

**60 Seconds with...**

Leading independent hotel industry consultant, Melvin Gold, FIH. After eight years' operational experience with Intercontinental, Thistle and Metropole Hotels, Melvin joined consultancy PKF as a consultant, becoming a director and then MD of their hotel team. In early 2004 he set up his own consultancy ([www.melvingoldconsulting.com](http://www.melvingoldconsulting.com)).

**What do you most enjoy about your job? What are the biggest changes and challenges you see?**

I am passionate about this industry and its opportunities, and I love understanding clients' business objectives and helping them to achieve them. Changes and challenges are much the same thing I think – I would say technology, service standards, people (finding, training, motivating and retaining) and of course the balance between customer service, revenue and profits!

**What most frustrates you about hotels and how they yield rates?**

Inconsistency and lack of transparency. I think they have a big challenge in recognising the motivations of their clients these days – when bookings are received via the internet, can hotels really understand whether the client is a business or leisure guest?

**How do you think technology will impact on the booking/stay experience?**

Customer online reviews on sites such as Trip Advisor will gain in importance and increasingly negate star gradings value. They provide so much more useful insight, hotels have to manage the sites and stop moaning about false reviews. I think the next big thing in hotel stays will be self check-in machines, but I've been saying that for years. Maybe it's finally happening now.



**Do you think online self-booking tools for meetings will become commonplace?**

This is some way off. The technology, range of yield management issues, and the range of client requirements tend to make it complex.

**Is 'green' the next big thing, or has the economic climate made it take a back seat?**

Green is big, but as we have recently seen, the economic factors and profit motivation (in some cases the survival instinct) are bigger. Self-interest is still paramount. Where there is a win-win - such as laundering towels less often - which also saves cost, then green can win more easily.

**What do you see happening with the environment reporting aspect in the next five years?**

Responsible companies will embrace it, and their clients may demand it. The two may combine to cause it to be far more important. When reporting

and transparency is a requirement of clients or their agents it will rise up the agenda of hospitality providers for both meetings and accommodation. But how will independent hotels or small chains deal with this?

**What are your predictions for the next 12-24 months on average rates for London, major cities and provinces for conferencing and accommodation?**

Occupancy is key. As hoteliers feel more confident about filling their rooms they'll try to build back their average rates. London is well ahead of the regions for accommodation at present and some cities will take a while to recover. Customer confidence is even further behind in the conference sector. The impact of the public sector cuts is the big unknown and could set things back.

**How do you see the future for serviced accommodation?**

The growth of budget hotels will drive new supply. The best of the full service hotels will increasingly focus on their market and on adding value for their clients. Niche products – boutiques, serviced apartments etc. – will continue to be developed. The mid-market will be squeezed, except for the best of the brands in that space, and the best of the independents. If hotels are under-invested and not customer focused they will have a tough future... or no future!

**What's the next big thing for MICE?**

Hard to say, but I think all-inclusive prices will be key to gaining customer support in the future. Surprises will be welcome in the product, but not in the price or final bill! The MICE sector has to win back customer confidence and persuade them to book ahead – transparency and guaranteed pricing must therefore be key to that.