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Evolution  
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Since the last publication of InnFocus, it is difficult to comprehend how drastically our industry continues to be impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic. In June, we were all hopeful we would move to Phase 3, and get back to business: rehiring our teams and once again welcoming guests in the warm, hospitable way we are known for worldwide. But as the summer played out, the reality of the market restrictions—which included border closures, complete shut down of the cruise industry, meetings and group market, along with the tour and even domestic markets—proved to be crippling for our industry.

Of course, select regions of BC that are historically popular among BC and Alberta residents, such as the Okanagan, Tofino, Parksville corridor, and Whistler, did see strong summer demand. However, those areas are small destinations that are simply not representative of the BC accommodation industry at large. In gathering industry data and occupancy averages from regions across the province, all reports offered sobering results with historically unmatched lows for RevPar and occupancy levels.

Compared to 82.9% occupancy that was reported for hotels across BC in July of 2019, 2020 brought a mere 44.2% average along with an average daily rate drop of 33.4%. RevPAR also decreased to 64.5% and room revenue sat at 65.2%. The harsh reality of this is that it will be hard work to recover, and it will not be a short recovery. Our industry needs to dig deep, brace ourselves, and support one another. The forecast for the fall is dire.

As the voice of the accommodation industry, the BCHA continues to work with TIABC, ABLE, BCRFA, and Restaurants Canada at the provincial level, along with Hotel Association of Canada and the Canadian Hotel and Lodging Association on a national scale. In taking our role with utmost sincerity, we have been able to submit recovery strategies and recommendations to government and advocate on the issues that will determine if many businesses will be able to stay solvent in the long run or not. These issues include property tax relief, business capital, low interest loans, temporary lay-off extension, and the extension of the CEWS program, among others.

We have successfully forged new partnerships with STR and the BC Regional Secretariat and continue to develop revenue management education sessions to support growing industry excellence in recovery. In addition, our partnership agreement with FortisBC is off to a great start with more hotels than anticipated signing up with our Energy Analyst to support energy savings at the property level. We have also continued to add educational opportunities to support learning along with the mental and emotional well-being of our industry during this tenuous time. As more people have begun travelling, dining, and meeting once again, there has been a heightened sense of fear in our culture, making it especially important for us all to support our employees with the skills and training to foster morale and facilitate success. Our joint webinar with go2HR on diversity and mitigating violence was fundamental to this training.

With the borders closed, no indication that international travel will resume any time soon, compounding cases across the province, and a focus on re-opening education this fall, we face the reality that the impact of this pandemic will likely be much greater and take much longer to recover than first forecast.

Our small but mighty team has their hands full, but we continue to remain highly engaged, advocating for fiscal support on both a federal and provincial level. We are committed to being agile and disseminating important information that will benefit you during this difficult time. We also remain dedicated to developing meaningful education programs and training to support in long-term recovery.

The BCHA has also continued to work closely with our industry leaders, which include the Metro Vancouver Response and Recovery Task Force, of which I am a co-chair, Destination British Columbia on recovery marketing strategies, the BCDMOA network, and our industry as a whole. On behalf of the BCHA, we wish you and your loved ones health and wellness and promise to do all in our power to support each of you, your businesses, and your employees.

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# The Evolution of Space

by Chris McBeath

If cleaning is the biggest priority in the hospitality industry right now, the next biggest is redesigning hotel spaces with enough flexibility to accommodate every coronavirus-related rule of cleanliness and social distancing—all while keeping guest comfort and safety intact.

In many cases, the global pandemic has accelerated industry transitions already underway, such as mainstreaming fully integrated technology, retrofitting building infrastructure, and repurposing space for greater flexibility.

Ushering guests through the hotel lobby and to their rooms has become a no-touch art unto itself—and negotiating communal spaces like health clubs, salons, and swimming pools is an entirely different animal. Designers and architects are already reimagining hotel amenities, along with lobbies, meeting areas and back-of-house operations, through the lens of physical distancing and hygiene requirements. Where it took more than a decade for green technology to gain serious traction in design and construction, COVID-inspired clean promises a far speedier integration.

### Reconfiguring Space

“Social distancing goes against the psychology of a hospitality experience,” says Dr. Stephani Robson, a former Vancouverite who is currently a senior lecturer in hotel and restaurant design at Cornell University’s School of Hotel Administration. “How do you do this safely without giving off a vibe that feels more like a medical facility? It’s a real challenge.”

Dr. Robson suggests starting with smaller seating groups in lobbies to offset crowding around the front desk; facilitating health checks; and offering no-touch registration processes. Where space is tight, digital queuing software might be considered, much like a restaurant’s waitlist management and paging system.



It’s about creating nooks and crannies to feel more secure.

“People feel comfortable when they can defend their personal space,” continues Dr. Robson. “Check-in could move into restyled conference areas where, instead of plexiglass barriers, there could be seating clusters divided by bookshelves, plants, and easy-to-move cube furniture that also maintains proper sight lines for an inviting atmosphere.

It’s not just placing seats far apart, it’s about creating nooks and crannies to feel more secure—booths with high backs and five-foot partitions.” The same can be accomplished in hotel restaurants and bars.

Before COVID-19, multi-use flex spaces were already on-trend, and these scenarios can be easily translated to restaurant dining



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where social distancing capacities are drastically impacting revenues. Today, guests might expect to eat in many different hotel spaces, such as themed conference rooms, pool patios or garden areas—anywhere that creates a memorable experience. Such dining options lend themselves to pitchers and large platters, where guests seated together can serve themselves family-style. One example is the JW Marriott Parq Vancouver, where the sprawling elevated outdoor patio has opened to dining and small group gatherings.

The Inn at Laurel Point in Victoria is also using its outdoor space in unexpected ways, revealing a new look just weeks before COVID-19 forced its closure. “It wasn’t great timing,” says Brooke Harris, Director of Sales. “Now we’ve reopened again, we’re seeing how our renovated space is flexing to host smaller groups in a very coronavirus-aware setting. For example, our new garden area has already seen a donor lunch set up in scenic ‘pods’, each with its own picnic basket. Our outside space is integral to the hotel and, with its proximity to the ballroom, we’re able to provide many flexible COVID-safe set-ups.”

## Now is the time to relocate your hotel’s gym equipment to private rooms.

### Hybrid Guestrooms

Repurposing guestrooms into private offices emerged as a global trend prior to COVID-19, and promises to gain momentum in coming months as teleworkers seek out clean, quiet spaces to set up shop. Fairmont Pacific Rim in Vancouver is one property offering this option, alongside complimentary parking.

Customized wellness was another pre-COVID trend, and now promises to hit its stride. Hilton’s two-in-one hotel-gym guestrooms and Westin’s WORKOUT guestrooms (complete with Peloton bikes) are right on target to cater to the evolving wellness psyche. Demand will likely grow exponentially, so perhaps now is the time to relocate your hotel’s gym equipment to private rooms. At the very least, start offering mats and dumbbells as part of room service offerings, along with virtual instruction videos.

“Retrofitting rooms can be tricky,” cautions Dr. Robson. “Equipment needs a certain amount of square footage and may transfer noise and vibration. For older properties in particular, it might be a question of making sure some rooms simply have space devoid of furnishings to allow guests an area for yoga or Pilates floor exercises.”

### The Techno Boom

Without a doubt, COVID-19 has set augmented technology on a wildly faster track. Its ability to create a seamless, integrated, empowered, and touchless guest experience will elevate technology to the new gold standard, both back- and front-of-house.

Technology-based sanitization will impact how space is developed and used. Touch-screen technology will likely phase out in the name of hygiene, making way for mobile and virtual check-in; at the same time, voice recognition will move to the forefront in controlling digital room systems.

Teleworking and crowd-caution means that, for the next year or so—and perhaps beyond—meeting spaces will need to be smaller and bubble-oriented, and packed with accessible, fast and ready-to-use technology. Right on target are Crowne Plaza’s new concepts like The Pod and The Nook, which offer independent work space for soloists or

small groups alongside tablets for on-demand F&B service; the hotel also hosts a 24/7 grab ‘n go snack shop with self-pay technology enabled by a swipe of a room key or credit card.

But COVID-19 has upped the technological ante even further. Think Zoom rooms with green screens, Webex Meeting Center platforms, TeamViewer gatherings, webcams, and high-quality broadcasting equipment setting the stage for everything from product launches to avatar-style conventions.

That said, Dr. Robson believes there will always be a need for personal connection that open chat lines can’t satiate. “Working from home is full of distractions, and for the concept to keep its productivity team members need to feel that team energy. They need to reconnect for watercooler conversations, talk over a desktop from an appropriate distance, and have one-on-one interaction beyond screen time.”

She emphasizes that room mix is key, suggesting that some rooms can be set up as workspace with beds removed to capture remote workers, a submarket made all the more viable with platforms such as HotelsbyDay.com, Recharge, and Dayuse.com. “If a hotel can provide stable, blazingly fast WiFi, room service, and a quiet productive space, day use of guestrooms and meeting space is an interesting revenue opportunity.”

Another area that deserves a solid nod is virtual reality (VR). Already a boon to a hotel’s marketing arm by enabling guests to virtually try-and-feel the experience before booking, COVID-19 raises the idea of bringing VR stations into empty meeting rooms to help guests choose local adventures, tours, and entertainment. Hotels can further augment these tech rooms with Wii activities such as virtual golf and tennis.






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Courtesy of Inn at Laurel Point

## Designing Spaces for Tomorrow

When it comes to design, you can't get much better authority than Jean-Michel Gathy. His design firm, Denniston, has produced hundreds of the world's most elite hotels, including the iconic three-acre SkyDeck, suspended 57 stories atop Singapore's Marina Bay Sands. The platform's centerpiece is a 475-foot-long infinity pool—the longest elevated pool in the world.

"Every crisis changes industry," says Gathy. "After 9/11, the primary issue was safety. Now it's health, and we must adapt. Hygiene is the new security." So, for hotel architects like Gathy, what happens next?

"Ten years ago, if you wanted to be a go-to architect you had to be a green architect. Now it's illegal not to be," says Gathy. "I believe that in a matter of one to two years, the concept of health will become law for buildings in exactly the same way. It will be in the materials you can use, and the air and water systems you need to install."

Gathy goes on to explain that design will involve details like anti-microbial surfacing for everything from lobbies to side tables in the restaurant and back-of-house; self check-in kiosks; limits to how many people can ride in an elevator; and elevator programming that shuttles guests directly to their floor.

"There will be auto-cleaning metals in bathrooms and special resins

on the floors, and walls that viruses cannot stick to and survive on," says Gathy. "Special invisible plastics and removable films will cover TV remote controls, faucets, showerheads, and door handles. Air and water delivery systems will be filtered and purified. Basic rooms will give way to more studios and suites with kitchens and laundry facilities to reduce housekeeping and room service interactions."

Within five years, Gathy predicts, "All of these things will be standard in the hotel industry, especially at the highest end."

## The Last Word

In the short term, hoteliers will continue to pivot their way through current challenges as they welcome close-to-home travellers. "Because Canadians tend to be very understanding and accepting, they are more willing to 'go with the flow' with the many changes that are happening within the hospitality industry," says Dr. Robson. "By the time the market opens to a broader spectrum of travel, a lot of what is being tried right now will have been finessed and international travellers themselves will be better equipped and more informed as to what to expect. By then, the industry will be implementing long-term solutions in terms of design, infrastructure, and technology. And it will be all the stronger for them. ■"



## Thank You for Your Support

2020 has severely challenged BC's hospitality industry, with the global pandemic forcing closures and losses across the province. Like other charities, the BC Hospitality Foundation (BCHF) has been negatively impacted by COVID-19 – in fact, the organization has cancelled all in-person fundraising for the year, and while numerous businesses and individuals have stepped up with donations and special programs, their support won't make up for lost revenue.

But it's not all bad news! According to Dana Harris, Executive Director of BCHF, the charity was founded on the promise that our hospitality industry will get through tough times by pulling together – after all, look at this year's #HospitalityHustle. The virtual event was such a success the BCHF has decided it will continue as an ongoing program to help us stay healthy on the road ahead.

The #HospitalityHustle took place province-wide, with participants registering online and choosing a physical goal such as walking 5K, cycling 10K, dancing or prancing. For several weeks, participants posted training videos on social media using the hashtag #HospitalityHustle – then, on May 31, they set out to (safely) accomplish their goal. The event concluded with an online social distancing dance party hosted by DJ, The TDM Sound. More than 350 people registered, demonstrating their solidarity with the hospitality industry as they committed to staying fit, mentally strong and connected to the community. We invite you to continue "Hustling for Hospitality" by engaging in ongoing exercise and sharing your experiences online (be sure to tag #HospitalityHustle!).

The BCHF gratefully continues to accept support from businesses in the hospitality community, many of which are generously donating a portion of product sales. You can support our supporters (and the BC economy) by choosing to purchase items from these companies. Examples of recent initiatives include:

- Rust Wine Co. will donate \$5 per Magnum of Gamay sold – order through The Bacchus Group
- LULU Spritz, an aperol- style cooler, donated \$1 per 4-pack sold in July
- Okanagan Crush Pad's Many Hands Rosé will donate \$1 per bottle sold – order at Everything Wine
- JAK's Beer Wine Spirits donated \$10 from every bottle of Isle of Harris Gin sold – the total donation amounted to over \$2,500
- Other support has come from Steel & Oak, Neighbourhood Brewing, Summerhill Pyramid Winery, Corcelettes Winery, Township 7 Vineyards & Winery, Vista D'oro, The Drinks List, Trialto Wine Group, Church & State Wines, Quails' Gate Winery, Poplar Grove Winery, Winemaker's CUT, Kelowna Concierge, Tourism Kelowna, Snow Cap Enterprises, BC Event Management and others

View a list of all current initiatives by visiting the BCHF's Ongoing Fundraising page (under "Act Now").

Or, sign up for our newsletter to stay apprised of new fundraising programs.

The BCHF thanks all our friends in the hospitality community who have supported us this year. Keep an eye out for upcoming seasonal activities, industry profiles, fitness tips, Wine Wednesdays and more by following us on social media, checking our website, and reading our newsletters. Stay healthy and safe!

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# How Touchless Technology is Helping BC Hotels Re-open

by Amy Watkins

From app-based check-in and keyless entry, to guest messaging and requests, touchless technology is helping BC hotels to provide a contactless experience for guests.



### Staying in your Pod

Whistler’s Pangea Pod Hotel has been a ‘contactless’ hotel from the moment it opened in August 2018, with the property utilizing a range of contact-limiting technologies to enhance the guest experience and streamline operations from the start. “We view the current environment as a huge opportunity—it’s changed Pangea’s massive investment in tech from something that was a ‘nice to have’ to something that’s now a ‘need to have’, helping differentiate our concept in the accommodation market,” says Pangea’s owner Russell Kling. “We’ve always believed that technology needs to be proactive rather than reactive, and there were strong arguments for why contactless technology was a ‘must’ well before COVID.”

“Guests are looking for an experience that is streamlined, efficient, informative, and of course hygienic. Contactless technology enables all of the above, while also freeing up our staff to spend their time looking after our guests versus looking after their keys or their cash.”

### Appy Hour

Another early adopter of touchless technology is the JW Marriott Parq Vancouver, where Marriott’s Bonvoy app had been utilized even pre-COVID. “From the app itself you’re able to make reservations, and Bonvoy members can receive a ton of information at their fingertips,” says GM Marion Harper Treskin. “It’s great for business travel and even leisure

Guests are looking for an experience that is streamlined, efficient, informative, and of course hygienic.

Guests check themselves in via custom-designed kiosks, on which they can locate their reservation, create their own wristband keycard, and place a card on file for incidental spends. Since COVID, the electronic wristband keycards that enable access to Pangea’s suites also double as a payment method in Pangea’s cafe and bar. Pangea has also deployed an in-house guest-messaging platform, meaning guests don’t have to wait in line at the front desk to ask a question or at the concierge desk to make a reservation.

travellers wanting to be more efficient, as you can have all that information on your phone or tablet. We haven’t really changed the app, since COVID as it already encompassed so many things—before you arrive you can make reservations through the app and once you’ve got the booking the messaging starts from that property.” Guests can find out when their room will be ready and minimize front desk contact by using the mobile app for keyless entry when they arrive, bypassing the need to physically check-in.



Courtesy of Pangea Pod Hotel

Once inside their rooms, guests can request extras and find out information using the app and QR codes that can be scanned via mobile. Quick Response (QR) codes are now used to enable guests to request items such as ironing boards, robes, slippers, and pens/pads that have had to be removed for safety (due to them being high touch points). By scanning the QR code in the room, guests can see what's available, request them, and access information that previously would have been in a desktop compendium of paper. QR codes enable guests to instantly access updated information such as dining specials or other information in the guest directory, all via the app.

## QR codes are now used to enable guests to request items.

“For people who want to get out and travel again, but are conscious of staying in their own bubble, it works really well because they can choose to still communicate with us and it's very personalized. It's all to do with what they want as a guest,” says Treskin. “It's not a generic thing because it's a two-way conversation, especially the requests and the chat, it's just like talking to the desk, but you're talking on your phone.”

“I imagine that the percentage of people who use our app will increase significantly,” notes Treskin. “It was a good proportion before, although maybe it was the demographic that's used to using their phone for

everything anyway, but now it's going to maybe force people who wouldn't have considered it before to start using it.”

### Key Learnings

Creating lodging technology that works for all demographics has been at the heart of Vancouver-based guest technology company Operto. It started in the Airbnb space as a solution for owners who need to provide a remote and contactless experience for guests. Solutions included giving access codes or tokens via mobile, so pre-paid guests could seamlessly check in without the host present.

“Over the last two months we've really exploded into hotels,” says CEO Michael Driedger. “Some hotels have been playing around with touchless tech, but they haven't really needed to use it. They've had apps, but the challenge with an app is that there are a lot of steps, and apps are demographically challenged. For any touchless strategy to be effective across a really wide guest demographic, it has to have multiple ways for them to get in.”

The easiest solution is an access code, as people can print off the information and use the code to get in. Mobile web pages or apps can be used to give an option of opening via mobile, or the code can be used on a keypad to enter. Some hotels haven't integrated apps to enable guests to pre-pay, and so they still need to visit the front desk to pay for the room and incidentals.

Technology can also be used to help improve the guest experience in terms of using intelligence to monitor the occupancy of the space (using indicators such as CO2 levels) to provide ambient temperatures and save energy. ■



# BCHA's GoGreen Program



by Dylan Tomlin

We are pleased to provide an update on BCHA's GoGreen program, which is a collaboration with FortisBC that helps hotels conduct in-depth energy analyses and identify energy conservation opportunities.

At the date of publication, our Energy Analyst had completed seven full-site energy assessments (six virtually and one in-person). Properties included in these assessments vary from hotels constructed as recently as two years ago to century-old heritage properties, each with distinct levels of energy-reducing opportunities.

When the GoGreen initiative was first launched, the BCHA encouraged members to express interest by visiting the website. From that initial survey, 14 hotels put their names forward—and since then, through presentations and word-of-mouth, an additional 41 hotels have indicated an interest in participating. We are thrilled with this initial response!

Now, hotels can achieve even greater energy and carbon reduction thanks to BCHA's partnership with GreenStep and its EcoFund program. Hotels that sign up for the GreenStep EcoFund will benefit from additional analysis of their carbon footprint by BCHA's Energy Analyst, as well as guidance to identify and implement energy-saving projects, along with the association's support to communicate their success.

Participation is simple. With EcoFund, hotels can leverage their customers to fund measurement and reduction of their environmental impacts and carbon footprint, at no cost to them. Here's a quick description of how the program works:

**Collect Eco-fees** - By signing up, you agree to add a \$2 eco-fee to each customer transaction at point-of-sale. This eco-fee becomes your EcoFund.

**Showcase Participation** - GreenStep will provide you with a window decal, certificate, and point-of-sale information that can be printed or added to your website, so you can advise customers that your hotel is part of the EcoFund program.

**Submit Data and Eco-fees** - GreenStep's customer support team will work with you to determine the data that needs to be measured to

track your progress and environmental reductions over time. Eco-fees are remitted to GreenStep on a monthly basis, and cover the initial set-up fee and EcoFund. The remainder will go directly to your business's personal EcoFund.

**Prioritize Green Projects** - The EcoFund Advisor can help you determine the potential return on investment of a given project. This means investments in emissions-reduction projects can be prioritized to those that have the most impact from an environmental and cost-savings perspective.

**Invest Your EcoFund Back Into Your Business** - 100% of your contribution to the EcoFund, less an energy management fee, will be directed back to your business for investment in eligible projects and purchases, such as energy-efficient lighting, equipment and technology retrofits, renewable energy installations, waste reduction, and water conservation technology. EcoFund's team will provide basic recommendations and guidance, and approve your project's eligibility.

**Share your Success Story** - GreenStep will develop project spotlights and case studies annually and after each successfully installed project, so you can communicate to customers and other stakeholders what you've done, how you did it, and what you plan to do to continue reducing your environmental impact.

**Offset Emissions** - You may also choose to offset your emissions to become carbon neutral, or purchase renewable energy credits (RECs) like Bullfrog Power. However, this option will only be considered after your business has exhausted available reduction opportunities.

**Invest in the Community** - Interest collected on the EcoFund will be used to create a separate Community Green Fund that supports carbon reduction projects and education for non-profit organizations.

In light of the current climate crisis, programs like the GreenStep EcoFund can help us shift towards a positive outlook. More details pertaining to the EcoFund, and how it can help hoteliers, will be presented later this year via the BCHA webinar series.



# Does Your COVID-19 Safety Plan Need a Refresh?

by Arun Subramanian

With the tourist season in full swing, now is the perfect time to review your COVID-19 safety plan. Following your business's initial reopening, you may have already ironed out some of the kinks, however, with increased visitors and recall of more staff members, your plan will need to be refreshed to ensure it remains effective.

Also keep in mind the prospect of a different kind of guest checking in this summer: a public health or WorkSafeBC officer. After all, officers are out all around the province, conducting workplace inspections. They are checking that robust safety plans are in place, that employees have been trained on the required controls to protect themselves and customers, and that your documented COVID-19 controls are being followed. So don't get caught for non-compliance! Take time to review and update your plan so you can feel confident that everything's covered, particularly if your next guest happens to be carrying a clipboard!

To help you get started, here are a few tips to guide you through the process of reviewing and updating your COVID-19 safety plan.

## Train and Reorient Your Team Regularly

You've taken the time to explain new protocols to your employees, and they seem to get it. But do they really? Do their actions reflect the new requirements? Have they been able to keep up with the incessant changes? Are they feeling supported by their managers when dealing with guests pushing back or not following guidelines? These are questions you need to ask yourself regularly, as they will form the basis of continued training. Remember, it's often hard for frontline employees to keep track of multiple changes while dealing with anxieties

of their own. Reiterating the important elements of your safety plan and arranging regular COVID-19 refresher sessions will help prevent "COVID complacency" from setting in, and will also provide staff with an opportunity to honestly discuss how things are going. Be sure to clearly convey your expectations so there isn't any confusion, particularly if you're introducing new or modified controls as the summer season progresses. And don't forget to express to your team that their health and wellbeing is your top priority!

Express to your team that their health and wellbeing is your top priority!

## Communicate Your Safety Plan to Guests

You've already published your safety plan on your website, but is it current? Public health and WorkSafeBC officers will typically read this information before they pay you a visit. Making sure the information is accurate and up-to-date will not only help an officer's review process, but will also signal to prospective guests that you're serious about protecting their health and safety. You can offer further information to guests when their booking is confirmed, updating them on relevant changes to protocols before they arrive. This will help to facilitate a smooth arrival and ensure better compliance with your policies.



### Observe and Monitor Your Safety Plan in Action

It's one thing to write down an elaborate plan, and quite another to execute it in real life. Remember, you want to be the one who identifies and fixes an issue before anyone else brings it to your attention (or includes it in an inspection report). Pay attention to how your customers and team members are responding to your COVID-19 controls. It may be necessary to see a control in operation before you realize it isn't working or needs to be adjusted. Amendments will likely be simple—for example, you might need to add signage to prominent locations, or change traffic flow to maintain physical distancing during busy times.

### Request Feedback from Staff and Guests

Feedback is key! You need your team to remain onboard and understand why your COVID-19 safety controls are in place. After all, they are performing the work every day and are extremely familiar with what's involved. They may have a brilliant idea you haven't considered, or an objection you need to resolve before they feel comfortable. Also, pay attention to guest feedback, particularly if they express a concern, and be sure to act on it swiftly.

### Remember: the Situation is Changing Rapidly

Public health orders, guidance, protocols, and industry best practices are constantly evolving. It's your responsibility to stay apprised of the latest developments impacting your industry sector and ensure your business

remains compliant. Being knowledgeable will also instill confidence in those around you, including a visiting safety officer.

### Evaluate and Revise Controls as Needed

As you open up different areas of your business, or welcome more guests, you may find that new risks arise. You should also consider less obvious risks, such as mental health concerns of staff or how well your employees are equipped to deal with adverse reactions from guests who are resistant to new controls. Don't forget to revisit your safety plan regularly as the summer season advances. Update your website, communicate any changes to your team and your guests and, above all else, remain adaptable!

For further help reviewing and updating your COVID-19 safety plan, refer to go2HR's easy-to-use COVID-19 Workplace Assessment Tool. Additional information and tips can be found on our dedicated webpage [www.go2hr.ca/covid-19-safety-plan](http://www.go2hr.ca/covid-19-safety-plan).

If you have questions or need support with any aspect of your safety plan, contact us at 604-633-9787, or email [safety@go2hr.ca](mailto:safety@go2hr.ca). Our qualified health and safety experts are available to assist, and look forward to supporting you and your team.

Learn more about go2HR, including our industry HR and health and safety programs and resources at [www.go2hr.ca](http://www.go2hr.ca) ■

*Arun Subramanian is Director of Health and Safety, go2HR.*

# Vancouver

## Location, Location, Location

by Joanne Sasvari

As Vancouver hotels reckon with a new landscape, it's time to double down on what they do best.

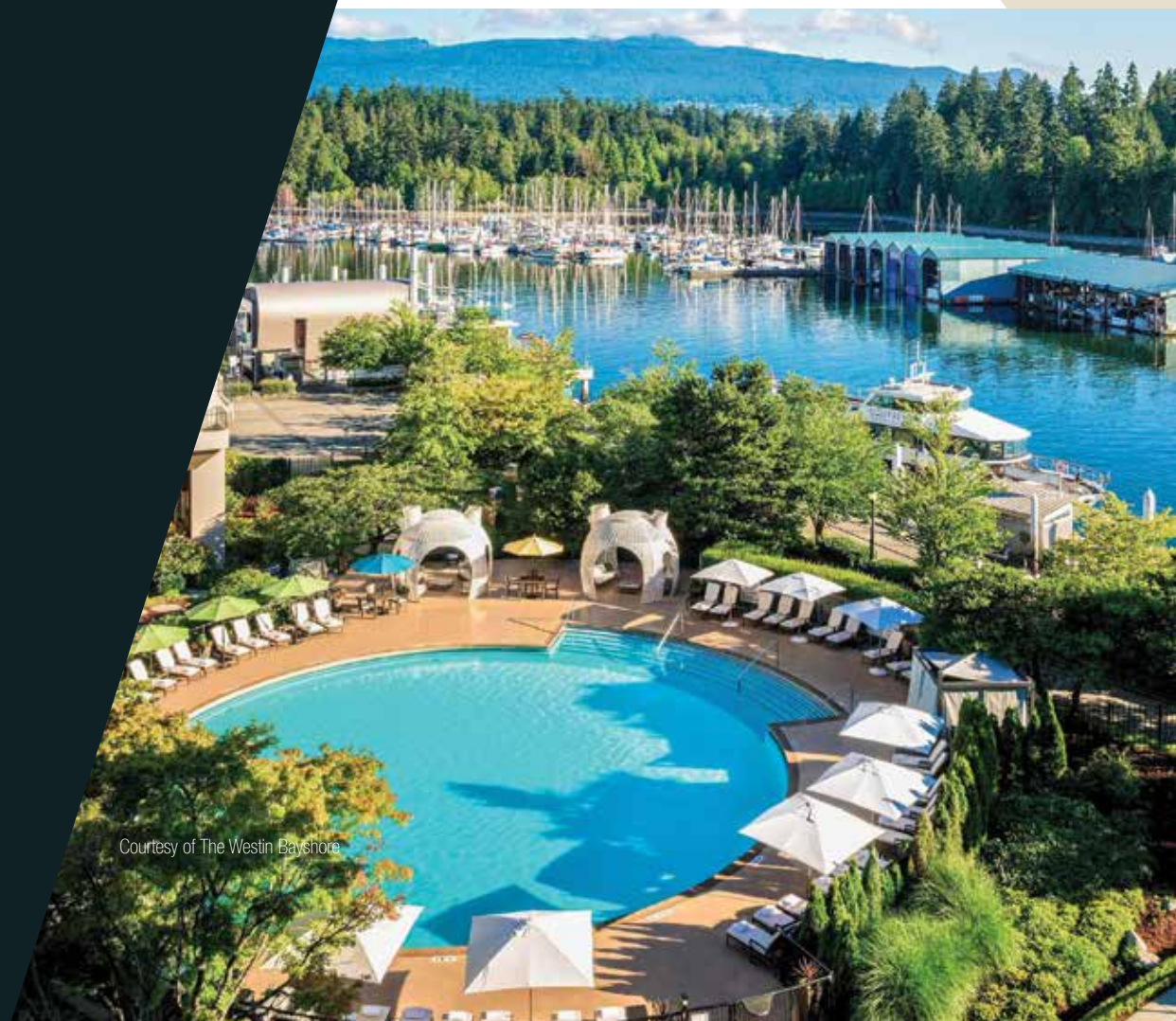
Most years, BC's biggest city would be flooded with visitors, its trendy restaurants booked weeks in advance, its convention centres packed with presentations, its hotels bustling with arrivals and departures. This is not that year.

A few Vancouver properties have managed to stay open throughout the COVID-19 pandemic; others are reopening gradually. Some remain closed indefinitely. Meanwhile, the city has lost several properties to redevelopment, including the Empire Landmark, Coast Plaza and Four Seasons. Despite a few new hotel openings in recent years, a 2018 City of Vancouver report estimates that Vancouver had 1,100 fewer guest rooms than a decade earlier. The shortage has only worsened since then.

This might have had dire consequences if 2020 were like 2019, which was a record year for overnight visitation. Back then, Tourism Vancouver estimated the city needed about 4,000 additional hotel rooms.

Now, those lost rooms are cushioning the blow of reduced demand as travel restrictions and traveller wariness deal the global tourism industry a devastating blow. Occupancy has been slashed in half over the past few months—the biggest drop in Canada, according to hospitality consultancy company HVS and market data firm STR. Paradoxically, Vancouver still reports the country's highest occupancy rate since it had so few rooms to begin with—but local hotels know they will need to initiate a drastic shift in operations if they are to successfully navigate the “new normal”.

Courtesy of The Westin Bayshore





## The Westin Bayshore

"It's certainly been a very, very interesting time," says Paul Canning, general manager at The Westin Bayshore. His property has remained open throughout the pandemic (although the restaurants are closed), and has carefully followed government guidelines on cleanliness, social distancing, training, and communication. "We're really looking at it from the guest perspective, from check-in to check-out," says Canning. "We've had a really cautious, measured re-opening."

Now they are looking at ways to make up for lost revenue, for instance, by using banquet rooms for smaller gatherings and off-site workspaces. After all, Canning notes, "We have the largest convention space at any hotel in the city."

Change is nothing new for the property, which opened in 1961 as a single low-rise structure called The Bayshore Inn. A tower was built in 1970, and over the years a patio area and convention space were added. Now part of the vast Marriott network, the hotel features 499 recently renovated guest rooms and more than 71,000 sq. ft. of meeting space, as well as boutiques, a restaurant, lounge, spa, and indoor and outdoor swimming pools.

"The reason why guests come here overwhelmingly is because of our location," explains Canning. "We're right on the harbour and we've got unparalleled views of Stanley Park and the water."

Canning is thankful that the property had full occupancy right up to the onset of the pandemic. Business is slowly returning, augmented by the decision to repurpose banquet rooms for small gatherings and off-site workspaces. But still, he says, "The whole industry is hurting, and Vancouver is hurting especially."

## Moda

Like The Westin Bayshore, the Moda Hotel stayed open right through the pandemic. But, as General Manager Alan Jeong says, "Our occupancy was hit big time. There are only domestic guests at the hotel."

Moda typically attracts international travellers, who of course aren't travelling right now. "People from Europe say it's a very European-style hotel," notes Jeong.

Moda opened as the upscale Dufferin Hotel in 1908, built by architect John Edmeston Parr and developer Thomas Arthur Fee, who were responsible for many of the city's historical landmarks. A century later, "The Duff" was sold to Viaggio Hospitality Group, which transformed it into a chic 67-room boutique hotel just in time for the 2010 Olympic Games.

"It's very unique. It's an independent hotel. That's one thing I love," says Jeong. "There's more freedom. We can try new things, especially with decorating. There's a lot of history in the building, which you can see in the mosaic tiles and moulding in the lobby. It's such a vibrant feel to the old hotel."

Among locals, the property is best known for its popular bars and restaurants, including Cibo Trattoria, which was named Canada's best new restaurant by enRoute magazine when it opened in 2009. Guests, though, are attracted by the central downtown location—and the value. "Our motto is: affordable indulgence," notes Jeong. "We are proud that we are serving that accommodation need. We are happy to serve the guest who is travelling on a budget, but is looking for something unique at that price range."



Courtesy of Moda



Courtesy of Pinnacle Hotel Harbourfront

## Pinnacle Hotel Harbourfront

Jonas Melin also appreciates the value of understanding where a property fits into the marketplace. “We sell what we have. We are a 3 1/2 star hotel and we position ourselves that way,” says the general manager of the Pinnacle Hotel Harbourfront.

The Pinnacle shut down in the early days of the pandemic, and re-opened eight weeks later. The process was a challenge, Melin says, “because hotels are not meant to be closed down.” It also took one of the city’s biggest properties out of circulation.

“In Vancouver city there are about 100 hotels of varying sizes. We’re one of the biggest,” says Melin. The property, which opened in 1975 as a Holiday Inn, has 432 rooms and over 30,000 sq. ft. of meeting space, as well as a bistro, car rental agency, gym, and pool. In 1992, it became a Ramada Renaissance; in February 2015 it joined the locally owned Pinnacle Hotels group.

As a small brand, Melin says, “You can be a little bit more nimble and more flexible, and make changes at a much faster pace. Being a local brand, we’ve done a lot of work in BC. We’ve built that up over the past five years. Those relationships are paying off now.” After all, he points out, “The cruise business is not here. The conference business is not here.”

Increasingly, the property is attracting locals who might use it for meetings, conferences, and events. They can easily turn a small ballroom into a boardroom or classroom, and still meet safe social-distancing requirements.

But, as the pandemic continues to affect travel worldwide, who knows what will happen next? As Melin says, “Forecasting is not two or three months in advance. It’s two or three weeks.” ■



# Hotel Salespeople, Take Note:

## Video Email Will Bring Your Virtual Tours to Life

by Doug Kennedy

Those of you who read my hotel sales training articles or attend my workshops know I'm a huge advocate for using a "tech for touch" approach to stand out from competitors. I have long recommended hotel group and event salespeople embrace personalized video email to network and prospect, respond to inbound inquiries, and follow-up after meetings. While this approach is relevant during all market conditions, it is especially important in the current climate with COVID-19 disrupting the meetings and events business and slowing the flood of inbound leads to a trickle.

Smart sales leaders already have a set sequence of follow-ups for inbound and prospecting leads, alternating between phone calls and email messages. However, I'm confident that a more personalized approach will lead to increased sales and stronger relationships with planners—and video email is the perfect medium. Using this "tech for touch" approach, you'll stand out from the competition and restore the human touch to what has become an overwhelmingly digital sales process.

To get started, your sales team will need a monthly subscription to one of several platforms that drop video messages directly into the body of the email, rather than just inserting a link. This is vitally important to maximize click-through rates, as the recipient will quickly see the message is personalized rather than a generic, automated message. (Email me at [doug@kennedytrainingnetwork.com](mailto:doug@kennedytrainingnetwork.com) for a list of providers with inexpensive subscription rates.)

These platforms can be used in many ways, such as sharing full-screen video messages while the sender stands in the lobby, meeting rooms or elsewhere on-property, however, the focus here is on personalized, narrated virtual tours. This "touchpoint" is ideally placed as the initial or secondary follow-up for inbound leads, and it looks something like this:

First, your hotel salesperson will prepare the message by identifying four or five images from your hotel's photo gallery, then downloading these into a folder (alternatively, they can open a window for each image). The images should be striking and appealing, and hold relevance for the group that the planner is representing.

Next, the salesperson will log in to the video email app, activate her webcam, start a message, and click the "screen recorder" option. From there, she will greet the prospect by name, then walk the prospect through the images she has selected, using a storytelling approach to guide the prospect through the recommended event venues, facilities, outlets, and accommodations.

By training your team to use video email for personalized, virtual tours, you'll be providing meeting and event planners with a helpful resource they can forward to other decision-makers. Besides increasing chatter about your property, this will generate a positive first impression of your hotel's overall hospitality. Plus, personalized video emails are a terrific way to conduct "welfare checks" on key client contacts!

Doug Kennedy is President of the Kennedy Training Network. ■



# Celebrating Diversity & Inclusivity in the Hotel Industry

by Amy Saini

BC has long held a reputation of a highly desirable destination for tourism and adventure. The province has much to offer with rugged and awe-inspiring nature, vibrant cities, and a strong multicultural and diverse society. It is no surprise that tourism numbers continue to soar year after year in beautiful British Columbia.



Tourism has been a driving force in the globalization that shapes BC. Consequently, the hotel industry is always in the forefront as the world changes around us, pushing the industry to continuously evaluate its practices, stay competitive, and meet the needs of its guests and workforce. Successful hotels are acutely aware that providing a high calibre of guest experience happens alongside building and retaining a diverse and inclusive workplace. Thus, the industry focuses on employing individuals with varying backgrounds to form diverse teams that directly impact the quality of the guest experience.

## Local hotels have taken creative approaches to accommodate staff with disabilities.

The Black Lives Matter movement's recent global events continue to push the hotel sector to look closely at existing diversity and inclusion strategies. There is so much more to learn, more conversations to be had and more changes that need to be made to move forward on this spectrum. To meaningfully engage in this work, it is essential to understand this spectrum and how diversity differs from inclusion.

### What is Diversity?

The Canadian Centre for Diversity and Inclusion (CCDI) defines diversity as the variety of unique dimensions, qualities, and characteristics we all possess. Diversity is not limited to cultural background. Diversity includes the unique perspectives that each of us brings to our organizations and work communities. Some examples of this are diversity in work experience, diversity of thought, and personal experiences. Other elements include but are not limited to:

- Religion, culture or socio-economic status;
- Gender identity, physical abilities, or sexual orientation; and
- Age, education, and life experience.

Diversity as a core value is fundamental to success in the hotel industry. Hotels are well positioned to strive for diversity best practices as they are serving people from a wide range of cultural values and backgrounds. Hotel staff work with all kinds of accommodations and differences; this requires flexibility, and it is just one way that a high diversity competency shapes the day-to-day work in this sector.

### What is Inclusion?

Inclusion differs from diversity in that inclusion is about the collective. CCDI defines inclusion as creating a culture that strives for equity and embraces, respects, accepts, and values differences. As our workplaces move towards greater inclusiveness, it's important to stop and celebrate these hard-earned wins. Let's take the opportunity to celebrate the strides hotels have made to embrace a more inclusive culture.

### Celebrating Diversity

In this spirit of forward-thinking and inclusivity, local hotels have taken creative approaches to accommodate staff with disabilities. For example, one luxury hotel downtown places notes in their rooms to alert guests that a cleaner is deaf, then directs them to the front desk if they need help communicating.

Another example of this ingenuity is seen in the interior of our province. In 2018, The Prestige Lakeside Resort in Nelson, BC, received an award recognizing their diversity and inclusion practices in supporting staff with disabilities. Hotels are exploring how they can make environments more inclusive for their patrons and staff.



## Find ways to extend beyond traditional cultural awareness training.

### Diversity and Inclusion Best Practices

In examining best practices through the sector, it is clear that hotels that are thriving as ambassadors of diversity and inclusion have three essential practices embedded in their culture. These practices lay the groundwork for building cultural competence, engagement, and communication in their teams.

First, best practice hotels recognize the importance of a formal diversity program. They have a strategy that is reflected in all human resource functions. This strategy impacts recruitment, training and development, and employee engagement programming. Many of BC's hotels may already have a program in place or are developing one.

Second, hotels build strong relationships with community organizations to build diversity and employment equity in their workforce. Hotels collaborate with immigrant service agencies, Indigenous employment programs, and international programs at postsecondary institutions. Partnering with local agencies increases access to prospective employees who may be underrepresented groups from an employment equity standpoint.

Third, hotels are looking beyond diversity and focussing on inclusivity. They find ways to extend beyond traditional cultural awareness training for their teams and look at creative ways to ensure their culture is welcoming and inclusive. Thus, we see more and more hotels

focussing specifically on comprehensive onboarding, ongoing employee education and development, and increased social activities such as potlucks and multicultural celebrations.

This work is ongoing and ever-changing. It requires consistent evaluation of the extent to which current day practices are culturally sensitive, inclusive, and equitable. It requires a desire for growth through ongoing audits of existing policies, procedures, and processes. It requires listening to our people and hearing their suggestions, experiences, and input. The BC hotel industry has continued to demonstrate its agility and solutions focussed outlook. There are lots of wins to celebrate with many goals achieved and milestones that have been reached. There is more to learn as the industry commits to continual growth and transformation. ■

*Amy Saini is an HR Consultant with HR West ([hrwest.ca](http://hrwest.ca)). HR West provides human resources consulting support to organizations across varying sectors in BC.*



## BCHA MEMBER ENGAGEMENT

by Mike Macleod

*“Organizations exist to serve. Period. Leaders live to serve. Period.”*  
– Tom Peters

As of August 2020, I joined the BCHA team in a new role as the Director of Member and Business Development. This is a position that I am honoured to have. It goes without saying that these challenging times require clarity from organizations such as ours to ‘serve’ the hotel sector in BC as never before.

My career within the accommodation industry began in Vancouver in 2002. On my second day on the job, I found myself in the proverbial ‘deep end’, except this was not a pool, it was the San Francisco Bay. I had been asked to join a hotel sales mission in California to fill in for someone at the last minute and I knew virtually nothing about my property; I hadn’t spent more than ten minutes in the office at that point. But I instinctively leaned on my core belief in fostering engagement with others and my service-oriented attitude to get me through. Since that choppy day on the bay, I have relied on those fundamental values each day in navigating my nearly 18-year career.

Throughout that time, my focus has always been about customer service, solutions, and positive outcomes. As we chart our course forward as an organization, you can expect efficiency, approachability, and genuine interest in what your needs as a member are. And you can expect determination. Period.

Over the coming months, the leadership team at the BCHA will continue to refine our member engagement practices and deliver programs to improve your operations or bottom line. We also know that these extraordinary times mean working together to provide exceptional value. In short, we will do everything we can to ensure you see benefit of membership in the short term. We added a number of new members this summer and it is my pleasure to welcome them to the association. To each of you, the team and I look forward to working with you.

As I have gotten to know our team at the BCHA, it is clear that they

have been working hard on your behalf since our last update. For the past several months, the team has worked diligently to keep our membership informed and updated during these trying times, ensuring the support of our members is not only heard but realized.

To that end, we have continued sending out twice weekly communications as well as arranging several webinars with our partners to provide guidance and assistance as we navigate the waters of this ever-changing landscape.

In case you missed it, navigate to our YouTube page or the BCHA Education Webinars page to view video content on topics such as Property Tax Advice, Optimizing Building Efficiency, Sustainability and our GoGreen program, Conflict Resolution & Workplace Violence as well as the Temporary Lay-off Variance Tool with the Ministry of Labour. As always, we would like to thank our partners: go2HR, FortisBC, and Altus Group, among others.

Another member resource is our Online Recovery Resource Guide, which features hand-picked suppliers for the items that are currently in high demand, which may assist you in implementing updated protocols now and in the future. We have partnered with these suppliers to take some of the research work out of the process and present a one-stop-shop for those who do not wish to navigate through our online Membership Guide. Included are options for touchless technology, PPE, sanitization products as well as technology solutions that will assist in ensuring general hotel operations run smoothly.

Finally, we are excited to be working on some new initiatives in the coming months. Included in those will be diversity programs as well as Revenue Management guidance to assist in recovery efforts across the province.

I look forward to hearing from members at any time. Please feel free to connect with me at [membership@bcha.com](mailto:membership@bcha.com). I would be happy to discuss new ideas, hear your feedback, or walk you through any of our programs. Please know that through these difficult times we are here to help.

## WHAT’S NEW?

by Joyce Hayne

Rethink2gether provides support to get certified for “The PLEDGE on Food Waste.” Cut down on food costs, save food, and boost your brand image. [www.rethink2gether.com/hotels](http://www.rethink2gether.com/hotels) and [www.thepledgeonfoodwaste.org/](http://www.thepledgeonfoodwaste.org/)

Sunco Communication & Installation Ltd is offering 2 months free on Hosted Hospitality. Sunco’s Hosted Hospitality cloud-based solution is an easy-to-manage monthly cost per room, per day that includes fully managed remote support, all local phone lines, and integration to existing property management systems. [www.sunco.ca](http://www.sunco.ca)

Sunco’s Managed Services not only takes the administration pressure off for your organization’s telecom needs, it helps save your business time and money. Managed Services provides a faster response and solution with

less downtime, as they replace defective equipment rather than sending it away for repairs ensuring your operations can continue. [www.sunco.ca](http://www.sunco.ca)

For the perfect night sleep try the new Elegance Pillow from Coast Textiles. 100% cotton filled with gel fibre polyester, non-allergenic, bug and dust mite-proof, machine washable, and stain resistant. Available in standard, queen and king sizes. [www.coasttextiles.com](http://www.coasttextiles.com)

RoomKeyPMS has released enhancements to its recently launched mobile check-in functionality with the addition of digital signature and document storage features. These enhancements are part of its Recovery Roadmap designed to provide hotels with an array of tools that support new operating standards hotels need come back strong. <https://roomkeypms.com/products/mobile/>



# Meetings and Conferences During COVID-19:

## Patience, Protocols and Phasing into the Future

by Laura Starr

British Columbia is in a uniquely positive position: we've entered Phase 3 of the BC Restart Plan before other major Canadian cities have reached the equivalent of theirs, and there is much gratitude to be had for Dr. Bonnie Henry, who has held strong throughout the pandemic, protecting our province with strict guidelines and vigilant testing protocols. Our COVID-19 case number is lower than most provinces, and our outbreaks have been effectively tracked and contained.

However, as we sit on the precipice of feeling good about ourselves, there is no denying this pandemic is far from over. The hospitality industry, based so heavily on social interaction, has taken an insufferable blow, and hotels in particular are suffering an economic scarcity like no other, thanks to closed borders, limited tourism, and the inability to book events with assuredness. We're all ready to get back to a "normal" that makes us feel safe, but we must be cautious, and we mustn't rush to conclusions.

Our sacrifices to date have granted us the privilege of entering Phase 3, and this is already proving valuable to the hotel sector. Bookings are increasing, and small groups (under 50 people) are gaining creative confidence to coordinate meetings and conferences, whether virtual, hybrid, or dynamically organized to prioritize attendee safety. However, it's clear that until large gatherings (over 50 people) become permissible once again, hotels will struggle to fill the economic gap that comes with losing large events. How do you plan for a future of conferences and meetings when that subject is currently not on the table for discussion?

According to Ingrid Jarrett, president and CEO of the BC Hotel Association (BCHA), we approach the future by focusing judiciously on what hotels are currently doing, and empowering staff with tools and resources to do their jobs safely. Right now, we are building up

confidence that hotels can function within recommended guidelines and host safe interactions for guests and small gatherings. A slip-up in following safety protocols will only delay the industry's capacity to commence conversations about loosening restrictions to groups over 50 people. Now is the time for our industry to be immaculate.

Since conferences and meetings are not unique to hotels or hospitality, many voices—including international, national, provincial, regional, and city groups and associations—have come together to build and enact guidelines, protocols, and best practices for any sector working with groups of people, including event management companies, tourism bureaus, and destination management companies. However, because the pandemic is being regulated on the provincial level, it begs caution when looking to borrow safety measures from outside BC.

### Industry Resources

The Hotel Association of Canada (HAC) boasts an excellent COVID-19 information portal targeted to the hotel industry. Closer to home, the BCHA has established a BC-specific COVID-19 information portal that includes the following dropdown links:

- COVID-19 Quicklinks
- COVID-19 Recovery & Guidelines
- COVID-19 Liquidity for Hotels
- COVID-19 Support for Employees
- COVID-19 Advocacy Efforts

If you are a hotelier who is interested primarily in conference and meeting protocols, take time to acquaint yourself with the comprehensive information provided on the site. After all, hotels function



Courtesy of Pinnacle Hotel Harbourfront



as ecosystems—for conferences and meetings to be conducted with safety and precision, all angles of business must be properly handled, including room cleanings, employee rights and safety, and behind-the-scenes economics.

By clicking the COVID-19 Recovery & Guidelines link, you'll find an option to download the BCHA Tourism and Hospitality Best Practices Guidelines (PDF). This current and up-to-date document was submitted to the provincial government and WorkSafeBC, and has been approved and endorsed by both. It covers the full gamut of hotel operations, including recommendations for hosting small groups and meetings, from a mitigation and response strategy (a must-have!) to the execution of food and beverage, and touching on all details in-between, such as high-frequency touchpoints and new duties and responsibilities to delegate to staff.

### Utilizing Technology

Many hotels are finding success in hosting small meetings, presentations and strategic sessions. Jarrett recently held a BCHA board meeting at the Vancouver Pinnacle Harbourside and says, "It was an outstanding meeting, with heightened distancing protocols and sterile kits at each place setting. The meal service was outstanding and food and beverage and breakout sessions were well set up for interactive creativity to support engaging, dynamic creativity." She suggests these gatherings represent a rediscovery of sorts, as we learn that many tools already at our fingertips can be excellent resources for facilitating safe measures in groups. One example is Google Docs, which allows for a shared

workable document that enables a number of people to sit in a room spaced six feet apart, and still collectively work on a document. Another virtual meeting tool is Miro, which is a virtual whiteboard for team collaborations.

### Systems for Traceability

Moving forward, Jarrett emphasizes the significance of investing in systems for traceability. It's important to know who attended what and who sat where, and to store this information for a minimum of one month in case an outbreak happens. Integrating tracking into hotel check-ins will build in importance, as more individuals begin to travel into our province from outside BC (where did they come from, and which method of travel did they take?). The government of Canada has a new tracing app, which can be found at [www.canada.ca/en/public-health/services/diseases/coronavirus-disease-covid-19/covid-alert.html](http://www.canada.ca/en/public-health/services/diseases/coronavirus-disease-covid-19/covid-alert.html). Managing and tracking the potential spread of COVID-19 is a responsibility that no business should take lightly.

Right now, the focus must remain on what is within the control of our hotels, and that means diligently following guidelines and showing that hotels can manage meetings safely and smoothly. Although there are some hotel association hands working with government to design recommendations for the eventual lifting of restrictions on events over 50 people, we will, for now, work on patience and building trust: trust in the government, trust in the consumer, trust in travellers, and trust in the corporate sector to safely get back to business. ■



# Five Scary Topics for a Revenue Strategy Meeting

by Kathryn Baker, CRME

The best-of-the-best hotel strategy meetings embody many key attributes: they're engaging, animated, results-oriented, productive, decisive, relevant, and maybe even enjoyable. This meeting should be the single most important hour of the week for strategy and decision-making, so why are we saying they should also be scary?



Well, the world is somewhat scary right now. We live in an uncertain, jarring, unnerving, and uncomfortable time, and the hotel business is experiencing that more than most industries thanks to sharp reductions in travel and large meetings. If the hotel strategy meeting is meant to be the most valuable, then shouldn't we face these realities together, head-on? With that, here are five scary topics to bring into your weekly strategy meeting:

### 1. Reviews/Guest Reputation

Hopefully this isn't too frightening! Sometimes executive teams are reluctant to discuss reviews and ratings in this meeting format, but I feel the opposite to be true. After all, there's a direct correlation between guest reviews and price positioning, and this is the perfect place to discuss the topic. Start by reviewing current scores and changes from the prior week for all review sites, then confirm management responses and address guest issues.

Look at what successful competitors do over time.

### 2. The Competition

Okay, this one can definitely send a shiver down your spine, depending on your market. Here are a few things to address:

- Make sure you're looking at all of your competitors, not just those on your STR comp set. Explore Google's "Similar Hotels Nearby" and, on Expedia, filter for your hotel's star rating and neighbourhood.



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Online travel agent extranets also provide information about properties that have booked guests who also searched your property.

- You don't need to be a follower. If you find yourself always focusing on one or two properties and trying to stay within \$X of their rates—stop. Ask yourself, “What is the guest looking for?” The guest is certainly not looking only at your price position compared to another hotel.
- Look at what successful competitors do over time, and identify patterns from data in your STR and Demand360. What are you missing out on? Are you consistently losing occupancy on Mondays

and Thursdays? What channels are your competitors booking on those dates, and what is their lead time and ADR?

### 3. Market Mix

Without question, market mix is going to be different than it was in 2019, and even between January and February 2020. Some segments have flattened out entirely—citywide convention business, cruise-related rooms, international group and transient business, and business travel, just to name a few. Many hotels are starting from scratch with their segmentation, but that doesn't mean you can't find the most optimal business mix. Are you familiar with which of your channels is the most profitable, and which

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result in the most ancillary revenue (using actual data, not anecdotes or intuition)? The voice channel is very important right now for guests to feel comfortable that they have access to the most accurate and updated information about your property. How can you improve the voice experience? Are there segments which previously had been overlooked or discouraged that you can investigate now?

#### 4. Next Year

Right now, we're living in an extremely short booking window. In some cases, weekend same-day business rates and pickup should be reviewed hourly. For transient business further out—even for traditionally high-demand dates—the pace is often very slow.

### Price is likely not the primary barrier to travel or hotel stays.

This makes me think of a sign on Colorado's Eastbound I-70 coming into the Denver metro area, which has a very steep grade—it says, "Trucks, Don't Be Fooled!"

Don't be fooled into thinking the only thing we should be talking about in these meetings is the next few weeks, even if current demand only extends that far. Hotels still need to focus on building a rolling 12 months of availability and day-by-day strategy. Manage your transient offers proactively, and ensure holidays and events are identified and strategies are in place. Plan now for RFP's—start the analysis, calculate the ROI on consortia, and discuss all accounts now.

#### 5. Pricing and Profit

Industry publications frequently indicate hotels should stay away from panic-pricing, or heavily discounting in hopes of stimulating demand. Right now, price is likely not the primary barrier to travel or hotel stays—instead, it's health and safety concerns, government mandates and even unemployment impact. In your strategy meetings, hold each other accountable to ensure your price positioning isn't reactionary, and that

you're not trading down rate when guests would have paid the price you had in place before discounting.

Profitability is always a focus, but right now every piece of the puzzle matters just a little bit more. Here are a few ways to bring this topic into your strategy meetings:

- Always Talk ROI. Hopefully, marketing is a part of your strategy meetings. Any decisions on messaging, email blasts, or package offerings should be followed up with an ROI result, and then compared with past offers/strategies. Repeat what works best.
- Upsell and Cross-sell. Create an official plan for upselling and cross-selling pre-arrival, during arrival, and mid-stay. Document the communication process and measure the results, then bring them to the meeting. There is a real opportunity to maximize revenue with guests who are staying with you right now—there are fewer options for them off-property, so making it easy for them to stay longer and enjoy the amenities of your hotel is a win for them as well.
- Optimize your Data. How is this related to profit? Two examples: first, we don't always get email addresses from bookings that come through third parties, which means we can't communicate directly with a guest who has stayed at our hotels. It's scary to think about bringing a list of all third-party guests to a strategy meeting and measuring what percentage of them have an email attached; but, perhaps that awareness might lead to an improved process to capture the information. Second, look at source/segment codes. When we talk about profitability, we want to know the net ADR for each channel that books the hotel and make distribution decisions based on those numbers. If the data is inaccurate or unreliable, we can't determine an informed channel or segment strategy.

Bringing these topics (and data!) to your strategy meetings might feel uncomfortable at times, but facing these realities together is what will be of most benefit to your hotel. ■

*Kathryn Baker is a Founding Partner of ThinkUp Enterprises, and Executive Director of Strategy for Total Customized Revenue Management (TCRM). BCHA members can reach out for a free 30-minute consultation [Kathryn@tcrmservices.com](mailto:Kathryn@tcrmservices.com) [www.TCRMservices.com](http://www.TCRMservices.com)*



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# Six Ways Benchmarking can Support Post-pandemic Recovery

By Christian Strieder

While great uncertainty remains around the COVID-19 pandemic and its lasting impact on the global economy, there is certainty that benchmarking is a vital tool for hoteliers on their road to recovery.

With that in mind, we have compiled six practical ways benchmarking can support your distribution strategy and revenue recovery.

## 1. Daily Performance Monitoring is Now More Important than Ever

Benchmarking is the process of measuring the performance results of your own business against various segments of the marketplace—namely, the competition. In top-line benchmarking, hotels usually compare three key performance indicators (KPIs): occupancy (Occ), average daily rate (ADR) and revenue per available room (RevPAR) to both the overall local market (referred to as “industry”) and a self-selected competitive set (commonly known as a “comp set”).

Even when we get to the post-COVID-19 era, occupancy and ADR levels will take time to reach pre-pandemic levels. Maximizing RevPAR will remain the winning strategy though, as balancing occupancy and prices often yields maximum revenue generated for the hotel.

In the following example, the hotel achieved a higher occupancy than its comp set while having lower ADR. This had proven to be the best strategy on that day, showing the highest RevPAR and therefore the highest relative revenue for the hotel.

Occupancy	Wed 08-26
My Property	48.4%
Comp Set	34.9%
Industry	52.4%
Comp Set Rank	2 of 6

ADR	Wed 08-26
My Property	\$141.70
Comp Set	\$165.12
Industry	\$112.24
Comp Set Rank	5 of 6

RevPAR	Wed 08-26
My Property	\$68.58
Comp Set	\$57.62
Industry	\$58.82
Comp Set Rank	1 of 6

## 2. Learn your New Guest Segments

Hotel guests will be different because of the pandemic, at least in the decisive ramp-up period. Whereas the internal monitoring of a hotel’s self-defined guest segments is a fundamental task for every revenue-management professional, a view outside one’s own numbers is even more crucial than before. Many benchmarking tools support you with more granular segmentation data. For instance, STR benchmarking tools can help hotels compare the three main segments (transient, group and contract) against the competition and local market. The group segment will take longer to recover, so it is important to measure how much demand is flowing back into the market and at what price level. Share this information with your sales team and fight together for your fair market share.



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	Transient			Group			Contract		
	My Prop	Comp	Industry	My Prop	Comp	Industry	My Prop	Comp	Industry
Occupancy	42.3	54.7	57.7	43.4	24.2	16.5	0	5.3	10.6
% Change	-35.5	-6.0	3.9	314.5	.07	-13.5	0	18.5	-5.5

### 3. Fight for your Market Share

As stated earlier, the recovery phase will likely show a large gap between growth in supply and demand. On top of that, guests and their expectations will be different. During this time, it should be a team effort to find new ways to generate vital new revenue streams for the hotel. Different practices will have to emerge in revenue management, sales, marketing, and other departments.

For most hotels, RevPAR will temporarily remain at a lower level. But performance is always relative! The true success of teamwork may not surface much in absolute RevPAR levels, but on relative metrics. The two most important numbers of any benchmarking report are the RevPAR index (showing your fair share of the market) and the RevPAR index change (a positive number means your hotel gains market share from the comp set, a negative one indicates market share loss). The importance of benchmarking your hotel against the market is more important than ever, whether it be due to hotel closures and the impact on reportable comp sets, or because the dynamics of the market have changed and the market represents another meaningful comparative.

<b>RevPAR Index (RGI)</b>	<b>Wed 08-26</b>
Index (Comp Set)	92.2
Index (CS) % Chg	-22.6

### 4. Learn your New Markets

It is also crucial to understand how new guests will change the markets. Hotel chains with a portfolio across many cities may likely see significant performance differences across markets. The share of domestic vs. international guests, the reliance on major events and fairs and changing demand levels between industries are just a few of many variables. Benchmarking can help to understand newly emerging differences between submarkets, hotel classes, and days of the week.

The reality of the past may be different in each of these factors, which may yield valuable insights. For instance, if a midscale hotel discovers a trend of rising occupancies and rates in upper midscale hotels earlier than its same-class competitors, it can react quicker to this rising demand than its same-class competitors. Equally, a hotel that notices falling demand mid-week (e.g. caused by travel restrictions of a major corporate client in the area) can adjust its marketing activities for the relevant days in due course. Further, looking beyond the confines of the primary comp set, market performance data may indicate new tendencies. For example, RevPAR performance of the hotel's overall market and class may have recently been outperforming the more limited submarket and comp set benchmarks, and an overflow of guests into your hotel's area is likely to happen. Recognizing such shifts early will give you an advantage in capturing this demand.

### 5. Rethink your Comp Sets

Finally, not only might the guests be different now, but your competitors may be different as well. Some former competitors may have closed, changed affiliation, or decided to change their strategy fundamentally. So, who are the new and true competitors? The traditional focus on only one comp set will have to be rethought at least for some time.

Monitoring the post-COVID-19 performance of hotels formerly not considered as a competitor may prove beneficial to understand your new market. Think outside the box, compare your KPIs with several new hotels for a while and find the best position in the market to thrive in the years ahead.

### 6. Look Ahead to Stay Ahead

Your effectiveness in gauging industry recovery will advance to the next level when you have a clear view into the future. With the expansion of STR's Forward STAR tool around the globe, you can combine full historical data benchmarking with actual occupancy-on-the-books data to inform strategies across your hotel operation. For example, knowing that your property is lagging your market or comp set for a weekend next month will equip you to develop a targeted marketing approach to bring more guests to your property.

The BCHA has partnered with STR to provide members with current information to help with your benchmarking. If you need assistance, please reach out to the BCHA team. ■

*Christian Strieder is Country Manager, DACH at STR.*



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