



YOTEL looks to Plug and Play to help it drive further innovation

[YOTEL](#) is known for trying different concepts at its hotels. The Yobot, robot to help with luggage, at its New York hotel for example or, the housekeeping robots at its Singapore property.

The company recently signed a deal with start-up incubator Plug and Play to help it stay it ahead of the game.

YOTEL CEO Hubert Viriot recently spoke to tnooz about the thinking behind the partnership and innovation priorities.

The why?

Viriot says the company has always approached the hotel segment differently and asked how it can improve hotels, innovate, change perceptions and introduce new technology.

“It’s a big task for a young and dynamic company and our business is to manage hotels not to spend the entire time figuring out new technology. We put innovation at the core but to be effective we wanted a partnership with someone that does this as a business.”

He adds that Plug and Play has a boss for the travel, hospitality and leisure category who lives and breathes the industry and understands the challenges. Viriot also says the global reach of the incubator was very important.

“It has listened to what we are looking for, not just an industry, but YOTEL specifically. And, with brief in mind they then scout for new start-ups. It’s a very proactive approach.”

What was your brief?

Viriot shares that there is no one idea the company wants to pursue, but many. The internal teams were asked for their input into the areas where they wanted to see innovation and different ideas. Each team came back with a different view – the IT team wants a new property management system; the operations team is keen to explore robotics for hotel maintenance and

cleaning and food & beverage wants to use technology to process and deliver orders.

“Then there are more out of the box things such as asking what might be a different technology to integrate, it’s probably something we have not thought of or something like the impact of blockchain.”

Priorities for the business

The company came up with 10 points, all viewed as a priority for the needs of different departments.

“There is not one that is more important than the other. If we have to make a choice, it ends up my responsibility. That’s something Plug and Play insists on – to have the senior management teams involvement.”

What is YOTEL hoping to get out of it?

While Viriot acknowledges that YOTEL is unlikely to be able to find partners for all of its priorities, he says he is looking for real results that improve the business. For example, if the company was able to partner with a start-up that was approaching hotel PMS in a different way, he would see that as a result.

“We’re really struggling with 99% of the PMS out there. We sell rooms by the hour and none of the PMS can understand that. We get round that by using two PMS at the same time which is very expensive and creates enormous problems with bugs.”

That’s just one specific area YOTEL is keen to have fresh input on. Plug and Play has already introduces 20 start-ups to the company and according to Viriot, YOTEL would like to regularly integrate a new partner to “stay ahead, stay competitive.”

Has YOTEL worked with start-ups before?

YOTEL has worked with start-ups in the past. For the housekeeping robots at its Singapore hotel, the company worked with a local start-up and had the support of the Singapore government. In addition, for its current PMS requirements, the company uses Oracle as well as a younger company.

However, going forward, Viriot says that because YOTEL is expanding rapidly with 14 properties in the pipeline, it needs to be sure “partners are robust enough to grow with our scale.”

How important is it to work with start-ups?

Viriot concludes that it’s “hugely” important. He reiterates the relative youth of the brand as well as the fact that its approach has always been different, starting with founders who are not from the hospitality industry.

“We’re looking differently because it has been so traditional and there are so many aspects of the industry that need to be revolutionised. Keeping an eye on what is happening is the responsibility of any management team.”