

# **Boston Hospitality Review**

[www.bu.edu/bhr](http://www.bu.edu/bhr)

Published by the Boston University School of Hospitality Administration

---

## **Apple, Nike, and brands that define, not follow industries**

By Adam Wallace, Founder and CEO,  
Spherical

Marketing Innovation Part II – May 2024

## About the Author

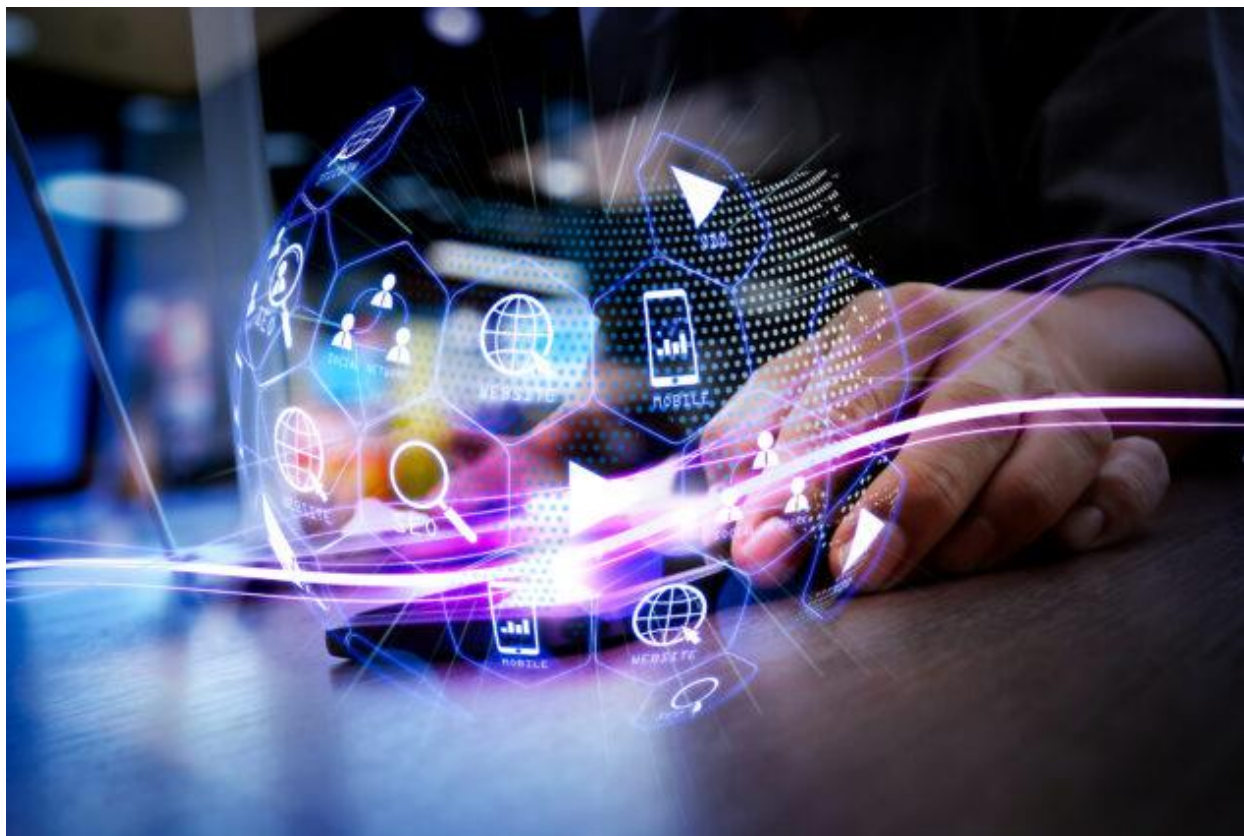


Adam Wallace is the Founder & CEO of Spherical, an agency for inspired hospitality experiences. He has led the agency to successful partnerships with the most impressive and exciting hotel companies in the world including Rosewood Hotels & Resorts, EDITION Hotels, Capella Hotels & Resorts, Park Hyatt, Proper, Equinox Hotels, Sydell Group, Bunkhouse, and Habitas. Spherical has led work for iconic properties with Aman, Four Seasons, Waldorf Astoria, Maybourne, The Fifth Avenue Hotel, and many more.

Adam has long been a pioneer in leveraging a strong creative to drive results in the digital era for hotels. His work started with putting his family's hotel on the map in the early days of social media, proclaimed by eConsultancy as "the most social media savvy hotel in New York – if not the world." Wallace has been featured as a speaker at dozens of conferences across North America and Europe and is widely recognized as an innovator in online marketing in travel and tourism.

Connect on [LinkedIn](#)

## Apple, Nike, and brands that define, not follow industries



Source: everything possible on Shutterstock

**Adam, you grew up in the world of hotels thanks to your uncle and his role at the Roger Smith. What fascinated you about hospitality marketing in your early days of hospitality?**

I've always loved the rich sensory experience of hospitality. The design of a space with all the layers of architecture, interior design, art, sound design, the rich experience of food & beverage offerings, and the humanity of it all. Each of these elements is a beautiful canvas for photography, video, and design, all passions of mine. What I learned from my uncle was a layer deeper than this. He unlocked a level of human storytelling, getting into the people and meaning behind the experiences. I find the layers of hospitality endlessly interesting.

**Looking back, are there any memorable marketing campaigns or efforts that you recall that inspired you to pursue hospitality marketing in the first place?**

At a young age, I was always influenced by the power of the campaigns by Nike and Apple. The icons of my world Michael Jordan and Tiger Woods expressing the inspirational message: “Just Do It.” And when I got my first computer, the legendary campaign: “Think Different” by Steve Jobs encouraged breaking the mold and changing the world. These are the most timeless campaigns ever made, and they really shaped me. In hospitality, one that stood out above the rest was in 2008 as the financial crisis hit, Ian Schrager did a campaign with Morgan’s Hotel Group with the line: “Fuck the Recession: Recess Is On.” It was a memorable play on words and a positive, forward-looking message. As a whole, hotels haven’t done a very good job at memorable campaigns, but this stood out.

**Do you consider yourself “innovative,” and if so, why? Why not?**

I’ve always been inspired by those who define industries, not those that follow trends. In my work, I’ve led first with what feels right to me in the overall landscape. Often, this has put me ahead of others. In 2006, I launched a video-storytelling website for my family’s hotel, before YouTube was bought by Google. In 2008, we were the first successful hotel on Twitter. In 2009, we were doing short-form video with collaborative digital partnerships. In 2012, I hired a full-time photographer to lean into Instagram. I’ve now built a full-time team for short-form video [content]. We’re stepping into VR with the launch of the Apple Vision Pro. We’re leveraging AI throughout the organization and still view this as the tip of the iceberg. I like to lean into innovation. As my advisor says, “riding the crest of change.”

**What innovative marketing examples can you share with us to demonstrate hospitality can, in fact, be innovative?**

I like what I’m seeing in AI applications in architecture and interior design. The speed of creative application and innovation is tremendous. Designers are able to go from written prompts to full visualizations immediately. I don’t think this will limit the need for designers and architects, but rather push creative thinking further, faster.

Much of hotel technology has been behind in innovation, still stuck on figuring out relatively fundamental tech systems. I do think, however, that we’re closer to all systems speaking to each other more seamlessly, which will unlock the opportunity for hoteliers to deliver a much more personalized experience to guests, both digitally and on property. As this happens, the tech won’t be the bottleneck, but rather hoteliers’ creative thinking to differentiate messaging and experiences to different customer profiles.

## **How do you and your team keep up with new technologies or social media functions in order to stay one step ahead?**

I try to be a practitioner myself. I've been experimenting with the Meta Ray-Ban glasses that have first-person video cameras built in. I've loved seeing the innovation in camera technology and the streamlining of video editing and publishing. All big tech has made a big play towards video storytelling, which has always been a passion of mine, so I am always keeping up.

Website technology has always been a focus of ours, reducing friction in the booking path to the point of sale. We have had a close collaboration with Selfbook from their incubation to bring digital wallets to simplify transactions, which had otherwise been fragmented. The industry still has a way to go, but I'm always an advocate of stepping into the next thing.

## **Are there marketing efforts, agencies or individuals in the hospitality space today who you admire and why? Can you share an example?**

I'm loving what Belmond is doing on Instagram. They're a good example of a hotel company being part of a larger luxury company, LVMH, that really understands branding. They have done an amazing job at bringing the experiences they create to life digitally in an entertaining and engaging way that draws me in and leaves me wanting more. Video tactics, like using ambient audio and experiential vignettes are really compelling. They break the experiences into short form, so you stay engaged. Another well-loved Instagram account is Reschio, a property in Italy that combined bringing in the right audience with a commitment to creating thoughtful, playful content on property. Both examples spark a bit of joy in me and don't leave me feeling like I'm being sold to.

## **Is there anything else you would want to share to motivate aspiring marketers to pursue innovative approaches?**

If you are a young marketer with an interest in hospitality, I strongly recommend leaning in to become a generalist. Great marketing requires interdisciplinary thinking in the interest of being creative and analytical. It's super-helpful to understand all of the elements and channels that influence someone's hotel purchasing decision. And to be versed in each (social, digital advertising, email marketing, websites, analytics, revenue management, sales, etc.). Being a practitioner and student of all the parts is hugely valuable. We're still going through a bigger arc of transformation in the industry from being more sales-driven, to generating transient direct demand. If you can become

strong at understanding what drives people to choose to stay at a hotel in this modern landscape, you'll be valuable in this space.