Case Study

Hospitality Technology Industry

HITEC 2026

James Taylor opens the world's largest hospitality technology conference with a keynote on creativity, AI adoption, and the human advantage hospitality leaders need to protect

COMPANY OVERVIEW

HITEC is the annual flagship conference of HFTP® (Hospitality Financial & Technical Professionals) — the world's largest hospitality technology event, convening CIOs, CTOs, revenue management leaders, independent operators, and hospitality technology suppliers.

CHALLENGE

The industry had spent two to three years getting AI-ready. With 78% of hotel chains having deployed AI but only 7% operating with a coherent AI strategy, the room needed an honest keynote that addressed the gap — without the vendor optimism filling the exhibit hall.

SOLUTION

A 50-minute opening keynote — **SuperCreativity: Accelerating Innovation in the Age of Artificial Intelligence** — built around deep audience research and hospitality-native case studies.

AUDIENCE

~350 IT professionals, software developers, revenue managers, hoteliers, and hospitality technology suppliers. CIOs and CTOs from Hyatt, Hilton, and Marriott among attendees.

LOCATION

San Antonio, Texas, USA.

RESULTS

HFTP described the session as bringing a timely and energising look at creativity, innovation, AI, and the distinctly human advantage hospitality leaders still need to protect and strengthen. Attendees left with a research-backed framework and a concrete innovation model to act on immediately.

ABOUT THE ENGAGEMENT

HITEC 2026 gathered 6,100+ attendees in San Antonio for its annual event. Attendees to the Headliner session spanned the full breadth of the industry: CIOs and CTOs from global hotel brands including Hyatt, Hilton, and Marriott; revenue management leaders from ownership groups and management companies; independent operators; and the suppliers and consultants who serve them.

The challenge the programme committee set was specific. The industry had spent the previous two to three years focused on getting AI-ready — building data infrastructure, establishing governance frameworks, and selecting technology stacks. The question facing HITEC 2026 was what comes next.

78%
of hotel chains had deployed AI tools

7%
were operating with a coherent AI strategy

80%
of AI failures stem from people & process, not technology (BCG)

The Preparation

James conducted detailed preparation ahead of the engagement, including a content alignment call with the HFTP programme committee to map the specific pressures the audience was carrying into the room: adoption barriers inside their organisations, the pace of investment decisions, technical debt, and the labour dynamics reshaping the industry.
A psychometric analysis of the attendee list identified a room that would respond to evidence over enthusiasm — with a significant cluster of analytically-trained revenue management and IT leadership professionals alongside owner-operators making capital allocation decisions for their own properties. This shaped content selection at every level.

- **Executive Alignment Calls:** Three sessions with senior leadership to map audience pressures, current client themes, and the exact questions the room would be carrying in.
- **Psychometric Audience Analysis:** James profiled the audience to calibrate content to the way this group thinks — evidence-based, intellectually rigorous, and peer-to-peer in tone rather than prescriptive.
- **Bespoke Content Build:** Stories, data, questions, and three specific takeaways were constructed from scratch around what this audience needed — not repurposed from a generic deck.

The Delivery

The 50-minute keynote followed James's 4P framework — Position, Problem, Possibilities, Proposal — opening with a hospitality-specific framing of the AI moment the industry was navigating. Rather than treating AI adoption as a technology problem, James reframed it through a BCG finding that 80% of AI implementation failures stem from people and process issues rather than technical shortcomings.

This set up the session's central concept: the Competency Penalty — a research-backed phenomenon in which employees, particularly women and workers over 40, avoid using AI tools for fear colleagues will judge them as less competent. For a room responsible for driving adoption across diverse workforces, this reframe shifted the conversation from infrastructure to culture.

The Possibilities section drew on cross-industry case studies selected for their direct relevance to hospitality operations:

- **IKEA** — upskilled 8,500 displaced customer service workers into a new AI-assisted interior design business generating $1.4 billion in new revenue.
- **Kempinski Hotels** — used augmented reality and AI-powered guest profiling to extend personalised service beyond its traditional VIP concierge model.
- **BCG Centaurs & Cyborgs research** — identified the two human-AI collaboration styles that most consistently outperform when humans work alongside AI.

The session closed with a practical Red Team / Blue Team innovation framework — Red Team for incremental AI deployment, Blue Team for transformative AI initiatives — and a call to put the guest, rather than the technology, at the centre of every AI decision.

The Results

- **Audience-First Research**

Psychometric analysis shaped content selection, ensuring examples and evidence matched the analytical mindset of a room spanning IT leadership, revenue management, and owner-operators

- **Hospitality-Native Examples**

Case studies from Kempinski Hotels and IKEA, alongside BCG's Centaurs and Cyborgs research, grounded cross-industry insights in the operational reality of the people in the seats.

- **Honest Framing**

The Competency Penalty section gave attendees a research-backed explanation for why AI adoption stalls — and a three-step framework for breaking it.

- **Actionable Close**

The Red Team / Blue Team innovation model gave attendees a concrete structural decision to take back to their organisations the following week.

"A timely and energising look at creativity, innovation, AI, and the distinctly human advantage hospitality leaders still need to protect and strengthen."
HFTP
Hospitality Financial & Technical Professionals — HITEC 2026

SuperCreativity:
Accelerating Innovation in the Age of Artificial Intelligence

Creativity is no longer optional. It is fast becoming the defining human advantage.

James Taylor KEYNOTE SPEAKER

About James Taylor

James Taylor is an award-winning entrepreneur, author, host, and inspiring keynote speaker on a global mission to unlock creativity, increase productivity and accelerate innovation.