**“Conversations On Turning 20”: Christine Tan on The Shifting Sweet Spot of Hospitality Tech**

When you get to the ripe young age of 20, you’re bound to collect lots of stories – not only about the past but lessons for the future.

As WiT marks its 20th year in 2025, we turn the spotlight on our community, our tribe pioneers and leaders, to tell their stories and share their views on the evolution of online travel and technology.

We ask them to look back on the past and their early days, reflect on the present and why this moment is pivotal for online travel and get them to imagine the future, the next 20.

This special WiT Studio series, “Conversations On Turning 20”, is the collective story of WiT.

As a Chinese saying goes, 以古为鉴，可以知兴替

“By using history as a mirror, one can understand the rise and fall of things.”

**Episode 9: Christine Tan, Vice President, Sales, Asia Pacific, Lighthouse**

Christine Tan, a veteran at the crossroads of hospitality tech and distribution, shares a front-row view of **how hotel distribution has transformed over two decades** – and where it's heading next.

**Key Discussion Points:**

* **The Biggest Shift: Real-Time, Dynamic Pricing**  
  Hospitality has moved from static rates and long lead times to real-time inventory and dynamic pricing. What was once an aspiration in 2005 is now the industry norm.
* **The Rise of Direct Booking and Smarter Hotels**  
  Hotels today are armed with **better technology**, **data-driven insights**, and **advanced marketing tools** to compete head-on with intermediaries — and they’re getting much better at owning the customer relationship.
* **The Evolution of OTAs**  
  Online Travel Agencies aren't standing still — they're evolving too, leveraging **AI for personalization** and fighting even harder for market share. It’s a battle of tech, distribution, and customer loyalty.
* **The Road Ahead: AI and Automation Take Center Stage**  
  Over the next 3-5 years, expect **AI and automation** to play pivotal roles in **pricing optimization**, **guest personalization**, and **distribution strategy refinement**. Strategic hotel-platform partnerships will become critical.
* **The Power Struggle: Who Owns the Customer?**  
  Hotels are investing heavily in **first-party data** and **loyalty strategies** to shift the balance from indirect (OTA-driven) to direct booking channels — a trend accelerated by COVID-19 and showing no signs of slowing.
* **A Timeless Truth: Tech Must Align with Business Goals**  
  Whether in 2005 or 2025, success still hinges on **understanding the customer**, **leveraging the right data**, and **making smart tech investments** that serve clear business objectives.

**Don't miss this deep dive into two decades of change and a bold look ahead at the future of hospitality distribution.**

**THE BIGGEST SHIFT**

03:45.53

Christine

Okay, so um in terms of evolution-wise, I think one of the biggest turning points um I saw was um you know the the shift towards real-time inventory dynamic pricing.

04:00.97

Christine

Back in 2005, we already discussed a lot of needs for better alignment between you know technology investment and business objectives. But at that time, Hotelius was still relying heavily on static rate structure and long late times for bookings. And you know they ah there's a lot of focus on how to get more bookings coming direct. ah It's still a major focus right now, but there is a very big difference between then and now.

04:29.87

Christine

because when we talk about real-time inventory dynamic pricing and you know um at that time we were talking about internet you know the the growth of internet but today we can't do without it so if you fast forward to today um I see the biggest change has been not just you know about the you know trying how do we shift business away, but also the rise of direct booking strategies, the use of technology to rebalance the direct and indirect distribution. um Hotels today have better technology, better data data that give them data driven insights. marketing Marketing capabilities are so much better for them to engage with the travelers directly.

**THE EVOLUTION OF OTAS**

05:14.90

Christine

So while, you know, so I see lots of these changes, however, we also see OTAs evolve as well, you know, like leveraging and competing ah even more heavily, you know, personalization is is is a key topic. And of course now with AI ah being used in in many of this different technology is given very ah personalized ah recommendation.

05:44.96

Christine

um So I think you know everyone's competing for market share, and but it's ah as a matter of how do you um how do you use this technology? How do you ah distribute and make sure that you continue to win in both areas? How do you balance that?

**THE ROAD AHEAD: GROWING RELIANCE ON AI AND AUTOMATION**

06:02.39

Christine

um If I look at three to five years ahead, I see increased reliance on AI and automation. ah From pricing optimization to guest personalization, ah AI will play a pivotal role in refining the distribution strategies. I think that's very key. I see more strategic partnerships between hotels and distribution platforms. ah Industry will continue to seek ways to balance this

06:35.11

Christine

direct and in this indirect distribution. We'll look at maximum profitability ah from there. And there's also a continuous ah shift towards customer ownership. you know Who owns the customer?

**THE SHIFT FROM INDIRECT TO DIRECT**

06:49.71

Christine

ah hotels are investing more and more in first party data, loyalty strategies to strengthen the direct connection with travelers. And from a data's perspective, I see that um you know the shift from indirect to direct has been very significant over the years.

07:08.06

Christine

starting from COVID, right? So when the OTAs, when people are not booking at all, we saw that everyone's focusing, you know, everyone's trusting that booking direct is the place ah to be. So in 2005, back in 2005, you know, 20 years ago,

07:26.12

Christine

whoop OTAs were taking the lead. But now I see that while OTAs remain influential, more and more hotels are succeeding in driving direct bookings through better digital marketing, loyalty programs, and improved brand dot.com experiences.

07:44.80

Christine

So ultimately, um the key to success in hospitality distribution remains the same, you know, understanding your customers, leveraging the right data and ensuring that technology investments align with the business goals. So that's a conversation, it has been leading for the, you know, nearly two decades, and we hope to see that continue.