can use for instance, by going to the hotel or providing information. So in these fields, there are some progress made, I guess. Also in terms of the PMS switching from more towards the clouds, environments. So you see that hotels are searching for more flexible environments where they can tune in, for instance, from a distance from their mobile phone, you know, like a bit of like, making life easier and being focused on cost reduction. You see that more hotels are using for instance, what we have here now more and more like a revenue management system so that they get more advices in their pricing strategy. For instance. It is a topic and normally these kinds of tools were too expensive for the independent total age, but you see, because of more competition and more parties providing it becomes more accessible for independent hosts again to use tools like this within ourselves in our product portfolio, we do a lot of website building. So we have website design templates. We see there that hotels are interested to gain more direct business and to improve their

own direct marketing and their own branding to get less dependent on the online travel agents, booking and Expedia in general. Yeah, what do we see more? As the developments I think, like compared to chain hotels, rather the independent hotels they have like the advantage to that they can shift faster than a chain because the most time that the owner decides and then process can start. But I think like of course within a chain there is more knowledge and also in the website, direct marketing fields. There are specialists on board and the independents are more leaning on external parties in this. So that what we see as more like a consumer perspective is that the chain hotels are profiling themselves more as independents. So I think like from the brands they put into the markets, I think the voices the endless here in Amsterdam is a good example already here for years. It feels as an independent hotel, and not like a Hilton. Or Marriott you know where you have like to stand arts you know what you're getting. But I I feel that the guests nowadays they want a unique experience, bit of local field and I think like the chain hotels are also trying to offer this in their branding strategy. So yeah, this is like a lot of information on different topics, I guess.

Marija

Yeah, that is really good. And so do you reach out to the clients or do most clients come to you yourself? To get your services from Hoteliers?

Unknown Speaker

Yeah, both. So we have different strategies in place. We go to trade shows. We do cold calling, you know, like to hotels. We try to have warm relationships with our clients and to see if they know other hotel yeas that wants to work with us. We do like online marketing with Google ads you know like on the words if hotels are searching for channel manager booking engine or websites. We do with partnerships as well a lot. So product integration so we have with technology partners we Yeah, they give us leads as well we give them leads.

Marija

So whenever you're doing let's say cold calling how, well I am not sure if you do it yourself, but let's say how would you convince a hotel that doesn't use much technology? How would you convince them that oh, this is something you really need? And what are maybe usually the things that they are afraid of that you noticed?

Unknown Speaker

Well, I think like hotels are always looking at competitors or neighbouring hotels. So I think like when you do business with a hotel they know and you have like good results to present they are always interested listening to it. And I think like the advantages we have for instance the Netherlands that a lot of hotel I will tell us no I would say SATCOM this is like for instance in Germany, like our biggest growing markets, sometimes more difficult because if they don't know your name, they are less eager to listen to your story. And I feel that that calling acquisition is getting more difficult because like hotels also as they need to they have limited time, especially if there are livestock issues within the operation. And yeah, they don't want to listen to suppliers, providing them information to sell things. So they you need to have like you have only like a couple of seconds. To create a bit of interest. And yeah, you have to be good at this sales wise to grab the time.

Marija

Yeah, for sure. And so, and once someone agrees, let's say to get one of your software's one of your services, how long does it usually take to implement it?

Unknown Speaker

Depending on the product I think like a booking engine, for instance, is a really easy product to implement you can implement in two weeks. But for instance or website most of the time takes longer. You can be operational within one week, if you like but most of the time it takes around three months with the content placing in the content management system and having the website operational.

Marija

And do you also provide training for some of the products or is it not necessary?

Unknown Speaker

Yeah, we did what we call the demo like office system and we have like training videos as well within the back end for certain things if they need to create a package for instance, for our room type or map rooms and a channel manager to connect this for instance, to their property management system. So these kind of tasks that are often done, we have videos for it to make it more efficient.

Marija

All right, and what are maybe some of the challenges that you see during the implementation process, or has there maybe even been a case where you implement something and then the hotel tells you actually well, we don't like it or we don't understand how to use it. We don't want it anymore?

Unknown Speaker

Yeah, of course. Yeah. I think like oh, meeting expectations. I think this is a very important one you know, like sometimes sales reps they are a bit eager to sell and then it is not really a fit, you know, to product so I think like it starts by being honest. If the hotel has certain wishes and we cannot provide just telling them and advising them a different product, maybe not from Hotel yourself calm but if you already sold a product, sometimes it is yeah, it is a time issue of the of the hotel a this is also the case. So, a family member gets sick you know, like these kind of elements are most of the time in a personal situation. So then it takes longer to onboard a product because there is simply no time in a hotel. Or yeah, there needs to be other integrations we don't have currently. So this could also be that that hotel is not satisfied by it. I could think of or they kind of get a better offer. Yeah, that is a possibility too.

Marija

All right. And do you do see that those independent hotels do they have like anyone at designated person from the IT department or is usually not the case?

Unknown Speaker

No, it is not the case. It is like most of the time the owner or the sales head of reception that we were talking to?

Marija

Do you feel like it makes it more difficult not having a professional person and knowledgeable person?

Unknown Speaker

Sometimes yes, yeah. Because you are actually educating someone at the same time as you're selling so sometimes, yeah. When you don't know elements, you're not missing them. So first, you need to make someone knowledgeable and then he can he can define it that he needs that products, for instance. And that sometimes costs a lot of time.

Marija

And also, it is not what you are supposed to do as a business, basically, like they should be educating themselves in a way?

Unknown Speaker

Yeah, yeah. Well, I think I, for instance, we don't focus on hotels smaller than 10 rooms. And that is also for a reason because for instance, if you look to Bed and Breakfast owners, for instance, their knowledge is even less, and they are most of the time, do it as a hobby next to their job. And this can be very time consuming. To work with groups like this and the support we can only give once you know. So you really have to make choices, or is this the right clients and some clients maybe it is better to that they leave the house and go with a different supplier because I did save a lot of support time and we're not making any profit on them anyway. So sorry, it is would be good to look at and while we are not really focusing like this that much. So if a client is on board, but I hear some names, you know, like of some hotels, they they are asking so much time because they they are changing staff all the time, or they just have a lack of knowledge and then actually it is very much leaning on our support desk to help them constantly. And that is that we should look careful to this as well in our return on investment.

Marija

Alright, yeah, that makes sense. And then I saw that you operate actually in quite a few countries. So not only the Netherlands with many other ones. Do you know, is the Netherlands your biggest market for your company? Do you maybe know how many percent by any chance?

Unknown Speaker

I think like around 70% of our clients is in the Netherlands. Yeah, so it is, yeah.

Marija

Oh, wow. Alright. Yeah, I expected a big percentage, but not, not this one. Have you maybe noticed any difference in the Dutch clients compared to clients from other country because again, my research is only on the Netherlands. So I am curious to hear if you maybe think the Netherlands is more technologically advanced compared to other countries or not?

Unknown Speaker

Yes, I think so. I think like, we can compare very easily, for instance, with Germany, and I think like, maybe Germany is around three years behind. If you compare it to the Netherlands in technology wise. They are there are examples of exceptions, like what I am talking about is very generally. So if your brain says go to the German countryside, you still have hotel websites, which are very old fashioned, they sometimes have a request for proposal form, you can not even see online availability and buy for instance. Or if you look to restaurant software, it is very rarely that you can book a table for as in a restaurant in Germany, online on the website, and here we already made this step. You know, like everything goes online, and it is unthinkable now that you have a restaurant without online reservation button. So I think like in accepting technology, the

Dutch are quite driven and I think together with the Nordics in the first group, I would say in Europe.

Marija

Alright, and what do you think then are the biggest impacts of why exactly are Dutch like so accepting of technology? What do you think can be the reasons maybe?

Unknown Speaker

Well, I think like in general, we are quite an efficient nation. I guess if there is room for improvements, we most of the time look at it. While we are trading nations, so we like in a way doing trades with good products internationally. And I think like in staffing there that we need to look at it carefully because there is just staff problem, you know, there is a shortage so automatize things are very much important within our culture.

Marija

Yeah, yeah. Makes sense. Alright, perfect. And then can you maybe tell me more about your b&b and how what type of technology are you using there and because you mentioned that you kind of use it as a testing version for your product. So have you ever noticed that something doesn't go well, and just in general, if you can tell me more about your approach with your b&b?

Unknown Speaker

Yeah, yeah, no, well, of course, I use some of the hotelier products. They are to test offers as well. I am looking how we work. We work with a PMS system. And for instance, this PMS system is a partner of hoteliers. We work closely together with now we are introducing a PMS product ourselves so we read we will resell it but we will label it as hotelier SATCOM. So, some of our products we develop ourselves like the website products or the booking engine products, but not the PMS product. For instance with this, I tested myself then in the bed and breakfast to see if it is actually a good product because while a lot of sales, technology, people, of course, everybody says their product is the best, you know. But it is how, if you're the client or the end user, yeah, you have to experience it and I think like advising it towards clients is much better if you know from an operational view how a product works and that you can also tell the pros and cons of the system if you're actually working with it. So this is a bit of like the thoughts with it, and I think it is very strong because I think like our company is very much offering consultancy, in a way you know. Like if we are talking with a hotel, you have to be familiar with a whole tech system in place in a hotel what communicates with bots and what would be a good product to work with. And I think like this, this while gaining knowledge based on this lab kind of feel with Bed and Breakfast it is an approach.

Marija

All right. Yeah, I mean, I think like this is a perfect combination for you as well because you can test it and see what what is there to fix and so on. And how many rooms are there and your b&b?

Unknown Speaker

Just two.

Marija

And do you have any employees that help you out with it?

Unknown Speaker

Yeah, I have a cleaning lady but she's like an external based on the occupancy I have so but not in a staff list. I do everything myself together with my partner.

Marija

Alright, because another thing I wanted to ask is, if there would have been someone else how would you tell them that oh, there is this new system, essentially like how do you work with the change management and how do you make them use the system but then I guess this this doesn't really apply?

Unknown Speaker

No, no, we have it of course with hoteliers. With our support desk if revenue employees they have to become familiar with the systems and this all this takes most of the time, at least six months. So before you someone's really all around helping hotels.

Marija

Alright, so what do you think would make it easier for those independent and just small hotels in general to accept technology? What can what can they do before actually implementing technology to make the whole process easier?

Unknown Speaker

Well first they need to feel a certain pain I guess you know, like that is that there is a lack of or they are doing worse than competition. So that they really see the advantage of technology. Because if they don't see it as sometimes some while also as are really have their own thoughts of working with technology. If they work with a book and if you start talking about PMS, they go crazy and they will defend you know, like how good the book works. If a person doesn't want to change, you cannot change them. I think like this is so yeah, you need to inspire them or tickle or tell stories. Start a pilot or these kinds of things to add to to create movements, I guess.

Marija

Alright, yeah, perfect. Makes sense. And then, do you think there is any sorts of training technological training that they could do before? Again, implementing a system to like to make them more knowledgeable? How can that happen?

Unknown Speaker

Yeah, I think like there are a lot of trainings in the markets for really the systems and the technology. Most of the time, it is done by the suppliers of these of these products, but we have like a lot of front office training, revenue management training. And then of course, the system is part of the training, how you can use the system boats I think, like in this whole travel technology, how it works. There is another general kind of training at least that I know is more summits or technology events. People could go to and they do hear different talks or specialists talking sometimes talk as well these kinds of events, but then in Berlin or on the independent hotel show or like that is forums where knowledge is provided or they talk about it. I think this would be a good way of gaining more knowledge going attending, offline and online.

Marija

Alright, perfect. Yeah. And do you are there many competitors, especially in the Dutch market for what you're offering your product? Do you have many competitors?

Unknown Speaker

Well, everybody offers a different set of products, some with some competitors. We have overlap in more in a distribution field with some competitors. We have more overlap in the website fields. So we have a lot of competitors in general, but not a lot of competitors offering the whole set of products. I will tell you our SATCOM is offering so for an independent hotel, we are I think like an ideal company because like if you're opening a hotel you can well we can help you actually with everything. So from the PMS to the website to the connectivity with Google providing your prices so it is a bit of a full software service organisation, I would say.

Marija

Alright, and let's say if someone decides to only get part of the full product, so only a few things. Do you make it easy to integrate it with other systems that they have? Is it easier to do so?

Unknown Speaker

Yes, yeah, like for us to only offer philosophy, the hotel you need to decide themselves with which product they want to use for what? So we have a lot of clients using our web products with a booking software and this is connected for instance to a different channel manager of a competitor, just because the hotel wants to work with this general manager and they don't want to work with the general manager we're offering. So but you don't see you see like also a lot of parties that are more protected in it so that they don't want to connect but I really believe in, in football free choice of first LGA where she wants to connect with.

Marija

Alright, perfect. Yeah. That is a nice philosophy. And how do you distinguish yourself? How do you distinguish your product? Like, why would you say it is better to you know, go for the full package instead of choosing someone else for certain parts of it?

Unknown Speaker

Well, I think like having one person to talk to is more efficient. And most of the time hotels if they how they how they operate is that they start with us, partly for part of the product mix. And then if they have good experiences with the support desk phrase, they think alright, maybe let's do that product. As well under hopefully a sitcom label. So short it is rare that our tells us alright, I wrote everything, because that they are completely dependent on you as well. I think like it is also like a cow management, bringing new products to the attention after hotel and gaining trust, which is the most important thing I guess, in building a relationship.

Marija

All right. And within these 25 employees are the only people that you need, you're not outsourcing anyone? So the support is in there, and everyone ekse, essentially. And that is enough to serve all the customers that you have?

Unknown Speaker

Yeah, most of the time. Yes.

Marija

Alright. Why most of the time?

Unknown Speaker

Well, sometimes you have a lot of onboarding experiences of a new clients and the same time you have to surface your existing client base. So that is someone that other two people take and one goes on holiday so these are like the situations that it can be a bit tricky, but somehow we survived, you know, like, because like it is while we our margins are also quite thin, because there is a lot of competition hotels don't want to pay too much. So we have to be careful hiring too many staff.

Marija

Makes sense. Alright, well, that sums up my all of my questions and well, we're basically right on time. So yeah, you're kind of the perfect clientele for me for my research because you have experience in running a hospitality business and in the technology. So again, I am really thankful you took the time to talk to me and give so much information.

Unknown Speaker

Yeah, sure. Yeah, you're welcome. And I would very much like to read you research as well. If maybe you could, you could send it to me that I can also see and get some takeaways for it to be nice.

Marija

Yeah, of course. Of course, I can share with you when I am done. Because I am doing this for the research department of Hotelschool. And there is currently one researcher that is really interested in technology in hospitality. So yeah, we are trying to gather a lot of data on this.

Unknown Speaker

Well, I wish you then all the best with Marriott and with the last part of the thesis. And glad to help.

Marija

Yeah, thank you. Thank you was nice talking to you. Good luck.

Interview #9 – conference centre director

Marija

I was in my final internship and then I mentioned that this is my thesis that I am doing. And then she said that she thinks you would be actually a really good person to talk to. So my thesis is about basically looking into the digital readiness of hospitality SMEs in the Netherlands. So what level is it currently at? What type of technology do these companies use? And then maybe how can we increase the digital readiness because, again, based on my survey and on research, you know, it is getting more and more important to have more digital technology in your business. Or at least that is what the research says and maybe you will have a different opinion. So I just want to know, what exactly does your business do? Do you use digital technology or not and then we will go from this forward so maybe the first thing if you could just tell me more about the Conference Centre. Like I mentioned, how many employees are there? How many guests can you have at once and what do you do there as well yourself?

Unknown Speaker

So, my name is Jean Marc, also known as Johnny among friends. I work in the Netherlands since many years in a conference centre. It is conference centre, which is run by a Christian movement. It has an anbi status, which is a non-profit status with which you also get some help from the government with like, VAT and those kind of things. It is an association from the Focolare that is the name from the movement, which owns this place, which was a former monastery, and there is a living community there of like 40 people within the walls and 30 people outside the walls. There is the Focolare events and Focolare Movement with their own project. And there is the Conference Centre and things created the whole what is happening, earlier on everything was based on volunteers. But until two years ago, they asked for my help and my advice so I started as a consultant, and they said we really liked you. You have the expertise, hotelschool, I had the skills so they were like, would you like to run the place? And I said, Sure. Then after a while, I was taking care of the sales and events, and I was doing everything from A to Z. And so basically there is an offer coming or even the marketing and then offers were coming in. I was asking for more details, sending an offer they accepted, they rejected it and make it mandatory with them so that they could see the place either before the offer or while it was already realised. We prepared the events. People came checking food sleeping, the whole experience serving coffee helping with the audiovisual everything until the last step which was basically send the invoice and customer satisfaction survey. And then after a while because I didn't have a boss which was one of the things since the beginning that I knew but it was a weakness from a company. It was a responsible because as an NGO Association your board cannot be paid so it is all on voluntary basis. They can be implemented director which can be paid so I was basically after a while he said as a joke - You're actually running this place like a director. And I was like, oh, no, no, of course not. But after a while, I got so many responsibilities that actually I was running everything. And the board was giving me the limits and was advising me on things that I could do or things that I couldn't do or things that wouldn't work within the vision and the mission and actually saved the beginning I had a lot of time to because it was COVID. But I had a lot of time to really understand the place understand the vision image and understand what the board wants because above me there was the board the daily board then there was the whole board then there is a board of the whole zone because this movement is worldwide. And then above the zone there is like the headquarters of course it is all voluntary based again so it sounds like a company. And so basically the responsible for the daily things on the whole place. They were my responsables as well and I will say taking care of the conference centre.

Marija

So how many people are there besides you? Or like your responsables? How many employees are there?

Unknown Speaker

In total, there are six paid people and around 15 volunteers.

Marija

All right. And do you live in the place as well yourself? You mentioned some people live in it.

Unknown Speaker

I did live there for one half years. Afterwards, I decided that it was too much to work and to live at the same place. And also, I was also doing some volunteering work within the play as a youngster was also the limits were not always clear. And that is too much

work and too much people asking Oh, do you have a key of this because you have to imagine its nine hectares. It is a former monastery. So the father's passed away. And since 2002, it is given to the movement and then in 2015 the last father passed away. So it has old buildings. A lot of it is a monument so you cannot change everything. And we're going to put the association which doesn't have that much money because it is based on the Catholic movement which Catholics are way more humble. That is how it is always done because the more evangelistic protesters which have a lot of money because everyone gives some money. But the Catholic when something happens you ask for or can give five euros can give 10 euros on the donations we've compared to other churches in the Netherlands, which are based on the gift 10% of your salary

Marija

All right. So how many people at once can you accommodate? What are the biggest groups that you have hosted ever?

Unknown Speaker

Groups are 300 people, we have 100 beds and we have 50 rooms. And now since the COVID we reduced our amount of rooms to have more temporary people and long stay guests who are here. So now we also have Ukrainians, we have 22 of them. So Ukrainians and the temporary people and the long stay guests and honestly, I would call them inhabitants because they are not guests at this point. We still have 35 rooms and 65 beds. And then once we have a group of 300 people we also have a camping with a toilet unit and shower unit.

Marija

And where are you located? Well, I mean, I am not really familiar with the Netherlands. But is it like somewhere near a big city or, if you can tell me more about the location?

Unknown Speaker

It is 10 minutes from thimbles by car all right.

Marija

And so let's say around you, are there any places that do similar type of business or is there anyone that you consider to be your competitor like quite close to you?

Unknown Speaker

We have a direct competitor with whom we are very good in contact because they are part of an evangelistic movement. And they have 300 beds, and they are alone today. And they also have a conference centre based but they went from volunteer basis to paying all the volunteers.

Marija

Alright, so how do you compare yourself to them or how, how do you differentiate yourself, and how do you make people want to choose you instead of them?

Unknown Speaker

But the first question is, we are working together because we have the same vision and mission, although the strategy is different. And the way we apply the vision and mission is way more humble compared to them. So we are working together for the same goal. We have a talk once a year to at least check How is everything going on? And if we are full, we send people to them and if they are full, they send people to us. So actually, we

are not competitors like usual businesses because we have to ask those who want to grow together and help each other. Since the beginning we have good, really relationships, also between the volunteers and between the practical people like me and the reservation people with the reservation people so there is also a lot of contact. They are open all year long and we are not, that is already a big difference. They managed to find a lot of people and they can also pay them we cannot pay the people. So it might be of the six people that are paid. I manage five of them excluding me so far and the rest is voluntary basis. My team of all the volunteers, it is a team of six and it is like the base. There is a team that can manage. There is way more volunteers, so there is way more to manage. When a reservation, we have one person they have five people have on voluntary basis, so it is quite and they have only associations and religious groups. And we have also some commercial and also internal groups, and not much commercial but still also quite some NGOs. Which we have more money and they only have NGOs which are usually linked to the church which means that we are broader for the target market and for what we offer why they have a more narrowed system and they were targeting but which means that they are full all the time. Alright, another thing is that we are we are smaller and we give more personalised service and we try to do everything with one contact person from A to Z compared to them you can enter with many people from different contacts. Also the I think the most important is that because we are smaller, and we have more personalised service we can adapt better to groups compared to them. Because they are bigger and they are more groups. They say that is the standard way that we do it and you have to adapt to us. We adapt to the clients.

Marija

That is nice. So then forward, since my thesis is all about digital technology, I am interested to hear your opinion on it. And I assume you don't use much of it in your business based on your message.

Unknown Speaker

Yeah, two things. One thing that, as I told you, I started as a consultant. **And one thing that I saw since the beginning is where was it inefficient?** What can go to help those volunteers to work more efficiently? I implemented was a reservation system because they were doing everything on Excel. I said, if you want me to work here, I need the reservation system and that is the only condition I am going to ask. Alright, and it is happened. They backed me up to say like alright, we need to finance it. **It was a 7000 Euro financing which is quite a lot.** Yeah.

Marija

Wow. So is that the only system that that the business has? Or the only like software that you use?

Unknown Speaker

Yeah. In the beginning we had to use our PMS system and, and the one that was the most all aim was for us room racoon. And we have a lot of conference rooms because we have seven conference rooms and they have an option where you can add a grey room. So it is not like sleeping rooms, but I managed to make it that because of the promise and you need an event system which is linked with an API to the to the reservation system. That was very expensive, and it was complicated to use for the volunteers and it was usually not in Dutch, and the volunteers, like 80 plus 70 plus, and they need something that works easy. And it is in Dutch, so I felt less was on record. **It was a lot of implementation. And because I was there and I could manage it, and I could implement the things it worked out, but otherwise someone else wouldn't be able to do it.**

Marija

All right. So why do you think you were able to do it and someone else would not? Did you already have like some specific knowledge or I am interested to hear you know, how did you go for the implementation process and what made it easier for you?

Unknown Speaker

Yeah. So first of all, after I checked different system like Mews, Abello room clouds all those kinds of things. And room racoons seem the best. That was the easiest interface and the booking engine for the few because we have groups accommodation, so we only focus on groups. But there were also a few people coming, usually. So I felt that alright, a booking engine can also be useful, but booking engine in the end did not work out because it did not adapt to our needs because it was too much a hotel system. But in the end, we managed to change the system to our needs. **But it took around a year to have it up and running properly.** So there was actually not that because every time every time there were mistakes and everything we had to be change things every time we had to work, alright, that doesn't work efficiently. How do we do it? And so, there was also based on our pricing system or pricing system also took one a half years to really changing completely to something where easier way more because people were coming with say, I want to come from Friday to Sunday. I want to come from Friday morning to Friday evening I want to come from so all those systems were actually quite complicated. So the implementation of the system are not the only thing it was the base as well. How does our pricing system works? We have three types of target markets with three types of prices. The price, the NGO price, which was 20% off and we had our internal practice, which was 50% of there was another issue, which was the commercial one was too high.

Marija

What do you mean what why was it too high?

Unknown Speaker

It was so the prices were too high and we were not offering more than what we would offer to the the NGOs or the association that can 20% off so people paid a lot for something that they were like alright, but I am a commercial group. I expect a professional service. I expect a professional, they expected better food. So the expectations were actually wrong to the people. So all of this to say that the implementation of a reservation system, it is not only alright, you add your things and you're done. My room costs 50 euros and that is it. And for the OTA it costs 40 and for the NGO so we had to complete other systems that we needed to adapt and every group was different with different needs.

Marija

All right. So and why did you not give up? You said it took like a year and a half so why did you personally not give up on this system? And then how did it make maybe other employees feel and the volunteers feel, you know, they tried to work with the system, they see that it is not going well. How did you keep them motivated?

Unknown Speaker

It was really hard to keep the volunteers motivated. **It was less hard to keep the employees motivated because the employees saw the added value.** And the volunteers forgot the added value throughout the time. They were like alright, it is just a system and I don't really want to learn it and I am too old to learn it so I am not going to and

basically, and then I was giving trainings, three times a year to the receptionist, because we have around like 12 receptionist all based on voluntary basis. And, and the reservation person I was continuously helping her with all the things but she was also like 60 Plus that it was also quite hard to that she could remember me so I was implementing a few SOP how to make a check in and all those kind of things. But it was really a lot of work but in the end now it is now up and running and it is making the work way more efficient. The reason why I wanted to keep doing it is because in the end, it was still more efficient than doing it on Excel and having an invoice on an Excel that you need to send to the bookkeeper and bookkeeper needs to send to the guests. I could now fill in all the information and then I could one click I could send the invoice and it was done. For them that was like wow you know one click and the invoice is done. And for very small things you need. You need to ask oh one person comes into the room for four hours you only need they need to pay 100 Euro I put room room rental 100 euros, I sent the invoice I was done, you know before there was way more complicated.

Marija

All right. So then essentially the main benefits you see are that you can save time with this system. Do you see that you are saving costs as well? Or what other benefits do you see from the system?

Unknown Speaker

I was saving. I did not save costs right away but once you are efficient, you save time and saving time saves you costs. So it was really good to have it and it was also a double check and it was a good communication tool. Basically, because I had one system for only patients. Then there was another system which called the banquet events or weathers and which we changed into a kind of like a checklist. So it was a really complete video, we call it the list. And then there was all the information and then the reservation system was supporting. But owners versus reservation system you already had a lot of information so when something was changing, I didn't have to communicate it one by one with the chef with the receptionist with the reservation person. So it was a continuous work where people were not calling me every 10 minutes for question, but they could find the information in advance if a guest arrived one hour earlier. There is the receptionist did not call me there is someone here where does he need to go know the check the system and they knew Oh yes, you are part of this group. Yes, you need to go to this room. Alright, so internal communication also improved drastically.

Marija

That is good to know. So then so you have the room raccoon and you said you had like a sales and marketing system or is this connected?

Unknown Speaker

We do not have a system for that we just make an offer on the Word document and then we send him to the PDF. And then what I do is that I have everything on an Excel where I have the whole overview of the of the options and the things that went through. And if they paid for me it is a check to see all the invoices paid or not. And that is all in Excel. So if someone calls and say are you available in September, I say yes, on this date, I can't on this date no because I have an overview of how many rooms which kind of meeting rooms, how many people etc. So I haven't failed to work on this. I have a word document to have all the information about the group come in and have the resolute

wisdom for the nights for the tourist tax for the invoices for the amount of people coming and for the basic information about the book.

Marija

Alright, and do you use anything for advertising? Do you post about yourself anywhere online? I mean, I know you have a website. Anything besides that?

Unknown Speaker

Beginning I came and it was also COVID period. So I tried to implement marketing. But in the end, we saw that there was no time for marketing because we got enough offers and enough requests, luckily. But what we did is that I use Canva a lot to implement a lot of things because everything needs to be very easy that everyone can understand how to use it. How does the audiovisual work, so I made a paper about it. This door needs to be closed after 10 I made a paper about it. Please turn off the lights and so many things happened on Canva. I tried to add Instagram not to sell but to create an online community because we are a community based association. So I want to create an online community. First things that were happening were people all over the world and even people living one kilometre away. Were still linked to this place and then the website improved. I tried to improve it quite a lot. But there is also a formula here where people can directly implement the information. And then on the information I can actually make an offer because whether we're sending a request, and then we have to send an email to ask, what do you need actually, and then we will make an offer. And so now this one, this one also a bit quicker.

Marija

Perfect. Alright, so I mean, it is not like you're not using anything at all. So I am happy to hear you have at least some things in your conference centre. So you said you work closely with your competitor. Now do you know what they use? I mean, I don't need to necessarily know what they use. But do you know if they are maybe more advanced or less advanced, if they have something very interesting like AI, VR, some things like that in their place.

Unknown Speaker

So our very competitive because we have also indirect competitors which are hotels and conferences but they are more in the region Efteling. Do you know maybe know it? It is a bigger theme park and so they are so we are surrounded by a lot of Airbnb actually. Yeah, and a lot of bed and breakfasts because there is this theme park which attracts a lot of those kinds of guests. So we have a lot of centre and we are really an expert in nature. So we are making good use of doing anyway. So and we have some hotels in the neighbourhood but they do not have what we offer and we are quite unique in what we offer because we are in a monastery in a green atmosphere. And actually people come to us also because we are unique in the sense that we are very relational. We are very people based. So we decided to not implement some technologies because you lose the human contact. And the last best thing of having volunteers is that you have this face to face contact is that you don't do an online checking. No, but you haven't. You have a person that waits for you that you can call and he's going to give you the key and he's going to show you a range I am going to show you where is the coffee machines show you where is the breakfast, where is everything. And this is why for example, we don't have a key box with a key that people need to put a code and then they can find the room everything is based with human interaction. So for example, a clear choice we made because I thought let us just put a key box we tell the people how to get there, that is it, not the voice, and not that is possible. Also every person or every group that

arrives the Events Manager is always in contact with the group organiser and we go through the day list. And then once you're clear and expectations are clear, and they know everything how it works and we make a tour with them. Then we can let it go and we can have some hosts which can serve the coffee and there is always a contact person as a backdrop. And then based on human interaction and it is really for us important. Now, our direct competitor. They are not advanced as us they are doing everything on echo because all their employees and all our money goes on helping us to improve our business. So they have everything on an Excel, it changes last minute. And we have another conference centre which isn't commercial based. They have a better use of technology like virtual events like a reservation system online as well. But the way they work is not as professional as we are because for example they also use alright you want to book they send an email with information and then they say, Are you sure you want to book. Then they send an invoice and what we do is we make an offer and they accept or based on the prices that are there and then afterwards we send in a deposit of 20% which is usually quite low. Then we send the invoice in the end but you do not send an invoice in to say like alright, that is gonna be your total price. You know, we make a nice introduction with what is your what's your name, what's your address, what's included, what's excluded and not 100 emails and go back we send them one document one page, not more. But there is all the information the cancellation policy, what is included and what is not included? And people really get it they come to have a paper it is clear it is black and white and compared to hotels where you have to sign and you have to pay 20% and 50% and 7%. And then you can change or not last minute. We only have one deposit, you confirm and we know you are coming, you can sell the deposit. Therefore, it is very clear very easy.

Marija

So as one of the last questions, then would you say because initially I was saying you know, based on research, they are saying that in order to survive as a business you need to have digital technology. But then based on what you're saying it sounds like you could still survive if you don't have that much digital technology or even nothing. So is that that you think as well?

Unknown Speaker

I am counter argument in what you are saying because our whole concept is going back to basics is going back to nature. We want to make people feel at home and how do we create this experience is by making feel really within the community. We don't sell rooms we don't sell beds, we don't sell food we sell our whole experience that you come with your group, that you are part of the community that you can do your events and we're going to take care of everything in the background and that people are happy and everything is organised for them. And this is all based on human interaction. Of course, there is some stuff we can do more efficient. That is where we need technology. Because being someone for time or having a system where half of the offer is already automatically generated. That is very easy. I am not against technology in this sense, but for the event itself. And that is where you really need to go back to this. Back to Yes, people want to get rid of technology people are there is too much they are too connected. They get too many notifications. They need to like go back into steel and the good thing is that when you enter my room is that really you have this this peace of mind you really get a sense of like wow, where am I? You know, like you leave everything behind? And you run and you're like alright, I was in traffic. I need to organise this I need to do that I needed that you arrive and you get a sense of calmness. And if you get lost in this place because it is quite big. And you don't have someone who tells you hi, welcomes in, asks do you want a cup of tea or a cup of

coffee? Then those people are going to be stressed for the whole time. And that is the opposite effect that we want to create.

Marija

Alright. Alright, well, yeah, I have not heard this from anyone else that I interviewed. So very interesting to hear your opinion. Yeah. So yeah, sounds like you are doing good and you're running a good business. So I am happy to hear that you don't need that much technology for it to actually do good.

Unknown Speaker

There was one last thing I want to say this is what I did and that was based on, on the environment. On in the sense of SWOT analysis on what the board was on the vision and the mission and the strategy. And it was also based on a target market. Yeah, so our target market appreciate also to have the contact and sending emails and having everything clear and but now I am going to leave this job and there is a new person coming which has a software skills and she has a completely different way of looking at the place. And I think it is important because she wants to implement technology in a complete different way than I wanted. I wanted to go back to just to everything was an email, but I was the only person working I was the boss. So I had everything in my head and in my systems, and I had a person helping me with reservation that works for a woman disappointing to say that she now there is a group of three people reservation Events Manager and sales. So those they are going to replace me. So my position listen to and the communication internally needs to be more easier. So for example, they are now looking at a system where you can online book your event and an offer and have an overview of the whole price and everything is made automatically. So that offered are not made one by one to fill it in. Then you make PDF and you send it to the guests but then people can adapt it. But if there was a change in amounts that it is automatically adapted for the invoice. It is called event venue or events with and so those are things that 50% of the offers could be already based with a machine. It has not a chatbot it is a pop up preservation system kind of like and then you can for example, choose your offers and so 50% of the offers of the main things that we sell, can be automated online with a person filling in the information. **This would already help them make things more efficient, and it would have a clearer overview of what we are offering and what people can expect.** We are looking at that one technology. The other technology is to have to use way more outlook offers. Way more options there that we are not using for example, having an overview of which groups are coming when at which time. And that was because now I am using Excel and I know in my head more or less when they are coming now we're looking into alright, this room is booked at this time this room is booked at this time this room is booked at this time in this group. Is it going to work out together and then gives a more global overview. Another thing where we are trying to implement is to use Kanban tools. So instead of alright the person came alright, they asked for an offer we send an offer they accepted or we forgot to ask if they accept it or not. We send a deposit or we need to ask the rest of the information. Oh one week in advance we need to ask again information. If you have a campaign tool or an online campaign to actually then **we can see alright in which process or we have the whole sales funnel.** Alright, hello, we can see deposit is asked now we just need to wait or information is asked or one month in advance. We need to know Alright, other diets. What are the names of the people? What kind of meals are they serving?

Marija

So most important back of the house and nothing like so the guest does not have to worry about anything but they do not see much of it. Alright, alright, perfect.

Unknown Speaker

Invoicing needs to be automatically nowadays, this cannot be done. Then I am doing an overview, a finance overview. In addition, I am trying to implement in bookkeeping, more automation with bookkeeping, that is also quite important. No, because we don't, we don't sell any food in the sense of so we don't have a POS we don't have channels. But before we were working with Airbnb, and it was connected to our reservation system. We were working with House workers and they also linked their system with our system. Yeah, so we are we still trying to improve in all the fronts.

Marija

All right, perfect. Alright, so that essentially sums up all my questions and for sure, I got a lot of information from you. So once again, thank you for taking the time and really telling me so much about the business. Very interesting to hear. I do not think I have ever heard about this type of place and also that you're running it this is amazing achievement. So yeah, happy that Ina gave me your contact. I was lucky, I guess.

Unknown Speaker

Happy to help. I know how it works. And I did it four years ago, so I am still in it. But watch out what trends tell you if it is one thing that I can tell you is that trends are very subjective on one specific part, but when you see what we do, we go against the trends but against trends of technology, but for the trends that there is too much technology.

Marija

Alright, but that is also a good opinion to have. Yeah, that makes your business stand out. So again, I am also not against your view. Very interesting to hear.

Interview #10 – industry expert

Marija

So just maybe as a as a starting point, if you could just tell me more about what you do at the company, what products are you offering? What type of clients do you serve and things like that?

Speaker 2

Did you check out our website and or should I start at the beginning?

Marija

I mean, it is at the same time it just for the record, but I do know that you have a PMS system, you have like an app store in the way and also API, like integration. So that's what I know from the website.

Speaker 2

So I can give you a good quick background to myself and then explain what we do at Apaleo. So myself, I have a hotel management background also studied hotel management, and Lausanne where I met Maurice and others. Back in the day in 2017, I founded a company which was called hotel hero, which was a review and recommendation platform for hotel software. So helping hotels to better buy technology, compare what software is on the market, what fits to their current PMS and current systems based on integrations based on what other hotels use contractual terms and things like that, which we did for five years, built that up with also with a German,

Austrian and Swiss hotel associations. And then our company was acquired by Apaleo. Two years ago. I do business development, and I focus on business development at Apaleo. And nowadays, I like for the last year I lead the business development team for Apaleo. We are believers in it Property Management System category. So we are in the PMS category. However, we think of PMS bit differently than a traditional legacy property management system. It's kind of you know, server based, or also cloud based PMS is those are the big names, you know, in the market. We see that their their approach is bit antiquated, so to say. Why? Because hotel technology really evolved super fast, right? So we could see that through COVID and other drivers. It's kind of staff shortage, if it's energy if it's contracted through COVID If it's multiple like just guest expectations. You know, you can name this and you have digital transformation which comes throughout the business. So this means that it's not any more really one system which can cover all of technology, functionalities a hotel has, which the traditional PMS did and back in the day, it was really what was needed. And the PMS always tried to cover more and more and more out of out of their own hand to be able to have a bigger share, of course of the IT budget themselves. So Apaleo actually turned it around and how this works and really focus on the core property management functionality. So this is about inventory management rate, Plan Management, reservation management, finance, double, and payment. And through our API first approach, we really have also connectivity at the core of our functionalities because we say a hotel needs to have a PMS not kind of a closed system. But really an open platform, able to enable them to connect the best systems and build a technology stack which fits to their needs. And not kind of have a closed system and try to connect and have the same integration problems for huge systems but only use 20% of, of the functionalities like that. So this was really much our focus or this is really the vision of the company and this was also one of the reasons why kind of our company I hold to here we joined Apaleo was that we sought always with the technology which was on the market. If it does not integrate to your PMS correctly, then, you know, the value is often not there. You cannot really you know, big trend when you look at technology, especially in hospitality. It is also going away from just looking at digitizing specific touchpoints. But it's really about looking at digitizing journeys and the entire journeys, if it's a guest journeys or if it's employee journeys, because it's typically the edge cases. It's typically the process behind the scenes which are actually the most time consuming if you take for example, the online checkout everybody talked about check in check in, you know, like that's the big thing to digitize and everybody allowed them you know, put a check in kiosk at the reception. However, then behind the scenes you still had somebody who had to manually add the business company address to the folio and then manually send out email for the invoice right. So these are kind of these absurd elements because people just think about oh, I just think about a certain touchpoint but you really think about this end to end journeys. And I think this is something where also our industry has moved a lot in the past few years due to the lack of staff and shortages about the change of kind of new business models coming to market. So all of that so that is pretty much what we do at Apaleo. Maybe I can give you a few more numbers if you like. Apollo was founded 2017. We work today with over 1000 hotels in 15 different countries. With our core markets being the markets of Germany, Austria, Switzerland. However, we're also when we look more at the Dutch market, we have a couple of Dutch hotels so the Benelux group from easy hotels works with our Apaleo, the teleport hotels which are like hostels, which are currently in use moving from us to Apaleo. And then we have maybe that's a bit early for thesis but we have maybe the most known Dutch Hotel Group which is currently just about to officially announced that they will be moving to Apaleo by end of year.

Marija

Wow. Wow, that is a big one. Well, thank you for sharing all the all of the information. Really interesting to hear. So, would you say you do not work much with SMEs? Because so far you named like quite a few chain chains.

Speaker 2

I mean it depends how you define SME, right. So we definitely, I mean, in a lot of different industries you would call 1000 People business in the sense of SME, here. We I would say that our core markets is small to medium sized hotel groups. So typically, if you have a couple properties up to like 20 properties, that is kind of where our sweet spot is. We also work with independent hotels, we also have really like 35 unit properties and things like that using Apaleo. But it has, it's not that straightforward for them. Why is that? We focus on the best of breed approach. What does that mean? That means kind of you have the best technologies in the different areas and you connect them together and you build like this great tech stack. And we of course, we have a lean PMS philosophy so we have limited functionalities because we don't say we don't do it all. So of course for small one, it can be super beneficial to work with Apaleo because they say oh, we just need two apps connected and a polio we have a super lean business quite and have a super cost efficient tech stack. But of course for many independent hotels and very small business, they say like, Oh no, that's too much research for me. I don't want to have five contracts like technology doesn't add that much value because the end of the day of my friendly rules I want to be at the front of house and that's they would most likely want to work more with a all in one solution which can, you know, does not everything perfectly but kind of covers quite a lot quite nicely and therefore simplifies their life. For this market. What we do is we work for example, with implementation partners. So these are consultants and partners who can help the hotel to actually do the whole implementation of free for different tools, so doesn't feel for the hotel as if they are kind of connecting everything themselves, but they have a person who kind of helps them select and then in and then implements for them. Why are we also focusing more on hotel groups is that again, this best of breed approach, but it's also that we were to multi property platform so we enable more kind of easier rollouts of new properties. We enable a centralization of departments so that you're able to centralize you know your accounting, your reservations, your revenue, departments, all of these kinds of elements. Which of course, add more value. If you have a couple of properties. And if you have just one property, then you can centralize anything. So that's where we are. And then the bigger groups when we look at this, this enterprise segment for us this is more something which we're developing into and they're from our technology infrastructure. This is where we make the difference for them. And that's why so to say they go for Apaleo so we have different we have the core value propositions which resonate most, but we have messaging a different positioning for the different segments because they have of course, different priorities.

Marija

And let's say so when you work with, like bigger groups, and then let's say SMEs, is there any difference that you see during the implementation process, so maybe difference in their thinking and their approach to technology? And, like, the skills that they have in the company as well?

Speaker 2

Yeah, for sure, for sure. I mean, it is not just about the size, I think it's not the only factor. So we have different ways of segmenting the market. So we've grown quite strong in the service department sector SOS apart hotels, etc, over the past few years. And why is that? Was that because of longer length of stays, actually their topic about

kind of streamlining processes was always more important. Digitizing the things like check in being able to offer kind of a digital companion was important because as you have less kind of turnover every day. Do not need necessarily so much staff for check ins every day, but you want to still offer certain levels. Of them, especially for kind of Airbnb and all of that, bringing it coming to market around 15 years ago, and I think a lot of new businesses being developed out of it 10 years ago, five to 10 years ago, has this has moved to a big switch. So we're here we for example, work with NUMA and lime home which are to have a very tech enabled hospitality concept to work with Apple iOS since day one. So they built from the first 20 units. They started to work properly. Why is that? Is that for them? They really looked at okay, we want to build a new business model. We want to be able to open properties at 30 units and be able to be profitable there and be able to offer kind of Airbnb with standards above a different kind of new models more like brand and an experience lime home is more kind of like super practical and looking more at to C to D series. But these kinds of concepts they have like 40 people in the development team. They bought their own tech they buy some of the shelf like ours, and the rest of them really by building the house and I think this is something which in the service department industry you could see and people are more are younger, innovative, it's a new kind of this hybrid concept, etc. It is all kind of more like challenger brands and challenger brands are definitely nowadays more tech enabled and all of that. When we go to the traditional hotel business, we can get for example. business hotels, city hotels are more relevant for us. We do not focus on the luxury segment we do not focus on the resort segment. We really look at the one on the businesses, which really benefit from streamlining from centralizing from all of it so they do not have tech capacities typically. And even if it's smaller groups or large groups. Larger groups of course have more but they also have more challenges but they really look at okay, how can I streamline my business and one of the big difficulties there is that the ones want most are the ones who have already the smallest teams because they are already super optimized. But then they often don't have a team in house to actually be able to manage the project because they already at working all that 150% They're like, Okay, we really want to go that step so that we can reduce our workload and we only work at 80%. But it's just like that, it would mean that we need to first go up to 200% So that's kind of the challenge often is to optimize teams to do that, to do that transition. And model. Exactly. So we really segment by not just by size, but really by type of accommodation business. What are the difficulties how much personal like in the five star hotel, there is always tons of you know, personal service and here there and that there. So it goes away from automation and goes wave streamlining, of course, data plays a huge role and but they are a little bit slower to adapt. You take for example, the other ones and then the last but not least, we always but that's what kind of an internal thing we also segment our prospects and customers in different mind-set. We have the rock stars, which are kind of the Numa the lime homes, which are the ones who love API, and they just want to talk tech, and really kind of like actually just like, see and see their product rules for themselves. Then we have the innovators who are the ones who want to bring innovation who want to change things, but they need guidance a bit more about you know how to do that maybe need additional resources and go for it. Then so that would be kind of like the people coming out of let's say the rockstars would be the ones who know tech and other ones are more likely interested in tech. Then there are the followers who are more the I want to do it like them Can you tell me how to do it? And then there's the conservatives who are like, Yeah, I'm, I'm more, you know, just thinking about all challenges and problems. There's so I think that in any kind of, you know, technology adoption or innovation adoption curve you always have different ways of segmenting the market. And for us, definitely in the first couple of years, it was very much just kind of rockstars and, and all of that now we're more in the mass market but in specific segments, and not for everybody.

Marija

Okay, so what you mentioned with these segments like the rock stars and so on, this is actually super interesting. Like I kind of I did not have the same words in my thesis, but I do have like maturity levels as well as the companies. So how do you then like attract those, those customers that are the conservative ones and how do you make them actually, like, accept technology? And I'm not sure like if you if you do like cold calls to those companies, or do they come to you, yourself always been how would you attract more of them? What do you think are they missing and how would we motivate them?

Speaker 2

Yeah, I think there is two different questions in there. So what how what do we do it's all about value based kind of messaging. It's all about you know, not talking about functionality like you know, if you talk to the rockstars you can talk about your API's you can talk to tech and the guys or girls will think about it themselves what they can do. The other ones it is really more about like, Okay, what are the benefits for them, what, you know, how is the operations going to be experienced going to be improved as their findings going to be improved? All of these kinds of things. It's about their and real tangible use cases that they can relate to that it's all of that taking away the scare of what does actually transformation mean the transition mean what How does the process happen? Okay, so one thing how you can motivate them in the best way because you are not going to motivate them by just building like crazy Rockstar like conservatives, you will motivate them by actually telling them hey, this is a proven thing. And if you don't do this, you're missing out and but you're not taking a risk or you're not taking a huge risk to your to the bigger risk is not changing. That is the one part of the answer. My second part of what do we do for attracting this segment? Nothing really. We started was my business before the hero really helping the struggling independents about like how to select the next system and that will happily Oh, we have our value based messaging we focus on kind of adding value. But we're not going to and when and we have always stakeholders and groups which are maybe conservative so not everybody's conservative, but you have like two people conservative movers. And its then references, connect them with other people and exchange thoughts bring that kind of exchange and be transparent. We have our own community also for our customers to be able to speak to one another. But we will not go to a hotel group. But we know like that there's if there's nobody in there is no interest and they don't see the value they just see the risk and just try to go everything is bad because it's not the same as they have. Then we are like okay, then let's not waste our time and you know where you find us. You happy to? We are always there if you have questions or you want something, but we're not going to go and push it. If it is the ones in the middle who are like, I want to go but I do not know how and I'm scared and please take my hand. Of course that's the ones where we are like okay, that's about now nurturing that's about now building that trust, helping them to really lay out what it means then to change build the ecosystem together and say like, okay, and try it out and you can see if it works or not works to take away that that risk, which they feel.

Marija

And then how would you think what can they do inside of the company to kind of go from being a conservative type of company to a rock star, what could they do?

Speaker 2

I mean, digital transformation has two parts to the definition right? So the first part is about kind of implementing digital tools throughout the different areas of your business. And they have included transforming your business model. So that's the first part and

that's kind of the most known part of the definition. The second part of the definition is really about setting up your culture. To be able to be open to fail. And if you fail, you fail fast, in a sense, you know, they did make data driven decisions, try things out. When I was at hotelschool, which is not too long ago. You know, it was always like first impression is the most important thing and you always have to be perfect at any time of the day as hospitality business and you're like, that is so outdated. Because you will always stay stable and you will never kind of evolve and our markets are evolving so fast to guests expectations are evolving so fast. There is so many trends coming to market and away from technologies just in general in our lives. If you look at like today, even 10 years ago, 20 years ago, and generations, it is moving old much faster. So if you do not kind of set up your companies with people who are open to try out new things and say hey, let's try it out in a very small and selected group and very safe environment. And if it works, we implemented a bit more if it doesn't work, we take it out. That is the thing that is very important. So the set mind-set is that that transformational change. And then you have also way too many people in companies where it's like yeah, I've been doing that for 35 years and that that's the thing so I think also the respect needs to be contributed for them. Because of course things have been working out for 35 years, etc. But it's also being able to say okay, is that not at six, maybe a single point of failure, you know, like these people will say like, Yeah, but I have full control over everything and I know how it works, but what happens if tomorrow Do you have a coach? Yeah. And you know, there's, I can tell you, there's a few hotel groups who have like one person who kind of can still hold everything together, but if the person is gone tomorrow, they would be at quite significant issue of change. So it's a lot about the organizational change. It's not about the transformational change where I think it's important but at the same time also getting used other skill sets into the to the company who are not, not just younger people who anyways are more digital native. But also looking at okay, maybe I need a developer or, you know, when at the end of the day we in our business, we have like a marketing ops person who just takes care of integrating system and making sure that data flows from different sources, different areas. To another to be able to make transparent with where we stand, right. And why should that be different in a hotel because as a hotel, you're not. You are not a brick and mortar business. You are a hybrid business, you are at least half digital, and have brick and mortar. So this is something again, goes back to mindset change and transformational change.

Marija

Yeah, I mean, these are like really good points and basically really in line with my thinking and what other people have mentioned. So you just put it nicely in like a few sentences. Thank you very much for this. So well, this is like a different topic now. But so you mentioned that you mostly work with like you said Austria, Switzerland, Germany, and then the Dutch market maybe not so much. But is there anything maybe that you have noticed? In terms of like, how is the Netherlands different from like other countries, especially in terms of like applying digital technology and their behavior? And yeah, things like that.

Speaker 2

Yeah. So I think the Dutch are. First advantage is already its very English speaking. Okay. And as it's English speaking, it's an it's also already quite quite open to new tech to new things, able to be one of the markets where international startups tried to sell to the Dutch early in a sense because you don't like Germany like don't try to sell to a German hotel in England like it happens more and more nowadays, but like or for example, France or Spain. So, it's that makes it easier as an entry level already. There is this kind of international vibe. Amsterdam is one of the travel tech hubs in Europe, right.

You had booking.com coming from there. You have the TripAdvisor big office you had a variety of travel companies around oki, Mews, whatever. They are called hotel champ. A lot of travel, hospitality tech companies are based from Amsterdam. So this is definitely a hub there, which impacts also kind of the tech used in the hotels. You had strong local players, like ID, PMS and all of these things, which are still quite, quite used. They're now kind of all going end of life. So a lot of change is happening in the in the Dutch market as well. So, I think in general, the Dutch markets have, I mean, in general, I think is a tech savvy market. I mean, I can more speak about kind of the cities I'm I don't know so much to the small countryside, hotels in the Netherlands, but at least I would say that they are quite, quite innovative. You know, when you look at, you know, a citizen m being at the forefront of hotel technologies since 2008, bringing kind of the, the online check in, or at least the check in kiosk to the scale market, student hotel, transforming way and as one of the leading kind of hybrid business models, things like that. So it is definitely on the Innovate side. And a lot of people, the Netherlands a lot of people do what kind of the big ones that like it was over the last 10 years. A lot of what I got, okay, what the citizen m do I want to do the same. That was kind of a big, big trend over the years, our sales as well, which is which is normal if you have an innovator who, who drives.

Marija

Thank you for these insights. So I guess maybe, while being conscious of time, maybe just one of the final questions. So when you are implementing your systems in the in the certain hotel, do you have some sort of training for them or? Well, is there anyone helping them with the implementation? How does it work?

Speaker 2

Yeah, so we have, so our system is built as a fully self-service solution. So this is quite unique. You are able to set up the whole system by yourself. Okay, you can go on our website today and just sign up and create your hotel and setup and you do not need. But, of course, if you signed a contract with us, there's an onboarding cycle whether it's like you set up your properties, you get support, q&a, trainings, and the goal life process but in the business model, very different than a lot of other vendors. We don't earn our money like seek integration fees on additional professional services because you want to change something in your room categories. Suddenly you get in, you need to pay 1000 euros to make that change or you want to talk to support you have to pay that or you wait three days or four days for support. So Apaleo you can adapt everything yourself. And so this allows much more flexibility but at the same time, there's guidance around and now, our commercial model is that we have a fixed fee per room per month.

Marija

All right. Okay. Perfect. Quite simple. All right. Yeah. Well, I think that summarizes all of my questions. And I mean, I got some really like perfect answers, honestly for the thesis. So this was really helpful. So once again, I am happy that Maurice actually reached out to you and that you agreed to speak. Thank you very much.

Appendix 5: Assessment and feedback form - LYCar Proposal

LYCar Proposal Grading Rubric

v.1.1 (Version LYCar 2020; 16 February, 2021)

Student Name:	Marija Paulaviciute	LYCar Coach:	Mr. Villanueva
Student Number:	791105	Primary PLO:	10
Date Submitted:	February 13th, 2023	Secondary PLO(s):	6

Note: All boxes with red border to be filled by student

Preconditions (required for assessment)	Yes	No	Comments
Checks content and completeness			
Executive Summary is present, concise, can be read independently, contains information about process and content, focuses on results and outcomes	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	
LYCar Proposal meets formal reporting criteria (according to e.g., LYCar Reading & Writing Guide)			
LYCar Proposal is written in English and is professional, including common basic components such as Intro, ToC, Conclusion etc.- see Reading & Writing Guide	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	
LYCar Proposal is max. 5.000 words (counting after Table of Content, incl. text in tables) - visual proof of wordcount is included in Appendices.	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	
Harvard Referencing Style is used consistently, referencing to primary sources only, List of References is well presented	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	
Check (technical) formalities and submissions			
Ephorus upload	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	
LYCar Proposal incl. Appendices are uploaded in Osiris	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	
Ethics and data management			
Ethical, integrity and data management requirements	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	
Entitled to assessment? (All yes above required):	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>		

DD1: The student has demonstrated knowledge and understanding in a field of study that builds upon their general secondary education, and is typically at a level that is supported by advanced textbooks

	Excellent	Pass	No Go
1.1 Use of literature and knowledge of the field	Student uses in-depth literature and knowledge of the field throughout the report. The report contains no mistakes and factual incorrectness.	Student uses in most cases literature and knowledge of the field in the report. The report contains some mistakes and factual incorrectness in a limited part of the report.	No sufficient or correct use of literature and knowledge of the field in the report. The report contains mistakes and factual incorrectness.
1.2 Intellectual depth and abstract thinking	Student takes all significant factors into account and looks from different perspectives, sees patterns, relates situations to concepts in order to solve larger problems. The reports show excellent thinking capacity of the student. New unique insights presented in the topic and depth of understanding displayed. Excellent linking between the elements and the underlying issues within the case situation.	Student takes different perspectives into account. The report shows intellectual depth (taking into account all significant factors and looking from different perspectives) in most parts of the report. Some patterns are clear. Some links have been made.	The report lacks intellectual depth (superficial and merely descriptive) in some parts of the report. Patterns are not sufficiently made clear.
Student Feedback:	Pass <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>		
	Not Yet <input type="checkbox"/>		
Assessor Feedback:	Pass <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>		
	Not Yet <input type="checkbox"/>		

Data from Dutch Central Bureau of Statistics is used to evaluate the size of the chosen industry and underpin the importance of analysis. Furthermore, literature review is made by focusing on academic journals and thus providing deeper insights to the established problem statement. All the sources are mentioned and thus can be checked. Additional insights and ideas are provided after the mentioned pieces of information to provide the reader with discussion and individual points of the writer.

1.4. the related concepts show the BMI and absorptive capacity, I would say there are more related topics you came across to add to your conceptual framework. (derived from your preliminary interviews?)

DD2: The student can apply their knowledge and understanding in a manner that indicates a professional approach to their work or vocation, and has competences typically demonstrated through devising and sustaining feedback and solving problems within their field of study

	Excellent	Pass	No Go
2.1 Application of theories/models to situations at hand	Student uses a range of theories/models appropriate to the problems in the case skilfully and able to add their own unique perspective and insight. They own the model(s).	Student mentions a range of theories/models appropriate to the problems in the case and applying some of them in the correct way.	Mentioning models and theories but not using them in a correct way.
2.2 Possible impact and meaning of own work - dissemination of research	Student plans evaluation of impact and meaning of own work in relation to business and industry with sound underpinning. Identification of all stakeholders and acts of dissemination. Plan on how to effectively disseminate knowledge through different channels fitted for a variety of audiences is also presented.	Student formulates criteria for evaluation. Student describes possible impact and meaning of own work. Identification of stakeholders and planning of dissemination through at least one valuable channel with an audience is presented.	Student fails to describe criteria how to evaluate impact. No identification of stakeholders or realistic plan on dissemination of knowledge through at least one valuable channel with an audience.
Student Feedback:	Pass <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>		
	Not Yet <input type="checkbox"/>		
Assessor Feedback:	Pass <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>		
	Not Yet <input type="checkbox"/>		

The need for a point of dissemination is identified with the most important stakeholders mentioned along with some details of the process and the targeted date.

Be even more specific on why it is significant to be digital ready, this will create more sense of urgency and will add value to your thesis. What about labour shortage, be also aware of the fact that you are mentioning the thin line between personal service in high end properties and digital amenities, this is from the hotelier perspective. I could surprise you what customers/guests have to say about this.

DD3: the student has the ability to devise data gathering events, gather and interpret relevant data (usually within their field of study) to inform judgements that include reflection on relevant social, scientific or ethical issues

	Excellent	Pass	No Go
--	-----------	------	-------

3.1 The Design Based Research Process	Student sets the research process up in a systematic and well organised way. Student makes sense of a problem mess, analyses a (complex) problem and formulates feasible solutions by using a design-based research approach. Logical flow from Problem definition to Analysis to Solutions Design/methods are well chosen and motivated,	Student analyses the problem, and formulates possible solutions underpinned by literature using a design-based research approach. Methods motivated and mostly logically chosen	Insufficient problem analysis and methodology, research cycle not used.
3.2 Analysis and evaluation of data	Student plans analysis and evaluation of data/information well using appropriate (digital) tools and makes data-driven decisions. All statements are underpinned with facts and figures and/or referencing. The appropriate tools are used in all steps. Analysis is sufficiently complex with use of information from more than 2 different dimensions (practioners, scientific literature, the organization and stakeholders).	Student plans analysis and evaluation of solutions clearly, with some flaws or unclearities. Some statements are underpinned with facts and figures and/or referencing, some lacking underpinning. Analysis is sufficiently complex using data from at least one dimension and sufficiently backed up with literature.	Plan of analysis and evaluation of solutions is not clear. Statements are mostly not underpinned with facts and figures and/or referencing; some are contradicting. No tools are used. Lacking or no analysis and not backed up with literature.

Student Feedback:	Pass	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	The report is set in the format of the DBR cycle with chapters being named accordingly and thus the logical flow ensured. Facts and figures are used and referenced, with additional individual insights put after each one of them. The sources of information include scientific literature, the organizations and their stakeholders.
	Not Yet	<input type="checkbox"/>	
Assessor Feedback:	Pass	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	The steps are clear, stronger conceptualization would improve the flow even better. Could use more organizational data, e.g. quantified results of guest reviews? A timeline will help you to stay on track.
	Not Yet	<input type="checkbox"/>	

DD4: the student can communicate information, ideas, problems and solutions to both specialist and non-specialist audiences

	Excellent	Pass	No Go
--	-----------	------	-------

4.1 Communication to audience making use of professional (business) English	Student divides information effectively in paragraphs/chapters. No noticeable errors in English usage and mechanics. Use of language enhances the argument and avoids abbreviations. Sentence structures are well varied, and voice and tone are highly suitable for the specific audience/s. Style and content complement each other into an appealing, high quality story. Highly skilful organisational strategy. The logical sequence of ideas increases the effectiveness of the argument and transitions between paragraphs strengthen the relationship between ideas. Sub-headings are employed effectively and the links between different sections are reinforced through linking expressions. Shows attention to detail in all parts of the report.	Student divides information in paragraphs/chapters. Errors in English usage and mechanics are present, but they rarely impede understanding. Use of language supports the argument. Sentence structures are varied, and voice and tone are generally appropriate for the intended audience/s. Generally, a clear organisational strategy. The sequence of ideas in most cases supports the argument and transitions between paragraphs clarify the relationship between ideas. The report is mainly comprehensively written and lacks some attention to detail in some parts of the report.	Distracting errors in English usage are present and they impede understanding. Use of language is basic, only somewhat clear and does not support the argument. Word choice is general and imprecise. Voice and tone are not always appropriate for the intended audience/s. Basic organisational strategy, with most ideas logically grouped. Transitions between paragraphs sometimes clarify the relationship among ideas. The report is not comprehensively written and lacks attention to detail in most parts of the report.
---	---	---	--

Student Feedback:	Pass	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	The report is well structured and easy to read.
	Not Yet	<input type="checkbox"/>	
Assessor Feedback:	Pass	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Your conclusions can be a more elaborate, tends to look like a summary instead of a conclusion. You need to add another dissemination, why not dissemetnet with your interviewee's e.g. apply the test there.
	Not Yet	<input type="checkbox"/>	

Appendix 6: SPSS outputs – survey

Descriptive statistics:

		Statistics		
		How old is your business? (in years)	How many employees does your business employ? (full time equivalents, FTE)	How many employees work during an average shift? (full time equivalents, FTE)
N	Valid	32	32	31
	Missing	0	0	1
Mean		15.28	106.34	35.06
Median		7.50	23.00	12.00
Mode		1	6 ^a	3

a. Multiple modes exist. The smallest value is shown

Inferential statistics:

1st test

		Coefficients ^a				
		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients		
Model		B	Std. Error	Beta	t	Sig.
1	(Constant)	1,344	,557		2,412	,022
	We successfully link existing knowledge with new insights.	,720	,158	,645	4,548	,000
2	(Constant)	,449	,595		,755	,457
	We successfully link existing knowledge with new insights.	,478	,167	,429	2,869	,008
	We use information sources within our industry.	,452	,162	,417	2,793	,009

a. Dependent Variable: We have the ability to work more effectively by adopting new technologies.

2nd test:

Paired Samples Test

		Paired Differences						Significance		
		Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference		t	df	One-Sided p	Two-Sided p
					Lower	Upper				
Pair 1	We have the right knowledge. - We have the ability to work more effectively by adopting new technologies.	-.613	1.022	.184	-.988	-.238	-3.338	30	.001	.002

Paired Samples Statistics

		Mean	N	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
Pair 1	We have the right knowledge.	3.19	31	.980	.176
	We have the ability to work more effectively by adopting new technologies.	3.81	31	.946	.170

3rd test:

Paired Samples Test

		Paired Differences						Significance		
		Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference		t	df	One-Sided p	Two-Sided p
					Lower	Upper				
Pair 1	Consultants to discuss digital technologies. - We have the ability to work more effectively by adopting new technologies.	-.935	1.504	.270	-1.487	-.384	-3.463	30	<.001	.002

Paired Samples Statistics

		Mean	N	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
Pair 1	Consultants to discuss digital technologies.	2.87	31	1.176	.211
	We have the ability to work more effectively by adopting new technologies.	3.81	31	.946	.170

4th test:

Paired Samples Test

		Paired Differences						Significance		
		Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference		t	df	One-Sided p	Two-Sided p
					Lower	Upper				
Pair 1	Our employees are aware of the set goals. - We have the ability to work more effectively by adopting new technologies.	-.645	1.450	.260	-1.177	-.113	-2.477	30	.010	.019

Paired Samples Statistics

		Mean	N	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
Pair 1	Our employees are aware of the set goals.	3.16	31	1.098	.197
	We have the ability to work more effectively by adopting new technologies.	3.81	31	.946	.170

Appendix 7: Dissemination acts – infographic



Marija Paulavičiūtė • You

Senior Analyst @ Marriott | Hospitality Management @ HTH | CIMA Exam qualif...

1w • 🌐



Important news for the hospitality industry in the Netherlands! Now is the time to start being more digital. 🖥️ 📱 🕒

With numerous Small and Medium Sized Enterprises (SMEs) operating within hotels, restaurants, cafes, and event spaces, the sector is growing and contributing 62% of all value added (EUR 215 billion) to the Dutch economy. However, with the increasing importance of digital technology, it is crucial for hospitality businesses to be digitally ready in order to overcome challenges such as changing consumer habits, labour shortages, increasing competition and the need to be more operationally efficient.

My infographic highlights the need for Dutch hospitality SMEs to nurture a digital culture by establishing a baseline, involving external consultants, getting all employees on board, setting SMART goals, being proactive, and monitoring and evaluating progress. By implementing these steps into their routine, businesses can ensure that their digital readiness is consistently improving and that the ways of assessing it are effective. Additionally, by taking these steps, the SMEs may stay ahead of emerging digital trends and technologies, giving it an advantage over rival businesses and the ability to provide superior customer service.

Thank you to those who have participated in my research during the past 5 months.

Check out the infographic now to learn more about the digital readiness of hospitality SMEs in the Netherlands and how they can progress in the industry. Let me know if you have any thoughts!

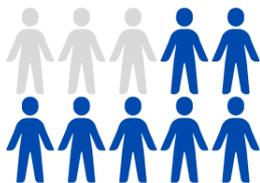
[#digitalreadiness](#) [#digital](#) [#digitaltechnology](#) [#digitaltechnologies](#) [#research](#)
[#hotelschool](#) [#netherlands](#) [#digitaltransformation](#) [#digitalisation](#)
[#businessmodelinnovation](#) [#restaurants](#) [#hospitalityindustry](#) [#technology](#)
[#hospitality](#) [#hotels](#) [#horeca](#) [#foodandbeverage](#) [#hotel](#) [#academicresearch](#)
[#thesis](#) [#changemanagement](#) [#dutch](#) [#amsterdam](#) [#thehague](#) [#smes](#) [#sme](#)

Digital readiness in Dutch Hospitality SMEs

With numerous SMEs operating within hotels, restaurants, cafes, and event spaces, the hospitality sector is growing in the Netherlands. These businesses are crucial to the country's economy because they boost job creation, economic growth, and the attractiveness of the country as a tourism destination.



SMEs contribute 62% of all value added (EUR 215 billion) to the Dutch economy



SMEs account for two thirds of total business employment in The Netherlands



Today, digital technology is seen as a crucial instrument for developing and maintaining customer interactions, increasing operational effectiveness, and attracting and retaining customers in both front and back of the house operations in the hospitality sector.

Although there is little research on the level of digital readiness of hospitality SMEs specifically in The Netherlands, the studies that are available indicate that there is still much space for development and that it is increasingly important to go digital in order to survive.

This proportion of interviewees think that:



According to the performed research, the majority of Dutch hospitality SMEs appear to lack a consistent method to identifying, improving and tracking their level of digital readiness. Therefore, if SMEs want to progress, they should implement the following steps into their culture:

1. Establish a base line
2. Involve external consultants
3. Get all employees on board
4. Set SMART goals
5. Outline a detailed plan
6. Be proactive
7. Monitor and evaluate progress
8. Integrate this mindset into the company culture

Discovery ?

1,757

Impressions



Posts that spark conversations perform best. Try sharing a tip or asking a question in your next post.



Start a post

Engagements ?

Reactions

28 →

Comments

0 →

Reposts

1 →

Top demographics of unique viewers ?

Job titles ▾

General Manager · 13



Founder · 12



Managing Director · 12



Project Manager · 10



Owner · 10



Appendix 8: Dissemination acts – messages and presentations to interviewees

☑ Sent Items ★ ☰ Filter

mary.margaret [redacted] 
Digital readiness research fin... 15:56
Dear Mary Margaret, I hope you are ...

Patrick [redacted] 
Digital readiness research fin... 15:51
Dear Patrick, I hope you are doing w...

quinten.vanovervest [redacted] 
> Digital readiness research f... 15:50
Dear Quinten, I hope you are doing ...

Idecorte [redacted] 
Digital readiness research fin... 15:49
Dear Lorenzo, I hope you are doing ...

vanhemert [redacted] 
Digital readiness research fin... 15:47
Dear Rob, I hope you are doing well....

 Quinten van Overvest <quinten.vanovervest [redacted]>   
To: ● Marija Paulaviciute Thu 04/05/2023 16:25

Hey Marija,

Love it, it's really well structured. To me, all aspects correlate well.

I am sure that this is just an overview of your findings, leading to the proposed solution. Therefore, I think that in your full report, you will dive into these findings in more detail.



Marija Paulaviciute

Dear Lorenzo, I hope you are doing well. I want to thank you fo...



Thu 04/05/2023 15:49



Lorenzo de Corte <ldecorte

>



To: ○ Marija Paulaviciute

Fri 05/05/2023 15:37

Hello Marija!

I am doing fine! I have taken a look at your presentation.

Overall it looks quite good, underneath I will give some comments. Please note they might sound critical, but I give them to help you prepare for your defence because you will get difficult questions.



Interviewed businesses and organisations

- | Hotels | Digital technology providers | Conference centre |
|---|--|---|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none">• A sustainable hotel chain with 4 hotels in total fully based in The Netherlands• A hotel part of Accor group• A family owned hotel part of a relatively small franchise• Two independent boutique hotels | <ul style="list-style-type: none">• MEWS• Hoteliers• Revinate• Apaleo | <ul style="list-style-type: none">• NGO |



Technical expertise

- SMEs in the hospitality sector often lack people with technical expertise required to install and maintain digital technologies successfully.
- Providers mention that working with client facing employees makes the implementation process longer compared with a designated IT department.
- Some SMEs might not see the value in adopting digital technology because of the needed effort.
- General managers do not consider the adoption of new technologies to be a difficult procedure, but the implementation process can bring about a change in employee behaviour.
- Most digital technology providers offer additional support and trainings, which should motivate the SMEs to get their product.



Appendix 9: Data upload confirmation

First upload:

LYCar data upload error   

 Marija Paulaviciute     
To: Research Hotelschool The Hague Wed 12/04/2023 14:26

Hello,

I have been trying to upload the transcripts of my LYCar company project interviews onto the data upload site and somehow, I get an error every time I try to do so. Please see in the picture below. The transcripts are extracted from Otter.ai website and come in a .txt format.

I have clicked on the link on Myhotelschool and it transferred me to this website and the first 3 rows were already filled in. My last name has some special characters and I thought it was because of them, but even when I write it correctly myself, I still get the same error.

I hope you can help me with this.
Kind regards,
Marija

 Marija Paulaviciute Thu 13/04/2023 11:25
Dear Ms Snapkovskaya, Thank you for your quick reply. Even after shrinking the files the uploading still doesn't work (although the files were only 20kb initially, which seems like a very ...

 Research Hotelschool The Hague     
To: Marija Paulaviciute Thu 13/04/2023 12:14

Dear Marija,
Sure, please send them all to me, I will upload it.
Kind regards,
Ludmila

...

 Marija Paulaviciute 
Dear Ludmila, Please find attached the first set of files. Let me know if you have received them and everything is fine. Kind regards, Marija Wed 19/04/2023 19:38

 Research Hotelschool The Hague     
To: Marija Paulaviciute Thu 20/04/2023 15:06

Dear Marija,

All received and stored now.
I understand there will be more files come?
Kind regards,
Ludmila

...

Final upload:

☑ **Focused** Other Filter

Today

-  noreply
File Upload Notification 09:16
Dear Marija Paulavi?i?t?, This is an au...
-  noreply
File Upload Notification 09:16
Dear Marija Paulavi?i?t?, This is an au...
-  noreply
File Upload Notification 09:16
Dear Marija Paulavi?i?t?, This is an au...

 noreply <noreply@hotelschool.nl>      

To:  Marija Paulaviciute Fri 05/05/2023 09:16

Dear Marija Paulavi?i?t?,

This is an automatic delivery message to notify you that a new file has been uploaded.

Name : Marija Paulavi?i?t?
Student Number : 791105
Email : 791105@hotelschool.nl
LYCar Coach : Mr Villanueva
Research Number : 2023-121

We kindly request you to forward this email to your LYCar coach as evidence that your data files have been uploaded securely.
Thank You.

 Reply  Forward

Appendix 10: Client evaluation form

LYCar research findings

Marija Paulaviciute
To: Schmidt, A.L. Dr. Tue 02/05/2023 15:01

Digital readiness of Hospitali... 2 MB
Deliverable Client Evaluation ... 131 KB

2 attachments (2 MB) Save all to OneDrive - Hotelschool Den Haag Download all

Dear Dr Schmidt,

I hope you are doing well.

As I am approaching my thesis submission date next Monday, I am finishing my research and therefore, as discussed, would like to share my main findings with you. It includes outcomes of the 10 interviews that I have done with various hospitality businesses and hospitality digital technology providers. My aim was to identify the current level of digital readiness in The Netherlands, point out the motivating factors and barriers, popular practices in the industry and then establish a framework helping these businesses to increase their digital readiness level.

As you may have seen, I have created and shared an infographic on my LinkedIn and will be sharing the above presentation/parts of my thesis with the same interviewees.



Evaluation Form Company Project/Research

(EVALUATION FORM OF ALL CLIENTS AND ON ALL DELIVERABLES IS COMPULSORY, FORMAT IS NOT)

Name of student:	Marija Paulavičiūtė	Student number:	791105
Name of company/organisation:	Hotelschool The Hague	Department:	Research Centre
Name of company tutor/research commissioner:	Dr. AL Schmidt	Position of company tutor/commissioner (if applicable):	Lector Technological Innovation
Project and/or Deliverable: (please specify)	Report on the digital readiness of hospitality SMEs in The Netherlands		
During the first (unofficial) evaluation the set-up for the project and end deliverable(s) is discussed. For this final evaluation the project has been delivered by the student and is thus evaluated. This is taken into consideration for the final assessment of the student.			

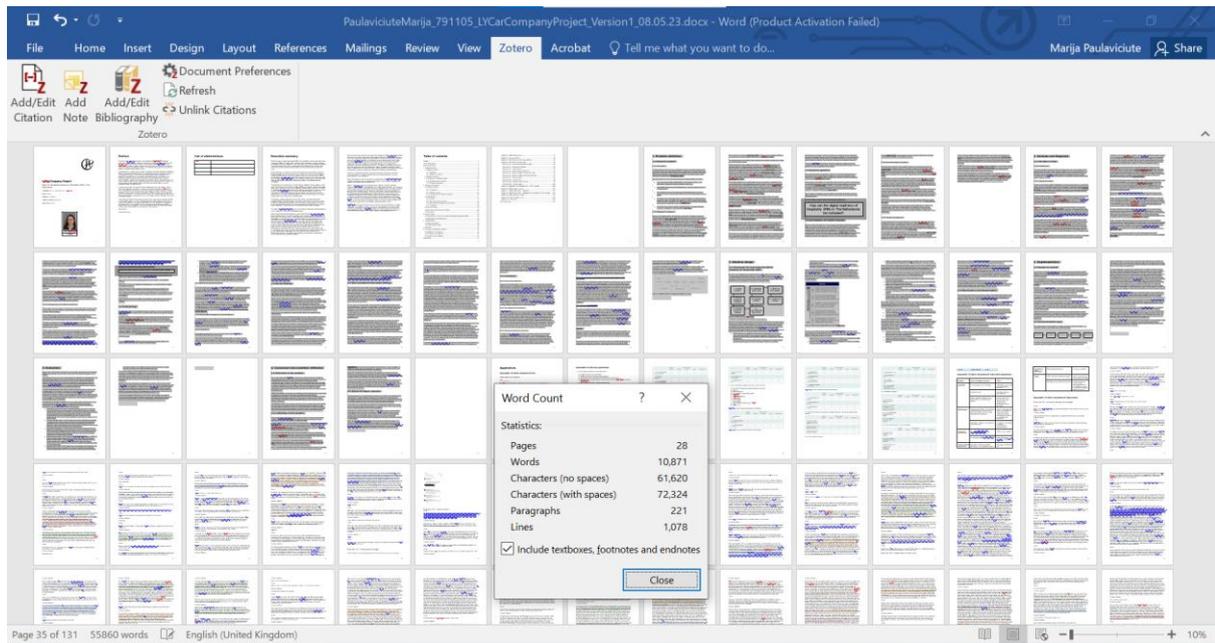
CATEGORY 1: EXPERTISE/KNOWLEDGE OF THE FIELD				
Rating	Excellent	Good	Room for improvement	Comments
Good	In-depth use of relevant literature and knowledge of the field. The deliverable shows excellent thinking capacity of the student (considering all significant factors and looking from all different perspectives).	Use of relevant literature and knowledge of the field. The deliverable shows mostly intellectual depth (considering significant factors and looking from different perspectives).	No or incorrect use of literature and knowledge of the field. The deliverable lacks intellectual depth.	You have interviewed a number of different decision makers in the field. However, links to literature are missing.

CATEGORY 2: KNOWLEDGE APPLICATION/SOLVING PROBLEMS				
Rating	Excellent	Good	Room for improvement	Comments
Good/Room for improvement	The theories and models are skillfully applied and the student can translate this in a unique solution and implementation. The student can relate situations to concepts that results into a solution that adds great value to the company's overall strategy. The creative solution is/can be implemented and evaluated and is solving the problem.	The student uses theory, models, and shows understanding of the issues at hand. The solution is realistic and implementable for the company. The solution is/can be implemented and evaluated.	Mentioning theory and models, but not using them in the correct way. The student cannot convince of the possibilities to implement and evaluate. It is not solving the problem.	You are building on Kotlers change management model, which you – however – not adapt/specify to the digitalization project. How do you convince me (the company) that the steps of Kotler are the relevant one for digitalization journeys? You are missing an opportunity to be more convincing. The maturity model comes out of the blue, while being relevant and seemingly fitting, though.

CATEGORY 3: INFORMED JUDGEMENTS				
Rating	Excellent	Good	Room for improvement	Comments
Good	The research process is done and explained in an excellent way. All statements, conclusions and recommendations are underpinned with the data collected by the students and/or referencing. The analysis is very substantial.	The research process is done and explained well. Most statements, conclusions and recommendations are underpinned with the data collected by the student and/or referencing. The analysis is substantial.	Weak problem analysis, research question not clear enough. Data collection and/or methodology is insufficient. Weak analysis, use of data from one dimension and not backed up.	Good and precise overview of the interviewed organizations. A more detailed/transparent presentation is missing (e.g., which questions were asked? Why those companies?)
CATEGORY 4: COMMUNICATION AND SHARING KNOWLEDGE				
Rating	Excellent	Good	Room for improvement	Comments
Good	Excellent ability to communicate information, ideas, problems and solutions to all stakeholders involved. The deliverable adds great value to the main stakeholders. Initial and creative channels have been actively used to share outputs and knowledge.	Good ability to communicate information, ideas, problems and solutions to stakeholders. The deliverable adds value to the company. Existing channels have been used to share knowledge	The deliverable could have been better delivered to the stakeholders. The deliverable could have added more value, if better delivered. No active communication of outputs and knowledge.	Generally good structure. I am missing a more condensed form of presentation, i.e., through using tables or figures to compress written information. IN the current form, the report remains ok – but not very visually appealing.
CATEGORY 5: INTERCULTURAL HOSPITALITY LEADERSHIP				
Rating	Excellent	Good	Room for improvement	Comments
Good	Student can lead the project by themselves. Student is self-critical towards improvement and takes feedback to heart. Student deals with a diversity of stakeholders in an intercultural competent way. Hospitality mindset is seen in project or work in a very distinct way.	Student can lead the project with little help. Student is critical towards improvement and listens to feedback. Student deals with different stakeholders. Hospitality mindset can be seen.	Tasks performed are described and not critically analyzed. Student is not too critical towards own learning and can listen better to feedback. Student does not know how to deal with differences in stakeholders. Hospitality can be improved.	Good hospitality mindset. However, your double responsibilities have had their impact. The variety of interview stakeholders underlines your capability to deal/approach different parties in the hospitality sector.
OVERALL COMMENTS:				
Generally rich report and relevant solution, which lacks specificity (i.e., adaption of general change management models). A stronger links to your findings (e.g., though quotes, numbers) would have underpinned your report better.				
STUDENTS' COMMENTS:				
Comments on evaluation:				
DATE & STUDENT'S SIGNATURE:			COMPANY SUPERVISOR'S/RESEARCH COMMISSIONER'S SIGNATURE:	
 05-05-2023			 05.05.2023	

THE COMPLETED FORMS (ON ALL DELIVERABLES AND PERFORMANCE) NEED TO BE EMAILED TO THE LYCAR COACH AND PUT IN THE APPENDICES OF THE CAREER PORTFOLIO

Appendix 11: Word count



$$10871+89+18=10978$$

List of references

Aktas, M., 2023, *What is Kotter's 8 Step Change Management Model (All you need to know)* Available at: <https://userguiding.com/blog/kotters-8-step-change-model/> (Accessed 26 April 2023).

Alecu, E., 2013 New determinant factors of change management in the hospitality industry. , 13(4), pp.10–23.

Ali, B.J. and Anwar, G., 2021 The Mediation Role of Change Management in Employee Development. Available at: <https://papers.ssrn.com/abstract=3834721> (Accessed 9 March 2023).

Auguste, J., 2013 Applying Kotters 8-Step Process for Leading Change to the Digital Transformation of an Orthopedic Surgical Practice Group in Toronto, Canada. *Journal of Health & Medical Informatics*, 04(03), pp.1–4.

Aydin, G., 2020 Social media engagement and organic post effectiveness: A roadmap for increasing the effectiveness of social media use in hospitality industry. *Journal of Hospitality Marketing & Management*, 29(1), pp.1–21.

Bemile, R., Achampong, A. and Danquah, E., 2014 Online Hotel Reservation System. , 1(9), pp.34–60.

Bharwani, S., Mathews, D. and Ghura, A.S., 2019 Business model innovation in the Indian hospitality industry: A study of the willingness to outsource specialty restaurants in luxury hotels. *Worldwide Hospitality and Tourism Themes*, 11(4), pp.362–377.

Bonfanti, A., Vigolo, V. and Yfantidou, G., 2021 The impact of the Covid-19 pandemic on customer experience design: The hotel managers' perspective. *International Journal of Hospitality Management*, 94(10), pp.28–71.

Bonte, D., 2022, *Council Post: Checking In—The Hotel Industry Embraces Higher-Tech Hospitality* Available at: <https://www.forbes.com/sites/forbestechcouncil/2022/11/22/checking-in-the-hotel-industry-embraces-higher-tech-hospitality/> (Accessed 23 April 2023).

Breier, M. et al., 2021 The role of business model innovation in the hospitality industry during the COVID-19 crisis. *International Journal of Hospitality Management*, 92(10), pp.23–27.

Bucciarelli, E., Odoardi, I. and Muratore, F., 2010 What role for education and training in technology adoption under an advanced socio-economic perspective? *Procedia - Social and Behavioral Sciences*, 9, pp.573–578.

Car, T., Pilepić Stifanich, L. and Šimunić, M., 2019 Internet of things (IOT) in tourism and hospitality: opportunities and challenges. *Tourism in Southern and Eastern Europe*, 17(5), pp.163–173.

Carlisle, S., Ivanov, S. and Dijkmans, C., 2021 The digital skills divide: evidence from the European tourism industry. *Journal of Tourism Futures*, ahead-of-print(ahead-of-print). Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1108/JTF-07-2020-0114> (Accessed 24 April 2023).

Carol, T., 2016 Why Choose Qualitative Research over Quantitative Research? *Medium*. Available at: <https://medium.com/@thomascarol1988/why-choose-qualitative-research-over-quantitative-research-8cf3141d99a5> (Accessed 2 May 2023).

CBS, 2021, *Trade, hotels and restaurants* Available at: <https://www.cbs.nl/en-gb/economy/trade-hotels-and-restaurants> (Accessed 9 February 2023).

Chong, S. et al., 2019 The role of small- and medium-sized enterprises in the Dutch economy: an analysis using an extended supply and use table. *Journal of Economic Structures*, 8(1), p.8.

Christ-Brendemühl, S., 2022 Bridging the gap: An interview study on frontline employee responses to restaurant technology. *International Journal of Hospitality Management*, 102(10), pp.31–83.

Cobanoglu, C., Berezina, K., Kasavana, M.L. and Erdem, M., 2011 The Impact of Technology Amenities on Hotel Guest Overall Satisfaction. *Journal of Quality Assurance in Hospitality & Tourism*, 12(4), pp.272–288.

Dierckx, M.A.F. and Stroeken, J.H.M., 1999 Information Technology and Innovation in Small and Medium-Sized Enterprises. *Technological Forecasting and Social Change*, 60(2), pp.149–166.

Dignon, A., 2023, *Five Biggest Challenges Facing The Hospitality Industry in 2023 | Trail* Available at: <https://trailapp.com/blog/five-biggest-challenges-facing-the-hospitality-industry-in-2023> (Accessed 9 February 2023).

Editors, H.T.N., 2022 Research: 73% of Travelers More Likely to Choose Hotels Offering Self-Service Tech |. Available at: <https://hoteltechnologynews.com/2022/06/research-73-of-travelers-more-likely-to-choose-hotels-offering-self-service-tech/> (Accessed 23 April 2023).

Epsilon, R., 2023, *Council Post: The Case For Change Management In The Hospitality Industry* Available at: <https://www.forbes.com/sites/forbestechcouncil/2023/02/01/the-case-for-change-management-in-the-hospitality-industry/> (Accessed 16 April 2023).

Esposito, M., 2017, *Change management in SMEs - News & insight* Available at: <https://www.jbs.cam.ac.uk/insight/2017/change-management-in-smes/> (Accessed 1 May 2023).

Grant Thornton UK, 2019, *Business model innovation | Hotel's roadmap to 2020* Available at: <https://www.grantthornton.co.uk/globalassets/1.-member-firms/united-kingdom/pdf/publication/2016/business-model-innovation-hotels-roadmap-to-2020.pdf> (Accessed 5 February 2023).

Ham, S., Kim, W. and Jeong, S., 2005 Effect of information technology on performance in upscale hotels. *International Journal of Hospitality Management*, 24, pp.281–294.

Hertog, P.D., Gallouj, F. and Segers, J., 2011 Measuring innovation in a 'low-tech' service industry: the case of the Dutch hospitality industry. *The Service Industries Journal*, 31(9), pp.1429–1449.

Hilkenmeier, F., Fechtelpeter, C. and Decius, J., 2021 How to foster innovation in SMEs: evidence of the effectiveness of a project-based technology transfer approach. *The Journal of Technology Transfer*. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10961-021-09913-x> (Accessed 5 April 2023).

- Hoover, L., 2021, *What Is Qualitative vs. Quantitative Study?* Available at: <https://www.gcu.edu/blog/doctoral-journey/what-qualitative-vs-quantitative-study> (Accessed 2 May 2023).
- Hotho, S. and Champion, K., 2011 Small businesses in the new creative industries: innovation as a people management challenge. *Management Decision*, 49(1), pp.29–54.
- Hovenier, R.G., 2021, *Dynamic capabilities and business model innovation in the Dutch hospitality industry : a multiple case study in times of strategic disruption following COVID measures in 2020* Available at: <http://essay.utwente.nl/88363/> (Accessed 12 February 2023).
- Kansakar, P., Munir, A. and Shabani, N., 2019 Technology in the Hospitality Industry: Prospects and Challenges. *IEEE Consumer Electronics Magazine*, 8(3), pp.60–65.
- Kim, S. (Sam) et al., 2021 Preference for robot service or human service in hotels? Impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic. *International Journal of Hospitality Management*, 93(11), pp.27–34.
- Klein, V.B. and Todesco, J.L., 2021 COVID-19 crisis and SMEs responses: The role of digital transformation. *Knowledge and Process Management*, 28(2), pp.117–133.
- Lam, C. and Law, R., 2019 Readiness of upscale and luxury-branded hotels for digital transformation. *International Journal of Hospitality Management*, 79, pp.60–69.
- Lam, T., Cho, V. and Qu, H., 2007 A study of hotel employee behavioral intentions towards adoption of information technology. *International Journal of Hospitality Management*, 26(1), pp.49–65.
- Landry, L., 2020 Business Model Innovation: What It Is & Why It's Important. *Northeastern University Graduate Programs*. Available at: <https://www.northeastern.edu/graduate/blog/implementing-business-model-innovation/> (Accessed 9 February 2023).
- Lau, A., 2020 New technologies used in COVID-19 for business survival: Insights from the Hotel Sector in China. *Information Technology & Tourism*, 22(4), pp.497–504.
- Lazarević-Moravčević, M., Slavica, S. and Grozdana, B., 2014 Specifics of Management in Small and Medium-Size Enterprises in Serbia. *Economic Analysis*, 47(3).
- Lee, J., 2008 An Overview of change management in the hospitality industry. *UNLV Theses, Dissertations, Professional Papers, and Capstones*. Available at: <https://digitalscholarship.unlv.edu/thesesdissertations/547>.
- Ludin, D., Holler, M., Wellbrock, W. and Mueller, E., 2022 How COVID-19 Accelerates Business Model Innovation and Digital Technological Transformation in the Hospitality Industry: A Focus on Restaurants in Baden–Wuerttemberg. *International Journal of Innovation and Technology Management*, 19(06), p.2242002.
- Mander, J., 2022, *Qualitative & Quantitative Research Methods* Available at: <https://blog.gwi.com/trends/qualitative-vs-quantitative/> (Accessed 2 May 2023).
- McGinley, S., Wei, W., Zhang, L. and Zheng, Y., 2021 The State of Qualitative Research in Hospitality: A 5-Year Review 2014 to 2019. *Cornell Hospitality Quarterly*, 62(1), pp.8–20.

- Momani, A.M., Alsakhnini, M. and Hanaysha, J.R., 2022 Emerging Technologies and Their Impact on the Future of the Tourism and Hospitality Industry. *International Journal of Information Systems in the Service Sector (IJISSS)*, 14(1), pp.1–18.
- Muller, C., 2010 Hospitality technology: a review and reflection B. DiPietro, R. and 'Raymond' Wang, Y., (eds.). *Worldwide Hospitality and Tourism Themes*, 2(1), pp.9–19.
- Müller, J.M., 2019 Business model innovation in small- and medium-sized enterprises: Strategies for industry 4.0 providers and users. *Journal of Manufacturing Technology Management*, 30(8), pp.1127–1142.
- Nikopoulou, M. et al., 2023 Determinants of Digital Transformation in the Hospitality Industry: Technological, Organizational, and Environmental Drivers. *Sustainability*, 15(3), p.2736.
- OECD, 2021 *SMEs Going Digital: Policy challenges and recommendations*,
- Ogbonna, E. and Harris, L.C., 2002 Managing organisational culture: insights from the hospitality industry. *Human Resource Management Journal*, 12(1), pp.33–53.
- O’Hea, K., 2011 Digital Capability: How to Understand, Measure, Improve and Get Value from it. *IVI Executive Briefing Series*. Available at: <https://mural.maynoothuniversity.ie/6396/> (Accessed 13 March 2023).
- Papadopoulos, T., Baltas, K.N. and Balta, M.E., 2020 The use of digital technologies by small and medium enterprises during COVID-19: Implications for theory and practice. *International Journal of Information Management*, 55(5), pp.21–34.
- Ruel, H. and Njoku, E., 2020 AI redefining the hospitality industry. *Journal of Tourism Futures*, 7(1), pp.53–66.
- Shaik, J. et al., 2018 Digital marketing in hotel industry. *International Journal of Engineering & Technology*, 7, p.288.
- Shapoval, V. et al., 2021 The COVID-19 pandemic effects on the hospitality industry using social systems theory: A multi-country comparison. *International Journal of Hospitality Management*, 94(9), pp.13–28.
- Sharma, A., Shin, H., Santa-María, M.J. and Nicolau, J.L., 2021 Hotels’ COVID-19 innovation and performance. *Annals of Tourism Research*, 88, p.103180.
- Shen, S., Xu, K., Sotiriadis, M. and Wang, Y., 2022 Exploring the factors influencing the adoption and usage of Augmented Reality and Virtual Reality applications in tourism education within the context of COVID-19 pandemic. *Journal of Hospitality, Leisure, Sport & Tourism Education*, 30(14), pp.3–15.
- Souto, J.E., 2015 Business model innovation and business concept innovation as the context of incremental innovation and radical innovation. *Tourism Management*, 51, pp.142–155.
- Spencer, A.J., Buhalis, D. and Moital, M., 2012 A hierarchical model of technology adoption for small owner-managed travel firms: An organizational decision-making and leadership perspective. *Tourism Management*, 33(5), pp.1195–1208.
- Tabrizi, B., Lam, E., Girard, K. and Irvin, V., 2019, *Digital Transformation Is Not About Technology* Available at: <https://hbr.org/2019/03/digital-transformation-is-not-about-technology>.

Tong-On, P., Siripipatthanakul, S. and Phayaphrom, B., 2021 The Implementation of Business Intelligence Using Data Analytics and Its Effects Towards on Performance in the Hotel Industry in Thailand. Available at: <https://papers.ssrn.com/abstract=3944077> (Accessed 27 April 2023).

Torres, A., 2016 Electronic Menu and Ordering Application System: A Strategic Tool for Customer Satisfaction and Profit Enhancement. *International Journal of u- and e-Service, Science and Technology*, 9, pp.401–410.

Trepanier, S., 2021, *Change management in the Hospitality industry - Hotello* Available at: <https://hotello.com/en/change-management-hospitality-industry/> (Accessed 12 March 2023).

Trongtorsak, S., Saraubon, K. and Nilsook, P., 2021 Collaborative Experiential Learning Process for Enhancing Digital Entrepreneurship. *Higher Education Studies*, 11(1), pp.137–147.

Tussyadiah, I., 2020 A review of research into automation in tourism: Launching the Annals of Tourism Research Curated Collection on Artificial Intelligence and Robotics in Tourism. *Annals of Tourism Research*, 81(2), pp.28–41.

Ukpabi, D.C. and Karjaluto, H., 2017 Consumers' acceptance of information and communications technology in tourism: A review. *Telematics and Informatics*, 34(5), pp.618–644.

Valsamidis, S.I., Maditinos, D. and Mandilas, A., 2019 Innovative Business Models in Tourism Industry. *Proceedings INNODOCT/19. International Conference on Innovation, Documentation and Education*. 16 December 2019 Valencia, 2019-12-16, Universitat Politècnica de València.

Venkatesh, V., Thong, J.Y.L. and Xu, X., 2012 Consumer Acceptance and Use of Information Technology: Extending the Unified Theory of Acceptance and Use of Technology. *MIS Quarterly*, 36(1), pp.157–178.

Verhoef, M.J. and Casebeer, A.L., 1997 Broadening horizons: Integrating quantitative and qualitative research. *The Canadian Journal of Infectious Diseases*, 8(2), pp.65–66.

Vérité, C., 2022, *Record-high labor shortage in the Netherlands: more vacancies than people looking for a job* Available at: <https://www.newsandip.com/record-high-labor-shortage-in-the-netherlands-more-vacancies-than-people-looking-for-a-job/> (Accessed 5 April 2023).

Vieira, B.M., Borges, A.P. and Vieira, E.P., 2023 The role of social networks for decision-making about tourism destinations. *International Journal of Internet Marketing and Advertising*, 18(1), p.1.

Yu, C.-E., 2020 Humanlike robots as employees in the hotel industry: Thematic content analysis of online reviews. *Journal of Hospitality Marketing & Management*, 29(1), pp.22–38.

Zeng, Z., Chen, P.-J. and Lew, A.A., 2020 From high-touch to high-tech: COVID-19 drives robotics adoption. *Tourism Geographies*, 22(3), pp.724–734.