



# today's hotelier

August 2019 | [todayshotelier.com](http://todayshotelier.com)

THE OFFICIAL PUBLICATION OF AHA

## C-SUITE

Laura Miller of Chase talks card fraud

## IN THIS ISSUE:

### LAW & TOURISM

How economic growth impacts police and visitors to their area

## FEATURE

Data and hotel security:  
Everything you need to know  
about protecting your data, your  
property, and your business

## ADA COMPLIANCE

Which of these is not like the  
others? Service animals, comfort  
animals, pets, and the ADA

## PLUS:

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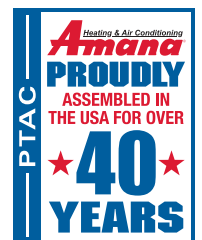
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1100 Abernathy Road, Suite 725  
Atlanta, GA 30328  
P: (404) 816-5759  
info@aahoa.com  
www.aahoa.com

**AAHOA STAFF CONTRIBUTORS**

**Toni-Anne Barry**  
Communications &  
Public Affairs Coordinator

**Lisa Brown**  
Copy Editor

**Heather Carnes**  
Director, Marketing

**Peter Clerkin**  
Director, Communications

**James Jenkins**  
Senior Vice President Business  
Development

**Rachel Humphrey**  
Interim President & CEO

**Kati Siconolfi**  
Director, State and Local  
Government Affairs

**Kathryn Stone**  
Chief of Staff

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**NAYLOR**  
ASSOCIATION SOLUTIONS

5950 NW First Place  
Gainesville, FL 32607  
P: (800) 369-6220

www.naylor.com

todayshotelier@naylor.com

**NAYLOR STAFF CONTRIBUTORS**

**Sunny Goel**  
Design/Layout

**Kira Krewson**  
Sales Manager

**Rob Lee**  
Publisher

**John O'Neil**  
Advertising Director

**Nancy Taylor**  
Senior Marketing Specialist

**Geneva Toddy**  
Managing Editor

**Tracy Venzen**  
Project Coordinator

**Chris Zabel**  
Advertising Associate

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Editorial inquiries: [todayshotelier@naylor.com](mailto:todayshotelier@naylor.com)

Advertising inquiries: [John O'Neil](mailto:John O'Neil), [joneil@naylor.com](mailto:joneil@naylor.com)



## Safe employees are happy employees

**JAGRUTI PANWALA**  
AAHOA Chairwoman (2019-2020)

“Going to work each day knowing that help is on the way with one quick push of a button allows employees to feel safer and more secure.”

**C**OMPREHENSIVE HOTEL safety must include security precautions for hotel staff. Employee safety devices (ESDs) are one method that several brands have found to be uniquely successful in both protecting employees and increasing their feeling of security when going to work each day. These devices, also called panic buttons, are usually specific to hotel employees who frequently go into guest rooms, such as housekeepers, and other employees who work by themselves. They are a small, easily accessible, and subtle way for hotel staff to call for help in the event of an emergency.

ESDs are a great tool because they create a direct line of communication between staff no matter where they are. If a crisis arises and the button is pressed, an alert will immediately be sent to other employees in the hotel who will know there is an emergency and can respond quickly. This can dramatically reduce the amount of time it takes for help to arrive, whether it is other hotel staff or first responders. Any situation, regardless of the type of problem, can and should be diffused as quickly as possible and ESDs are a dependable way to give employees the ability to report issues as soon as they happen.

Certain states are even looking to pass legislation that would require hotels to

provide ESDs for hotel employees. In New Jersey, for example, a new regulation stipulates that all hotels with more than 100 rooms must give housekeeping staff and other employees who go into guest rooms ESDs to carry at all times beginning in January 2020. Similar regulations are gaining support in various states throughout the country, so it is important to take note of any ESD initiatives that might be gaining support in your state to prepare for new requirements.

If you think ESDs could be a good fit for your property and your staff, there is no need to wait for your state or locality to pass a regulation before implementing them. ESDs should not be seen as an added expense, the potential ROI and long-term benefits greatly outweigh the cost. Providing these devices to employees can directly impact employee retention and make your hotel more appealing to job seekers. This added security measure will set your property apart from others that do not have it. Going to work each day knowing that help is on the way with one quick push of a button allows employees to feel safer and more secure. It is a simple but impactful benefit that you can highlight to all potential hires. I encourage all AAHOA Members to research this new tool and consider introducing it to their properties. Your current and future staff will thank you for it! ■

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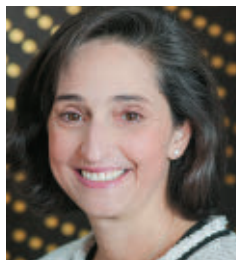


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## Protecting your staff, your guests, and yourself

**RACHEL HUMPHREY**  
AAHOA Interim President & CEO

**T**HE STANDARD FACETS OF hotel security have changed immensely in the past several years. In the era of data breaches, for example, hotels have had to adopt and acclimate to new data security measures, and even the switch to mobile key cards is becoming increasingly popular among brands to increase room safety. These developments are helping our industry evolve and better suit the needs of guests. But hoteliers shouldn't allow traditional security measures to become outdated while these new safety features are being implemented. Protocol for standard emergency issues like a fire, natural disaster, or criminal activity should regularly be updated in the same way hoteliers continually improve their digital security.

With this in mind, it's important to recognize that the best security protocol of one hotel might differ greatly from another. Location brings certain challenges that are unique to that area, from extreme weather to specific types of crime. For this reason, getting the expert opinions of local law enforcement and emergency responders is essential. Meeting with personnel from the local sheriff's department or even a fire marshal over a cup of coffee can help you understand the unique challenges your area faces that you might not be aware of. It's also a chance to highlight security issues your business has faced that you're not sure how to properly handle. In both cases, they can assist you in determining optimal security measures and emergency strategies based on their experiences and knowledge of what is working for other local businesses.

This is a great opportunity to ask questions on specific ways to improve the

security measures you do have in place, even if they already meet local, state, and federal requirements. Hearing first hand about your property can better enable them to identify areas where you might need another security camera or help you create more efficient emergency exit routes. They are the most informed professionals to let you know if there are any gaps in your security.

Staff training is another area you can discuss with these officials. As every hotelier knows, all hotel staff receive a slew of training during their onboarding process, but they can suggest additional trainings that could supplement the training you already provide to help your employees better prepare and react to different emergency situations. This could be anything from a threatening person entering the hotel to what to do in the event of a power outage. Your employees will feel more secure going to work each day knowing that they have the tools necessary to handle any situation that could come their way.

Reaching out to local law enforcement and first responders will help you improve the overall safety of your hotel for guests, your staff, and the property itself. It will also foster a relationship between your business and first responders that will benefit both parties in the event of a crisis. You and your employees will be more in tune with what to expect and because your employees are prepared, they will be able to offer assistance to officers as needed. Starting off with a simple conversation can reap long-term benefits and protections for the business you've worked so hard to build. Make this a part of your business plan by scheduling that visit today. ■

## 5 THINGS TO KNOW ABOUT AAHOA THIS MONTH

1

### August Regionals

Join AAHOA at one of its seven Regional Conferences & Trade Shows this month:

North Carolina (Raleigh) August 1  
Georgia (Atlanta) August 6  
Upper Midwest (Des Moines, IA) August 12  
Mid Atlantic (Cherry Hill, NJ) August 14  
Northwest (Portland, OR) August 20  
Upper Midwest (Elmhurst, IL) August 22

2

### Hotel Data

Vice Chairman Biran Patel, Treasurer Vinay Patel, and Young Professional Director Eastern Division Purvi Panwala will represent AAHOA at the Hotel Data Conference in Nashville, TN, August 14-16. They will discuss how to deal with current and future labor issues and how to prepare for the next economic downturn.

3

### Northwest & Charlotte Golf

AAHOA is proud to host two charitable golf tournaments this month. Register today at [aahoa.com](http://aahoa.com).

Northwest Region Charity Golf Tournament (Camas, WA) August 19  
Charlotte Charity Golf Tournament (Charlotte, NC) August 24-25

4

### G6 BAM

G6 owners attending the G6 Hospitality Conference are invited to attend the G6 Hospitality Brand Alliance Meeting 6-7 p.m. on August 26 to learn more about your free AAHOA membership.

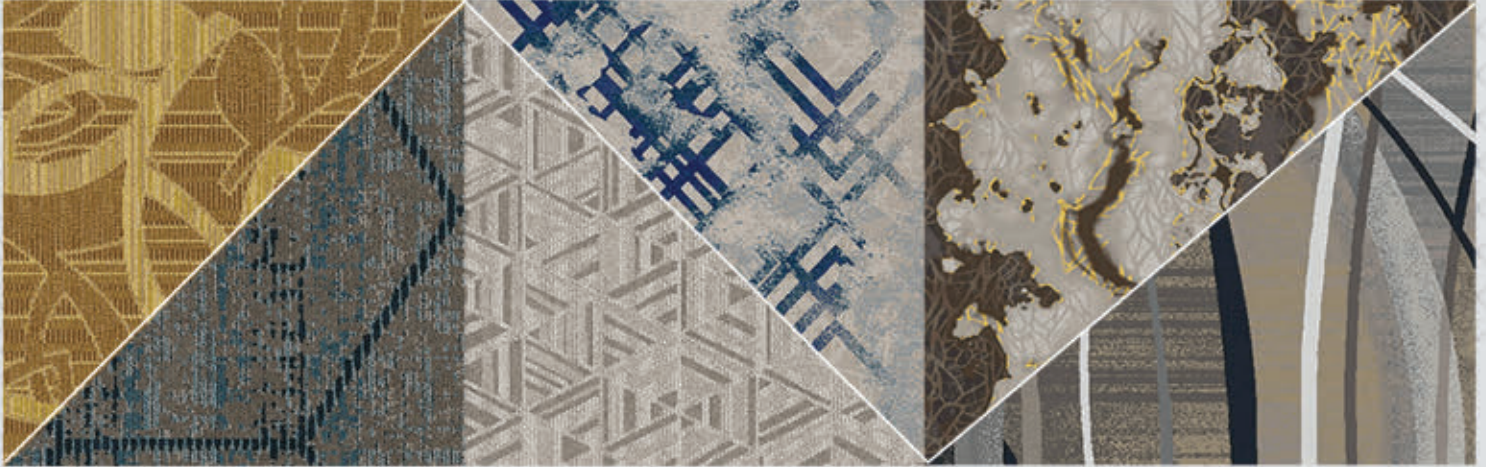
5

### Southern Lodging Summit

AAHOA heads to Memphis, TN, on August 27-28 to participate in the Southern Lodging Summit. Vice President of Government Affairs Chirag Shah will join panelists from AHLA and the Tennessee Hospitality and Tourism Association to forecast how immigration, foreign trade and tariffs, labor shortages, and inbound tourism will affect our industry.



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# Beyond benefits: Health Reimbursement Arrangements

by TONI-ANNE BARRY



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OFFERING COMPETITIVE employee benefits is essential for employers to attract talented job seekers, but it can be tough for small businesses. With rising health care costs, health insurance is one of the top benefits that employees are on the lookout for and having an insurance plan can be the difference between someone accepting a job or staying on the market. Supplying full insurance plans, however, isn't feasible for many small businesses, especially businesses with fewer than 20 employees. This is a growing concern for employers and employees alike, but a new rule issued by the Trump administration seeks to fix this issue. The rule will allow employers to contribute to their employees' health care costs through Health Reimbursement Arrangements (HRAs) without having to provide full plans.

HRAs are employer-funded accounts that help cover the cost of individually purchased plans within the Affordable Care Act market. Before this rule was instituted, HRAs were only able to cover out-of-pocket expenses. But now, employers can support and encourage their employees to enroll in health insurance plans by providing tax-sheltered funds for their HRA that can be directly used to pay their monthly premiums. The administration estimates that up to 800,000 employers will offer reimbursement arrangements to more than 11 million American workers once the rule goes into effect on Jan. 1, 2020.

AAHOA Vice Chairman Biran Patel had the distinct honor of attending the White House Rose Garden ceremony as President Trump unveiled the new HRA rule. Biran said, "The competitive labor market and the labor shortage affecting our industry mean that hoteliers must be more creative in assembling benefit

packages to attract and retain employees. HRAs are yet another tool we can use to ensure our employees have access to affordable health care, and that allows us to remain competitive in the benefits we offer."

For hoteliers who don't currently offer insurance plans to their employees, HRAs could be a great way to contribute to the costs of employees' health care in a more manageable way. Not only is it an added benefit for individuals who previously did not have an insurance plan at all, but employees who had access to only one plan can now pick an insurance plan that is best suited for them if their employer opts to use HRAs. Under this structure, employees will have greater discretion across the board when it comes to their medical coverage, and all small business owners can strengthen their business by offering such an appealing benefit to their staff. ■



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# The hospitality industry faces significant risks from card fraudsters...but there's hope

by LAURA MILLER, PRESIDENT, CHASE MERCHANT SERVICES COMMERCIAL BANKING SEGMENT

**P**AYMENTS FRAUD CONTINUES to increase across industries. A record 82 percent of organizations reported payments fraud incidents in 2018.<sup>1</sup> And, according to the American Hotel & Lodging Association, more than half of all credit card fraud takes place within the hospitality industry – with total losses approaching \$3 billion annually.

While chip-enabled cards safeguard the physical front desk against counterfeit card fraud, fraudulent online hotel bookings are expected to increase in the coming years. Industry estimates suggest online booking fraud could increase by as much as 25 percent.<sup>2</sup> The hospitality industry is considered to be a major source of the compromised card credentials criminals use to commit counterfeit card fraud.

## PROTECTING YOUR BUSINESS

Unlike in the movies, most crimes are not elaborate jewelry heists committed by attractive but wayward protagonists who engage in witty repartee. They are crimes of “opportunity.” A criminal spots an opportunity to steal and they take it. Card fraud, virtual or physical, is the same.

The good news is there are steps you can take to protect your business. You can minimize your fraud risk in a few simple steps, freeing you to focus on other, revenue-generating aspects of your business.

The first step is to take the Payment Card Industry (PCI) Security Standards Council Self-Assessment Questionnaire



Laura Miller, President, Chase Merchant Services Commercial Banking Segment





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to help you evaluate your security practices and determine where you have gaps. The council also provides a list of best practices that hoteliers can use to help protect their business:

- ➔ Replace default passwords with strong passwords and regularly update them.
- ➔ Protect card data and only store what you need.
- ➔ Inspect payment terminals for tampering and discontinue use of compromised equipment.
- ➔ Use trusted business partners and know how to quickly contact them and escalate issues.
- ➔ Install patches and updates provided to you by your software vendors.
- ➔ Strictly limit in-house access to card data (and know the employees who do have access).
- ➔ Don't give hackers easy physical or digital access to your systems.
- ➔ Use reputable antivirus software and install the updates they provide to you.
- ➔ Regularly scan for vulnerabilities and fix issues.
- ➔ Use secure payment terminals and solutions.
- ➔ Use a firewall to protect your business from internet intrusions.
- ➔ Encrypt data to make it useless if stolen by criminals.

Not every data breach is caused by malicious criminals. According to the 2018 Cost of a Data Breach study published by IBM and the Ponemon Institute, only half of all data breaches are due to malicious or criminal attacks. Human error and system glitches account for the remaining half. Regardless of their root cause, the PCI Security Standards Council's best practices strengthen your defenses against the financial and reputational cost of a data breach.

### BEST PRACTICES FOR THE LODGING INDUSTRY

There are unique rules in place for credit card processing in the lodging industry. These rules help protect the

“Unlike in the movies, most crimes are not elaborate jewelry heists, committed by attractive but wayward protagonists who engage in witty repartee.”

cardholder, but they also can protect you from fraud. Knowledgeable criminals know sophisticated ways to “game” the system. These rules can help you stay one step ahead:

1. If a guest's charges exceed the initial estimated authorization amount obtained at check-in, always obtain an incremental authorization approval for the additional transaction amount.
2. If a stay extends beyond two weeks, you should settle the transaction and obtain authorization for a new transaction.
3. If a guest “purchased” additional items during their stay (e.g., mini bar items), you must provide the cardholder an amended receipt and process the transaction within 24 hours after checkout.
4. In the case of damages to property, the cardholder must expressly approve the charge before the merchant processes the transaction.
5. In the case of Dynamic Currency Conversion (when/if you display the purchase price in the cardholder's own currency), the cardholder must be offered a choice to accept or decline DCC and must actively choose the DCC option prior to the transaction being processed.

### FRAUD HAPPENS. WHAT'S NEXT?

So, what should you do if, despite your best efforts, you do experience fraud or a data breach? First, quickly identifying and containing the activity will reduce the impact to your business's reputation and to customer trust. Here are the

specific steps you should take if fraud does occur:

1. First, call your merchant provider and notify them immediately of any suspected fraudulent activity. They can work with you to help identify the cause and then develop a strategy to help contain it. They may advise you to engage your property management system (PMS) and gateway solution providers.
2. Once the issue has been contained, you should work closely with your merchant provider to identify potential security vulnerabilities and implement more robust security measures to help prevent future fraudulent activity.
3. Finally, depending on the scope of the fraud or breach, you may be advised to alert the Payment Brands (e.g., Visa, Mastercard) and the PCI council.

### THE HUMAN FACTOR

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- 1 AFP Payments Fraud & Control Survey, 2019
- 2 Kount, eBook: Fraud Takes Off In The Travel And Leisure Industry



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# LAW & TOURISM

## How economic growth impacts law enforcement and visitors to their area

by ADAM WEBB

ENRIQUE RAMOS/SHUTTERSTOCK.COM

**L**AW ENFORCEMENT CAN HAVE A LOT OF FACES. IT can help stop robberies, find a missing person, and track down a fugitive on the run. But how does all of this apply to local businesses?

It may not be the first thing that comes to mind when you think of law enforcement and community interaction, but when it comes to tourism, the police force can lend a helping hand quite often. In Williamson County, TN, just south of Davidson County, home of state capital Nashville, communities like Franklin and Liepers Fork are leaving their own footprint on the tourism scene.

Ellie Westman Chin is the president and CEO of Visit Franklin, a business set up to be a concierge service for the bustling little town. In her five years of living and working in Franklin, Chin says the police help ensure not only visitor safety but that of the locals as well.

"There are a couple different ways we work with the police department," Chin said.

She and Franklin Police Department spokesman Lt. Charlie Warner work together to ensure everyone in the area stays safe and knows what's open for their needs.

"First is when there's any kind of weather event, like my first year here there was a big ice storm. Of course, we had visitors in our hotels and so what our visitors wanted to know

was 'Are there any places to eat? Are any of the restaurants open? Is the mall open?'" Chin said.

"So, we had a big survey out to our partners and created a list to give to hotels to post on social media and say, 'These places are open even during an ice storm.' At the same time, the city and Charlie are posting things about what streets are closed and how the streets are getting cleared. What Charlie and I realized is that both the residents and the visitors need both of this information. The visitors want to know where they can drive and is it safe? And, of course, the residents want to know if the mall's open, can I go out to eat? So, we realized that was a pretty good marriage because of the information that we're sharing."

Ice storms are a pretty rare occurrence in Tennessee, and traditionally when they do occur, residents flood the grocery stores to stock up on milk and bread. But when a rogue patch of weather doesn't bring traffic to a standstill, events like the Pilgrimage Festival or this year's NFL Draft do.

"Charlie reached out and said, 'Hey, can you keep us posted on are hotels going to sell out?'" Chin said.

This year's NFL Draft occurred at the same time as the St. Jude Rock 'n' Roll Marathon in Nashville, as well as Franklin's biggest event, the Main Street Festival.

"So, they wanted to know if we were going to have a whole lot more people on our streets that we should be aware of.



So, we share with the police department when we know there's going to be an influx of people in our community," Chin said.

In addition to working with local tourism, local police departments hold yearly active-shooter training sessions and women's self-defense classes. Chin said she benefited from both and while they're voluntary, she recommended seeking out similar training.

With Franklin's continued growth comes its first hotel in the downtown area. Previously, visitors to Williamson County's largest city were forced to the outskirts of town or even farther. But in August, the Harpeth Hotel will open its doors on 2nd Avenue downtown.

"We're looking forward to opening the first hotel in the heart of this great city, offering visitors a refined yet comfortable place to stay and dine while they explore the unique culture and landscape of the area and create their own stories at our hotel," General Manager Justin Foster said in a press release.

Though this isn't Foster's first go round as a hotel general manager, he said guest safety and a rapport with local law enforcement are always important.

"Typically, you have a police liaison in the area. I had one in Utah and in California," Foster said. "I've always had a good relationship with that liaison. I've had them over for coffee or for lunch before. You hope you never have to make that call very often, but it's just a partnership to make sure your guests are safe."

If there's one theme that accompanies anyone in law enforcement, it would be safety. Officer Tommy Walsh has been a police officer for more than 30 years in Brentwood, the town that separates Franklin and Nashville, and he shares Foster's sentiment when it comes to hotel safety.

"I think security has certainly improved at many of the businesses and hotels in the area," Walsh said. "We have officers with specialized training who are available to conduct a security survey and provide recommendations. Beyond physical changes such as lighting, door locks, cameras, or other improvements that could be made, we would suggest businesses communicate with us regarding any suspicious activity or when they have a concern about anything that might be going on. We know from experience



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that those relationships are the best chance we have to prevent crime."

Walsh also shared the same opinion as Foster when it came to having a main point of contact for local businesses.

"We have an excellent working relationship with many local businesses and business owners. We work with many of the hotels in the city and have existing relationships with management. It is always helpful when hotel staff have a point of contact who they can call on when they have a question or concern," Walsh said.

He went on to say that some hotels learn about safety the hard way.

"Some is learned behavior after an incident and some is preventative in nature," Walsh said.

"Many of the department-type stores have loss-prevention staff that work with our officers on a regular basis. That has proven to be effective in both preventing criminal activity and arresting suspects who choose to commit criminal acts. We also have several hotels in the city [that] from time to time employ off-duty officers to help prevent issues from arising."

Although the city has grown over the past decade, Williamson County businesses and its law enforcement want to retain the small-town charm it has amassed over the years.

"Despite its growth, Franklin has managed to keep its down-home charm," Warner said. "That's a testament to the people who call Franklin home. Our residents are so supportive of our officers, and of the department's efforts and initiatives to keep them safe. They're amazing, actually. Our relationships with business owners, managers, and employees are important to us. Businesses want to thrive, and they recognize that the safety and their customers' feeling of well-being contribute to their continued success."

"From my view, it appears that the businesses, both new and existing, have benefited from the growth," Walsh said. "Anytime a city experiences growth, there is an impact. It might be more cars on the road, more people who live in the city or who may work or shop in the city. The police department has not seen a dramatic increase in calls for service, but we have seen an increase and have worked with the city to add additional officers as we continue to grow." ■



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# ***SECURITY SLIP-UP***

Steer clear  
of these five  
hotel security  
mistakes

by AMY BELL



**I**N LIGHT OF RECENT TRAGEDIES AND INCIDENTS, it's become clear that hotels and resorts are highly vulnerable to crime and security threats. In these uncertain times, five-star hotel security is no longer a luxury – it's a necessity.

Unfortunately, many hotels are disappointing their guests when it comes to hotel safety. "As one who has spent 60 to 80 nights a year in hotels all over the world, I have had the opportunity to see a lot of positive and proactive hotel security programs," says James H. Clark, CPP Staff Consultant with SRMC, LLC, an independent security consulting firm. "Conversely, I have also seen some not-so-good ones."

According to Rick Amweg, MPA, another security consultant with SRMC, it's not necessarily a matter of what hotels are doing to let their guests down – it's what they're not doing. "Many travelers consider a hotel their home away from home, and as such, they expect a rather personal approach to security," he says.

Want to keep your guests and property safe and sound? Avoid these five common hotel security mistakes.

#### **MISTAKE #1: AN INEFFECTIVE PLAN**

Far too many hotels suffer from lackluster security procedures or, worse yet, no security plan at all. Amweg says it is essential for every hotel to have a solid prevention plan that is tailored for their specific location. "A corporate security plan is a great start, but the plan has to be localized to the specific site," he explains.

William H. Nesbitt, CPP, President of Security Management Service International, wholeheartedly agrees. "Security is very much a situational discipline," he says. "This means that hotel security programs should be driven by need, and responsive to the ambient threat environment."

In order to establish a baseline, he says a comprehensive threat assessment is a must for every hotel. "This assessment should be conducted by a credentialed security professional who is independent (not tied to a line of security equipment and/or the provision of contract security guard). That is not to imply that security technology and security officers are not a potential part of the solution."

Of course, it's pointless to have a security plan if your employees do not understand or follow the procedures. "Hotel security is not the responsibility of just the management team," Amweg says. "Every team member, every housekeeper, maintenance person, front-desk employee, and so on has a role to play in providing a secure environment. You can prevent a lot of bad things from happening when every employee has been trained to have security as part of their job."

Which leads us to...

#### **MISTAKE #2: LACK OF TRAINING**

When hotel employees do not receive proper security training, threats are overlooked and mistakes are made. These oversights could lead to a serious incident and ultimately

result in the injury or death of hotel guests or employees. Such a tragedy can forever tarnish a hotel's reputation, which is why security experts say training is an essential investment for every hotel.

"The most significant action a hotel manager can take is to constantly train staff on their responsibilities for checking IDs, being cautious and deliberate when activating key cards, and being aware of suspicious behavior or unsafe conditions within the hotel, such as frequent traffic into a hotel room, propped-open remote doors, and late-night parking-lot activity," Clark says.

He also points out that hotel bartenders and wait staff should be well-trained on safe serving practices. "They need to have a sound plan of action when dealing with an intoxicated patron," he says. "I have observed hotel bar managers over-serve patrons based on the premise that they are overnight guests and will not be driving. Even if that is true, intoxicated patrons are a liability for any hotel and are sometimes prone to become aggressive with other patrons."

Additionally, security training should not be treated as a "one and done" situation. For hotels, security education should be seen as an ongoing process, says Mac Segal, Vice President of Business Development and Consulting, EMEA, for international security company AS Solution.

"Security is not a wave the magic wand from today to tomorrow and it's all in place," Segal says. "It's an evolving process of education and awareness. Everybody on the property should have security awareness and basic training to notice a suspicious individual or bag. The receptionist should be trained, the bellboys, and the concierge. We preach this and do this for more and more hotels."

Of course, most hotel employees have probably heard the phrase, "If you see something, say something." However, Segal points out that without proper training, this is a vacant mantra. "If you see what, tell who?" he poses. Unfortunately, he says, many hoteliers simply aren't willing to invest in ongoing security training. "Security education is super important, but it's a harder sell than you might think."

### **MISTAKE #3: NO VISIBLE SECURITY ON THE GUEST FLOORS**

While plenty of hotels, particularly casino resorts, have many security officers onsite, Segal points out that these officers are rarely on the guest floors. "You never seem to see security on the guest floors. They're all downstairs on the gaming floor watching the money," he says. "Their job is to make sure no one is stealing money from the casino. But if they're also there to protect the guests, how come you rarely bump into them in the elevators or walking around on the guest floor?"

This leaves guests vulnerable to all kinds of security threats, including theft, abduction, and assault. "Bad buys could just walk around the hallways and say it's housekeeping and try to get into rooms," Segal says. "Unless security has been called



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to a room for a specific purpose, in U.S. hotels I've never run into a security officer walking around the room floors during the day or night. And I work with the highest luxury brands and I've stayed in low-end hotels at airports."

He says if security officers spent more time patrolling these hallways, it would give guests a greater sense of security and well-being. "I think that would go a long way to show duty of care toward your guests, if the security personnel were actually visible – not only on the casino floor or outside the front door," he says. "Also, it's a deterrent for anyone on the property that's thinking about room theft or child abduction or some other criminal activity."

### **MISTAKE #4: OVER-RELIANCE ON CAMERAS**

If you think surveillance cameras are the magic bullet to end all security threats, think again. "Hotels tend to rely, and maybe over-rely, on technology to address security issues," Amweg says.

Segal echoes that sentiment. "No camera has ever stopped a gunman," he says. While more and more hotels are installing cameras in the lobby, elevators, and even guest corridors (primarily outside of the U.S.), Segal says cameras should not be viewed as a replacement for security personnel. "Guests want to feel safe, and there's an expectation of visible security. I think the public wants to see it, and I think they feel good if they can see it."





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### MISTAKE #5: ZERO-STAR TREATMENT FROM SECURITY OFFICERS

When it comes to protecting hotel guests and property, an effective team of security officers is crucial. However, what happens when one of these officers is forced to interact with a hotel guest? In most cases, Segal says, they fail miserably.

“Usually, the security team is contracted,” he explains. “So, they’re not as experienced as the rest of the hotel employees in guest relations.” While guests at high-end hotels receive polite, friendly, five-star service from the receptionist, concierge, bellboy, and food-service employees, they are typically not met with the same level of professionalism when they interact with a security officer.

“So, when people have to interact with security, they’re thinking, ‘What happened to the five-star service?’” Segal says. “Because very often, those officers have been trained in security by whatever external company has been contracted. They’ve got their guard license, but they haven’t been trained in guest relations and hotel operations and the guest experience. I think that’s a major downfall. I seldom see hotel chains that invest in training the security team in guest interface.”

### BALANCING ACT

Security is a tricky issue for all businesses, and hotels are certainly not immune. Yet, considering the current climate, it’s more important than ever for hoteliers to enact a solid security program.

“Once upon a time, security used to make people nervous,” Segal says. “But that expectation has changed. Now, people want to see security.”

He goes on to say that security can feel like a balancing act. “There’s a seesaw of freedom and security,” he says. “The more security you have, the less freedom you have, and the more freedom you have, the less security you have. And the fulcrum of that seesaw is threat. The higher the perceived threat level, the more freedoms we’re willing to sacrifice in order to feel safe and secure. I don’t think most hotels are getting there yet.”

However, if hoteliers steer clear of these common mistakes and invest in plenty of training, it is possible to strike the ideal security balance. ■

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# DATA AND HOTEL SECURITY:

Everything you need to know about protecting your data, your property, and your business

by FAITH HALEH ROBINSON





**D**ATA PROTECTION IS THE PROCESS OF safeguarding important information from any kind of loss or fraud, as well as protecting individual information during an exchange of transactions. It can directly affect customers' trust in your business and, as a consequence, can also affect your reputation and revenue. For example, Marriott International was a victim of one of the largest data breaches in history. As a result of the breach, customer details were being accessed from as far back as 2014. As a result, the personal information of about 383 million customers was exposed.

It is a priority that hoteliers know how they can better protect their hotel and their guests, especially with all the vulnerabilities surrounding important data.

### DATA PROTECTION: HOW TO PROTECT YOUR HOTEL AND GUESTS

A vast amount of personal information is shared online. From sending confirmation emails to recording data from guests, business owners need to be aware of the risks their hotels could encounter, both internally and externally.

Different types of data protection are:

- ➔ **Confidential internal data:** Hotel/business-specific information, i.e., bank accounts, email accounts, social media accounts, legal information, utilities, etc.
- ➔ **Customer personal data:** Guest names/addresses/user accounts, Social Security numbers, flight information, and room information
- ➔ **Financial data:** Credit/debit card numbers, payment account data (PayPal), guest bank information/accounts

The PCI (Payment Card Industry) Security Standards Council is designed to protect credit card holders and provide regulations to reduce credit card fraud. According to PCI standards, the best way to maximize the security of a cardholder's data is to continuously monitor and enforce the use of controls specified within PCI standards. Becoming familiar with compliance standards from major credit cards that are a part of the PCI's executive committee, such as American Express, Mastercard, Visa/Visa Europe, Discover, and JCB International, also is of major importance.

Analyzing how data is stored internally within your business is the first step to protecting you and your guests. Some questions that may help guide you to better assessing and defending your business are:

- ➔ **What kind of information are you obtaining from your guests?** For example, what kind of personal information is needed for your business (mailing addresses, emails, account information, etc.)? Is the information you are taking from your clients really essential for your hotel?
- ➔ **What devices are being used to store guests' information?** Are you using the latest technology or services to secure this data?

- ➔ **Who has access to the data?** What kind of protection mechanisms are in place to help lower risks of cyberattacks?
- ➔ **What kind of data is stored?** What external and internal services are in place or being utilized? Who among your staff members has access to this type of information?
- ➔ **What are the compliance requirements for data security?** Are you learning about them and actively implementing them as you learn?

Answering these questions can help you better understand and evaluate how you are setting up a better defense system against certain cyberattacks and security breaches.

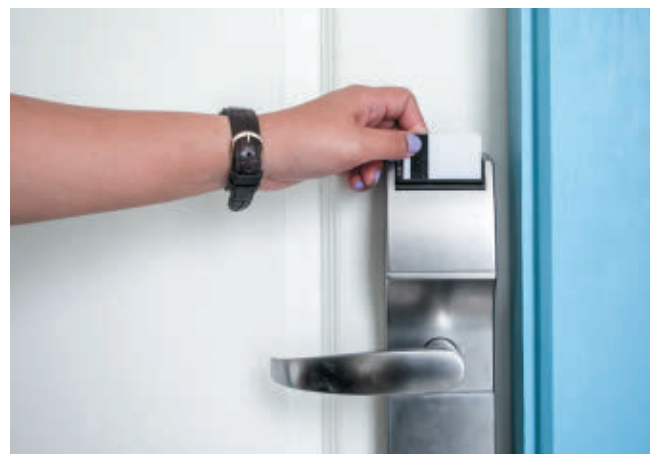
### PROPERTY PROTECTION

According to the Bureau of Justice Statistics, more than 50,000 violent crimes, combined with property crimes, struck hotels annually between 2004 and 2008.

As soon as customers walk into your hotel, hoteliers must ensure that their guests are safe within their property.

"Training is critical. Report anything suspicious, call 911," said Alex Kramer, president of Elite Hotel Group, as advice to hotel owners.

Kramer reports from experience that hoteliers and their employees can witness suspicious activity or an act of violence at any moment while working. He says that there have been countless suspicious stories, quite commonly consisting of "guests" asking staff members to replace lost keys. Without asking for any kind of identification or confirming that the guest's name matches with the name on file, the staff member may innocently give a person access to a room that is not theirs. Although the staff member may be unaware, this is a safety hazard and can leave room for crimes to occur. If the employee is trained to ask for a guest's form of identification in these instances, it can greatly reduce the consequences of suspicious activity.



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Of course, the guest may still say something like, "My ID is in my hotel room," before shrugging their shoulders and expecting to receive a new key immediately.

In this situation, Kramer says, “Train your staff members to escort guests to their rooms so they can get their wallet or purse.” This is imperative in order to help prevent successful acts of suspicious activity and violence against guests at your hotel. Staff members need to be highly trained to keep a strict policy with guests, especially when those guests are asking for new room keys or any information pertaining to a specific individual’s room number. Always ask for identification when situations like these arise. The more well trained your staff members are in safety and security, the better protected your property will be.

Having additional help on your property, such as hiring security, also is hugely important. This is not only beneficial for your guests, but it also can reduce crime and theft rates in your establishment. Bringing in a security guard to monitor a hotel parking lot and the hallways inside the hotel can help reduce potential risks and also comes with the added bonus of giving guests peace of mind and assurance during their stay.



If hoteliers are faced with tight budgets and are not able to hire more help in the way of security, Kramer recommends having a good relationship with the local police force.

“We offer [the local police] free coffee and breakfast around the clock so they can patrol the area and even come inside. This way, they are around and show their presence. It’s a relatively inexpensive way of ensuring that you’re getting extra protection,” Kramer says.

## PROTECT YOURSELF AND YOUR BUSINESS

Amber Welch, privacy technical lead at Schellman & Company, LLC, and cybersecurity expert, offers beneficial tips for hotel owners on how they can keep their business and guests protected:

- ➔ **Change default hotel passwords on devices and property management systems.**

Your PMS, such as AAHOA\*PMS by Autoclerk, is the primary location where user data will be stored and processed, so protecting it is very important.

- ➔ **Keep computers with administrative access locked away from guests.**

For example, if you have a machine used for remote administrative access to the PMS, it should not be located in the business center or just behind the front desk. It should be

secured, like paper records would be, in a management office that can be locked.

- ➔ **Secure Wi-Fi and Ethernet ports (or remove them).**

WPA2 enterprise for internal staff Wi-Fi and a captive portal for guest Wi-Fi should be two different networks and require different passcodes in order to access each. As far as Ethernet goes, you can simply remove faceplates with ports or drywall over them.

- ➔ **Keep internal devices and systems off of guest Wi-Fi.**

Internal devices are things that are connected to your PMS or any confidential data. This would be your employee desktop/laptop computers, any servers, and IoT devices like smart locks or CCTV. Guest Wi-Fi should not be used for these devices.

- ➔ **Be careful of vendors that process data.**

As an example, if you outsource your marketing to a company, that marketing company is a vendor that processes data because you give them personal information for the purpose of marketing for your hotel. Any company with access to customer, employee, or other personal and financial information could accidentally leak that information or even sell it illegally. Be smart about which vendors you trust with your data.

- ➔ **Patch and update devices frequently.**

A patch is a collection of updates and security fixes for systems and devices. Patches tend to be more specific to security flaws and vulnerabilities.

- ➔ **The biggest vulnerabilities are vendor breaches, phishing attacks, not patching, and not encrypting data.**

A vendor breach is when a vendor (contractor/sub-processor) is hacked and your company’s data is compromised. Patching is applying the patches addressed above within the appropriate timeline. Encryption is the use of coding to protect data at rest in a database or in transit over a network. If a patch is not updated in a timely manner, if a vendor is hacked, or if the hotel’s data is not correctly encrypted, it can result in a leakage of crucial and confidential information.

- ➔ **Make sure vendors are contractually liable for breaches, obligated to inform you, and responsible for damages.**

Know who you are hiring and their policies, as well as any updates they may undergo that may impact your business.

- ➔ **Check out Cybrary.com for free security awareness training.**

If you would like cybersecurity training, or would like your staff members to have additional training, cybrary.com may be a start to develop additional skills.

- ➔ **Be careful of phishing attacks and use two-factor authentication whenever possible.**

Phishing is a type of cyberattack that involves someone luring a target through email, texts, or telephone “fishing” for data and other personal information.

- ➔ **Suggest hired technical professionals attend conferences and give them a training budget.**

- ➔ **Change guest Wi-Fi passwords quarterly or use a captive portal.**



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# Which of these is not like the others? Service animals, comfort animals, pets, and the ADA

by DAY AL-MOHAMED and BRUNA E. PEDRINI

**T**RAVELERS WITH DISABILITIES in the United States spend more than \$13.6 billion annually and seek high-quality hospitality experiences. Among these travelers, more than 20,000 use service animals. It is therefore important to understand what qualifies as a service animal under the Americans with

Disabilities Act (ADA), and what does not. Four key questions help clarify these situations.

## WHAT IS A SERVICE ANIMAL?

The ADA is very specific. Under the ADA, a “service animal” is only a dog (or miniature horse) that:

1. Is individually trained.
2. Works or performs tasks for individuals with physical, sensory,





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“‘Service animal’ is the only relevant term under the ADA. The ADA does not recognize comfort animals, therapy animals, or companion animals.”

animal whose sole function is to provide emotional support, comfort, therapy, or companionship is not a “service animal” under the ADA.

### HOW WILL I KNOW?

First, remember that service animals are not pets subject to a pet policy and can be ANY breed of dog. Second, the ADA does not require service animals to wear a vest, ID tag, or specific harness.

If it is not apparent what the animal does, you may legally ask only two questions:

1. Is the animal a service animal required because of a disability?
2. What work or task has the animal been trained to perform?

You cannot ask about the person’s disability, require medical documentation, identification for the animal, or ask that the animal demonstrate the work/task. If the person answers with specifics, you must assume the animal is a service animal.

### WHERE CAN THE SERVICE ANIMAL GO?

Persons with service animals may not be limited to “pet-friendly” rooms. Service animals go anywhere the handler can go and should never be left alone. If someone has an allergy or is afraid of animals, try to find a compromise, but if someone must relocate, always move the non-disabled individual.

### CAN A SERVICE ANIMAL BE REMOVED?

A service animal must be under the control of the handler at all times. Typically, the animal will be on a leash or harness, but control can also mean verbal control. If the service animal is not housebroken, is

out of control, or is growling and showing aggressive behavior, then the person with a disability may be asked to remove their service animal. The person with the disability must be allowed to stay without the dog or miniature horse. Before excluding a service animal, document the animal’s behavior immediately and completely.

Legitimate service animals perform critical tasks for persons with disabilities. These animals receive extensive training and are well-behaved, clean, nondisruptive, and under the handler’s control at all times. Staying informed helps to limit fake service animals and support and welcome your guests with service animals. Good information is good for business! ■

*Day Al-Mohamed is a multi-skilled disability policy executive with more than 15 years of experience working directly with public and private industries, as well as with national-level policymakers. She provides technical assistance and support on a variety of legislative and regulatory issues. She currently works for the U.S. Department of Labor to develop innovative strategies for enhancing workplace safety and health. She can be reached at [Day@DayInWashington.com](mailto:Day@DayInWashington.com).*

*Bruna E. Pedrini is of counsel to Fennemore Craig and practices in the areas of accessibility and anti-discrimination law. Brunna counsels and trains businesses and government entities to comply with the ADA, state, and local accessibility requirements, and defends Title III and Title II lawsuits. She previously served as Chief Counsel for Civil Rights for two Arizona Attorneys General and as a visiting professor at the ASU College of Law. She can be reached at [bpedrini@fclaw.com](mailto:bpedrini@fclaw.com).*

psychiatric, intellectual, or other mental disabilities.

Service animals help with “visible” disabilities such as blindness or mobility impairments but it also includes animals that alert when blood glucose levels rise or someone is about to have a seizure.

“Service animal” is the only relevant term under the ADA. The ADA does not recognize comfort animals, therapy animals, or companion animals. An

# How do I make the right financing decisions in order to achieve financial security?

by RUSHI SHAH



JESTERPOP/SHUTTERSTOCK.COM

**A**CHIEVING FINANCIAL security is a common goal for most everyone. The path we take to get there, our tolerance for risk along the way, potential reward in exchange for the risk we take, and how we determine when we've arrived, however, vary widely. For hotel and commercial real estate owners, financial security is more than accumulating wealth. In this industry, financial security is the financial freedom to do what you want without worrying about future threats, or "handicapping the downside." One of the best ways to achieve financial freedom is to choose the right financing strategy that insulates your personal wealth

from unnecessary risk and positions your portfolio for opportunistic growth.

## THE ONLY THING CERTAIN IS UNCERTAINTY

We talk to a lot of hotel and other commercial real estate owners who believe they already have secured their financial future, and as a result ignore opportunities to improve their situation or myopically focus on saving money today at the expense of uncalculated risks in the future. Recourse, or the risk on borrowing debt, is a key concept that is frequently in an owner's blind spot. It also is core to one of the most mispriced elements in the calculation of revenues and expenses – contingent liability. Contingent liability is any real or

theoretical liability that is not a liability today but could become a real financial liability in the future. Even though they are not currently a risk, because there is potential for them to be an issue in the future, contingent liabilities must appear on owners' personal financial statements.

Banks and credit committees at every financial institution in the business of lending money pay close attention to the number and severity of contingent liabilities. They know from experience that in times of market or systemic distress, what is now theory can quickly morph into reality. Hotel and commercial real estate owners are particularly scrutinized, as they tend to have highly correlated and less-diversified portfolio



holdings. As a result, when the market shifts, all asset classes on an owner's balance sheet move in the same direction. This creates a viral or contagion effect to the overall financial security of once-well-heeled property owners.

### ACCURATELY PRICING THE VALUE OF RECOURSE RISK

Hotel and commercial real estate owners' ability to make the right financial decision is often skewed by what is known as institutional memory, or the tendency to forget about what perils a financial downturn can bring to their personal financial security. An extended recovery and expansion in the economy often contribute to this lack of hindsight and cause owners to grossly misprice the value of recourse risk. A more-prudent pricing approach looks at recourse risk from the perspective of two key components. The first is the monetary component that results from the spread. The second is the structuring and servicing of the loan.

### MONETARY COMPONENT

The monetary component is strictly calculated in the form of a rate premium. According to a study done by one of the top London-based insurance clearinghouses, recourse insurance or personal-guarantee insurance should cost 2 percent per year on the interest rate. Using this benchmark and with all else being equal, a non-recourse loan should be priced at a 2-percent-higher interest rate than its full recourse counterpart. In today's environment, however, most non-recourse loans are actually pricing below that of a full personal-guarantee loan for all asset types and particularly for hotels. There are two theories behind this discrepancy. On the one hand, it can be attributed to market demand. Because non-recourse loans carry additional structuring and typically include pre-payment penalties, owners are not willing to pay a premium to take on the debt, despite the

minimized risk benefits. On the other hand, it could be a symptom of higher costs, as banks must price full-recourse loans higher in order to cover extensive regulatory and compliance expenses, especially for hotel loans.

### STRUCTURING & SERVICING COMPONENT

Most lenders sell servicing rights for non-recourse loans to a third-party servicer as it is typically more cost effective than managing it in house and servicing is not the highest and best use of their resources. This practice, along with additional loan structuring the lender may mandate in order to protect its interests, can sour owner appetite for non-recourse options and cause them to overlook the benefits. It is important to understand the why behind these perceived disadvantages. Lenders must require the additional layers of protection because they have no other recourse against a borrower in the event of default. For example, we recently closed a \$13-million deal for a hotel. As part of the transaction, the owner was able to cash out \$7 million, which he used to build two new hotels in the same parking lot adjacent to his existing hotel. The lender was willing to offer a non-recourse loan because of our close relationship but required additional structuring to prevent the owner from directing business from the collateral hotel to the new hotel. Per the loan parameters, if the owner was caught doing so, the owner would be on the hook for any losses arising from it. This type of structuring was only an option because it was a non-recourse loan and was the only way in the current market landscape for the owner to achieve the high level of leverage he wanted at a fairly low interest rate. Some owners would view this added structuring as a nuisance and deal-breaker for pursuing non-recourse debt. In the current market environment, however, being

able to lock in a long-term loan at a high loan-to-value and at a relatively low interest rate without recourse, compared to a higher-rate conventional loan burdened by personal guarantees, more than justifies these perceived risks.

### SETTING EMOTIONS ASIDE

Hotel and other commercial real estate owners who have worked hard to achieve what they consider financial security often let their emotions cloud their decision-making process. They may rationalize that there is no value in non-recourse debt because they know how to run their business and are never going to default. While this spirit and integrity is to be commended, no one ever enters into a financial transaction with the explicit or implicit intention for it to fail. Smart owners, who want to achieve true financial security or freedom, are willing to look past their pride and focus on what is best for their future and their legacy. They understand the benefits of working with an expert intermediary to evaluate, negotiate, and structure the most strategic financing solution that insulates them from unnecessary risk and positions them for ongoing success. ■



*Rushi Shah is principal and CEO of the commercial mortgage and real estate investment banking firm and AAHOA Club Blue Member Mag Mile Capital.*

*As a leader in hospitality financing, Shah specializes in structuring and placing high-leverage, non-recourse bridge and permanent debt with cash out for full- and limited-service hotels nationwide. Since joining the firm's predecessor, Aries Capital, in 2015, Shah has structured and closed hundreds of millions in financing for all property types. Shah has held previous positions at Northern Trust and has an MBA from the University of Chicago's Booth School of Business.*



## How to discourage loitering at your hotel

by DON KERMATH

JOECLEMONSON/SHUTTERSTOCK.COM

**B**EING SAFE AND SECURE rank among the top guest expectations for your hotel. Guests are shelling out good money so they can conduct business or enjoy time away from home. They don't want to be harangued by panhandlers, accosted by muggers, solicited by drug dealers, or burgled in their hotel rooms. Downtown Baltimore La Quinta General Manager Hazelyn D'Arco claims she has difficulty keeping employees because transients make them afraid for their safety. Your property's reputation, and yes,

even your employee turnover rate, are impacted by how well you handle loitering in and around your hotel.

A May 2016 Cornell Hospitality Report titled "Hotel Performance Impact of Socially Engaging with Consumers" reconfirmed an earlier study that hotel revenue is directly associated with TripAdvisor ratings. Better ratings equal increased revenues. Receive a bad TripAdvisor review and you have an urgent, pervasive, and expensive problem. Don't wait until you get the disparaging reviews. Act now!

What can you do to make your property safe and secure from transients?

1. Uncover how to make your property unfriendly to loitering.
2. Engage guests, staff, and your neighbors to discourage loitering.
3. Get actionable information immediately to combat loitering at your property.

### MAKE YOUR PROPERTY UNFRIENDLY TO LOITERING

Use defensive architecture to discourage unwanted loitering.

1. Install benches that discourage sleeping.
2. Slope low walls, planters, and window sills.



3. Make planters taller than 1.25 meters (4 feet).
4. Install large, irregular-shaped rocks or objects at unintended resting locations.
5. Use prickly vegetation like crown of thorns, cacti, and holly in planting beds.
6. Secure the open area often found at the bottom of stairwells.

## MARK YOUR TERRITORY

Define your exterior borders to delineate civic and private spaces to discourage loitering. Hire security to enforce your borders, if necessary. Use low walls, material and grade changes, gateways, planters, lamp poles, and unique sidewalk and road paving treatments. Keep your property and surrounding area graffiti and litter free to communicate vigilance.

## KEEP YOUR EYES WIDE OPEN

If staff and guests can see something, they can say something. Remove line-of-sight barriers and install security cameras where not possible to remove barriers. This often means installing more windows and removing or shortening interior walls. Remove large shrubs that conceal activity and raise tree canopies.

"Having good, plentiful, bright exterior lighting is something we definitely look at and know the brighter an area, the greater discouragement there is for what we would call bad activity," says Adam Novotny, Area General Manager for Crowne Plaza and Radisson Downtown Baltimore.

## ENGAGE GUESTS, STAFF, AND NEIGHBORS

Do not accidentally encourage loitering.

1. Discarded tobacco is attractive to transients. Provide sturdy, lockable canister-style ashtrays in all smoking areas. Use signage to encourage compliance from smokers (e.g., Help

Combat Loitering: Put Cigarette Butts in Bin). Educate them on how cleaning up their tobacco combats loitering.

2. Trash of all kinds is attractive to transients. Secure dumpsters indoors. If this is not possible, trash container lids should be locked.
3. Giving handouts directly to transients encourages more loitering behavior. Make donations of food, clothing, and money to food banks and homeless charities. Staff and guests should not offer food, clothing, or money directly to transients. Post lobby and in-room marketing assets educating your efforts to combat loitering and your donation efforts with homeless charities.

## GET YOUR NEIGHBORS ONBOARD WITH YOUR EFFORTS

You are not an island and your guests don't just stay on property. The best efforts will include all the business and residential neighbors within your business district. Show them what you are doing and encourage them to do the same. Often, there are business and neighborhood organizations already working on the issue. Use them as a resource to educate yourself and your neighbors.

The Downtown Partnership of Baltimore is making a difference. According to its 2018 Annual Report, the group employed Downtown Baltimore Guides who had 139,596 citizen interactions and a Clean Team that collected more than 350 tons of trash to discourage loitering and bad actors. At the same time, Downtown Partnership expanded its homeless outreach program and security patrols. Crime in the same area has dropped 23 percent, due in part to Downtown Partnership's efforts. This is a model any business improvement district can follow.

## BE COMPASSIONATE

Staff, especially security staff, should be given compassionate engagement

protocols when dealing with transients. Most of the time, a transient's behavior is not illegal, it's just unwelcome to your guests.

1. Staff should keep a safe distance, never make physical contact, and be polite when requesting a person to vacate the property. Novotny does not want his security staff to take a risk. "You're not going to engage them, you're not going to try to physically remove them, and you're not going to touch them," he says.
2. Allow the person to gather all their belongings, no matter what condition the items might be in.
3. Make contact information available for local homeless and drug addiction centers. Contacting the police does not have to be your only option.
4. If the person is noncompliant with your verbal request, you should contact the police.

## WHAT'S NEXT?

Precisely target your property vulnerabilities from the recommendations in this article. Reach out to local organizations and consultants who understand your particular needs. Implement the strategies that work best for your hotel. Finally, get a good night's rest knowing your loitering problem is being addressed. ■

*Don Kermath is the human resources, communications and connections expert that empowers hospitality leaders to transform their workforce into productive, cohesive, team players who stay for the long haul and contribute to innovation and excellence on the job. After meeting with Don and exploring how you are currently trying to improve your organization, you may discover that his highly customized programs make sense for you (and could really benefit your bottom line). Email Don at [Don@DonKermath.com](mailto:Don@DonKermath.com) for your own How to Discourage Loitering Action Guide, or visit [www.DonKermath.com](http://www.DonKermath.com) for more information.*

# Fight for a fair wage: The important role of small business owners

by ALFREDO ORTIZ







P103/SHUTTERSTOCK.COM

**F**OR BUSINESS OWNERS IN the U.S., especially small ones, a stable and growing economy is of paramount importance. Not only does it make operating a business less challenging, but a secure future better enables a steady and predictable stream of investment.

But what can small business owners do to improve the possibility of a brighter economic future? Well, one of the biggest threats facing the hotel industry, as well as other businesses that heavily depend on entry-level staff, is a rising minimum wage.

A minimum wage, or level of income usually reserved for entry-level workers, is an hourly pay floor mandated by local, state, and federal governments. In other words, businesses are legally barred from offering a wage beneath that level.

The minimum wage is different depending on what area of the country a business operates. While the federal government enforces a broad mandated wage level, many states and localities raise it within their borders. For example, the U.S. federal minimum wage is \$7.25 an hour, but the wage floor in Chicago is set at \$12 an hour.

Although mismatching and constantly fluctuating minimum wage levels may be confusing and daunting when trying to operate a business in multiple jurisdictions, the patchwork of wage floors is actually a good thing. The cost of living in New York City, for example, is obviously much higher than a small farming community in Iowa. Therefore, applying a minimum wage that makes sense in both areas is essentially impossible.

In some ways, having a minimum wage is a good policy that helps everyone. Not only does it protect employees from receiving predatory pay, but it injects a sense of stability into the larger economy.

However, the problem becomes evident when the federal government, as well as

many states with a mix of urban and rural communities, attempts to implement a one-size-fits-all wage law. Illinois is set to increase the minimum wage incrementally until reaching \$15 an hour in 2024. And many in Congress continue to push for similar legislation at the federal level.

If the minimum wage, compared to the cost of living, is set at a tier too high for a community, businesses won't be able to operate as usual within budget constraints, forcing owners to either reduce employees, cut hours, or close down operations altogether. Numerous anecdotal examples confirm this to be true.

Take for example Native restaurant in Santa Monica, CA, that halted operations because of increasing overhead costs, including a rising minimum wage. Or Creative Kidstuff, a popular children's toy store in Minnesota that closed all six store locations in June, partly due to minimum wage increases.

In fact, because of the negative impact on businesses, as well as consequences for would-be employees, 74 percent of U.S. economists oppose instituting a far-reaching \$15 minimum wage at the federal level.<sup>1</sup>

Business owners and their employees should therefore advocate against unreasonable minimum wage increases, something my organization, the Job Creators Network, helps facilitate. AAHOA Members can join the fight by first visiting [JoinJCN.com](http://JoinJCN.com) and learn more about alternative policies that promote wage growth without harming businesses at [FightFor50.com](http://FightFor50.com).

Far-reaching minimum wage hikes bridle the very economic engine that drives prosperity for businesses, employees and communities across the country. AAHOA Members should help push back against it. ■

*Alfredo Ortiz is the President and CEO of the Job Creators Network.*

<sup>1</sup> [https://www.epionline.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/03/EPI\\_Feb2019\\_MinWageSurvey-FINAL.pdf](https://www.epionline.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/03/EPI_Feb2019_MinWageSurvey-FINAL.pdf)

# Operational resilience prepares hoteliers to win despite market conditions

by TODD SABO, PRESIDENT – NORTH AMERICA, RMS HOSPITALITY SOLUTIONS



FOXY BURROW/SHUTTERSTOCK.COM

**H**OSPITALITY'S NEAR decade of RevPAR expansion has been an incredible time for lodging brands and hotel technology startups to grow, but now is not the time to sit back and enjoy the ride. Although no one can predict exactly when this growth streak will end, there

is consensus among the industry that a downturn is coming.

In preparation for this downturn, I anticipate the transition from on-premise hotel technology to the cloud will not only continue but accelerate. Adopting cloud-based software and systems will make your brands and your people better equipped to scale and innovate, the basis for operational resilience.



Operational resilience is key when making decisions and necessary adjustments in response to market shifts. It's not just being reactive to industry ups and downs, but it's also finding ways to create demand for your properties through data-driven marketing and customer service.

Hoteliers focusing on operational resilience will be able to take full advantage of our current boom times and find efficient ways to increase rate, RevPAR, and profitability. More important, they'll be the ones whose properties will still make money, increase market share, and generate breakthrough ideas when a cyclical downturn inevitably hits our industry.

Integration is fundamental to operational resilience. It's a term your head of IT constantly uses, but integration matters just as much when looking at your staff and the customer journey as it does when looking at your systems.

## INTEGRATE HOTEL TECHNOLOGY

The most obvious place for integration is your hotel's technology stack. If your property management and revenue management systems, channel manager, and booking engine are all run in the cloud with software-as-a-service applications, you're keeping pace with leaders in the industry.

If you can't seamlessly share data across the PMS, CRS, channel manager, and booking engine, you're going to waste valuable time and open your company up to devastating errors.

With an integrated tech stack, all the data you need for strategic action is instantly accessible. You reduce the risk of double or dropped bookings and accounting errors, and increase data continuity across your property. An all-in-one PMS can show you the heartbeat of your hotel, with reporting that tracks pace, pickup, and how occupancy and revenues compare to last year and the forecast.

Modern cloud-based systems can automate crucial processes and provide real-time visibility into your hotel's operations. The more "set it and forget it" features your PMS provides, the more efficient and resilient your property will be. Have a plan for what to do when economic conditions cause a change in demand, and be ready to execute when the data you track indicate those changes have occurred.

Something to watch out for when choosing new pieces in your tech stack are "hybrid" cloud solutions. With many hybrid systems, an application may be sitting on a server in the cloud, but you'll need a VPN client to tap into it. The software is not as flexible or scalable in these situations as some vendors would have you believe.

## INTERNALIZE TEAMWORK

Integration among your team members and decision-makers is extremely important. Cloud applications woven together in one platform can help your staff work better together and collaborate more.

At the strategic level, make sure every single person internalizes their part in maximizing profitability. The revenue managers and sales and marketing teams bring in the business, and the general manager along with operations and housekeeping staff make sure those guests come back.

Communication is what optimizes day-to-day operations. That's why it's important for hotel technology platforms to feature a built-in message center for staff to bring up issues with each other and their managers as well as communicate with guests.

With the right PMS, this instant two-way communication can begin when reservations are secured. Messaging among staff members can ensure that preferences for known guests are accounted for when preparing rooms before check-in, down to details like the right kind of pillow on the bed and

the right type of beverage stocked in the mini fridge. Messages to and from guests within the PMS system can also help your property provide a seamless experience from arrival to stay to checkout.

## INCORPORATE YOUR HOTEL INTO THE GUEST JOURNEY

The crucial last mile of operational resilience is to integrate your hotel into the guest experience. Your PMS should make it easy to execute targeted marketing and for guests to interact with you directly.

Think about the best way to price rooms for your most frequent, loyal guests. A robust guest profile in the PMS should show more than a ZIP code and phone number. It should also have data including a person's household income, how many times they have stayed on property, most recent rate type, and total revenue per stay.

Based on this information, create a report that targets markets that fit your ideal profile, as well as the markets producing your most frequent or highest-spending guests. That's priceless data for your revenue managers and sales leaders.

Cloud-based systems also are more likely to automate marketing campaigns that trigger emails and text messages at the moments of highest potential impact. Depending on where guests are in the life cycle of their stay, the right message can engage them at the time of booking, check-in and checkout, or when they're starting to research their next trip.

By mastering this integration of technology and people now, hotels will be able to seize opportunities in good times and adjust to the challenges of a downturn, when necessary, the definition of operational resilience. ■

*Todd Sabo is president of the North American division of RMS – The Hospitality Cloud, a global, cloud-based reservation and property management software solution provider.*

# Washington D.C.

by ASIF LAKHANI



**B**EGINNING IN OCTOBER 2019, WASHINGTON D.C. HOMEOWNERS are prohibited from listing their secondary residences on online home-sharing platforms such as Airbnb and others (VRBO). Furthermore, property owners who have medical or professional absences are capped to renting out their secondary units for just 90 days in a calendar year when they are not present. Primary residences are still allowed to be rented out even though online booking services are technically not permitted as part of the new ordinance.

In a statement, Airbnb pushed back against the law, saying it would drain \$64 million in supplemental income for Washington D.C. hosts. A preliminary financial analysis conducted by the District's Chief Financial Officer concluded that the new legislation could cost D.C. government \$96 million in "transient lodging" revenue and \$104 million in total lost expenses.





Supporters of the legislation claim the short-term rentals drive up scarcity of long-term housing options and discouraging their usage will help keep home and hotel room prices in check. Short-term rentals account for just under a third (~9,000) of total hotel rooms available in the District, according to a D.C. Council committee report.

On the plus side, tourism and travel to the nation's capital is at an all-time high. As a matter of fact, Washington D.C. has experienced nine consecutive years of tourism growth, with a record

number of 21.9 million domestic visitors having made a trip to the District in 2018, according to Destination D.C., the District's tourism and convention bureau. (The latest report was not available at press time.)

Destination D.C.'s 2017 numbers show the influx of visitors, which totaled 22.8 million people, resulted in \$814 million in tax revenue for the District, and \$7.5 billion in total visitor spending that year. The travel supported more than 75,000 in industry jobs as well, according to Destination D.C. In all, there are 140 hotels in Washington D.C. with more than 30,000 hotel rooms. An additional 18 hotels featuring more than 3,000 rooms are in the development pipeline, according to the report.

Visitors to Washington D.C. have plenty to see and do while there. The District proudly claims to be both the "Capital of Free" and "America's Front Yard" with solid reasoning for each. Without a doubt, the main attractions in D.C. are the White House and the National Mall, where the Washington Monument, U.S. Capitol Building, and Lincoln Memorial showcase the past, present, and future of American history. D.C.'s National Mall is the highest-visited national park in America, according to Destination D.C. A number of free museums, such as the U.S. Botanic Garden and National Gallery of Art, are located at the National Mall as well.

Those looking to visit the White House can schedule a free tour (via one's member of Congress) up to three months in advance. An alternative option to seeing the inside of the building is by planning a trip to White House Visitors Center, which is free to enter and features interactive exhibits, a large-scale model of the White House itself, rare artifacts, and a gift shop. The building is located downtown, just off of the White House grounds.

Other free attractions in Washington D.C. include the 17 museums, galleries, and National Zoo that make up the Smithsonian Institution. Specific

museums in the collection include the National Air & Space Museum, Natural History Museum, and the National Postal Museum, to name a few. There are more than 150 million objects on display throughout the Smithsonian Institution, according to Destination D.C. Not one to shy away from history, the District also is home to The Phillips Collection in Dupont Circle, which is the first museum of modern art in the United States. The permanent collection galleries are free; the ones requiring tickets are available at nominal costs.

However, Washington D.C. isn't just free museums. There are a handful of waterfront communities located in the region, all of which are easily accessible via water taxi or river cruise. The National Harbor, Alexandria, and Georgetown all are popular destinations with each having its own unique vibe.

Food in the District also is among some of the best the country has to offer. There are 16 Michelin star restaurants in Washington D.C., according to Destination D.C., so fine-dining enthusiasts will have no trouble finding a place to eat when in town, though snagging a reservation may not be as easy. On the other end of the spectrum, D.C. has an incredible number of excellent casual yet affordable dining options that are perfect for families and/or business meetings. President Obama was no stranger to the Washington D.C. food scene himself, having frequented places such as Oyamel Cocina for Taco Tuesday and Taylor Gourmet sandwiches, according to "The Feast" on Bravo TV. Chances are if it's good enough for the President, it's good for the rest of us, too.

As far as tourism and travel go, Washington D.C. is worthy of being on everyone's list. While the short-term housing legislation will change the landscape of tourism and travel to and from town, there really is something for everyone to do, see, and explore in Washington D.C. After all, isn't that what a great front yard should be – one that invites you in and makes you want to stay a while? ■

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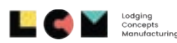
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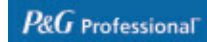
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# AAHOA *around the nation*



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1. The AAHOA Officers hosted our Brand Alliance Meeting at the Choice Hotels International Conference in Las Vegas.
2. AAHOA Treasurer Vinay Patel spoke at the Meet the Money® Conference on a panel titled "Winning Strategies for Buying and Selling Hotels."
3. AAHOA Vice President of Government Affairs Chirag Shah conveyed the importance of building relationships between government and business in the general session, "Your Government & Your Business," at the Hunter Hotel Conference.
4. AAHOA Florida Regional Director Bharat Patel held a Town Hall in Dania Beach, where members discussed short-term rentals, human trafficking awareness, and predatory ADA lawsuits.
5. AAHOA Southwest Regional Director Imesh Vaidya trained 100 percent of his staff on human trafficking prevention in New Mexico at the Holiday Inn Express and LaQuinta Suites in Clovis, and the Quality Inn & Suites and Holiday Inn Express in Hobbs. You should, too! [aahoa.com/HTAT](http://aahoa.com/HTAT)



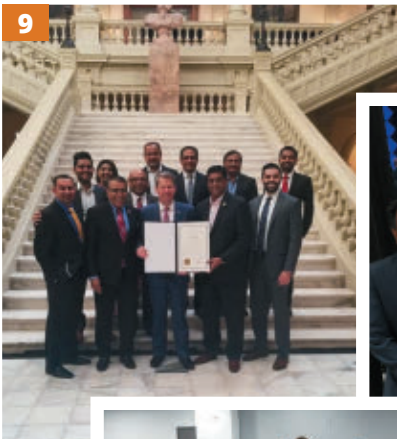


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6. Vice Chairman Biran Patel and Treasurer Vinay Patel spoke at HD Expo in Las Vegas. Biran spoke on the HD/ISHP Town Hall: Owners' Roundtable, while Vinay participated on a panel titled Development 101.
7. North Pacific Regional Director Kamlesh (KP) Patel and the North Pacific Regional Ambassadors hosted the AAHOA North Pacific Regional Conference & Trade Show in San Jose, CA.
8. Gulf Regional Director Nick Zaver and AAHOA Members attended a speech by the president in Louisiana.
9. AAHOA Members joined Gov. Brian Kemp at the Proclamation of Asian-American Heritage Month signing ceremony at the Georgia State Capitol.
10. AAHOA was a proud sponsor of the Arizona Lodging & Tourism Association Unity Dinner, which was held in Phoenix.
11. Florida Regional Director Bharat Patel held a Town Hall in Fort Myers, where Florida Restaurant & Lodging Association Southwest Florida Regional Director Lois Croft spoke.
12. South Pacific Regional Director Mike Riverside hosted the AAHOA South Pacific Regional Conference & Trade Show in Anaheim, CA, where he welcomed Mayor Harry Sidhu.
13. AAHOA Chairwoman Jagruti Panwala spoke about the importance of maintaining brand relationships at the 41st NYU International Hospitality Industry Investment Conference in New York.

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Top left photo: Rep. Gus Bilirakis (R-FL-12)

Top right photo, far left: Rep. Henry Cuellar (D-TX-28)

Bottom photo: Rep. Kenny Marchant (R-TX-24)





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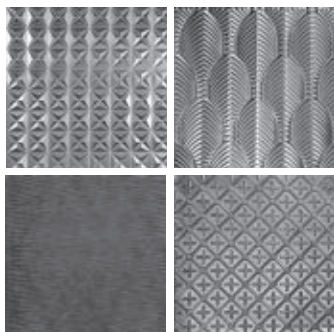
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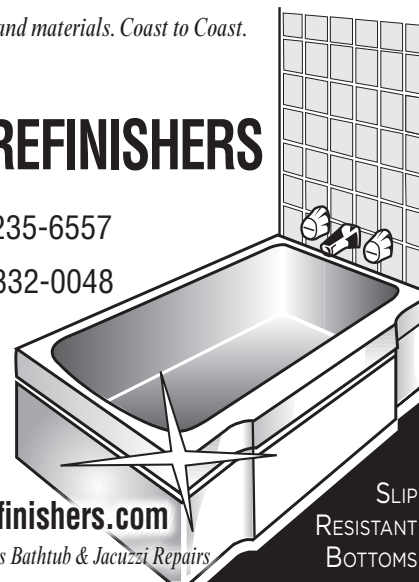
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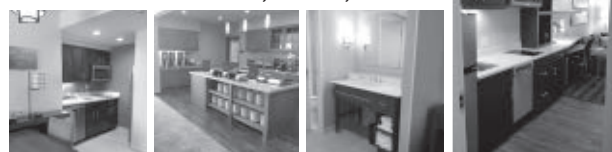
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