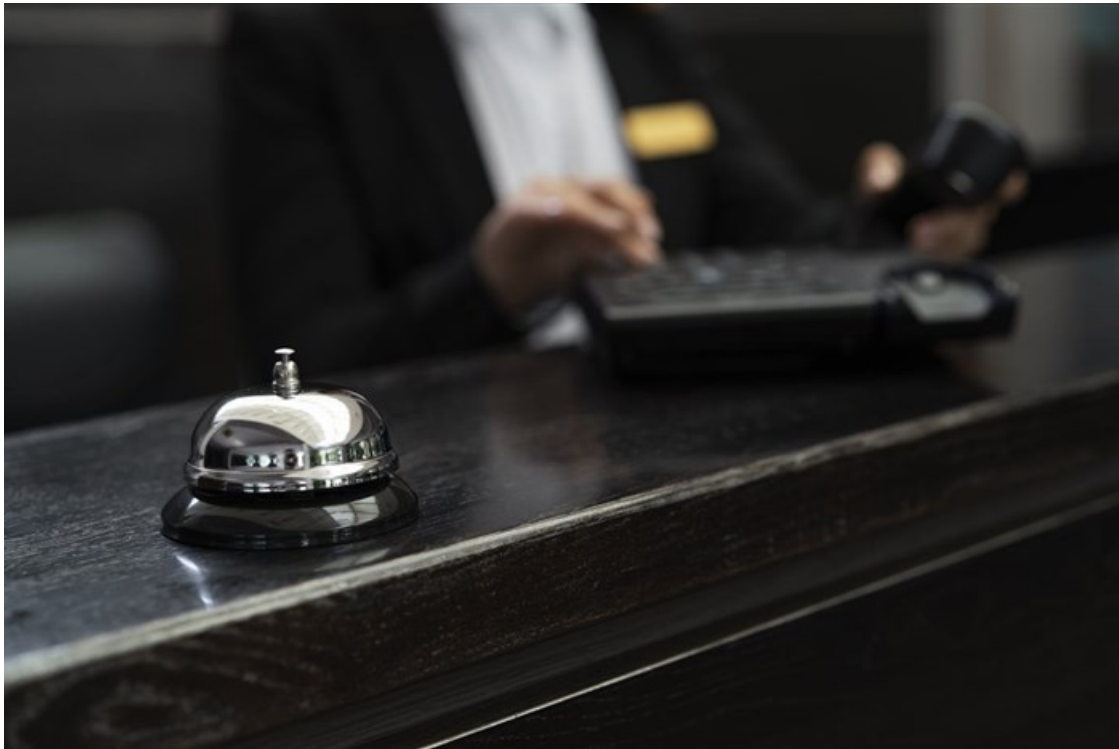


Big data key to hospitality, but human intervention crucial for achieving genuine value

Big data is having a transformative effect on hospitality across the Middle East and beyond. However, leading hoteliers speaking on the opening day of Arabian Travel Market (ATM) 2023, held at Dubai World Trade Centre (DWTC) from 1-4 May, emphasised that human intervention remains essential if owners and operators wish to derive genuine value from the information being gathered.



Source: [Freepik](#)

Hospitality debate: What more can big data unlock? featured a range of expert insights into the power of data to improve guest experiences within the Middle East's hospitality sector. Moderated by Paul Clifford, Group Editor – Hospitality & Design at ITP Media Group, the session saw Chris Hartley, CEO of Global Hotel Alliance; Tommy Lai, chief executive officer at General Hotel Management Pte Ltd; Sandeep Walia, chief operations Officer – Middle East at Marriott; and Nicolas Huss, CEO of Hotelbeds, took to the ATM Global Stage to share their views.

Commenting on advancements in the hospitality sector's data capabilities over the past decade, Lai said: "It used to be you'd need a lot of people for analysis, but now, you can collect data and AI will decipher it for you. Big data and AI are evening the playing field between small groups and larger brands."

Big data usage

Speaking on the importance of interpretation, Walia said: "This technology can help guests to narrow down the hotels they would like to stay in," noting that big data – when used in combination with AI – can help to identify the best options for customers. "But ultimately, guests have to connect with us to make the booking, so the balance between AI and the human touch is equally important and can't be forgotten."

Reiterating the importance of quality over quantity, Hartley said: "Acquiring data is one thing but that isn't 'big data'. It's what you do with the data that's critical. We've known for years, for example, that credit card companies have a huge amount of data on spend – way beyond the hotel. This tells you a lot more about the customer than they might reveal to you during a one-off stay."

Huss agreed but warned that an ethical approach is essential in order to realise the full potential of this information. "I think there are several rules," he said. "The first is that everything has to be anonymous. The second is that we must ensure that the data we have adds value to the guest experience. And finally, we must acknowledge that the way we behave when we're staying at a hotel doesn't always reflect what we do when we leave that environment. We will only thrive if we have the best data and some form of human care."

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