

Hotel Management, June 2018  
One-on-One: Best Western Hotels & Resorts' Greg  
Adams



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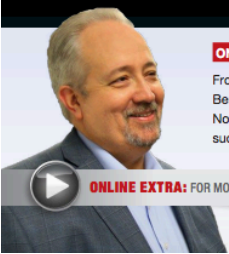
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**ONE-ON-ONE WITH BEST WESTERN'S GREG ADAMS**

From working in a Marriott call center to his role of chief digital officer at Best Western, Greg Adams has always tried to be a part of something great. Now, he wants to help one of the largest hotel companies in the world remain successful as technology evolves, and that means keeping things simple.



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## Best Western Hotels & Resorts' GREG ADAMS

The company's chief digital officer says hotels need to think bigger, be more connected and spend wisely on technology



BY C. ELLIOTT MEST  
@CELMEST

Greg Adams always knew that if he strived to be part of something great, his career would take care of itself. He paired this mentality with a knack for thinking analytically, which led him to join Best Western Hotels & Resorts four years ago as SVP and chief digital officer, but this wasn't his introduction to hospitality.

"Honestly, pure luck led me here," Adams said. "I worked as a reservation agent for Marriott while I attended college in Omaha, Neb., and I eventually started my own company to have more time with my kids. This all led me to Best Western."

Following his stint at Marriott's call center, Adams shifted to database marketing at Hyatt and also joined one of the company's national sales offices. "I've benefitted from the chance to learn from a lot of different disciplines," Adams said. "It has been helpful in my current role because I don't look at things strictly from a technology or IT perspective."

Perspective is important in today's hospitality climate, where technology has never been more important and the complexity of running a hotel company swells with each

passing year. According to Adams, the greatest challenge facing companies like Best Western is understanding the current climate of the internet, and how to remain successful as technology continues to evolve.

At the basic level, Adams said hotel companies are no longer running websites, they are tending to vast consumer-focused ecosystems. These ecosystems are a challenge to work with because they are fickle, intricate and often stitched together using decades-old technology. Add to this the myriad considerations associated with cybersecurity, and Adams has a lot on his plate.

"With all of that in mind, we have to keep things simple enough for guests to use," Adams said. "We look at technology from the customer's point of view. We don't design websites for hoteliers. We don't want guests to have to repeat themselves, or think too hard about how to solve a problem they have. Designing a website so it's intuitive is hard to pull off."

### NO FILLER

When looking into new technology to implement at Best Western, Adams said it's important to consider exactly what will make a measurable difference in a hotel, and disregard the rest. This can be difficult, he said, in part because often new technology arrives before businesses can find a use for it, leading to wasteful spending if the timing isn't right.

"I wouldn't say we experiment from the standpoint of cutting-edge technology. We have to know who we are, and make measured bets on technology based on that," said Adams. "I like to know the odds, and how we might end up with a win by doing something new. You won't see me in any casinos in Las Vegas!"

For example, Adams said that Google Glass originally looked like a game changer for augmented reality, but today the device has seen few long-term adopters. If Best Western had chased the technology around Google Glass, Adams said, they would have been "throwing money away."

Augmented reality may seem interesting, but Adams said it's still too far away for businesses to properly monetize it. Instead, the technology that interests Adams is automation, as well as anything that makes use of guest devices.

"I don't think hoteliers should be in the hardware business, he said. "Some hotels want to do things like put an iPad in every room, but is that the best use of their resources? Statistics show most guests carry four devices with them while they travel, so it may be unnecessary."

### REAL ANSWERS

Adams said the mentality that leads hotels to invest in iPads as opposed to innovating comes from operators asking the wrong questions, driving them to the wrong answers. With each guest bringing an average of four devices with them, the limited amount of available bandwidth for the industry remains an issue to this day. The problem isn't coming up with more bandwidth, said Adams, but coming up with a bandwidth ecosystem where guests can be satisfied with what hotels are able to provide.

"I look at the outcome I'm after. I don't want more bandwidth, I want satisfied guests," said Adams. "We have hotels commanding a lot of bandwidth and they still have unsatisfied guests. On the other end, we have hotels with low bandwidth and high guest satisfaction. That's because they are meeting guest expectations, and they are satisfied. We can't just throw money at this problem."

One thing Adams struggles with is the amount of time he spends on cybersecurity and compliance. However, he said these precautions are necessary as cybercriminals grow in number and sophistication.

"This is the world we live in. It's understandable, but it's not productive and it adds little to society," he said.

Despite this, Adams also enjoys thinking critically about problems facing travel and hospitality, and finding solutions to them is the most satisfying part of his job because it allows him to make a difference in a guest's experience.

"The things we do can really have a huge impact on someone's overall life," Adams said. "I'm sure many people remember going on vacation with their parents as a kid. That can be life-changing. Some of my fondest memories were things I did as a kid on vacation, so the experiences we deliver today can have a ripple effect for decades." **HM**



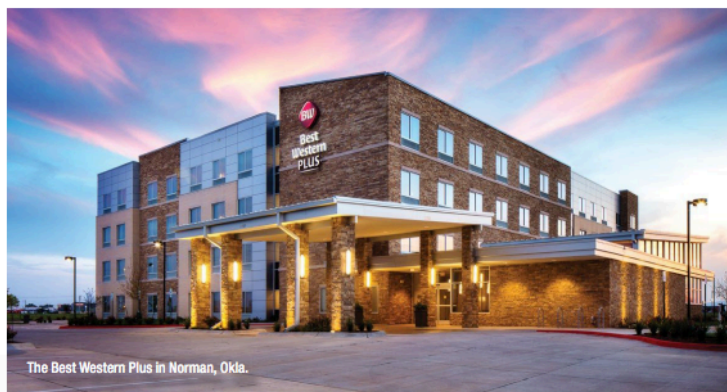
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The Best Western Plus in Norman, Okla.