

The hotel company also has enhanced its new SME business travel program with deeper discounts and signed more accounts.

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Dallas-based hotel company Omni Hotels & Resorts, which has 50 properties open in the U.S. and Canada, is investing heavily in its product and service as it looks to ascend the hotel service-tier and capture more of the corporate market. Omni chief commercial officer Jeff Doane, **who joined the company last year**, spoke with BTN managing editor Chris Davis last month at the Global Business Travel Association convention in Denver about the company's luxury ambitions, its push for small-to-midsize businesses and the effects of macroeconomic uncertainty. Edited excerpts follow.

BTN: You've been at Omni about a year and a half now. How has the experience been?

Jeff Doane: I love it. My background includes serving as chief commercial officer at Accor after it acquired Fairmont in 2016. I had worked for Fairmont for a number of years, and probably the best experience was helping move Fairmont from a four-star, upper-upscale brand into the luxury space, creating more of an experiential type of brand. Omni is trying to kind of do the same thing, and that really appealed to me. The culture here is strong, and everybody's going in the same direction and is focused on the same things.

BTN: How does that upmarket strategy translate to the business travel segment?

Doane: You want to tailor your product around the needs of your customer. There's a service experience that's expected when you're in that four- to five-star space. Then moving from one that provides just that to a brand that's creating more unique and rewarding and personal experiences for travelers to me is the difference between four and four-and-a-half stars. Then it escalates right to Ritz-Carlton and Four Seasons where they have such attention on the guests. We want to be right in the heart of that luxury space.

From a product standpoint, we've invested \$2.5 billion in our hotels over the past three to five years, and we're poised to do the same in the next three to five. We know that business traveler wants great Wi-Fi, great breakfast, great gym, great sleep experience. Those are the things that we're really focused on in terms of specifically for the business traveler. And that experiential side is, why are you in town and do you want a foam

Omni's Jeff Doane talks...



- Moving upmarket and catering to corporate travelers
- Omni's SME Select Business program
- Rate outlook for 2026

BTN: Does that change the corporate customers you're targeting, either on a corporate or individual level?

Doane: Within every company there's levels of travel. You may be at the midscale end of the market, and you may be working with Amazon, but Ritz-Carlton is working with Amazon too. So your customer ends up being the same, where you fall in that spectrum determines who ends up staying in those hotels. Certain customers will be like, 'We just started working with you. This is fantastic. We love your product.' So it's new to him. I think there's a lot of that kind of opportunity for us, but I think there's also a lot of companies that we're working with where maybe a different traveler within their organization stays with us.

BTN: Along those lines, all of the big hotel companies in the U.S. are multi-brand up and down the line, including luxury. How do you carve a niche for yourself?

Doane: We've always said we're not replacing Marriott or Hilton or Hyatt. They have so many dots on the map and cater to every traveler. It would be naive for us to think that was possible. But we are a complementary brand for people who want higher-touch service, and we think that we can win people over once they experience this.

BTN: The macroeconomic picture has been volatile this year. What are you hearing from corporate clients? Are they cutting back?

Doane: They're just plugging along. A lot of our customers say they've had a pretty good first half of the year and a lot say the second half is going to be like the first half.

[On tariffs,] we have to come with some conclusion on this or something's got to give. [In a session on GBTA's Business Travel Index] the speaker said if the tariffs end up at 20 percent, there will be an impact. I don't know that there's not another way to look at it. So you're hoping that cooler heads prevail and it ends up in 3 percent to 5 percent range. The longer the uncertainty lasts, the more it's in people's heads.

BTN: Are requests for proposals or how buyers communicate changing?

Doane: We're seeing more customers saying, you know what, we work with the big brands and we have that kind of relationship with them, but we're looking to try to figure out how we complement that. How do we create a more diversified set of options for our traveler? This year, year to date, business travel revenue has grown for us by 17 percent and volume has grown 10 percent

I think it's the customer saying, 'I don't like to be so boxed in.' And we're a little bit more of a one-on-one relationship with the customer and that's real important too because they like to know who to call.

number of the big brands have these kinds of programs just for small to medium-sized companies. Well, Omni, is a small to medium-sized hotel company, so I think we're a natural for that.

We're real happy with how it's progressing. We thought 50 to 75 accounts would be a good start, and we're already at 200.

BTN: Does its success give you any ideas in terms of enhancing it?

Doane: We came out with a 9 percent discount off of our normal rates, and we realized that probably wasn't rewarding enough. So just recently we changed it to 12 percent.

BTN: Are you integrating AI into your RFP process or operations?

Doane: Not in RFPs yet, but we've moved our reservation system to the cloud. There's a certain amount of AI involved in that in terms of knowing your guests and understanding them. We are working with a company called BlueConic to better understand our guests. If we know what a traveler wants from us, we can take better care of them and develop those personalized offers.

BTN: How are you approaching 2026 rate strategies?

Doane: The latest projection I saw from CBRE was like 1.8 percent to 2 percent growth for next year. [Note: **CBRE in May projected** full-year 2025 U.S. average daily rate to increase 1.2 percent year over year and revenue per available room to increase 1.3 percent.] I'm not sure we're back to stabilized occupancy altogether in the United States. I don't know that there's enough pressure for hotel companies to really try to drive rate. You'll try and move it to accommodate cost increases. We're at that stage of trying to get our foot in the door with a lot of companies and try and expose our product to them and their travelers. And that's not the time where you're pushing for double-digit increases, you know?

BTN: What's ahead on the development front?

Doane: We have a beautiful brand-new hotel opening in Fort Lauderdale in October, right at the marina and convention center. We are working on a project in Raleigh, N.C., again right at the convention center. Same thing down in New Orleans. And then there's a bunch of other projects that we're talking to people about.