

THE AI OPERATING SHIFT

Authority, responsibility and the business
behind short-term rentals in Asia

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This is independent STRA research.

Reading the evidence

STRA RESEARCH

STRA's own research programs, mapping and published studies.

OPERATOR EVIDENCE

Experiences reported by professional property managers. An operator's account is not an independently verified performance measure.

INDUSTRY RESEARCH

External institutional, technical and industry research, with its original scope retained. Attributed practitioner perspectives remain opinion.

COMPANY EVIDENCE

Vendor studies, product descriptions and commercial claims. These are not treated as independent evidence of operating outcomes.

Evidence labels identify the source of a passage or visual. They are not ratings of certainty. The methodology and references explain the distinctions used throughout the report.

About This Report

I have spent more than 40 years working across travel, distribution, technology and hospitality, and I have seen plenty of technologies arrive with predictions that they would change everything. Some did. Some disappeared. Most eventually found a useful place inside the business.

AI feels different because it is beginning to move beyond helping people with individual tasks and into the operation itself. It can find information, interpret what is happening, make recommendations, connect work across systems and, increasingly, act.

For a professional property manager, that changes the conversation.

I did not write this report for the technology industry. I wrote it with the professional property manager in Asia in mind, particularly the person running perhaps 20 to 50 properties with a small team and a very real business to operate every day.

That person may be dealing with an owner in the morning, checking tomorrow's arrivals, reviewing rates, chasing a cleaner, questioning a payment, solving a guest problem and looking at the bank account before lunch. They may use a PMS, spreadsheets, accounting software, WhatsApp, LINE and several other systems because that is what the business requires. They probably do not have an AI department, a data team or somebody whose full-time job is to work out what the latest technology means.

They do not need another report telling them that AI is coming.

They need to know what it means for the business they are already running.

That became the test I kept returning to while researching and writing this report. If something does not help that 20- to 50-property professional operator understand the operating shift or make a better decision about their business, I must question why it is here.

That does not mean larger operators are unimportant. Their experience can show us what becomes possible when there is greater scale, more specialised teams and deeper technology. Nor does it mean the smallest professional operator should be expected to remain small. It simply reflects something STRA has argued consistently: professional does not mean large. It means taking responsibility for the stay and the business behind it.

Our research started from there.

Earlier in 2026, STRA surveyed 523 professional property managers across 23 Asian countries. Around 17% told us they were using AI. That number was interesting, but it left a much more useful question unanswered. **What did “using AI” mean?**

Through **Verifying AI**, we went back to professional property managers across Asia and asked eight practical questions.

1. *Where is AI being used?*
2. *How did it enter the business?*
3. *What is it allowed to do?*
4. *What has genuinely improved?*
5. *Where does it break down?*
6. *Where does the information it needs live?*
7. *What would operators never allow it to do without a person involved?*
8. *What would have to change before they considered their business AI-native?*

More than 100 operators responded. Their answers did not produce one neat view of where the industry is heading, which is precisely why they were useful. For one operator, AI may still mean help with a guest message or marketing. For another, it is already qualifying leads, analysing information or acting inside parts of the operation. Some are moving deliberately towards greater autonomy. Others remain cautious about allowing AI anywhere near money, owners, important guest decisions or the final delivery of hospitality.

Alongside those responses, I spoke directly with operators and hospitality leaders, looked at what technology companies are building, reviewed wider industry and technical research and kept bringing the discussion back to the same place: the operating business underneath it all.

Asia makes that especially important. A property-management business here may operate across different languages, currencies, ownership arrangements, payment systems, regulations, buildings and service models. Important information may sit in the PMS, an accounting system, a spreadsheet, an owner's email or inside the head of somebody who has worked in the business for ten years. The cleaner, contractor or building manager who ultimately solves the problem may never touch the company's main technology at all.

AI must work inside that reality.

This report therefore does not make the case for AI, and it does not make the case against it. I am far more interested in where it genuinely removes work, where it gives a smaller business access to capability it could not previously justify, where it improves decisions, where the economics make sense and where a person still needs to be involved.

Most importantly, I am interested in what happens as AI moves from helping somebody do the work to being allowed to do part of the work itself.

Because once software can act, the question changes.

Keith Cowarn

Founder

Short-Term Rentals Asia



*“The defining question may not be what AI can do,
but what operators are prepared to allow it to do.”*



Executive Summary

THE AI OPERATING SHIFT

What Agentic AI Means for Professional Short-Term Rental Management in Asia

Artificial intelligence is beginning to change more than the speed at which work is completed inside a short-term rental business. It is changing who, or what, is permitted to carry out that work.

Until recently, most practical applications of AI involved assistance: preparing guest communications, analysing information, producing content or helping employees make decisions. The next development is more consequential. Agentic AI can be instructed to pursue an objective, access business information, interact with software and act within defined limits. That moves AI from a tool used by an employee towards a participant in the operation itself.

For professional property managers, the question is no longer simply what AI can do. It is what the business is prepared to allow it to do, under whose authority and with what consequences when something goes wrong.

This report examines that shift from the perspective of the professional short-term rental operator in Asia, rather than the technology supplier. Its purpose is not to encourage greater AI adoption, nor to argue against it. It is to establish what responsible implementation requires, where genuine operating value may be found and which decisions should remain under human control.

STRA's Verified Report 2026 drew on research involving 523 professional property managers across 23 Asian countries, alongside its wider verified and mapped network. Its industry indicators identified AI implementation at approximately 17%, illustrating the distance between the industry's public conversation about AI and its implementation within professional operating businesses. STRA subsequently conducted its eight-question *Verifying AI* research, receiving more than 100 operator responses and examining actual applications, operating improvements, failures, limitations and the boundaries of acceptable autonomy.

The findings and operator discussions point towards an important distinction. AI adoption is not the same as AI operating readiness.

A property-management business may already use sophisticated software and still depend on undocumented instructions, disconnected information, manual financial reconciliation and the judgement of a small number of experienced employees. These arrangements can work because people continually resolve the gaps between systems. When AI is authorised to act, those same gaps become operating risks.

Asia adds another level of complexity. Professional property managers work across different languages, currencies, ownership arrangements, regulatory requirements, payment practices and service expectations. A process that appears straightforward in a technology demonstration may involve several systems, local exceptions and personal relationships when applied to an actual property. Neither portfolio size nor technology expenditure is a reliable substitute for understanding those conditions.

The report therefore examines the operating foundations that must be established before greater autonomy becomes sensible: reliable business information, clearly documented instructions, appropriate system integration, defined permissions, financial controls, escalation procedures and continuing human accountability.

Attention is given to financial decisions. A guest refund, an owner payment, a maintenance expense or an adjustment to a financial statement carries consequences beyond completing a task efficiently. STRA's Authority Ladder distinguishes between AI observing, recommending, acting within limits, acting and reporting, and operating autonomously. It provides a practical way to determine how much authority should be granted to a particular process, rather than treating autonomy as a single technology decision.

The report also introduces the STRA AI Operating Readiness Profile, examining ten dimensions of business readiness. It is intended to help operators identify where their existing processes can support AI, where additional controls are required and where the most sensible decision may be to retain human responsibility. Readiness is not reduced to a single score, because a business can be well prepared in one area and exposed in another.

The commercial opportunity is significant, but it should be assessed through operating outcomes rather than product claims. The relevant measures include work genuinely removed, errors avoided, time recovered, service consistency, the cost of supervision and the ability of the business to manage more properties without a corresponding increase in administrative complexity. AI that creates additional checking, corrections or fragmented systems may add expense without improving the operation.

The wider implication is that professional property-management businesses may gain access to capabilities previously associated with larger organisations. Smaller teams could become more productive, improve their financial and operational visibility, and manage complexity without necessarily increasing headcount at the same rate as portfolio growth. That possibility does not remove the importance of people. It makes their judgement, local knowledge, hospitality experience and responsibility for the business more important in determining where technology should act and where it should stop.

For operators, executives, investors and technology providers, the report offers a basis for more disciplined decisions. It explains the difference between assistance and autonomous action, identifies the conditions required for implementation, provides a framework for assigning authority and establishes the questions that should be asked before operational responsibility is delegated to software.

The central conclusion is that the next stage of AI in professional short-term rental management will not be determined by the number of tools a business adopts. It will be determined by how well that business understands its own operation, how clearly, it defines authority and how effectively it can maintain control as more work is carried out by technology.

Readiness must come before autonomy.

STRA RESEARCH

The research behind the operating question

17%

estimated organisational AI implementation across STRA’s
verified professional property manager network in Asia.

STRA's Verified Report 2026, drawing on research involving 523 professional property managers across 23 Asian countries and its wider verified and mapped network, identified AI implementation at approximately 17% among professional property-management businesses.

523 property managers	23 Asian markets
Survey sample in the STRA Verified Report 2026; separate from the implementation estimate.	Geographic coverage of STRA’s verified network and wider research.

7,176

mapped professional property managers

Approximately 126,000

properties across Asia

STRA’s continuing mapping and verification program. These mapping figures are separate from the survey sample and from the qualitative Verifying AI operator work.

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The argument follows the work, the authority given to technology and the people who remain responsible for the outcome.

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CHAPTER 01

The Operating Shift

The software is being allowed to do something.

Artificial intelligence did not arrive in short-term rental management as one big change. For most property managers it appeared in pieces.

Someone started using ChatGPT to improve a listing description. A team member used it to translate a guest message. A revenue system introduced a new recommendation feature. A PMS added an AI tool. Marketing content became quicker to produce. Spreadsheets could be analysed without spending an afternoon working through formulas. Guest questions could be answered faster.

Much of this was useful, although not necessarily revolutionary. The property manager remained between the technology and the business. AI could write something, summarise something, translate something or suggest something, but a person usually decided what happened next.

That distinction is beginning to change. AI is moving closer to the operating side of the business, where the work is no longer simply producing an answer. Increasingly, the technology can be connected to the systems a property manager already uses, given access to information about the business and permitted to complete parts of the work itself. For professional property managers, that is a much more significant change than the arrival of another chatbot.

Consider a guest who asks whether they can check out three hours late. AI can already write a perfectly polite response. The operating question begins when the system can look at tomorrow's reservation, check whether another guest is arriving, see when housekeeping is scheduled, understand the property's late-checkout policy and then respond to the guest without waiting for somebody in the office to make the decision.

The same difference appears across the business. There is a considerable distance between identifying a pricing opportunity and changing the rate, between recognising that a guest may deserve compensation and issuing a refund, or between finding a discrepancy in an owner statement and changing the financial record.

This is where much of the language around AI becomes unhelpful. Automation has been part of property management for years. If something happens, a predetermined action follows. Generative AI widened what software could produce because it could work with language, images and less structured information. Agentic AI takes the discussion further because the system can potentially pursue an objective, work across different sources of information and take actions along the way.

For the property manager, the technical terminology matters less than the practical difference. The software is being allowed to do something. That is the operating shift at the centre of this report.

It is already visible in the early responses to STRA's **Verifying AI** research. One professional operator described AI being used across demand generation, sales and lead qualification, property assessment and guest experience. The technology was not confined to producing marketing copy; it had entered several working parts of the business.

When asked what AI was allowed to do, the same operator made an interesting distinction: it could “recommend and act for sales” while suggesting actions for guest experience. That difference is more revealing than a simple question about whether the company uses AI.

Two property managers can both answer yes to that question while operating very differently. One may use ChatGPT occasionally to help write social media posts. Another may have AI qualifying enquiries, assessing prospective properties, communicating with guests and completing defined actions inside its systems. Both count as AI users, but the role technology plays inside their businesses is clearly not comparable.

STRA's earlier estimate of 17% identifiable organisational AI implementation was a starting point. It distinguished business implementation from occasional individual use, but it did not describe every task, permission or operating result behind that estimate.

Verifying AI examines those questions in more detail.

We asked operators where AI was actually being used, how it entered the business, what it was allowed to do, what had improved, where it failed, where the knowledge it needed was stored and what they would still refuse to hand over without a person involved.

Those questions reflect the reality of professional property management in Asia because most operators are not technology companies and many are not large businesses. A professional property manager may manage fifteen properties, fifty, five hundred or several thousand. The smaller operator may still be responsible for pricing, distribution, guest communication, owner relationships, maintenance, payments, housekeeping and the phone that rings when something goes wrong at 11.30 at night.

This responsibility applies across portfolio sizes, even though the resources available to carry the work differ.

AI therefore enters a very different environment from a clean software demonstration. It enters businesses where information may sit across a PMS, spreadsheets, messaging applications, accounting systems and people's heads. It enters relationships with guests and owners. It encounters local contractors, different languages, building rules, payment systems and regulations. Sometimes it encounters something as ordinary as a cleaner who has not arrived.

This is why the next stage of AI in short-term rentals cannot be understood simply by counting features or subscriptions.

A useful way to think about the change is to consider how far technology has moved into the work. At one end, it assists a person. It can then begin recommending what should happen. From there, it may be permitted to take certain actions within limits, and in some parts of the business it may eventually complete routine work and report what it has done.

Those positions can exist inside the same property-management company at the same time. An operator may be comfortable allowing AI to answer routine pre-arrival questions while keeping compensation decisions with a person. Revenue technology may be permitted to adjust rates within agreed parameters while owner payments still require approval. Marketing content may be largely automated while an unhappy guest is immediately handed to somebody who knows the property and can make a judgement.

There is no reason to assume that every part of the business should move at the same speed, or even in the same direction.

That is also why this report does not treat greater autonomy as the inevitable destination of professional property management. The interesting development is that greater autonomy is becoming technically possible. Whether it is commercially useful, operationally sensible or appropriate for a particular business is a different question.

For decades, property-management technology has helped people operate businesses. PMS platforms organised reservations, channel managers moved inventory, revenue systems analysed pricing, accounting software recorded transactions and messaging tools helped teams communicate. People remained the connective tissue between much of it.

AI may increasingly occupy some of that space between the systems. If it does, the property manager's relationship with technology changes with it. Choosing software is one decision. Allowing software to participate in the operation of the business is another. That is where the discussion becomes much more interesting for professional property managers across Asia.

The question is no longer simply whether you use AI.
It is what you are prepared to allow it to do.

STRA FRAMEWORK / 01

AI Operating Path

Framework developed by STRA • Chapter 1

01 Assist

Prepare, translate, summarise or analyse. A person carries the work forward.

↓

02 Recommend

Propose what should happen. A person approves the action.

↓

03 Act within limits

Complete defined actions inside boundaries set by the operator.

↓

04 Act & report

Complete authorised routine work and report the action and outcome.

↓

05 Defined autonomy

Operate with less routine human involvement for a defined task.

These are ways of participating in work, not required stages of adoption. Reporting and defined limits apply wherever AI acts. Different tasks in one business may use different arrangements.

CHAPTER 02

Beyond the AI Hype

The more useful measure is the cost of getting the work done.

AI is having its moment, and the short-term rental industry is no exception.

Artificial intelligence has arrived in short-term rentals with the usual rush of announcements. New products, new features, new agents and plenty of predictions about what will disappear next. Property managers are being told that AI will answer guests, manage revenue, qualify leads, coordinate maintenance, prepare reports and increasingly operate parts of the business without somebody sitting in front of a screen.

Some of these applications are already being used successfully; others remain closer to a demonstration than something I would want to run unattended on a busy Saturday night.

The short-term rental industry has been through enough technology cycles to know the difference eventually becomes important. Property-management systems were going to bring everything together. Channel managers solved distribution and then became another connection to manage. Revenue systems gave operators access to pricing capability that was once difficult for smaller businesses to obtain. Guest communication, payments, locks, direct booking, accounting and maintenance each developed their own technology. Most solved a real problem, but collectively they also created a business where somebody can spend a surprising amount of the day moving between systems that were supposed to save time.

AI is arriving on top of that. The economics are already entering operator conversations. In STRA discussions with professional property managers during 2026, questions around token cost, integration and the cost of running AI at greater volume began appearing alongside the more familiar discussion about what AI could do. That is an important change. Operators are beginning to ask what happens after the demonstration, when the technology becomes part of the working business.

For a professional property manager with 20 properties and four people, another piece of software is not automatically progress. It can mean another subscription, another login, another integration and another place where information has to remain correct. The same problem exists at 2,000 properties, although the organisation around it is very different. This is why the part of AI that interests STRA is less about another button appearing inside the PMS and more about whether the technology can reduce some of the work created by the technology already there.

There is a practical difference between software that helps somebody do a task and software that begins completing the work itself. Drafting a reply to a guest saves a few minutes. Reading the reservation, checking the property's information, understanding what the guest is asking, deciding whether something can be approved, responding and updating the relevant system removes several steps.

The second example is where the economics and operating structure begin to change.

The language around this is becoming increasingly loose. Almost everything is now described as AI and a growing number of products are described as agentic. For a property manager, the label is not particularly useful. What matters is what the software can see, what it can decide, what it can change and what happens when the situation does not follow the expected path.

A Wi-Fi question is a good example. Producing a friendly answer is easy. Resolving the problem when the router is offline, the password in the PMS is old, tomorrow's guest is arriving early, and the local contact has stopped answering is something else entirely. The difficulty is rarely producing another sentence. It is understanding what is happening and getting the right thing done.

Ben Gusberg compared AI in public LinkedIn commentary as a brilliant first-day employee with no context. I like that description because it brings the conversation back to the business. A very capable new employee can still make a mess of things if nobody has explained how the company works, which information to trust, what they are allowed to approve and when they should ask somebody else.

There is another part of this conversation that has received much less attention: **cost**.

When AI is used occasionally, the economics can almost disappear. A few guest messages, a translated description, some marketing copy or an analysis of last month's performance may cost very little. That is not necessarily what the next stage looks like.

An AI agent operating throughout the day may be reading conversations, retrieving reservation history, checking property information, working through a request, using other systems, checking what happened and returning to the task when something changes. Multiply that across hundreds of reservations, properties, owners and operating events and AI becomes an ongoing operating expense rather than an occasional software feature.

Questions about token cost, model choice and the cost of running AI at greater volume are already beginning to appear in STRA's conversations with professional property managers. The underlying technology will continue to become cheaper and more efficient. Recent technical work around models such as DeepSeek-R1 is one indication of how quickly those economics can change, but property managers do not need to understand the infrastructure behind it to make a commercial decision.

What matters is what is happening when AI is used repeatedly inside the real business.

A routine property question may not require the most capable or expensive AI available. A difficult owner dispute may require something quite different. A cheaper system is not much of a saving if somebody must check or correct the result afterwards. Comparing model prices therefore tells the property manager very little on its own.

The more useful measure is the cost of getting the work done.

As an illustration, if an AI system costs \$1 to complete work that previously required \$10 of staff time, the direct saving is easy to understand. If it costs 20 cents but creates five minutes of checking, regular corrections and an occasional expensive mistake, the calculation changes. Allowing a five-person business to grow without immediately employing a sixth person could have a different value again. These are examples of how to assess the economics, not measured results from STRA's research.

This is particularly relevant across Asia, where professional does not necessarily mean large. Many property managers operate with small teams and disciplined budgets. They are unlikely to build their own AI infrastructure or employ people to decide which model should handle every task. They will increasingly rely on the choices made inside their PMS, revenue system, communications platform and other technology. The cost of AI may therefore arrive invisibly at first, bundled into subscriptions or transaction pricing, before becoming more obvious as usage grows.

Vendors will have to answer this as well. It is relatively easy to demonstrate an agent completing a task. It is harder to show what that task costs when it runs thousands of times, how often a person must intervene and whether the operating result is better.

This is one reason STRA's research starts with the property manager rather than the technology. *What work is taking time today? Where are mistakes occurring? Which decisions are repetitive? Where is somebody moving information from one system to another simply because the systems do not talk properly? What requires judgement? What needs a person physically at the property? What does the operator want to improve? Only then does the technology become useful to examine.*

There is a danger that the industry responds to years of accumulating software by adding an AI layer that creates another layer of complexity. If the agent needs constant checking, another dashboard, another subscription and another set of rules that nobody quite understands, the property manager has not necessarily moved very far.

The more interesting possibility is the opposite. AI could sit across parts of the existing operation and reduce the amount of time people spend finding information, moving between systems and dealing with routine work. It could allow smaller operators to use capabilities that previously required specialist staff or larger teams. It could make some existing software easier to use rather than requiring another system to learn.

None of that requires every property-management company to become an AI company. There will be businesses where a particular AI application produces an obvious improvement and others where the sensible decision is to leave the process alone. A cleaner arriving on time does not become more valuable because an AI agent arranged it. An owner statement is not better because AI prepared it.

A guest problem is not resolved because the response arrived in ten seconds. The outcome still must be right.

That is where much of the current AI conversation becomes less interesting than the business underneath it.

The technology is moving quickly and the cost of using it is likely to continue changing. Property managers do not need to predict which model wins or learn the economics of GPU infrastructure. They do need to understand whether the AI entering their business is reducing work, improving the operation and making commercial sense once it is used at the scale of the real business.

For STRA, that is a better place to begin than the latest product announcement.

CHAPTER 03

Asia Is Not a Simple Operating Environment

*The technology may travel globally. The operation
remains local.*

There is no single way to operate a professional short-term rental business in Asia.

A property manager in Tokyo, a villa operator in Bali, an apartment business in Bangkok and a multi-city operator in India may all describe themselves as professional property managers, yet the businesses underneath that description can look remarkably different. The properties are different, the guests are different, the relationship with owners is different and the rules governing what can be rented, how guests are registered, how money moves and how the stay is delivered can change considerably from one market to another. That has always been part of operating in Asia. AI simply makes those differences harder to ignore.

Much of the technology used by the global short-term rental industry has developed around the idea that an operating process can be standardised and then repeated. There is good reason for that. Standardisation makes software easier to build, businesses easier to scale and work easier to automate. Asia regularly tests the edges of that assumption because the operating environment changes as soon as the business crosses a border, and sometimes well before it does.

Language is an obvious example, although translation is only the beginning. A guest message can be translated almost instantly, but understanding what the guest means, how directly something should be said and what response is appropriate can involve considerably more than converting words from one language into another. The same applies when communicating with an owner, cleaner, building manager or local contractor. AI can remove some of the friction created by language, but fluent communication and local understanding are not always the same thing.

Money adds another layer. A business may sell accommodation in one currency, receive settlement in another, pay suppliers locally and report to an owner somewhere else. Taxes, commissions, payment fees, refunds and owner distributions can all sit between the amount the guest paid, and the amount eventually received by the property owner. Someone familiar with the business may understand those differences instinctively. Software being asked to reconcile them or act on them needs the business to be much more explicit.

Ownership can be equally varied. Asia's professional STR sector includes individually owned apartments and villas, leased inventory, managed portfolios, branded accommodation, mixed-use buildings and different combinations of management and revenue arrangements. Even within the same company, two owners may have agreed to quite different terms. One may allow repairs up to an agreed amount without consultation while another expects a call before almost anything is spent. Those arrangements do not always sit neatly inside a system. They may have developed through contracts, emails, messages and years of working together.

Technology must operate inside that reality rather than the cleaner version of the business shown on a systems diagram.

The technology itself is also uneven. STRA's research over several years has shown rapid adoption among professional property managers across Asia, but that does not mean businesses are moving towards one common technology setup. A perfectly workable operation may use a PMS alongside spreadsheets, accounting software, messaging applications and local payment systems, with people connecting the pieces when necessary. One response to Verifying AI described where the information needed by AI currently lives in three words:

“PMS and spreadsheets.”

There is nothing particularly unusual about that answer.

Messaging applications may carry operating information because that is where owners, staff and suppliers already communicate. A local contractor may never enter a maintenance platform. A cleaner may send a photograph through LINE or WhatsApp. An owner may approve an expense in a message. The formal system and the working business can therefore be two different things even when the operation itself is well managed.

Physical hospitality adds something else. Highly remote operating models exist across Asia, with digital access, automated communication and limited interaction during the stay. So do businesses built around meet-and-greet, concierge support, daily housekeeping, local staff and close contact with guests.

AI may recognise a maintenance problem, find information and coordinate a response. Somebody still has to repair the air conditioner, replace the lock, deliver the missing linen or deal with the neighbour standing downstairs. The balance between digital and physical work will continue to differ between markets, properties and service models.

Regulation makes those differences more pronounced. Short-term rental rules across Asia range from national legislation to city regulations, building rules, licensing requirements and registration obligations, with very different approaches to enforcement. The same applies to guest identification, privacy, taxation, payments and the handling of personal information. What works in one destination cannot simply be assumed to work in another.

For a technology company building globally, this can look like fragmentation. For the property manager, it is simply the market in which the business operates.

Some of those differences can be made easier by technology. Others reflect local regulation, culture, commercial arrangements and the way hospitality is delivered. They are not problems waiting to be standardised out of the business.

This is particularly relevant to smaller professional operators. A ten- or twenty-property business is unlikely to employ specialists for every language, regulation, distribution question or reporting requirement it encounters. AI may help organise information, translate, identify discrepancies and remove repetitive administration without requiring the operator to build a much larger organisation around the work.

The local knowledge still must come from somewhere.

Asia therefore deserves more than a global AI operating model with the geography changed. Any system working inside a professional property-management business here will eventually encounter an owner with a particular agreement, a payment that does not reconcile neatly, a building with its own rules, a local regulation, a message sitting outside the PMS or a person who knows something the system does not.

The operation remains local.

Asia Operating Complexity Map

Framework developed by STRA • Chapter 3

One operating decision
Several local conditions

Condition	What the operator must make visible
Language and meaning	Translation, intent, tone and local understanding.
Ownership and agreements	Property-specific terms, spending authority and later exceptions.
Currency and payments	Collection, settlement, fees, refunds and owner distributions.
Regulation and buildings	Local permissions, registration, access and building rules.
Systems and knowledge	PMS, spreadsheets, messaging, accounting and people's memory.
Physical hospitality	Housekeeping, maintenance, local teams and the delivery of the stay.

Local context → Decision within authority → Verified outcome

A conceptual map of the conditions discussed in Chapter 3. It does not rank countries or imply that one operating model represents Asia.

CHAPTER 04

Inside the Property- Management Business

Professional does not mean large.

Before deciding where AI belongs in a property-management company, it helps to look at what the company does.

From the outside, the business can appear relatively simple. Properties are listed, guests book them and somebody looks after the stay. From inside the business, there is considerably more going on.

A professional property manager may be responsible for attracting demand, managing distribution, handling reservations, communicating with guests, setting rates, coordinating cleaning and maintenance, managing payments, reconciling accounts, reporting to owners, responding to reviews, dealing with buildings and local requirements, managing staff and contractors, maintaining technology and stepping in whenever something does not go according to plan.

In a large company those responsibilities may sit across different teams. In much of Asia's professional STR sector, they do not. The same person who deals with an owner in the morning may review rates before lunch, solve a guest problem in the afternoon and check a payment before going home. In a smaller business the founder may still be involved in several of those things during the same hour. That does not make the business less professional. Professional does not mean large. It means taking responsibility for the stay and the business behind it.

This matters when we talk about AI because much of the technology conversation still assumes an organisation with clearly separated departments, specialist people and systems that neatly correspond to each function. That is not the starting point for many professional property managers across Asia.

A better place to start is with the work. The operating business begins before the booking. For years, property managers have thought about this mainly through distribution. **1. Which OTAs are producing demand? 2. How does the property rank? 3. What does the listing look like? 4. Is the direct website converting? 5. Are rates competitive? 6. Where did the booking come from?**

AI is beginning to sit further upstream. A traveller can now ask a system to suggest accommodation that meets a particular set of requirements. An owner can ask for property managers in a destination. An investor can ask which operators are active in a market. A guest may encounter a business through an AI-generated answer before they ever see its website or OTA listing. That adds another part to the operating map: discovery.

For the professional property manager, the sequence increasingly looks something like:

Discovery → Distribution → Booking → Stay → Operations → Money → Owner

These are connected areas of work rather than a fixed sequence. Operations, financial control and owner responsibility run through the booking and stay, and the boundaries overlap.

Discovery is about being found and understood. Distribution turns the property into something that can be bought. Booking creates a commercial commitment. The stay creates a hospitality obligation. Operations deliver it. Money must be collected, matched, accounted for and distributed correctly. The owner then needs to understand what happened to their property and their money.

AI can potentially appear at every point. That does not mean it should. In discovery, AI may help a business understand demand, create content, answer enquiries, qualify leads or increasingly influence which properties and operators are surfaced to somebody looking for accommodation or management services.

Distribution already contains considerable automation. Rates and availability move between systems, listings are updated and reservations are passed back into the operating business. AI may add another layer of analysis and decision-making, but the value still depends on whether the property is being sold correctly and profitably.

Once the booking arrives, the work becomes more immediate. Before arrival, the team needs complete guest information, checked payments and correct access details. Requests for an early check-in or a cot may have to be coordinated with housekeeping, while a building may require identification before the guest arrives. These details connect communication with the work required to deliver the stay.

This is where AI is already easiest to see because communication is visible. Writing and translating messages can save time. Finding the right property information can save more. Eventually, an agent may be able to handle parts of the process from beginning to end.

The stay itself is different. Hospitality happens in the physical world. A guest standing outside a Bangkok apartment at 11pm needs an access code that works, whatever communications technology the business uses. A villa in Bali still must be cleaned, equipment repaired, linen delivered and damage inspected. Somebody must establish that the property is ready for the next guest.

AI can help coordinate much of this work. It cannot clean the apartment or replace the compressor.

That distinction will remain important because short-term rental management is not purely a digital business. Technology can change how the physical work is organised without removing the physical work itself.

Operations are also where local knowledge carries considerable value. A contractor who answers quickly in Phuket may not use the maintenance system. The reliable cleaner in Osaka may communicate in a particular way. A building manager may have their own process for registering guests. A property owner may insist on approving repairs personally. Those arrangements may look inefficient from the outside while working extremely well in practice. The job of technology is not necessarily to remove every local workaround.

Sometimes the better result is simply making sure the business knows where the information is and that the right person receives it at the right time.

Then there is the money. This part of property management receives far less attention than guest communication, but it may be one of the areas where AI eventually creates more value. A professional operator can be dealing with OTA payments, direct payments, commissions, taxes, cleaning charges, deposits, refunds, maintenance costs, owner expenses and payouts across different properties and sometimes different currencies. Somebody must make those numbers agree. STRA's earlier work on the multi-owner financial challenge showed how quickly this becomes complicated when one operating company is managing money on behalf of many owners. A guest can have an excellent stay while the operator still has a serious problem if the owner statement is wrong.

AI does not need to control the money to be useful here. Comparing transactions, identifying missing payments, matching records, finding unusual entries, checking statements against ledgers and flagging differences for somebody to investigate may remove hours of work that currently receives very little attention outside the finance function. For a small property manager, saving five hours of reconciliation may be more valuable than generating another hundred guest messages.

Owner management then brings a different kind of work. Owners want performance, but they also want explanation. They ask why a property was empty, why a repair cost what it did, why a rate changed, why a guest received compensation or why this month's payout is different from last month's. Those conversations carry history.

The operator may know that an owner is comfortable investing in maintenance but sensitive about discounting. Another may care more about occupancy than average rate. One owner may want every decision explained. Another wants to hear from the manager only when something unusual happens. AI can help prepare information and find the history behind a question. It may draft the answer. The relationship itself is harder to reduce to a workflow because trust has accumulated over time.

This is also where the difference between information and judgement becomes clearer. The system can calculate that a property earned less this month. The property manager may know that two weeks were deliberately blocked for repairs, that the owner rejected a longer booking and that a nearby building project affected demand. The number is correct. It is not the whole answer.

When the business is viewed this way, the most interesting AI opportunities are not always the most visible ones. Guest messaging attracts attention because everybody understands it. Content generation is easy to demonstrate. A chatbot looks impressive on a screen. The less visible work may matter more. The less visible tasks include finding arrivals with missing information, identifying an unreconciled payment, comparing a repair request with the owner's approval limit and checking whether housekeeping has confirmed a property.

They also include finding inconsistent listing information and preparing the material needed for an owner call. None of these tasks sounds particularly dramatic. Together they consume a considerable amount of time.

This is where the economics become interesting for smaller professional operators. A 2,000-property company may already have people whose job is to analyse revenue, reconcile accounts, monitor operations or manage owner reporting. A 30-property company often does not. The work still exists. It is simply spread between fewer people. AI could give smaller operators access to some of the analytical and coordination capability that previously became economical only at greater scale. The result does not have to be fewer people. It may be that the same team can handle more properties, spend less time moving information between systems or have more time for the parts of the business where personal attention carries greater value.

That is a much more relevant proposition for much of Asia's professional STR sector than a discussion about replacing departments that many operators never had.

It also changes how we should think about the technology stack. The average operator does not wake up wanting another piece of software. They want tomorrow's arrivals to work, guests to be looked after, rates to make sense, cleaners and contractors to know what they are doing, money to reconcile and owners to remain confident in the business. If AI helps achieve those things with less effort, it has earned a place. If it simply adds another dashboard, another subscription and another set of alerts, it probably has not.

This is why the STRA AI Operating Map begins with the operating business rather than the technology.

The map covers discovery, distribution, booking, the stay, operations, money and the owner relationship. Looking at those connected areas helps the operator identify where time is being lost and where a decision needs better information. Then ask what is happening at each point.

- Where is time being lost? Where are mistakes occurring?
- Where does information have to be moved manually?
- Where does somebody repeatedly make the same decision?
- Where does local knowledge matter?
- Where does money change the consequence of getting something wrong?
- Where does a person add value because the situation genuinely requires judgement or human contact?

Once those questions are answered, the useful role for AI becomes much easier to see.

The business comes first. The technology must earn its place inside it.

STRA FRAMEWORK / 03

STRA AI Operating Map

Framework developed by STRA • Chapter 4

Connected areas of work, with the authority for each action set by the operator.

Work	Assist	Possible bounded action	Human authority
Discovery	Prepare clear business information	Update approved public information	Credibility and external claims
Distribution	Compare channel information	Synchronise approved changes	Channel strategy and exceptions
Booking	Qualify enquiries; check details	Follow up within agreed rules	Availability and commitments
Stay	Prepare replies; retrieve information	Send approved routine information	Service recovery and physical hospitality
Operations	Triage; prepare tasks	Schedule approved routine work	Safety, major spend, physical checks
Money	Compare records; flag discrepancies	Prepare reconciliations	Ledger changes and release of money
Owner	Prepare performance summaries	Send approved routine reporting	Trust, disputes and exceptions

The rows organise connected work, not a chronological process. Revenue, operational coordination and financial control run across several rows. These are illustrative applications rather than adoption rates or blanket permissions.

CHAPTER 05

When AI Starts Acting

*Human operators learn to recognise the difference
between an action and an outcome.*

There is a considerable difference between asking AI to “write a reply to this guest” and asking it to “resolve this guest's problem.”

The first is familiar. The system produces something and a person decides what happens next. The second gives the technology a job to complete. It may need to find information, make a choice, use another system, take an action, check what happened and decide whether the job is finished.

That is where agentic AI becomes relevant to property management.

The word *agent* can make this sound more complicated than the operating idea really is. Give the system a job, access to the information and tools needed to do it, and permission to take certain actions, and it can begin working through the task rather than waiting for somebody to instruct every individual step.

Property managers already work this way with people. A team member is rarely told every click to make or every sentence to write. They are given responsibility for something, access to the systems they need and an understanding of what they can decide themselves. After time in the business, they also know the properties, the owners, the regular problems and when something does not look right.

Software does not arrive knowing any of that.

Imagine a guest sends a message late in the evening saying they cannot enter the apartment. Writing a sympathetic response is easy. Resolving the problem is not.

The system first needs to know which guest and which property are involved. It needs the correct access information and some way of establishing whether the guest received it. Then it must work out what has gone wrong. Is the door code incorrect? Is the smart lock offline? Is the guest standing at the wrong entrance? Is there another building door they need to pass through first?

If the normal access process has failed, the job changes. There may be a backup key with somebody nearby. The lock may be capable of being reset remotely. Building security may be able to help until a certain time. Someone from the local team may need to go to the property.

At some point there may also be a situation the system should stop trying to resolve itself.

None of this is unusual. It is an ordinary night in accommodation when something has gone wrong.

Someone who has worked in the business for several years may know exactly what to do because they remember that this building has two entrances, that the lock occasionally loses connection, that the spare key is five minutes away and that security will help until 11pm. Much of that knowledge has never needed to be formally assembled because the person simply knows the property.

An AI agent only has what the business has made available to it.

Some of that may sit in the PMS. Some may be in property instructions, previous guest conversations, the smart-lock system, maintenance records or another piece of software. Some may still be in a spreadsheet, WhatsApp conversation or somebody's head. If the information is current and the problem follows a familiar path, the agent may be able to deal with most of it without disturbing anybody else.

When the information is missing, two systems disagree or the situation is unusual, producing another confident answer is not useful. The system needs to recognise that it has reached the edge of what it has been given enough information or permission to handle.

Knowing when to stop is part of doing the job properly.

People make these decisions throughout a property-management business. A reservations employee may be able to approve an ordinary late checkout but speak to the manager before issuing a substantial refund. Someone in operations may call the usual plumber for a routine repair but seek approval when the contractor discovers a much larger problem. A revenue manager may move rates within an agreed range while discussing an unusual event period with the owner or general manager.

The boundaries already exist. They have simply been carried by people.

Once software starts acting, those boundaries must become clearer because the system cannot rely on years of working in the business to understand where they are.

The size of the job matters as well. “Send the arrival instructions” is reasonably narrow. “Look after tomorrow's arrivals” is not. That could mean checking whether each property is ready, confirming access information, finding missing guest details, communicating with housekeeping, responding to questions and dealing with anything that does not follow the normal plan.

A manager can give that responsibility to an experienced employee in a few words because both people understand what sits underneath it. Giving the same responsibility to software means the business must be much clearer about what information it can use, which systems it can reach, what it can change and when somebody needs to take over.

This is where the difference between taking an action and completing the work becomes important.

Creating a maintenance task does not mean the maintenance has happened. Sending a contractor a message does not mean the contractor is coming. Receiving a reply saying “done” does not necessarily mean the repair worked. Sending arrival instructions does not mean the guest received them or can enter the property.

Property managers deal with this difference every day. They do not simply start work; they make sure something happened.

For some jobs that is easy to establish. A payment either reconciles or it does not. A message has been delivered or it has not. A smart lock can confirm that a code was created. Other outcomes are less certain. A cleaner can mark a property ready while an inspection photograph suggests otherwise. A contractor can complete a repair that fails again the following morning. A guest issue can be closed in the system while the guest is still unhappy.

If AI is going to complete more of the work, it needs some way of checking the result rather than simply recording that an action was taken.

That difference also changes the consequence of getting something wrong. A poor paragraph can be rewritten. Cancelling the wrong reservation, sending access information to the wrong person or issuing a refund that should never have been approved is something else. The fact that software can take an action does not tell the property manager whether it should be allowed to take it.

For a smaller professional operator, this does not require another department or somebody with AI in their job title. The person who takes over may simply be the founder. In a ten- or twenty-property business that person may already be the one who handles the unusual guest problem, the larger expense, the difficult owner conversation or anything else that falls outside the normal run of the day.

There is potentially real value in having fewer routine matters reach that person. If the straightforward work can be completed properly and only the exceptions come forward, the founder is spending less time answering questions the business already knows how to answer and more time on situations where their experience is actually useful.

That is a much more recognisable use of agentic AI for many professional property managers across Asia than a business somehow running itself.

It also gives us a fairly simple way of understanding what an agent needs before it can be trusted with a piece of work. It needs to know what it is trying to achieve. It needs the information required to make the decision. It needs access to whatever tools or systems are necessary to carry it out. It needs to know what it has permission to do. It needs to recognise when the normal situation has become an exception, and it needs somewhere to send the work when it should no longer continue alone.

Finally, it needs some way of knowing whether the job was done.

Objective → Information → Tools → Permission → Exceptions → Handover → Outcome

That is enough for a property manager to understand what we mean by an agent throughout the rest of this report.

The chapters that follow deal with the harder part: whether the business itself can provide those things clearly enough for the agent to work with them, much of the knowledge required to run the business has never been written down.

STRA FRAMEWORK / 04

Agent Decision Loop

Framework developed by STRA • Chapter 5

01 Objective

Define the outcome the operator wants.

↓

02 Context

Gather current reservation, property and business information.

↓

03 Plan

Choose steps consistent with the instructions and authority.

↓

04 Tools

Use only the systems and access required for the task.

↓

05 Action

Act within the permission and spending limits.

↓

06 Verify

Check what happened, not simply whether a task was sent.

↓

07 Outcome and next step

Close the task when the outcome is verified. Return to context or planning if further authorised work is required. Hand over when information or authority is insufficient.

Escalation can occur at any stage. It is a handover when the task exceeds the agent's authority or cannot be verified, rather than a compulsory final step. The system must not continue merely because it can call another tool.



CHAPTER 06

The Instruction Layer

The task is to know where those situations begin.

Most professional property-management businesses do not run from a manual.

They may have operating procedures, property notes, checklists, owner agreements and instructions inside the PMS, but a large part of how the business actually works sits with the people running it. They know which cleaner can be called when somebody cancels at the last minute, which owner wants to approve every expense, which contractor will answer at midnight and which guest problem needs a phone call rather than another message.

This has worked because people carry context with them. They remember previous conversations, recognise unusual situations and adjust what they do without necessarily documenting every reason behind the decision. When AI is given permission to act, some of that knowledge has to become more explicit.

Consider an instruction such as “deal with maintenance emergencies.” Most experienced property managers would understand what that means inside their own business. They would also understand that a leaking tap, a burst pipe, a failed air conditioner and a smell of gas are not four versions of the same problem.

For AI, “deal with maintenance emergencies” is an ambition rather than an operating instruction.

The business must decide what qualifies as an emergency, what should happen first, who can be contacted, how much can be spent without approval, when the owner needs to know, what should be said to the guest and at what point somebody takes over. A small operator may already have answers to all of those questions. They simply may never have written them down.

The written rule and the way the business operates are also not always the same thing. An owner agreement might say that repairs above a certain amount require approval, while years of working with that owner have established that an urgent plumbing problem should simply be fixed. The PMS may say check-in begins at 3pm, while the team routinely releases the property earlier when housekeeping finishes ahead of schedule. A compensation policy may provide a general limit, but the manager knows that a guest who has spent half the night without power should not be handled in the same way as somebody reporting a minor inconvenience.

These are not signs of a badly managed business. Hospitality has always involved judgement. People learn where the written rule ends and how the business expects them to deal with what comes next. Software does not acquire that understanding simply because it has access to the system.

Ben Gusberg described AI during the research for this report as something close to a brilliant first-day employee with no context. It is a useful comparison. A new employee may be capable, experienced and quick to learn, but they still need somebody to explain how this business works.

That is a different job from writing prompts.

A prompt tells AI what somebody wants at a particular moment. An operating instruction has to remain useful after that moment has passed. It has to carry enough of the business behind it for the same piece of work to be handled consistently tomorrow, by another property, with another guest or when something does not quite follow the usual pattern.

Words that people use comfortably can become surprisingly important here. Reasonable. Urgent. Important. High value. Good guest. Minor issue. Use your judgement. Property managers use language like this every day because the people around them understand much of the missing meaning.

Tell someone who has worked with you for five years to offer “reasonable compensation” after a service failure, and they probably understand what you mean. They know that the answer may depend on the value of the booking, how serious the problem was, how long it lasted, whether the business caused it and what the owner has previously agreed to.

Tell software the same thing and *reasonable* still needs a meaning.

There does not need to be an industry answer because the answer belongs to the operator. One property manager may allow a team member to resolve a particular problem immediately while another wants the same decision brought back to the founder. One owner may give broad discretion over maintenance while another wants to be involved. The instruction must reflect the business being operated, rather than somebody else's idea of how a property-management company should work.

The same applies beyond guest communication. Revenue decisions have limits. Maintenance expenditure has limits. Owner reporting has rules about what is included and what is checked. A sales enquiry becomes interesting to one company for reasons that may be quite different from another. These decisions have usually developed around the business itself.

That is the instruction layer: the accumulated explanation of how this business expects work to be handled, including its rules, limits, exceptions, priorities and the situations where somebody needs to use judgement.

A larger company may already have much of this spread across operating manuals, training material, policies and system settings. In a smaller property-management company it may sit largely with the founder and a few experienced people. Neither arrangement tells us whether the business is well run. What matters is whether the knowledge needed to do a particular job can be passed on when somebody or something else is expected to do it.

For a twenty-property operator, this should not become a hundred-page AI manual. Start with the decisions already being made every day. 1. *What do we normally do here?* 2. *What changes the answer?* 3. *What can the team decide without me?* 4. *What always comes back to me?* 5. *Does this owner have a different rule?* 6. *What would I never allow somebody new to decide on their first day?*

The answers already exist inside the business.

Writing some of them down may also prove useful for reasons that have very little to do with AI. Many small property-management companies depend heavily on knowledge held by the founder or one experienced employee. The weakness becomes obvious when that person is away, somebody leaves or the portfolio grows beyond the point where the founder can remain involved in every decision. Making the way work is actually done easier to understand can make the business less dependent on one person's memory.

It can also expose practices that are less settled than everybody assumed. If refund decisions change depending on who is working, owner authority is unclear or maintenance decisions depend on whoever answers the phone, putting those practices into software does not improve them. It simply makes the inconsistency easier to repeat.

There is value in being forced to examine decisions that have become automatic and ask why the business handles them that way. The answer does not need to turn hospitality into a rule book. Some situations will always depend on experience, judgement and the relationship with the guest or owner.

The business simply needs to know which parts of the work can be explained and where that explanation stops.

A prompt is not an operating instruction. Once AI is expected to do more than produce an answer, it needs some understanding of how this property-management business expects the work to be done.

Even with clear instructions, the decision can still be wrong if the information underneath it is wrong.

CHAPTER 07

The Business Has to Know What Is True

Somebody, somewhere, must know what is true.

A property-management business rarely has one version of the truth.

The reservation sits in the PMS. The payment record may sit somewhere else. The owner agreement is in a document or email. The cleaner confirms the property is ready through WhatsApp. A maintenance contractor sends photographs directly to somebody on the team. The guest was promised an early check-in in a message that never made it back into the reservation notes. An owner approved a repair six months ago but changed the spending limit during a telephone conversation last week.

Somewhere between all of those systems and conversations, somebody in the business usually knows what is going on.

In a larger company that knowledge may be spread across an operations team, reservations, finance and people working in the destination. In a 20-property business it may sit largely with the person running it, who remembers that one apartment has a temperamental hot-water system, another owner wants to be contacted before anything significant is spent and tomorrow's cleaner responds more reliably to WhatsApp than the task system.

This is not an unusual way to run a professional property-management business in Asia. Different parts of the operation have developed around the systems, people and local relationships that work. One response to STRA's Verifying AI research described where the information needed by AI currently lives in three words:

“PMS and spreadsheets.”

A lot of property managers will recognise that answer.

People have become very good at filling the spaces between systems. They remember what was agreed, notice when something does not look right, check another record, call somebody and make a judgement about which information should be trusted. Much of this barely registers as work because it has become part of the way the business operates.

As AI moves further into that work, those gaps become harder to ignore.

Consider something as ordinary as an outstanding guest payment. The PMS says the reservation is paid. The accounting system says money is still owing. A member of the team seeing both records will probably stop before sending anything to the guest. They may check the payment processor, look at the reservation history or ask whoever handled the booking.

An AI agent instructed to chase outstanding payments needs to know which record carries authority before it does anything.

The same problem appears elsewhere in the operation. Housekeeping marks a property ready, but the latest inspection photograph suggests otherwise. The standard arrival time is 3pm but somebody has already promised the guest 1pm. The owner agreement permits repairs up to a certain amount while a later message from the owner gives a different instruction. The booking shows four guests while the information submitted for building registration shows two.

Connecting more systems does not remove these contradictions. Sometimes it simply makes them easier to see.

That may prove to be one of the more useful applications of AI inside a property-management business.

There is a great deal of work involved in comparing information. Payments have to be matched. Missing arrival details have to be found. Owner statements have to agree with the underlying transactions. Reservations need the correct access information. A property marked ready may need checking against something else before the next guest arrives. Two records showing different amounts need somebody to notice.

AI can potentially do much of that checking continuously and bring the differences forward.

For a smaller professional operator, that may be considerably more useful than some of the AI applications receiving greater attention. Finding tomorrow's arrival with incomplete access information before the guest is standing outside the building has an obvious value. Finding a financial discrepancy before an owner questions the statement does as well.

Finding the difference and deciding which record is correct are still two different jobs.

That distinction becomes more important when the software is allowed to act. An AI system can identify that two figures do not match without being given permission to change either of them. It can flag that an owner's latest instruction conflicts with the signed agreement without deciding which one should govern the next repair. It can identify that housekeeping and the reservation record disagree about whether a property is ready without promising the guest an early arrival.

The business must decide what happens next.

There is unlikely to be one universal source of truth across the whole operation, and there does not need to be. Different decisions depend on different information.

The PMS may carry the authoritative reservation record. The payment processor may be the better evidence that money moved. The signed owner agreement may govern the commercial relationship until a properly recorded change is made. The smart-lock system may know whether a code was created. The person standing inside the apartment may know more about whether it is ready than the green tick on the housekeeping dashboard.

The difficulty comes when nobody has considered which source should be trusted until the sources disagree.

People can often work around that ambiguity because they understand the context. They know which system tends to update late, which owner changed an arrangement recently, which supplier communicates outside the formal system and when something unusual is worth checking before anyone acts.

Software needs more help.

That does not mean a 30-property business needs a data project before it can use AI. Nor does every spreadsheet need to disappear. A business can operate perfectly well with information in several places if it understands what those places are being used for and where the important decisions come from.

The practical question is much narrower: is the information reliable enough for the job the AI is being asked to do?

The consequence of being wrong helps answer that.

An old restaurant recommendation in a guest information file may be inconvenient. An old access code is different. An incorrect owner spending limit is different again. A duplicated maintenance record may create some wasted work. A duplicated refund creates a financial problem.

The closer AI gets to decisions affecting the guest, the property, an owner or money, the more important it becomes to know what information sits underneath the decision.

This also changes the way property managers should think about their existing systems. For years, the industry has talked about integration largely as a convenience. Systems that talk to each other reduce double entry and save staff moving information around. Once AI can use those connections to make decisions or take actions, integration carries more weight. The system is no longer simply moving information. That information may determine what happens next.

For many operators, the first useful result of introducing more AI may therefore be discovering where their own business does not agree with itself.

That is not necessarily a failure.

If AI finds that an owner agreement, spreadsheet and PMS contain three different versions of the same instruction, the technology has identified a problem that already existed. If it repeatedly must ask a person which record is correct, that tells the operator something about the business as well.

Some of those problems will be worth fixing. Others may simply need a clear rule about which source takes precedence. A few may remain deliberately human because the answer depends on circumstances that do not fit neatly into a system.

The objective is not to create a perfectly ordered property-management business before AI can be used. Most operators would never get there, and there is little reason they should try.

It is to understand enough about the information behind a piece of work to know whether software can be trusted to use it.

For the professional property manager, this is a much more practical question than whether the business has “good data.” A 20-property operator does not need the same information architecture as a company managing 2,000 properties. Both, however, need to know whether the guest has paid before chasing them for money, whether the property is ready before promising an early arrival and what an owner has actually authorised before committing them to an expense.

AI can help find the contradictions. It can compare records, surface missing information and reduce the amount of checking people do manually.

But when the records disagree, the business still needs to know what it believes.

And once the answer involves money, the consequences become considerably harder to ignore.



CHAPTER 08

Money Changes the Risk

And know what it costs to let them do the work.

AI can make a mistake in a guest message, and somebody corrects it. It can make a mistake with money and the conversation changes very quickly.

Money runs through almost every part of a professional property-management business. A rate is changed. A guest asks for compensation. A repair needs approval. A payment has not arrived. A cleaner submits an invoice. An owner questions an expense. A refund is requested. At the end of the month, revenue and costs must find their way into the right owner statement and ultimately the right payout.

None of this is new. Property managers make these decisions every day, often without thinking of them as financial controls. Someone on the team can approve a small guest credit but needs permission for a larger refund. A maintenance contractor can be called immediately for an urgent repair, but expenditure above an owner's agreed limit needs approval. A member of staff can prepare an owner statement, while somebody else checks it before it goes out.

AI does not create the need for those boundaries. It does make us look at them more closely because some of the authority previously given only to people can now be given to software.

There is a useful way to think about that authority without making it more complicated than it needs to be. AI can **observe** what is happening. It can **recommend** what should happen. It can **act within limits** already set by the business. It can **act and report** what it has done. In some tightly defined areas, it may eventually be allowed to operate **autonomously**.

That is the Authority Ladder used throughout this report:

Observe → Recommend → Act within limits → Act and report → Autonomous

It is not a ranking and there is no reason for a business to move from left to right. The right position depends on the work.

Take an owner statement. AI could compare the statement with the ledger and identify something that does not match. Nothing has been changed and no money has moved. The operator might then allow it to suggest that an expense appears to have been allocated to the wrong property. Over time, clearly defined reconciliation differences might be corrected automatically while anything outside the normal rules is brought to somebody's attention. The completed statement may still require a person to approve it before it reaches the owner.

Guest compensation presents the same choice in a different form. A system may recognise that a guest experienced a genuine service failure and recommend compensation. An operator could decide that small amounts within an agreed limit can be issued without waiting for approval. A larger refund, a dispute over responsibility, several affected nights or a situation where the owner may carry the cost can go to a person.

Maintenance makes the point even more clearly. A blocked drain at 9pm does not need a management meeting. If the business has an approved contractor and the cost is within the owner's agreed maintenance limit, there may be little value in waking somebody simply to say yes. If the contractor arrives and discovers that an \$80 repair is an \$800 problem, the decision has changed and the authority should change with it.

“AI handles maintenance” tells a property manager very little. “AI can contact an approved contractor and authorise work up to \$150, after which the operations manager must approve it” is something a business can work with.

This is also where some of the current conversation about autonomous AI becomes easier to put into perspective. A property manager does not have to decide whether they trust AI. They have to decide what they trust it to do. Those are very different decisions. The same operator may be comfortable with AI identifying a payment discrepancy, allow it to approve a small maintenance expense, require a person to authorise a refund and refuse to let it change an owner's bank details under any circumstances.

That is already how professional businesses treat people. Authority follows the job.

The financial side of multi-owner property management makes this particularly important. Revenue can arrive through OTAs and direct bookings, with commissions, taxes, cleaning, maintenance, refunds and other expenses sitting around it. Different properties may have different owner agreements and spending limits. Add multiple currencies, local tax requirements and systems that do not always reconcile neatly with one another, and a considerable amount of work can sit behind what eventually appears as a single owner payout.

STRA's earlier work on the multi-owner financial challenge found that much of this can remain surprisingly manual. That makes finance one of the areas where AI could become genuinely useful to a professional property manager. Comparing records, matching transactions, finding differences and bringing unusual items forward is exactly the kind of repetitive work that can consume hours without adding much value simply because a person did it.

For a 30-property operator, saving several hours of reconciliation every month may be worth considerably more than another tool that writes guest messages. It does not require handing the bank account to an AI agent. The useful work may simply be finding the three transactions that need attention instead of asking somebody to manually check three hundred.

There is another side to that efficiency. Software can repeat a mistake much faster than a person.

If somebody allocates one expense to the wrong property, there is one mistake to find. If a system has been given the wrong instruction and applies it to several hundred transactions, the business has a different problem. The speed that makes AI useful can also increase the cost of getting an assumption wrong.

That is why the consequence of the action matters more than how impressive the technology appears. Some actions are easy to reverse. Some reach a guest immediately. Some create a commitment to an owner or supplier. Some move money. Some alter a financial record that may not be noticed until the end of the month. The sensible level of checking will not be the same for all of them.

Money also raises a second question that is becoming more relevant as AI moves further into everyday operations: what does the AI itself cost to run?

For occasional use, the answer may hardly matter. Someone asks AI to analyse a spreadsheet, draft an owner email or summarise a set of reviews and the cost is small compared with the person's time. The economics begin to change when software is working continuously across hundreds of stays, reading conversations, retrieving information, checking reservations, comparing transactions and using other systems throughout the day.

Property managers do not need to become experts in token pricing or model infrastructure to understand this. Those costs are changing quickly anyway, and much of the choice will eventually sit inside the PMS, revenue system, communications platform or other technology the operator already buys.

The more useful measure is the cost of getting the work done.

A cheaper AI model is not necessarily cheaper if staff must correct it repeatedly. A more capable system may cost more each time it runs but make commercial sense if it resolves the work properly. An agent that appears to save four hours but creates two hours of checking has not saved four hours. A system that allows a five-person business to manage another twenty properties without immediately adding another position may have created substantial value even if the monthly technology bill has increased.

This is where operators need something more useful from technology companies than another productivity percentage. If a product is going to qualify leads, manage guest communication, reconcile transactions, coordinate maintenance or prepare owner reporting, the property manager should be able to understand what happens when it does that work repeatedly inside a real business. 1. How often does somebody intervene? 2. How often is the result corrected? 3. What happens when it gets something wrong? 4. What does it cost at the volume the operator runs?

Those are ordinary commercial questions. They should remain ordinary commercial questions simply because AI is involved.

Money has a useful way of cutting through much of the noise around this technology. It forces the business to become specific. Changing a rate is different from recommending one. Drafting a refund response is different from issuing the refund. Finding an owner-statement discrepancy is different from changing the ledger. Identifying a repair is different from committing somebody else's money to fixing it.

There may eventually be some very strong uses of AI around the financial side of professional property management precisely because so much of the work involves checking, matching, comparing and finding exceptions. For smaller professional operators, that could remove hours of work that currently sit with the founder or a small team.

The opportunity is worth examining. So are the boundaries.

A professional property manager already understands the basic discipline because they use it every day with people: who can see the information, who can recommend a decision, who can approve the expenditure, when somebody else needs to take over, and whether the result justified the time and money spent getting there.

AI does not need a different standard. It needs the same clarity applied to a new kind of worker.

STRA FRAMEWORK / 05

STRA Authority Ladder

Framework developed by STRA • Chapter 8

Delegated authority for a particular task

The positions overlap and do not rank readiness

Authority	What it permits	Where the decision sits
Observe	Read, compare and identify an exception.	A person decides what happens next.
Recommend	Suggest an action or prepare it for approval.	A person approves the action.
Act within limits	Execute a defined action inside agreed boundary.	The operator sets limits, records actions and reviews exceptions.
Act & report	Complete routine work within agreed limits, then report its outcome.	The operator reviews the record and exceptions.
Defined autonomy	Complete a defined workflow without routine approval, within permissions.	The operator retains limits, monitoring and intervention.

The operator chooses authority for each task.

Reporting applies to every consequential action; “act and report” describes routine work completed without prior approval, within continuing limits. Defined autonomy retains permissions, monitoring and a route to human intervention.



CHAPTER 09

Who Is Accountable When the Agent Acts?

The property manager still owns the operation.

When somebody inside a property-management business decides, we usually know who made it. A reservations manager approved the refund. The owner agreed to the repair. Someone in revenue changed the rate. The founder decided to make an exception for a guest.

Once software begins taking some of those actions, the line can appear less obvious.

An AI agent may use a model supplied by one company, operate through software provided by another, connect with the PMS and work with information supplied by the property manager. If something goes wrong, there may be several technical explanations for how it happened.

The guest will not care very much about any of them.

Neither will the owner who receives an incorrect statement, discovers an expense they did not approve or wants to know why something happened to their reservation or property. Their relationship is with the property manager, and they expect the property manager to explain what happened and put it right.

Professional property managers already understand this because they rely on other businesses every day. A cleaning company prepares the property. A contractor repairs the plumbing. A payment provider handles a transaction. An OTA delivers a reservation. A smart-lock provider may control access. When one of those things fails, the operator may need to establish where the failure occurred, but the guest or owner still expects somebody to take responsibility for the immediate problem.

AI joins that chain.

Imagine an agent issues a refund that should not have been approved. The instruction may have been wrong. The reservation information may have been incomplete. An integration may have passed the wrong information. The agent may have interpreted the situation incorrectly or the software may have behaved differently from what was expected.

Those distinctions matter when the business works out what went wrong and how to prevent it happening again. They matter considerably less to the guest whose booking has just been affected.

The same applies to an owner statement. If an expense has been allocated to the wrong property, telling the owner that “the AI did it” does not settle the matter. The owner appointed the property manager to manage the property and account for the money.

This is where accountability needs to remain very ordinary.

A professional property manager does not need to accept responsibility for a software defect it did not create, any more than it should accept responsibility for a payment provider's technical failure. The technology company still has responsibilities for the product it sells. The PMS provider has responsibilities for its platform. The company providing the underlying model has responsibilities for its technology.

Those responsibilities do not remove the property manager's responsibility for the operation.

If the business has allowed software to communicate with a guest, change a reservation, arrange work at a property or make a financial decision on its behalf, somebody inside that business still must be able to answer when the result reaches the guest or owner.

That does not require a large governance structure. For many professional property managers across Asia, the person answering may simply be the founder. They are probably already the person who deals with an unusual refund, a serious guest problem, an owner dispute or something else that does not fit the normal run of the business.

What changes with AI is that the decision may have been made before a person saw it.

That makes one practical ability increasingly important: the property manager needs to be able to establish what happened.

If an owner questions an expense, the operator should be able to work out what the system did and why. If a guest received a refund, somebody should be able to establish what led to it. If a reservation was changed, the business should not be left guessing whether the instruction, the information, the software or something else caused the decision.

This is not about recording every routine action simply because AI was involved. A guest asking for the Wi-Fi password does not need an investigation file. The need becomes more obvious when an action has a real consequence, and somebody later asks the perfectly reasonable question: why did you do that?

There will be mistakes. People make them now. Contractors make them. Software makes them. Professional property management has never meant that nothing goes wrong; it means the business can explain what happened, put it right and decide what needs to change.

AI does not alter that basic responsibility.

The model provider owns the model. The software company owns its product. The PMS provider owns its platform.

The property manager still owns the operation.

CHAPTER 10

The Human Operating Layer

*The person receiving an escalation still needs to know
what good looks like.*

One of the first questions asked whenever AI enters a business is whether it will replace people. For much of professional short-term rental management in Asia, that is not a particularly useful place to begin.

Many operators do not have large departments waiting to be automated. They have small teams covering a wide range of responsibilities. The founder may deal with an owner, review rates, check tomorrow's arrivals, solve an operations problem and look at the bank account before lunch. The reservations person may also handle guest issues. The operations manager may know every cleaner and contractor personally.

There may be very few positions to remove. What these businesses usually have too little of is time.

That changes the value of AI considerably. If routine work can be taken away from five people, the immediate result does not have to be four people. It may be five people managing more properties without working longer hours. The founder may spend less time finding information and more time with owners. Someone in operations may deal with the properties that have a problem rather than checking all the ones that do not.

This idea of additional capacity has been coming through in STRA's conversations with operators and deserves to be considered separately from headcount reduction. A business may use AI extensively and still employ the same number of people. What changes is the amount and type of work those people can handle.

That has relevance in Asia because professional does not mean large. A small operator may never employ a revenue analyst, a dedicated quality-control person, somebody solely responsible for owner reporting or a team member whose job is to analyse operating data. The work still exists. It usually sits with people who already have several other responsibilities.

AI may give some of that capability to a smaller business without requiring the organisational structure that once came with it.

There are obvious places where machines can remove repetitive work. Finding information, comparing records, translating a message, summarising a conversation, identifying something unusual, checking whether required information is missing and handling predictable communication can all save time.

Then the guest asks something that does not fit. An owner disputes a charge. The cleaner says the property is ready, but the inspection photographs suggest otherwise. A guest wants compensation because construction next door started at 7am. A family arrives expecting a facility that was removed months ago. A contractor says the repair is complete and the guest says it is not.

The person dealing with those situations is no longer processing routine work. They are working out what happened, who is responsible, what is reasonable and what should happen next. As more predictable work is handled by software, the people in the business may find themselves dealing with a greater concentration of the difficult work.

That changes how productivity should be judged.

Removing ten routine questions from somebody's inbox may save time. If the five conversations left behind involve frustration, money, judgement or an unusual operating problem, the person's job has not simply become smaller. In some respects, it has become more demanding.

The skills that matter begin to move as well. Knowing where to find the Wi-Fi password becomes less valuable if the system can retrieve it instantly. Knowing how to deal with a family standing outside an apartment at midnight when the normal access process has failed remains valuable. Preparing a standard owner report may take less time. Explaining why performance changed, what is happening in the market and what the operator intends to do about it still requires an understanding of the property and the owner.

Property management is a service business. The quality of the operation has never been measured by how few people touched the work.

Hospitality also contains different kinds of work. Some of it is information: check-in time, property directions, Wi-Fi instructions. Some of it is coordination: whether the cleaner has finished, whether the contractor has arrived, whether the property can take an early arrival. Some requires judgement. And some remains stubbornly physical: preparing a property, inspecting damage, replacing something that is missing, repairing equipment or standing in front of a guest when the stay has gone badly wrong.

AI can remove work around the first areas and increasingly coordinate parts of the second. It can assist with decisions and, as Chapter 8 established, be given different levels of authority according to the work. The physical stay still must be delivered.

This matters across Asia, where many professional STR businesses have developed around local service networks rather than large, centralised teams. Cleaners, maintenance contractors, building staff, drivers, local hosts and owners may all be part of delivering the stay without sitting neatly inside the property manager's technology. Better coordination may make that network easier to manage. It does not replace the network.

The more interesting question is what the people inside the property-management company become able to do with the time that is released.

For a thirty-property operator, access to specialist capability has traditionally been constrained by economics. The company may need better revenue analysis but cannot justify a full-time analyst. It may want tighter financial checking without employing somebody to inspect every transaction. It may want tomorrow's arrivals monitored for problems without asking a staff member to work through every reservation. It may want better owner reporting while the founder is still the person who ultimately explains performance to the owner.

A much larger operator can distribute that work across specialist teams. A two-thousand-property company may have dedicated people in revenue, finance, quality, owner relations, sales, operations and technology. The thirty-property operator still has many of the same business questions without the same organisational depth.

AI does not make those two businesses the same. It may reduce how much organisational scale is required to access some of the same capability.

I had a very useful version of this conversation with **Manmeet Singh (Manit) Thakralbutra, Founder and CEO of Arawana Group**, looking at AI from the perspective of a larger hospitality business. What struck me was how quickly the discussion moved away from AI itself and into the everyday questions of running the operation.

We talked about productivity, analysis and reporting, financial decision-making, workforce planning and project review. Manit was interested in actual operating examples: where had AI genuinely removed work, where had somebody still needed to intervene, and had the technology improved the operation or simply created another system and another set of outputs for somebody to manage?

I think that is equally relevant to the thirty-property operator. The systems and resources may be very different, but both businesses still must decide whether AI is giving people more useful time and better information to work with. For the smaller operator, that may be particularly valuable because access to capability that once required another specialist employee may increasingly come without having to build another layer into the company.

That could matter considerably to the structure of professional property management. Growth has often meant adding people because the volume of coordination, checking and administration grows with the portfolio. If part of that work can increase without headcount moving at the same rate, a smaller operator may remain smaller by choice while still building a stronger business.

It may also allow growth to happen differently. A five-person company could remain a five-person company for longer. The founder may not need to add the next administrative position simply because the portfolio has grown by another ten properties. Someone already inside the business may gain time to take on work that previously could not be given enough attention.

None of this removes the need for people who understand the operation.

In fact, one of the less discussed consequences may be what happens to the way people learn.

Junior employees develop judgement partly by dealing with ordinary situations. They answer straightforward guest questions before handling an angry guest. They work through normal reservations before encountering the one that does not fit. They see ordinary maintenance problems before having to decide what to do when a contractor, owner and guest all want different things.

If AI handles every simple case, the person receiving the difficult one may have fewer opportunities to build the experience that tells them what good looks like.

That is a management question, not a technology problem. Businesses will have to think about how people learn the operation when some of the work that previously taught them has disappeared from their day. Someone still needs to understand why the ordinary decision is ordinary before they can recognise the exception.

Experience also carries things that are difficult to separate from the business itself. Knowing an owner's history matters. Knowing which contractor will answer at 10pm matters. Understanding that a guest is genuinely distressed rather than simply negotiating matters. Recognising that something does not feel right even though the systems say everything is fine can matter.

Some of that knowledge can be captured in the instructions described earlier in this report. Some comes from years of operating properties and dealing with people.

This is why the human part of the business should not be treated simply as whatever is left after AI has taken everything it can.

As routine work moves away, the time released can be used around relationships, difficult decisions, local knowledge, physical service and the situations that do not follow the expected path.

For many smaller professional property managers across Asia, that may be where the commercial value becomes most interesting. AI does not necessarily mean building the same business with fewer people. It may allow the same people to build a better business, manage more without adding complexity at the same rate and spend more of their time on the work where being human still counts.

AI and Human Work

Framework developed by STRA • Chapter 10

The work changes according to repetition, context and consequence.

Machine-supported work	Shared work with boundaries	Human work and responsibility
Drafting, translation and routine information	Guest communication with exception handling	Service recovery and difficult conversations
Finding and comparing records	Reconciliation prepared for review	Owner money, disputes and approval
Demand analysis and reporting	Rates adjusted within agreed parameters	Commercial judgement and unusual owner needs
Task preparation and scheduling	Maintenance coordination with spending limits	Physical repair, property quality and safety
Checking, copying and routine follow-up	Exceptions routed to a responsible person	Relationships, local context and accountability

Less routine handling can create more capacity for the work that needs experience.

Illustrative roles that can overlap. A person remains responsible for consequential decisions and physical delivery; the allocation does not forecast job losses or reserve every task to one category.



CHAPTER 11

Are You Actually Ready for Agentic AI?

AI can work technically and still be a poor commercial decision.



By this point, the question of readiness should be easier to bring back to the property-management business itself.

It is tempting to assess readiness through technology. Which PMS do we use? How connected are our systems? How much AI have we already adopted? Is our data clean? None of those questions is irrelevant, but they can make the subject much larger than it needs to be.

A more useful starting point for a property manager is to choose one piece of work that AI is already touching, or that you are considering giving to it, and follow that work from beginning to end.

Take an early check-in request.

A guest asks whether they can arrive at noon rather than three. In many businesses somebody can deal with that in a couple of minutes. They look at the reservation, check whether the previous guest has departed, see what is happening with housekeeping and perhaps message the cleaner. They know whether early check-in is complimentary, charged or only offered in certain circumstances. Then they answer the guest.

Because somebody already knows how the business works, a simple request can remain simple.

Follow the same piece of work as though AI were doing it and the business becomes much easier to examine. Where does the reservation information come from? How does the system know whether the previous guest has left? Where is the cleaning schedule? Does housekeeping have to confirm the property is ready? Can the guest be offered noon before that confirmation arrives? Is there a charge, and can it be waived? What happens when the cleaner does not answer?

There is no need to turn this into a theoretical exercise. Use a real request from the business and trace what happened.

Look at where the work started, which systems and people were involved, what information was used, what decisions were made and where the job finished. If somebody had to leave the PMS, open a spreadsheet, check WhatsApp or call the cleaner, include that. If the founder became involved because something unusual happened, include that as well.

Then look at what AI is already doing inside that piece of work.

Perhaps it is only drafting the reply. Perhaps it is checking availability and suggesting an answer. Perhaps it can already communicate with the guest or change something inside the reservation. The Authority Ladder from Chapter 8 gives the operator a simple way to describe where it currently sits without reopening the whole argument:

Observe → Recommend → Act within limits → Act and report → Autonomous

Now follow the same job on a day when it does not go according to plan.



The cleaner is running late. The previous guest has not left. The building requires guest registration before access can be issued. The reservation says the apartment is available but somebody in operations knows maintenance is still inside it.

What happens next will tell the operator a great deal about readiness.

The point is not to document every possible exception before allowing AI anywhere near the business. Property managers have operated for years without writing down every situation they might encounter. The exercise is useful because it exposes how much the technology needs to know in order to take on more of this particular piece of work safely and whether the business can provide it.

Repeat the same exercise with something else.

A maintenance request will reveal different issues. So will an owner statement, a sales enquiry, a rate change or an unpaid balance. The business may be comfortable allowing AI to go much further with one than another. That is entirely reasonable.

Readiness does not have to apply to the whole company at once.

This is the purpose of the STRA AI Operating Readiness Profile. It is not intended to give a property manager an AI score or tell them how advanced their business is. It provides ten areas to look at when examining real work:

Process • Data • Integration • Instructions • Financial Controls • Permissions • Escalation • Security & Privacy • Governance • Performance & Economics

The value comes from applying those areas to something the business does.

Take the early check-in request and the profile becomes quite practical. The process is what normally happens from the guest asking to receiving an answer. Data is the reservation, departure and housekeeping information required to make that decision. Integration is whether the systems involved can work together or somebody still has to move the information between them. Instructions are the business rules already discussed in Chapter 6. Permissions and financial controls determine what the technology can actually do. Escalation tells us where the unusual case goes. Security and privacy matter according to the information being exposed. Performance and economics tell the operator whether handing over more of the work has improved anything.

There is no need to repeat the reasoning behind each of those areas here. The previous chapters have dealt with them. The profile simply puts them in one place so the operator can use them against a real part of the business.

That also prevents readiness from becoming a technology shopping exercise. Buying another AI product does not make the business more ready and running a small operation through a mixture of a PMS, spreadsheets and messaging applications does not automatically make it less ready.



A twenty-property operator who understands exactly how a particular piece of work gets done may be in a better position to hand part of it to AI than a much larger company where the same work passes through several systems and nobody is quite sure why.

Once AI is involved, the operator can watch what happens rather than relying on what was expected to happen.

How often does somebody step in? How often is the result changed or reversed? Are the same problems appearing repeatedly? Has the time spent on the work actually fallen? Has the work become faster without becoming better? Has somebody simply moved from doing the job to checking what the AI did?

Then bring it back to the commercial question from Chapter 8: what did it cost to get the work done properly?

The answer may be measured in hours saved, fewer interruptions, fewer mistakes or additional capacity rather than fewer employees. A five-person property-management company may remain a five-person company while managing more properties. The founder may recover time previously spent checking routine work. Operations may spend less time looking for problems and more time dealing with the properties that need attention.

That is enough to decide whether AI has earned a larger part of the job.

The same approach also avoids another trap in the AI conversation: assuming that the destination must be autonomy. It may be. For some tightly defined work, allowing software to complete the job without somebody watching every step may make perfect sense. Other work may remain at Recommend or Act within limits for years because that is where the business gets the best result.

There is no reason those decisions need to be the same across guest communication, finance, maintenance, revenue, sales and owner reporting.

For a professional property manager, readiness can therefore be tested one piece of work at a time. Follow the job from beginning to end. See what the technology needs to do it properly. Watch what happens when the normal sequence breaks. Measure what people still must do around it and decide whether giving the technology more of the work improves the operation.

The business does not need to be ready for autonomous AI.

It needs to know enough about itself to decide where autonomy earns its place.



STRA AI Operating Readiness Profile

Framework developed by STRA • Chapter 11

Ten dimensions considered for each workflow

Dimension	The operating question
Process	Do we know the normal work and where exceptions begin?
Data	Which information should the system believe for this decision?
Integration	Which connections help, and which checkpoints should stay?
Instructions	Are rules, limits and exceptions clear enough to act on?
Financial Controls	What requires checking or approval before money or records change?
Permissions	Does access match the task and its authority?
Escalation	When should the system stop, and who takes over?
Security & Privacy	What information is needed, protected and appropriate to share?
Governance	Who owns the behaviour and can change or stop it?
Performance & Economics	Does the work meet the required standard, and what does it cost once checking, corrections and failures are counted?

Consider each dimension for a particular workflow. Record the evidence, any unresolved gap and the human boundary. Strength in one dimension does not cancel weakness in another; no composite score is calculated.

CHAPTER 12

What Asia's Operators Are Actually Doing

AI adoption and AI authority are not the same thing.

FROM THE OPERATOR**OPERATOR EVIDENCE**

Verifying AI • Experiences and boundaries reported by professional property managers across Asia.

The most useful part of this research has been hearing professional property managers talk about AI in the context of the businesses they run.

The language changes very quickly once that happens. The conversation moves away from predictions and starts dealing with WhatsApp messages, security, guest quotes, spreadsheets, trust accounting, owner communication, false alarms, staff time, software changes and the question of whether somebody still needs to approve something before it happens.

That was the reason for Verifying AI.

STRA's Verified Report 2026, drawing on research involving 523 professional property managers across 23 Asian countries and its wider verified and mapped network, identified AI implementation at approximately 17% among professional property-management businesses. It gave us a useful starting point, but it did not tell us what using AI meant once we got inside the business. A property manager occasionally using an AI tool to help write marketing copy and another allowing AI to qualify leads or take an action inside the operation could both answer yes to the same question.

So, this time we asked different questions.

1. Where is AI being used?
2. How did it enter the business?
3. What is it allowed to do?
4. What has genuinely improved?
5. Where does it get things wrong?
6. Where does the knowledge it needs live?
7. What would the operator still refuse to hand over without a person involved?
8. What would have to change before you considered your business AI-native?

Verifying AI received more than **100 responses** from professional property managers. Some were already allowing AI to act inside parts of the business. Others were using it carefully around communication, analysis or marketing. Some remained deeply cautious. The responses did not produce one clean story, and we did not expect them to.

Alongside the eight-question Verifying AI survey, I sat down with a few of the professional property managers and talked through many of the same issues. I was less interested in whether somebody could describe their business as AI-enabled than in what was happening on an ordinary working day.

Throughout this chapter I have selected a small number of those voices because their answers bring operating questions into focus. They are not the survey. They are examples from a much wider body of responses.

The answers do not line up neatly. They should not.

Agung Juliarta at Puri Asia in Bali described a business using AI but not yet embedding it deeply inside the operating system. One of the first notes I wrote during our conversation was simply:

“Use it but not in system.”

AI was already helping around communication, including email and voice, and Agung could see its usefulness across other parts of the business. But throughout our conversation he kept bringing the discussion back to the role of the property manager. AI was a tool. It was not there to make every decision.

That distinction makes sense in the business Agung operates. Bali's professional STR sector contains villas and other accommodation with very different owners, service expectations and operating arrangements. A process that works perfectly well for one property may not transfer neatly to the next. Agung spoke about the importance of human touch, meeting the guest and knowing when the property manager still needs to make the decision.

Asked whether he regarded the business as AI-native, the answer in my notes was straightforward:

“Not really.”

There was no discomfort in that answer. AI can be useful without the company needing to reorganise itself around the technology.

Another Bali operator who contributed to Verifying AI asked not to be identified in this report. However, the answers are included with permission on that basis.

AI entered the business through members of the team and later through prompts within software they were already using. Today it assists with quick WhatsApp responses for out-of-hours contacts and with foreign-language enquiries.

When we asked what AI was allowed to do, she answered:

“Helps, we teach it and give it guidelines and keep check to ensure it maintains our standards and brand guidelines.”

They have seen improvements in response time and efficiency. Her description of its role in marketing was equally useful. AI, she said, **“elevates our ideas (as opposed to creating them).”**

Then the technology failed in a way that rarely appears in an AI product demonstration.

A software change affected the AI being used around WhatsApp and the business lost what was described as **“months of learning.”** At the time of her response, they had been unable to get it back.

That experience raises a very practical question for a small professional property manager. If a business spends months teaching a system how it communicates, what its standards are and how it expects work to be handled, *where does that accumulated knowledge belong? What happens when the software changes, an integration disappears or the operator changes provider?*

The answer to our question about where the knowledge AI needs to operate the business currently lives were only two words:

“My people.”

Their present boundary is just as clear. They would not allow AI to quote guests without a person involved. Before becoming comfortable with AI taking a more active role in quoting and booking, she wants better security and backups, so the business does not lose the time already invested in teaching it.

When we gave respondents the opportunity to tell us what the STR industry should be discussing that we had not asked, they wanted more conversation between operators about best practice, what people had learned and what others should watch for.

That is probably a fair description of where much of the industry currently sits. Property managers are learning some of this while running the business.

My discussion with **Adhiguna at AkraCara** took a different direction.

Security appeared early in my notes and kept coming back. So did the difference between experimenting with AI and implementing it.

We discussed communication, marketing, analysis, websites and applications. There was clearly interest in what AI could do, including productivity and the possibility of doing more with the people already in the business. But Adhiguna kept returning to what happens when experimentation moves closer to the real operation.

Errors matter differently there. Security matters differently. What AI is allowed to act upon becomes more important, and human approval remains part of the discussion.

That distinction between experiment and implementation is easy to overlook. Somebody in a property-management company can begin using an AI tool this afternoon. Marketing may use one. The founder may analyse a spreadsheet with another. A feature may appear inside software the business already pays for. None of that necessarily means the company has decided about how AI should operate inside the business.

Adhiguna's concern was what happens when it does.

Ankit Goenka at JadeCaps was looking at the question through a broader technology environment. Our conversation moved through multiple OTA accounts, the channel manager, dashboards, rate management and Claude, as well as the possible use of agents around listings, financial analysis and operations.

AI was entering **“step by step.”**

Two other short notes from that conversation have stayed with me because they appeared almost beside one another:

“New agent - new volumes.”

And:

“Risky.”

I do not think we need to choose between them.

The commercial attraction is easy to understand. If an agent can take on work that previously required somebody to find information, check something or move between systems, the business may be able to handle more operating volume without adding people at the same rate.

The risk travels with that possibility. The more work software can do, the more consequential a poor instruction, incorrect information or inappropriate action can become.

Ankit was looking at both.

Karan Miglani at ELIVAAS gave us another perspective because AI is already being used across several parts of the company.

His Verifying AI response described AI across demand generation and sales, including lead qualification, search, recommendations and content. On the supply side, it was being used around lead qualification and property scoring. Guest experience included bots, welcome groups, surveillance and task scoring.

This was not something that had wandered into the business accidentally. Karan described the move as planned and implemented through technology to solve for scale.

When we asked what AI was allowed to do, he was specific:

“Recommend and act for sales and suggest for guest experience.”

That is an important distinction. The same company can give AI different amounts of authority depending on the work.

Karan reported improvements across efficiency, productivity, cost saving, quality control and guest experience. When asked where AI broke down in the real operation, his answer was much shorter:

“False positives/alarms occasionally.”

When we asked where the knowledge AI needs to operate the business lives:

“PMS and spreadsheets.”

There is no reason to make that answer sound more sophisticated than it is. A professional business can be using AI across several parts of the operation while some of the information underneath it still lives in ordinary systems and spreadsheets.

Karan's answer to what he would never allow AI to do without a person involved was equally direct:

“Actual service to guest as hospitality at last mile has to have humane touch.”

His answer to what would have to change before he considered the business AI-native took the idea further:

“Have physical layer added to AI thinking for extreme guest experience.”

The wording is Karan's, and it reflects the business he is building. AI can move further into sales, analysis, qualification and parts of the guest operation while the physical delivery of hospitality remains something else.

Agung, Adhiguna, Ankit and Karan are all professional property managers operating in Asia. The anonymous Bali operator is dealing with many of the same questions from another position again. There is no obvious order in which they should be placed on an adoption curve, and doing so would probably tell us less rather than more.

One sees AI primarily as a useful tool while keeping decisions close to people. Another has already discovered that months of accumulated AI learning can disappear when the underlying software changes. Security and the move from experimentation into implementation dominate another conversation. Another is considering additional operating volume alongside risk. Another already allows AI to act in sales while keeping it closer to recommendation around guest experience.

These are different businesses making different decisions.

There is a useful response from outside Asia that I have deliberately included because it gives us a view from a property-management business that has already dealt with considerably greater operating scale.

Will Creedon at Alloggio in Australia, completed the same Verifying AI questions. Australia is not part of the Asian evidence base for this report, and his response should not be read as though it is. I have included as a comparative perspective from outside the Asian research geography. His contribution is useful because it shows how some of the same questions around authority, operating knowledge, guard rails and human involvement are being approached from experience at considerably greater operating scale.

At Alloggio, AI is already being used across reservations, guest services, trust accounting, task management, organic listing appraisals and a BOI reporting overlay. Its introduction was planned and staged.

When asked whether AI helps, recommends, decides or acts, Will answered:

“It does all 4 depending on the context — what is important is guard rails, context, data clarity.”

That is a considerably wider operating role than we heard from some of the Asian operators, but the important part of the answer may be what follows it. Greater authority depends on what surrounds the technology.

Will reported improvements in speed to the customer, NPS and cost efficiency, followed by a phrase that says something about what he believes the released capacity is for:

“Allowing humans to be with humans.”

When we asked where AI breaks down, he did not blame the model.

“When we have not given it the right clarity and library of knowledge.”

His answer to where that knowledge should live is particularly relevant to the argument running through this report. Will described a data warehouse or library and then added:

“You need to complete control over one centre of truth.”

The wording may not be grammatically perfect, but the operating point is clear: at scale, Alloggio is working towards control over a central source of operating knowledge.

Put that beside two answers from the Asian operators.

“My people.”

“PMS and spreadsheets.”

And then:

“One centre of truth.”

These are not three stages of an AI maturity model. They are three answers from businesses with different histories, structures, systems and operating scale.

They also show why the information question becomes harder to ignore as AI is given more work. A small professional operator may function perfectly well with important knowledge held by experienced people because those people are close to the work every day. Another company may operate effectively with information distributed between the PMS and spreadsheets. At considerably greater scale, relying on people to continually resolve which version is correct becomes much harder.

Will's boundaries have not disappeared because Alloggio is using AI more extensively. Regulation, tax and statutory accounting audits remain areas where he would not remove the person, along with dealing directly with owners through voice.

Asked how far he believed the business was from becoming AI-native, he gave the most definite answer in the research:

“I'm 15 months away.”

His final response is perhaps more interesting than the timetable. When we asked what the STR industry should be talking about that we had not asked, Will wrote:

“How we accelerate use to remove us and where is that line.”

That is a different question from whether AI belongs in property management. It comes from somebody already asking how much of the operation can move away from people and where the line should remain.

There is another kind of evidence worth putting beside these operator accounts: what property managers do when AI is already available to them.

Publicly released platform data during 2026 showed a marked difference between routine guest communication and messages carrying an operating decision. AI-generated drafts covering ordinary thank-you, Wi-Fi information and arrival confirmation were sent unchanged around one-third of the time. For late checkout, early check-in and refund requests, the proportion sent unchanged was around one in ten.

The same public data showed increasing use of AI-assisted messaging overall, while AI-generated review responses were accepted without changes more often than the average AI-assisted guest message.

These are company figures, not STRA measurements, and they are not an Asia benchmark. The published information also does not allow us to tell whether somebody editing a late-checkout or refund response was changing the language, changing the decision behind it or doing both.

That limitation is important because a late-checkout request is not simply a writing exercise. Somebody may need to know when housekeeping is arriving and whether another guest is checking in. An early arrival depends on whether the property is actually ready. A refund involves money and often responsibility for what happened during the stay.

The operator may be editing the message. They may also be retaining control of the decision.

That behaviour sits comfortably beside what the property managers told STRA without requiring us to pretend the evidence says more than it does.

What these conversations have changed for me is how little value there is in asking whether the industry is adopting AI as though adoption were one thing.

Agung uses it but does not see it as embedded in the system. One Bali operator relies on it for out-of-hours and foreign-language communication but will not let it quote a guest. Adhiguna is thinking carefully about security and the distance between experimentation and implementation. Ankit sees the possibility of new operating volume and the risk beside it. Karan already allows AI to act in sales while drawing a different line around guest experience. Will is working from the experience of a much larger operation and talking about guard rails, data clarity and control over one centre of truth.

Those differences are more useful than forcing the answers into a single percentage.

The 17% from STRA's earlier research told us that AI had entered part of Asia's professional STR sector.

It did not tell us where it had entered, what operators trusted it to do, where it was failing, what sat underneath it or where people were drawing their own line.

Verifying AI has begun to answer those questions.

Sometimes AI is answering WhatsApp messages after hours. Sometimes it is qualifying a sales lead. Sometimes it is helping analyse the business. Sometimes it is scoring a prospective property, checking work or supporting trust accounting. Sometimes the knowledge it needs is in the PMS. Sometimes it is in a spreadsheet. Sometimes it is still sitting with the people who have run the properties for years.

And sometimes months spent teaching the technology can disappear because somebody else's software changed.

That is what AI adoption looks like when we stop talking about it from the outside and go into the property-management business itself.

There is no single destination visible in these conversations, and I do not think STRA needs to invent one.

The more useful question from here is what happens to the shape of the property-management business as this intelligence starts appearing in more places around it, before somebody finds the operator, where the operator meets the guest or owner, and inside the work required to run the operation.

Asia's professional property managers are not waiting for somebody to give them a finished answer about AI.

CHAPTER 13

The Next Operating Model

AI may not simply help companies become larger. It may make becoming large less necessary.

It would be easy to finish a report about AI by predicting what the AI-native property-management company will look like.

I am not convinced that would be particularly useful.

Short-term rental businesses have never developed in a straight line. Technology arrives, operators adopt the parts that work, guests change their behaviour, distribution changes again and local operating realities usually have the final say. AI will be no different.

The conversations in this report do not point towards one future model either. Agung is using AI without putting it at the centre of the operation. Another Bali operator is seeing genuine gains in communication while keeping quoting with a person. Adhiguna is thinking carefully about security and what happens when experimentation becomes implementation. Ankit sees the possibility of handling new volumes alongside the risk that comes with it. Karan is already allowing AI to act in sales while drawing a different line around guest experience. Will Creedon, looking from the experience of a much larger operation in Australia, talks about guard rails, data clarity and control over one centre of truth.

Those businesses are not travelling towards the same destination.

What does appear to be changing is where intelligence sits around the property-management business.

There are three places I think are worth watching.

The first is outside the business, before the property manager even knows somebody is looking.

For years, discovery has largely meant being visible on an OTA, appearing in search results, building a direct website, maintaining social channels and developing enough reputation that guests and owners come back or recommend the business.

AI is beginning to sit between some of those sources and the person making the decision.

A traveller looking for accommodation in Bangkok does not necessarily need to search through pages of listings. They can describe the type of stay they want, the location, the price, who is travelling and what matters to them. An apartment owner can ask which professional property managers operate in a particular part of the city. A villa owner in Bali can ask who manages properties like theirs. An investor can ask which companies operate professionally in a market they know very little about.

A property manager can do the same thing when looking for technology. Rather than visiting ten PMS websites and comparing what each company says about itself, an operator managing 30 properties can describe the business and ask which systems appear suitable.

That changes something about visibility.

The answer depends on what the AI can find, whether it understands what it has found and what information it decides is worth using.

STRA ran a small exploratory test in October 2026 to see what happened when AI and search systems were asked unbranded questions about professional short-term rentals in Asia. We deliberately left STRA's name out of the questions. We asked about professional STR research, verified property managers, operator discovery and AI adoption.

The results were uneven.

STRA material was being surfaced strongly around professional STR research in Asia and particularly around finding verified professional property managers. When the questions became more general, finding individual property managers in Bali or Thailand, for example individual company websites became more prominent. Around AI adoption, larger global vendor research remained easier to find than STRA's developing Asia-specific work.

This was a small test conducted at a particular point in time. It was not an AI ranking and should not be presented as one. Different questions, systems, locations and dates can produce different results.

What interested me was something simpler.

Information existing on the internet does not mean an AI system will find it, understand it correctly or consider it useful enough to include in an answer.

That has implications for professional property managers.

The industry has spent years thinking about visibility through listings, OTA ranking, Google, direct websites and social media. Those routes remain important. AI adds another route through which a guest, owner, investor or potential employee may encounter the business.

For professional property managers, that could be particularly significant because the operating company behind the accommodation has often been less visible than the properties themselves.

The OTA knows the listing. The guest may remember the villa or apartment. The owner knows who manages it. Yet a business responsible for hundreds or thousands of stays can remain almost invisible outside its immediate market.

That has been one of the reasons STRA has spent several years mapping and verifying the professional operating businesses behind short-term rental supply across Asia.

We should be careful about taking that argument further than the evidence allows. STRA does not currently know whether being independently verified changes the likelihood of an operator being recommended by an AI system. We should not claim that it does.

What we can begin to measure is whether professional operators are being found, how accurately they are being described, what sources are being used and whether the operating business behind the listings is becoming more visible.

That is worth following because producing information has become extraordinarily easy.

A business can now create hundreds of destination pages, property descriptions, social posts and articles at very little cost. The internet is unlikely to suffer from a shortage of content. The harder problem may increasingly be deciding what deserves to be believed.

For a professional property manager, the answer is unlikely to be simply producing more.

Being clear about who operates the business, where it operates, what it manages and what services it provides becomes more useful when those facts are consistent wherever the business appears. Operating history, independent references, professional participation, verification and other evidence outside the company's own marketing may also give an AI system something against which to check what the company says about itself.

We are still early in understanding how important that will become. But discovery is already beginning to change, and professional operators should be watching it.

There is another perspective worth considering here, particularly from outside the short-term rental industry.

Chanida (Cee) Charuchinda, a Bangkok-based strategic adviser working across luxury, digital marketing and marketing technology, contributed to STRA's Verifying AI research from the perspective of The Brand Saloon. Her company works with AI-assisted marketing analysis, optimisation and emerging approaches to Answer Engine Optimisation and Generative Engine Optimisation.

What interested me was not simply the technology being used, but the distinction she made between AI capability and human control. Her response described AI being used to analyse, optimise, evaluate and improve marketing performance, supported by a specialist team, while retaining human supervision over the work.

For professional property managers, there is a wider commercial question here. As AI increasingly influences how people discover and assess businesses, will being visible through an OTA listing be enough? Or will operators need to make their business identity, professional credentials, service proposition and operating reputation easier for these systems to understand?

That is not an argument that every property manager needs an AI marketing strategy. It is a reason to pay attention to how professional hospitality businesses are represented and recognised beyond their individual listings.

The second change is happening at the edge of the business, where the property manager meets guests, owners, suppliers and distribution partners.

This is where much of the AI already visible in property management sits today.

Messages are written and translated. Enquiries are qualified. Reviews are analysed. Guest questions are answered. Sales conversations are supported. Information can be retrieved from the reservation or property record without somebody searching for it manually.

The more interesting change begins when the conversation becomes a decision, and the decision becomes an action.

A guest asks for late checkout. AI can write the answer, but the operating value increases if it can check tomorrow's arrival, look at housekeeping, understand the property's rules and decide whether the request can be approved.

That same progression becomes more difficult when the request involves a refund, an owner commitment, a maintenance expense or something unusual during the stay.

The operator evidence in this report suggests that those boundaries will not move evenly.

Karan is already comfortable allowing AI to recommend and act in sales while keeping it closer to suggestion around guest experience. The anonymous Bali operator will allow AI to assist with communication but will not let it quote a guest without somebody involved. Will Creedon's larger operation allow AI to help, recommend, decide and act depending on the context, while regulation, tax, statutory accounting audits and direct owner conversations through voice remain on the other side of his present line.

Publicly released platform data examined for this report points in a similar direction.

Routine guest communication appears more likely to be accepted without changes than messages involving late checkout, early arrival or refunds. We cannot tell from those figures whether operators were changing the words, changing the underlying decision or doing both, but the difference is worth noting.

The edge of the business is therefore unlikely to become simply automated or human.

A guest may move between the two without knowing or caring very much until something goes wrong. Routine questions may increasingly disappear into the technology. Exceptions may arrive with people sooner. A sales enquiry may be qualified before anyone touches it. An owner may receive a report assembled largely by software and still expect a person to answer when the numbers do not make sense.

For the property manager, the job is to decide where that handover works.

The third change may ultimately have the greatest effect on the way the business itself is organised.

It is happening inside the operation.

Property-management businesses have accumulated systems for years. PMS, channel manager, revenue management, accounting, housekeeping, maintenance, communications, payments, owner reporting and a collection of spreadsheets and messaging applications can all be part of the same working business.

The industry response has often been another integration or another platform promising to bring more of it together.

AI introduces another possibility.

Instead of requiring a person to move continually between those systems, some of the work between them may increasingly be handled by software.

A guest problem arrives. The system finds the reservation, checks the property information, reads the recent conversation, looks at the maintenance history and determines whether there is an established way of dealing with it.

A payment does not reconcile. The difference is identified before somebody spends an hour comparing records.

Tomorrow's arrivals are checked and the few with missing information are brought forward.

A maintenance issue is recognised, the appropriate supplier is contacted within agreed limits, and somebody is involved only when the normal process stops fitting the situation.

None of those examples requires the underlying systems to disappear.

Another platform claiming to replace five existing products will not matter very much if the operator still needs all five underneath it. What may matter is whether the person running the business can spend less time navigating those five systems.

For a professional property manager with 30 properties and a small team, that could change the economics of the business considerably.

Growth has traditionally brought more work with it. More properties mean more reservations, more guest conversations, more owner statements, more cleaning coordination, more maintenance and more things that can go wrong. At some point the business usually needs another person.

AI may begin to change where that point sits.

If a five-person company can move from 30 properties to 40 or 50 without everybody working longer hours, because routine coordination and checking have reduced, the technology has created something commercially useful even if no job has disappeared.

The same operator may also gain access to work that previously sat beyond the practical reach of a small business. More regular financial analysis, better checking of owner statements, earlier identification of unusual booking patterns or closer monitoring of operating performance may become possible without employing a specialist for each one.

That could change one of the assumptions that has sat underneath property-management growth for a long time.

AI may not simply help companies become larger. It may make becoming large less necessary.

A professional operator may be able to remain relatively small, local and close to owners and guests while gaining some of the operating capability previously associated with a much larger organisation.

That does not remove the advantages of scale. Larger businesses have capital, purchasing power, substantial datasets, management depth and the ability to spread technology costs across many properties. Smaller operators have different strengths: local knowledge, shorter decision paths, close relationships and often a very clear understanding of what is happening property by property.

AI could strengthen either model.

It could also make a badly organised business faster at being badly organised.

That is why the work underneath the technology has occupied so much of this report. Giving software access to more systems is useful only if the information can be trusted. Allowing it to act is useful only if the boundaries are understood. Removing routine work helps only if the work is removed rather than replaced with checking and correction.

The economics will eventually settle some of this.

Occasional AI assistance is already inexpensive. Continuous AI operation is different. An agent working throughout the day may repeatedly retrieve information, use other systems, check results, return to unfinished work and ask for help when something falls outside its instructions.

Those small costs accumulate.

The technology itself is also becoming cheaper and more efficient. Different models can be used for different jobs, and a routine property question does not necessarily need the same capability as a difficult owner dispute.

Property managers do not need to become experts in the infrastructure underneath that.

They do need to count the whole cost of getting the work done.

If AI removes two hours of work but creates an hour of checking and correction, the saving is not two hours. If an inexpensive agent makes a financial mistake that takes half a day to unravel, its token cost is irrelevant. If it allows the same team to manage another ten properties without increasing working hours or reducing service, the commercial value may be considerable.

The business result is what counts.

Across these three areas - discovery outside the business, interaction at its edge and coordination inside it - the next operating model begins to look less like a fully autonomous property-management company and more like a redistribution of work.

Some work moves towards software. Some decisions remain with people. Some information becomes more important because software needs it. Some systems may become less visible to the people using them even though they remain essential underneath. Some roles change because less time is spent finding and moving information. Other parts of hospitality remain stubbornly physical.

And all of this will happen differently across Asia.

A professional operator in Japan, a villa manager in Bali, an apartment business in Bangkok and a multi-city company in India are not operating the same business with different addresses. Their regulations, owners, guests, labour, payments, technology and service expectations differ.

The technology may become increasingly common.

The businesses using it will remain local.

That is why STRA should be careful about predicting the arrival of one AI operating model for professional short-term rentals in Asia. The more useful work will be watching what changes inside these businesses.

- 1. Can a 30-property operator handle another ten properties without building another layer of management?*
- 2. Does AI reduce the number of systems people need to touch even when those systems remain underneath?*
- 3. Do professional operating businesses become easier for AI to find and understand? Where do property managers continue to insist on approval?*
- 4. What happens to cost when AI runs throughout the working day rather than being opened occasionally?*
- 5. And, perhaps most importantly, what happens when operators discover that a process they were preparing to automate should have been fixed first?*

The next operating model will not arrive with a product announcement or a new label for the industry. It will appear gradually in the way professional property managers organise their businesses, decide what software is allowed to do and choose where their own time, judgement and relationships still have the greatest value.

That is where I think we should keep looking.

The Next Operating Model

Framework developed by STRA • Chapter 13

Operating possibilities to examine

These are arrangements that may coexist across different workflows. The chapter does not establish adoption dates or a timetable for moving from one to another.

	Assisted operation	Bounded delegation	Selective autonomy
Routine work	People use AI to prepare and analyse.	Defined tasks run inside agreed limits.	Some routine workflows need little human handling.
People	People complete the workflow with AI assistance.	People handle exceptions and decisions outside agreed authority.	People retain oversight and judgement alongside relationships and physical delivery.
What must hold	Useful information, appropriate access and human checking.	Clear instructions, permissions, verification and intervention.	Reliable controls, recorded outcomes and human intervention.
Capacity question	Can the team complete existing work more easily?	Can the team absorb more work without overhead growing at the same rate?	Can a smaller operator access capabilities once associated with scale?

These arrangements may coexist within one business.

STRA interpretation • Chapter 13. The table does not imply growth rates, savings or adoption probabilities. Physical hospitality and operator responsibility remain part of each arrangement.

Conclusion - Readiness Before Autonomy

AI is already becoming part of professional property management. How far it goes inside each business will be decided by the operators responsible for the outcome.

There is no reason every piece of work needs to move at the same speed. An operator may be comfortable giving AI considerable freedom in one part of the business and very little in another. Those decisions will change as the technology improves, as experience grows and as businesses learn where it genuinely helps.

Readiness comes before autonomy.

For the professional property manager, that means understanding the business well enough to decide what can be handed over, how far that authority should extend and where responsibility remains.

The technology will keep moving.

The decision about where it belongs remains with the operator.

Methodology

The report brings together distinct parts of STRA's research. The STRA Verified Report 2026 describes a network of 7,176 professional property managers across 23 Asian markets and approximately 126,000 properties. Its survey covered 523 managers, while its estimate of 17% identifiable organisational AI implementation concerns the wider verified network and excludes occasional individual use. The mapping, survey and implementation estimate are not interchangeable samples. Verifying AI is a separate qualitative programme and is not used here to calculate an adoption percentage.

Verifying AI uses eight open-ended questions to examine where AI is used, how it entered the business, what it is permitted to do, reported improvements, failures, sources of operating knowledge, human involvement and conditions for becoming AI-native. The operator accounts in this report are qualitative evidence. They should not be read as prevalence estimates for Asia or as independently measured returns.

Karan Miglani's quotations have been checked against the submitted ELIVAAS questionnaire. Ankit Goenka's and Adhiguna's accounts are presented as paraphrases of Keith Cowarn's working discussions, without claiming a verbatim transcript. Named attribution has been authorised. Public practitioner commentary is identified separately from interviews. External research retains its original sector and scope; company commentary remains company evidence, and an operator's reported improvement remains a reported improvement unless independently measured.

The frameworks are STRA's synthesis of the operating questions examined in this report, informed by the operator evidence and the technical and governance sources below. They are not presented as novel inventions of every underlying principle. Illustrative scenarios and amounts are examples rather than recorded incidents. The readiness profile has ten dimensions and no overall score; the operating arrangements describe possibilities that may coexist, rather than a forecast or timetable.

Research by STRA. Evidence from professional property managers across Asia. Industry perspectives attributed to the people who contributed them. AI used as a research and editorial tool. Editorial judgement, interpretation and conclusions by STRA.

Research & Sources

The AI Operating Shift is grounded first in the experience of professional short-term rental property managers.

STRA's Verified Report 2026, drawing on research involving 523 professional property managers across 23 Asian countries and its wider verified and mapped network, identified AI implementation at approximately 17% among professional property-management businesses.

That gave us a useful starting point, but it did not tell us what “using AI” meant once the technology entered the working business. Writing a property description, analysing performance, qualifying a sales lead, answering a guest and issuing a refund could all be described as AI use while carrying very different operating consequences.

That gap led to Verifying AI, STRA's subsequent eight-question research programme. More than 100 professional property managers responded, giving STRA a deeper view of where AI is being used, what operators are allowing it to do, what has improved, where it breaks down, where the knowledge it needs actually lives and where operators continue to insist on a person being involved.

This report also draws on direct operator discussions, previous STRA research and a deliberately limited group of external industry, hospitality, governance and technical sources. Those sources do not all carry the same weight and have not been treated as though they do.

An operator describing their own business gives us direct operating evidence but does not by itself establish what is happening across the entire sector. Vendor research can provide useful comparison or behavioural evidence but remains commercial research. Product material can show what technology is being developed without proving that the claimed operating outcome has been achieved. Government and institutional material help us understand wider questions around authority, accountability, data, security and human oversight; it does not tell us how property managers in Asia are using AI.

No technology company commissioned this research or has editorial control over the report, its findings or its conclusions. Inclusion of a company, product, operator or external source does not imply endorsement by STRA.

Where the evidence does not support a wider conclusion, we have not made one.

STRA Primary Research

Short-Term Rentals Asia. STRA Verified Report 2026. August 2026.

STRA's Verified Report 2026, drawing on research involving 523 professional property managers across 23 Asian countries and its wider verified and mapped network, identified AI implementation at approximately 17% among professional property-management businesses.

The figure measures reported use at the time of the research. It does not measure frequency, depth of adoption, level of automation or the authority being given to AI inside those businesses.

Short-Term Rentals Asia. Verifying AI - 2026 Operator Research. September 2026.

STRA's follow-on research received more than 100 responses from professional property managers and was built around eight questions:

1. Where is AI being used in your business today?
2. How did AI first enter your business?
3. What is AI allowed to do?
4. What has genuinely improved because of AI?
5. Where does AI break down in your real operation?
6. Where does the knowledge AI needs to operate your business live?
7. What would you never allow AI to do without a person involved?
8. What would have to change before you considered your business AI-native?

Respondents were also invited to tell STRA what the industry should be discussing about AI that we had not asked.

Verifying AI was designed to look beyond adoption and into the operating business itself. The responses did not produce one uniform position on AI, nor were they expected to. Operators are using different technology, managing different portfolios and working within different markets, service models and levels of operating complexity.

The wider response group forms the primary operator evidence behind this report. Individual contributors quoted or identified in Chapter 12 are selected voices from that larger body of evidence. They have been included because responses illustrate an operating issue clearly, not because STRA considers their views more representative than those of the other respondents.

Selected Operator Voices

The following contributors are among the operators whose responses or subsequent discussions are used more directly in the report.

Their inclusion should not be read as the research sample itself. They are selected examples from more than 100 Verifying AI responses and STRA's accompanying operator discussions.

Agung Juliarta – Founder & CEO, Puri Asia, Bali, Indonesia.

Discussion covering the use of AI around communication and business activity, the distinction between using AI and embedding it within the operating system, AI as a tool rather than the decisionmaker, and the continuing importance of human judgement and high-touch hospitality in Bali.

Adhiguna – Founder & CEO, AkraCara, Indonesia.

Discussion covering security, operating errors, communication, marketing and analysis, human approval, and the difference between experimenting with AI and implementing it inside the operation.

Ankit Goenka – Founder & CEO, JadeCaps, India.

Discussion covering staged AI adoption, the existing technology environment, AI agents, financial analysis, operating productivity, portfolio capacity and the relationship between additional operating volume and risk.

Karan Miglani – Co-Founder & CTO, ELIVAAS, India.

Verifying AI contribution covering demand generation, sales and lead qualification, property assessment, guest experience, productivity, false positives, business knowledge held in PMSs and spreadsheets, and the continuing role of people in the physical delivery of hospitality.

Anonymous professional property manager - Bali, Indonesia.

Verifying AI contribution covering out-of-hours and foreign-language communication, human checking of AI output, marketing support, security, business knowledge residing with people and the decision to retain human involvement in guest quoting.

The operator also described losing months of accumulated AI learning following a change to software being used by the business. That experience is included because it raises a practical operating question about what happens to knowledge and work invested in AI when the underlying technology changes.

The respondent's identity is known to STRA and the original research submission is retained. Their identity and business have been withheld from publication at their request for current local business reasons.

Comparative Operator Perspective

Will Creedon – Founder & CEO, Alloggio, Australia.

Creedon's Verifying AI response is included separately as a comparative perspective from an operator with experience at considerably greater operating scale.

His contribution covers planned and staged implementation across reservations, guest services, trust accounting, task management, property appraisal and reporting; different levels of AI authority according to context; guard rails, data clarity and control over operating knowledge; and areas where human involvement continues to be required.

Australia sits outside the geographic scope of STRA's Asia research. Creedon's contribution is therefore not included as evidence of AI adoption among Asian professional property managers. It is used because it provides a useful comparison with some of the same operating questions emerging from the Asian research.

Manmeet Singh (Manit) Thakralbutra - Founder & CEO, Arawana Group, Thailand. Direct discussion with Keith Cowarn / STRA examining AI from the perspective of an operating hospitality business, including productivity, analysis and reporting, financial decision-making, workforce planning, project review and the continuing role of human judgement. Included as a wider hospitality leadership perspective and not as part of the Verifying AI professional STR operator sample.

Chanida (Cee) Charuchinda - Strategic Adviser, The Brand Saloon, Thailand. Cee contributed to STRA's *Verifying AI* research in September 2026, bringing a perspective from luxury brand advisory, digital marketing and marketing technology. Her work includes AI-supported marketing analysis, Answer Engine Optimisation (AEO) and Generative Engine Optimisation (GEO). While her company uses AI across marketing activities, she emphasised the importance of specialist expertise and keeping people involved in the decisions. Her contribution informs Chapter 13's discussion of how AI may change the way professional hospitality businesses are discovered, understood and represented online.

Related STRA Research

Short-Term Rentals Asia. Verified Property Manager Mapping Program.

STRA's continuing independent mapping and verification work has identified more than 7,000 professional property managers representing more than 126,000 properties across Asia.

This work provides wider context for the structure of the professional operating sector discussed throughout this report and supports a principle that runs through STRA's research: Professional does not mean large. It means taking responsibility for the stay and the business behind it.

Short-Term Rentals Asia. *The Multi-Owner Financial Challenge - Trust, Regulation & Financial Control in STR. 2026.*

STRA research examining owner reporting, reconciliation, multi-currency operations, financial controls and the operating difficulties created when financial information is distributed across different systems.

The work provides background to Chapters 7 and 8, particularly where AI begins interacting with financial information, owner statements, reconciliation and authority to change financial records.

STRA AI Operating Readiness Profile. 2026.

Developed as part of *The AI Operating Shift*. The profile examines ten parts of the operating business: Process, Data, Integration, Instructions, Financial Controls, Permissions, Escalation, Security & Privacy, Governance, and Performance & Economics.

It is not a certification, score or AI maturity ranking. It gives the property manager a practical way to examine the business before deciding where software should be given greater authority.

STRA Exploratory AI Discovery Research

In October 2026, STRA conducted a small exploratory exercise examining how AI and search systems responded to unbranded questions about professional short-term rentals in Asia.

STRA's name was deliberately excluded from the questions.

The exercise examined professional STR research, verified professional property managers, operator discovery in individual Asian markets, regional industry organisations and AI adoption. It now informs Chapter 13 and the report's discussion of AI increasingly sitting between a professional operating business and the people trying to find it.

This was exploratory research. It is not presented as an AI ranking, market benchmark or statistically representative study. Results can change according to the system used, prompt, retrieval sources, location and date.

STRA retains the underlying prompts and research record so that comparable testing can be undertaken again.

No claim is made in this report that STRA verification causes an AI system to recommend a professional property manager.

Wider STR and Hospitality Research

External industry research has been used selectively, primarily to compare STRA's Asia-specific evidence with developments elsewhere in short-term rentals and hospitality.

Guesty. *The AI Gap: Why Some STR Operators Are Pulling Ahead.* 2026.

Vendor research based on 534 short-term rental operators globally. Guesty reported substantially greater AI use among its research population than STRA found in its earlier Asia research.

The studies cover different populations and methodologies and are not treated as directly comparable measures of the same market. Guesty's findings are identified as global vendor research rather than evidence of AI adoption among professional property managers in Asia.

Guesty. *Agent Hub and 2026 product material.*

Used only as evidence of the direction in which established property-management technology is developing, including specialised AI agents operating across different parts of the business. Product descriptions are treated as company descriptions of capability rather than independent evidence of operator outcomes.

Mews. *Hotelier Survey 2026.*

Hospitality research involving more than 500 properties in the United States, Canada, United Kingdom, France and Germany. The research provides wider context around AI adoption and the continuing role of people in guest-facing hospitality.

It is not presented as evidence of AI adoption among professional short-term rental operators in Asia.

Mews. *Agentic AI for Hotels: The Mews Vision for AI in Hospitality.* 2025.

Used as a hospitality technology perspective on the movement from AI assistance towards systems capable of undertaking more operating work. It is treated as vendor analysis rather than independent evidence. STRA_THE_AI_OPERATING_SHIFT_MAS...

Deloitte. *The Future of Hospitality: Navigating New Frontiers.* 14 January 2026.

Used as broader hospitality context around technology, operating models and service.

Regional AI Governance

The following sources are not used as evidence of short-term rental adoption. They provide wider context for questions already appearing inside professional property-management businesses around authority, accountability, information, security and human oversight.

Infocomm Media Development Authority, Singapore. *Model AI Governance Framework for Agentic AI*. 2026.

Singapore guidance addressing AI systems capable of planning and taking actions with increasing levels of autonomy. It is relevant to this report's treatment of bounded authority, access to information and tools, human oversight, accountability and controls around systems that can act.

ASEAN Secretariat. *ASEAN Guide on AI Governance and Ethics*. 2024.

Regional guidance for responsible AI governance and deployment across ASEAN. Used as background to the report's discussion of accountability, data, risk and the different environments in which organisations operate across the region.

ASEAN Secretariat. *Expanded ASEAN Guide on AI Governance and Ethics - Generative AI*.

Additional regional guidance addressing issues created by generative AI, including accountability, data, security and responsible deployment.

AI Risk and Technical Material

These sources are used to understand the technical and governance questions created as AI moves from generating output towards carrying out work. They are not evidence of AI adoption or performance inside short-term rental businesses.

National Institute of Standards and Technology. *Artificial Intelligence Risk Management Framework: Generative Artificial Intelligence Profile*. NIST AI 600-1. 2024.

Cross-sector guidance used as background to the identification, evaluation and management of risks associated with generative AI. It is not property-management-specific guidance and is not presented as a regulatory requirement for operators.

National Institute of Standards and Technology. *Artificial Intelligence Risk Management Framework (AI RMF 1.0)*. 2023.

Used as wider background to the report's discussion of governance, measurement, accountability and risk.

Anthropic. *Building Effective Agents*. 19 December 2024.

Technical company material used narrowly to understand the distinction between structured workflows and systems capable of undertaking work with greater autonomy and access to tools. It is not used as evidence of property-management adoption or outcomes.

Anthropic. *Demystifying Evals for AI Agents*. 9 January 2026.

Technical company material used in relation to evaluate agent behaviour over time rather than relying on isolated successful outputs or demonstrations.

Reading the Evidence

No single source in this report tells the whole story.

STRA's 523-property-manager research established the earlier regional baseline. Verifying AI then went further into the business through more than 100 operator responses. Selected operator voices show what those questions look like when they reach real properties, guests, owners, teams and financial decisions. Previous STRA work provides additional context around verification, professional property management and financial control.

External research has a narrower role. It helps us compare what is happening elsewhere in STR and hospitality and understand some of the technical and governance questions created as software is given greater access and authority.

Throughout the report, STRA has tried to keep the origin of that evidence visible.

A vendor number remains a vendor number. An operator experience remains that operator's experience unless wider evidence supports it. An exploratory STRA exercise remains exploratory. A product capability is not an operating outcome. And what AI may eventually be capable of doing is not evidence that a professional property manager should allow it to do it today.

The differences between the evidence are part of the research rather than something to be tidied away.

Research by Short-Term Rentals Asia. Evidence from professional property managers across Asia. External industry and technical material identified according to its origin. AI used as a research and editorial tool. Editorial judgement, interpretation and conclusions by STRA.



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