HPE GreenLake

How IHG Hotels & Resorts simplifies server management to prepare for the future

IHG HOTELS & RESORTS

Imagine managing servers as well as software and firmware updates for thousands of different businesses. That's a tall order and my job as a technical advisor for global deployment at IHG Hotels & Resorts. We operate 17 hotel groups with 6,000 locations, including familiar brands like Holiday Inn and the InterContinental Hotels Group, with each group and location having a unique IT setup. I oversee hardware and software deployment and management, our application layer, and infrastructure certification at all these hotels.

Every hotel within IHG is an endpoint, and my duties include telling managers what computers and switches to buy. We have a brand standard and specify certain PCs, workstations, servers, routers, and switches to ensure a standardized IT environment across our operations while catering to each location's specific needs. Our goal is to simplify the management of the critical systems that run on this infrastructure while also providing the perfect guest experience to our customers. The hotel landscape is competitive, and guests will quickly turn elsewhere if they have a poor experience.

To keep everything working, I run scripts daily, trying to reach almost every hotel to do an update, and I have the network team knocking on my door because I'm killing bandwidth with all the traffic the updates generate. I have to balance updating our firmware and software against crippling our backbone. Network lag is a serious problem that affects every aspect of our operations, from the logistics of ordering food and linens to running the front desk at every hotel. With 6,000 locations to manage, it's critical we optimize how we manage our IT infrastructure.

I was pulling my non-existent hair out

We've worked with HPE for 13 years. We have rolled out their servers and collaborated with them on various projects. A few months ago, I was at an Atlanta Hawks game chatting with the HPE folks about IHG's unique challenges. We wanted to manage everything from a centralized location and needed a streamlined workflow to simplify updates. We also needed a better way to predict hardware failures. We had hotels going down because they couldn't get new hardware or replacement parts due to supply chain issues, and I was pulling my hair out, even though I don't have any.

If we knew that a fan or hard drive was on the brink of failure, we could stand up new infrastructure in HPE OneView. Or we could dispatch a technician to replace the defective component. But lacking predictive network analytics meant we were constantly reacting and putting out fires instead of preventing them. I asked HPE if they had something to help IHG stay on top of our infrastructure. They told me about HPE Compute Ops Management, an upcoming solution that unifies, simplifies, and secures compute lifecycle management.

I can rest easy as an IT professional

We've partnered with HPE and worked closely with their engineering team to help bring HPE Compute Ops Management to life. It allows me to rest easy as an IT professional because I no longer have to worry about a component failing or a firmware update breaking our infrastructure. Imagine being on vacation and pushing out firmware without interrupting your holiday. That's what you get.

We rolled out HPE Compute Ops Management in February 2022, starting small with ten hotels in New York, Atlanta, Cleveland, San Francisco, and L.A. We tested the platform and monitored each location to see what we could do. It was instantly clear we could work out critical issues and keep our systems current.

One of the first things that caught my eye was the predictive hardware analytics. I saw that one of the drives in a Midwestern server was failing, and a fan was about to go on another. I monitored both, including the temperature of the machine with the defective fan, and the system generated alerts and email notifications immediately. I knew then that I could trust the system, and I didn't have to spend every hour of every day monitoring our infrastructure.

Another revelation was the ability to monitor the status of firmware updates across our operations. We could finally see how bad things were: We were two versions behind at some hotels and up to date at others. This level of visibility will help us plan future updates. Imagine pushing out multiple patches to our 6,000 hotels at the same time. I can now see when we need to apply patches, so we can schedule ahead to prevent choking our network with hundreds of six-gigabyte service packs. HPE Compute Ops Management does not require that we download large service packs and uses HPE cloud hosted service packs to update components based on the differences between what's installed on the server and the latest firmware. This cuts down the time to perform updates dramatically and addresses the network bandwidth concern highlighted previously.

All of this put a smile on my face. I called my boss, Kerrell Hurt, and walked him through our new setup. I told him that we'd found our solution that's going to work beyond anything we'd imagined. We now had our tool that will be everything we need to monitor our servers and predict anything that could go wrong, addressing issues quickly and reliable in real time.

When it comes to updating firmware or software, we can set up a test environment, apply the needed patches, and see what happens. If we encounter an issue, we smooth out the wrinkles or wait for the release of an update that doesn't cause any conflicts. I can also schedule or manually push out an update outside peak times to avoid overtaxing our infrastructure.

I can manage everything in a single pane of glass

HPE Compute Ops Management also has an API integration that allows me to perform operations programmatically via scripting and automation that allows me to onboard large number of servers quickly and consistently across all my hotel locations.

The HPE Compute Ops Management dashboard is equally impressive. I can view all my servers and assign groups and tags to manage them better.

Right now, I have grouped our infrastructure by region and tagged it by brand. I have East Coast, West Coast, and Midwest groups and tags for each of our hotel chains, like Crown Plaza and InterContinental. I have an overview of our global infrastructure in a single pane of glass, which lets me monitor server health in real time, schedule updates, and allocate resources to address issues like faulty hardware before they become a problem.

All of this being built on HPE GreenLake cloud is a vital part. This cloud native platform is light years ahead of everyone else — it's the future for unifying your server, storage, and networking infrastructure in one cloud-based portal.

For example, a few weeks ago, I woke up at 3:00 a.m., logged into HPE Compute Ops Management, hit **push** and **apply firmware**, and rolled out a service pack for our HPE ProLiant hybrid servers. I went back to bed knowing that it would apply the needed updates and reboot all our servers while I slept. There was no need to stay up and monitor the deployment because we'd already tested the patches in our sandboxed environment, and everything had worked without a hitch.

The endgame is an outstanding guest experience

We've rolled out HPE Compute Ops Management at 150 of our hotels. We can predict hardware failures and monitor the server infrastructure, so managing IT at each hotel is beyond easy. The HPE team is adding new features every day, and I truly believe this is the future, but don't take my word for it. HPE offers a 90-day trial of the HPE Compute Ops Management platform, and I urge every IT manager to try it.

Three months is plenty of time to set up every location and server. If you are moving your VPN and NPLS networks to a software-defined solution, you can push firmware and driver updates across your new and legacy infrastructure as you make that transition. It really is that simple.

I can talk infrastructure all day, but the endgame is an outstanding guest experience at our 6,000 hotels. After all, if you can't delight a traveler, you have to go back to the drawing board. HPE Compute Ops Management has given us the tools to update our equipment without crippling our network, and we can prevent hardware and software issues before they arise.

The result is streamlined operations behind the scenes and a best-in-class front desk experience. Let's face it, the faster guests check-in, the sooner they can start enjoying their stay and the many amenities our hotels.

– **Roger Hilton**

Technical Advisor of Global Deployment, Infrastructure, & Integration, InterContinental Hotels Group

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