



Hotels Aim to Unlock Communication Challenges to Improve Guest Experience



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Delivering a memorable, seamless guest experience is every hotelier's top goal. But it's also essential that the processes and resources hotels leverage to deliver that experience lead to operational efficiency and smart cost management.

Not surprisingly, achieving this balance comes down to people and relationships—supported by the right enabling technology. The majority of 150 hospitality executives responding to a recent survey by studioID see communication and collaboration as the building blocks for customer and employee satisfaction, which respondents note go hand-in-hand. Improved communication and collaboration enhances employees' productivity and encourages staff retention. Respondents agree that happier hotel workers are more likely to provide service that creates a stellar guest experience.

But the very nature of hotel management and operations creates challenges. Staff often cross between behind-the-scenes roles and client-facing positions. On-site employees tend to work long shifts, including on weekends, and can face language barriers. Sales and management are often on business travel or work remotely at least some days, adding another set of obstacles to overcome when relaying teamwide messaging.

With guest expectations only increasing, hoteliers need new ways to work together. And they're turning to advanced communications tools and artificial intelligence to make it happen. Here's how they're leveraging these tools to enable next-generation guest and employee experiences.



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Eyes on the prize: Guest experience



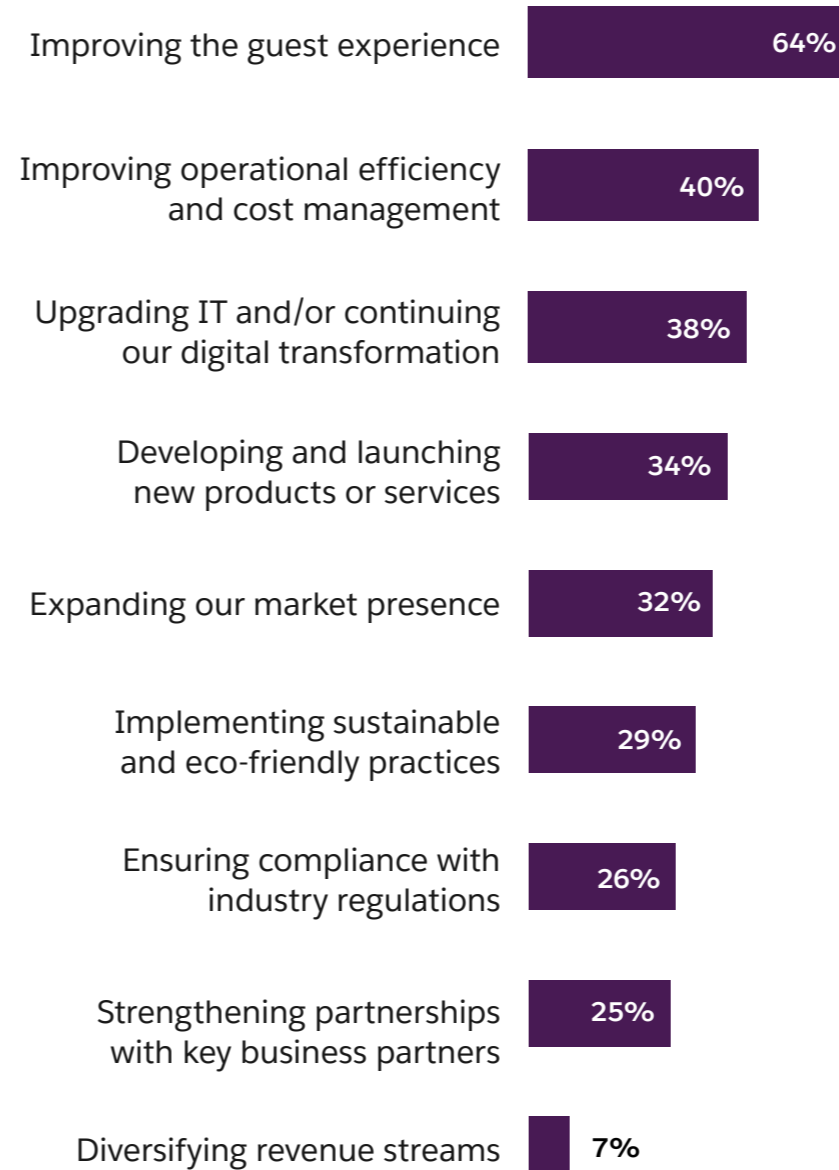
Hotels are based around guest hospitality, so the guest experience is naturally the respondents' top strategic priority (64%). Hoteliers strive to develop expertise in finding new ways to anticipate and delight guests to maintain continuous improvement. But improvements come with a cost, which is at odds with their second-highest priority: improving operational efficiency and cost management. Upgrading IT and/or continuing digital transformation is a close third, an acknowledgment of the key role tech will play in the future of hospitality.

Hotels have long relied on tech to help improve the way they work. In fact, the majority (79%) agree that when it comes to projects and tasks, internally or with partner organizations, it is currently easy for their employees to collaborate with each other and with partners. An even larger percentage call the quality of collaboration and coordination within their organizations, or with partner organizations, good (52%) or very good (40%).

While the majority of respondents agree they have the tools to collaborate successfully on projects, they acknowledge challenges persist, both in the back of the house and with guest-facing positions.

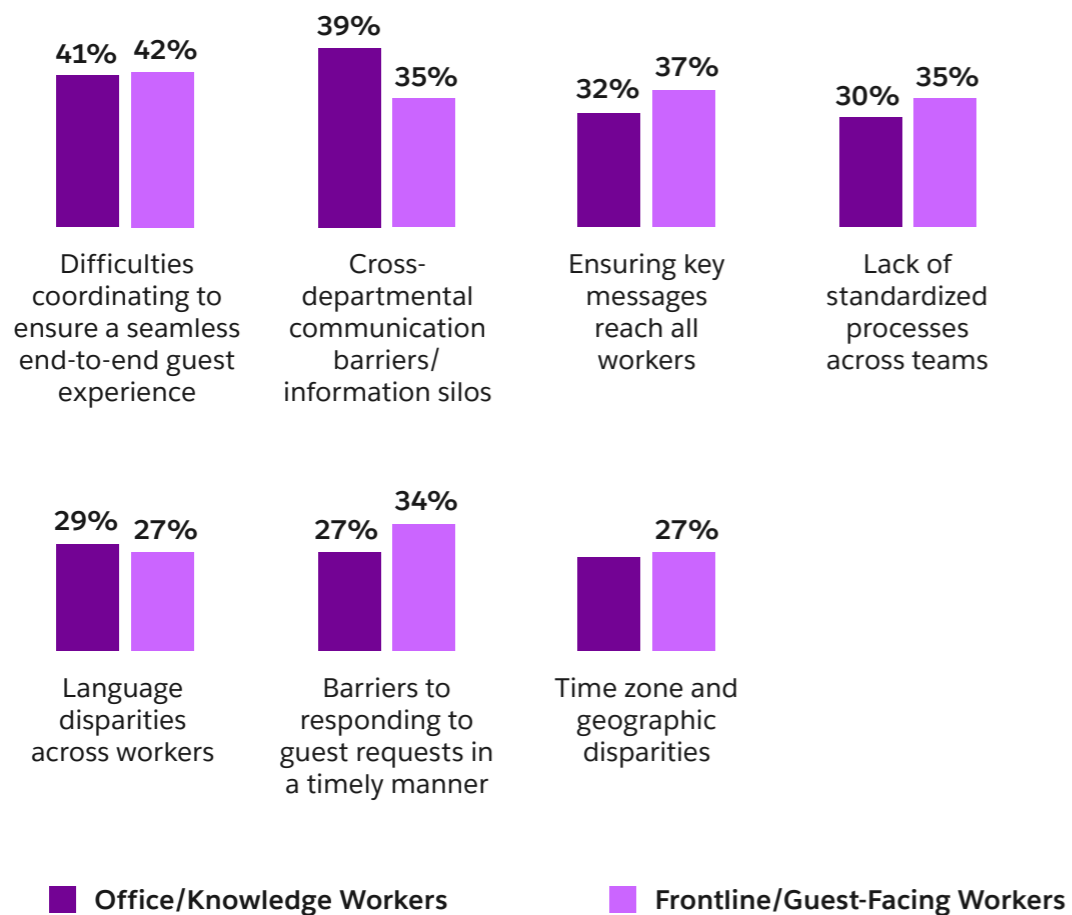
Hoteliers' Top Priorities

(*respondents chose top 3)



Top Communication Challenges

(*respondents chose top 3)



Difficulties coordinating a seamless end-to-end guest experience are common to both office/ and frontline/guest-facing positions (41% and 42%). The other most commonly cited challenges are cross-departmental communication barriers and information silos (39% and 35%) that spill into trouble ensuring key messages reach all workers (32% and 37%).

“Lack of real-time communication channels between, for example, the front desk agents and the concierge or valet, can lead to significant operational deficiency,” says Jacqueline Nunley, travel and hospitality industry advisor for Salesforce. “The impact on guest service is commonly perceived as a lack of attention to detail, which is often critical to get satisfaction and loyalty in the hospitality industry.”

Expectations and collaboration capabilities also vary widely by hotel sector—budget, midrange, luxury—she adds, and communication between office and guest-facing workers, or even workers in different departments on property, is also subject to breakdown.

“Feeling connected when you might not be physically connected, is a game changer; it’s pretty critical,” since even on a single property, the workforce spans shifts and works in disparate areas, says Jack Gerhke, lead solution engineer for Slack. “I think that’s an area of opportunity for a lot of hotels.”

Employee retention is another issue that continues to impact hotels – and their ability to reach their strategic goals. Nearly half (45%) of respondents call this a very or extremely significant issue for their organizations, with another 23% calling it somewhat significant. That aligns with a recent finding from the American Hotel & Lodging Association (AHLA) that 67% of hotels are experiencing a staffing shortage, with 12% reporting they are “severely understaffed.”



2

The state of communication and collaboration



Hoteliers have long recognized that communication and collaboration are must-haves to facilitate operations and the guest experience. Over time, many have invested in collaborative platforms as well as software tools to manage specific components of their operations.

As a result, the survey found, respondents' companies use on average 3.5 different communications or collaboration tools. Two-thirds of companies use commonly adopted team collaboration and communication applications (for example, Slack, MS Teams, Webex, Teams, Zoom). Slightly more than half (53%) employ productivity suites (such as Microsoft 365 or Google Workspace) or project management and task collaboration (including Asana, Trello, Jira, Confluence, Hive) (47%). Other tools include file-sharing platforms, task management systems, and unified communications platforms.

The use of so many different tools can impair employees' ability to communicate..



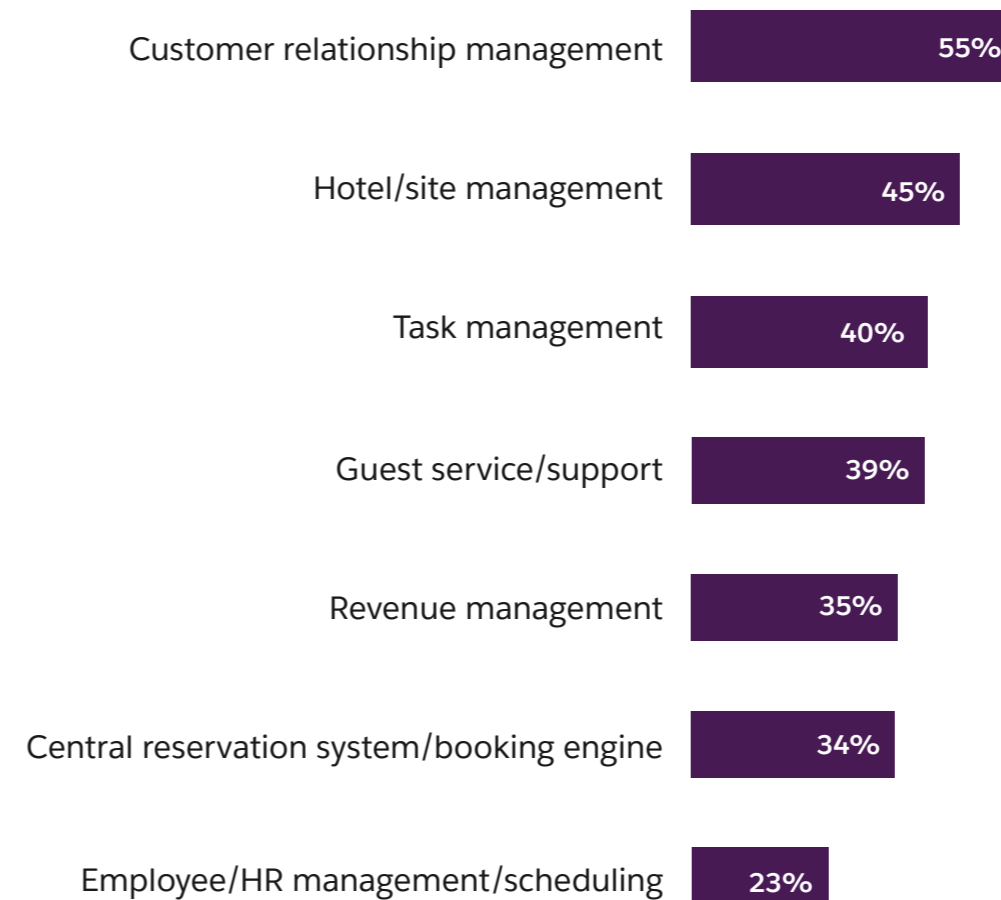
Companies use
an average of
3x
different
communication or
collaboration tools

“The implication for multiple tools is overlap and redundancy,” says Nunley. “The overlapping functionalities have created an operational nightmare when it comes to integration. And that snowballs into the challenges that are associated with maintaining that cohesive flow of information across the organization.” Hotels struggle to integrate the communications aspects of those applications and determine where the redundancies lie, she says.

As the communication/collaboration challenges outlined highlight, there is room for improvement across multiple systems. Respondents believe simplifying processes by consolidating programs and operations could provide greater value for hoteliers, which would then benefit guests. Customer relationship management (55%) leads the list of the systems respondents believe are/would be enhanced by integrating additional or superior communication and collaboration capabilities, followed by hotel/site management (45%) and task management (40%).

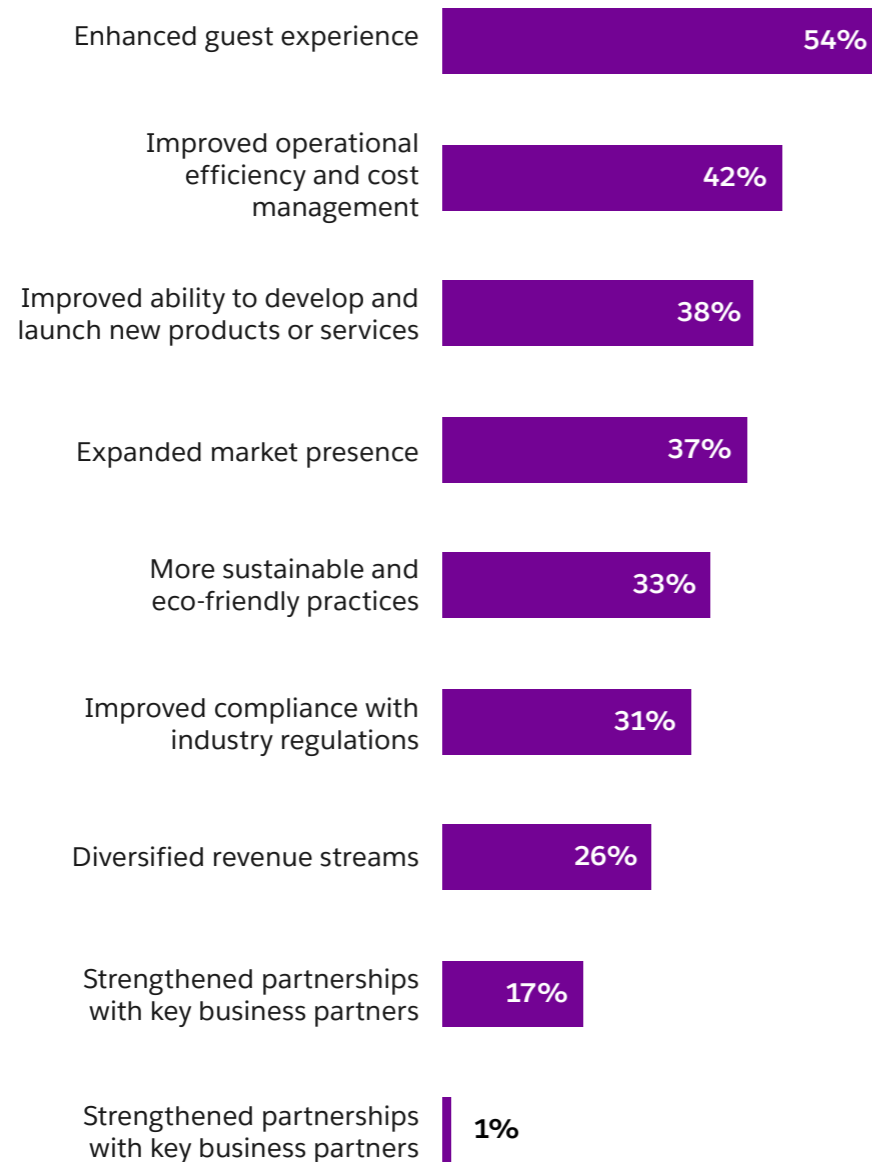
Help Wanted

Systems respondents believe would benefit from integrating additional or superior communication and collaboration capabilities



How Better Communication Can Help

(*respondents chose top 3)



The lack of well-integrated, streamlined communication and collaboration seems to be holding hotels back from achieving their strategic goals, namely improving guest experiences to build greater customer loyalty.

Hotels need tools to share and collaborate using strategies built around data collected in the travel process, from registration to on-site behavior.

“There are a lot of applications that different groups are using, and there’s a ton of useful data and information that’s structured and stored there,” says Gerhke. “However, not everyone has the same access or level of visibility into the different systems. But it doesn’t mean that that data is not valuable to the entire team.”

The results respondents have achieved, or believe they would achieve, by improving communication and collaboration across their workforce and with partners aligns with their organizations’ top two strategic priorities: enhanced guest experience (54%) and improved operational efficiency and cost management (42%).

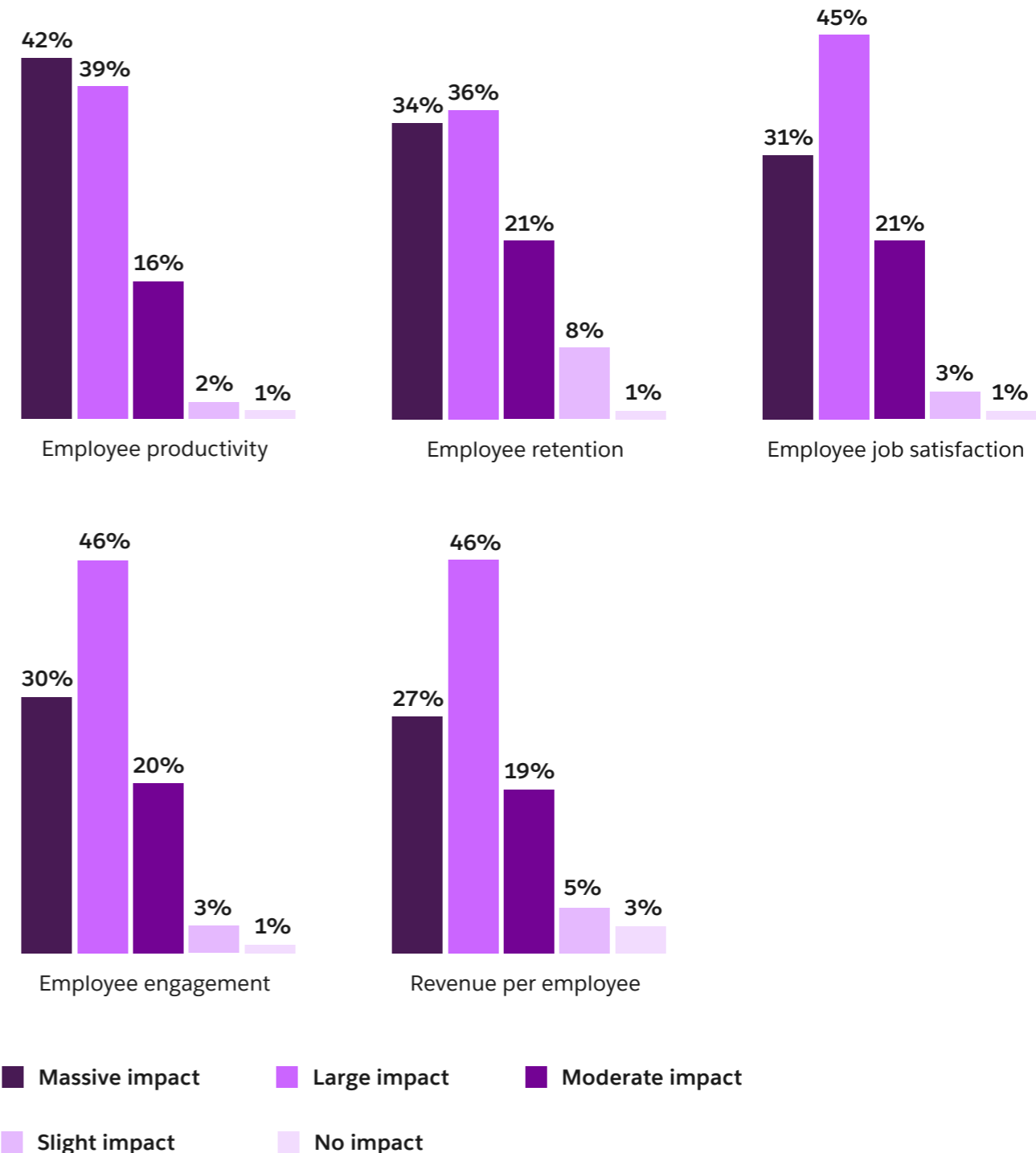
Other benefits of better communication and collaboration include improved ability to develop and launch new products or services (38%) and expand market presence (37%).

Guest and operational benefits aren't the only advantages that flow from better communication. Respondents insist improving employee communication and/or collaboration will have a dramatic impact on all aspects of the employee experience (EX). Employee productivity is the biggest benefit, with 81% saying improving employee communication and/or collaboration would have a large or massive impact. More than three-quarters (76%) see a massive or large jump in employee job satisfaction, while 70% say employee retention, another critical KPI, would also benefit.

When employees have at least some level of access to the people and information to do their jobs, there is sentiment that many are held back by the platforms they are using. They would be "more efficient, [and] can see issues and be proactive and solve them, because they're using a communication tool that allows them to have visibility," says Nunley.

Gauging Employee Experience

How respondents believe better communication will impact hotel employees



3

The AI future



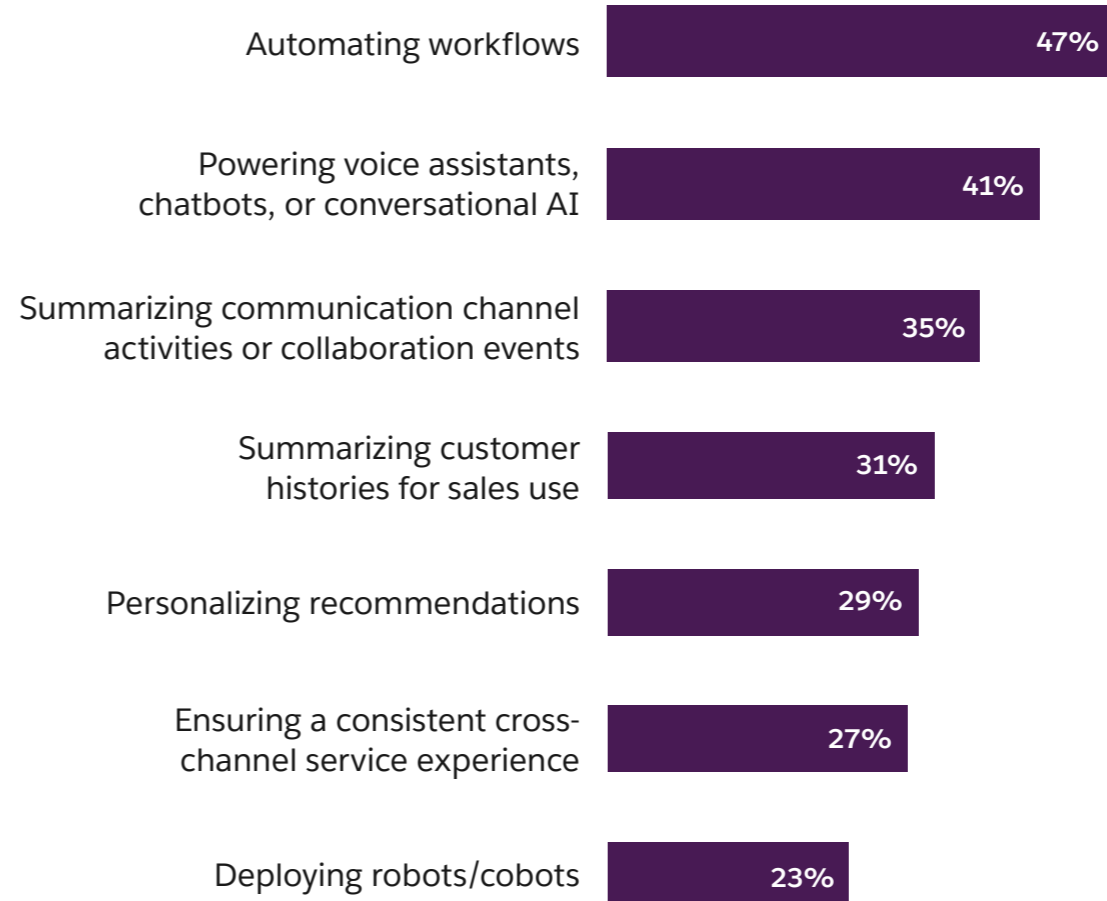
Hotelier respondents are particularly excited about the ability to leverage artificial intelligence, and generative AI, in particular, to address their communications and collaboration challenges. Nearly two-thirds (62%) say their organizations are very excited about the use of artificial intelligence in their internal and guest-facing operations.

Automating workflows (47%) leads the list of likely implementations, followed by powering voice assistants, chatbots, or conversational AI (41%) and summarizing communication channel activities or collaboration events (35%).

As with enhancing communication and collaboration, respondents also see AI as directly assisting with their top two strategic goals. More than half (53%) anticipate using AI in their organizations will improve operational efficiency and cost management, and 49% expect AI will enhance the guest experience.

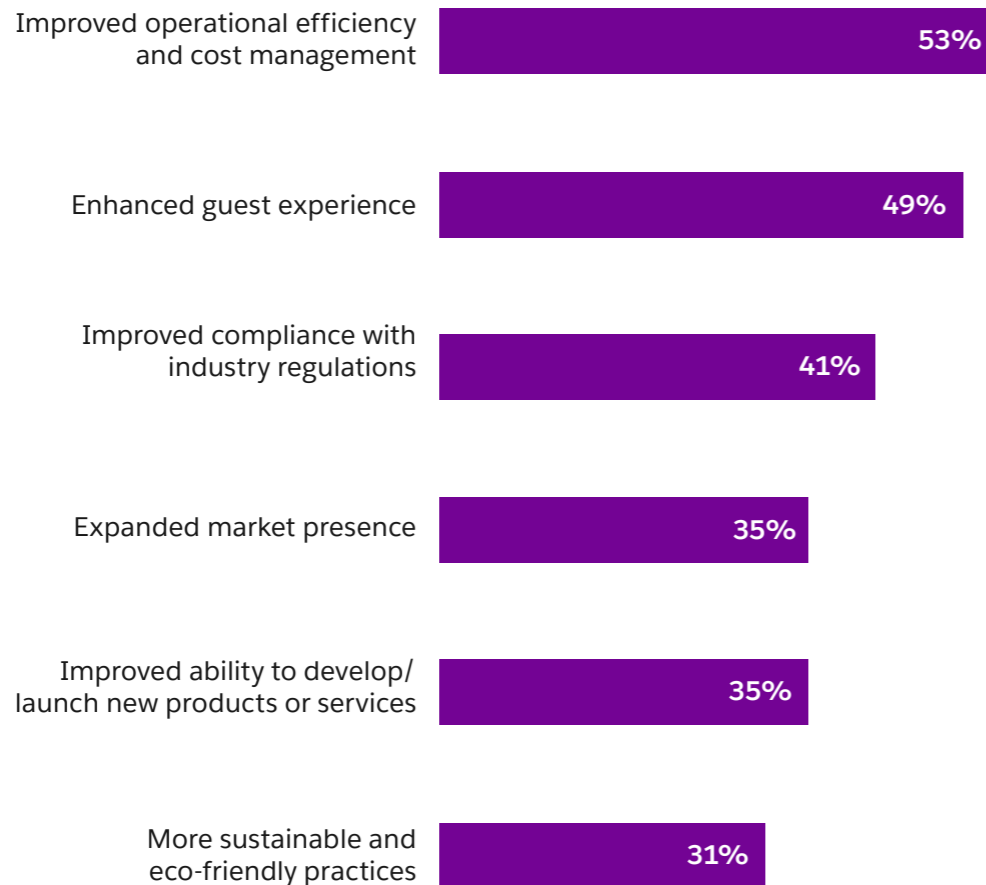
Where AI Fits In

Where respondents see the most potential for AI-driven communication and collaboration improvements (*Respondents chose up to 3)



Anticipated AI Benefits

(*Respondents chose up to 3)



Other top anticipated benefits of AI use include improved compliance with industry regulations, ranked third at 41%, expanded market presence and improved ability to develop/launch new products or services (both 35%).

Adding AI to communications and collaboration promises to enhance the effectiveness of both. For example, says Gerhke, “AI can help hospitality organizations get ahead of guest expectations. You can use historical data and generative AI to make offers to that guest to surprise, delight, and improve the loyalty of that guest with things like Slack,” such as a housekeeper accessing the preferences of a VIP guest. Or staff could use it to offer hotel general managers AI-generated recaps of what has happened on an overnight shift or provide remote call center workers access to a recent folio at a guest’s request.



By integrating with a broad suite of hotel applications, Gerhke says, a software solution like Slack becomes the organization's central communications and collaboration hub, bringing in the pertinent data and information and centering it around a common denominator in Slack. "We have customers that have 17 different applications integrated into one channel," streamlining and significantly improving their ability to deliver that guest experience. They also see operational benefits, from more efficient use of labor to saving on per-seat costs for applications.

Respondents' enthusiasm is clear in their attitudes toward technology. The largest group (40%) call their organizations early adopters, 25% say they are early majority adopters, and 23% describe their organizations as innovators.

Hoteliers' eagerness to adopt new technology makes this an ideal time to elevate communication/collaboration with AI, to meet guests' and employees' expanding needs.

"Hospitality is all about relationships," says Nunley. "It is fundamental that communication tools improve and become more accessible to attract future workers in hospitality, and leverage AI-enabled technology as learning and collaboration tools. The highest level of excellence with hospitality is the nonverbal execution of anticipating your needs, and solving them," she says, and the right platform can make that happen.

Great communication and collaboration among hospitality employees lie at the heart of a great guest experience and more efficient operations. This survey found that hotels struggle to coordinate to ensure a seamless guest experience and communicate effectively across departments, and that many hoteliers see improving communication and collaboration as critical to supporting their strategic goals.



They also see enhancing communication and collaboration as key to creating a better employee experience, offering significant impact on employee productivity, retention and job satisfaction—all essential in an era of widespread staff shortages. Many are very excited to leverage artificial intelligence to address their communications and collaboration challenges.

As the survey revealed, hoteliers motivated to keep up with the constantly rising expectations of their guests, enhance operational efficiency and empower employees to be more productive and satisfied in their jobs feel strongly that enhancing communication and collaboration with better software and the added power of AI are essential steps to achieving their goals.

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