Technology: The Machine-Ready Hotel

What the show said about AI search, websites for machines, joined-up systems and automation.

5–6 October 2026

Olympia London · Technology

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Reading the Theme.

This report is organised by the ideas inside the theme, not by session or stage. Content from the Innovation Stage and the Hotel Business Stage of Independent Hotel Show London has been filtered for what speakers said about technology (AI, agentic search and booking, automation, systems integration, data, distribution and digital marketing) and grouped into six sub-themes.

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01 · EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Be Readable, Be Ready, Stay Human.

Technology ran through both stages of IH London 2026, from AI search to housekeeping allocation. Read together, the sessions returned to a handful of practical points: make the hotel readable to machines, get the data and systems in order, and keep people in charge of the guest.

Speakers on the Innovation Stage and the Hotel Business Stage described guests who now meet hotels through AI answers and social search, and a limited US rollout of agentic booking. Adam Hamadache of Formula said increasingly customers will see your AI shadow, AI's version of its understanding of the business.

What sat behind the website mattered too. Sandrine Zechbauer of RMS reported that nine in ten hoteliers surveyed rated their data below three out of five for AI. Rebecca Prizeman of The Watergate Bay Group described how a market review counted 12 solutions quickly and the group chose an architecture. Lee Bryan of eviivo said AI pricing needs a human override.

30%
Forecast share of travel bookings made by AI agents by 2030
IDC, cited by Sam Weston, 80 DAYS

50%
Approximate share of Google searches now featuring AI overviews
Adam Hamadache, Formula

35%+
Instagram and TikTok users who now start a search on the platforms
Alison Battisby, Avocado Social

9 in 10
Hoteliers rating their data below 3 out of 5 for AI readiness
Sandrine Zechbauer, RMS

9–12
Clicks, "kind of", for Claude to reach the rate and room details
Judi Blakeburn, Watergate Bay Hotel

SIX WAYS TECHNOLOGY SHOWED UP

1 **Websites gained a second audience.** Sam Weston said a site must inspire the human and inform the machine; in Judi Blakeburn's Claude test, getting to the rate, breakfast and room details took somewhere between 9 and 12 kind of clicks.

2 **Discovery moved into AI and social.** AI overviews appear on around 50 percent of Google searches (Hamadache), and over 35 percent of Instagram and TikTok users start a search on the platforms (Battisby).

3 **Readiness came up in two ways.** Nicola Longfield named operational readiness, not the technology, as the barrier; separately, Sandrine Zechbauer's survey found 83 percent reporting more operational stress from technology not working as it should.

4 **Automation came with an override.** Lee Bryan of eviivo said human intervention is part of a well-designed AI pricing system, and a panellist from The Headland Hotel described AI room lists for the whole hotel and cottage village in 17 seconds each morning.

5 **Data was pitched as making small budgets measurable.** Evan Saunders of Azira said mobile location data and AI can show whether an ad led to a stay, and that even small hotels or small chains can use it.

6 **The human layer stayed the edge.** Nicola Longfield said the human touch will be the differentiator because systems and automation will be standardised.

Asked if agent readiness is a today challenge, Judi Blakeburn answered:



It has to be a today.

JUDI BLAKEBURN · Advisor, Watergate Bay Hotel

02 · THEME FRAMING

What Technology Meant on Stage.

Technology at IH London 2026 was not one conversation. It showed up as AI search and agentic booking, automation, systems integration, data, distribution and digital marketing, in dedicated sessions and in sessions whose main subject was design, leadership or food and beverage. This page sets out what speakers meant by it.

The picture was practical. Few speakers treated technology as a goal in itself. Lee Bryan of eviivo closed the session on automation by saying the main takeaway is letting the technology work behind the scenes to give guests experiences to remember, and Judi Blakeburn of Watergate Bay Hotel described walking a booking journey through an AI agent as a lesson, because it showed what was missing for human customers as well.

DISCOVERY
Guests ask AI and search on social. AI overviews feature on around 50 percent of Google searches (Hamadache).

BOOKING
Agents can browse a hotel site and, in the US, book. Plain labels and short journeys matter (Weston, Wolfram).

FOUNDATIONS
Data, systems and skills. Nine in ten rated their data below three out of five (Zechbauer).

ROLES
Automation with an override, and the human touch as the edge (Bryan, Longfield).

Source · Cross-session synthesis of the Innovation Stage and Hotel Business Stage transcripts, IH London 2026. Speakers cited on the sub-theme pages that follow.

Two statements from Innovation Stage sessions frame this page. Sam Weston said that for the last 25 years the industry built websites for humans and now has to build for two audiences. Rebecca Prizeman's approach to the group's project was to prioritise ruthlessly and not put something live unless the whole journey around it is live, and the lesson Prizeman drew was that technology is not always the hardest part: bringing people along is.



I don't want to be talking about technology three years from now. I would just like to be talking about the experience it delivers to our guests.

Rebecca Prizeman · Group Head of Digital and Systems, The Watergate Bay Group, Another Place and SeaSpace

HOW THIS REPORT READS THE THEME

Where a session was only partly on-theme, only its on-theme portion is used. Where speakers disagreed, both positions are recorded. Every figure and statement is attributed to the speaker, or to the panel where the speaker is unclear, with the speaker's hedges kept, and forecasts are attributed to the firm the speaker cited. Where a recording was unclear, the point was left out.

03 · KEY SUB-THEMES

Six Ideas Through Which Technology Took Shape.

Filtering the technology sessions produced six recurring ideas. Each is attributed to named speakers on its own page; sub-theme 01 rests mainly on one session, the others on several.

THE TECHNOLOGY THEME MAP · SIX SUB-THEMES

01 · WEBSITES FOR MACHINES
Agentic booking, plain labels and facts an agent can read.

02 · SEARCH EVERYWHERE
AI overviews, social search and the AI shadow.

03 · READINESS AND ONE GUEST VIEW
Data, systems and skills.

04 · AUTOMATION BEHIND THE SCENES
Concierge, pricing, housekeeping and food and beverage.

05 · DATA-LED TARGETING
Location data, incremental guests and tested messages.

06 · THE HUMAN LAYER
Skills, oversight, cost and the human touch.

Source · Thematic filtering of the Innovation Stage and Hotel Business Stage transcripts, IH London 2026.

The map is deliberately not a hierarchy. Sub-themes 01 and 02 are about being found and booked: how agents and AI answers now meet a hotel before the guest does. Sub-theme 03 is what sits behind the website: the data, systems and skills that two speakers said decide whether a tool works. Sub-theme 04 is where automation was described, with an override. Sub-theme 05 is how data and AI were used to find and measure guests, and sub-theme 06 is the reality check that kept the picture honest: skills, oversight and cost.

This report reads the six as a sequence rather than a list. Be readable to machines (01). Be found where guests now search (02). Get the data and systems in order (03). Automate with a goal and an override (04). Measure the guests you have not met yet (05). And keep people in charge of the stay (06). Each sub-theme has its own page in Part II.

WHAT QUALIFIED AS ON-THEME

Content was counted as technology when a speaker described AI, agentic search or booking, automation, systems integration, data, distribution or digital marketing, or the people and skills around them. Sessions on design, leadership and food and beverage were used only for what they said about technology.

SUB-THEME 01 · WEBSITES FOR MACHINES

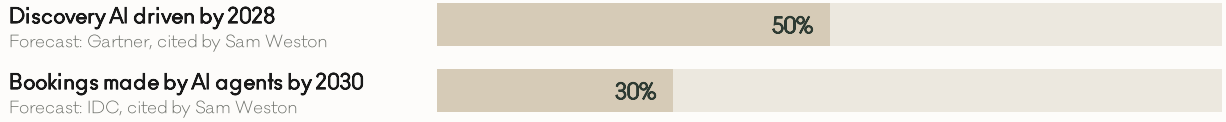
A Website Now Has Two Audiences.

Agentic booking was a major topic in the Innovation Stage session on websites for machines. Speakers described two routes by which an AI agent can book a hotel and showed what happened when agents were set loose on real sites.

Sam Weston, Head of AI & Marketing at 8O DAYS, described two routes to agentic booking: a guest inside a chat with an AI assistant who never needs to visit the hotel site, and an agent that browses the hotel's own website and booking engine. Weston said that as of 27 August Google introduced agentic booking within AI mode in the US, with 1O launch partners, five OTAs and five large chains, and independents underrepresented.

The tests were revealing. Weston showed an agent on a luxury resort site in Mauritius meet a cookie pop-up and a question about UK residency, then go to Booking.com instead. Anna Wolfram, Head of Marketing at Grantley Hall, found that ChatGPT located the Book Now button instantly but had what Wolfram called a bit of a panic attack when a promo code made the dates look unavailable. Judi Blakeburn, Advisor at Watergate Bay Hotel, ran Claude across the group's sites: the rate it returned was correct and it said whether breakfast could be booked, but it took somewhere between 9 and 12 kind of clicks to get to that information, and a timed newsletter pop-up landed across the book button.

THE AGENTIC AI FORECASTS SAM WESTON CITED



Source · Sam Weston (Head of AI & Marketing, 8O DAYS), The next visitor to your site might not be a human. Both bars are third-party forecasts as cited by the speaker.

Weston's five first steps were mostly checks a hotel can run itself: audit pop-ups and interstitials, count the clicks from landing to a live rate, label the booking journey clearly, ask vendors about agent readiness, and test with browser agents yourself. Weston described WebMCP, an emerging standard that tells an agent where to click to book, as sitting behind the scenes like schema markup, and put adding it to a typical single-property site at probably about a day's work, with adoption around the first quarter of next year.



We're trying to start building websites for two audiences. We need to inspire the human, but we also need to inform the machine.

Sam Weston · Head of AI & Marketing, 8O DAYS

STRATEGIC TAKEAWAY

Most of the first steps speakers described are about the booking flow: fewer interruptions, plain labels and facts stated explicitly. Only the WebMCP step was costed, by Weston, at probably about a day's work. Judi Blakeburn said the test showed what was missing for human customers as well.

SUB-THEME 02 · SEARCH EVERYWHERE

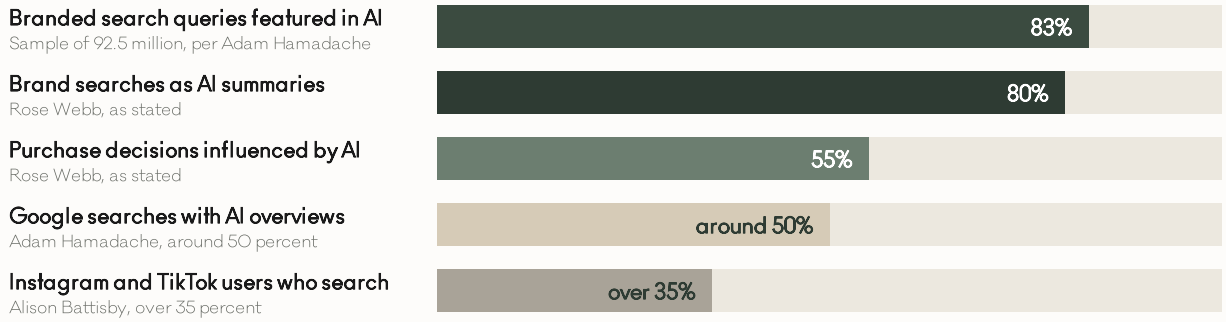
Discovery Is Moving Into AI and Social.

Discovery was moving out of the Google results page and into AI summaries and social platforms. Adam Hamadache argued that a hotel is now judged before the guest reaches its website.

Adam Hamadache, CEO & Founder of Formula, said AI overviews now feature on around 50 percent of Google searches, so fewer searches lead to a click and organic traffic is starting to be eroded. Hamadache argued that even hotels with older guests should prioritise AI visibility: Hamadache put baby boomers (62 plus) at one in four adopting AI and Gen X at around 50/50.

Hamadache called the picture AI builds of a business from everything online its AI shadow, an uncontrollable first impression that can arrive as a neutral snapshot or as a blunt assessment of pros and cons, with negative sentiment from reviews reaching guests before the hotel's website does. Hamadache's five-part response was customer clarity (no more than five guest types), authority mentions, reviews that answer specific questions, brand consistency and structured data, including an audit of the 27 directory listings Hamadache said hotels in the UK and Europe should check.

AI AND SOCIAL IN SEARCH · FIGURES AS SPEAKERS STATED THEM



Source · Adam Hamadache (Formula), Rose Webb (Clermont Hotel Group) and Alison Battisby (Avocado Social). The measures differ, so compare each bar with its own label only. Hamadache's 83% and Webb's 80% are separate claims by different speakers, not one figure.

Search is also leaving Google. Alison Battisby said over 35 percent of Instagram and TikTok users now start a search on the platforms, that people there search with between two and five words, and that the platforms use AI to read the caption, the spoken voiceover and the text overlay of a video. That content now feeds ChatGPT, Gemini and Google, so Battisby's summary was that SEO has become search everywhere optimisation. Mark Durber of Clockwork Marketing added that people search for meaning, so a specific page beats a vague one: a Torquay hotel Durber worked with went from something like 20 keyword positions in Google to over 200 on the first page of Google.



Increasingly, customers will see your AI shadow.

Adam Hamadache · CEO & Founder, Formula

SIGNAL

Hamadache's argument is that a hotel's website, listings and reviews all feed the answer an AI gives, so consistency across them matters. Battisby made a separate point about captions: the platforms use AI to read them, and that content feeds ChatGPT, Gemini and Google.

SUB-THEME 03 · READINESS AND ONE GUEST VIEW

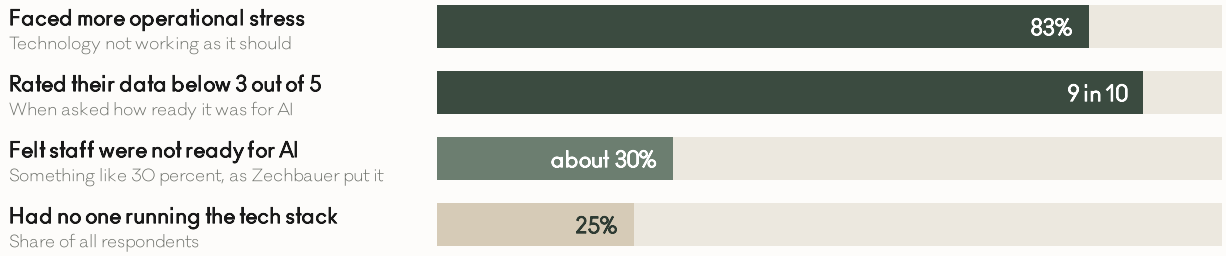
Where to Start Before Adding AI.

Zechbauer and Longfield each described where to begin, and Prizeman described one group's own move to a single stack.

Nicola Longfield, Chief Commercial Officer for Global Accommodation & Payments at Access Hospitality, named guest communications, revenue and rate management, scheduling automation and back-office functions such as procurement as where AI is making most difference, with revenue management probably the biggest. Longfield described the toggle tax of front-of-house teams switching between the four to six systems hotels typically use, and said fragmented data means AI capabilities cannot be unlocked.

Sandrine Zechbauer, Chief Marketing Officer at RMS, reported what a survey of something like 500 hoteliers, run in May 2026, found: the majority of hoteliers run at a minimum four to six different pieces of software, and the promised simplification is not arriving. People told the team they spend upwards of seven hours a week fixing issues such as incorrect rates between systems. Zechbauer said you cannot run good AI without good data.

THE READINESS GAP · RMS SURVEY, AS REPORTED BY SANDRINE ZECHBAUER



Source · Sandrine Zechbauer, Chief Marketing Officer, RMS, on an RMS survey of something like 500 hoteliers run in May 2026. The new skills stack for the future of hospitality, Innovation Stage.

Rebecca Prizeman, Group Head of Digital and Systems at The Watergate Bay Group, showed the other side. The Watergate Bay Group is moving four hotels onto one stack, the last due live in January 2027. The group's market review counted 12 solutions very quickly, and managing 12 integrations with a small team, with guest data kept consistent, was described as not something the group has the resources to cope with, so it chose an architecture rather than systems. The group's booking engine now sells curated packages in the booking journey, and Prizeman sees 40 percent of reservations booking dinner with their stay. Prizeman will not put something live unless the whole journey around it is live.



If it unlocks five hours a week, where is that five hours a week being consciously redirected? Because otherwise it will just get caught up in operational noise.

NICOLA LONGFIELD · Chief Commercial Officer, Global Accommodation & Payments, Access Hospitality

STRATEGIC TAKEAWAY

The speakers did not give one order of work. Zechbauer's step one was to find someone in the team with a few hours a week to lead the technology piece. Longfield suggested starting with the biggest problem before thinking about AI.

SUB-THEME 04 · AUTOMATION BEHIND THE SCENES

Automation, With an Override.

Speakers described automation in several places: an AI concierge for guests, pricing and housekeeping allocation, with menu costing software as a related example. Lee Bryan was explicit that the person must be able to override the tool.

Lee Bryan, Head of Distribution at eviivo, said AI always needs a clear commercial goal, just as it would if a human revenue manager were operating it, and that the tool must give the hotelier control, explainability and trust, with the price drivers visible. The hotelier must be able to go into the AI pricing tool and override it or stop it, for a wedding enquiry or maintenance, because human intervention is part of a well-designed system.

THREE PLACES AUTOMATION WAS DESCRIBED · AND WHAT SPEAKERS SAID AROUND IT

GUEST-FACING	PRICING	BACK OF HOUSE
AI concierge: an always-on first contact	**A goal, visible drivers and an override**	**Admin first, hours handed back**
Late at night the website may be the only front desk. Local partner and attraction pages give the concierge more to answer with. (Lee Bryan)	A clear commercial goal such as RevPAR, occupancy or revenue, with control, explainability and trust. The hotelier can pause it. (Lee Bryan)	Room lists for the whole hotel and cottage village in 17 seconds, giving the head housekeeper an extra hour each morning. (a panellist from The Headland Hotel)

Source · Lee Bryan, Head of Distribution, eviivo, The Hotel That Never Sleeps; a panellist from The Headland Hotel in the session Independent in identity. Derived from transcript.

On housekeeping, a panellist from The Headland Hotel in the session Independent in identity said room lists for the whole hotel and cottage village are now run by AI and take 17 seconds every morning, and that no costs had been incurred yet because the hotel is a guinea pig hotel for an AI company, though those costs will come at some point. Another panellist said the benefit may not show in the headline profit lines but could show as lower labour turnover. A vendor presenter, speaking before the Power Breakfast, said from a paper read the other day that between 10 and 20 percent of housekeepers' time is spent on identifying what to do next, and described the company's own task allocation as assigning the right task to the right person at the right time.

On food and beverage, a panellist on the Food and Beverage panel described menu costing software that works from live supplier invoice prices; this was costing only, not described as AI.



A rate decision is very rarely ever just taken in isolation. It can be determined by day of the week, events, competitor analysis, remaining inventory.

LEE BRYAN · Head of Distribution, eviivo

STRATEGIC TAKEAWAY

Lee Bryan's conditions for AI pricing were a stated goal, visible price drivers and a person able to stop it. The back-of-house benefit described was time handed back to a team, such as the extra hour a head housekeeper no longer spends on room lists, as a panellist put it.

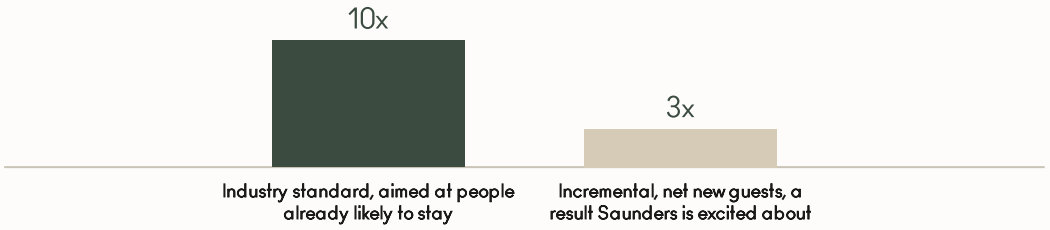
SUB-THEME 05 · DATA-LED TARGETING

Measure the Guest You Have Not Met.

Data and AI were presented as a way for small budgets to find guests who are new to a hotel and to see whether the marketing worked. One speaker questioned how much of that data a hotel should use.

Evan Saunders, SVP Revenue and Strategic Partnerships at Azira, called the industry-standard 10x return on investment a ridiculous metric, because the hotel industry only thrives on it by targeting people who are already going to stay. Saunders said they get excited about 3x, asked why anyone should be excited about getting less return on investment, and tied that to incrementality. The challenge, Saunders said, in today's marketplace is measuring conversion: if people book through OTAs, many hoteliers have no idea whether their campaigns worked.

RETURN ON INVESTMENT · INDUSTRY STANDARD VERSUS INCREMENTAL GUESTS



Source · Evan Saunders, SVP Revenue and Strategic Partnerships, Azira, Hotel Business Stage. Figures as stated by the speaker.

Saunders explained that anonymised mobile location data and card transaction data, analysed with AI, can show who stays at a hotel's competitors and whether someone who saw an ad later checked in, however they booked. In Saunders's example of a relaunched family-friendly resort with no previous guests, audiences were built from who stays at direct competitors and who stays in the area, filtered for who would suit a family hotel. Saunders said these audiences passively create themselves thanks to AI, so even small hotels or small chains can do it, and called it a way to democratise hotel marketing.

Other speakers used data in smaller, more personal ways. Rose Webb, Marketing Director at Clermont Hotel Group, said the team might test 20 different permutations of messaging on a single paid ad and optimise on what works, and also asks guests directly what matters to them. Mark Durber advised segmenting guests by the reason they travel, their motivation, rather than only by age or income. KK Prabakaran of The Wellesley Knightsbridge suggested there is a line between recognition and intrusion, and asked whether a team necessarily has to use all the data available to show guests that it knows more about them.



We're not targeting people who stayed there in years past. We're targeting net new guests to drive net new revenue.

EVAN SAUNDERS · SVP, Revenue and Strategic Partnerships, Azira

SIGNAL

Saunders tied measurement to net new audiences, Durber to motivation and Webb to tested messages. Prabakaran suggested there is a line between recognition and intrusion, and asked whether a team necessarily has to use all the data available.

SUB-THEME 06 · THE HUMAN LAYER

Skills, Oversight and the Human Touch.

Speakers took different views on how technical hotel staff need to become, and several described where people stay in charge: at booking, during the stay and in oversight of the machine.

On the new skills stack panel, Sandrine Zechbauer proposed a hospitality engineer, a person who combines service skills with technical skills such as understanding APIs and how data flows. Asked about that tension, Nicola Longfield respectfully disagreed that staff need technical skills: the hardest things to teach are service instinct, curiosity and problem-solving, and Longfield's aim is to simplify the interface so that staff need not understand an API. Another panellist said AI will make redundancies in the industry, without a doubt, while noting about 69,000 to 70,000 vacancies, mostly front of house, kitchen and housekeeping roles, and that to the very best of the speaker's knowledge AI tech stack solutions cannot deliver those physical functions at the moment.

AT BOOKING	DURING THE STAY	IN OVERSIGHT
Both a digital journey and a human one, each equally considered (Prizeman). A follow-up phone call even after an agent has booked (Wolfram).	Less technology in the room (Hulme). Choice between tech and a cup of tea at reception (Nuno César de Sá).	A person able to override pricing (Bryan). People who still know what good numbers look like (a panellist on the new skills stack panel).

Source · Rebecca Prizeman, Anna Wolfram, Matt Hulme, Nuno César de Sá, Lee Bryan and panellists, IH London 2026. Derived from transcripts.

In front of the guest, several speakers argued for less technology or more choice. Matt Hulme of Dynargh Design advised clients to strip elements of tech out of rooms, so that a guest on a one- or two-night stay is not confused about how to do the lighting, and noted that what is specified can be out of date within 18 months or two years of a build. Nuno César de Sá, General Manager at Grantley Hall, said luxury is about choice: if you want to do tech, do tech, and if you want to sit down with the receptionist and have a cup of tea, do that. Marie-France Perrel of the MICHELIN Guide noted that the guide's selection is made by inspectors, not generated by AI or an algorithm.

On oversight and cost, Rebecca Prizeman said technology is not always the hardest part, because the hard part is bringing the people along: nobody wants a system imposed on them that they do not fully understand. A panellist warned that if systems are allowed to run away too early a business will lose its knowledge capital, and that once it loses sight of whether numbers are good or bad it has lost control. On cost, Sandrine Zechbauer said the full scale of the cost of AI has not been seen yet, because it is heavily sponsored by the models.



We have an opportunity to give people what they really need most, which is deep and meaningful human interactions.

MICHAEL JACOBI · Managing Director, Scally Hotel Collection

STRATEGIC TAKEAWAY

Speakers took different views on how technical staff must become: Zechbauer proposed a hospitality engineer, Longfield put service instinct first. Michael Jacobi's own condition for booking was practical: the tech stack has to be in order and the booking process has to work fast.

10 · STRATEGIC INSIGHTS

Reading Across Both Stages.

These are the report's own readings across sessions. Each rests on what the named speakers said.

INSIGHT 01 · TWO SPEAKERS DESCRIBED LESS CONTROL OVER THE FIRST IMPRESSION

Adam Hamadache called the AI shadow an uncontrollable first impression, and Rose Webb said marketers no longer control the narrative because people define the brand.

INSIGHT 02 · AGENTIC BOOKING WAS DESCRIBED AS EARLY

Adam Hamadache said Google has started to cross this transaction threshold in the US, within the last 90 days, and that it is early days and not great for anything complicated. Sam Weston said Google's agentic booking launched with 10 launch partners, five OTAs and five large chains, with independents underrepresented.

INSIGHT 03 · WHAT HELPS A MACHINE HELPS A HUMAN

Judi Blakeburn found that the details missing for an agent were missing for human customers too. Anna Wolfram asked for literal calls to action, Mark Durber for specific pages, and Adam Hamadache for consistent listings.

INSIGHT 04 · ONE SPEAKER NAMED READINESS, NOT THE TECHNOLOGY, AS THE GAP

Nicola Longfield said operational readiness, rather than the technology, is the barrier at the moment. Separately, Sandrine Zechbauer's survey found 83 percent reporting more operational stress from technology not working as it should, nine in ten rating their data below three out of five, and one in four with no one running the tech stack. Rebecca Prizeman described the group's own route: a market review counted 12 solutions quickly, and managing 12 integrations was not something the group had the resources to cope with.

INSIGHT 05 · AUTOMATION IS ACCEPTED WHEN IT CAN BE EXPLAINED AND OVERRIDDEN

Lee Bryan asked for control, explainability and trust in AI pricing, and said human intervention is part of a well-designed system. A panellist on the new skills stack panel put a related warning: once people lose sight of what good numbers look like, they have lost control of the business.

INSIGHT 06 · INDEPENDENTS WERE CALLED QUICK TO ACT, AND DATA WAS CALLED WITHIN REACH

Anna Wolfram said, hopefully, that independents have the power to listen to the advice, see it for themselves in walkthrough videos and make changes, and Judi Blakeburn said that when something is seen today and a colleague is told this evening, something will change. Evan Saunders said even small hotels or small chains can use location data to find and measure new guests.

META-INSIGHT

Reading across the sessions, this report's view is that the advice was specific: make the hotel readable to machines, get the data and systems in order, give automation a goal and an override, and keep people in charge of the guest.

11 · OPPORTUNITIES & CHALLENGES

Opportunity vs. Risk Along the Theme.

The six sub-themes, with the opportunities and challenges speakers described, side by side.

Opportunity to Risk Matrix · Technology, IH London 2026

SUB-THEME	OPPORTUNITY	CHALLENGE
Websites for Machines	Sam Weston put WebMCP at probably about a day's work for a typical single-property site, and Anna Wolfram said, hopefully, that independents have the power to see it for themselves in walkthrough videos and make changes.	An agent that stalls can go to Booking.com, as in Weston's Mauritius test, and agents are obedient and bypass upsell copy, so average transactions may fall (Weston).
Search Everywhere	Specific content can win: a Torquay hotel went from something like 20 keyword positions in Google to over 200 on the first page of Google (Mark Durber).	AI overviews feature on around 50 percent of Google searches, so fewer lead to a click, and negative sentiment from reviews can reach guests first (Adam Hamadache).
Readiness and One Guest View	One platform lets a group sell curated packages in the booking journey; Rebecca Prizeman sees 40 percent of reservations booking dinner.	Nine in ten rated their data below three out of five, and one in four had no one running the tech stack (Sandrine Zechbauer).
Automation Behind the Scenes	An extra hour each morning for a head housekeeper (a panellist from The Headland Hotel); an always-on AI concierge (Lee Bryan).	AI pricing needs a goal, explainability and a human override (Bryan), and costs may rise because the models are heavily sponsored today (Zechbauer).
Data-Led Targeting	Net new guests can be found and measured, even by small hotels or small chains (Evan Saunders).	OTA bookings hide whether a campaign worked (Saunders), and KK Prabakaran suggested there is a line between recognition and intrusion.
The Human Layer	As systems and automation are standardised, the human touch can be the differentiator (Nicola Longfield).	Something like 30 percent of respondents felt staff were not ready (Zechbauer), and Zechbauer proposed a hospitality engineer while Longfield, asked about that tension, put service instinct first.

Source · Cross-session synthesis of Innovation Stage and Hotel Business Stage transcripts, IH London 2026. Speakers named in each cell.

Two challenges recur in the table. Sandrine Zechbauer said the full cost of AI has not been seen yet, because the models are heavily sponsored. Lee Bryan said the hotelier must be able to override AI pricing or stop it in its tracks, and called human intervention part of a well-designed system rather than a failure of automation.

STRATEGIC TAKEAWAY

Read across each row, the right-hand column lists what speakers said could get in the way of the opportunity in the middle column.

12 · EVOLVING NARRATIVES & STAKEHOLDER IMPLICATIONS

Where the Old Story Ends and the New One Begins.

The sessions also recorded narrative change: assumptions speakers retired and new framings they put in their place.

OLD STORY TO NEW STORY, AS SPEAKERS FRAMED IT

- **From SEO to search everywhere optimisation.** People use ChatGPT, Instagram and TikTok as well as Google, so SEO has shifted (Alison Battisby).
- **From one audience to two.** For 25 years sites were built for humans; now they must also inform the machine (Sam Weston).
- **From controlling the first impression to managing the AI shadow.** The picture AI builds from everything online is an uncontrollable first impression (Adam Hamadache).
- **From choosing systems to choosing an architecture.** The aim was one guest view, one booking journey and one confirmation (Rebecca Prizeman).
- **From a technology barrier to an operational one.** The technology is ready; the question is how hotels redesign roles so it can work (Nicola Longfield).
- **From marketers controlling the narrative to guests defining the brand.** Information has been democratised, and other people listen to what others say a brand is (Rose Webb).



SEO has shifted. It's no longer Search Engine Optimization, it's Search Everywhere optimization, because that's how consumers are behaving.

ALISON BATTISBY · Social Media Strategist & Founder, Avocado Social

STAKEHOLDER IMPLICATIONS

- **Owners and general managers.** Find someone in the team with a few hours a week to lead the technology piece (Zechbauer), and start with the biggest problem before thinking about AI (Longfield).
- **Marketing and distribution leads.** Audit listings and captions for consistency and specifics, and walk the booking journey with an agent (Hamadache, Battisby, Blakeburn).
- **Revenue, IT and operations.** Give AI pricing a commercial goal and an override (Bryan), and note that incorrect rates between systems cost people hours each week (Zechbauer's survey).
- **Booking engine and technology vendors.** Expect to be asked about agent readiness (Blakeburn said the conversation should be today, not for 2027 or 2028), and to make pricing explainable (Bryan).
- **Teams and training leaders.** Longfield: hire for service instinct and curiosity, and decide where saved hours go before they are absorbed by operational noise. Zechbauer: consider a hospitality engineer with technical skills.

13 · STRATEGIC RECOMMENDATIONS

What Independent Hoteliers Should Do Next.

Ten moves drawn from advice speakers gave, each anchored to a named speaker. The order and wording are this report's own reading.

01 · WALK YOUR OWN BOOKING JOURNEY

Book as a guest and with a browser agent, counting the clicks from landing to a live rate (Sam Weston, Judi Blakeburn). Blakeburn's test took somewhere between 9 and 12 kind of clicks, and showed what was missing for human customers as well.

02 · USE PLAIN, LITERAL LABELS

Ask people to do exactly what you want, such as book now, rather than wording like secure your dream (Anna Wolfram), and label each stage of the booking journey clearly (Weston).

03 · REMOVE FRICTION A MACHINE CANNOT PASS

Audit pop-ups and interstitials, and state closures and amenities explicitly (Weston, Blakeburn). A closed hotel was reported as fully booked, and a timed newsletter pop-up landed across the book button.

04 · AUDIT EVERY LISTING, CAPTION AND PAGE

Check name, address and phone number everywhere, including the obscure directories (Adam Hamadache); name the location, selling points and time of year in captions (Alison Battisby); and be specific, not vague or broad (Mark Durber).

05 · ASK VENDORS ABOUT AGENT READINESS NOW

Raise it with the booking engine partner (Weston). Blakeburn said the conversations should happen today, not for 2027 or 2028.

06 · START WITH A PERSON OR A PROBLEM, THEN ADD AI

Zechbauer's step one was to find someone in the team with the interest and a few hours a week to lead the technology piece; Longfield advised starting with the biggest problem you can address, before you even think about AI.

07 · PRIZEMAN'S GROUP: ARCHITECTURE FIRST

Rebecca Prizeman's group chose an architecture after counting 12 solutions, and Prizeman's approach was to prioritise ruthlessly and to put nothing live until the whole journey around it is live.

08 · GIVE AI A GOAL AND AN OVERRIDE

Bryan's conditions for AI pricing: a clear commercial goal, visible drivers and a human able to pause or override it.

09 · MEASURE NET NEW GUESTS

Use location and transaction data to test whether ads reach people who have not stayed before (Evan Saunders), and consider whether, as Prabakaran suggested, there is a line between recognition and intrusion, and whether all available data needs to be used (KK Prabakaran, who put it as a question).

10 · DECIDE WHERE THE SAVED TIME GOES

If a system unlocks five hours a week, say where those hours are consciously redirected, or they are caught up in operational noise (Nicola Longfield).

14 · FUTURE OUTLOOK & CONCLUSION

What Speakers Expect Next.

This page uses only the dates and forecasts speakers gave, each attributed, and names the firm where a speaker cited one.

OUTLOOK, AS SPEAKERS GAVE IT

- **Agentic booking was described as early.** Adam Hamadache said strong website connectivity will be even more important in 2027, and Sam Weston put WebMCP adoption at around the first quarter of next year. Hamadache said Google's US booking is early days and not great for anything complicated, such as children, a promo code or reward points.
- **Forecasts were cited from third parties.** Sam Weston cited Gartner on 50 percent of discovery being AI driven by 2028 and IDC on 30 percent of travel bookings being made by AI agents by 2030, adding that even if there is hype in the figure it is still a significant number.
- **Leoni described a change in what customers ask for.** Alessandra Leoni said that 12 months ago customers had an embargo on AI, and that now everybody is asking for AI agents, AI phone agents and AI receptionists.
- **One group's consolidation has a date.** Rebecca Prizeman's last hotel is due live on the shared stack in January 2027, with segmented push notifications planned.
- **The cost of AI is an open question.** Sandrine Zechbauer said the full cost has not been seen because the models are heavily sponsored.
- **The pace may outrun the planning horizon.** Michael Jacobi said ten years may be too long a horizon for asking what guests will expect, given how fast AI is moving.

CONCLUSION

Technology at IH London 2026 was discussed less as a single tool than as a set of readiness questions. Speakers described guests using AI and social platforms to search, and a limited US rollout of agentic booking that Hamadache called early days and not great for anything complicated. Their advice, in this report's reading, was to make the website say plainly what the hotel offers, keep listings consistent and know what the technology is for.

Speakers also set limits. Bryan wanted an override on AI pricing, Hulme advised less technology in the room, and Longfield expected the human touch to be the differentiator.



I think the human touch will be the differentiator because systems and automation will be standardized.

Nicola Longfield · Chief Commercial Officer, Global Accommodation & Payments, Access Hospitality

CLOSING INSIGHT

Practical steps named by speakers included walking the booking journey (Blakeburn), auditing listings (Hamadache), a person to lead the technology piece (Zechbauer) and an override on AI pricing (Bryan).

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