



DOHA DONE RIGHT



SAIFI SUITES ADOPT
NEOS TECHNOLOGY

Getting Personalisation Right

EXCLUSIVE INTERVIEW Roger MacFarlane - Vice President
Technology Middle East & Asia - Mövenpick Hotels & Resorts



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Numerous hotels try, but only few succeed, in creating a well-rounded in-room entertainment experience. We asked someone who has a true vision in this respect, Roger MacFarlane, what his «vision» of the perfect in-room entertainment experience is...

The in-room entertainment experience means having a personalised approach to a guest's stay. This personalisation can come in relation to digital content, the quality of the selection of TV channels, and of course, the ease of use of an interactive TV system that is very intuitive. Personalisation means tailoring all those systems, from ambient lighting to air conditioning to the interactive TV set up to a guest's specific needs and purposes. That's where it's coming from.

What percentage of properties «get it right», and why?

Quite frankly very few get it right. A lot of people talk about personalisation but they handle it in varying degrees and varying levels and through a number of manual

processes. Ultimately, this industry is very traditional in its way of operating, and we need some level of automation. I believe technology is the facilitator for providing that level of personalisation, rather than manual guest recognition programmes that a number of hotels carry out at different levels.

I don't believe all hotel groups get it right, but certainly at Mövenpick we have been looking at new levels of personalisation for some time; looking at leveraging technology to provide a high degree of personalisation. In all our new hotel projects, I am trying to build these kinds of systems into the infrastructure so that it is a plug and play approach and there is a synergy between the systems to enable a more personalised stay for a guest. ▶

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NEOS HAS A ROBUST, SOLID SYSTEM. THEY PROVIDE THE LEVELS OF PERSONALISATION THAT I AM LOOKING FOR AND WANT TO SEE IN OUR HOTELS

► **What, for you are the biggest drawbacks with full IP systems, and how do you think they should be dealt with?**

I believe IP networks and IP convergence are the future. I have been looking at convergence in our projects ever since the year 2000, and we have led in many parts of the Middle East with different IP technologies and network convergence. Where hotel groups get it wrong with IP convergence is when they overcomplicate things. Technology for technology's sake is not the way to go. We need a common sense approach to the technology and

with that approach comes simplicity. This avoids confusing and alienating guests.

What is the most important thing for you when choosing new vendor partners?

Firstly that they have a strong solution; secondly that they are creative and on the same page as me when we are talking about personalisation; thirdly that they are cost competitive, and finally that they have a good support network. I am looking for partner, not a vendor. That's the bottom line. As a partner there is give and take, there is understanding, co-operation and collaboration.

You are currently examining a number of new ideas with NEOS. What are your thoughts about the advantages of their solutions?

Their solutions are strong. They have been in the market for a while and provide good levels of personalisation, from the welcome message to the music libraries, tailored digital content, etcetera. NEOS has a robust, solid system. They provide the levels of personalisation that I am looking for and want to see in our hotels. ■



Doha Done Right

W Doha Hotel and Residences offers the “best of the best” including the latest in-room technology by NEOS

The renowned W Doha Hotel and Residences recently upgraded its system to NEOS iTV V7. We take a closer look at this “dazzling jewel”, and how the new in-room entertainment solution adds true value to the guest’s stay.

INDULGENCE IN DOHA!

As desert dunes soar next to towering skyscrapers, W Doha Hotel & Residences dazzles by the Arabian Sea. Historic forts, modern art, camel racing, championship golf, ancient souks, luxury shopping, old Shisha cafes, modern cuisines. Doha does it all. Where in Doha



with everything from Bliss bath products to the W Signature Bed with plush down comforter, their room is a getaway where Whatever/Whenever is theirs at the touch of a button.

has been excellent: “Everyone likes the new menu design and the way the channels are organised by category. Also the menu is easier to navigate.” According to Mr Zalabani, despite the fact that it is hard to offer a “better than expected” service, the new solution by NEOS achieves this goal: “There is a DVD player available within the STB, so many guests watch their own movies, and this is a big plus. Also there is room for the guests to listen to their own music by connecting their flash drives or iPods to the STB. One of the best options is that guests can record one channel while watching another one. Then they can watch the recorded one later.”

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WE HAVE AN EXCELLENT RELATIONSHIP. I WISH ALL VENDORS PROVIDED THE SAME SUPPORT AND RELATIONSHIP

will you indulge in restaurants by Jean-Georges, the hottest nightclub and the cosy Living Room while unwinding at Bliss Spa, cooling off in WET or energizing at SWEAT? Our Whatever/Whenever service makes all other wishes come true. When the guest takes the lift up to explore all that awaits him or her in their room, they can expect a “sensational, seamless blend of comfort, style and technology” which is so unique to W hotels. Fully stocked

A STRONG OPERATOR

“Despite economic and political uncertainty in parts of the region, Starwood continues to see demand for growth of all of our brands across the Middle East and North Africa,” said Frits van Paasschen, President and CEO, Starwood Hotels & Resorts. “MENA is key to Starwood’s global expansion strategy, representing our second largest growth market after China. When you consider that the region has 35 metropolitan areas with a population of over one million, and many with a wealthy middle class, there’s huge long-term potential for internationally-branded luxury and upper-upscale hotels.”

IN-ROOM ENTERTAINMENT – THE W DOHA WAY!

Since the recent upgrading of the hotel’s system to NEOS iTV V7, IT Director Amr Zalabani says guest feedback



Mr Zalabani says one of the most important aspects is the support and after sales service. “The NEOS support is the best, they do it any time any day with a smile. We have an excellent relationship. I wish all vendors provided the same support and relationship.” ■

Saifi Suites Adopt NEOS Technology

Customised turnkey solution for streaming IP-based entertainment



Hayssam
Serhan, PhD
CEO of NEOS Interactive



Waleed
Abou Zeid
Saifi Suites General Manager

When it comes to getting a “suite” experience in Beirut, NEOS has been working as the key contractor in an all-IP streaming TV in-room entertainment package for the stunning new Saifi Suites project.

THE ART OF LIVING IN DOWNTOWN BEIRUT

Only 10 minutes away from Beirut International Airport (around 7 km), Saifi Suites is a distinctive hotel in the heart of posh downtown Beirut. From this prestigious location in the centre of city, Saifi Suites the ideal place to explore all that Beirut has to offer from cafes, restaurants and high-end shopping in downtown to the vibrant nightlife in Gemmayze and the capital’s major commercial centres. Its location is also a convenient starting point to discover the rest of Lebanon. The ambiance at this Four Star hotel is one of elegance and trend-setting style. Saifi Suites is a unique experience that bridges different worlds and embodies a luxurious lifestyle that is modern, inspiring and innovative. Here, the art of living is felt in every detail, from the signature character right down to the lobby with its cutting-edge design and the spacious rooms and suites. The hotel’s Society Bistro and Wine Lounge have chic allure, making them a destination in and of themselves. See, feel and live the Saifi Suites experience. It has become “the” destination in the region’s most enchanting city.

A CUSTOM TURNKEY SOLUTION

As guests today expect High Definition TV – and lots of channels – as a strict minimum, Saifi Suites settled upon NEOS as the key contractor to establish a state of the art in room entertainment service for guests. This turnkey solution covers everything from the Satellite Dish Antennas to Middleware Servers, IPTV Streamer, in-room STB, TV integration and PMS interface. In this installation, NEOS will be installing its latest interactive TV solution, and on top of it, NEOS will be installing its new IPTV Head-End for streaming around 120 channels (encrypted and Free to Air) in collaboration with the biggest TV channel providers in the area, giving the guest the possibility of Recording/Time-shifting TV channels.

NEOS CEO, Dr Hayssam Serhan, says it was important for those involved in the hotel building project to have a system that would simply work... and work simply! *“What gave NEOS the edge in getting this project was the ability of providing the hotel with a turnkey solution of the latest technologies in IPTV*



including many needed customisation at the lowest cost,” says Dr Serhan.

“Again and again, NEOS is always the best in providing free customisation services to its clients, and in this project we provided Saifi Suites with new GUI and free consultancy & development for a completely customised interface to their PMS system and offered them a free study related to the best TV Channels selection for getting the highest number of streamed channels through the head-end.” After a great deal of discussion, VoD was excluded from the initial project, as hotel management aims to survey customers on their preferences before leaping into this option. However the system can be easily upgraded to include a VoD option.

Saifi Suites General Manager, Waleed Abou Zeid, says a great deal of importance was placed on having state of the art network and entertainment technology in the hotel.

But what was the original spec for in-room entertainment, and how did Saifi go about choosing a technology partner for interactive and VOD? It all started through a meeting with the IT

consultant, Data Consult, and in the first meeting, Mr Abou Zeid was convinced by Hayssam: “I think Hayssam was the first factor in closing the deal after the financial one”, says Abou Zeid. “He explained the product to me, backed by data consult. The issues he covered led me to go in the direction of NEOS.” The installation is now complete and ready to run... So how would Mr Abou Zeid describe the experience of working with NEOS? “Till now, as per my expectations... hoping that everything will be running smoothly in order to keep this image in my mind!” NEOS, of course, has other similar projects in the pipeline at the moment. Dr Serhan says currently there are four similar medium-sized projects (going from 71 up to 321 rooms), that we will soon be able to take a closer look at!

“In those projects we will be offering our customers the latest technologies in interactive systems and TV streaming,” says Dr Serhan.

“On top of that, we will be offering hotel guests the possibility to control and browse NEOS iTV through their iPad/ iPhone/AndroidPhone for higher guest experience. We are working hard at the same time on having direct presence in more countries as well.” ■

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