

# THE SCIENCE OF A DIRECT BOOKING: HOW TO CHOOSE THE RIGHT WEBSITE CMS TECHNOLOGY

## THE COMPLETE GUIDE TO SELECTING THE NEXT CONTENT MANAGEMENT SYSTEM FOR YOUR HOTEL WEBSITE





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## THE ROAD TO A DIRECT BOOKING STARTS WITH A POWERFUL WEBSITE CMS TECHNOLOGY

For hotels, the direct booking channel is ever-important. As the path-to-purchase for consumers becomes increasingly complicated across multiple channels and multiple devices, your hotel website must be more than a “pretty face” or read as a static brochure.

The right CMS technology helps engage, retain, and acquire past and future guests. Without it, you seriously jeopardize direct revenue, especially in this time of flattening occupancy rates and increasing distribution costs. The real long-term cost of choosing the wrong CMS technology is a dramatic increase in OTA dependency, higher distribution costs, lower revenues, and lower customer engagement.

A successful hotel website incorporates the right balance of excellent design, state-of-the-art CMS technology, robust merchandising capabilities, and engaging visual and textual content, while providing an optimized user experience from top to bottom.

### **A hotel website CMS is essential for:**

Driving revenue for need periods and occupancy demands by targeting feeder markets and market segments, past guests, and in-market travelers via real-time control of content and promotions

Increasing direct bookings via enhanced merchandising capabilities, content personalization, and reservation abandonment applications.

Engaging past and future guests throughout the complete customer life cycle.

Showcasing the property product and amenities via responsive design and ability to add multiple designs and mini-sites, as well as change the design and page layout quickly and easily.

Ensuring robust SEO performance with easy implementation to meta data, schema, and more.

### **Can your CMS do that?**

We'll take a look at what your hotel website CMS needs to ensure that it's ready for success.

## NAVIGATING THE CHALLENGES OF FINDING THE RIGHT WEBSITE CMS

Before researching and comparing CMS technology options, it's important to evaluate and assess the state of your current CMS. What are the day-to-day bottlenecks you encounter when managing your website content? Which business or operational needs is your current CMS not able to solve?

Another major consideration when choosing your next CMS is finding a technology solution that is tailored for the hospitality industry. Many CMS solutions do not have features and functionalities that are essential in driving direct bookings and selling the overall hotel experience (e.g. featuring real-time rates on the website, modules to showcase room types, interactive maps of things to do, etc.).



### CONTENT CHALLENGES

Lack of full content control (visual, textual, promotional) and hotel-specific features that are easily updated via the CMS:

- Promo tiles, special offers and packages
- New landing pages
- Main image rotations and animations on every page
- Interactive maps
- Calendar of events/happenings
- "Hot Dates & Hot Rates" groups/meetings calendar
- Imbedded videos

### TECHNOLOGY CHALLENGES

Lack of technology features that affect ease of use and meet stringent security standards:

- Ability to change/revamp site navigation
- Ability to publish new landing pages
- Ability to change website design themes and page layouts on the fly
- Support of technical SEO
- User permissions for quality assurance
- Secure cloud hosting with fast download speeds
- Ability to integrate with booking engine/ CRS, RFP, loyalty program, dining and spa reservations, social media feeds, live weather, and more.

### ECOMMERCE CHALLENGES

Lack of merchandising features that help sell rooms and drive direct bookings:

- Ability to have every web page sell and upsell via main image promo slides, marketing messages, promotional banners with real-time rates/availability feed, special offer and package landing pages, and more
- Automated targeting with dynamic promotions to website visitors based on feeder market origin, language, past website behavior, booking history, and more.
- Modules to showcase room types
- Loyalty program integration and gated rates
- Reservation abandonment applications

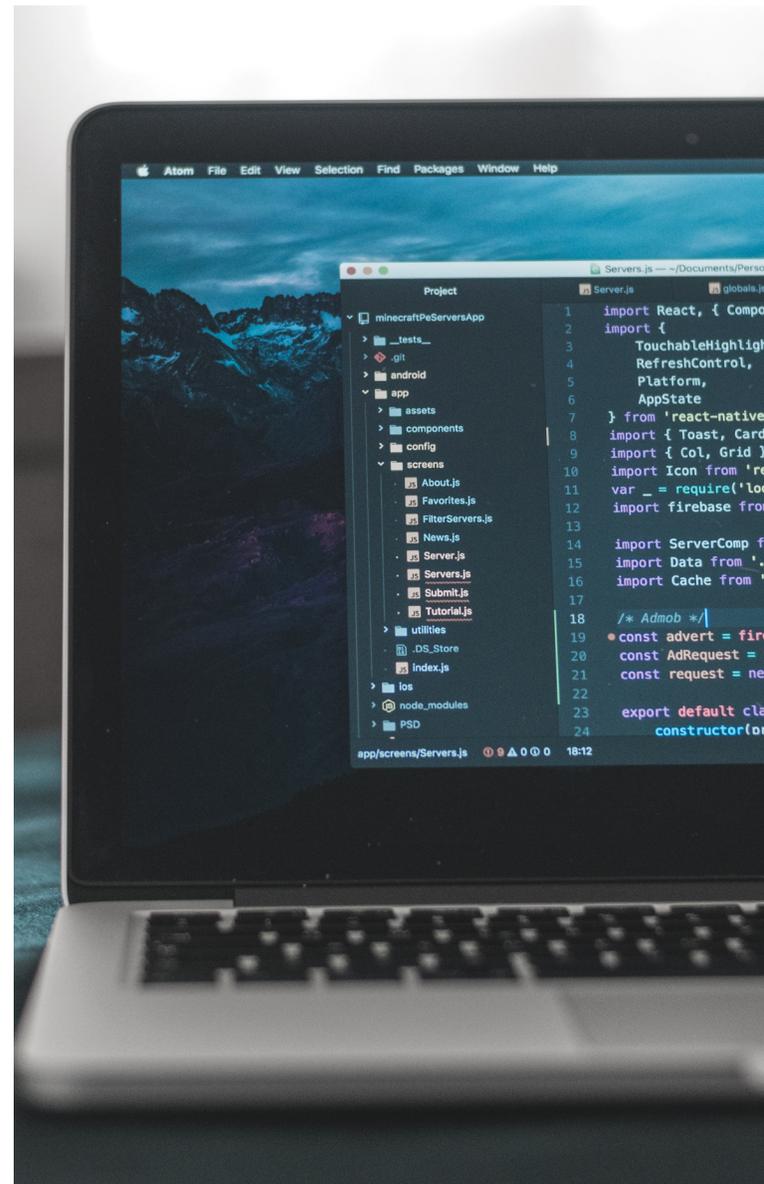
## AUDITING YOUR CURRENT WEBSITE CMS TECHNOLOGY

We've covered the main challenges you may be facing with your current CMS technology. Now let's review the main obstacles that far too many hoteliers face when managing their website to see how your current CMS technology stacks up.

### DO YOU HAVE THE RIGHT CMS TECHNOLOGY POWERING YOUR WEBSITE?

Here are some challenges your hotel website may be facing with its current website CMS technology:

- **Your CMS may not meet some or all of today's stringent security standards**
- **Your CMS lacks the functionality you need to tackle key business and occupancy needs**
- **Your CMS lacks ease of use and the ability to publish content across devices in one simple update**
- **Your CMS often requires IT intervention for content updates to publish properly.**
- **Your CMS lacks the ability to allow user permissions and restricted access to multiple admins**
- **Your CMS lacks functionalities and modules specifically designed for hospitality and hotel merchandising**
- **Your CMS lacks the ability to dynamically personalize special offers, packages, and promotions based on visitor data and guest profiles**
- **Your CMS is not SEO-friendly**
- **Your CMS is not cloud-based**
- **Your CMS lacks proper/seamless integrations with booking engine/CRS, RFP, loyalty program, dining and spa reservations, social media feeds, live weather, and more**



If the answer is “yes” to most of these challenges, it's time to consider upgrading to a CMS that meets today's marketplace and hospitality landscape demands.

## WHAT ARE THE REQUIREMENTS FOR SUCCESS?

If your CMS technology presents the challenges we just discussed, you should plan to upgrade to a new provider with a flexible platform to achieve your hotel's business needs and goals.

### YOUR WEBSITE CMS TECHNOLOGY SHOULD:

- Be a cloud-based system that allows your organization to concentrate on driving direct bookings rather than investing resources in managing IT infrastructure
- Be secure and protected from malicious hacking with hosting on a cloud-based scalable platform with fully integrated CDN for fast download speeds
- Be enabled with hospitality-specific capabilities and modules to drive direct bookings
- Be enabled for real-time automated targeting with dynamic promotions to website visitors
- Allow full content control (visual, promotional, textual) of every page on the property website plus the creation of unlimited content, promotional, group and marketing landing pages and content sections without the help of your IT team
- Allow for multiple website designs and page layouts to showcase your products and services (F&B, spa, event space, and more)
- Be fully compliant with the latest technical SEO best practices
- Have the ability to add new properties to multi-property and brand websites on the fly
- Be integrated with your website analytics platform
- Be properly/seamlessly integrated with your booking engine /CRS, RFP, loyalty program, dining and spa reservations, social media feeds, live weather and more
- Be easily upgradable as new technologies and enhancements emerge
- Allow CMS admins to manage the site successfully without the intervention of IT
- Allow your team to work together on a single platform, with common workflows



## CREATE, MANAGE, ENGAGE, OPTIMIZE

The right CMS technology should be the core of your digital strategy.

For any CMS technology to effectively increase conversions and drive direct bookings, it must provide the tools to create, manage, engage, and optimize. A great CMS will provide easy and powerful content creation tools, as well as features to easily administer workflows.

To truly engage potential guests, CMS technology must have the power to personalize and create meaningful digital experiences at your fingertips and allow you to optimize content throughout the path to purchase.

### Parlez-vous Français?

For a truly multilingual, global experience, your CMS technology should also provide the tools to personalize content in any language.



## VISUAL, TEXTUAL, & PROMOTIONAL CONTENT

Great CMS technology will allow for full control of content. It will include content automation features that give you the power to schedule, publish and un-publish content such as special offers, events, landing pages, and more.



### Visual Capabilities

- Serve as the depository for all digital and visual assets of the property to provide a centralized image library
- Ability to add multiple design, page layouts and website design themes to update the look-and-feel of the hotel website or content section on the fly
- Include full photo editing features such as cropping tools and image upload requirements for quality assurance
- Allow the publishing of unlimited image galleries on any page within the website (weddings, meetings, etc.)
- Schedule automated publishing and un-publishing of images and events
- Allow Hero Image editing and unlimited image rotation/animation on every page throughout the website

### Textual Capabilities

- Full control over website content
- Publish unlimited number of content, promotional and landing pages
- Editing features such as spell check and text formatting tools
- Scheduling automated publishing and un-publishing of landing pages

### Promotional Capabilities

- Adding marketing message overlays to hero images
- Unlimited publishing of promo tiles (i.e. onsite banners promoting special offers and packages)
- Unlimited publishing of special offer landing pages
- Ability to determine special offer order and hierarchy based on business needs and priorities
- Scheduling of automated publishing and un-publishing of special offers for need periods

## SEO CONTENT + TECHNICAL CAPABILITIES

Your CMS technology should include the following capabilities, aligned with SEO best practices:

### SEO Content

- Allow for the ongoing publishing of fresh, relevant content, including promotional landing pages, special offers and packages, events, and more
- Allow easy on-page SEO and H1/H2 header optimization on every page
- Allow easy on-page SEO with text editing features such as spell check and formatting tools
- Allow for easy internal linking between relevant landing pages

### SEO Technical Capabilities

- Support rich snippets, canonical programming and schema code implementation
- Allow for meta data optimization on every page
- Allow alt Keyword tags on all images
- Allow alt keyword tags on all videos



### Third-Party Technology Integrations

Integrates with any third-party solutions providers, as needed:

- **Booking Engine/CRS**
- **PMS**
- **RFP Vendors**
- **Loyalty Program Vendors**
- **Spa and Golf Reservations**
- **Dining Reservations**
- **Image Distribution Systems**
- **Social Media Feeds**
- **Weather Feed, Etc.**

## MERCHANDISING CAPABILITIES

The direct online channel offers limitless opportunities for the hotelier to present the hotel product and value proposition directly to travel consumers. A merchandising strategy that is centered on communicating the unique features of the property (hotel services, meeting and event space, latest promotions and special offers, local attractions, and more) and focuses less on the rate alone.

Your CMS should provide you with the technology to manage your merchandising strategy on your own and on the fly, showcase content on the prime real estate of the website, and personalize relevant content based on the user. These merchandising technology capabilities allow the hotel to “sell on value” as opposed to “sell on rate” and to maximize revenues on the hotel website like never before.

The merchandising capabilities of the CMS technology you are evaluating should include, at a minimum:

- **Special Offers/Packages: create, schedule, and share**
- **Promo Slides: easy to upload, with auto-publish and unpublish feature**
- **Content Personalization: Real-time automated targeting with dynamic promotions to website visitors**
- **Real-Time Room Rate Promotional Tiles: promote occupancy need periods**
- **Onsite Banners/Promotional Tiles: Create and schedule to promote most important specials offers/packages or immediate needs**
- **Marketing Messages in Main Image Window: ability to enable on every page**
- **Marketing & Landing Pages: Create unlimited number of landing pages on the fly**
- **Calendar of Events/Happenings: promote events at property and in destination**
- **Meeting/Weddings/Event RFP Functionality: with alert system and database management**

## CHOOSING A WEBSITE CMS TECHNOLOGY: HOW TO KNOW IF IT'S 'THE ONE'

One of the most important decisions you'll make in executing your digital strategy is choosing the right CMS technology. Without a holistic solution, your website conversion rate, distribution cost, and your overall "book direct" strategy will suffer, dramatically affecting your property's top-line revenue and bottom line.

As a hotel begins the process of selecting a new CMS technology, understanding the important factors to consider when selecting a vendor will help you choose the right partner and set you on the path to success.

### **Big Picture Factors to Consider:**

- **The CMS technology provider is not only a leader in technology but a leader in the hospitality industry, consistently launching CMS modules and features designed specifically for hotel direct distribution and marketing**
- **The CMS technology provider creates the tools for constant innovation and has the resources and technology to adapt to the rapidly evolving digital landscape**
- **The CMS technology provider can confidently demo the technology with different use cases that specifically answer your hotel's business and occupancy needs**
- **Your CMS technology provider is experienced in integrating with booking engines/CRS, PMS, RFP and loyalty technology vendors, spa and dining reservation technologies, Social Media Feeds, Weather feed, etc.**
- **The CMS technology provider isn't just a vendor. It's a strategic partner that not only offers award-winning CMS technology, but understands the complete customer lifecycle and how the CMS technology plays a role in the overall marketing mix to fuel the path to a booking.**
- **The CMS technology provider isn't *just* a website vendor, but a full-service digital technology, marketing and consulting firm specializing in hospitality and who can support your ongoing full-service digital marketing and direct channel strategy *post-website launch*.**

## EVALUATING USABILITY

Choosing the right CMS technology is an important decision that will determine the success of the new property website and the property's direct bookings, so its is vital to involve key stakeholders in the process. Who in your hotel organization will need to take part in evaluating the website CMS technology? Be sure to include team members that can evaluate the usability of the CMS technology objectively, and any team members who truly understand the importance of the CMS technology.



## THE TOP TEN QUESTIONS TO ENSURE WEBSITE SUCCESS

Before moving forward with a new CMS provider, it's important to do your homework. The answer to these ten important questions will determine if a vendor can truly meet your requirements and successfully increase direct bookings.

### 1) Does the CMS provider “understand” the unique needs of the hotelier?

The CMS provider should be focused on hospitality-specific capabilities that generic providers outside the industry are not equipped to handle. This includes but is not limited to e-commerce strategy (including real-time dynamic personalization and targeting of key feeder markets and market segments), merchandising via special offers, promotional tiles, real-time rate modules, interactive maps, dynamic calendar of events, dynamic booking widgets, CRS, RFP, loyalty program technology interfaces, social media feeds, reservation technology interfaces, and more. These elements work together to optimize conversions and drive direct bookings.

### 2) Is the CMS provider proprietary or open source?

Hoteliers are managing multi-million dollar properties. They have fiduciary responsibility to maximize the property's direct online channel presence, boost direct revenues, and lower the costs of online distribution. Utilizing an open source CMS like WordPress exposes them to great security and vulnerability risks that hotel managers and owners cannot afford. It's no wonder that all of the industry leaders, from Marriott to Hilton and Four Seasons, utilize proprietary CMS technology to power their websites.

### 3) Is the CMS provider e-commerce enabled?

The hotel website has a single objective: generate maximum bookings and revenue by properly positioning the hotel products and services and engaging past and future guests. From opening promotional slides and videos, marketing messages, “timed” promo tiles and banners that appear/disappear from the website, and dynamic personalization of special offers and promotions, the CMS provider must support a robust merchandising strategy.

### 4) Does the CMS provider support complete content management?

The CMS provider should provide hoteliers with full control over the content on the property website. By allowing the user to manage visual, promotional, and textual content at any time, the CMS becomes a valuable tool that enables hoteliers to address business needs in real time. The content on a hotel website should not be static; therefore, the hotelier should be able to easily create any piece of content at any time.

### 5) Does the CMS provider support responsive design?

The CMS provider must support responsive designs for all screens, including but not limited to desktop, tablet, smartphone, and iWatch as well as future screens such as automotive dashboards. Since today's hyper-interactive travel consumer uses multiple devices throughout the travel planning process, it is important to be able to manage content across screens in one simple update without requiring multiple instances of the content.

## THE TOP TEN QUESTIONS TO ENSURE WEBSITE SUCCESS

### **6) Does the CMS provider support multiple designs and page layouts?**

Different hotel products and services such as F&B, spa, event spaces, weddings, etc. require unique visuals and designs that are different from the “pure” hotel website designs. The website CMS technology must support multiple designs, design themes, page layouts and parallax mini-sites focused on unique product offerings of the property. At the same time, the website CMS technology should be enabled to change the look and feel of the hotel website with a “click of a button” or in an automated fashion (ex. switching from a “daytime” design to a “nighttime” design).

### **7) Does the CMS provider fully support technical SEO?**

To ensure the visibility of your website and its content on search engine results pages (SERPs), it is important that the CMS technology is in full compliance with the latest SEO best practices. In order to fully support technical SEO, the CMS technology should include Schema.org implementation support, automated XML sitemap for indexing, redirect capabilities, rich snippets and canonical programming, and URL modification and management.

### **8) Does the CMS provider utilize cloud hosting and a content delivery network (CDN)?**

When the CMS provider runs on a fast and scalable cloud hosting platform, the site performance is significantly enhanced with increased page download speeds and one seamless dashboard. The CMS technology should also utilize a CDN for fastest possible content delivery and a rich user experience.

### **9) Is the CMS provider integrated with the website analytics platform?**

The website CMS technology should be fully integrated with the website analytics platform, including automated coding of web analytics to any new content, landing or promotional page added to the website on the fly. This ensures that hoteliers can track and measure the performance of every piece of content, from a landing page to a promotional slide, and continue to update and hone their website content to drive more revenue.

### **10) Is the CMS provider supported by ongoing optimizations and new functionality developments?**

Website CMS technologies are constantly evolving and improving. Therefore the hotelier’s website CMS technology should be fully supported by ongoing code updates, capabilities enhancements and optimizations, and new functionalities as they arise. This will ensure that hoteliers can take advantage of the latest technology and constantly improve the overall performance, speed, and responsiveness of their website.

## YOUR MUST-HAVE TECHNICAL CHECKLIST

- Proprietary technology that is secure and protected from malicious hacking (as opposed to open source CMS platforms), hosted on a cloud-based scalable platform with fully integrated CDN for fast download speeds**
- Fully enabled for merchandising of the property's product and services, including room bookings, restaurant reservations, group and event RFPs, to convert lookers into bookers with automated time-based Special Offers publishing: assign "publish" and "un-publish" times and dates to special offers, packages and promotions to automatically appear and disappear from the site.**
- Focused on hospitality-specific capabilities and modules to drive direct bookings: special offers and packages modules, on-site display banners, real-time room rate promotions, room showcase modules, reservation retargeting and abandonment avoidance, CRS, RFP and loyalty program technology interfaces as needed, social media feeds, spa, golf and dining reservation technology interfaces, and more.**
- Allows dynamic content personalization enabling real-time automated targeting with dynamic promotions to website visitors based on feeder market origin, language preferences, previous website behavior, booking history, loyalty program affiliation, etc. to achieve true one-to-one marketing.**
- Allows full content control (visual, promotional, textual) of every page on the property website plus the creation of unlimited content, promotional, group and marketing landing pages and content sections.**
- Allows full support of responsive website design and ability to add multiple design, page layouts and website design themes to update the look-and-feel of the hotel website or content sections at the click of a button**
- Ability to add new properties to multi-property and brand websites on the fly with automatic addition of the new property to drop-down and search menus, reservation widgets and site maps.**
- Full compliance with the latest technical SEO best practices, including rich snippets, canonical programming and Schema.org implementation support**
- Integrated with your website analytics platform**
- Flexible and modular CMS technology, easily upgradable as new technologies and enhancements emerge**

## FINDING THE RIGHT WEBSITE CMS TECHNOLOGY

1. What are your top 3 business needs? Ex: increase occupancy, shift distribution from the OTAs, target meeting planners

1.

2.

3.

2. What must-have CMS features can help you achieve these goals? (Please check as many as apply.)

- Ability to publish unlimited content pages**
- Ability to publish unlimited group pages**
- Ability to publish unlimited special offers**
- Ability to publish unlimited landing pages**
- Scheduling automated publishing and un-publishing of landing pages**
- Dynamic content personalization based on website visitors and guest profiles**
- Hero Image Promo Slides with marketing message overlay**
- Ability to determine special offer order and hierarchy based on business needs and priorities**
- Schedule automated publishing and un-publishing of special offers for need periods**
- Unlimited image galleries on any page within the website**
- Automated publishing and un-publishing of images and events**
- Hero Image editing and unlimited image rotation on every page throughout the website**
- Support for multiple brands, properties, and sub-properties (e.g. restaurant, spa, casino)**
- Loyalty program integration**
- Unlimited private group landing pages for corporate, wedding and SMERF groups**
- Ability to interface with third-party technologies: Booking engine/CRS, PMS, RFP and loyalty programs; social media feeds; spa, golf and dining reservations, etc.**

3.. Which of these features are missing from your current CMS?

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4. Based on what you answered in #2 and #3, write down your top 5 must-have features.

→ *These are the absolute must-haves you should look for in a CMS.*

1. 

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2. 

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3. 

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4. 

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5. 

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## COMPETITIVE WEBSITE CMS TECHNOLOGY ANALYSIS

When evaluating a potential website CMS technology, it's important to compare and evaluate each website CMS technology based on a set of standard features and best practices. For each feature below, write a ✓ under the partner name if they offer this feature. Each ✓ = 5 points. Add up the points at the bottom. The partner with the most points provides the most holistic solution.

**Write in CMS partner names:** \_\_\_\_\_

Proprietary technology that is secure (not open source)			
A cloud-based system with CDN for fast download speeds			
Fully enabled for merchandising of the hotel product/ services			
Focused on hospitality-specific capabilities to drive direct bookings			
Enabled for automated targeting with dynamic promotions to website visitors			
Allows full content control (visual, promotional, textual) of every page on the property website			
Allows publishing on the fly of unlimited content and landing pages			
Allows adding of multiple design, page layouts and website design themes to update the look-and-feel of the hotel website on the fly			
Ability to add new properties to multi-property and brand websites on the fly			
Fully supports technical SEO			
Loyalty program integration			
Integrated with your website analytics platform			
Flexible and modular CMS technology, easily upgradable			
Ability to interface with third-party technologies: Booking engine/CRS, PMS, RFP and loyalty programs, social media feeds, spa, golf and dining reservations, etc.			
<b>Total:</b>			



## **ABOUT US**

Founded in 2001, the firm is headquartered in New York City and has global offices in Las Vegas, Tallinn, Munich, and Asia-Pacific. Through its Smart Guest Acquisition Suite, including the smartCMS®, Smart Personalization Engine, Smart Data Marketing, and full-service digital consulting and marketing solutions, HEBS Digital helps hoteliers drastically boost direct bookings, lower distribution costs, and increase the lifetime value of guests. Its diverse client portfolio consists of top-tier luxury and boutique hotel chains, independent hotels, resorts and casinos, franchised properties and hotel management companies, convention centers, spas, restaurants, DMO and tourist offices.

Part of NextGuest Technologies, HEBS Digital and Serenata CRM, the most comprehensive Hotel CRM Suite today, are the creators of the hospitality industry's first Fully-Integrated Guest Engagement & Acquisition Platform.