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# PREMIER

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Summer 2019

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**AGENT EDUCATION**

**COWORKING**  
CHECKS-IN TO HOTELS



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**H**undreds of agents attended our acclaimed, “UpClose with ABC” events in Boston, Chicago and San Francisco this year, taking advantage of the opportunity to network with our staff and over 30 preferred suppliers during evenings of great food, fun and dozens of exciting prize giveaways.

We kicked off UpClose in May in Chicago at the modern and luxurious **Hyatt Centric Chicago Magnificent Mile** located just steps from Navy Pier. In June, Beantown’s **Wyndham Boston Beacon Hill** hosted our event, providing a spectacular backdrop for the evening’s festivities. In August, we wrapped up our 2019 series at the iconic **Westin St. Francis on Union Square**,

a San Francisco landmark.

The support of partners like **ACCOR, Carey International, Hilton, Hyatt Hotels and Resorts, Marriott International, and Wyndham Hotels & Resorts** plus many more led to a great evening.

Thank you to all the agents and preferred suppliers who made our UpClose events a tremendous success.

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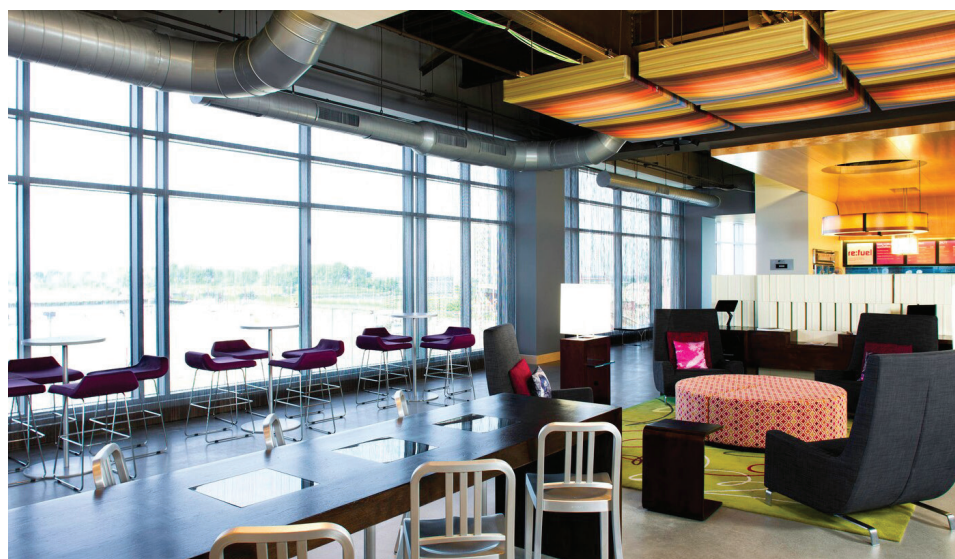
# COWORKING CHECKS-IN TO HOTELS

Hotels for several years have sought to make their lobbies more “communal” spaces, and increasingly, they now are seeing that work pay off, with the public spaces now attracting crowds far beyond just the hotel guests.

Much like Starbucks became known not only as a place to grab a tall latte but also a spot where work-from-home folks could settle down for a few hours of Wi-Fi use, many hotels also are capitalizing on an influx of people using their public spaces as makeshift offices. At the same time, businesses solely devoted to the concept of coworking spaces, such as WeWork, have seen rapid growth as well. As such arrangements provide an additional revenue source for those hotels—those guests also sip coffee or cocktails and munch on snacks while adding to a lively atmosphere—hotels are looking for ways to boost that business.

“The lobby is the new public square,” hospitality interior manufacturing company White Space’s CEO Aytan Litwin said in a New York Times article published late last year. Litwin pointed to New York’s **Ace Hotel** as the granddaddy of the trend, which opened a decade ago to find its lobby perpetually packed with non-guests using the space for work.

There are plentiful other examples of around the United States. BizBash reports that the **Hilton McLean Tysons Corner** in Virginia has found success with its Technology Lounge off of its lobby, featuring



Aloft Cleveland Downtown - Worktables

comfortable seating, television panels and wall monitors. Across the country in Vail, the recently opened **DoubleTree by Hilton** included a space with conference rooms and free coffee, which it developed in partnership with Proximity Space. While Vail might be known primarily as a leisure resort, that addition has proven popular with those in town for sporting activities—not just guests of the hotel—who need to fit in a few hours of work or meetings.

In Cleveland, at the **Aloft Cleveland Downtown**, worktables with outlets now pull in workers from nearby businesses EY

and Northwest Mutual and people who live in nearby apartment buildings to conduct impromptu meetings, according to Crain’s Cleveland Business.

“Communal spaces in hotels do not only attract a younger audience but also serve as a way to connect with local communities in ways that an old-fashioned business center never could,” Hospitality Insights contributor Samuel Wich wrote on the site in April. “A successfully run coworking space can be a great way of getting more people to interact with [a] property, spend more time onsite and eventually generate more revenue.”

Hotel companies now are looking at opportunities on a wider scale. In May, **ACCOR** announced it was partnering with coworking space supplier **Wojo** to implement 1,200 coworking spaces across its properties, ranging from economy to luxury brands, worldwide over the next three years. **ACCOR** itself created **Wojo**, previously known as **Nextdoor**, through a joint venture with **Bouygues Immobilier** a few years ago.

These will include a variety of offerings. **Wojo** “Spots” will focus on nomadic workers needing a friendly atmosphere and a reliable WiFi connection, setting up working areas in hotel bars, restaurants and lobbies. **Wojo** will



Hilton McLean Tysons Corner - Technology Lounge



offer monthly subscriptions for frequent users not staying at the hotels. Wojo “Corners” will be more sheltered areas for those wanting a space to work together with colleagues. The plan also includes Wojo “Sites,” which are larger, stand-alone coworking spaces that can even be rented as office space.

“We are reimagining hospitality not as a place or service but as infinite connect moments, whether you want to live, work or play,” according to Accor chief brand officer Steven Taylor. “We are creating a holistic ecosystem around the consumer, and Wojo is a great example of how our unique augmented hospitality strategy will allow us to connect into the everyday lives of customers.”

Hotel companies also are developing brands that have a focus on the coworking trend. **Hilton** earlier this year announced a new brand, **Signia Hilton**, that focuses particularly on meetings and events. Design features include a destination bar in each hotel reflecting the property’s home city or destination and a lobby that “will foster an impressive and comfortable space that doubles as a lobby and social destination for guests throughout their stay,” according to **Hilton**. Meeting spaces, meanwhile, will include small and midsize rooms designed to “spark new ideas and optimize work and collaboration” in addition to the large ballrooms and pre-function areas.



Mercure Paris Montmartre - Wojo Corner

Coworking spaces also are a major feature of **Marriott International’s** relatively new brand **Moxy Hotels**, which bills itself as a “millennial-focused brand.” The **Moxy Chelsea** in New York, for example, dedicated its second floor to a variety of spaces for both work and play, including a bar, meeting studios, a conservatory and a lounge for coworking.

**Marriott’s** redesign concept for its **Sheraton** brand announced last year also included what it is calling the “Community Table” for its lobbies. These long tables will have built-in wireless charging with

USB ports as well as outlets for laptops and drawers available for rental.

In all, **Marriott International** brands that have a focus on revitalizing common areas will more than double in size over the next two years, a rate four times as high as the rest of the **Marriott International** portfolio, The New York Times reported.

These trends also should raise the hotels’ profile with the regular transient business guests, who will be able to work in a livelier public space if they so choose. For those looking for a bit more quiet and solitude, they still can find respite in their own rooms.



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# AGENT EDUCATION OPPORTUNITIES

With new hotel brands constantly popping up—“soft” brands, lifestyle brands, extended stay brands, to name a few types—even the most seasoned travel agent might have trouble keeping up. A strong knowledge of the key hotel players, however, is essential to make sure clients are always being matched with hotels that fit their specific needs.

Knowing the value of the agency community, many major hotel companies have designed educational programs specifically for travel professionals to become more familiar with their company, their offerings and reward programs and to help them better sell these brands. These programs largely are available through the dedicated travel agent pages within the hotel chain websites, and are open to any travel professional with valid credentials. In addition to professional development, many of these programs offer its graduates additional incentives such as deeply discounted room rates for personal travel, and chances to win bonus prizes including complimentary accommodations.

Here are a few programs in the market today.



ACCOR offers a path to become an expert in its brands through its “Learn With Us” sales tool. Available in 10 languages, the program consists of 17 modules, detailing each of the company’s brand identities and the properties within those brands as well information about corporate sales offers and the Famous Agents and Le Club AccorHotels rewards programs.

The final module, “Ambassador House,” presents agents with a quiz that, if



successfully completed, earns them the title of AccorHotels Ambassador. With that, agents access several benefits including discounts of up to 30 percent and free amenities on personal bookings, a personal gift sent each year, access to the AccorHotels Ambassador newsletter and a shot in two annual prize drawings for a stay at any ACCOR around the world.

Fairmont, Raffles and Swissotel and part of ACCOR, in 2017 introduced its Famous Agents Academy as a part of its Famous Agents program, and that since has been rolled into this program.

## Hilton

Hilton offers an online program providing facts and information about its wide portfolio of hotel brands through its Hilton Worldwide Agent Education Tool. The company recently relaunched this education tool.



IHG offers online training for travel professionals through its IHG Agent University.

The university currently lists nine course offerings—seven core courses and two electives—designed to inform agents about IHG’s offerings and wide variety of brands. Core courses include learning about IHG’s loyalty programs, its upscale brands, its midscale brands and its extended stay brands. Electives include an introductory course on the university itself and IHG’s history as well as a dive into IHG rates, commissions and the global distribution system.

To take the courses, agents first must register on the IHG Travel Consultant Connection site and can then take classes on their own schedule through the site. Completing courses makes agents eligible to win IHG Rewards Club points.



Marriott offers a full online library of training resources for travel professionals with its Hotel Excellence! program.

The program is available in 10 languages and covers information specific to Marriott,



such as its brand portfolio, pricing and commission policies, as well as broader hotel industry knowledge and sales tips. Modules in the program are designed to work on any web-enabled device, such as computers, phones and laptops.

Agents who complete the program gain access to Marriott’s “Fam-Tastic” special rates around the world, newsletters detailing the latest Marriott-related news and additional tools and resources to help sell Marriott’s properties. Agency owners can also access enhanced commission as one of Marriott’s Preferred Travel Agency partners.

## OMNI HOTELS & RESORTS

Omni University is designed to help travel professionals discover all of the ways that Omni can meet their clients’ needs through the hotels in their various collections. The course provides an overview of the Resort Collection, City Center Collection, Landmark Collection, and Convention Collection. The course also provides information on the Global Hotel Alliance, the world’s largest alliance of independent hotel groups, of which Omni is a part.



Those who complete the course get their own downloadable “Omni Specialist” diploma as well as regular updates on Omni’s new projects and renovations, sample travel itineraries and special offers from Omni.






Members of the Radisson Rewards for Business can learn more about Radisson's brand and major destinations through its QuizBook training module. This one is quick — it takes only about five minutes to complete — and agents get a chance to win bonus points for the program upon completion.

## WYNDHAM HOTELS & RESORTS

Travel professionals can learn more about Wyndham's portfolio of nearly 9,000 hotels around the world through its online Wyndham Wise Training Course. The program also teaches travel professionals how to sell more to key markets. Travel professionals will be entered for a chance to win a gift card upon completion.

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# A SUMMER IN REVIEW: TRAVEL DEMAND GROWTH

**A**s summer begins to wind down, forecasts and economic factors indicate a busy travel season, although hotels face a more challenging market than in recent years.

Hotel data firm STR cut its projections for growth of U.S. revenue per available room—a metric that shows the combined effects for occupancy levels and rate—from 2.3 percent to 2 percent for the full year of 2019. That cut came after several U.S. markets saw RevPAR declines during the first quarter. In New York, RevPAR dropped 4.2 percent year over year, likely due to lower rates amid supply growth. RevPAR also dropped in Chicago (3.3 percent) and Philadelphia (6.4 percent), due in part to sluggish group business demand, according to STR.

Other U.S. cities had stronger performances in the quarter including San Francisco, Orlando and Nashville, STR reported, and RevPAR growth for many hotel companies has continued throughout the summer.

In his company's second quarter earnings call **Marriott International** CEO Arne Sorenson said the hotel company saw

## San Juan Marriott Resort & Stellaris Casino



**Caribbean/Latin America:** Marriott reported an 8 percent increase year over year in RevPAR in the Caribbean, where demand increased following several U.S. carriers increasing their service levels to the islands in the first quarter, though RevPAR was up only 0.6 percent year over year in the second quarter. Brazil also saw record demand during Carnival. RevPAR was down in Mexico, however, in part due to U.S. travel warnings for its neighboring nation.

group revenue bookings made during the quarter increase 6 percent year over year, and booking pace over the next year is up due in part to strong corporate demand.

**Hyatt Hotels Corp.** saw group bookings decline at U.S. full-service hotels in the quarter 2.9 percent year over year in revenue and 3.7 percent year over year in room nights, though rates were up slightly. Group business is particularly struggling in Chicago, Hyatt CEO Mark Hoplamazian said.

Overall, however, STR projects U.S. hotel rate growth this year will be 1.9 percent, which is flat when taking inflation into consideration.

Even so, the U.S. lodging industry appears poised to stay on “stable footing” at least through 2020, even as RevPAR growth slows, according to PwC’s Hospitality Directions analysis published in May. Economic factors in the United States remain positive: Unemployment should drop to around 3.5 percent this summer as GDP and consumer spending continue to grow, albeit at a slower pace than before, according to PwC.

The longer-term outlook is less rosy. MMGY Global CEO Clayton Reid cautioned that the U.S. eventually will be seeing “a slowdown across every travel category.” Reid predicted that early next year, leisure demand levels would shrink to what they

## The Tower Hotel - London



**Europe:** Markets in Europe are expected to have a slight decline in RevPAR in the region, though performance in some markets were strong in the quarter. RevPAR was up 4 percent in London, though demand in Paris was down amid political demonstration in the city. London, Barcelona, and Turkey are showing strong growth trends as well.



were in 2002, followed by corporate demand. Certain travel groups will remain strong after that point—older travelers, for example, and young solo travelers—but the larger segments, including middle-class families and small businesses, will show shrinking travel demand. As such, the industry is likely to see travelers booking in closer to their travel time



Raffles Dubai

**Middle East:** Hilton projects soft RevPAR growth in the region this year. Rates in the United Arab Emirates are under pressure following recent supply growth, and leisure travel to both there and Saudi Arabia has been somewhat weak.



Hotel Jen Beijing

**Asia/Pacific:** RevPAR is expected to grow in this region between 3 percent and 5 percent year over year for 2019. Japan and China, despite weaker demand at the beginning of the year are expected to strengthen for the rest of the year. Indonesia, Thailand and Vietnam are all expected to see the largest increases in passenger air travel over the next several years outside of the China, India and the United States.

and taking more frequent but shorter trips with lower levels of spending, he said.

International travel inbound to the U.S. has been a bigger challenge as well. After a stable February, inbound international travel to the U.S. was down 5.4 percent year over year in March, though some of that decline is likely related to Easter occurring later in April this year. Interest in the U.S. as a destination seems stable, with the U.S. keeping its share of international lodging searches steady year over year in April,

according to USTA. Travel to the U.S. from Japan appears to be on the rise this year, while travel to the U.S. from China is on the decline, the association reported.

At any rate, it's worth noting that the U.S. is nearing a record stretch of growth in the hotel industry, and all growth cycles must eventually end. Down cycles, meanwhile, present their own opportunities for travel professionals, including a chance to strengthen supplier relationships and to win trust from clients through available deals.



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