Business challenge

With its existing booking systems, Starwood Hotels & Resorts Worldwide, Inc. had no way to offer guests a customized experience.

Transformation

Starwood uses IBM Operational Decision Manager software to allow customers to select room location and features during booking, helping the company deliver the exact experience customers want.

Business benefits

80%
success in meeting
at least one customer preference

Increases
customer satisfaction
levels by speeding up check-in processes

Empowers
staff members
to change business rules quickly and easily

Starwood Hotels & Resorts Worldwide, Inc.

Improving customer engagement with a highly personalized experience

Founded in 1991, Starwood Hotels & Resorts Worldwide, Inc. operates and franchises more than 1,200 hotels, resorts and residences in nearly 100 countries under multiple brands, including St. Regis, The Luxury Collection, W, Westin, Le Méridien and Sheraton. Headquartered in Stamford, Connecticut, Starwood employs approximately 181,400 people worldwide.

"We believe that personalization is the next frontier that will differentiate us from our competitors."

—Josh Foure, Director of enterprise application architecture, Starwood Hotels & Resorts Worldwide, Inc.

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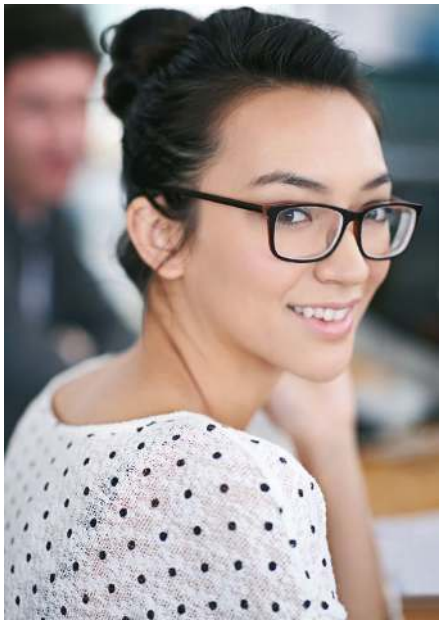
Personalizing travel experiences

To help drive customer loyalty and improve customer satisfaction levels, Starwood wanted to deliver a more customized travel experience. “We launched a personalization initiative at Starwood,” says Josh Foure, director of enterprise application architecture at Starwood. “We believe that personalization is the next frontier that will differentiate us from our competitors.”



However, with its existing booking systems, it could be challenging to meet customers’ requests. The system allowed a guest to select a room type and rate plan. However, each type of room could potentially be available in many locations, such as on different floors of a hotel, and guests could not easily provide guidance on their location preferences. In fact, when booking a stay on the web, guests’ only option for requesting a specific location, such as on a high floor or near the elevator, was to enter a comment in a text field. But if a hotel associate didn’t see the comment or didn’t speak the customer’s language, Starwood would not necessarily meet the request. Plus, the company had no way to track how frequently it satisfied these requests.

Offering greater choice

Starwood first undertook a major room cataloging effort to gather detailed information about all the rooms in its 1,200 properties. “We then identified around 80 criteria that we thought would make sense to ask our hotels globally, and then of those, we figured out which ones we wanted to enable for the properties,” says Foure.

Starwood implemented IBM Operational Decision Manager software to design and execute a set of business rules that allows customers to select room location, features and preparation through a web-based interface. The software also pulls membership data from the company's Starwood Preferred Guest program so that member preferences load automatically. With Operational Decision Manager software, Starwood can create rules to offer guests only the appropriate preferences for each property. For example, if a property only has one floor, the system will not offer customers preferences related to higher floors or distance from the elevator. The solution also allows Starwood to suggest preferences to patrons based on their membership status. For example, the system offers platinum members certain preferences not available to the general public.

After customers select their preferences, Operational Decision Manager software routes this information to the property the guest booked by using Starwood's existing IBM® WebSphere® MQ software. The organization also uses its IBM WebSphere DataPower® Integration Appliance XI52 and IBM WebSphere DataPower XC10 devices to provide integration between the company's central systems and each property's systems.

Improving customer satisfaction

With the solution, Starwood business staff can dynamically change business rules regularly based on new business initiatives because of Operational Decision Manager software's agility and easy-to-use rule authoring widget. The widget helps nontechnical users easily create and change business rules by providing an intuitive interface. "We wanted one interface where business staff could go in and manage everything about the preferences," says Foure. "So for us, the Operational Decision Manager widget was a key selling point."

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In the past, Starwood was unable to measure how often it met customer requests. Now, the business is on track to meet at least one preference for 80 percent of guest stays globally. Plus, because guests have specified their preferences at booking, before they arrive at the hotel, the check-in process is much more smooth and efficient, further improving customer satisfaction levels.

Solution components

- IBM Operational Decision Manager

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Take the next step

To learn more about IBM Operational Decision Manager software, please contact your IBM marketing representative or IBM Business Partner, or visit the following website: **ibm.com**/software/products/odm.

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