NTT DATA
Global IT Innovator

Best Western International Wins Compuware Best of Web Award

NTT DATA's Application Management and Development team helps international hotel chain improve response time and reliability, and drive revenue from online channel.

Abstract

Servicing hundreds of thousands of guests every night, Best Western International (BWI) relies on web-based booking as a primary reservation source for more than 4,000 properties in 100 countries. Online reservations and dynamically generated content provide 24/7, real-time services and timely information to as many as 40 million site visitors each month. In recognition of the site's performance, Compuware Corporation selected BWI for its Best of Web Gold Award and Last Mile Gold Award for 2012, exceeding all other hospitality websites in the areas of performance and site robustness.

But Best Western wasn't always at the top of its class. When BWI made the decision to make web performance the highest priority, it chose to partner with NTT DATA to make it happen. Together, BWI and NTT DATA designed a customized application development and management solution. The partnership's principal objectives included streamlining the web booking process, optimizing functionality, increasing content flexibility and accuracy, and – above all – accelerating system response time. BWI felt that improving these fundamental system operations would allow them to more effectively meet the needs of their global customers. As a result of these efforts, BWI has seen a continuous flow of industry awards for web performance while increasing revenue from its website.

Challenge

In the highly competitive digital era, savvy consumers expect engaging, accurate, and immediate information from a variety of platforms and devices. Hotel owners and operators recognize the need to regularly update, maintain, and enhance data to reservation systems and websites and at the same time provide a distinctive customer experience that establishes a relationship with the brand and the property. In 2005, BWI established the ambitious goal of having the best performing website in the hospitality industry. "Our goal was to be the best, and we weren't," says Scott Gibson, BWI's chief information officer. Back then, a 15-second response time was standard in the industry. But Gibson knew the company could do better. Since then, BWI's online presence has been a corporate priority because a bad online experience can immediately and permanently send a consumer to a competitor's site.

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The importance of highly functioning and responsive websites cannot be understated. Approximately half of the company's net room revenue is attributed to web bookings. "It's the revenue that drives our properties' profitability," Gibson says.

However, this commitment to be the best required a shift in BWI's corporate culture, making website performance a priority throughout the organization.

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The company sought to improve its website in such critical areas as response time, availability, and consistency. In addition to creating a performance-optimized site, BWI was eager to meet and exceed consumer expectations in terms of appeal, convenience, accuracy, seamless transactions, and developing a relationship with the brand. To meet that goal, the company turned to its IT services partner, NTT DATA.

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Solution

In 2005, NTT DATA and BWI began a collaborative, iterative approach toward meeting BWI's goals. By 2008, BWI had cut its website's response time in half. In 2010, BWI was Compuware Corporation's Silver award winner for outstanding performance for its website response time, availability, and consistency.

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In 2011, NTT DATA had redesigned BWI's site architecture to facilitate ongoing improvements and performance enhancements. In addition to introducing new features and easy-to-access content, the site improved transactional performance and helped BWI meet its core objectives of reaching customers within a limited budget and with an eye toward short- and long-term goals. In 2011, BWI was again recognized by Compuware for web performance, this time earning a Gold award.

In 2012, BWI turned its focus to increasing business in the global marketplace by further improving site functionality and performance. It also sought to enhance the Best Western Rewards® frequency member program and broaden its global customer reach by extending multiple language support.

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To meet these goals, NTT DATA assembled a team of architects and engineers who worked closely with BWI to create a website IT roadmap based on a clear understanding of client goals translated into IT objectives. These efficiency and customer-service objectives permeated all aspects of the team's work, from designing code to architecting databases. "NTT DATA was able to bring the expertise to the table that we needed to design an enterprise solution – and scale – for performance and reality," Gibson says. Working as partners with shared goals, BWI and NTT DATA put innovation where it was needed most – satisfying valuable customers and delivering greater volumes of reservations to BWI hotels.

To help maintain a cost-effective structure and provide around-the-clock service that met strict delivery demands, BWI leveraged open-source technology and offshore application delivery. BWI credits NTT DATA with continuously optimizing under-performing systems. These efficiency gains also facilitated easier to maintain systems. The net effect of these gains was to reduce an immense amount of previously wasted time and unnecessary work, Gibson reports. These efficiency gains translated into savings in both hours and budget, and most importantly, allowed BWI to focus on more strategic and higher ROI efforts.

The architects designed a new application framework and optimized database access to support the enhanced site functionality while development engineers and testers evaluated and tuned code for maximum efficiency gains.

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The team also designed a solution that would separate transactional system components from consumer-focused content, enabling BWI's business users to revise marketing text quickly and easily without IT involvement. Throughout the project and after the production implementation, the offshore maintenance team evaluated web analytics and continuous customer and hotel property feedback to produce monthly modifications that further improved site performance and customer experience.

> "Half of our revenue comes from BWI's website. It's the channel that drives profitability to the greatest extent. NTT DATA has helped our website become the best of the best."
>
> **Scott Gibson**
> CIO, Best Western International

Results

In 2012, BWI once again earned industry recognition, earning Compuware's coveted Best of the Web Gold Award and Last Mile Gold Award. By enhancing web performance and robustness, NTT DATA was instrumental in helping BWI drive profitability by shifting more business to its website and providing its online customers with faster, more comprehensive, and engaging access to accurate hotel information.

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Other benefits include:

» **Meeting IT goals without increasing organizational footprint.** NTT DATA's team adjusted efficiently upward and downward, meeting BWI's flexing needs and enabling internal staff to focus on strategic initiatives.

» **Providing IT solutions that reduce TCO.** NTT DATA's IT solutions provided a reasonable total cost of ownership, meeting the short- and long-term budget goals of the organization.

» **Beating the competition.** For 2012, BWI's average response time was an impressive 1.403 seconds faster that its closest competitor at 4.982 seconds. In racing terms, BWI didn't just beat its competitors, it nearly lapped them.

» **Ongoing optimization of site performance.** Through comprehensive internal and external testing and evaluation of web analytics, NTT DATA provides ongoing maintenance to improve site performance.

» **International recognition.** In addition to the Compuware awards, NTT DATA's site development for BWI garnered more honors as the site received Compuware's Transaction Awards in 2009, 2010, and 2011.

As long-term application development and maintenance partners, NTT DATA and BWI strive to continually improve site design to drive revenue while providing an unequaled customer experience. Today, as a result of its long-standing partnership with NTT DATA, BWI sets the industry standard for website performance. "That is a responsibility we accept cheerfully and wholeheartedly," Gibson says.

What's next for NTT DATA and BWI? They're focused on meeting the needs of the fast-growing mobile-booking market.

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"NTT DATA is a partner in the most true sense of the word – working with us to come up with solutions as our needs change."

Scott Gibson
CIO, Best Western International

About NTT DATA

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