

# Google Business Photos Show Consumers a New View

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When approached by Google in August about getting involved with its new Business Photos platform, Dorothy Dowling, senior vice president of marketing and sales for Best Western International, didn't think twice about signing up. The new service—which uses Street View technology—offers businesses, including hotels, the opportunity to show customers a 360-degree interactive tour of their properties. “We knew the technology was going to be a game changer in how consumers shop for and book hotels on the Web,” Dowling says.

Best Western expects to roll out Business Photos at its 2,200 North American hotels by the end of 2014. Hilton is also following suit and will launch the platform at 96 of its hotels as part of the pilot program. “We track our website, and the photo gallery is one of the most visited pages,” says Eduardo Chapoval, general manager of the Hampton Inn and Suites Miami/Brickell-Downtown, one of the participating Hilton properties. “Guests are looking at the pictures to make their decisions. Having that 360-degree view of an interactive tour will only help us.”

Hotels interested in taking advantage of Google Business Photos need to align with a photographer or agency that has been trained and certified to offer this type of technology. Rates vary by region, photographer, and project size, but there is no additional charge from Google to include the photos on the search engine's listing page or to embed the virtual tours on property websites. Best Western is offering hotel owners and franchisees this service as part of a bigger digital upgrade package that will run approximately \$900.

Once hotels set up a shoot with a photographer, the process takes less than a day—often just a few hours—to capture the whole property. There is little disruption to guests while the shoot is in progress, Dowling says. The final product—usually available to hotels within a few weeks—offers a detailed panoramic view of guestrooms and public spaces that traditional photos cannot provide.

“More and more people are driven to the Internet to make their booking decisions,” Chapoval says. “The ability to have them click on the street, step into our hotel, take the elevator up to our lobby, and walk through the property like they are here is fantastic.”