

- CASE STUDY -

A FLIGHT SIMULATOR FOR THE FRONT DESK

How Best Western Leveraged Virtual Reality to Transform Customer Service



ORGANIZATIONAL BACKGROUND

Mursion is the virtual environment where professionals practice and master the complex interpersonal skills required to be effective in high-stakes careers. Mursion's immersive training simulator is used by a wide range of innovative organizations in healthcare, hospitality and the corporate sector to improve employees' interpersonal skills through the delivery of customized training simulations that emulate the most challenging customer service experiences these employees face every day.

Mursion's mixed reality platform uses a combination of artificial intelligence and live actors to deliver powerful customer simulations where avatars perform the most challenging customer service behaviors that employees confront on the job. This blend of technology and human performance creates a fully immersive and challenging simulation environment where learners are forced to take risks, from which they can learn how to improve their day-to-day performance.

PROJECT DESIGN

In 2016, Mursion partnered with Best Western® Hotels and Resorts to help one of the world's largest hotel chains reach its vision to "lead the industry in superior customer care." After field testing Mursion's virtual simulation platform, Best Western decided to integrate virtual simulations into its **"I Care – Every Guest, Every Time"** program, a site-based training program designed to improve guest interactions throughout the guest's hotel stay.

Delivered directly to all of Best Western's North American properties by a team of 42 regional training coaches called regional services managers, the program emphasizes problem resolution, an area of customer service that challenged many Best Western sites according to customer feedback data provided to Best Western by Medallia, Inc. No role faced greater customer service challenges than that of front desk clerks, who have to manage the short tempers

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and high demands of tired and often frustrated business travelers every day. Best Western's front desk training included the following:

- **Training Module:** Each front desk staff member participates in a module that is delivered by a regional services manager focused on how to implement Best Western's service standards, while going above and beyond the call of duty for every customer.
- **Live Simulation:** Each front desk staff person participates in 1-2 live virtual simulations with Mursion, in which they interact with avatar-based characters that present challenging issues that mimic real-life customer problems.
- **After Action Review:** Immediately following the simulation sessions, regional service managers and general managers deliver standards-based feedback to front desk staff, and the team reflects on how to better handle similar problems moving forward.

PROJECT RESULTS

From January through June, Mursion will provide 2,500 hours of simulation to over 2,200 Best Western hotels in North America, serving approximately 12,000 front desk staff. Initial results of the program based on the first cohort of 380 hotels who received this training, demonstrate that Mursion is delivering on its promise to transform customer service:

- Based on the results achieved on this program, Best Western won a Silver Award from Brandon Hall for Unique Learning Program.
- As Best Western recently reported, "Results from the program are staggering. Hotels that received the training experienced the highest short term gains in customer satisfaction that Best Western has ever measured in such a short period of time."
- Hotels experienced an average of 2-5% gains in post-stay guest satisfaction survey ratings compared to flat rates for nonparticipating hotels (see Figure 1).

FIGURE 1: CUSTOMER SATISFACTION IMPROVEMENT

NET PROMOTER SCORE (NPS)	+ 3.2%
SERVICE	+ 2.5%
BREAKFAST	+ 4.2%
GUEST ROOM	+ 2.4%
CLEANLINESS	+ 2.1%
CHECK-IN	+ 1.8%
CHECK-OUT	+ 1.5%
PROBLEM RESOLUTION	+ 5.1%

- Gains were strongest for problem resolution (5.1%), the main focus of the simulation-based training.
- 97 percent of hotels reported being highly satisfied with the training.
- Best Western credits Mursion for helping them to sweep the upper midscale in midscale brands in nearly every customer service category, including "helpful and courteous service" (*Business Traveler News*, 2017).

COST EFFECTIVE OUTCOMES

The average cost to design and deliver the simulations driving these extraordinary outcomes was less than \$165 per hotel.

NEXT STEPS

Based on the success of the first phase of the project, Best Western and Mursion are currently planning a second phase of training that will include simulations for front desk staff on how to better serve Best Western Rewards members. The front desk agents "actually are being tested while learning in a much more fun environment," said Best Western Hotels & Resorts chief marketing officer and SVP Dorothy Dowling.

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