

11. Front Office – Information System

Hotel business is of a kind that needs to provide a myriad range of services to its guests such as food, accommodation, transport, recreational services, and so on. Since the front office contributes major portion in coordinating the services requested by the guests, it needs a system that can help the front office staff to sell services and track them seamlessly and simultaneously.

The front office information system includes mainly the property management system. Let us see, what PMS is and how useful it is for handling hotel management functions smoothly.

What is a Property Management System?

A Property Management System (PMS) is a software system employed to handle basic objectives of all the departments in the hotel business and coordinate functions between them for optimum business outcomes.

Why is PMS Required?

A PMS is required for the hotel staff for the following reasons:

- It integrates all critical operations of the hotel on one platform.
- It provides real-time information on accommodations, reservations, restaurants, spas, bars, and about every working arm of the hotel.
- It provides highly accurate information which is helpful for the management to plan new goals and handle the investments in a better way.
- It boosts the efficiency of the front office staff and in turn maximizes the performance of the hotel business.
- It simplifies the time-taking or complex operations otherwise done manually.
- It works for the convenience of the hotel staff, managing body, as well as the guests.

Types of PMS

There are two basic types of PMS:

- **Local PMS:** They have large technical requirements such as workstation, Computer/workstation, Data server, Terminal servers, Operating system, Network cards, and Removable back-up systems.

- **Cloud-based PMS:** They mainly need computers/workstation and Internet connection.

Difference between Local and Cloud-based PMS

	Local PMS	Cloud-based PMS
Availing the PMS	Owner needs to purchase the PMS hardware and software.	Owner needs to take subscription from a PMS vendor.
Requirement of Internet Connection	No	Yes, a reliable high speed connection is mandatory.
System and Access	PMS software and data reside on a server to which multiple terminals are connected. The PMS is accessed from a program installed on each terminal.	PMS software and data reside on a shared server at the PMS vendor's data center. Users access the system through a Web browser from anywhere, anytime.
Requirement of On-site IT expertise	Yes	No
Advantages	Does not rely on an Internet connection. Reduces concerns about online data security. Robust functionality for vast amount of data.	Less costs of hardware or IT. No technical and data security responsibility on owner. Affordable subscription pricing. Simple, quick set-up. Easy access from anywhere, anytime. Automatic data back-up. Integrated Web bookings. Free system upgrades. Scalable and adaptable.
Disadvantages	Requires complex and expensive hardware. Unreachable from remote areas.	Not suitable for properties without a reliable Internet connection. High concerns over online security.

	<p>Expensive and complicated to maintain and upgrade.</p> <p>Time-consuming, software installation and training.</p> <p>Additional costs and hardware needed for enabling web-based features</p> <p>Responsibility of system and data security is owner's headache.</p> <p>On-site IT expertise is required.</p>	
Mark on Timeline	It is a traditional solution.	It is a contemporary solution.
Pricing	Capital expenditure and operational expenditure both; for hardware, software and its updates, and IT expert's charges.	Operational expenses for renewing subscription.

Popular Property Management Systems

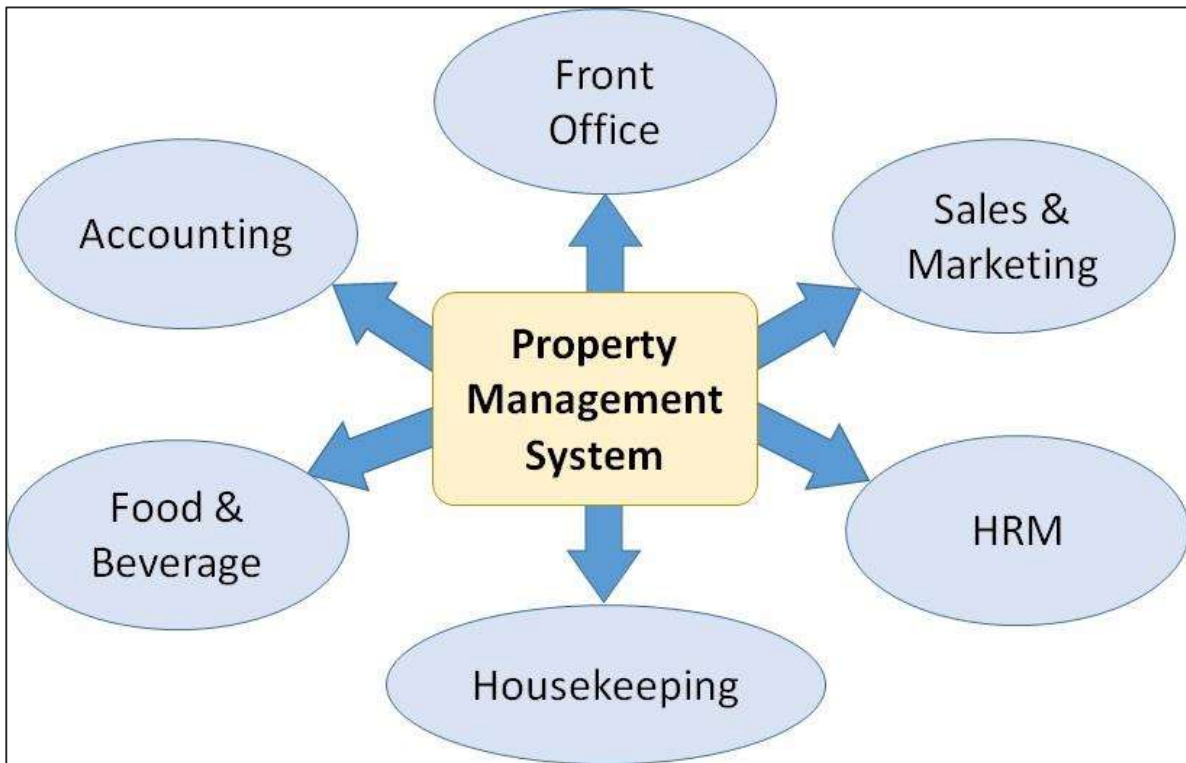
Some popular PMS: Autoclerk, Skyware MSICloud, CloudPM, eZee Frontdesk, Hotelogix, Hetello, Hoteliga, OpenHotel, OPERA PMS, are to name a few.

Common Software Options in a PMS

A PMS takes care of each department in the hotel. These are the commonly available features among PMS:

PMS Features for Front desk

- Reservation
- Registration
- Accommodation status
- Guest and non-guest accounts
- Cash handling
- Night auditing
- Reports



PMS for Sales and Marketing

- Guest database for market segmentation
- Guest history
- Yield management
- Travel agents' information as clients
- Reports for goals
- Performance evaluation by comparative analysis

PMS for Housekeeping

- Lost and found
- Accommodation status
- Laundry charges

PMS for Food and Beverage

- POS sales
- Material inventory
- Periodic sales reports
- Standard recipes

PMS for HRM Department

Individual staff member's records regarding shifts, attendance, and appraisals.

PMS for Accounts

- Account payables and receivables
- Payroll
- Balance sheet
- Profit/Loss reports

PMS for Communication

Outgoing and incoming call records with date, time, place, duration, and charges.

Concerns in Selection of Appropriate PMS

The following concerns are considered while selecting an appropriate PMS:

Property and Business Domain Concerns

- Size of the property: The number of accommodations
- Number of locations
- Number of employees
- Property service policies
- Budget for technical resources and training
- Nearest future growth

PMS Domain Concerns

- User-friendly design that fosters intuitive navigation through logical order of tasks.
- Training expertise and time period required to train the staff.
- Hotel's online presence.
- Guest-oriented functionality.
- Scalability.