



# Client Spotlight: Craig Shipley, Director Of Revenue, Marketing & Sales Strategy, The Durham Hotel

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Contributed by **Paula Perrin**, Sr. Market Analyst, SHR

### ***How did you come to hospitality, Craig?***

I grew up on a dairy farm outside of London, Ontario in Canada. When I was figuring out where I wanted to go in my life, my mom mentioned a hospitality course at Georgian College. I love people, so I went and it just spoke to me. I got my diploma in hospitality from Georgian, then went to the U.S. and the University of Southern New Hampshire for a bachelor's degree via their international hospitality program. The big hotel brands recruited heavily from the program and I was grateful to be hired on with the New Orleans Marriott.

### ***What was your deciding factor to stay in?***

I think at some point, you have to decide if hospitality is a job or a career. I was fortunate to have some great mentors that cared about me and helped me to see hospitality as a limitless career opportunity. Having the support and the drive to apply myself changed everything, and knew I was in for the journey!

### ***Was your career-path a straight line?***

Funny how things work out when others believe in you. From Event Operation, I helped open two Renaissance hotels in New Orleans in Event Management roles.

Then I went back to the New Orleans Marriott as the Director of Restaurants, so I cut my teeth pretty quickly in the Big Easy. Things were going well. And then Hurricane Katrina happened, which took pretty much everything we had, but it didn't take my wife or me, so we were all good.

***Did you ever think of just giving up on hospitality?***

No, never. I just love it too much. My wife got an opportunity in North Carolina, and I went with her having faith that I'd land something great in hospitality there. Sure enough, guys in New Orleans connected me with the GM of a Marriott in NC, and he connected me with a guy at a franchise management company he knew who was looking for a sales person. I really wondered if I could shift to such a different role, and from Marriott-managed properties to franchise. But I took the plunge into sales, got into the company, had a lot of support, and started building an amazing team where I eventually oversaw sales for 18 hotels on behalf of Summit Hospitality Group, which owned and managed multiple brands.

***How did you end up at The Durham Hotel?***

They say hospitality is a small world when it comes to who knows who. It's really true. A friend and previous colleague who partnered with some local owners to build The Durham Hotel contacted me, and ended up offering me a partnership in his management company Early Bird Night Owl, with The Durham being the first one in the portfolio. And here we are.

***Let's shift gears and talk about the state of hospitality tech today. How do you see it?***

I think it's an open fire hose. There is just so much tech, it's hard to navigate through all the noise at times. I feel the key is to know your unique needs, have a clear understanding of what you're trying to accomplish, research the tech that is available to you, and do your homework to find the best fit.

***What was your process for finding the right technology for your company?***

I talked to my peers at other hotels along with vendor partners of ours to see what they were doing, what potholes to watch for, and successes they'd seen, and talked

in-depth with them on their experiences and who else I needed to speak with. If you want the real picture, you can't look at your hotel tech in silos; your PMS over there, and your CRS over there. You need to see it for what it will be; an integrated system. We knew that we were doing IDeaS, and we had Opera PMS, so what would the CRS system be? You really have to look down the road 3-5 years to map out each scenario and their potential outcomes, good and bad. These systems affect multiple departments and have great benefits across the board if done right. We chose IDeaS because we got to actually see the migration of a friend's hotel to that platform. It's really looking and talking to a lot of vendors and hoteliers, then sifting through everything to choose the best overall systems for your situation. I always tell everyone, do your homework and it's not all about cost!

### ***What do you look for in a tech vendor relationship?***

I believe the biggest challenge is finding a company that is more than a vendor. They need to be relationship-centric. What I mean is, that when I've used or talked to some of the bigger players in the hotel tech space, it feels transactional. So, I perceive a completely transactional situation all the way down the line, from sales to implementations, to service. Plus, we wanted a voice at the table. I'm not a turn-key kind of guy. I want to be hands-on to create the best revenue opportunities for my property, not the easiest. We need trusted partners that understand our goals and unique challenges, and have the expertise and resources to lean on.

### ***Why did you choose SHR?***

In our case, we were looking for a CRS that included a very visually appealing booking engine and a system that enhanced everything else it affected such as our digital, sales, and revenue strategies. We were also looking at cost, but like I said, that was not a deal breaker. Ultimately, though, when it comes to a CRS, the bottom line is that you really need more than just software if you don't want to end up feeling like a number. We'd heard the rumors that SHR is super relationship-centric. It's true, they are and then some. From the engineers, through migration, to our account manager, everyone is relationship-oriented up and down the board. Plus, we love the shopping cart mentality of Windsurfer® CRS. It's similar to Amazon and the big retailers, so it's exactly what users are expecting and are comfortable with.

## ***How did your migration to Windsurfer go?***

We did IDeaS first, then we did the CRS. I met Caroline Gates at SHR who told me up front who I would have for my dedicated rep. I even got to see this person on a fun video, which was so human, and really genius. Then we did the intro call. Honestly, it was so refreshing to know in the beginning that we were going to be working with someone who was going to be with us all the way. The migration was not seamless, of course, none of them ever are because there are so many moving parts. There were hiccups on both sides. But regardless, the customer service with SHR was always there, so issues are not really as big of a deal as they would be otherwise.

## ***What advice do you have for people considering getting into hospitality?***

I believe there are two types of people. There are those who really get their joy, their juice, out of making other people happy, and there are those who don't. This business, at its heart, is not built on text book knowledge. You're dealing with human emotions, experiences, good and bad 24/7. So, if the human experience is not your source of joy, if it's all about money and title, then this business is NOT for you. If it doesn't give you joy, the industry will kill you. But if you love people, truly enjoy helping them, you'll have what you need. Because then all you have to do is apply yourself and everything will fall into place.

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