



Ken Heymann
COO, UniFocus

If knowledge is power, most hotel managers don't have enough. In more than 30 years in the hospitality business, I have learned that giving department heads better information makes them better managers.

And the best information is the information they can access on their own, not information contained in a report that may or may not be produced regularly by the accounting staff. But, for many organizations, managers have access to financial data on a monthly, perhaps weekly, basis with little access to operational information with sufficient frequency.

Years ago, management consultants talked about the importance of a Management Information System (MIS). An MIS is, simply, a computer system designed to deliver information to all levels of management in order to help an organization function. With the amount of information available today, effective MIS tools are readily available. Yet, many management systems do not deliver information frequently enough or widely enough to satisfy the information needs of today's managers.

UNIFOCUS

So we want to assert two key aspects of a good system:

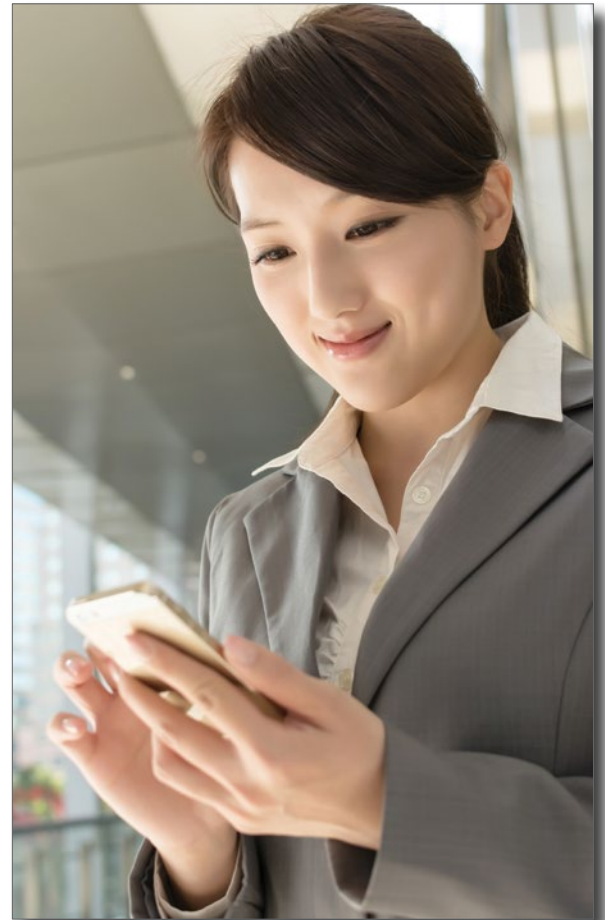
1. All managers should have access to information via their desktop or mobile devices.
2. The information should be the same for all.

In other words, what the department head sees should be the same as what the director sees...as what the GM sees...as what the Regional VP sees. From an operational perspective, the most important information to see is the daily forecast, daily labor plan, and yesterday's operational results. A good MIS will provide this information.

The Daily Forecast should be the most recent prediction of room, guests, covers, etc. While revenue forecasts are essential for financial planning, operations people clean rooms and serve guests. They need to know how many want to be served. It is not sufficient to use the monthly forecast to plan for the day. The operations forecast must include the most current anticipated volumes.

Managers should be able to easily change their schedules based on revised forecasts and agreed to labor standards, where feasible, and be in a position to communicate those changes via updates or mobile communications. With these basic pieces of information, changes can be communicated rapidly and widely.

The manager also needs to have information about what transpired yesterday. How many rooms were occupied? How many covers were served? How much labor did we expend to service those customers? How much should we have spent? Was the service up to our standards? What feedback do we have from those guests who ate in our restaurant or slept in our hotel?



This set of questions can be answered fairly simply and should be accessible through a dashboard or report that, again, is immediately available to the manager.



While the data needs to be available on a daily basis, it is just as important that the manager be able to see the data displayed over a period of several days, or weeks. While any single day may be particularly successful with high guest satisfaction and good productivity, or unsuccessful if the reverse is true, the ability to look at the information over a period of time helps the individual and organization move from reporting results to analyzing results and trends.

Thus, the data should be available in graphic and table format, and depicted in a manner which is easy to understand. Too often, organizations produce information that is difficult to view and understand. Reporting should be crisp and easy to read with key results highlighted.

By providing core operational information and disseminating it widely via technology, all levels in an organization are better equipped to have an intelligent conversation about the essential components of day-to-day performance.

The technology and information is available; it's just a matter of providing it to everyone who needs it to ensure that managers have the knowledge to manage performance effectively.

About the Author

A 30-year hospitality industry veteran, Ken Heymann oversees all business operations at UniFocus. He is an expert on organizational development, change, and quality management. Ken has contributed to such industry publications as The Cornell Hospitality Quarterly, The Bottom line, Lodging Hospitality, and Hospitality Technology. He authored a chapter on Managing Change in Leadership and Quality Management, published by the Educational Institute of the AH&LA. He is the former chairman of the Board of Governors of the College of Merchandising, Hospitality, and Tourism at the University of North Texas and has taught at UNT as an adjunct faculty member.