



CUSTOMER STORY

# Playa Hotels & Resorts Simplifies Going Public by Connecting Financial Reporting & SOX Compliance

Brandon B. Buhler, SVP and Chief Accounting Officer for Playa Hotels & Resorts, shares Playa's journey of bringing a human touch to internal audit with Workiva—from going public, to SEC reporting, to SOX compliance.



Simplicity of integrating supporting documents and SEC reporting was crucial



Playa reduced its close time from 10 days to 4



PwC helped Playa create a "three lines of defense" internal control environment



**Playa Hotels & Resorts (Playa), a leading operator of luxury all-inclusive beachfront resorts in Mexico and the Caribbean, needed a solution that would easily fulfill numerous needs—from financial reporting to compliance processes.**

Playa owns and/or manages 22 resorts in Mexico, Jamaica, and the Dominican Republic, with over 8,000 associates across recognizable brands like the Hyatt Ziva/Zilara, Hilton All-inclusive, Jewel Resorts, Wyndham Alltra, and Sanctuary Cap Cana.

The journey from going private to public, along with continuous partnerships and acquisitions, is a complex road. For Brandon B. Buhler, Chief Accounting Officer for Playa, who oversees all things corporate and property accounting, financial systems, financial reporting, technical accounting, and internal controls, simplicity is key.



**Integration needed: Searching for something beyond spreadsheets**

When Brandon joined Playa in 2014 as the Director of Financial Reporting, he knew that they needed to invest

in technology if they wanted their operations to match their ambition.

Brandon said, “We needed something more than simple spreadsheets and documents to support the financial statements for reporting as we were preparing to go public.” Workiva’s cloud-interconnected spreadsheets offered something desktop spreadsheets could not.

So when the Workiva platform came highly recommended, Playa decided it was the right tool to invest in. “We started using the Workiva platform for generating our SEC reporting files as well as the supporting documents,” Brandon explained. “The integration of the supporting documents and the filing have been a huge factor to successfully producing and filing every quarter.”

Playa’s initial success with the Workiva solution encouraged them to look beyond financial reporting. Brandon said, “Using Workiva to prepare and file the supporting documentation helped us decrease our close significantly. We worked down at the property level, shared service level, and at the corporate level. We have been able to reduce our close time from around 10 days to four days, and that really has been from the support of the tools.”





## Going public: Creating three lines of defense

In Playa's journey to go public, they collaborated with PwC to aid with SOX compliance. PwC helped Brandon and his team prepare a "three lines of defense" environment. The first line is a preparer and reviewer, the second line is a quality and risk department that implements spot check audits, and then the third line is Playa's internal audit team. Brandon said that looking at Workiva's tools was the natural step because "being able to collaborate among those team members was really important to us as we started having frequent recurring strategic meetings."

With multiple jurisdictions and locations, Brandon needed a powerful governance tool that was user friendly. "We had different skill sets in technology. We needed something that would address the multi-languages that we have, Spanish and English, and that would aggregate responses."

A common challenge of SOX compliance is keeping all parties aligned. For Playa, there is the company itself, its internal audit team, and external auditors. As Brandon describes it, you have to make sure that "we're singing the same song, from the same song sheet...the tools that we have within the Workiva platform have enabled us to make sure that we're in sync when we're looking at the controls and the scoping."

Brandon called out the version controls, reviews, and approvals as particularly helpful functions of the Workiva platform.



**We needed something more than simple spreadsheets and documents in preparing the financial statements for reporting as we were preparing to go public.**

**Brandon B. Buhler**  
SVP & Chief Accounting Officer  
Playa Hotels & Resorts

"We also implemented certification functionality with Workiva. We're using that primarily in our 302 and 404 certs, as well as other validations, that we have individuals down at all of our properties, shared service center, and corporate provide back to the main contact so we can aggregate those validations." PwC also helped Playa become an early adopter of the SOX controls module.



## Workiva: The human touch

While technology was a key role in Playa's expansion, Brandon knew the true key to success was picking a tool its employees could easily grasp. "We have an adage in the company that if we take care of our associates, we motivate them, and in turn they'll turn around and they'll give that guest experience with love to our guests, and that's why people come back to our resorts."



By focusing on training and upskilling, Playa was able to automate the more administrative busy work and empower its employees with access and knowledge. Brandon said that this helped ensure better data was being produced while people used their time in more impactful ways to increase the quality of reviews and the final output.

Brandon and his team aren't done integrating the Workiva platform into their processes. The next step is integrating their internal control self-assessments into the platform to better leverage testing with the first line of defense into the other lines, and eventually, with the external auditors.

No matter what else may happen on Playa's journey in the future, Brandon knows that Workiva will be there to support them.

See what Workiva can do for you.  
Visit [workiva.com/request-demo](https://workiva.com/request-demo).



## IN BRIEF



### Disconnected challenges

- Transitioning from private to public
- Filing for SOX for the first time in 2020



### Connected results

- Easy to bring new associates onboard and upskill current employees
- Single source of truth for teams to find current numbers
- Drove close from 10 days to 4



### Connected solutions

- [SEC Reporting](#)
- [SOX Compliance](#)
- [Financial Close Reporting](#)



### Why they chose Workiva

Playa Hotels & Resorts wanted to modernize beyond spreadsheets and leverage technology that made day-to-day work more efficient and effective.

