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YES—AND...GETTING PRACTICAL WITH A.I.

SESSION TAKE-AWAY



YES AND...
THE POWER OF POSSIBILITY

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PALMER HOUSE



Making AI Work for Hospitality

Artificial intelligence is rapidly changing how organizations create content, analyze information, train employees, and make operational decisions. But with an ever-growing number of tools available, knowing where to begin can be challenging.

In this practical session, Joseph Schumaker, Marty Cattaneo, and Hannah Montes explored how hospitality professionals can move beyond experimenting with AI and begin integrating it into their everyday work. Through live demonstrations, operational examples, and real-world lessons, they illustrated how AI can save time, improve efficiency, and support better decision-making while keeping human expertise at the center.

The central message: AI should make hospitality professionals more effective, not replace the human judgment and connection that make hospitality meaningful.

1. Start With the Work, Not the Technology

With hundreds of AI tools available and new capabilities emerging constantly, choosing where to begin can feel overwhelming.

Rather than trying every new platform, Schumaker encouraged attendees to identify the tasks that consume the most time in their daily work. Those tasks provide a practical starting point for exploring where AI might create value.

For hospitality professionals, potential applications include:

- Concept development: Brainstorming menus, foodservice concepts, and promotional ideas.
- Presentations and proposals: Developing pitch decks, organizing information, and creating presentation graphics.
- Training and onboarding: Producing instructional videos, welcome messages, and equipment demonstrations.
- Data analysis: Reviewing spreadsheets, operational reports, financial information, and customer feedback.
- Communication: Creating and updating content for employees and stakeholders, including multilingual materials.

A Live Example: From Idea to Presentation

During the session, Schumaker demonstrated how several AI tools could work together to develop a fictional corporate dining concept.

Starting with an audience-suggested idea for Spam tacos, he used:

1. **ChatGPT** to generate an initial foodservice concept.
2. **Gamma** to transform the concept into a presentation with supporting visuals.
3. **Synthesia** to develop a promotional video featuring an AI-generated avatar.

The demonstration showed how AI can accelerate the early stages of creative development, moving from an idea to presentation materials within a single session.

Importantly, Schumaker emphasized that the human user remains responsible for directing, editing, and refining the results.

Key Takeaway: The best AI application is not necessarily the newest or most sophisticated tool. It is the one that helps solve a meaningful problem in your existing workflow.

2. Better AI Results Start With Better Context

Many professionals approach AI by typing a question and expecting a useful answer. While this can work for simple tasks, more complex responsibilities require a deeper approach.

Marty Cattaneo introduced a distinction between prompt engineering and context engineering.

Prompt engineering focuses on how to ask AI for something.

Context engineering focuses on giving AI the background information it needs to understand the task, organization, and environment in which the work takes place.

Cattaneo compared context engineering to onboarding a new employee. You would not expect a new hire to make informed decisions without understanding their responsibilities, organizational structure, colleagues, and limitations. An AI assistant benefits from that same foundation.

Building Your AI Context

Cattaneo described several categories of information that can help an AI assistant become more useful.

Context Area	Information to Provide
Scope	Your responsibilities, services, locations, and operational environment
Organizational Structure	Key stakeholders, reporting relationships, and decision-makers
Suppliers and Partners	Relevant vendors, their capabilities, and working relationships
Constraints	Budget limitations, approval processes, operational challenges, and restrictions
Ongoing Updates	New information, changing priorities, and lessons from previous work

The goal is to establish a foundation that can be reused and refined rather than explaining your entire work environment with every request.

The Value of Context in Practice

Cattaneo described building an extensive organizational context for his AI assistant to support his work overseeing Intel's global dining strategy.

Once that foundation was established, he could use the assistant to help develop strategic documents, presentation materials, and operational spreadsheets.

In one example, a consolidated site information spreadsheet that had previously taken at least half a day to assemble was recreated in approximately ten minutes using his AI assistant and information he had already gathered.

His approach also allowed him to build on previous work rather than repeatedly starting from scratch.

Putting It Into Practice

Begin building an AI context document using information you are authorized to share.

Start with your role, responsibilities, stakeholders, and operational constraints. Then provide the AI assistant with that context and ask it to identify what additional information would help it support your work.

Keep refining the context as your needs change.

Cattaneo's guiding advice was simple: **Stop writing prompts and start writing context.**

3. Treat AI as a Collaborator, Not an Automatic Solution

AI tools are becoming increasingly capable, but their abilities vary significantly between platforms and can change as new features are introduced.

Cattaneo shared an early experience in which he spent considerable time trying to get an AI assistant to build a presentation it was not yet capable of producing.

The lesson was not simply to write a better prompt. It was to understand the technology's capabilities before investing significant time in a particular approach.

Two Questions to Ask Your AI Assistant

What can you do today that you couldn't do before?

New features may become available without users realizing it. Cattaneo described how enterprise access to internal files, communications, and other resources changed what his assistant could accomplish.

What are you unable to do?

Understanding limitations early can prevent wasted effort, unrealistic expectations, and unnecessary frustration.

These questions can be a useful starting point, but an assistant's description of its own capabilities should be confirmed through actual testing and organizational documentation.

Build a Routine for Learning

Cattaneo encouraged attendees to dedicate approximately 15 minutes each week to exploring new AI capabilities.

This might involve testing an existing workflow, reviewing newly available features, or identifying tasks that could benefit from additional automation.

The objective is not to become an AI expert overnight. It is to develop practical familiarity with the tools available to you.

Key Takeaway: Effective AI use involves an ongoing conversation between the user and the technology. Understanding what a tool can and cannot do is as important as knowing how to ask it for help.

4. Responsible AI Starts Before You Enter the Data

The efficiency of AI introduces new responsibilities, particularly when working with sensitive business information, employee records, customer feedback, and operational data.

Hannah Montes emphasized that responsible AI use begins before information is uploaded or analyzed.

Just as a chef prepares ingredients before service, professionals must prepare their information before introducing it into an AI workflow.

Four Questions to Ask Before Choosing an AI Tool

1. What do we need this tool to accomplish?

Clearly define the task and expected outcome. A general-purpose assistant may be useful for simple work, while specialized business intelligence tools may better serve complex operational analysis.

2. Can the tool adapt to our needs?

Hospitality environments change quickly. Consider whether the tool can accommodate new information, changing priorities, and evolving operational requirements.

3. Can it protect the information we provide?

Confirm organizational approval and determine whether the tool is appropriate for the sensitivity of the data being used.

4. Can we verify its output?

The information produced should be traceable, reviewable, and defensible. If a recommendation is presented to leadership, the team must be able to explain where the underlying information came from.

Prepare, Protect, and Verify

Montes outlined an approach grounded in clearly defined tasks, precise instructions, appropriate data handling, and human review.

Before using AI for analysis:

- Define the task and what a successful result should include.
- Remove sensitive or identifying information where appropriate.
- Set clear instructions and limitations.
- Use only tools and data practices approved by your organization.
- Review outputs for inaccuracies, missing information, and unsupported conclusions.
- Confirm findings before sharing them or making operational decisions.

Key Takeaway: AI can accelerate analysis, but responsibility for the accuracy, security, and appropriate use of information remains with people.

5. Faster Analysis Is Only Valuable When the Results Are Reliable

One of AI's most promising applications in hospitality is its ability to process substantial amounts of operational information.

Montes described using AI to analyze large volumes of customer feedback, including scenarios involving thousands of survey comments.

AI can help identify recurring themes, organize feedback, and highlight potential concerns much faster than a fully manual review.

However, speed introduces an important risk: an AI-generated summary may overlook information that matters.

Why Human Review Matters

Consider a survey containing thousands of customer comments.

An AI assistant might identify the most frequently mentioned themes while overlooking a small number of comments reporting a serious food safety concern.

Even if only ten customers mention undercooked chicken, those comments may warrant immediate attention.

Montes emphasized that the importance of information cannot always be determined by how frequently it appears.

AI can also generate inaccurate conclusions, omit portions of data, or identify patterns that are not supported by the source material.

For these reasons, professionals must inspect the underlying information, investigate unusual findings, and validate conclusions before acting.

From Data to Decisions

A reliable AI-supported analysis process can follow five steps:

- 1. Prepare:** Organize information and remove data that should not be shared.
- 2. Analyze:** Use an approved AI tool to identify themes, patterns, and potential concerns.
- 3. Verify:** Check the results against the original information, paying attention to missing data and critical exceptions.
- 4. Investigate:** Apply operational knowledge to understand why a pattern or anomaly may have occurred.
- 5. Act:** Develop recommendations supported by verified findings and human judgment.

This approach becomes particularly important across global dining operations, where information may come from multiple sites, languages, suppliers, contracts, and operating environments.

The goal is not simply to analyze more information. It is to turn trustworthy information into better operational decisions.

6. Keep the Human Element at the Center

Throughout the session, all three presenters returned to a common principle: AI is most valuable when it supports the people doing the work.

In foodservice and hospitality, technology can help reduce repetitive administrative tasks, make information more accessible, and accelerate content development.

AI-generated training videos, for example, may allow organizations to update instructional content without repeatedly filming the same material. Multilingual video capabilities may also create new opportunities to communicate with employees in their preferred languages.

Likewise, AI-supported operational analysis can help teams spend less time sorting information and more time addressing customer needs.

But these advantages depend on responsible implementation.

Technology does not remove the need for professional expertise, ethical decision-making, or accountability. It creates opportunities for people to apply those qualities more effectively.

The purpose of AI in hospitality is not to remove the human element. It is to create more capacity for the human element to thrive.

Your Practical AI Action Plan

You do not need to transform your entire operation to begin using AI more effectively. Start with one meaningful opportunity.

Your First 30 Days

Week 1: Identify the Opportunity

- List your three most time-consuming recurring tasks.
- Select one that may benefit from AI assistance.
- Define what a successful improvement would look like.

Week 2: Build the Foundation

- Identify which AI tools are approved by your organization.
- Develop a basic context document for your role or chosen task.
- Determine what information can safely be shared.
- Confirm the tool's actual capabilities and limitations.

Week 3: Test and Refine

- Run a small, low-risk trial using appropriate information.
- Evaluate the quality, accuracy, and usefulness of the output.
- Refine your instructions and context based on the results.
- Compare the process with your existing workflow.

Week 4: Evaluate and Expand

- Review whether the tool saved time or improved the result.
- Identify errors, limitations, and necessary human review.
- Document what worked and what did not.
- Decide whether the workflow is worth repeating or expanding.

This 30-day plan is an application exercise developed from the session's recommendations, not a formal implementation timeline presented by the speakers.

AI Tools Mentioned During the Session

The presenters discussed several tools that illustrate different applications of artificial intelligence. These are examples, not endorsements.

Tool	Application Discussed
ChatGPT	Ideation, concept development, and general AI assistance
Gamma	AI-assisted presentations, pitch decks, and visual content
Synthesia	AI avatars, training videos, multilingual communication, and promotional content
Microsoft Copilot	Enterprise assistance, document creation, and spreadsheet analysis
Google Gemini	AI assistance, research, and information analysis
Claude	AI assistance and spreadsheet or document analysis
PLAUD	Recording, transcription, session notes, and AI-generated summaries

Tool capabilities, pricing, data handling, and availability may change. Confirm your organization's approved platforms and policies before adoption.

Final Reflection: Start Small, Think Practically

The promise of AI is not simply that it can perform impressive tasks. Its value lies in helping people work more effectively, make better-informed decisions, and dedicate more time to work that requires human expertise.

The three speakers offered complementary lessons: identify opportunities where AI can reduce friction, provide the context necessary for useful results, and maintain responsibility for protecting and verifying information.

For hospitality professionals, the next step does not need to be complicated.

Identify one task. Choose an appropriate tool. Give it the context it needs. Test the result. Keep people responsible for the decisions.

The question is no longer simply, "What can AI do?" It is, "What can AI help us do better, and how can we use it responsibly?"

This resource was developed with AI assistance using a transcript of the original conference session. Content has been condensed and organized for clarity and ease of reference.