

A PRACTICAL GUIDE FOR HOTEL OWNERS, GMS AND FINANCE LEADERS

Where AI actually pays off in hospitality

And 3 places it doesn't.

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Most AI advice is written by people selling AI.

I'm not. I spent 25 years in hotel finance — accounts assistant through to group financial controller, and Director of Finance cover through mergers, exits and system transitions. I now build tools for hospitality businesses, mostly on the Microsoft licences they already pay for.

So this is written from the other side of the desk. What has actually worked inside a working hotel, what hasn't, and how to tell the difference before you spend money finding out.

Finance is where I trained, but it isn't where this stops. Some of the best results I've delivered have been in golf operations and HR, and they worked for a finance reason: capture it once, at the moment it happens, and make it provable afterwards. That instinct travels further than the department does.

Two things worth saying before we start.

AI is not the interesting part.

The interesting part is that a job someone did by hand every Tuesday now does itself. Whether that happens through AI, a workflow, or a well-built form matters far less than whether it happens at all. Some of the best results I've delivered involved no AI whatsoever — and the client didn't care, because the Tuesday job was gone.

You don't need a strategy yet.

Businesses that start with an AI strategy tend to produce a document. Businesses that start with one genuinely annoying task tend to produce a result — and then the strategy writes itself, out of things that already work.

If you read nothing else: pick the task your team complains about most, and fix that one properly. Everything in this guide is in service of choosing it well.

4 questions before you build anything.

Run these over any task you're considering. Three yeses and it's probably worth doing. Fewer than three and you'll spend more building it than you ever get back.

1

Does it happen at least once a week?

Frequency is what pays for the build. A task that happens twice a year needs a good checklist, not an app.

2

Can you write the rule down?

If you can't explain the rule to a new starter in a paragraph, AI can't follow it either. "Anything over \$5,000 goes to the GM" is a rule. "It depends on the situation" is not — not yet.

3

Can someone check the output in under a minute?

This is the question people skip. If verifying the answer takes as long as doing the work, you haven't saved anything. Trust, then verify — and the verifying has to be cheap.

4

Does anyone need to prove it happened?

Approvals, acknowledgements, sign-offs, compliance. If yes, you're not only saving time — you're buying an audit trail, and that is usually worth more than the hours.

A task that scores four out of four is worth building this month. In my experience there is always at least one, and the people who do it every day already know exactly what it is.

5 places it genuinely pays off.

1 Approval chains

The highest-return thing I've built. A multi-property group was running document sign-off through a third-party e-signature subscription. We replaced it with a purpose-built approval app on the Microsoft licences they already held — requests, routing, thresholds, approvals and a full audit trail in one place.

It saves roughly **\$5,000 a year in licence fees alone**, and it is now the most-used app in the group.

Four out of four: high frequency, writable rules, instant verification, and an audit trail everyone wanted anyway.

2 Getting numbers out of documents

Supplier invoices, statements, contracts, rate sheets. AI reads them; a person checks the exceptions. You are not replacing the accounts payable clerk — you are giving them back the two hours a day they currently spend typing.

3 Matching and reconciliation

POS to PMS to ledger. Bank to sub-ledger. The value isn't in the 98% that match — it's in surfacing the 2% that don't, on the day rather than at month-end when nobody can remember what happened.

4 The first draft of the words

Variance commentary. Board pack notes. Policy summaries. AI is very good at removing the blank page and very bad at judgement. Use it for the first and never the second.

5 Capturing what nobody is capturing

The category most people miss, because it doesn't look like a time problem. Sometimes the work isn't slow — it isn't happening at all.

A golf operation I built a guest check-in system for had three of these at once. Player emails were captured for some guests and not others. Where guests had travelled from was recorded nowhere. And no player had ever signed a health and safety waiver.

Guests now check themselves in on an iPad in their own language, accept the safety acknowledgement and sign for it. Signatures are stored against the visit, junior players are routed to a parent or guardian, and anything the app learns that the booking system doesn't already hold is flagged to the pro shop and chased by email at the end of each day.

Only one of those three saves anybody time. The other two are a revenue asset and a liability the business no longer carries.

And 3 places it doesn't.

1 Anywhere you can't check the answer

AI will produce a confident forecast that is wrong in ways you cannot see from the outside. That's fine for a first draft you intend to interrogate. It is genuinely dangerous when the number goes into a board pack unchallenged.

The rule I work to: **AI can draft anything. It signs nothing.**

2 On top of a broken process

Automating a bad approval chain gives you a fast bad approval chain — and now it's harder to fix, because it lives in software and someone has to pay to change it.

If the process confuses people today, sort it out on paper first. That takes about a week and saves about a year.

3 Where the volume isn't there

The arithmetic is unforgiving. A build that takes 20 hours and saves 15 minutes a week pays for itself in roughly two years. The same 20 hours spent on a daily task pays for itself in about two months.

Frequency, not complexity, decides whether a build is worth doing.

One rule that has never let me down. Whatever you build must not become a second version of the truth. Your PMS or booking system stays the system of record. The thing you build should feed it, flag what's missing and chase what's outstanding — but never quietly disagree with it. Two systems that half-agree cost more than the manual process ever did.

And one more, quietly. Guest and employee personal data does not belong in a public AI tool. Use the tools inside your own tenant, where the data stays yours and your auditor can see where it went. This is the easiest mistake to make and the hardest to explain afterwards.

How to start, in 4 weeks.

WEEK 1 – WRITE THE LIST

Ask every team — finance, front office, F&B, golf, housekeeping, HR — for the tasks they repeat more than once a week, and for anything they know should be captured and isn't. Don't filter it, don't rank it, don't judge it. You are looking for irritation, not opportunity. Irritation is more honest, and it is spread far wider than the finance office.

WEEK 2 – SCORE IT

Run the four questions over the list. Pick the single highest scorer — not the biggest, not the most impressive, the highest scorer. The big one will still be there in three months, and you'll be far better equipped for it.

WEEK 3 – BUILD THE SMALLEST VERSION

One approval type, not all of them. One property, not the group. Small enough that being completely wrong costs you a week.

WEEK 4 – RUN BOTH WAYS AT ONCE

Old process and new process side by side, for one full cycle. Trust, then verify. When the new one matches the old one, turn the old one off — and not a day before.

If week four doesn't match, you have learned something real for the price of a month. That is the cheapest lesson in this guide, and the one most businesses skip straight past on their way to an expensive one.

WHO WROTE THIS

If one particular task came to mind while reading, that's the one.

I'm Dessy Leckie. Twenty-five years in hotel finance across New Zealand and Australia, from accounts assistant to group financial controller, with Director of Finance cover through mergers, exits and system transitions.

These days I split my time between senior finance leadership and building the tools that take the manual work out of running the place — approvals, capital tracking, guest sign-in, compliance records — on the Microsoft platform most hospitality businesses already pay for. Finance is where I trained. It is not the only place the thinking applies.

Microsoft Certified: Power Platform Fundamentals (PL-900) and Azure AI Fundamentals (AI-901).

Usually the task that came to mind while you were reading is the right place to start. If you'd like a second opinion on whether it's worth building, that's a thirty-minute conversation and it costs nothing.

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Trust, then verify.