Can you describe your role and what it entails?

**Michael Menis**: I’m accountable for all our revenues and customer interactions through our digital and voice channels. This includes our consumer-facing websites, online marketing, social media activity and mobile, as well as our call centers around the world. I’m increasingly tasked with thinking horizontally about the role digital plays throughout the entire guest journey.

So instead of thinking solely about verticals, such as our website strategy, it’s more about putting the consumer at the heart of our strategy and understanding the needs of that consumer throughout the entire guest journey. The concept of having digital and channel accountability existed before, but we’re evolving our strategy a bit to think about how to thread digital through the entire organization.

“We want to leverage digital to influence brand preference and loyalty, as well as to help drive guest satisfaction with the hotel experience.”

Just prior to this role, I was accountable for all of the digital work—websites, social, mobile and online marketing. I now have the added responsibility for the call centers, which are still a very large and active part of our business. The call centers handle reservations, but they also manage a lot of guest relations functions. And I’m tasked with evolving our digital strategy to include all elements of the company’s objectives. We want to leverage digital to influence brand preference and loyalty, as well as to help drive guest satisfaction with the hotel experience.
What are your biggest business priorities?

**Menis:** My priority is to evolve our web, social, mobile and voice strategies to better map to the needs of our customers and the company. Our guests are looking to stay connected with us through the entire guest journey. Their expectations of us are changing, and we need to evolve our strategy and manage those expectations.

Of course, our customers are looking to leverage all the digital channels and voice to research a hotel and book a reservation. But they’re increasingly looking to help manage their stay and remain connected with us.

What projects are you working on right now?

**Menis:** We’re looking to drive efficiency at the hotel and drive a better guest experience through things like mobile check-in, integration with food and beverage to order room service, and integration with customer service by connecting with guests through the app.

In each of these areas—whether it’s mobile, social or web—we have a great opportunity to continue to evolve and improve our guest experience at the hotels, particularly through the mobile channels.

We have mobile websites for each of our brands, including the Holiday Inn® Hotels, Crowne Plaza® Hotels & Resorts and InterContinental Hotels & Resorts properties. And we have apps for each of our brands with each of the major mobile devices, even Google TV and Kindle. We focused first on creating mobile-optimized websites. We evolved that to an app strategy to drive reservations from our IHG® Rewards Club loyalty members. And we continue to build the value of the app by driving a more efficient in-hotel experience.

What are you learning about integrating digital platforms like Google TV and Kindle into the guest experience?

**Menis:** We pride ourselves on being a company that embraces innovation—it’s a delicate balance. There are a number of things we try for which we need to be comfortable with a level of failure. In some things, it makes sense for us to be really strong and deep, and that, of course, varies by region and brand. And then there are things we test and try to determine the role they can play in meeting the needs of our guests.

With the mobile web vs. apps, it’s fair to say that people use different things for different reasons. We might find the mobile web is being used for research and to access data for a hotel, while apps are used to confirm reservations, post bookings, and find directions to and locations of hotels. Customer interaction with the mobile web and apps continues to evolve. IHG Rewards Club members might be a bit different as well—they might use the app to check their points balance or book a reward night.

What are your biggest business challenges?

**Menis:** We have more than 4,600 hotels in close to 100 countries, and we really need to understand the needs of our customers by brand and market. Mapping these needs to the technical needs of our systems, platforms and hotels can be quite complex. It can be quite a challenge for us to stay on top of the changing needs of our customers and the ever-changing technology landscape. But it’s something we pay a lot of attention to—the needs of our guests and trying to identify the right technologies by market and brand.

“We look to eMarketer to help us understand the needs and expectations of our customers by market.”

How do you confront the velocity of change from the standpoint of both the customer and technology?

**Menis:** This is an area in which eMarketer has actually helped us quite a bit. We look to eMarketer to help us understand the needs and expectations of our customers by market. I’m often looking outside of our industry to understand the needs of our customers, because our customers interact with so many companies, devices and technologies. eMarketer provides us with a platform to access research, data and consumer insights. People who stay at our hotels also fly with specific airlines and shop with particular retailers, so all of those touchpoints influence their experiences and expectations. Guest expectations are not limited to or solely influenced by their experiences with hotel companies.
What eMarketer content has been helpful and informed your thinking?

**Menis:** We’ve pulled a lot of research lately around smartphones by market to understand, for instance, the kinds of services customers would like to see delivered through a phone and their expectations for what businesses should be delivering. We’ve also found the device adoption by market data very helpful. Different markets behave differently, and consumer adoption of technology is different. eMarketer has helped us continue to understand the technology landscape in the digital space.

“We pull information from the Digital World Atlas on a regular basis to understand technology adoption in our priority markets.”

We pull information from the Digital World Atlas on a regular basis to understand technology adoption in our priority markets. It offers a broad landscape view, which is one of the things we like about eMarketer.

Two things I accessed recently were the 2013 worldwide social network users forecast and comparative estimates, as well as a chart showing US internet users who use Instagram, by demographic. We also regularly look at smartphone adoption rates and consumer expectations as they relate to smartphones.

What do you like best about eMarketer?

**Menis:** Efficiency and speed are always important, and eMarketer offers me quick access to relevant information. This is sometimes very difficult to do with an enormous amount of content. I like the idea of easy-to-read and easy-to-use charts and graphs. eMarketer is a great source of trends and for data and intelligence outside of our particular industry. For me, research and data are a critical part of delivering on our goals in this ever-changing landscape.

How is eMarketer different than other digital research sources you use?

**Menis:** Speed and efficiency. The information is easy to digest, understand and share. It has the benefit of having consistent design elements. I like the idea that eMarketer pulls together information from a number of different sources.

What keeps you up at night from a business marketing perspective?

**Menis:** For me, it’s the idea of focus and how to stay innovative and forward-thinking. We’re in a place where we’re seeing exponential growth in mobile and social. As a result, we receive countless emails and notices from vendors. It’s hard to weed through all those things. I care less about the technology and more about what it delivers to our guests and for our brands.

Our focus is to continue to provide a great guest experience and we use digital to drive increased preference and loyalty for our brands. We are also threading digital throughout the entire organization.

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