



How Sonesta Hotels Leverages Schoox to Ensure Employee Success at Scale

Sonesta Hotels began its journey in 1937 as a single beachside hotel. Today, the chain includes thousands of properties spanning across nine countries. It boasts a mix of traditional hotels, extended stay locations, and sprawling resort properties complete with gyms, spas, and restaurants. Most of this growth occurred in the short span between summer 2020 and early 2021 when the conglomerate expanded to include hundreds of new properties and thousands of new employees—propelling Sonesta Hotels to the top of the hotel industry. Critical amid this larger period of growth was the acquisition of Red Lion Hotels, which added more than 900 franchised locations to the Sonesta Hotels portfolio.

Prior to the expansion, Sonesta Hotels comprised just two brands. Now the hotel chain includes fifteen brands—each with their own organizational structures, operational challenges, and training requirements.

Business Challenges

Sonesta Hotels identified an opportunity to enhance training, but it needed an LMS that goes beyond basic training to accomplish measurable improvements in operating standards. Simply delivering virtual content with instructions on how to perform tasks wasn't enough. For training to be effective, managers also had to confirm if employees could perform the tasks while on the job.

"Online training is great," says Senior Director of Training at Sonesta Hotels, Derek Fournier, "but ultimately, we need to know if we're teaching the right skills and if employees can perform those skills in front of guests."

Sonesta Hotels required a solution that leverages multiple learning and development methods to prepare each employee for success, ensuring they have the skills required to deliver an exceptional customer experience to guests.

The hospitality company initially sought to provide a manager development course based on a blended learning model for the 45 general managers of its Extended Stay locations—combining virtual instruction, on-the-job training, and managerial signoffs on skills assessments to ensure retention. From there, it planned to roll out more training programs across its growing portfolio of properties and brands.



CUSTOMER SINCE:

2020

SIZE:

7,500

INDUSTRY:

Hospitality

HEADQUARTERS:

Newton, MA

As the Sonesta Hotels umbrella expanded to include Royal Sonesta, Sonesta Hotel & Resorts, and several other brands, the company also had to create new learning environments or “academies”—each one reflecting a unique brand and culture. Since the various brands, properties, and individual jobs are all so different, the company required a platform that delivers personalized content to the right employees without overloading them with material meant for other brands or parts of the business.

Finally, because of the 24/7 nature of the hotel business, the company sought a solution that allows employees to complete coursework anytime and from any device, especially since nearly 80% of Sonesta Hotels employees do not have dedicated computer workstations.

Why Schoox?

Finding a solution that made it possible to pair on-demand, asynchronous content with live in-person or virtual instructor-led sessions was critical for Sonesta Hotels. Its leadership team selected Schoox primarily for the platform’s ability to support multiple modes of learning and managerial signoffs on skills retention. As the company grew, Schoox also enabled Sonesta Hotels to set up multiple academies for each distinct business unit and manage it all through a single platform.

“The onboarding and culture pieces were key for us. As we grow exponentially, we’re keeping focus on how to provide a consistent onboarding experience,” shares Derek. “With properties across the United States, asynchronous content combined with on-the-job training helps us ensure that managers in one location are receiving the same level of training as managers in another part of the country. Schoox gives us the best of both worlds,” he continues.

The platform also serves as a convenient way for the company to connect and communicate with all employees at once—a particularly valuable feature because many employees do not have corporate email accounts. Leadership at Sonesta Hotels also found Schoox to be useful for addressing several immediate project management needs.

“The reason we’re with Schoox is the flexibility it gives us. Little did we know how important that would be when we got started, but it became clear as we continued to scale our business.”

—Derek Fournier, Senior Director of Training at Sonesta Hotels

The COVID-19 pandemic further highlighted the importance of Schoox in learning and development at Sonesta Hotels. With the influx of new properties and thousands of employees to onboard, Schoox made it possible for Sonesta Hotels to provide a consistent training experience despite severe restrictions on travel and face-to-face collaboration.



Sonesta Hotels found the skills signoff functionality to be a key differentiator of the Schoox platform, a major reason why the hotel conglomerate selected Schoox as their preferred L&D technology partner.

Results

Schoox helped Sonesta Hotels onboard and train thousands of new Sonesta Hotels employees and improve learning and development for its existing employees. The LMS offers Sonesta Hotels full visibility into employee progress, as well as granular control over how to categorize users and map them to each other within the system. Employees appreciate that they can start or pause a course at any point, allowing them to learn at their own pace.

“The ultimate measure of learning is the impact on the guest.”

—Derek Fournier, Senior Director of Training at Sonesta Hotels

Schoox enables Sonesta Hotels to connect three major pillars of its business—employees, guest feedback, and training—to measurable goals and business impact. When the hotel receives online reviews, for example, it can easily map complaints to areas where training might be weak and implement a targeted solution. This helps Sonesta Hotels resolve problems on a case-by-case basis, and when appropriate, roll out standardized process improvements company wide.

“As we grow, we want to make sure we’re delivering consistency in the customer experience. If reviews for a particular hotel or service are negative, we first check if the employees have completed the associated training courses for their role. If they haven’t, we address that. If they have, it presents an opportunity for us as leadership to improve the training, because it isn’t translating into a great customer experience,” explains Derek.

Looking Ahead

From security and engineering to restaurant staff, Schoox is now a one-stop-shop for all things learning and development at Sonesta Hotels. It also helps the company fulfill ad-hoc training initiatives. When COVID-19 presented unprecedented challenges for the hotel industry, Sonesta turned to Schoox to deliver timely education around public health and vaccination awareness to its entire workforce.

As it expands its footprint throughout the hospitality industry, Sonesta Hotels plans to continue leveraging Schoox to introduce new team members to its corporate culture and deliver a continuous, personalized learning experience for each employee.



Within the first six months, Sonesta Hotels employees logged over 20,000 hours of training and 50,000 course completions.

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