

Driving Business Outcomes



The Best Western Hotel in Gidding, Texas (left); Best Western Premier Hotel by Carmen's in Hamilton, Ontario, Canada (above)

An Interview with Dorothy Dowling,
Senior Vice President and Chief Marketing Officer,
Best Western Hotels & Resorts

EDITORS' NOTE Before joining Best Western in 2004, Dorothy Dowling held executive-level positions with ARAMARK's parks, resorts, and conventions divisions. She began her hospitality career in Canada after earning a joint Masters of Arts degree in sociology and leisure studies from the University of Waterloo in Ontario. In September 2013, Dowling was named Vice President of the Global Business Travel Association Allied Leadership Council. In 2015, she was named the 18th most influential Chief Marketing Officer in the world in the Forbes/ScribbleLive/LinkedIn's 4th Annual CMO Influence Study. Dowling, who jumped in the rankings from 27th in 2014 to 18th, is the third highest ranked female CMO on the list and is one of just two hotel marketing leaders on the 2015 list.



Dorothy Dowling

COMPANY BRIEF Best Western® Hotels & Resorts (bestwestern.com) headquartered in Phoenix, Arizona, is a privately held hotel brand with a global network of 4,100 hotels in more than 100 countries and territories worldwide. Best Western offers seven hotel brands to suit the needs of developers and guests in every market: Best Western®, Best Western Plus®, Best Western Premier®, Executive Residency by Best WesternSM, Vib®, BW Premier Collection®, and GLOSM. Now celebrating 70 years of hospitality, Best Western provides its hoteliers with global operational, sales and marketing support, and online and mobile booking capabilities. More than 26 million travelers are members of the brand's award-winning loyalty program Best Western Rewards®.

When you joined this company in 2004, what made you feel it was the right fit?

I met David Kong when he was the interim leader of the business. He's a leader who is heavily vested in building great teams and wants to bring out the best in individuals. At that point in my career, I felt he was someone who I could work well with and achieve some of my best work. I also felt Best Western, at that time, needed great leadership because it had to make many changes and I knew David would create positive change for the brand.

How important was it early on to communicate your vision for change?

We have many owner-operators in our business who individually lead their hotels; they are heavily vested in the economics of their business results. I have always been a marketer who has identified brand-building opportunities and business activation opportunities as two pillars in defining marketing success. Business Activation is critical in returning an ROI to hotel owners and has always been top of mind for me throughout my marketing career.

When I joined Best Western, I looked at how we could drive business outcomes. We have to deliver on business outcomes to build trust, and that's how we build followership. We focused on the fundamentals that would really drive business to our hoteliers at the times of the year they needed it, and we also identified the big levers we needed to deliver on to position our brand for the long term. Best Western is going to be celebrating its 70th anniversary this year.

We have to constantly reinvent ourselves, listen to our customers to understand their needs, and reevaluate if our business is on track to meet those needs.

Within that mid-market, certain brands have a broad presence. How do you differentiate in the space?

The mid-market has a proliferation of brands, but there are good margins so everyone is adding more hotel product to this category.

As a historic brand, we have amazing destinations around the world that have been passed down through families. They are pieces of real estate that could not have been acquired today, so we have great locations that we can lead with. However, at day's end, we still have to be listening to the customer, and, at this point, we're poised to be one of the most successful brands. We have always embraced the local flavor of our hotels and, as a brand, we've provided the consistency of standards that the customer expects.

Best Western was one of the first hotel brands to incorporate TripAdvisor traveler ratings and reviews directly on to our property websites. This was a conscious choice to build confidence with customers through the independent, authoritative voice of the customer. The fact that we win four times more recognition from TripAdvisor, through their certificates of excellence, demonstrates the quality of our product and our commitment to customer service at our hotels.

How broad is your customer profile and does the business traveler understand the experience Best Western offers?

There is tremendous growth in the mid-market for both business and leisure.

We have a very diverse customer base so we have different strategies on different days of the week and during different seasons.

We work hard in the managed business travel space. There has been a tremendous evolution in that space over the past several years, mostly because companies often have business travel as the number-two expense on their list of controllable expenses.

This has led them to look at select service hotels as a category and they have recognized it's a good product for their travelers. It typically meets their travelers' needs in terms of location, and the company is confident they will have the productive and comfortable experience they need to have while traveling on business. Select service hotels are typically close to a number of food establishments, and typically provide breakfast and Wi-Fi free of charge.

How important has your loyalty program been?

It has become a defining quality in terms of driving business and leisure travelers.

We have listened to our customers about what is important to them, so we have ramped up the value associated with our loyalty program. Today, consumers want loyalty currency that has real value, they want to ensure their points do not expire, and they want to redeem their points with ease.

We have enriched Best Western Rewards significantly through ongoing promotions. We commit to customers that their points do not expire and we work hard to ensure that we have free nights and other redemption options available that are important to customers so they can use their points.

Have you changed your marketing profile based on how the profile of the customer has changed?

The she-conomy is really important to the hospitality category and we began focusing on that several years ago – 90 percent of the financial decisions in the household are made by women. Even on the procurement side, there is a much stronger representation of women in those roles than men.

We want to make sure we have the right voice and imaging, and that we're speaking to women travelers about what is important to them. ●