

# Make the connection

In such a customer-facing, trend-driven industry, IT's behind-the-scenes role, underpinning and improving the guest experience, is often overlooked. **Giuseppe Flammia**, chief information officer at MSC Cruises, talks to *World Cruise Industry Review* about the importance of business partnering and why integration and visibility are essential requirements when it comes to driving operational performance.

## Where are the main areas of focus for MSC in regards to IT upgrades at the moment?

**Giuseppe Flammia:** Through the implementation of new software and IT upgrades on our ships, we have drastically refined our service. The main areas of focus include passenger check-in methods, easy-to-use interactive services, reliable communication services between the ships and the rest of the world and mobile communications for MSC guests.

IT development is equally crucial for onboard security – video surveillance in particular to ensure the security of guests and crew – and for waste management and energy saving systems. These are all areas where we're constantly looking to improve.

## Can the importance of IT in delivering the best product sometimes be overlooked?

IT wins are directly related to business wins: the closer the IT to business, the better the performance, of course. IT

## Giuseppe Flammia

Giuseppe Flammia is chief information officer for MSC Cruises. He began his career as an IT specialist for an insurance company before joining the MSC Group in 2003. He was IT infrastructure manager and head of corporate IT infrastructure before taking up his current role.



must be a key factor of success for an organisation, the challenge being to support company growth while still keeping costs under control.

Technology impacts everything we do onboard. In the interest of providing the best service possible to our guests, we constantly invest in innovation and embrace new technologies. IT is integrated in every aspect of our product, from onboard security systems to satellite communication devices, waste management and onboard payment processes.

## Where have you witnessed recent successes when it comes to integration?

We have been carrying out several projects in which IT has proven to be extremely beneficial. This includes a

series of recent developments in the way we proceed passengers to check-in while completing their cruise card processing simultaneously. MSC's entire check-in operation has been fine-tuned to reduce the time at the check-in desk.

We have also perfected our technology to monitor and manage the massive inventory of materials throughout the fleet. At any given time, the shore-side office can follow the use of consumables on every ship. The system extends to everything on board – from food in the provision stores to uniforms, engine parts, cleaning chemicals and medicines.

IT integration also greatly benefited our booking system, which is under complete restructuring to provide more flexibility within the constant evolution of the cruise business. >>

**Has a focus on integration also influenced the manner in which onboard management software systems have evolved over time?**

The main development involves the shift from a multiple system, with shops, hotel managements and other departments using a different tool, to a unique and wholly integrated platform. To give an example of prioritisation, this has been implemented on our telecommunication lines to provide full availability to our guests during the day. Operational activities and maintenance are mainly carried out at night.

**Does having the right platform in place play a big part in customer relationship management?**

Technology enables us to continuously improve the service and security we provide to our passengers in all aspects of their cruise. All system upgrades are carried out to reach this objective.

With the recent implementation of ResOnline for instance, we can ensure that exactly the same passenger

reservation information is available both onboard cruise vessels across the fleet and in the reservations department at head office ashore. Any information or changes – special requirements, excursions, name changes, guest additions – previously transmitted manually by email and subject to human error, are automatically transferred. This enables us to avoid potential mistakes which could engender guest dissatisfaction.

More than a tracking system, our ships are connected to our global CRM which allows us to follow any incident or complaint in real time. The result is an extremely quick capacity for intervention.

**How important has it been bringing in external partners to help achieve these levels of synergy?**

MSC Cruises carefully selects its IT partners to always ensure the best quality of service to its guests. Our main partners are Fidelio Cruise, IBS and IBM.

To gain real competitive advantage, a supplier must be seen as a partner more than an operator. This small difference creates the big challenge. They should make more effort to really understand their customer needs, and as soon as a true partnership is born, both partners start to take real advantage cooperating together.

We have a set of criteria for everything we buy and seek partners who can meet those very high standards. MSC Cruises is open to working with partners who offer tangible and concrete innovations. We look for reliability, global service ability, guaranteed delivery whenever we operate, and long-term partnerships (where possible). We want partners who can replace imitation with innovation.

In my opinion the most important criteria to consider when selecting our partners is not just the quality of service they offer, but also the speed with which they can step in to solve problems. We need to make sure we can count on these people under any circumstances. ■



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