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**N E W S**

## TECHNOLOGY INNOVATORS ARE **TRANSFORMING** THE INDUSTRY



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# The Walt Disney World Swan and Dolphin Resort:

## TECHNOLOGY INNOVATORS WHO ARE TRANSFORMING THE INDUSTRY

BY JEANNE BREI

Back in the mid-'90s, the Walt Disney World Swan and Dolphin Resort launched what was believed to be the hotel industry's first property-specific website. They followed that up by being one of the first to debut a property-specific downloadable mobile app for Apple's iPhone in 2009. They were also one of the first to use 360-degree photography to showcase property amenities.

And now, nearly a decade later, they continue to be at the forefront of technological advances in hospitality and events. At a recent Technology Showcase at the Swan and Dolphin, Audrey Cornu, Tishman's vice president for internet for Tishman Hotels Corporation, owners of the Walt Disney World Swan and Dolphin Resort, spoke of assembling a team to create a GPS that would work indoors and be able to guide you from floor to floor, navigating escalators, stairs and elevators. Years earlier, she had approached both Google and Apple, but the technology did not exist. Fortunately, she recently found a willing collaborator in Mist Technologies.

Mist, a pioneer in self-learning networks powered by artificial intelligence, partnered with Tishman to bring new indoor wireless location experiences to the Swan and Dolphin. The resort is using the Mist Learning WLAN to deliver exceptional onsite mobile experiences to guests, event attendees and planners, including in-building navigation, asset tracking/event analytics and proximity notifications.

"The Walt Disney World Swan and Dolphin Resort is a unique property servicing guests from around the world and hosting some of the largest enterprise conferences in the industry," says Cornu. "We have been working with Mist to deliver a state-of-the-art indoor location experience to business groups and leisure guests while building an asset tracking infrastructure for events and in-house use."

"Mist's virtual beacon technology and machine learning are game changers in the BLE space," says Carlos Lugo, director of IT at the Swan and Dolphin. "The accuracy is quite good and everything is managed via the cloud, which is a huge help to the IT staff



Pictured L-R: Nagarjun Srinivasan, technical staff, Mist Systems; Jeff Aaron, VP marketing at Mist; Bob Friday, CTO & co-founder, Mist Systems; Audrey Cornu, vice president internet, Tishman Hotel Corp.; David Ely, TurnoutNow co-founder & COO; and Guy Goldstone, VP of systems engineering, Mist

as they no longer have to deal with battery-powered physical beacons or on-premise temporary appliances. Our Wi-Fi/BLE APs are permanently installed and cabled throughout the building."

In addition to wayfinding, the Swan and Dolphin is also using the Mist solution for proximity-based messaging to guests. "Personalized services are key to delivering a great meetings experience, and Mist makes this possible," explains Gino Marasco, director of sales and marketing for the hotel.

Mist's vBLE/Wi-Fi system comprises more than 300 access points located throughout the property that can identify and send relevant "user states" or data regarding a user's downloading traffic, coverage, and throughput to distinguish anomalies from mobile devices every few seconds. The company's technology can determine whether connectivity issues are related to the network, phones or operating systems and predict future trends that enable operators and IT staff

to better plan for high-density environments and other scenarios. In Swan and Dolphin's latest remodel, new technology added includes electronic reader boards throughout the meeting space and the latest in high-density Wi-Fi offering high-speed, uninterrupted internet to groups as large as 15,000 people.

The Swan and Dolphin plans to offer premier event services throughout its meetings and public spaces by giving show organizers a turnkey solution for delivering meeting information, schedules, floor plans and directions to attendees. No additional hardware is required by the organizers, which saves planners on time and logistics, when planning an event. Mist and the Swan and Dolphin have also partnered with TurnoutNow, the world's most innovative event data capture platform, for asset tracking throughout the resort. Organizers can track booth visits, dwell times and offer personalized advertising opportunities that are customized based on user



behavior and/or location.

At the technology showcase, they discussed how the built-in (cabled) AP beacons can detect if 500 people have wandered into the lobby bar and how the AI aspect can immediately text three more bartenders to go and assist—without the need of managers to get involved. It can also detect if there's slow booth traffic in one corner of the tradeshow area and can text show management to take counter actions—such as sending a food or beverage cart to that area.

According to Bob Friday, chief technology officer for Mist, “It’s been an exciting project for the entire team, and we are excited to be on the forefront of offering cutting-edge, location-based services in hospitality. We expect this technology will continue to help distinguish the Walt Disney World Swan and Dolphin Resort as a leading resort for meetings and conventions.”

A recipient of the prestigious *Meetings & Conventions* Hall of Fame Award,

the luxurious Swan and Dolphin Resort is a nationally respected and recognized leader in the convention resort arena. Ideally located in the heart of Walt Disney World, the resort opened in June of 1990 and offers 2,270 guest rooms and more than 331,000 square feet of meeting space. Features consist of 86 meeting rooms, including two executive boardrooms, four ballroom options, 110,500 square feet of contiguous convention/exhibit space, outdoor function areas and two business centers. The Marriott/Starwood-managed resort offers unique Disney Differences with character appearances, theme park events, Disney Institute seminars, and much more.

For its 25th anniversary, the resort underwent a three-year, \$150 million renovation which included a redesign of all guest rooms, complete transformation of the Dolphin Resort lobby (with 9,890 individual crystals in the new Dolphin lobby chandelier) and renovation of all meeting space, which finished its final phase in fall 2017. It’s currently undergoing a \$3 million transformation of the Swan Resort’s lobby, public spaces and coffee bar. Upon completion by the end of 2018, the resort’s two main lobbies, all guest rooms and meeting spaces will all have completely updated appearances. In September, they

announced they’re breaking ground soon for a third tower (currently unnamed) that will be 14 stories tall and include:

- » More than 22,000 sq.ft. of meeting space, including two ballrooms, 12 meeting rooms and a rooftop reception space offering spectacular views of the nightly Walt Disney World fireworks
- » 349 guest rooms including 151 suites featuring separate working and private spaces, built-in AV system, large conference table and other features designed to create the perfect collaboration space
- » Landscaped 16,800-sq.ft. elevated outdoor deck with a fire pit and pool
- » 90-seat restaurant and a 50-seat lounge
- » Health club, business center, grab-and-go market, upscale craft cocktail lobby bar, Disney benefits

Scheduled to be completed in fall 2020, the new structure will be located next to the Swan Resort on the site of the tennis courts. Once the new tower is completed, the resort will offer more than 2,600 total guestrooms and 350,000 sq.ft. of meeting space. The new location will be open for group bookings March 1, 2021

“This new resort is designed to allow us to better meet the needs of meetings and groups,” says Director of Sales and Marketing Gino Marasco. “Its unique new features will complement our location, recent renovation and service

to give planners even more options to enjoy.”

Both leisure guests and conference attendees enjoy the cutting-edge technology that the innovators at the Swan and Dolphin provide. Cornu, an accomplished hospitality executive who oversees internet development and marketing for more than 10 Tishman hotels and resorts, is a champion for web technology and its positive implications for the hotel industry in particular. She continues to lead her company in defining innovative ways to incorporate it into their daily business. In 2000, she led the beta version of a hotel website for The Ocean Villas at the Westin Rio Mar Beach in Puerto Rico. The resort’s internet-based virtual “concierge” allowed guests to make restaurant reservations to tee times online and order the kind of food they wanted stocked in their refrigerator.

“People love technology,” says Cornu. “I’ve been in IT for over 30 years and hospitality for over 20. I’m always looking for the next big technology that’s going to change our industry. The last couple of years, I’ve been studying AI and location-based services to learn how they can help the hospitality industry deliver a better customer experience to both our leisure guests and our conference attendees. With Mist, we have found the right blend of AI and location-based services. It’s not only going to improve the customer service, but lay the foundation of how we deliver services to our guests in the future.” ©