



# Vantage Entrusts CRS to Sabre to Boost Bookings

By Jeff Higley  
December 9, 2011

LAS VEGAS—Increased booking capabilities on channels such as mobile and social media was the prime motivator behind Vantage Hospitality Group's decision to partner with hotel Internet marketing company Sabre Hospitality Solutions to manage the former's central reservations system.

The news was announced Wednesday during Vantage's 2011 conference and trade show at the Golden Nugget Las Vegas.

Vantage's migration to Sabre from its current hotel reservations platform with Genares will begin on 1 February 2012. Vantage owns Genares, but the hotel company's needs outgrew the technology company's capabilities, said Roger Bloss, Vantage's founder, president and CEO.

"It wasn't about money. It wasn't about corporate profit," he said. "It was about the future."

Scott Anderson, president and CEO of hospitality consulting firm High Country Hospitality, said having a platform that encompasses all areas of technology, including mobile and social media, is important for the future of the brands and for the future of property owners.

High Country Hospitality partnered with Vantage earlier this year in an effort to expand the Vantage's hotel reservation and distribution services.

"Gen Xers and Gen Yers are going to become the buyer of our product in the next five years or 10 years," Anderson said, adding that about half of the U.S. population is under 44 years old and a large portion of that age group is early adopters to new technologies such as mobile.

To look at how popular mobile devices are in buying items, Anderson pointed to this year's sales on Cyber Monday. The Monday following Thanksgiving is a day for retailers to sell goods online at reduced costs, Anderson said. According to an IBM study report, 6.6% of consumer sales were done on a mobile device this year compared to 2.3% in 2010.

"Sixty percent of mobile consumers looking for hotel reservations are looking for tonight or tomorrow night," Anderson said. "That's exactly our customers, ladies and gentlemen."

He added that 83% of Americas Best Value Inns' 2011 revenue booked through its CRS is booked online, and that figure is expected to increase.

"Vantage, ABVI, Lexington must keep promoting their mobile-booking engine and improve the functionality of the mobile-booking engine," Anderson said. "We cannot afford to not be innovative. We cannot afford to not have the best mobile functionality."

He also said it is important for the company to have the capability for booking widgets on Facebook and other social media platforms.

Therefore, Vantage turned to Sabre, which traces its founding to 1960 when it was launched as the reservations platform for American Airlines.

"Our membership has grown so fast and so large that we now require a different type of technology," said Bernie Moyle, Vantage's COO and CFO, adding that the process for choosing Sabre began two years ago.

Steve Fitzgerald, Sabre's COO, said the company's ability to create devices that are compatible with all operating systems in order to match the hardware that the customer is using is a key ingredient to Vantage's future platform in creating device-agnostic websites.

Fitzgerald and Bloss called the request for proposal for Vantage's business the biggest of its kind this year. Both said they are eager to jump into the relationship.

## Social Media and Marketing

Social media and mobile applications also are on Vantage's front burner for 2012, said John Burkard, VP of distribution and technology.

One piece of advice he gave to members to increase their social media presence was to place a quick response code on every printed folio and encourage guests to scan the code to link to review

sites so guests can post their own reviews.

"Don't turn away from this reality (of social media)," Moyle said, adding that 43% percent of guests are influenced by online social media outlets.

On the sales-and-marketing side of the business, Vantage has used strategic alliances to broaden its communication channels, according to Peter Frantz, the company's marketing director. One such partnership places ads in 12 million newsletters from Domino's Pizza and is part of a program that allows members to have free keycards provided by the pizza chain for more than 32,000 rooms in the Vantage portfolio.

Vicki Schell, VP of distribution for Vantage, said online promotions resulted in a 23% increase in reservations and a 27% increase in revenue for Vantage brands.

The company is embarking on its first national TV ad campaign – a series of 10-second commercials embedded in national-syndicated programs, such as Dr. Phil, Judge Judy and Family Feud.

"The mission isn't to have TV ads to sell franchises," Bloss said. "For a brand of our age to have every media channel (type) covered is really gratifying."

