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IT Innovations That Generate Revenue and Get You More Customers

– Katherine Walsh, CIO

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Hilton Hotels: 24-Hour Party People

Letting customers do something themselves is often the best way to their heart. Tim Harvey, CIO and executive VP of global distribution services at Hilton Hotels, kept that vision of customer satisfaction through self-service in mind as he set out to improve the \$8.1 billion hotel chain's online booking channel. Harvey's vision, e-Events, is now a reality, and a CIO 100 Award winner. The proprietary website, which lets customers book up to 25 rooms for events, conferences and parties, reserve meeting spaces, order food and drink, and reserve audio/visual equipment—all online—is the most comprehensive one-stop shopping application in the hospitality industry.



Tim Harvey, CIO and executive VP of global distribution services at Hilton Hotels

Harvey says all of this was made possible by integrating multiple business capabilities into one enterprisewide technology platform, OnQ. The key to the project's success, according to Harvey, lies in combining the power of systems such as reservations, CRM, BI and a revenue management system that optimizes pricing while displaying inventory availability.

As is the case with almost any project of this scope and scale, Harvey ran into resistance. For example, sales, Harvey says, which is focused on selling as many rooms at the best price as possible, was loath to put this process in the hands of customers. But Harvey set out to prove that e-Events wouldn't result in a loss of control for the sales arm. He argued that e-Events simply opened a new sales channel, allowing customers to book directly and take advantage of all of [Hilton's](#) products; sales would still control inventory availability and pricing.

Harvey says customer satisfaction is booming. Previously, planners booking group meetings could call only during business hours and often had to wait for salespeople to return their calls. For Hilton, that meant the possibility that customers would turn elsewhere. But Harvey says that last year e-Events, which was fully deployed in April 2006 at a cost of \$1.5 million, generated \$2.6 million in new revenue. It's expected to bring in \$19 million this year, and \$65 million in 2008—an ROI worthy of the Presidential Suite.

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