



## Which Hotel Chain Does Customer Service E-Mail Best?

At the height of travel season, we decided to conduct a (non-scientific) experiment to find out which hotel chain does customer service e-mail best. Using the clever pseudonym "Jane Doe," we sent this e-mail query to hotel chains with properties near Chicago's Midway Airport.

**Subject: Request for info - room for disabled traveler - Labor Day 2008**

Hello -

I'm interested in making a hotel reservation for my brother near Midway Airport in Chicago on August 31 and September 1, 2008. (He uses a wheelchair.) Does the [*insert hotel name here*] have rooms for handicapped travelers? If so, how do I make a reservation?

Thanks -

Jane Doe

Within two days of sending our query, we'd received responses from five hotel chains: Best Western, Marriott, La Quinta, Hyatt, and Hilton.

**Read on for the hotels' e-mails and our comments on which hotels provided excellent service and which bombed.**



### Sample 1: Best Western

From: Best Western - Customer Service  
 To: Jane Doe  
 Date: Tue, Jul 8, 2008 at 10:08 AM  
 Subject: Re: BW Web Customer Relations E-mail  
 (ABC123456A12345A0BC)

Dear Jane,

Thank you for contacting Best Western International. I have reviewed your comments, and upon researching this matter our records indicate that the B/W River North Hotel does not have any handicap rooms available for the public to book. They requests that you contact them direct at 312-467-0800 in order to make these special arrangements. However, as an alternative the B/W Hawthorne Terrace Hotel offers a handicap accessible room which can be booked online, as it is guaranteed once booked. Please be sure to select the correct room type when booking.

If we can be of further service, please do not hesitate to contact us again through email or directly at 1-800-528-1238.

Thank you,

John Smith  
 Best Western International

**Comment [E-WRITE1]:** Good choice for "from" line. Customers will recognize who's sending them e-mail.

**Comment [E-WRITE2]:** Quick response! This response arrived within two hours.

**Comment [E-WRITE3]:** Not a good idea to use this abbreviation in the subject line. Many customers may not realize that *BW* stands for *Best Western*.

**Comment [E-WRITE4]:** Inadequate subject line; it doesn't forecast the topic of the e-mail at all.

**Comment [E-WRITE5]:** Good idea to use the personal pronouns *I* and *you*.

**Comment [E-WRITE6]:** Awkward sentence construction here. Did the records research this matter?

**Comment [E-WRITE7]:** Inconsistent use of the abbreviation. Is it *BW* or *B/W*?

**Comment [E-WRITE8]:** Poor choice of words. Are the rooms themselves "handicap"?

**Comment [E-WRITE9]:** Grammar errors do not make Best Western look good!

**Comment [E-WRITE10]:** It's not clear what type of special arrangements are being offered. Does the hotel have accessible rooms or not? Are they offering to retrofit a non-accessible room?

**Comment [E-WRITE11]:** Good customer service! The agent offers an option that will help the customer! It would help, however, if the agent indicated how close the Hawthorne Terrace Hotel is to the River North Hotel.

**Comment [E-WRITE12]:** An odd statement. Does this sentence imply that rooms booked by phone are not guaranteed?

**Comment [E-WRITE13]:** Not sure what he means by *directly* here. I called, and this is a general customer service number.



Sample 2: Marriott

From: internet.customer.care@marriott.com
To: Jane Doe
Date: Tue, Jul 8, 2008 at 10:02 AM
Subject: RE: Request for info - room for disabled traveler - Labor Day 2008 [A123456789101AB123A1234567]

Comment [E-WRITE14]: Quick response! This response arrived within two hours.

Dear Jane Doe,

Thank you for contacting Marriott Internet Customer Care. We appreciate the opportunity to assist you.

Comment [E-WRITE15]: Polite and friendly opening.

Handicapped accessible rooms are available at all Marriott hotels in the U.S. On Step Three of the reservation process, you can request the room type under Accessible Room Preference.

Comment [E-WRITE16]: Excellent! This is a direct answer to the customer's question and it appears near the beginning of the e-mail! It might be improved slightly if the agent included the name of the specific hotel we asked about.

Due to occasional changes in rates and availability, we cannot quote rates or book reservations for Chicago through email. We recommend using the Marriott.com reservation feature as a convenient way to check rates, availability, and room information. On the following webpage you will find a guide to the online booking process: https://www.marriott.com/suggest/faqs\_reserve.mi#question1

Comment [E-WRITE17]: Move or delete this sentence? Telling customers what you can't or won't do isn't a good customer service strategy.

If you need additional assistance making reservations online, please feel free to reply to this email or contact an Internet Customer Care Associate by phone at 800-721-7033 (toll-free in the United States and Canada). We are available to help you 24 hours per day, 7 days a week.

Comment [E-WRITE18]: Good! This paragraph offers ample assistance in making reservations. Marriott is being as thorough as possible.

For our international guests, a listing of international reservation offices is available at the following site: https://www.marriott.com/reservation/worldnum.mi

If we can be of further assistance, we invite you to reply to this email.

Comment [E-WRITE19]: The tone of this sentence, and this e-mail, is rather formal. Some customers will find this tone quite professional; others might find it a bit officious.

Thank you for choosing Marriott.

Regards,
John Smith
Marriott Internet Customer Care



### Sample 3: La Quinta

From: LQ Customer Service  
 To: Jane Doe  
 Date: Tue, Jul 8, 2008 at 8:39 AM  
 Subject: Request for info - room for disabled traveler - Labor Day 2008  
 [Incident:112233-0000123]

Dear Jane Doe,

Thank you for considering La Quinta Inns & Suites for your hotel travel plans!

At our Chicago Matteson location we do offer ADA assessable rooms.

We are unable to provide rates via email as they are always subject to change by date and location.

For the current rates and availability, please feel free to access this information online at LQ.com.

Please contact La Quinta Reservations at 1-800-SLEEP-LQ (1-800-753-3757) if you need further assistance.

Sincerely,

John Smith  
La Quinta Operations Support

**Comment [E-WRITE20]:** Poor choice for "from" line. Will customers know who "LQ" is?

**Comment [E-WRITE21]:** Quickest response of all! This response arrived within one hour.

**Comment [E-WRITE22]:** Good. The subject line features the customer's words. The incident number (not very useful for the customer) is at the end of the subject line.

**Comment [E-WRITE23]:** To La Quinta's credit, the customer service agent answers the customer's question directly in the second sentence of the e-mail. Good! However, this phrasing has two problems: "ADA" may be accurate terminology, but it's not wording that the customer used. Also, this spelling error doesn't do much for La Quinta's reputation.

**Comment [E-WRITE24]:** Interesting comment as our inquiry did not include a request for rates.

**Comment [E-WRITE25]:** This advice to book online would be much better if the link went directly to the Reservations page and not to the home page. And whichever link appears in the e-mail should be clickable.



### Sample 4: Hyatt

From: [conciierge@hyatt.com](mailto:conciierge@hyatt.com)  
 To: Jane Doe  
 Date: Tue, Jul 8, 2008 at 8:21 PM  
 Subject: **Re: My Reservation 0102030405060**

Dear Ms. Doe:

Thank you for your message to Hyatt Hotels & Resorts. I am delighted to learn of your intent to stay with us and welcome the opportunity to assist you with reservations.

Please note room rates and reservations are subject to availability and may sell out at any time. Rates and reservations are not guaranteed until a confirmation number is given.

As of today, (based on single occupancy) the following accommodations and rates are available at the Hyatt Regency McCormick Place, beginning on Sunday, August 31, 2008 for one night:

Standard guest room--179.00 USD plus tax  
 City View guest room--199.00 USD plus tax

The Hyatt Regency McCormick Place does offer handicapped accessible guest rooms. The ADA guest rooms feature wheelchair accessible doors, accessible peepholes, roll in showers, towel racks/sink and vanity and bathtub and commode grab bars.

The reservation you have requested requires a credit card guarantee. However, please do not send your credit card number via e-mail as e-mail is not a secure method of communication. Please make your reservation on-line at [www.hyatt.com](http://www.hyatt.com) or contact Hyatt via telephone. To speak with a Hyatt Representative from within the US and Canada, please call 888-591-1234. To view a list of contact numbers available in other countries please visit: <http://www.hyatt.com/hyatt/customer-service/numbers.jsp>

When making reservations on-line and via telephone, please note that a complete address, phone number, and estimated time of arrival is also required.

I look forward to receiving your reply. Thank you for your interest in Hyatt.

Sincerely,  
 Darrell  
 Hyatt Sales Representative

**Comment [E-WRITE26]:** Clever choice of "from" name, but it might be better if it were *Hyatt Concierge* rather than just *conciierge*.

**Comment [E-WRITE27]:** This response arrived about 12 hours after we sent our query.

**Comment [E-WRITE28]:** Nearly meaningless subject line: no hotel name, no reference to accessible room, etc. And, I don't have a reservation yet, so "My Reservation" doesn't really work.

**Comment [E-WRITE29]:** Friendly, enthusiastic, and personal opening.

**Comment [E-WRITE30]:** Somewhat interesting info, but where's the answer to my question about accessible rooms?

**Comment [E-WRITE31]:** Hmm ... I did not ask about rates. Where's the answer to my question about accessible rooms?

**Comment [E-WRITE32]:** Here's the answer to my question. This is a thorough paragraph with much useful information, but it is in the wrong place. This should be the second paragraph not the fourth.

**Comment [E-WRITE33]:** Ample, detailed information about making a reservation.

**Comment [E-WRITE34]:** Polite closing.



### Sample 5: Hilton

From: internethamp@hiltonres.com  
 To: Jane Doe  
 Date: Wed, Jul 9, 2008 at 3:08 PM  
 Subject: Re: Reservation/Rate Questions (Ticket# 07082008G57020001:AR0004)

**Comment [E-WRITE35]:** Not a good choice of "from" name. What is *Internet Hamp*, anyway?

**Comment [E-WRITE36]:** Slow response. This reply came 31 hours after we e-mailed.

**Comment [E-WRITE37]:** Weak subject line. At the minimum, it should include the hotel name.

Dear Jane,

The Hilton Internet Contact Center has recently received your email. We are pleased that you took the time to write us.

**Comment [E-WRITE38]:** An odd greeting. If they are replying to me, why do I need to be told that Hilton has received my e-mail? Why are they thanking me for writing, a task which is surely my means, not my end!

As rates and availability are time and date sensitive, and therefore subject to change, we cannot quote rates or book reservations via email. Please feel free to call reservations at 800-664-4321, this department is more than willing to further assist you. To access up to the minute rates and hotel information on [www.hiltonfamily.com](http://www.hiltonfamily.com) please follow these directions.

**Comment [E-WRITE39]:** Two embarrassing problems in this sentence: it's a run-on and *than* is misspelled.

1. Locate the "find a hotel" feature on the lower left-hand side of the page.
2. Provide the name of the City in the block provided
3. Then enter the "State/Province or country in which the city is located
4. Please click the "Find It" button.

**Comment [E-WRITE40]:** This phrase needs hyphens.

Once you have completed the steps above, you will be directed to a page listing all of the Hilton Family Properties that have met your search criteria. Click on the name of the hotel if you wish to see information on the property. If you are ready to book a reservation or check rates click on the "View Rates".

**Comment [E-WRITE41]:** This level of detail on how to make a reservation makes it sound hard and time-consuming. If the reservation form prompts the user for the correct information, perhaps the agent could reduce the amount of detail in this and the following paragraphs.

You will then be taken to a page where you will need to provide your arrival and departure dates, the number of rooms, and the number of guests. Once all of this information has been entered click "Continue" and the available rates should appear.

**Comment [E-WRITE42]:** I'm still waiting for an answer to my question about an accessible room at the Hampton Inn Chicago Midway Airport.

To choose a rate/room type, click the radio button next to the rate that you are selecting and then the "Continue" button at the bottom of the screen. You will then need to fill out all the required fields with an (\*) asterisk. Once you have completed this please click "Book Now" to confirm your reservation.

**Comment [E-WRITE43]:** Such a wordy paragraph! This paragraph, and the one that follows, could easily be cut by half.

**Comment [E-WRITE44]:** Is an accessible room one of the room types a customer can select? If so, the e-mail should state that.



If you require further assistance, please dial 1-800-774-1500 and choose one of the following options when prompted by the Voice Response Unit:

- \* Select option "1" for help with reservations, cancellations and hotel information.
- \* Select option "2" for help with technical issues or questions about one of our Brand websites.

If you are currently outside of the US, please visit <http://www.hilton.com/en/hi/feedback/hrwfone.jhtml> for a list of our Worldwide Reservation Offices and their telephone numbers. Or you may place a toll call to us directly at 972-770-6136.

Sincerely, |

John S  
Internet Coordinator

**Comment [E-WRITE45]:** Why am I given a different phone number than the one in the second paragraph?

**Comment [E-WRITE46]:** Dreadful jargon. Interacting with the "Voice Response Unit" does not give a customer a warm fuzzy feeling.

**Comment [E-WRITE47]:** Well, we've reached the end of the 374-word reply but Hilton failed to answer the original question at all: "Do you have a room for a traveler who uses a wheelchair?"