

# When Technology is Part

*Spotlight on hotel tycoon Petter Stordalen – and his*



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## Petter Stordalen

Owner & CEO Nordic Choice Hotels

*Through his company Nordic Choice Hotels, the flamboyant billionaire, environmentalist and philanthropist Petter Stordalen owns in excess of 170 hotels and employs more than 12,000 people. For him, running hotels is a passion, and caring for the environment – and his people – is a mission. Much of this is made possible by more intelligent use of technologies.*

Nordic Choice Hotels is one of the largest hotel groups in the Nordics. Its chains include Comfort, Quality Hotels, Quality Resort, Clarion Collection, Clarion, and within Nordic Hotels & Resorts there are 9 unique hotels. A stunning flagship hotel The Thief opened early in 2013, and is today broadly cited in European industry circles for its prize-winning sustainable design and construction. All hotels are environmentally certified ISO 14001.

ERP – or Enterprise Resource Planning – has been at the heart of Petter Stordalen's activities for many years, as the efficiencies created are not only good for business and for customers, but also for local communities and the planet.

*before for our industry. Many people have been asleep and have not seen this coming. They are unable to capitalize on the new opportunities. They have played safe all the way, but now the rules have changed."*

This paradigm change, says Stordalen, paved the way for Cenium, a new player from Scandinavia, to enter the playing field. "Cenium is serving everything from hotel booking to the management of salaries, loyalty programs, staffing needs, meetings and restaurant operations. But the potential is even greater. The system is a unique tool for a robust customer strategy. With Cenium, we can develop a 360-degree platform – a single point of contact with the customer", said the Nordic Choice Hotels owner.

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Already four years ago at a conference in Las Vegas, he underlined the fact that the tourism industry was hurtling at full speed ahead through a storm spurred on by new digital communication forms, constantly picking up pace. "There's a big wave of opportunities", said Stordalen. "These opportunities are larger and more defining than ever

With Nordic Choice's mix of business, resort and leisure properties, it was evident that using disparate "best of breed" software for different functions and activities across the different brands would be difficult – if not impossible – to do effectively. Stordalen thus made Cenium a core part of his business, having realized that his company could not deliver the kinds of services and business initiatives he wanted without an agile platform such as that offered by this platform. Over the past few years, Stordalen has been happy to share what began as one of his best-kept secrets, as

# of Something “Bigger”

## “Strawberry Philosophy”



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Cenium is spreading to some of the world's largest hotel companies. “Cenium can help take the industry a step further”, he said. “Its development has not been risk-free, but in Nordic Choice we are not averse to taking some risks. The alternative can be a lot worse!” Innovation has indeed long been at the heart of Nordic Choice, as the group was among the very first to deploy mobile and RFID access and has been a forerunner in environmental friendliness.

Outside his hotel business, Stordalen also runs a number of shopping malls, and true to his ERP philosophy, his entire business runs on Microsoft Dynamics with

components that have developed within the platform.

### People, Planet, Profit – at the heart of Strawberry Philosophy

Stordalen affirms that the best advice he ever received came from his father when he was a lad, trying to sell strawberries in the local market. He looked at the other sellers' strawberries and they all looked so much better than his own. He went home and told his father that he needed new strawberries that were bigger, more colorful and much sweeter. His father looked at him and said, “Petter, sell the berries you have, because they are the only ones you have”. He thus learned the importance on focusing on what you have and to make the most of it. In other words, “Don't wish you were someone else or worked somewhere else. That's a waste of energy... concentrate on your own skills and capabilities, not your limitations”.

He consequently went from being cited in 1974 as Norway's “best local strawberry

seller” to becoming one of Scandinavia's most successful businesspeople with an estimated personal net worth of \$1.5 billion.

“The Strawberry Philosophy can help any company to outperform the competition,” says Stordalen. “Innovation comes through passion. Passion flourishes only when you believe in yourself and your company.” Stordalen looks for three key values: “energy, courage and excitement”. “Those are the qualities that I look for in people,” he says. “Our main sources of creativity are all the bright and motivated people within the company. Together they make the difference when they manage to focus on their own personal skills and talents. When they can channel their focus on a few things, they will not lose the energy and passion to bring what is at first sight a simple idea to fruition as an incremental value-adding innovation for the customer. The aim of Cenium's ERP solution is to leverage the passion found in our people and enable a commitment to service and a world class guest experience.”