

Windsurfer® IBE And Taco Bell's The Bell Hotel

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Maybe you caught the news Taco Bell took over a Palm Springs hotel to create a grand social experience to celebrate the Taco Bell Lifestyle to its 100th anniversary. To execute a flawless booking experience, Derrick Chan, Director of e-commerce for Taco Bell, Jennifer Levin, Senior Associate Manager of Marketing for Taco Bell and Monica Davis, Sr. Director of Brand Experience for United Entertainment Group (UEG), Taco Bell's Event Marketing, contacted **Angelo Directo**, VP of Design for SHR, to see if it could be done.



Got any questions? I'm happy to help.



After laying out the ground work for “The Bell” hotel with the SHR Development and Implementations Team (more on that later), and the UEG folks in Chicago, New York, and Los Angeles, all teams gave a collective green light to the project.



The Plan

To re-brand the booking engine for one weekend, UEG and Taco Bell would create, with SHR, a (taco?) “shell” hotel for the promotion. The shell hotel is actually the virtual hotel inside of the Windsurfer CRS, complete

with custom-branded IBE with every brand detail in place, right down to Taco Bell colors, fonts, images, and logos. They would then plant a special The Bell Hotel booking button on the main Taco Bell website, guests would click the link, and be taken to the virtual hotel, never sensing that they were inside the Windsurfer Booking Engine.

This is where **Sally Ramos**, SHR’s VP of Implementation and Consortia Services, and Megan Parks, Software Developer extraordinaire, got involved. Sally kept a watchful eye on how the hotel was coordinating inventory and rates between the shell hotel and the “real” hotel. Megan, a devoted Taco Bell fan herself, received art direction from Jen Levin and created all the booking engine branding, inputting the content and photos for all room types, rates, policies, plus adding terms and conditions in the IBE and email templates, all to meet the teams’ high standards for a seamless look and feel.

The Work

Over the two months to ramp up, SHR worked with multiple teams, including hotel staff, to make sure everything would go smoothly. Three weeks before the button was made live, SHR collaborated specifically with Taco Bell IT and Derrick Chan. “We went through load testing the SHR booking engine as well as traffic throttling to see how many requests per second we could handle,” said Angelo. “Based on that testing, we agreed on an acceptable threshold for the traffic entering our booking engine.” This had to be done seamlessly and in sync within the teams to ensure that guests did not get any error messages. “That would take close communication and coordination between ourselves and the Taco Bell team,” he added. With

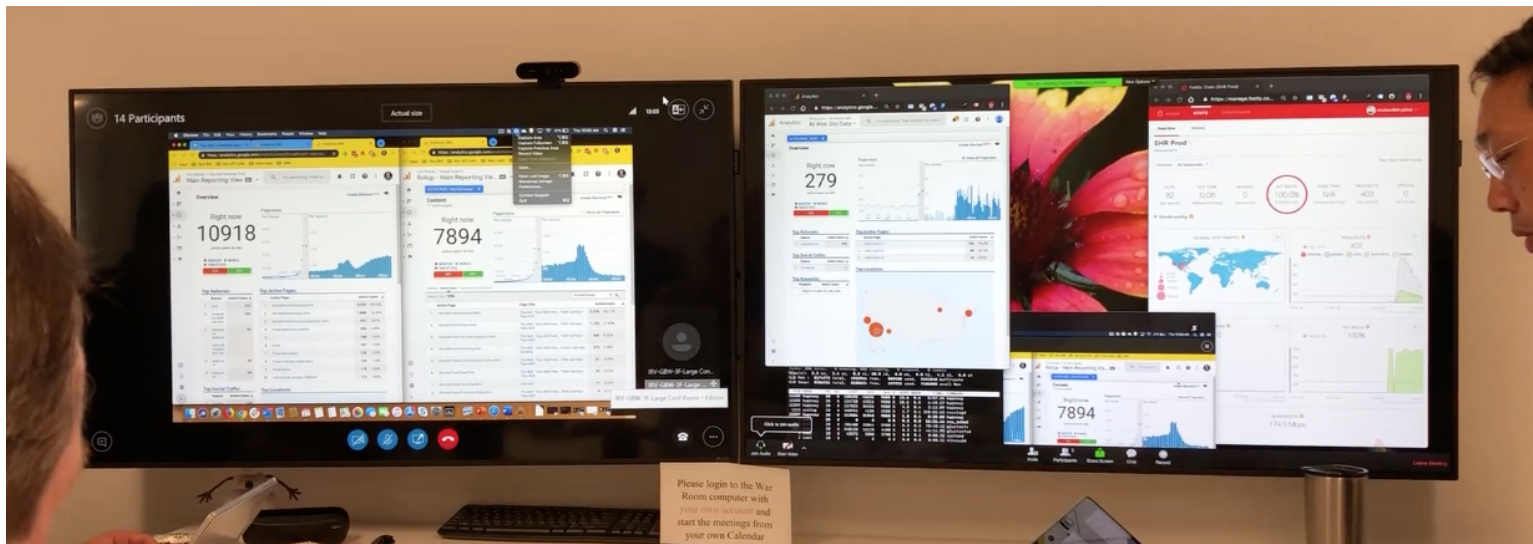


everything coming together a little more each day, Taco Bell was ready to open up the reservations function, building up a frenzy of eager fans for their unique experience.

The Launch

The day of the button going live, the teams were in their respective War Rooms watching as thousands of people competed for access to The Bell Hotel booking button. “We experienced hundreds of hits per second without crashing or any unacceptable load times,” said Angelo. “We sold out in just 2 minutes, with a truly on-brand, smooth and

seamless user experience.”



What Does It All Mean?

To the outside world, especially the guests of The Bell, it was a successful brand experiential event that celebrated its biggest fans—and that’s exactly the result Taco Bell was going for. Because for Taco Bell, the seamless success of their virtual hotel in Windsurfer means that they now know they can do large-scale events like this in the future, promoting their brand in a very unique and spontaneous way, which enhances their competitive success. “It’s hard to believe how much work and planning was needed just to support an online sale that lasted 2 minutes,” said Derrick. “This is one of those moments where it literally took a village to pull off this online booking due to the volume of fans that wanted to experience The Bell Hotel. It

was a great moment when all of our planning and coordination paid off with a smooth and issue free online booking experience.”

“Everyone was pleased with how everything has gone, from planning, to launch, to booking,” said Monica of UEG. “We deeply appreciate SHR’s cooperation and attention to the testing and discussions leading up to the project’s huge success.”



For SHR, it means that the company’s well-known mantra about teamwork, flexible tech, and being a real partner was not only affirmed, but affirmed under extremely compact and high-stakes circumstances. SHR now knows for certain what it had previously suspected; that it can pivot on an even thinner dime when needed.

“It all went smoothly because of great communication and massive cooperation within each team, and everyone being realistic about knowing our limitations and working to them,” said Angelo. “We and our client and *their* client now know that we can pull this kind of special project off without a hitch.”

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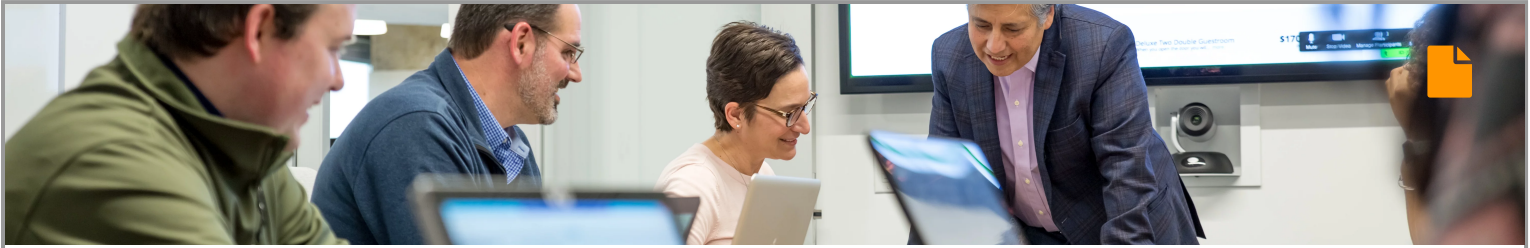
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