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The Official Publication of AAHOA

THE IMPACT OF COVID-19

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APRIL 2020
THE IMPACT OF COVID-19
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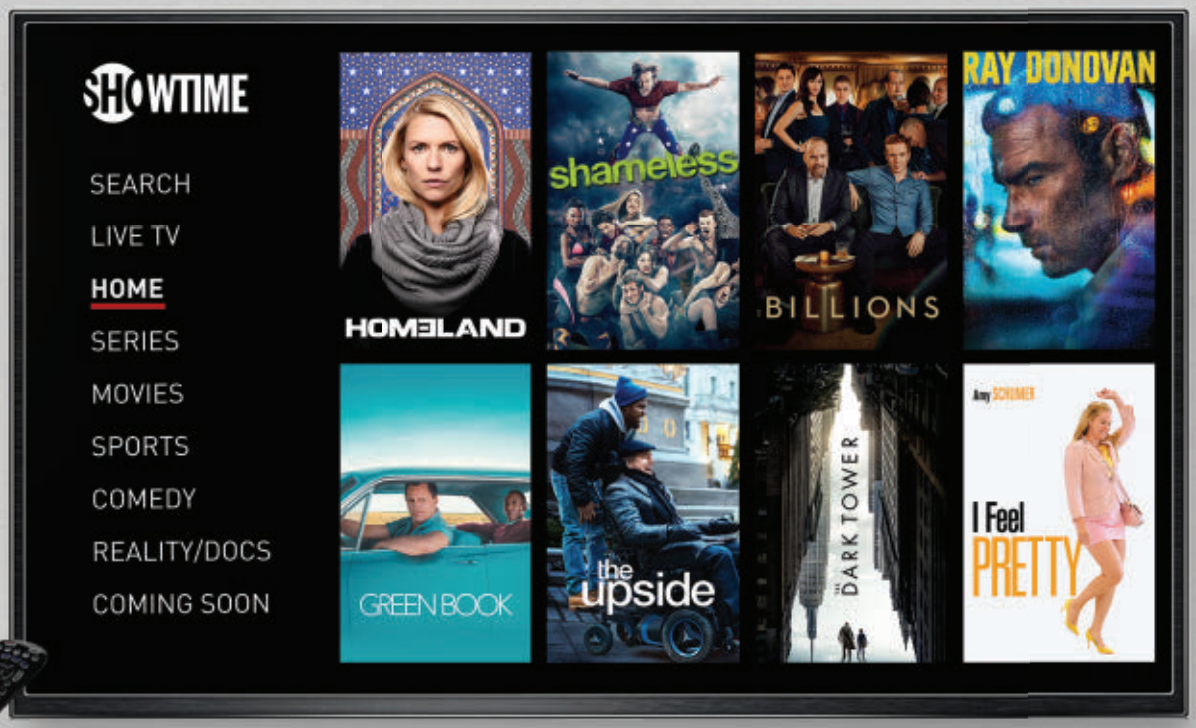
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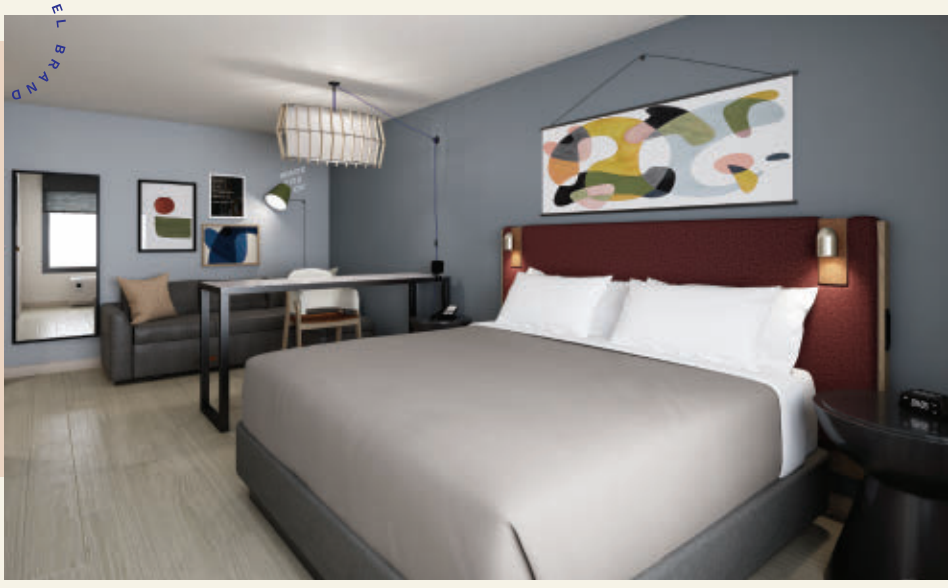
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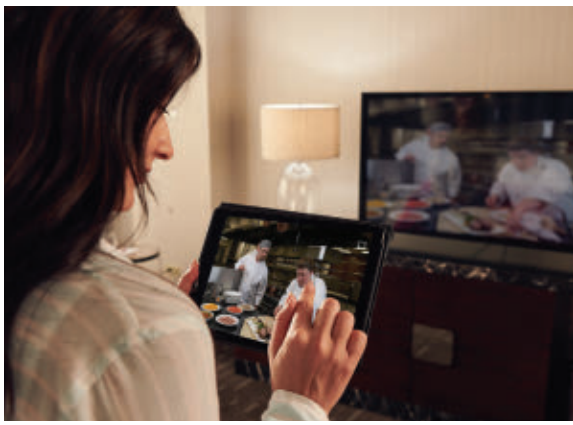


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5 THINGS TO KNOW
ABOUT **AAHOA** THIS MONTH

1.

AAHOA COVID-19 Resources: The hospitality industry is facing incredible adversity right now. To help members weather this unprecedented storm, AAHOA has compiled an exhaustive body of resources, including daily updates, one-page downloads on top-of-mind topics, and more. Visit AAHOA.com/COVID-19.

2.

AAHOA Action Alert Center: AAHOA is working tirelessly around the clock on the national, state, and local levels to get financial assistance and relief for hoteliers, many of whom are currently facing unimaginable hardships. But we need your help. There's power in numbers, so make your voice heard. Check out our latest calls to action on AAHOA.com.

3.

COVID-19 Webcast Series: AAHOA has compiled a series of coronavirus-related webcasts that will help determine the next steps to protect your business as best you can. AAHOA is making these webcasts available to the industry as a whole, so be sure to share with your network, whether you're an AAHOA Member or not.

4.

Get Your Questions Answered: AAHOA has created a centralized location to email your questions so we can provide top-level member customer service for all your questions. Send an email to covid19@aahoa.com, and someone from AAHOA will get back to you as quickly as possible.

5.

AAHOACON Rescheduled: In the wake of the coronavirus pandemic, the 2020 AAHOA Convention & Trade Show has been rescheduled for August 9-12, in Orlando. For answers to questions regarding event registration, hotel registration, and more, check aahoa.com/convention.

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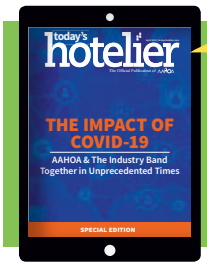
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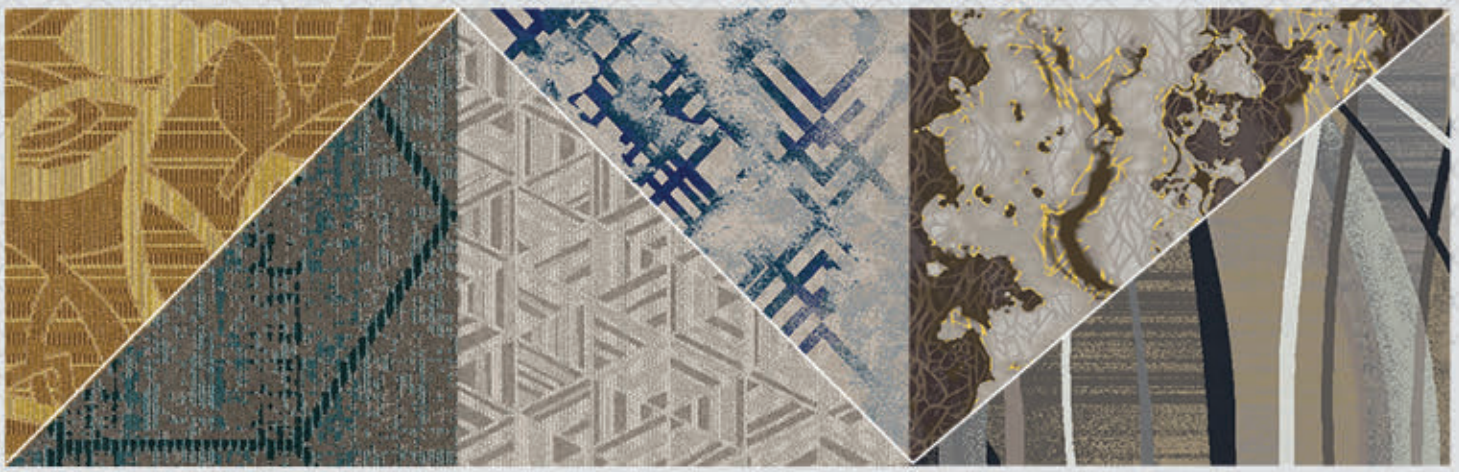
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COVID-19 and the strength of AAHOA

> “Our industry overcame numerous challenges throughout the years, and I am confident that it will emerge stronger on the other side of this crisis.”

OUR ASSOCIATION, OUR INDUSTRY, AND our nation are facing an unprecedented crisis due to the rapid spread of COVID-19. Once an ominous illness a continent away from our communities, COVID-19 is now affecting all parts of everyday life. The severity of the virus’s impact on our nation’s health, peace of mind, and economy cannot be understated. However, this is no time to retreat or to accept defeat. Our industry overcame numerous challenges throughout the years, and I am confident that it will emerge stronger on the other side of this crisis.

I want to assure you that our board and AAHOA’s entire team are working around the clock to address the issues hoteliers are now facing in this new reality. It seems like every hour there is a change in the COVID-19 situation. As lawmakers scramble to confront numerous issues, AAHOA is developing resources daily for our hoteliers while advocating our members’ concerns with brands and elected officials. We are gathering all suggestions and all inputs from our volunteers as well as members to address these rapid changes.

AAHOA is doing everything we can to assist America’s hoteliers. I encourage you to consult the resources on www.aahoa.com. There you can find daily webinars, COVID-19 updates, action alerts, messages from AAHOA leadership, and links to public health agencies. Staying up to date is the best way to keep your guests, your employees, and your properties safe.

AAHOA continues to be proactive in working with brand executives to find ways to mitigate the cost and pressures hoteliers are facing as a result of COVID-19. We have already connected with every single brand CEO. In our ongoing conversations with the brands, we’ve requested measures such as waiving royalty fees, pausing brand standards, waiving penalties on guest satisfaction and loyalty enrollments, and reducing OTA fees. Please continue to share your concerns with us. AAHOA Members are speaking, and the brands are listening. Brands are cutting fees and adding additional relief measures. We expect more changes to come as we determine the lasting impact COVID-19 will have on hoteliers across the country. As AAHOA engages brands at the national level, we encourage you to speak with your local brand representative and let them know the issues you are facing at your property.

We are a resilient industry, and moreover, a determined association. We are all in this together, and we will get through this together. My thoughts are with all of you and your families during these trying times. ■

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CECIL P. STATON
AAHOA PRESIDENT & CEO

Unprecedented times call for unprecedented measures

IN RECENT WEEKS, WE HAVE all witnessed the unfathomable effects of the novel coronavirus. Domestic travel has almost ground to a halt. People are quarantining themselves in their homes. Many businesses are closing. The U.S. must confront the constantly changing environment in the face of COVID-19. This crisis touches every community across the country.

Lawmakers on Capitol Hill and in state capitals across the country are rushing to address the economic downturn brought about by COVID-19. As governors, congressmen, and state legislators convene to draft concise, timely legislation, AAHOA is working overtime to ensure that America's hoteliers are represented in every law, executive decision, and relief package. Many of our members are taking on active roles to this end – our entire association is setting a record for political engagement. We've never seen so many letters, emails, tweets, and phone calls from AAHOA Members as you relay your concerns to elected officials across the country.

Most lawmakers aren't hotel owners, and many do not know what it takes to run a small business. Sharing stories with these legislators creates a level of understanding that otherwise might not be possible. It gives them real people to think about rather than just statistics on a sheet of paper. When we add real people and real issues into the decision-making process, we are one step closer to guiding meaningful, targeted solutions.

Declines in occupancy rates, RevPAR, and ADR are creating a looming liquidity crisis for our industry. When you make your voice heard and share your story about how the COVID-19 pandemic is affecting your employees and your business, it can make a real difference in how politicians react to this crisis.

AAHOA is here for you and will continue to be here helping America's hoteliers weather the storm brought about by COVID-19. Our industry will come out on the other side, and AAHOA is working hard to ensure that your business makes it through as well. We are all in this together. ■

“As governors, congressmen, and state legislators convene to draft concise, timely legislation, AAHOA is working overtime to ensure that America's hoteliers are represented in every law, executive decision, and relief package.”



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3-MINUTE READING TIME

Tourism, tariffs, and free trade: Impacts of U.S. trade policy

by SEAN GROSSNICKLE



> Despite the freeze on tariffs brokered in the phase-one trade deal, hotel owners and developers are still subject to volatility when sourcing construction and furnishing materials from China."

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IN JANUARY 2020, THE WHITE HOUSE announced the passage of the U.S.-Mexico-Canada Agreement (USMCA) and a preliminary trade deal with China, de-escalating long-standing tensions on two fronts of the administration's trade wars. Both the USMCA and phase-one trade deal with China bring a degree of stability to what has been a tumultuous two years of trade negotiations between the U.S. and several other allies.

The USMCA revises the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA), which President Trump had vowed to replace since the early days of his campaign. This new trilateral trade agreement updates and amends NAFTA to modernize various components of the deal, but the USMCA mirrors regulations of its predecessor. Essentially, both trade deals ensure tariff-free trade of goods and services between the U.S., Mexico, and Canada. A report published by the U.S. International Trade Commission (USITC) estimated that the USMCA would create 176,000 jobs and boost the GDP by $68.2 billion. Domestic manufacturing is slated to benefit the most out of any economic sector, and the service industry, notably travel services, is expected to experience the largest gains in output and employment.

A strong economy generally indicates promising growth for the tourism industry. If the estimates from the USITC ring true, then many Americans will generate disposable income and have more freedom to travel and vacation at destinations across the country. The U.S. Travel Association estimates that the USMCA will facilitate inbound tourism from Canada and Mexico, potentially generating $1.7 billion in visitor spending and creating 15,000 jobs.

The phase-one trade deal between the U.S. and China marks one of the more substantial de-escalations in the prolonged trade war. However, inbound tourism from China has diminished since the onset of the negotiations, dropping by 5.7 percent in 2018. The current agreement between China and the U.S. is more of a placeholder in the trade war; a comprehensive trade agreement would be needed to return inbound tourism to pre-trade war levels.

The Chinese government has demonstrated abundant willingness to leverage tourism policy in the ongoing trade talks. During the past three years, the Chinese government has issued stiff travel advisories, restrictive visa policies, and pushed skewed media coverage to discourage travel to the U.S. China represents the third-largest market for inbound tourism, and Chinese tourists, on average, spend more than visitors from other countries. A report published by Tourism Economics estimates that from 2018 through the end of 2020, the U.S. could expect to see nearly two million fewer Chinese tourists, which entails an opportunity cost of $11.1 billion in visitor spending.

Despite the freeze on tariffs brokered in the phase-one trade deal, hotel owners and developers are still subject to volatility when sourcing construction and furnishing materials from China. Project timelines are critical to the hotel industry pipeline, and the past two years of punitive tariffs engendered unease given the significant mark up on Chinese steel, aluminum, and furnished goods. According to a report conducted by STR, the average time to plan and construct a hotel in the U.S. in 2019 increased to 3.3 years compared to the long-run average of 2.8 years from 2010 to 2018. This trend is not solely attributed to the trade war, as a number of other factors can impact hotel construction. However, the rising costs of structural steel and aluminum, furniture, fixtures, and other equipment from China coupled with the increasing trend in construction time is cause for concern. ■

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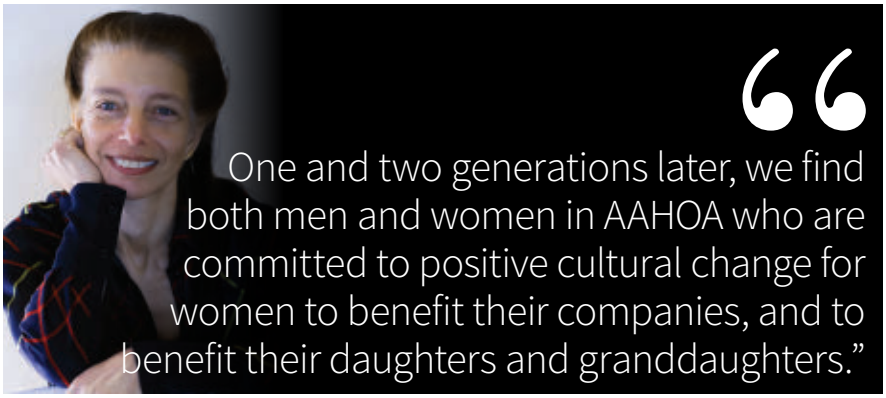
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Castell Project and AAHOA work together to provide professional opportunities for women

by PEGGY BERG



PAIGE MCFALL

Peggy Berg created Castell Project in order to work with hospitality industry companies to accelerate the development of high-potential women.

WHILE WOMEN BECAME A majority of college students in 1973, it wasn't until 2019 that women became a majority of the college-educated work force. It took 46 years, likely because company culture discouraged women from moving up when they had families. But now, with the pressure of our majority female talent pipeline, 78 percent of talent professionals say diversity is a top hiring priority for their company, and gender diversity in particular is the number-one issue they are tackling in this area, according to LinkedIn Talent Solutions. This shift is accelerating as baby boomers retire. It means successful companies need to bring women into leadership as well as bringing them into the entry-level workforce.

Further, "firms with female CEOs and CFOs produce superior stock price performance, compared to the market average, and firms with a high gender diversity on their board of directors are more profitable and larger than firms with low gender diversity," according to GlobalMarket Intelligence. With undeniable statistical evidence, responsible corporate leadership is driving change.

UNDERGOING A SIGNIFICANT CULTURAL SHIFT

Women taking prominent positions with financial control – P&L responsibility – is a significant cultural shift. Until 1974, women could be denied credit cards and mortgages in their own name because of gender. Since they couldn't have mortgages, women usually couldn't own their homes, and we certainly couldn't own hotels. When I got a college loan, a mournful banker told me that he was sure I'd never pay it back. It was probably the first loan he'd ever done for a woman.

Even today, leaders of many companies – or the mothers, fathers, professors, and bosses who trained them – were brought up to assume that women could not be financially responsible and should not have public roles. They assumed that women could not hold professional positions of responsibility while raising families. Those biases ran deep. My partners told clients that I had gone on "the mommy track" when I had my first child.

Many of Castell Project's champions and supporters have daughters. AAHOA has improved prospects for businesses including many that are owned and operated by married couples and women. Although today women may not be the most visible partner, their leadership is vital. One and two generations later, we find both men and women in AAHOA who are committed to positive cultural change for women to benefit their companies, and to benefit their daughters and granddaughters.

OFFERING OPPORTUNITIES FOR WOMEN

Companies need a culture that welcomes both women and men at all levels in order to compete for talent in the hospitality industry. This is as true of family companies as of other corporations. A family company that offers opportunity to women also positions itself to be the employment choice for its own next generation.

By the time I got my first loan to buy and renovate a hotel, the bank and the SBA were eager to expand their market with women borrowers. And my dad was there with his checkbook, although I was afraid to ask him to invest. It represented a financial risk for him and a risk of failure on a whole different level for me. But he was so excited that, ultimately, it wasn't even a question. His belief in his daughter meant the world to me.

For this reason, it truly gives me pleasure to work with hotel companies and their owners to develop this new generation of women leaders. This is a time of remarkable opportunity for women, their companies, and their families.

At Castell Project, we are proud and excited to be working with AAHOA and its members. ■

Peggy Berg is the founder & president of Castell Project.

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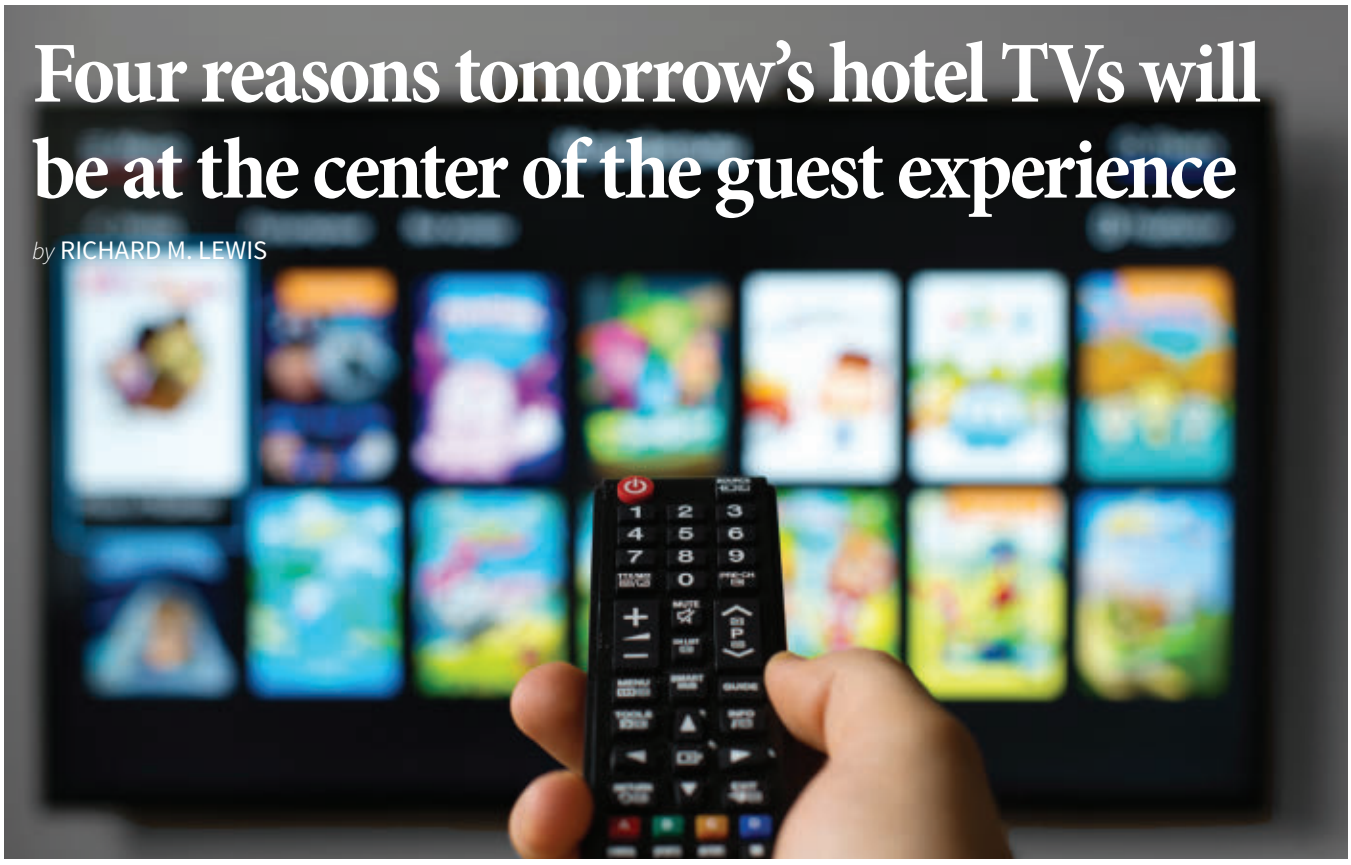
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Four reasons tomorrow's hotel TVs will be at the center of the guest experience

by RICHARD M. LEWIS



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IS THE TELEVISION YOU WATCH at home today like the TV you watched five years ago? Probably not. For one thing, if you're like one-in-five U.S. households, it's no longer attached to a cable or satellite TV service. Five years ago, there were nearly 100 million households with pay TV service; today it's about 83 million, and by 2023 that number is expected to be less than 73 million, according to research firm eMarketer.

TV'S EVOLUTION

That's because TVs – whether at home or in hotel rooms – have evolved rapidly into something more. From a physical design standpoint, in-room TV systems continue to get bigger and sleeker, allowing hotels to reimagine their guest spaces. But equally important, they've become two-way application-delivery platforms, giving hotels tools they need to differentiate their in-room experience.

Today's smart TVs are networked entertainment hubs, capable of handling over-the-top (non-cable, non-satellite) programming, hotel marketing and communications, and guests' own preferred media. In the near future, it's very likely the in-room TV – and not a separate smart-room device – will be the integrated platform for controlling music, lights, climate settings and more.

Here are four in-room entertainment trends that hotels can expect to monitor in 2020:

1

Bigger TVs: The economics of flat-panel TV production have made it so the new standard for in-room entertainment are TVs that measure 49 to 55 inches (diagonal), driven in large part by more-affordable larger screens in the consumer market. Some hotel brands have even standardized on 65 inches, and there are now hospitality-specific models as big as 75 inches.

For a while, there was a disconnect between the larger TVs going into rooms and the content they showed. In many cases, hotels were displaying older-format content on high-definition TVs. But most hotels have shed the old analog and low-resolution channels, which can be an eyesore on today's bigger, high-resolution TVs, in favor of all-HD content, taking full advantage of large-screen TVs. As a result, the in-room entertainment experience is equal to (and in some cases better than) guests' home entertainment experience.

And with bigger, 4K Ultra HD TVs becoming the norm, hotels are seeing the benefits of mounting them on walls instead of on furniture or in credenzas. For one thing, mounting a 55-inch, flat-screen TV on a wall adds to the distance at which guests watch, which improves the viewing experience. For another, hotel designers can use the extra space to improve the interior design and increase guest's comfort. Requiring less furniture to support the in-room television saves money and creates a more spacious hotel room.



IMAGE: LG

Changes in television are changing guests' expectations.

2 **Better TVs:** In the past, dramatic improvement in foundational TV technology has often meant higher prices. When the first organic LED (OLED) TVs came out with their stunning picture quality, it was understandable that hospitality brands, which may procure hundreds of TVs at a time, might take a wait-and-see approach. Now, with the growth of OLED TVs on the consumer market, cost-effective OLED TVs are available to the hospitality market. In addition, there is considerable innovation in LCD TVs with the use of nanoparticles to vastly improve the quality of large TVs.

Using nanoparticles eliminates unwanted light waves, thereby enhancing on-screen colors and ensuring guests can enjoy the picture from a variety of angles. Such nanotechnology results in a sleeker design – TVs about 2.5 inches deep – allowing for even greater innovation in room design. Such nano TV technology is available now.

3 **4K content:** One way or another, guests will start to enjoy more higher-resolution 4K content on their in-room TVs. Streaming services already deliver more programming in 4K, even though it may require five times the network bandwidth as 1080p HD. For various reasons, hotels are adopting more Internet Protocol television (IPTV) in rooms, whether to support services such as Netflix and YouTube or to give guests access to hotel programs and information. As hotels build out the network infrastructure to support not only IPTV, but also reliable internet access for guests, pervasive digital signage and eventually network-based automation, control, and artificial intelligence, they will be able to deliver more 4K entertainment.

Even if hotels don't invest immediately in the network infrastructure to support 4K entertainment, the 4K UHD TVs they're installing today can still deliver a superior viewing experience. Most of the new 49- to 65-inch TVs that hotels are buying are indeed 4K UHD TVs. And the latest generation of 4K UHD TVs are better than ever at taking an existing HD signal and upscaling it up to take advantage of the 2 million pixels for optimal viewing. Moreover, modern TVs include technology like high dynamic range, which improves a TV image's contrast ratio and color accuracy, resulting in a better picture even if content isn't yet at full 4K resolution.

4 **Bring-your-own entertainment:** Because today's hotel-room smart TVs are application platforms, they have the ability to allow guests to customize their entertainment experience. There are two primary ways people can bring their own media. The first way is to log into their preferred streaming accounts via the TV itself. Using their own, existing credentials, guests log into services like Netflix and Pandora to enjoy personalized programming. TV providers, hotels, and technology integrators ensure the login information is secure and protected, and guests enjoy the same streaming media they'd enjoy at home.

Still, guests may not find it convenient or desirable to enter their login information into a hotel TV. Therefore, a second, emerging method of BYO entertainment is beginning to take shape. "Casting" allows guests to take whatever they're watching on their mobile devices and "cast" it to the TV, so it appears on the big screen. The experience is similar – guests enjoy the streaming services to which they already subscribe – but without the need to login separately.

CASTING THE BOTTOM LINE

For many, this could be the holy grail of in-room entertainment. Guests may decide that what's on their smartphones is the only content they need during their stay, freeing up hotel operators to cut back on their investment in traditional programming and delivery. Some properties have successfully rolled out certain casting services. Google's Android platform and Chromecast technology have proven effective. But as more mobile platforms introduce support for in-room casting, more hotels will look to enable their smart TVs to receive those streams.

And while all these trends positively impact the guest experience, TV technology is also evolving to improve operations. For example, as hotels adopt more smart TVs and build out their network infrastructures, software solutions exist that allow operators to manage and customize the in-room experience from a central location.

The TVs that guests watch today are not like they were five years ago. To a certain extent, they're what hotel brands want them to be. The advantage of an IP-based, open approach to hospitality entertainment is hotels can develop solutions that best fit their needs and help establish unique, differentiated relationships with their customers. ■

Richard M. Lewis is Vice President, Technology & Research at LG Business Solutions USA. For more information, visit https://www.lg.com/us/business/commercial-displays.

Unanimity in New Jersey: lawmakers rally around tourism funding

Common Ground profiles members of opposing parties who are working together to advance issues important to hoteliers.

by SEAN GROSSNICKLE

THE ISSUE

Since 2003, a hotel occupancy tax has funded New Jersey's tourism marketing campaign, which in 2018 attracted more than 100 million tourists who spent $44 billion while visiting the Garden State. For every dollar New Jersey invests in destination marketing, there is a $32 return to the state. In addition to tourism marketing, the occupancy tax supports various cultural and historical programs while spurring economic growth throughout the state. However, the annual funding for these state-run programs was frozen at the legal minimum for the past 10 years.

COMMON GROUND

Democratic and Republican lawmakers in the New Jersey General Assembly and Senate unanimously passed legislation (A3101 & S247) that will increase the state's annual funding for tourism marketing, cultural, and historical programs. On Jan. 14, 2020, Gov. Murphy signed this bipartisan bill into law, securing a substantial boost in tourism marketing that increased the annual budget from $9 million to $17.6 million.

AAHOA extends its gratitude to the New Jersey Restaurant & Hospitality Association, lawmakers, and other industry partners for the years of hard work they dedicated to passing this legislation. ■

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An industry in crisis mode

A message to America's hotel owners from AAHOA

OVER AAHOA'S 30-YEAR history, we've survived 9/11, we've come through the 2008 economic crash, and we've weathered recessions. Now, we're knee-deep in a global pandemic. We wish we knew when things will return to normal. But until they do, AAHOA is here to provide America's hotel owners with the resources, advocacy, and hope that you need so much right now.

The weeks and months ahead are likely to be long and uncertain, but if we lean on each other for support, learn as much as we can, work together, and keep a positive spirit, there is no doubt we will come through this more resilient than ever. This is why AAHOA was formed – because we recognized we are stronger together.

AAHOA's commitment to providing America's hotel owners with the information you need is unmatched. In a matter of days, AAHOA pivoted its entire education, communications, and resources strategies to meet the needs of its Members . This included a dedicated COVID-19 webpage (www.aahoa.com/covid-19), an Member email "hotline" (covid19@aahoa.com), dozens of coronavirus-related webcasts – with as many as two airing per day – a robust government affairs strategy around federal, state, and local advocacy initiatives and immediate and regular contact with all brands, seeking the relief hoteliers need in these unprecedented times. While the situation changes daily, AAHOA is staying abreast of the latest developments and delivering hotel owners the information you need during a time of crisis.

More specifically, here's where we're focusing our efforts, and it's critical that we each continue to share this information with members across the country. It's equally important that all members read communications we're sending out. We're updating members every day with the info you need to know. Membership and participation in your association has never been more important, and it's times like these that we realize the fundamental importance of this organization and the reason it was created so many years ago.

- **Government Advocacy:** AAHOA continues to work with government leaders at the state and federal levels to explain how the pandemic will have a ripple effect on the economy, while advocating for an ease in regulations, access to capital, and no new burdens. Our number one priority is addressing the liquidity crisis our members are facing. While we've seen a positive impact as a result of our efforts, we need every AAHOA Member to answer our advocacy calls to action.
- **Brands Advocacy:** AAHOA continues to engage with brand senior leadership every single day, and brands are continuing to update their owner-relief efforts. We hear you, and we're having these important discussions. Importantly, they hear you too. As the situation changes daily, so do our efforts and the relief forthcoming.
- **Education:** AAHOA is offering at least one coronavirus-related webinar per day to keep hotel owners informed. We also are publishing one-pagers and other resources on www.aahoa.com/covid-19 that are helpful for both franchised and independent properties. As frequently as you have questions, we have been sourcing industry-leading experts to provide the answers, and we won't stop.
- **Communications:** We are sending daily email and text message updates, we've created a dedicated website, are launching virtual events, and are addressing members' calls and emails. And with AAHOA's dedicated email address, covid19@aahoa.com, members can direct their questions and get answers fast.

As the situation continues to unfold over the coming weeks and months, AAHOA is here for you. And we're not making ourselves available to just AAHOA Members – in effort to help every hotelier in America, AAHOA has made these resources available to *everyone*. It's in times of crisis that we realize the importance of banning together to make a difference.

We stress that the most important thing right now is participating in – and encouraging others to participate in – each call to action with your elected officials, which can be found on our resource page at www.aahoa.com/covid-19. It has never been more important to have your voice heard at the federal, state, and local levels.

As an industry, we are resilient. As an industry, we pull together. As an industry, we will survive these times. While the landscape has fundamentally changed, we know we'll rebound and be stronger than ever, and through it all AAHOA will be by your side.

U.S. HOTEL INDUSTRY COULD TAKE FIVE YEARS TO RECOVER

Hotel asset management company Hotel Asset Value Enhancement (hotelAVE) released a study that shows it will take the hotel industry in the United States approximately five years to achieve pre-COVID-19 occupancy, revenue, and profitability. The pace of recovery from the pandemic will be extended after an immediate mini-spike beginning in May or June, according to the company's "hotelAVE COVID-19 Hotel Outlook."

To draw its conclusions, the company analyzed the historical data of past events related to the industry's recovery after a crisis or health event, including the period following the September 11 attacks, the 2008 financial crisis, the Zika outbreak in Miami, and the SARS outbreak in Toronto.

In 2020, the report shows that the COVID-19 pandemic will cause hotel revenues in the U.S. to decrease 25 percent to 30 percent. If the progression of the virus in China and Italy is any indication, hotel occupancy in the U.S. will decrease to about 25 percent to 30 percent in March and 10 percent to 15 percent in April or worse if hotels continue to close either by reason of governmental mandate or financial necessity. For example, hotelAVE estimates that 15 percent to 20 percent of its hotels in the U.S. will close temporarily by the end of March because the fixed carry costs are less than the negative cash flow projected from staying open, as well as health-related concerns for employees. Other hotels are reducing services and available guest rooms to operate with a small staff.

The report notes that leisure hotels, especially in markets to which travelers can drive, will rebound more quickly than group business, which typically takes twice as long to recover. Additionally, those hotels that geo-target for "stay-cation" and capture leisure business from their local community will recover faster. While it might be difficult to do currently, the report also says that maintaining rate integrity and minimizing rate discounting will facilitate and accelerate recovery. Key industries such as government, health care, legal, and logistics will act as catalysts for business travel.

SOUND OFF:

How AAHOA Members Are Responding to the COVID-19 Pandemic

As the COVID-19 pandemic affects hotels around the globe, hotel owners are struggling with cancellations, declining revenue, and cash flow issues. Here's what is top of mind for AAHOA Members as they navigate today's murky waters.

by ALICIA HOISINGTON

AS THE HOTEL INDUSTRY grapples with the fallout from the global COVID-19 pandemic, hoteliers are asking, "What does this mean for my business?" The answers they are finding don't always offer concrete solutions. Nevertheless, the industry is attempting to forge ahead the best it can.

But it has not been easy, as daily reports continue to spell out just how dire the near future looks for the industry. For instance, the U.S. Travel Association projects that decreased travel due to the coronavirus will inflict an $809-billion hit on the U.S. economy and eliminate 4.6 million travel-related American jobs this year. These employment losses alone will nearly double the unemployment rate from 3.5 percent to 6.3 percent. Directly hit are small businesses, which the U.S. Travel Association says account for 83 percent of travel employers. What's more, the analysis shows that total spending on U.S. travel is set to plummet by 31 percent for the year, costing $355 billion. That's more than six times the impact seen from 9/11.

DISAPPEARING REVENUE

The news is bleak, to say the least, and AAHOA Members are feeling the pain due to cancelled group business and a near-halt to corporate and leisure travel because of quarantines across the country. In a survey conducted by AAHOA in mid-March, members shared what's keeping them up at night.

For one hotel owner, occupancy is dropping by as much as 40 percent to 50 percent on weekdays, and groups and events continue to cancel.

"This will affect business majorly in the short term. Long term, we believe travel will be slower to recover than other parts of the economy," he said. "Also, will companies now choose to work from home even more? Will this now force all companies to cut down travel?"

Some Austin hotels have seen a 60-percent drop in revenue and average daily rate. "This will impact my bottom line and may put us underwater and into financial distress," another hotelier commented.

Another hotelier saw $137,000 worth of reservations cancelled in just one day for the months of March and April. "Our management company is thinking we may still get to 50-percent occupancy, but they have dropped the rate to $130 from $150 a night plus cancelled breakfast," he said.

With such a dramatic loss in revenue and with many prognosticators fearing the worst is yet to come, it's not surprising that hotel owners are left wondering how they will continue to pay their bills and how their mortgages will be affected.

Those concerns are top of mind for many. Another hotelier has seen occupancy slashed by 50 percent or more within a week at all of its hotels, while future reservations are being cancelled every day. Occupancy for the group is forecast to be reduced by more than 60 percent to 70 percent compared with the previous year.

"We might be OK in the long term if this disaster ends in the very short term,

like one to two months. But the question is: Can we stay in business until it happens?" he said. "The hotel business is mostly fixed costs and, normally, we cut ADR to gain occupancy. But in today's environment, there is no business to gain."

This hotelier has approached his lender to discuss the current situation, "but not much is promised, and so we are afraid that we might not be able to fulfill our obligations," he said. "We need relief either on not paying our current expense or be given an interest-free loan so we can continue paying."

Another hotelier in Plainsboro, NJ, has experienced a 50-percent loss in revenue and a 90-day deficit of $800,000, says financial relief is needed for at least 90 days in regard to taxes, the mortgage, and interest rates. "We are falling short on cash, and we're not able to sustain the fixed costs affiliated with the property," he said.

MANAGING LABOR

Labor, which often is one of the largest expenses for hotels, is one of the biggest concerns for AAHOA Members. With cash flow severely stunted or completely evaporated, hoteliers are struggling to keep employees on the payroll.

It's a huge worry for many. "We have no ability to retain people when there is a limited amount of work to be done," another hotelier said. "The workforce will be shrunk; we're potentially looking at a 20-percent cut in the overall rosters."

For many, the thought of not being able to keep employees working is one that hits hard. "Our employees need money to run their households. We have had most of our employees working with us long term. Since there is no income, we can't pay them or can't give them their normal working hours," he said. "We need our employees to stay with us since they have been working with us for so many years. They are our family, and without them, we can't run our business."

Some owners are doing their best to retain staff, such as Al Nathu who has not laid off any employees. "As a matter of fact, I have not been paying myself as a business owner," Nathu said. "I feel that our staff, who have been with us for so long, we owe them that much. Even in rough times, we try to do as much as we can."

Another hotelier's team is trying to keep its staff working by cross-training current employees and avoiding new hires for the typically busy summer season. The hope is that existing employees can keep working for the same amounts in their paychecks.

For a hotelier in Connecticut, their hotels have lost 60-percent occupancy in just over three days, and has had to ask employees to cut down on their hours in order to save on payroll. "We are trying to work with all of our employees to facilitate as much as work we can, but if the problem continues, we will be falling behind in paying bills," he said.

Mike Patel, President of SAI Hotel Group, says he's worried about how his employees will fare during this crisis.

"Our team members will be hurt greatly in health and financially," Patel said. "We are worried about them and their families, but cash flow will be a large issue as well as having minimum staffing to properly take care of guests seeking shelter and safety. We need relief and assistance as small business owners and operators."



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Top 5 States for Hotel-Related Job Loss Due to Pandemic

Based on current occupancy estimates, AHLA says that four million total jobs have been eliminated already or are on the verge of it. In certain affected markets, including Seattle, San Francisco, Austin, and Boston, hotel occupancy rates are already down below 20 percent, and individual hotels and major operators have already shut down operations.

The hotel industry supports about 2.3 million jobs directly and more than 8.3 million jobs total (direct hotel operations, guest spending, indirect supply chain and induced), according to an AHLA report. However, the dramatic declines in occupancy rates will lead to massive job losses for employees across the industry.

AHLA and Oxford Economics examined the numbers and determined how many hotel-related jobs are on the brink of being lost in every state due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Below are the top five states for job loss.

State	Current Hotel Employment by State		COVID-19-Induced Job Loss by State	
	Direct Hotel Operations Jobs	Total Hotel – Supported Jobs*	Direct Hotel Operations Jobs	Total Hotel–Supported Jobs*
California	285,122	1,014,600	-125,454	-414,069
Florida	201,433	747,705	-88,631	-305,146
Nevada	193,478	395,492	-85,130	-161,404
Texas	145,617	658,637	-64,072	-268,797
New York	112,897	528,618	-49,674	-215,734
TOTAL U.S.	2,286,261	8,306,612	-1,005,955	-3,390,014

Source: American Hotel & Lodging Association/Oxford Economics, March 2020.
*Total jobs, including supply chain.
Note: Figures represent proportionate impacts of the U.S. hotel industry based on historical performance (Each 10-percentage-point decline in occupancy is shown as having the same successive impact for illustrative purposes.) Economic impacts are based on Oxford Economics research for AHLA.

FOR BRANDS, A CALL TO ACTION

Some of that relief needs to come from brands, owners say. First and foremost, many are calling on brands to either waive or reduce franchise fees and other fixed costs, especially for services owners are not receiving during this crisis. Others want brand-mandated standards to cease during the pandemic, like PIPs, inspections, enrollment mandates, guest surveys, and food service, while some are asking brands to give them more time to pay their invoices and to seek reduced rates with OTAs. While we have seen some relief, there are still many options yet determined. Where watching every dollar counts, the fees paid to brands and OTAs account for a large portion of franchised owners' operating expenses.

"I would like to see the brands step up and reduce the franchise fee burden for properties that are hurting or offer a deferral program where the next six months of fees could be deferred and paid throughout 2021," one hotelier said.

Mike Stohler, Managing Partner of Gateway Private Equity Group, says brands should give waivers on brand-required vendors so owners can reduce costs. Additionally, he says brands need to extend the deadline to complete property improvement plans. "Our biggest concern revolves around required PIPs," Stohler said. "We hope our flags will give us longer periods to complete."

Mili Shah wants to take it one step further. "Franchisors must cancel or extend all PIPs indefinitely for all of its brands until further notice," Shah said. "Material and labor will not be available for a long uncertain future."

And another says that now might be a good time for brands to renegotiate with third parties to lower commission rates. "Bring them to reality," he said. "And it's time to push more discounts on the brand sites."

Some owners think brands should consider easing up on certain standards during this time, especially as many hotels sit empty or nearly so.

"They should consider rolling out temporary housekeeping to only service rooms every third day," Sumeet Jetha of Jetha Group said. "Also, consider a temporary pause to having night audit present and put a pause on brand-mandated purchases, PIPs, and other high-ticket items."

Sam Patel of Kisna Hospitality agrees. "Brands need to remove breakfast requirements and reduce brand standards that will help reduce expenses, as well as put a temporary halt on inspections and training requirements," he said.

"All of us hoteliers are hurting," Stohler said. "If we have to temporarily shut down, it's to preserve capital in order to open back up again and rehire our staff. I found out that my flag will still charge me every fee they can outside of room revenue if I have to shut down."

At the end of the day, owners want to be in business when this is over, and they need their brands to step up in every way possible to get through this together. These are unprecedented times, and the industry needs to band together to take the steps necessary on the road to recovery—and it has to start now, with every part of the industry doing its part. ■

AAHOA

ASIAN AMERICAN HOTEL OWNERS ASSOCIATION

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At Radisson Hotel Group, we've made it our mission to be an owner-centric company by ensuring we're fully available to owners – communicating with them directly, providing helpful resources, and, most importantly, listening to their feedback. Without question, the guest is crucial; however, it's great owners who create flourishing hotels and, in partnership with their teams, deliver memorable moments each and every day.

Our Development team prioritizes building relationships with said prospective and current owners to help grow Radisson Hotel Group's portfolio in the Americas. Although the 21-person team has been together for just over two years, their depth of knowledge is decades deep. With roughly 400 years of experience in total, these industry veterans saw the opportunity to help transform an almost 60-year-old company into an international disrupter.



"Our experience is non-comparable. The team is like nothing I've ever seen before," said Terry Sanders, chief development officer, Americas, Radisson Hotel Group. "We're making a splash in the industry and closing deals in major metropolitan, gateway cities. We're truly punching above our weight."

At our Americas Business Conference in Miami, Florida in April 2019, we announced the addition of six key hotels, including one Radisson RED and the multimillion-dollar conversions of three Radisson Blu hotels. This announcement exemplifies the growth strategy outlined in the company's five-year plan. These signings and conversions provide a variety of unique destinations for business and leisure guests as they span from Canada to Latin America, and from the Great Plains to the sunny West Coast.



"We talked in depth about our plans for expansion at last year's conference, including how we'll further establish the Radisson Blu and Radisson RED brands in the Americas," said Aly El-Bassuni, chief operating officer, Americas, Radisson Hotel Group.

"Since then, we've continued working closely with our company leaders and global partners to bring our brands to new markets and allow more guests to experience our exceptional hospitality. Our Development and Operations teams, as well as our loyal owners who believe in our brands, are helping put our five-year plan in action – to build a remarkable future for Radisson Hotel Group."

We gathered more than 1,000 of our hotel owners, management teams, partners and global team members at our Americas Business Conference in Las Vegas this past February 2020 to recognize, educate and network about where we've been and where we're heading as a company. We ended 2019 on a high note with the openings of Radisson Hotel New York Times Square, Radisson Bogotá Metrotel and Treasure Island - TI Hotel & Casino, a Radisson Hotel within a matter of weeks of each other, and we look forward to opening Radisson Blu Aruba, Radisson RED Miami Airport and Radisson Blu Anaheim, among other properties, in 2020.

The vision behind Radisson Hotel Group's five-year plan is to become one of the top hotel companies in the world and the company of choice for guests, owners and talent. Through its owner-centric philosophy and high-performing Development team, Radisson Hotel Group is making tangible progress toward increasing visibility in the Americas by strategically closing new property deals and transforming existing hotels.

For updates on Radisson Hotel Group's growth and expansion, visit Terry Sanders' LinkedIn page:
https://www.linkedin.com/in/terry-sanders-57b53a11/

Pictured above: Radisson Bogotá Metrotel, Treasure Island - TI Hotel & Casino, a Radisson Hotel, Radisson Blu Anaheim

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GEN Z vs. MILLENNIALS

Understanding who they are and how they travel

by TOM GRESHAM

WHEN IT COMES TO UNDERSTANDING THE TWO YOUNGEST generational cohorts of consumers, Generation Z and millennials, misconceptions rule the day, according to hotel industry experts. Often, those inside and outside the industry lump together members of both generations into a vague mass, missing the details that make them distinctive.





Linchi Kwok, associate professor in the Collins College of Hospitality Management at Cal Poly Pomona, said many hospitality companies treat millennials and Gen Z as a single "younger" group. Millennials represent those born between approximately 1981 and 1996, while Gen Z covers those born between 1997 and 2012. Lynn Kaniper, president of Dana Communications, agreed that the hospitality industry struggles with "a solid knowledge of the generational differences."

"Some see 'young people' and assume they're all the same," Kaniper said. "The industry is finally starting to get a handle on millennials, and it feels like they assume they can apply the same philosophies to reaching Gen Z, but this is definitely not the case."

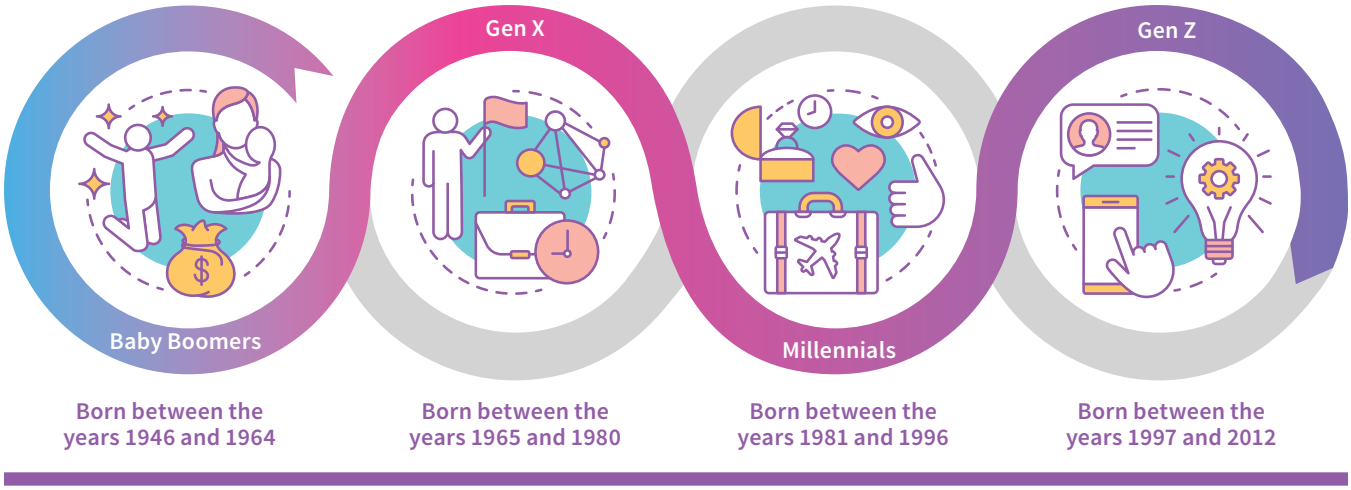
Dana Communications has conducted research on the two groups, sharing data with clients and at industry events, and Kaniper said people often are surprised to hear the influence the two generations already have.

"By 2025, millennials will make up 75 percent of the global workforce, but I can remember clients saying to us they don't have the income," Kaniper said. "Now, we have this entrepreneurial generation (Gen Z) that is starting businesses in or just after high school, and they have more of an income and are harder working than previous generations."

Meghan Carty, a research analyst at Skift who has studied generations and travel, said it's understandably difficult to delineate differences in the generations unless one is immersed in consumer research. She noted that she hears people mistakenly refer to teenagers as millennials, though the youngest of that cohort are young adults.



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"It's not *always* wrong to lump them together, because they do have some things in common," Carty said. "And today, we're mostly paying attention to the oldest of Gen Z, who are likely going to be more similar to young millennials than they will be to the younger people in their own generations, who are still children. But to lump Gen Z (the oldest of whom will be turning 23 this year) with the oldest millennials (the oldest of whom will be turning 39) risks generalizing too much, and this is even more true if members of these generations across different countries are lumped together, as country of residence is often a greater indicator of behavior and preferences than age is on its own."

WHO THEY ARE

Kaniper points to a series of key general characteristics about the youngest consumer generations.

Millennials, she said "accept diversity, need instant gratification, grew up during an economic boom and are mobile pioneers. They're also optimistic, focused on experiences, digitally dependent, like value-driven brands, are environmentally conscious and like celebrity endorsements."

On the other hand, Gen Z "is the most diverse generation.... They're entrepreneurial, socially responsible, grew up during a recession, realistic, focused on saving money, and are mobile natives. In terms of brands, they favor authenticity and respond best to endorsements from influencers, whom they see as trustworthy and more 'regular' than celebrities."

As it relates to lodging, the generations overlap and differ in a variety of ways. For instance, Carty said millennials' prioritization of unique experiences has had "a huge impact on the hospitality industry" and Gen Z appears to be following in their footsteps.

"As Gen Zs enter adulthood, I think it will continue," Carty said. "You can see the impact with the large chains unveiling Instagrammable boutique-like brands all the time, and the general trend of an increased focus on incorporating aspects of the local community and opportunities for offsite activities. Hotels are being forced to compete with the Airbnb experience, which, to many millennial and Gen Z travelers, offers a more 'live-like-a-local' authentic experience. I think we can expect that we will continue to see a lot of innovative ways that hotels will try to bring the best aspects of this experience, while maintaining the service and conveniences hotels already offer."

Kwok said he believes one common misunderstanding about both generational categories is that they are not as drawn to the allure of luxury hotels and restaurants as older generations. "I believe they still want the luxury experience," he said.

"The way that Gen Z defines luxury, however, might be a little bit different from the older generations," Kwok said. "Because Gen Z prioritizes things representing extrinsic values over intrinsic values, for example, they probably prefer the luxury experience with many touchpoints that make them feel special. They want sustainability while enjoying the luxury experience, and they also expect easy access to the luxury experience as well as a faster speed in service delivery."

Kwok said boutique micro-hotels are particularly adapting to Gen Z's preferences. Kaniper also believes lodging offerings are changing to reflect the younger generations' mindset.

"Since both generations value experiences, properties are starting to offer pared-down accommodations (i.e., smaller rooms with high-tech touches) so travelers can save money on their stay and put their money toward experiencing the destinations they visit," Kaniper said. "We're also seeing an emphasis on social spaces catering to younger generations, like high-tech lounges and rooftop bars. Properties are also amping up their wellness focus, as this is also important to younger generations."

Kwok said Gen Z is more likely to use mobile devices for payment and delivery service than millennials, and they are more likely to accept automatic service or services provided by machines.

"They 'naturally' want to create their own solutions when facing an issue, but millennials look to others for answers, including the companies they do business with," Kwok said.

LIFE STAGES AND RESPONSIBLE TOURISM

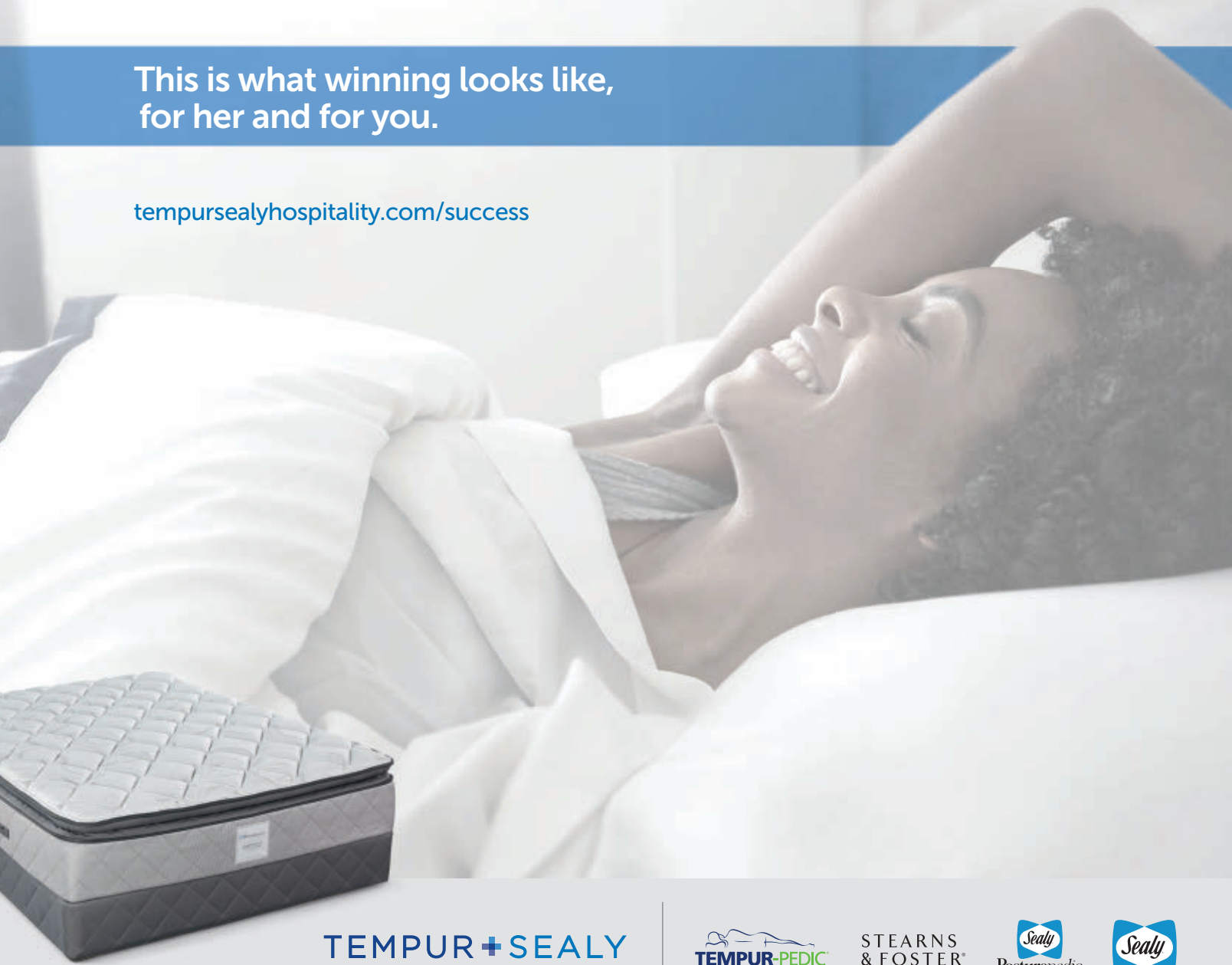
With the oldest members of Gen Z newly entering the workforce and becoming financially independent for the first time, Carty said the group's youth makes it difficult to say how the generation will be different from its predecessors over the long term.

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> In terms of brands, [Gen Z favors] authenticity and responds best to endorsements from influencers, whom they see as trustworthy and more 'regular' than celebrities."
>
> – LYNN KANIPER, PRESIDENT, DANA COMMUNICATIONS



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For instance, recent Skift showed millennials are more likely to have gone on wellness trips and cruises than Gen Z. However, Carty said "It's unclear if this reflects their actual preferences or if it's simply a matter of the fact that millennials have had up to 16 years more time to have gone of these types of trip and probably have more disposable income to have done so."

Some of the differences between millennials and Gen Z boil down to the simple difference in their current life stages.

"Many millennials have their own families now, and if not, they've been in the working world for a while and are more career-focused, whereas Gen Z is either still in high school or just getting out of college and beginning their careers; they aren't starting their own families yet," Kaniper said. "Especially in terms of travel, millennials are both planning for solo or friend trips, as well as family trips."

One clear unique trait of the Gen Z traveler is an emphasis on socially responsible travel, Carty said.

"We found that in all the countries we surveyed, Gen Z indicated they make efforts to make responsible travel decisions and that the majority are willing to pay more to use travel companies that demonstrate environmental responsibility," Carty said. "This is promising to see, but it will take time for us to see whether these values are maintained when it's their own money they're spending."

Kaniper said socially responsible travel among Gen Z not only encompasses concerns tied to sustainability and a reduced carbon footprint.

"Voluntourism is becoming a big trend for this generation and oftentimes, they are picking destinations based on the impact they could have," Kaniper said.

COMMUNICATING WITH THE GENERATIONS

Kaniper said millennials and Gen Z separate themselves from other generations in their understanding of technology and the role it plays in their everyday lives.

"They use technology to navigate daily life much more than older generations and therefore are on a more similar page," Kaniper said. "For example, it's easier for brands to communicate with millennials and Gen Z via channels like social media and apps than it is to connect with Gen X, boomers, etc. on these mediums."

Experts said technology preferences vary between the generations. When communicating with them, therefore, it's critical to use the tech resources that best fit your target audience. In social media, Carty said Skift's research showed Facebook was dominant among millennials, while Gen Z largely favors YouTube, Instagram, and Snapchat.

"While they all seem very tech savvy, they are hanging out in different places," Kwok said.

Ultimately, generational traveling trends are a crucial consideration for hotel industry insiders, but Carty cautions against leaning into sweeping conclusions. Within a generation, major differences will inevitably exist based on a range of additional details.

"It's really important to look beyond generation, otherwise some important nuances will be overlooked," Carty said. ■

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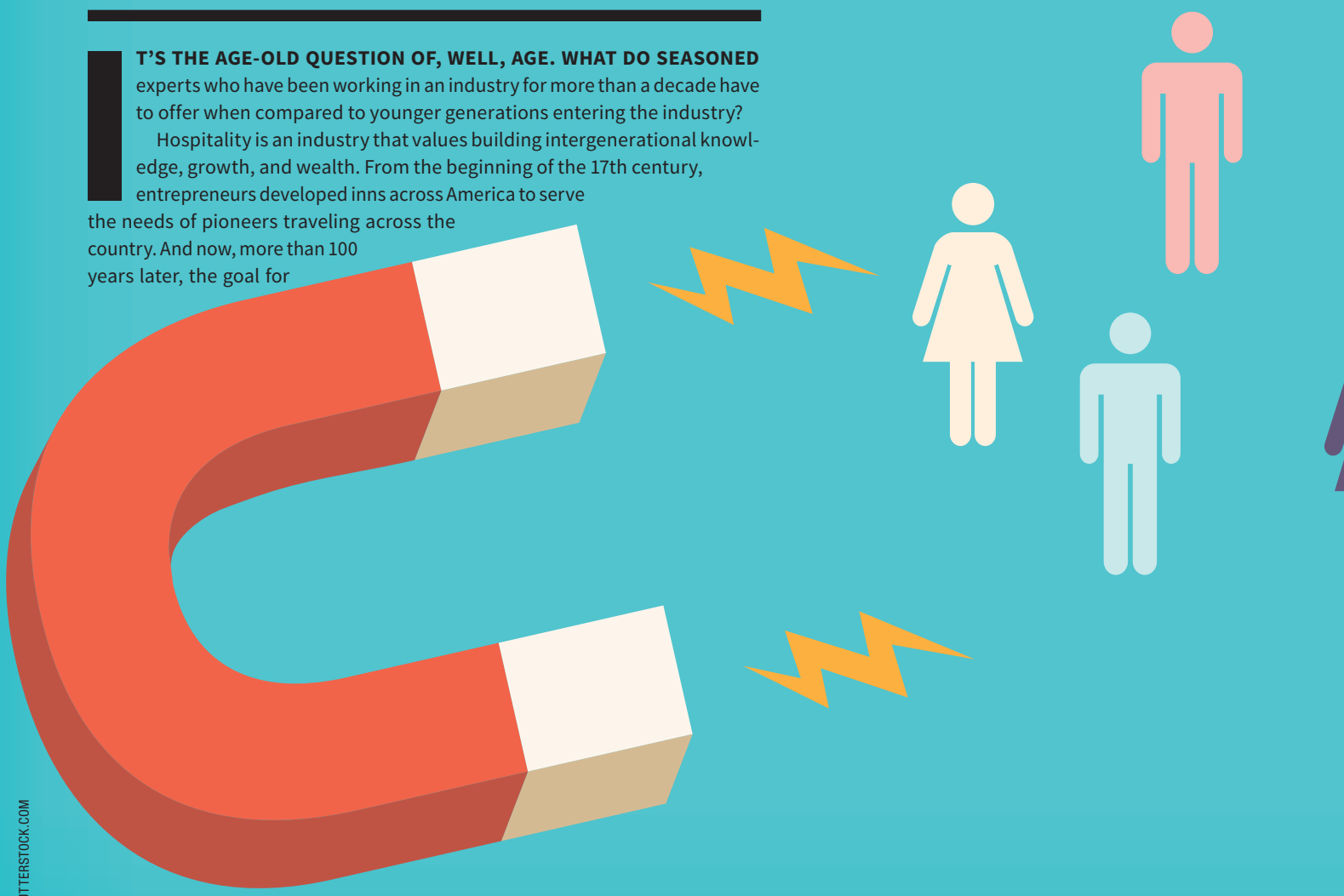
PIONEERING HOSPITALITY BY ATTRACTING MULTIPLE GENERATIONS

Millennials "killing" industries and how Gen Z will transform the industry

by ZOHREEN ISMAIL

IT'S THE AGE-OLD QUESTION OF, WELL, AGE. WHAT DO SEASONED experts who have been working in an industry for more than a decade have to offer when compared to younger generations entering the industry?

Hospitality is an industry that values building intergenerational knowledge, growth, and wealth. From the beginning of the 17th century, entrepreneurs developed inns across America to serve the needs of pioneers traveling across the country. And now, more than 100 years later, the goal for



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hotels and hospitality hasn't changed much. Hospitality professionals still strive to serve the needs of travelers. However, the way this is done has completely transformed due to new generations bringing in new ideas, the adaption of emerging technology, and acceptance of age diversity.

WE ARE THE EXPERTS

The baby-boom generation viewed the hospitality industry as a culture of results. Figure out what the customer wants and deliver results flawlessly. With this mindset, they built hotel empires starting with one property and expanding to 10. This idea of expansion is very relatable to many boomers and Gen Xers.

Boomers and Gen X strived to build intergenerational wealth and create a standard of excellent service. Now, the question is posed: How will younger generations move the industry forward while keeping the integrity of everything previous generations built intact?

MILLENNIALS – THE DISRUPTORS

Millennials have a reputation of "killing" trends in industries. For hospitality, millennials are "killing" the front desk check-in process and "killing" the hot continental breakfast many hotels offer.

Sameer Tharani, a millennial hotelier, owns and operates two properties. "I don't think millennials are killing industry trends," he said. "If your client falls under an older generation, they may care about room service and being able to get free breakfast. It's all about identifying what your demographic wants and solving for it."

New York Times bestselling author Chip Conley agrees. "I'm not sure I agree with the premise that Millennials have killed industries. Millennials often take the less traveled path which means they're hard to predict especially for established global brands."

In 2008, three Millennials sparked an idea that would completely disrupt the hospitality industry. Many hospitality professionals saw the creation and development of Airbnb as a competitive move and an industry disruptor. What many hoteliers do not know is these three Millennials reached out to Chip Conley, who would be considered to fall under the Baby Boomer generation, to help transform the start-up company.

> "I'm not sure I agree with the premise that millennials have killed industries. Millennials often take the less traveled path which means they're hard to predict especially for established global brands."
> – CHIP CONLEY, AUTHOR

Conley, now Airbnb strategic advisor for hospitality & leadership, recalls sitting in meetings and clearly noticing the differences between him and the Millennials he was sharing the table with. Airbnb, now a multi-billion-dollar company, was started by Millennials and was able to reach new heights by welcoming age diversity and new perspectives.

GEN Z – THE NEWBIES

Bloomberg News describes Gen Z as individuals born between 1997 and 2012; that means Gen Z is already in the workforce. While boomers, Gen X, and millennials are navigating the hospitality space, they all agree there is absolutely no shortage of opportunity when it comes to the hospitality industry.

"Gen Z has never known a world without the internet," Yutta Shelton, Hospitality Practice Leader at Deloitte Consulting LLP said. "As this generation matures, we expect digital innovation to continue to rise. The industry will evolve to a place where digital becomes a powerful tool to improve service excellence. A big part of that is data-driven personalization."

When considering what Gen Z will bring to hospitality, Tharani said, "I try and think back to what my thought process was when I was that age. I was very ambitious and maybe even a little naïve. However, sometimes that combination can lead to great things, because an idea you have in your head can become something great if you work hard."

IN IT TO WIN IT – THE HUSTLE CONTINUES

With four different generations collaborating, what can be expected? "Previous generations in the industry are tackling challenges, but they don't have to overcome it alone," Tharani said. "New generations can bring new ideas to help find innovative solutions."

When multiple generations begin working together, characteristics like work ethic and risk-taking begin to collide. "I do think younger generations, seeing the success of tech start-ups, are perhaps growing less risk-averse in their professional lives," Shelton said.







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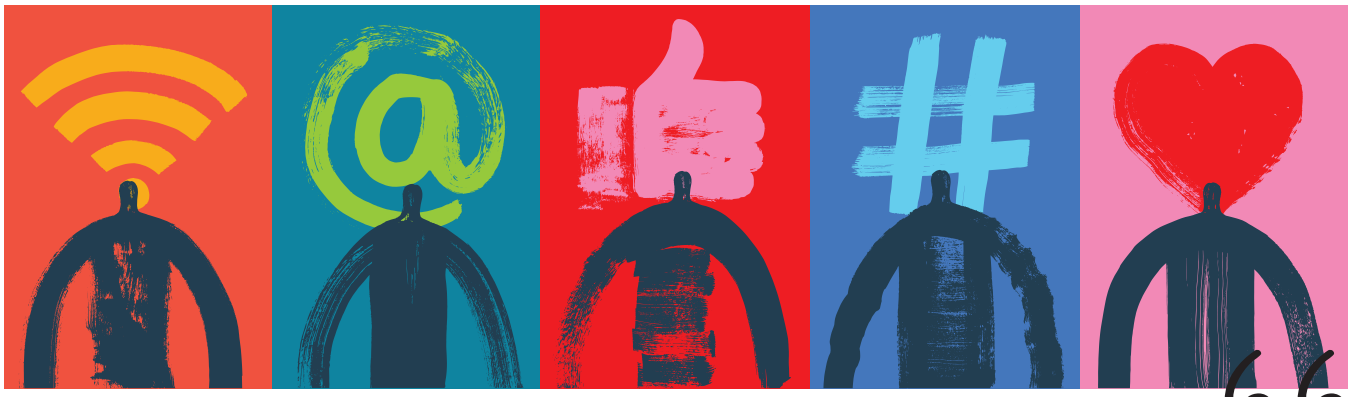
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"If your background as a millennial is from the hospitality industry, you might be more inclined to take risks because you have a strong support system," Tharani said.

OLD IDEAS, NEW WAYS

In 1989, a small group of hoteliers collaborated to create an innovative approach to solve the problem of discrimination within the hospitality industry, particularly from insurance companies and banks. This resulted in the creation of AAHOA. This example is a testament to how working together and sharing knowledge makes industries stronger and gives industry professionals an opportunity to collaborate and find innovative solutions. There is no doubt the hospitality industry has been moving forward ever since.

This same strategy is used today among different generations in the hospitality industry. For example, boomer hoteliers are welcoming new technology, while millennials are constantly reinventing ways to use technology. The end goal, going back to the hotel pioneers of the 17th century, is to serve the traveler and that is accomplished through welcoming age diversity in the industry.

Chip Conley couldn't have said it better. In his TED talk he states, "turn the judgement into curiosity," and that is the mantra to live by.

ARE WE ALONE?

Many hoteliers are often so engulfed in the operations and business strategy in their day-to-day they forget to take a step back and see that the hospitality industry is not the only industry being affected by intergenerational diversity.

"Every industry is benefited, especially if they're reliant on technology," Conley said. "It's become most evident in the advertising and marketing world where digital savviness is increasingly important."

Millennials have brought many new ideas that transform the way industries operate. "Perhaps the better question is…what industry isn't transforming?" Shelton said. "As much as millennials may be a generation disruptor, their behaviors and choices are disrupting businesses and society alike."

"Every industry has a focus on constant renovation and growth," Tharani said. "In the era we are in now, changes are going to happen and it's our responsibility to find creative ways to adapt while ensuring you are playing an integral role in maximizing your return and moving the industry in a positive direction."

> "As a millennial hotel owner, I would predict a lot of consolidation in terms of brands and many technology facets will be seen as a standard rather than a luxury."
> – SAMEER THARANI, INDEPENDENT HOTELIER

FUTURE TRENDS – WHAT'S NEXT?

In hindsight, some hoteliers could have predicted industry disruptors like Airbnb, while others say it's close to impossible to predict what the future of hospitality holds. That's why *Today's Hotelier* reached out to the industry insight experts at Deloitte.

"Perhaps the biggest trend will be a redefinition of the core hotel product," Shelton said. "Today, we associate large hotel brands primarily as a place to spend the night, grab a drink, or get a bite to eat. In the future, how hotel chains serve the consumer will evolve. Hotels will grow their presence in the consumer's everyday life, taking their core competency of service excellence with them into new spaces."

According to Shelton, some early signs of this are already beginning to permeate the marketplace. For example, hotels are expanding into co-working spaces, health and wellness facilities, destination activities, and even retail.

The idea that you don't need an established company or brand to succeed is a different type of work culture that new generations can bring in. "That workforce culture, business resources, and access to global markets through digital and social are all ingredients helping good ideas thrive outside of the traditional corporate ecosystem. It's a significant mindset shift," Shelton said.

"As a millennial hotel owner, I would predict a lot of consolidation in terms of brands and many technology facets will be seen as a standard rather than a luxury," Tharani said. "The individuals that will be successful will be the ones that consider age diversity an asset. If you stick to your ways, you might get left behind."

"The future is all about mutual mentoring," Conley said. "Wisdom no longer comes exclusively from the top-down or from old to young. I learned so much from younger generations about the tech industry, design thinking, and Millennial travel habits. We all have something to learn from each other." ■

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THE FUTURE HOTELIER

How will the industry shape up by 2025?

by IAIN SHAW

THE YEAR 2025 SEEMS LIKE A LONG WAY OFF, BUT WE ALL KNOW that life in the hotel business moves fast. The industry will look very different in five years, so now is the time to start planning.

By 2025, hotels will be jockeying to capture the imagination of Gen Z consumers, and a key area for action will be sustainability. A survey of 10,000 Gen Zs, published by Amnesty International in December 2019, found 41 percent regard climate change as a major global issue. Gen Zs will want to travel like their millennial elders, but they'll demand to do so sustainably.

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> A survey of 10,000 Gen Zs, published by Amnesty International in December 2019, found 41 percent regard climate change as a major global issue. Gen Zs will want to travel like their millennial elders, but they'll demand to do so sustainably."

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"Something we're starting to see and will see more of is how people will start shopping by values, and having certain values that they expect from hotels," said Emma Chiu of Wunderman Thompson Intelligence, which publishes the annual Future 100 trends report. "Rather than saying 'I want a king-size bed facing the beach,' they'll say 'Actually I want a room that has the lowest carbon footprint.' The type of features that people will look for will be in line with helping nurture the planet."

Energy-positive hotels will become commonplace, if not the norm. Norwegian architecture firm Snøhetta is behind the design for Svart, the first such hotel in the world. Located on the Arctic Circle and scheduled to open in 2021, Svart will generate enough solar power to sustain the hotel's day-to-day operations, as well as covering the energy expended on building the hotel.

SMALL STEPS

Many hoteliers can't aim quite so high, but there's plenty of room for improvement. "It's all about being incremental," Chiu said, pointing to the moves made by Marriott, InterContintental, and others to eliminate travel-sized toiletries. That initiative will become widespread, as will removing single-use plastics from hotel rooms. Hotels can draw examples from the sustainability-centered philosophy espoused by groups like 1 Hotels and Firmdale Hotels. "They really think about what they're doing with their waste," Chiu said. "They collaborate with interesting people when they want to get rid of bedsheets, for example, with companies that can help upcycle the items."

"Having a strong ethical identity is no longer optional," said Jenny Southan, the Founder and Editor of Globetrender, travel industry forecasting agency that recently published its Future of Luxury Travel Forecast: 2020-2025. However, the guest of 2025 will be discerning enough to spot token gestures from a mile away. "Greenwashing won't wash," Southan said.

Veganism is projected to occupy more space in the hotel industry of 2025. The Hilton London Bankside unveiled the first vegan hotel suite in the world in January 2019, featuring bedding and even a keycard made using vegan materials. In June 2019, the 11-room vegan hotel Saorsa 1875 opened in the Scottish Highlands offering vegan toiletries in addition to plant-based F&B offerings.

New approaches to hotel design will upend current norms. "Hotels will place a greater emphasis on enhancing the visitor's experience through the design and amenities offered in guest rooms, restaurants, bars, and other communal spaces," said David Duncan, President and CEO of hospitality management company First Hospitality. Lobbies will be more social, while guest rooms will be less cookie-cutter, offering more choice and flexibility in terms of beds, interiors, and amenities. Event spaces will be more dynamic, informal, and customizable. Some of this will be an acknowledgment of Airbnb's impact on the industry. "The trend of home-sharing and unique spaces will continue, and traveler demand for them will not diminish," Southan said.

There also will be greater overlap between hotels and flexible workspaces. "Hotels that will succeed over this new decade will prioritize smart, homely design with multiple co-working space options for the booming freelance/remote workforce," Southan said. "We will also see quirky innovations such as luxury bunk bed set-ups for groups, capsule rooms, pop-up properties, voice-activated in-room features, facial recognition security, and robot butlers."



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> Hotels will place a greater emphasis on enhancing the visitor's experience through the design and amenities offered in guest rooms, restaurants, bars, and other communal spaces."
> – DAVID DUNCAN, PRESIDENT AND CEO, FIRST HOSPITALITY

F&B will be more important than ever in 2025, not just as a driver of revenue but also in terms of guest experience and as a link between the hotel and the surrounding community. This means more outward-facing, street-level venues inviting direct walk-ins, more local products, and deeper connections with local suppliers. Southan said restaurants will be "embedded within communities, whether urban or rural, in an intelligent way, making genuine efforts to not just be a base for anonymous out-of-towners."

"Guests will be more involved in the dining experience," Duncan said. "As immersion in the local culture and transparency continues to be important, we'll see new opportunities for guests to connect with the farms, artisans, and other purveyors supporting our restaurants." Duncan said that F&B's importance is such that his company has launched a new division, First Hospitality Restaurants and Bars, to "focus solely on creating vibrant venues within our hotels."

WHAT YOU SEE IS WHAT YOU GET

Thanks to Instagram culture, dishes have never looked better. Taste, creativity, and uniqueness of concept are the next frontier, Chiu said. "Our palates are increasingly global, and the next generation's palates are going to be far more diverse than any other generation. They'll have tasted cuisines from all over the world from very early on, and they'll be fine with certain things that you feel might be more mature – bitters, sours, these kind of tastes."

One intriguing prediction sees the emergence of hyper-personalized menus and dishes tailored to the individual's DNA. "On the fringe, certain restaurants are opening up this whole bio-data service where they're able to look at your DNA samples and create dishes that are specific to you," Chiu said. "That might be the next way to elevate yourself."

Of course, tech, big data, and AI will be more comprehensively folded into hotel services and operations by 2025. The rollout of 5G networks will truly usher in the age of the internet of things, enabling hotels to implement all those guest-activated features forecasters have been telling us are just around the corner for the past few years, from the guestroom to the concierge. "Brands are already way past just the digital key," Duncan said. "With Hilton successfully piloting the connected room, other brands are sure to follow. Information technology and security must also be top of mind as digital footprints are part of a modern traveler's path."

Technology-minded hoteliers also may be looking to the stars five years from now. The Gateway Foundation is aiming to complete initial construction on the Von Braun station, touted as the first "space hotel," by 2025. The spaceport is intended to host 100 civilian space tourists, who could start arriving in 2027.

Back on Earth, hoteliers will be pushing the consumer experience to new dimensions. "We've barely scratched the surface of experiential travel," Duncan said. The next evolution of experiential travel will see hotels deploy a range of tools, including tactile construction materials and sound design, to trigger sensory responses that will give guests a sense of being at one with the space and surroundings.

Chiu says this development is intertwined with the growing importance of wellness as a theme in hospitality. The hotel spa could be transformed by more experimental meditative and sensory-based experiences. "People are trying to find new ways to engage in their health and well-being through heightening different senses," Chiu said. ASMR experiences (sounds used to trigger feelings of well-being) are one example. "We've not seen a lot of this happening in hotels yet, but we're seeing a lot of experimental experiences as part of a well-being partnership," Chiu said, citing the relaxation-focused ASMR performances offered by Whisperlodge as a possible source of inspiration.

The prudent hotelier regards long-range predictions with some skepticism, since forecasts don't always quite work out. A 2015 study by travel marketing agency MMGY Global reassured hoteliers that millennials were as loyal to their favorite hotel brands as previous generations. A few years on, an Accenture survey showed that 40 percent of retail industry leaders cited loyalty as their biggest headache with millennial consumers. The launch of Marriott's Bonvoy rewards program in 2019 was partly a response to the challenge of wooing millennials.

FIRST STEPS

Position your hotel to experiment with trends, but leave room to maneuver. Marriott did not purchase Airbnb, as many were predicting a few years back, but it did launch its own vacation rental program, Homes & Villas. Five years ago, one of the big tips for 2020 was the millennial-driven rise of smartphone bookings. And mobile has indeed exploded, with Criteo's *Travel Flash Report* indicating that by 2018, a third of hotel rooms were booked on a mobile device. However, that growth is dominated by online travel agents, and direct bookings via hotel platforms have struggled to keep pace.

Embrace new developments, but lead with a clear, updated statement of what makes your hotel stand out. "It's about knowing what your brand strategy is and looking at how to evolve that by putting in key values that your hotel can represent," Chiu said. "Perhaps your actions are similar, but your overarching messaging can be stronger than competitors."

Finally, remember that these 2025 predictions could arrive sooner than we expect. "Acceleration of technology outpaces most of these industry predictions," Duncan said. "Five years is too long to wait for new trends. Hoteliers must be vigilant of changes in other industries that are quickly flowing over into travel and must also be nimble enough to deploy relevant technologies at the right time." ■

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> A personal brand is how others know you inside and outside of the hotel industry. It's your unique story, your values, your reputation, and your impression upon the world."

CREATING A LEGACY

5-MINUTE READING TIME

How hoteliers can build their personal brand

by RUPESH PATEL

WHAT WOULD YOU LIKE PEOPLE TO SAY ABOUT YOU? IF YOU'RE like most hotel hoteliers, you're proud of your accomplishments. You want to be remembered for your hard work and successes. Today, I'm here to share how you can create a legacy with your personal brand.

Amazon CEO Jeff Bezos notably said, "Your brand is what people say about you when you're not in the room." Today, personal branding isn't just for celebrities and sports stars. Professionals like you and I are also taking advantage of this growth strategy. You may not know it, but you also have a personal brand out there. A personal brand is how others know you inside and outside of the hotel industry. It's your unique story, your values, your reputation, and your impression upon the world.

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EVERYONE HAS A PERSONAL BRAND.

Since 2015, I've been diligently creating my personal brand through the steps I'm going to share with you now. I have a successful brand that gets more than 250K views per month on my social posts with 32,000-plus followers. I've had the honor of being invited to speak at conferences, podcasts, and hospitality events. I get early leads on real estate deals, become a hospitality influencer, and now they're actually hiring me to speak! This is all due to a powerful personal brand I've built! You can do it, too!

Think of it as marketing for your life.

Your personal brand is important to your legacy. It's more important today as we live in a super-connected world. Building a solid personal brand can open many personal and professional doors.

HERE ARE FOUR ACTIONABLE WAYS YOU CAN CREATE YOUR OWN PERSONAL BRAND:



Creating a memorable personal brand requires effort. Your personal brand can stick to you for a lifetime; that's why it's important to start by asking yourself the following questions.

- What am I passionate about?
- What's my purpose?
- What are my interests?
- What can I contribute to the hotel industry, my network, or the world?
- Why am I creating a legacy?
- Who is my audience?

Once you've answered these questions, you'll better understand yourself and what value you can provide for others. For me, I choose to share my passions for hotel operations, leadership, and marketing. Your unique voice and experience is unlike anyone else's, so don't be afraid to be original.

YUGANOV KONSTANTIN/SHUTTERSTOCK.COM



The next step in branding yourself is to be visible to your target audience. For hoteliers, this means you should be visible in communities where other hoteliers reside. You can share your stories and experiences on multiple social channels.

Here are 10 channels you can use to start building your personal brand:

- LinkedIn
- Twitter
- Facebook and Facebook hotel groups
- Email
- Your personal blog site
- YouTube and videos
- Podcasts
- Instagram
- Phone calls (coaching)
- Messaging (WhatsApp chats groups)

Get started by focusing on just a few of these channels. I started with LinkedIn and remain focused on it because I have the most-engaged audience there. Don't worry about how many followers/connections you have; just show up and share! I started off with about 200 connections, and I'm now up to 32,000 followers.

Personal branding doesn't happen overnight. It's a long game. You must build rapport with people. They have to know, like, and trust you. People know me on LinkedIn because I show up every day! I share my real-life hotel experiences. This visibility and openness has helped me connect with other amazing hoteliers, industry leaders, and like-minded professionals.



As they say, you're only as strong as your network, and it's not who you know, but who knows you. Your network is key to creating your personal brand. You won't be able to create a personal brand all by yourself. You will need to rely on the connections, the people, who will be there to support and follow your brand.

Here are six tried-and-true networking tips for hoteliers:

- Attend hospitality conventions and conferences
- Show up to local hotel/lodging association gatherings
- Sign up to attend hotel brand regional meetings
- Make connections at conventions and visitors' bureaus or chambers of commerce meetings
- Network at local interest meetup groups
- Reach out to like-minded folks on social sites

Now that you've picked out the events you want to attend, it's time to actually make the connections you need to start building your personal brand. How? Let me explain. According to Steve Bressert, Ph.D., 40 percent to 60 percent of adults report being shy. That means more than half of the people attending a meetup or conference could be apprehensive to introduce themselves to a stranger.

Here are a few ways an introvert can overcome their shyness:

- Act confidently
- Make yourself vulnerable
- Just talk
- Understand we are all the same people
- Go with a friend

Building your network is important to your personal brand. Use these tips to have solid connections.



This step is actually my favorite part of the personal branding process. It's on the top on my personal list because I love to share my real-life hotel and marketing experiences. I teach and share every day because I know it's helping shape people's lives. I also love being creative!

Now, I understand not everyone has the creative juices running through their veins, so here are 10 ideas you can use to help you start building your personal brand:

- Share your interests
- Talk about your life experiences
- Teach a topic or strategy
- Show a step-by-step procedure
- Inspire others with your favorite quote
- Highlight someone else's successes
- Interview your mentor
- Create an engaging meme
- Make a video on how you got started in the hotel business
- Tell people about your personal life

Creating a personal brand seems like a lot of work but it's really not, especially if it's coming from your authentic self. My best advice is to simply START NOW and KEEP SHOWING UP! ■

Rupesh Patel is an award-winning hotel owner, hospitality influencer, and passionate entrepreneur. His website, smartguests.com, has helped more than 4,000 hotels improve their customer service, operations, and guest feedback. Rupesh hosts a live weekly hospitality show and regularly shares ideas, insights, and inspiration to his 32K+ followers on LinkedIn. Rupesh's creative ideas and fun approach can help any business grow! He can be reached at www.rupesh.co.

Women to the front

Castell Project brings balance to hospitality

by HEATHER CARNES

We want to evolve and progress, but changes in policies and behaviors bring unknown challenges and that keep us, and our organizations, stuck in patterns that hold us back.



> We are proud AAHOA is a supporter of the Castell Project and are excited to work with the women leaders of AAHOA."

SEVENTY-EIGHT PERCENT OF TALENT PROFES-sionals say diversity is a top hiring priority for their company, and gender diversity is the number-one issue they are tackling in this area, according to LinkedIn Talent Solutions. From CEOs to HR executives to supervisors, hospitality industry people express the desire to increase diversity, particularly in opening leadership to women. However, there is a breakdown between these intentions and the number of women in leadership roles.

While this is true across all industries, optimizing the contribution of female team members is particularly important in the hospitality industry because our employees, our talent pipeline, and our customer decision makers are all majority female. The industry is out of alignment, and this will become more severe as baby boomers retire. Castell Project, a 501(c)(3) non-profit built to facilitate bringing women into hospitality industry leadership, has a mission to see women in at least one of every three leadership positions.

Corporate leadership wants diversity because companies with diverse leadership are more resilient and more profitable over time. At the same time, company culture resists diversity because homogeneity is comfortable. There are adventurous souls that consider *change* to be great fun. But for most, *change*, including the changes around diversity, are likely to involve fear and/



ATLAS STUDIO/SHUTTERSTOCK.COM

Going beyond BUILD & ELEVATE

Other Castell Project initiatives include:

- **Castell@College:** On-campus two-hour programs connect teams of executive women with students at colleges and universities where they discuss the exciting opportunities and strong careers available to women in the hospitality industry – including women with kids. Castell welcomes executive-level women volunteers who want to participate in bringing Castell@College to their alma mater or a school in their community. It's high-energy, fun and a great way to give back. Learn more at www.castellproject.org/castell-college.
- **Women in Hospitality Industry Leadership:** An annual statistical report benchmarking the industry's progress toward bringing women into leadership. Women are visible throughout the industry, but only with data can we truly understand progress in leadership. The complete report is a free download available at www.castellproject.org/castell-research.
- **WSH List and Women on the Podium:** An annual list of 1,000 executive women in all hospitality fields that is curated into custom short lists of prospective speakers and provided to organizers of industry conferences on request. Visibility for women is a prerequisite to advancement and is critical for an industry that wants to show employees that they have opportunity.
- **The Castell Award:** An annual award that puts remarkable female leaders on the podium. Heather McCrory, CEO Americas of Accor, was awarded the inaugural Castell Award at *The Lodging Conference 2019.* Nominate a woman for the 2020 award at surveys.str.com/s3/Castell-Award-Nomination-Form.

or frustration. We want to evolve and progress, but changes in policies and behaviors bring unknown challenges and that keep us, and our organizations, stuck in patterns that hold us back.

HOW DO WE CHANGE?

There are two sides to bringing women into leadership. On one side, women with great potential need to build skills to grow into leadership roles. On the other, corporate culture must adapt so women have the competitive opportunity to move up. So, both individual women and companies must evolve.

To address these realities, Castell has designed initiatives to ease frictions that restrict the mobility of women. Castell provides training and resources to open corporate culture for women.

WHAT INITIATIVES DOES CASTELL DELIVER?

Castell programs provide specific and exclusive training for women in the five areas where gender-specific development makes a difference. The BUILD and ELEVATE programs include a year of support with a three-day training practicum, monthly team calls, and executive coaching.



Castell Project's Negotiation Skills Workshop provides attendees with the tools they need to make the best decisions for their businesses.
PHOTO COURTESY OF CASTELL PROJECT

Castell BUILD is for emerging women leaders. BUILD primes executive presence, establishes a resource network and teaches negotiation, building advocacy relationships and developing strategic career goals.

Castell ELEVATE is for established women leaders. ELEVATE enhances communication and negotiation skills, expands resource relationships, and raises executive presence. ELEVATE primes executive women for high-level advancement.

Each woman who participates is nominated by a champion from her company because we want Castell programs to support the growth of women within their companies. The insight these champions have into their candidates' strengths, weaknesses, and opportunities – whether the champion is a direct boss, human resource professional, or CEO – is eye-opening and encouraging. Either men or women can be champions and make an enormous difference in the careers of program participants.

WHO IS INVOLVED?

Castell Project is supported by Hilton, founding sponsor of the Ladder Up capital campaign, as well as ACCOR and IHG at the Leader level. Companies that own, manage, and advise this industry also are involved on committees, as sponsors and as champions and include Daly Gray, Pinnacle Advisory, Aimbridge, HVMG, Park Hotels and Resorts, Wyndham, Choice, Marriott, Pebblebrook Hotel Trust, Pinkowski & Company, RLJ, Hunter Hotel Advisors, BHN, Legacy Properties, The Lodging Conference, Apple REIT, Dellisart, John Hardy Group International, Atlanta Hospitality Alliance, and others. AHLEF supports Castell research with a grant.

We are proud AAHOA is a supporter of the Castell Project and are excited to work with the women leaders of AAHOA. ■

To champion a woman who has strong potential with your company, please visit www.castellproject.org/champions. To learn about participating, please visit www.castellproject.org/participants.

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Do I need to expand my financing options beyond my relationship with my local bank?

by RUSHI SHAH



MAGLARA/SHUTTERSTOCK.COM

REAL ESTATE FINANCING HAS MANY faces. Most hotel owners have an established, long-term relationship with a traditional banker. These go-to money sources offer lines of credit, as well as fixed loans on real estate, primarily to attract and preserve business and personal deposit customers. They are typically local community bankers charged with the responsibility of strengthening the community they serve by making credit available for successful developers

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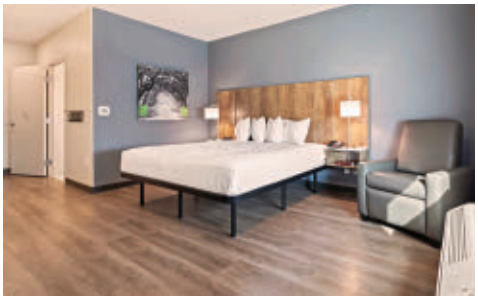
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> Quality intermediaries or investment bankers do more than just broker deals from borrowers to lenders. They scan the market to identify the optimal placement and recognize that every transaction does not fit every financing platform."

reinvesting in their own backyard. This makes them ideal sources for construction financing and other higher risk transactions.

Local community banks trend small and are handicapped by regulatory restrictions such as legal lending limits, concentration limits, the inability to lend on complex asset classes such as hotels, and government regulations such as Dodd Frank. While these local relationships are integral to a successful hotel owner's business, they should be leveraged mostly for maintenance. Owners looking to advance their business must augment traditional bank relationships with sophisticated, alternative lending sources that offer slightly higher risk capital.



TYPES OF ALTERNATIVE LENDERS

Where non-bank, capital market lenders edge out the competition is their ability to lend nonrecourse money. This is possible because unlike their traditional bank counterparts, capital market lenders focus on the asset's ability to perform before the profile of the borrower. In addition to CMBS conduit lenders, there are many other non-local bank lenders that play in the commercial real estate lending arena, such as life insurance company lenders, traditional investment management companies, non-CMBS balance sheet lenders, credit unions, regional banks, private equity funds, both public and private real estate investment trusts (REITs), and traditional debt funds.

ACCESSING ALTERNATIVE LENDERS

Unlike local banks with easily accessible brick-and-mortar locations and sales teams, most alternative, non-local bank lenders do not have an army of bankers hunting for deals. Instead, most non-traditional lenders build relationships with expert mortgage investment bankers around the country to generate curated deal flow. This value chain creates a pipeline of steady, high-quality transactions that are already underwritten to market standards. By focusing on only viable deals, lenders are able to analyze and quote more deals in less time. This business model validates the importance of a good financial intermediary to the equation. Lenders also rely on intermediaries to provide local market knowledge now and refinance them out of their loans later. For borrowers, this trusted relationship opens the door to more capital sources and ensures a higher probability of successful execution.

BEYOND BROKERING A DEAL

Quality intermediaries or investment bankers do more than just broker deals from borrowers to lenders. They scan the market to identify the optimal placement and recognize that every transaction does not fit every financing platform. While some lenders' sweet spot may be lending on hotels further down the chain scale in lower to middle markets, others won't even look at a deal unless it is a Hilton or Marriott flag. A good investment banking debt advisor will know where to take which deal to maximize the probability of closing for the borrower and minimize wasted time through trial and error. This market intelligence is especially critical for established hotel owners looking to free up their balance sheet for sustainable growth or to capitalize a refinance or acquisition. Bottom line, cultivating the right industry relationships is critical for short- and long-term success. ■



Rushi Shah is principal and CEO of the commercial mortgage and real estate investment banking firm and AAHOA Club Blue Member Mag Mile Capital. As a leader in hospitality financing, Shah specializes in structuring and placing high-leverage, non-recourse bridge and permanent debt with cash out for full – and limited-service hotels nationwide. Since joining the firm's predecessor, Aries Capital, in 2015, Shah has structured and closed hundreds of millions in financing for all property types. Shah has held previous positions at Northern Trust and has an MBA from the University of Chicago's Booth School of Business.



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Thank tax cuts on tax day

by ALFREDO ORTIZ



VECTORMINE/SHUTTERSTOCK.COM

TAX DAY IS UPON US. Millions of Americans will be sitting down at kitchen tables across the country to fill out their paperwork for Uncle Sam. Although few Americans will owe additional taxes come April 15, viewing the sum total that has been skimmed from your regular paychecks during the course of the year can be jarring.

Although unwelcomed, taxes are a necessary evil.

Sourced from taxpayer dollars, federal revenue helps fund programs in the national interest. The military is a prime example. Without the fighting force, American families would be left defenseless against foreign powers. Other programs, including Medicare, Medicaid, and Social Security, are also funded from your paycheck. Not to mention the general operations of government.

While some taxes are necessary, it's a tool that should be used with restraint. Americans, not government bureaucrats, know how to best spend their own money.

For the past 100-plus years, the amount of money Americans pay in taxes at the federal level has fluctuated wildly. The top marginal tax rate has been as high as 94 percent during World War II and as low as 7 percent when the income tax was initially adopted in 1913. Those belonging to the lowest tax bracket at the time paid a mere 1 percent.

While current federal tax rates are not near these extremes, rates are currently experiencing a downward swing.

The passage of the Tax Cuts and Jobs Act in 2017 lowered the top marginal rate to 37 percent. Additionally, the legislation lowered the tax rate for "pass-through" small businesses and created a 20-percent standard deduction for more modest enterprises. The bill also doubled the child tax credit, giving families even more savings.

Predictably, the tax cuts have spurred an energetic economy.

The overall unemployment rate has dropped to a five decade low, while the African-American and Hispanic-American employment rates are at record highs. Using a three-year benchmark, no administration in history has resided over an average unemployment rate of below 4 percent until now.

Wages are also moving in the right direction. After a period of stagnation, year-over-year wage growth has increased by at least 3 percent every month for over a year. Moreover, the labor force participation rate hit 63.4 percent in January, the highest level since 2013. The uptick suggests that an abundance of attractive job opportunities, spurred by the tight labor market, are drawing Americans off the sidelines and back into the workforce.

In sectors ranging from manufacturing to hospitality, small businesses and their employees have particularly benefited. Specific elements in the tax bill mentioned above have left these entrepreneurs with more resources to invest in new equipment and grow. HM Manufacturing in Illinois is just one example. Because of the tax cuts, the business has been able to purchase half a million dollars in new equipment, provide employees with health benefits, offer bonuses, and hire even more workers.

As Benjamin Franklin so famously observed, "Nothing is certain, except death and taxes." Isn't that the truth? At least taxpayers are better off now than they were three years ago prior to the passage of the Tax Cuts and Jobs Act. ■

Alfredo Ortiz is the president and CEO of the Job Creators Network.







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4-MINUTE READING TIME

DALLAS

by ASIF LAKHANI



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WHEN IT COMES TO TOURISM, Dallas is the shining star of Texas. The city saw 27.7 million visitors who spent $5.2 billion, generating $8.8 billion in total economic impact in the last fiscal year, according to the 2019 Annual Report from Visit Dallas. As a result, the area retained its crown as the top visitor destination in Texas and is No. 5 on Cvent's list of the top 50 cities for meetings and events in the U.S. and the only Texas destination in the top 10.

Six percent of the 27.7 million visitors in the last fiscal year came from international destinations, and 83 percent of the total visitors were back for a second time or more. The average trip length is 2.8 nights. Transient taxes generated $607.9 million in 2019, which drove down the household tax burdens to residents by more $1200 on average, according to the Visit Dallas report. Property taxes on tourism sites generated $285 million in local taxes, and the local tourism industry sustained more than 65,000 jobs that resulted in a total income of $3.4 billion. As a matter of fact, the report says tourism creates one in 19 jobs in the city of Dallas.

Dallas has 166 hotels with more than 77,000 rooms, according to Cvent. In 2019, there were 8.3 million total hotel room nights sold in Dallas totaling $1.6 billion in room revenue, which is a 3.5 percent increase from the year previous, according to the Visit Dallas annual report. A plan is in place to bring 2,500 more rooms to downtown Dallas as part of a $1.72-billion project overhaul, per Cvent. There is tremendous potential for growth in the Dallas hotel scene as the total room nights sold and revenue accumulated were the result of just 68-percent occupancy.

Visit Dallas efforts helped book more than 2.6 million room nights and more than 1,700 events in the last fiscal year. A vast majority of those were meeting sales, but sports, marketing, and tourism each contributed hundreds of thousands to the overall total as well. The economic impact generated by the city's marketing team totaled $2.2 billion overall and $1.3 billion in direct spending. Visit Dallas member

Continued on page 68

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HISTORIC LANDMARKS IN DALLAS

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FOUNDER'S PLAZA

A must-see in Dallas, Founder's Plaza tells the origin story of the city and features several historical structures and landmarks in Downtown Dallas. See a replica of Dallas founder John Neely Bryan's cabin, view a terrazzo map of Dallas County in the 1800s, and learn about the first settlers in Dallas.

OLD RED MUSEUM AND COURTHOUSE

Also located in Founder's Plaza in downtown Dallas, the Old Red Museum and Courthouse contains some of Dallas' most fascinating historical artifacts, photographs, and mementos in a comprehensive exhibit detailing Dallas County's history. In addition to the exhibit, see some of the building's original features like the steel vault, the grand staircase, and more than 100 stained-glass windows.

BATH HOUSE CULTURAL CENTER

Originally named the White Rock Bath House, this center was one of the first uses of art deco architecture in the Southwest and drew in thousands of people during the 1930s. Today, instead of showers and changing rooms, the Bath House Cultural Center houses an impressive theater and two gallery spaces to showcase local artists' work and performances, which are on display year round.

DALLAS HERITAGE VILLAGE

Located in the Cedars/Southside neighborhood, Dallas Heritage Village exhibits a collection of original, historic structures and furnishings built in Dallas from 1840-1910. Featuring the largest collection of original buildings in Dallas, as well as plenty of interactive exhibits, memorabilia, and classes, this village gives a full-on glimpse of life in Dallas during the 19th century.

DEGOYLER HOUSE & GARDEN

A beautiful, picturesque white Spanish Colonial-styled house, the DeGoyler House was the estate of petroleum industry tycoon Everrette DeGoyler and was known for its impressive and massive library. The house has much of its original garden features still intact and is available for tours at the Dallas Arboretum and Botanical Garden.

FAIR PARK

With the nation's largest collection of 1930s art deco-styled buildings, as well as more than three million historic documents and artifacts displayed at the Hall of State at Fair Park, the park is a notable attraction in Dallas and is packed full of history. It's also the site of the annual State Fair of Texas, welcoming more than one million visitors from all around the world each year.

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HISTORIC LANDMARKS IN DALLAS

FREEDMAN'S CEMETERY MEMORIAL

Representing a significant part of Dallas history, this landmark serves as a burial ground for Dallas' early African-American community post-Civil War and is one of the largest Freedman Cemeteries in the U.S. Stop by the beautiful landmark and learn about Freedman's town, a small and segregated African-American community in north Dallas, which is now known as Uptown.

JOHN F. KENNEDY MEMORIAL PLAZA AND THE GRASSY KNOLL

Stop by the John F. Kennedy Memorial after a visit to the Sixth Floor Museum for a time of reflection. The memorial honors the late president with a minimalistic monument that's open for public viewing daily. Also, just one block away for viewing and reflection is the infamous 'grassy knoll,' a small hill that become well known after the death of President John F. Kennedy.

LAKEWOOD THEATER

Built in 1938 in Old East Dallas, Lakewood Theater is an iconic landmark and most recognizable by its 100-foot neon tower and art deco architecture. While the theater has been renovated to an upscale bowling alley, it still displays its original and imaginative murals depicting Disney characters, as well as princes, soldiers, and dancers for a fun, whimsical experience.

MAJESTIC THEATRE

With a big, exquisite, and well-lit sign, the Majestic Theatre (known to locals as simply "The Majestic") is hard to miss. Originally opened as a vaudeville theater in the 1920s, the theater was a hot spot in town and hosted a variety of movie premieres with big stars like Gregory Peck, John Wayne, Jimmy Stewart, and more. Today, the theater hosts a variety of plays, musicals, and other live performance among the space's beautiful architectural features.

PIKE PARK

Take a stroll at Pike Park in Uptown. The 4.3-acre park and historical landmark was established in 1913 and was originally called Summit Play Park, a nod to its roots as a central gathering area in the neighborhood. Later, the neighborhood became known as "Little Mexico" as thousands of Latin Americans came to the area. It houses one of only three buildings with a Mexican-American history to be declared a Dallas Historical Landmark.

TEXAS THEATRE

Opened in 1931 in Oak Cliff, the Texas Theatre is a big part of Dallas' rich history. A staple in the community, the theater is known for its Venetian-styled architecture and being the first theater in Dallas with air conditioning. The theater also gained international attention for being the hiding spot for Lee Harvey Oswald in 1963. While the original seats are gone, you can still see where Oswald snuck in and sat down before being arrested for assassinating President John F. Kennedy, or catch one of the classic movies shown here daily.

Continued from page 64

hotels have an option to contribute to a voluntary tourism public improvement district fee of 2 percent of the room rate, which is used to develop incentives to bring conventions to the area, improve marketing efforts to attract visitors overall, promote arts and culture programs, and conduct visitor research.

A September 2018 report from *Dallas News* stated Austin led the Lone Star State in occupancy and average daily rate but emphasized that the Dallas market is twice the size of Austin's, which drives the need for Dallas-area rates to be more competitive across the board. Dallas had three noteworthy hotel openings and renovations on the docket at the end of 2019. The first is the Virgin Hotel, which opened in the city's Design District. Complete with 268 rooms, two penthouse suites, a rooftop pool, and multiple bars and restaurants, the Dallas location is one of only a handful of Virgin Hotels in the entire country. The Dallas Arts District now has a 183-room "art-forward," boutique hotel called the Hall Arts Hotel located across from the AT&T Performing Arts Center. In it are 10 suites with luxurious skyline views, two restaurants, one of which was led by Oprah's former private chef, and 27,000 square feet of private indoor and outdoor event space, according to a Visit Dallas press release. The Rosewood Mansion on Turtle Creek celebrated its 40th anniversary in January with a detailed renovation of the lobby, suites, and guestrooms. The estate was originally built as a private residence in the 1920s and reportedly held many lavish parties where President Franklin D. Roosevelt was often a guest.

Overall, Dallas is rapidly rising as a mainstay for top meeting destinations throughout the United States. The area "is a hot market for hotel development," according to Smart Meetings. Annual events include the State Fair of Texas, major sporting events, parades, and the largest film festival in the entire state – where everything is already bigger than average. Hoteliers, event planners, and other tourism industry professionals need not think twice about whether or not Dallas is a good place to invest. The answer, as the data and trends show, is undoubtedly yes. ■

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2020 hotel tech issues: The perils of automation

by BRUNA PEDRINI



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THE INTENSITY AND URGENCY TO provide for the best engagement and personalized experience has changed the landscape of the hospitality industry. Much of the hospitality industry is catapulting toward the "smart hotel" model, allowing travelers to control their hotel experience from a personal device, from booking and digital check-in; complete control of guestroom smart devices, hotel concierge chat assistance, digital check-out all from a single-unified, user-friendly app. Unfortunately, this is often done without considering the legal and human impact.

In a business focused on enhanced experiences, the lure of automation is very real. Prospective guests shop competing websites for the best deal, vendors promise the latest and greatest experience through use of their products and technologies, while people learn of employment opportunities and apply through websites and social media. Meanwhile, online reviews can build or kill a business, and regulators and plaintiffs search the internet for compliance and liability issues from thousands of miles away. This article calls for people in the hospitality industry to review and consider how to use technology without being trampled by unintended consequences. The following list is a start of the areas to evaluate; it is by no means exhaustive.

ALGORITHMIC BIAS

First things first: Automation's strength is also its weakness. Algorithms are quantitative data – a process or set of rules involving mathematical calculations that produce more data that helps people make decisions. Algorithmic bias (machine learning bias) or AI bias, *is a systematic error in the coding, collection, or selection of data that produces unintended or unanticipated discriminatory results*. Algorithmic bias is



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perpetuated by data scientists who train algorithms based on patterns found in historical data. With algorithms, the saying "garbage in, garbage out," is more real than ever. Although results produced by an algorithm may have the patina of objectivity, the real or implicit biases of the coders is baked into the product.

This means the recruiting tool a hotel may use to gather résumés, sort applicants, and assure non-discriminatory employment practices may not rate candidates neutrally when it comes to gender, race, disability, or religion. There need be no intent to discriminate by the business, but the end result may be discriminatory. Amazon recently walked away from their recruiting tool because the AI models used were trained on résumé data from the prior 10 years, which, due to historical patterns, were comprised primarily of white men. As a result of the data, the machine understood that male candidates were preferable, thus unwittingly perpetuating historical bias.

Algorithmic bias arises from the thousands of implicit and intentional biases of the persons collecting data, coding, and developing programs and products. The good news is that there are solutions: on a very basic level, recognizing that all persons use implicit biases in decision-making frees the creators of algorithms to identify, test, and limit the impact of their biases. Once an individual is aware of a bias, they can act to counter and neutralize its negative impact. As consumers of the end product, members of the hospitality industry can use their purchasing power to ask questions about the product and how it was developed. Contracts with vendors can include clauses requiring the seller to have a diverse workforce; contracts can require apps and products be built accessible and in compliance with federal and state standards. And most importantly, products can be evaluated in practice. Ultimately, it is the hotel owner's brand and business on the line.

FACIAL RECOGNITION AND FACIAL ANALYSIS

Facial recognition technology uses an automated process to analyze faces captured in images and video to identify or confirm the identity of individuals. Facial analysis and facial recognition are different in terms of the underlying technology and the data used to train them. The issues for commercial entities, however, are similar and numerous. Both systems, for example, tend not to identify all races and national origins equally. Studies have shown that facial recognition systems have a harder time identifying women and darker-skinned people, leading to false positives. Other systems have difficulty "seeing" persons of color and specific difficulty identifying the gender of dark-skinned women compared with white men such that the gender of 35% of dark-skinned women was misidentified compared with 1% of light-skinned men. Similarly, facial recognition systems do not perform well for persons with certain disabilities.

Hotels already use facial recognition for check-in, entering rooms and entertainment facilities, and cashless payments. Legally, this means that facial recognition/facial analysis should not be standalone solutions. Companies need to consider their processes to assure inclusion. Hotels that use facial recognition for financial transactions or to verify identity or age should have live back-up support onsite and readily available. Fun as the YouTube video, "How to Pour Beer with your Face" sounds, a thoughtful, inclusive approach will promote the fun without the litigation. And last, but not least, facial recognition used by private industry must be considered in terms of data privacy requirements.

TAILORED ADVERTISING AND MARKETING

Targeted marketing can raise civil rights concerns. Tailored advertising "should" not take into account protected-class status, yet the information collected on individual guests often can be correlated and sorted to detrimental effect. Hotels seek broad-ranging information such as identification (name, address, gender, etc.), preferences (high floor, firm pillows, special needs) and lodging history, behavioral information, such as dining preferences, and spa appointments, with details like frequency, time, and amounts spent. The questions abound: If the marketing one guest receives is different from that received by another, what is the basis for the distinction? Is one person or group receiving "better" treatment? Are the offers based on specifics related to that guest's individual habits or part of an estimate based on certain demographics including protected-class data?

WEBSITES AND APPS

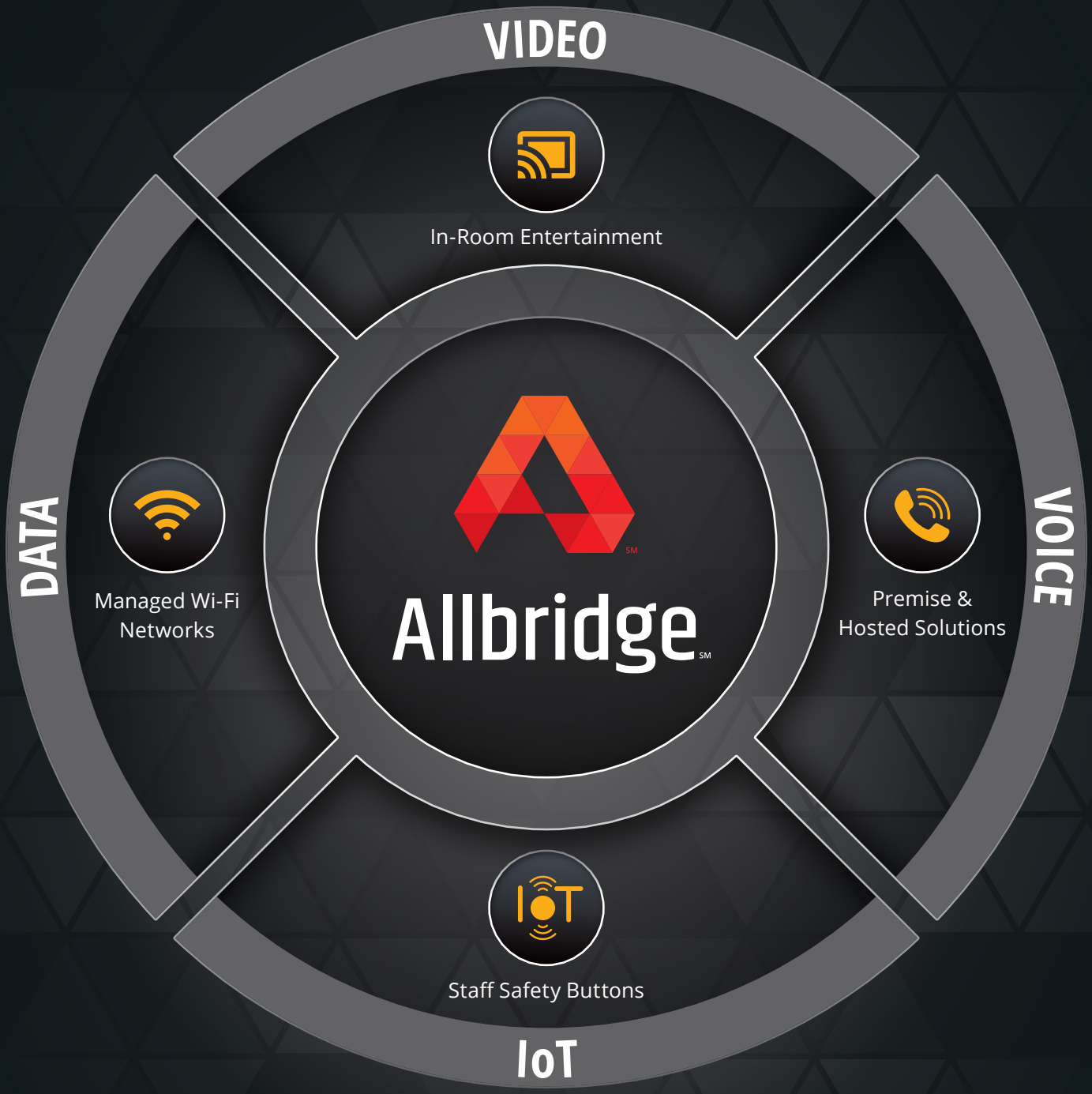
American with disabilities spend more than $17 billion each year on travel. Hotel websites, apps, and service accessibility is a necessity for would-be travelers browsing the hotel website from home as well as for hotel visitors who browse the site via smartphone or laptop. People with disabilities often also travel with additional assistive devices, and hotel websites should be able to support these types of devices. Hotel websites and apps should also be designed and maintained to ensure that all guests can properly conduct necessary travel planning, booking, and transactions online. Several large brands have developed lists that include whether entranceways, reception areas, and other important parts of the hotel are level areas without steps; whether gyms, conference, or business centers are accessible; and whether all hotel room and external bathrooms are fully accessible. Finally, hotels should also have accessibility policies that detail the scope and outline of their commitments to meet the requirements of the WCAG 2.0 AA standard.

CONCLUSION

Whether for front desk or automated checkout, technology in guestrooms, accessibility, marketing, or privacy concerns, technology use in the hospitality industry raises a myriad of legal issues to consider. The best advice: Think inclusively, analyze effects, and reach out to your legal counsel before you buy or commit to new technology. ■

Bruna Pedrini is an Of Counsel attorney with Fennemore Craig, P.C. Based in Phoenix, AZ, she specializes in the areas of accessibility, anti-discrimination, and education law, and she has experience representing builders, developers, colleges and universities, sports and concert stadiums and venues, as well as restaurants and hotels. She can be reached at bpedrini@fclaw.com or 602-916-5487.

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Marketing to the generations: Think lifestyle, not demographics

by JOHN S. FAREED



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MERRIAM-WEBSTER DEFINES *demographics as "the statistical characteristics of human populations, such as age or income, used especially to identify markets."* Ethnicity, education, household make-up, and geography are also considered demographic data. Hotel companies have long used demographics to develop products, positioning, and marketing messages.

Whether owner, investor, or asset manager, it's important for you to know this approach has become outdated and ineffective.

We are living in a time of unprecedented social, cultural, and economic change. We're living longer, healthier lives and have abundantly more free time and energy than any other period in human history. We are also more diverse. How we define our individual lifestyles, relationships, and work lives has never been more complex.

The major driver of this trend continues to be technology, as the connected world has given all of us access to ideas, concepts, products, and services from around the globe, and as a result, our beliefs and interests have become more diverse.

So, why is this important information for you?

The majority of hotel companies remain unprepared for the direction, scale, and speed of this change. Why? First, because identifying psychographic data which forms the individual personality of a traveling consumer, including attitudes, values, opinions, interests, habits, and/or general lifestyles, requires a great deal more science than simply using demographic data. Second, keeping up with the necessary systems and technology is expensive and requires sophistication beyond even the largest hotel companies' capabilities, although some are doing a far better job than others.

My advice is to be mindful of this the next time you're in the process of selecting a brand or management company for your hotel and ask about the company's current marketing tools and processes.

Are they focused on a mobile vs. desktop strategy? Desktop websites are on the verge of becoming irrelevant as more and more consumers opt to use mobile almost exclusively. Mobile sessions have overtaken desktop sessions and mobile revenues continue to grow across all categories, evidenced by Google's move to mobile-first indexing last year.

Speaking of Google, search remains the primary driver of hotel bookings. Do they have a robust and capable team focused on search engine optimization (SEO) and search engine marketing (SEM) at the property level, or are they focused exclusively on the brand's digital footprint?

As an industry, it's time we learn how to properly collect, analyze and group psychographic guest data. Ask if they have a past guest strategy that goes beyond the typical hotel loyalty program. Do they have a robust customer relationship management (CRM) system, and more importantly, how is it being used to grow business at the property level? Are they able to assist the property with delivering personalized guest experiences?

Rather than marketing to a narrowly defined demographic, hoteliers must embrace the new post-demographic landscape and position our brands, products, services, and marketing messages in a way that allows traveling consumers to express their individuality. ■

> "We are living in a time of unprecedented social, cultural, and economic change. We're living longer, healthier lives and have abundantly more free time and energy than any other period in human history."



5 lessons in revenue strategy from the world's most innovative hoteliers

by DAVID WOOLENBERG

EVERYBODY IS TALKING ABOUT THE potential that new tech, AI, and analytics are bringing to the practice of revenue management. But it's these technologies combined with the strategy that is employed by the business that differentiates the performance of one hotel from another.

We know that no two hotel businesses operate in the same way. Location, rating, guest demographics, and many more variables mean that each and every revenue strategy has to be bespoke. Add in ever-changing market dynamics and you need to build a strategy that has flexibility at its core if you are to move the needle on profitability.

We work with a wide array of hotel clients and get to see firsthand the best practices they are adopting and the results they are achieving. Here's a quick insight into how innovative hoteliers are pushing ahead.

1 DYNAMIC DISTRIBUTION

A 5-star resort property we work with in Ibiza, Spain, has truly taken distribution to a new level. Originally a tour operator-led hotel, the revenue team started yielding through OTAs and its direct channels and shifted the balance so that now only 10 percent of business comes from tour operators. Keeping channels open and yielding on price and packages led to higher RevPAR.

2 SEGMENTATION

An international hotel chain we work with recently redefined its revenue strategy to focus on its most profitable business. Attention was paid to segmentation, with the chain releasing one million room nights booked from less-profitable customer segments and replacing it with B2C and MICE, as these segments were driving higher ADR.

3 STAY CONFIDENT

Many hotel markets are seeing sharp increases in supply, which presents a challenge to existing hotels and can put a downward pressure on rates. A boutique chain we work with in Seattle, Bellevue, and Portland took advantage of the panic in the market by allowing competitors to sell out first, enabling them to charge higher rates for last-minute demand.

4 ROOM TYPE DIFFERENTIALS

A lifestyle brand we work with in Asia Pacific made huge gains in RevPAR and ADR by implementing dynamic room type differentials. The Hong Kong-headquartered company adopted an Open Pricing strategy to price each property, room, segment, and guest independently. Working with room type differentials, the group was able to flex room types up and down in line with market demand.

5 DYNAMIC PRICING

A casino resort we partner with recently underwent an expansion that saw its inventory triple in a 12-month period, yet it still sold out nearly every booking date and comped a majority of its rooms. The turning point in its revenue strategy came when it transitioned away from static offers to more dynamic prices personalized to the player ID, enabling the hotel to price according to market demand and the expected total spend of that particular guest. ■





> No two hotel businesses operate in the same way. Location, rating, guest demographics, and many more variables mean that each and every revenue strategy has to be bespoke. Add in ever-changing market dynamics and you need to build a strategy that has flexibility at its core if you are to move the needle on profitability."

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Consider the future when building your hotel

Thinking about future conversion prospects during the design and construction phases of a hotel project can extend the longevity of the structure

by STEPHEN SIEGEL

LONG-TERM HOLDERS OF LODGING ASSETS can increase future profitability prospects by thinking differently about their hotel construction methods. When building a new property, being mindful of eventual future uses can extend the structure's longevity after it's no longer a viable hospitality product. This thought process can potentially add decades of value to an asset's useful life.

When looking at construction methods, one must meet the requirements conscripted by the brand for their new property. However, there are ways to adapt those designs and remain within brand guidelines while also thinking about its eventual conversion to another use outside the lodging space.

As most long-term owners understand, brand standards change over time in order to keep up with present trends. Current building designs most likely will not conform to the brand requirements in the future. Major franchise companies continually update their brand within individual markets as we're seeing prototypical footprints changing through the evolution of the individual brands.

Markets also unexpectedly shift as demographics change over time. This can be seen in a fundamental way in major markets such as New York, San Francisco, Los Angeles, and Miami, where the need has shifted more to long-term housing. This new need has resulted in conversions from hotels to these types of living quarters. For example, hotels over the years have been repurposed to college dorms, senior housing, affordable housing, and even apartments. Being able to adaptively reuse the asset in the future can respond to these shifting market needs.

When considering repurposing within the hotel space, contemplate repositioning upward, not downward in the chain scale. Neighborhoods in metropolitan areas are gentrifying, and these neighborhoods are attracting higher-paying customers. Also, with the franchises constantly creating new brands, having the foresight to adapt to stricter standards in high barrier-of-entry markets will make the hotel a strong candidate for a boutique model, lifestyle brand or possibly a higher-scale brand. These market changes usually warrant a renovation cost that is much lower than replacement cost.

When markets change negatively, it could also be time to convert. With newer hotels entering the arena, continuous loss of revenue could make the property obsolete. When average daily rates precipitously drop, it causes profitability to fall, which makes it difficult to keep up with brand standards.

When contemplating a new hotel, create a presentation that includes a business model and projected ROI that reflects morphing demand streams that may warrant use change at some point. This is an important add when pitching the development to partners and lenders/financiers. Remember, a new college could be built in the area, and there may not be enough apartment space. A smartly thought-out plan years in advance could make the structure easily convertible to student housing.

PROPERTY ELEMENTS TO CONSIDER

Review the sizes of the rooms and construct them as large as possible based on available site constraints. While there is a current trend at the major hotel franchisors to shrink guestrooms to smaller sizes, most guests will not oppose the opportunity for a larger room. Recently, brands are emphasizing public space experiences and, in order to manage construction costs, room sizes have been



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reduced. In time, however, this trend may reverse itself as guests become uncomfortable with the tightness of the room sizes. This is more apparent when staying more than a couple of nights.

Consider the growth of extended-stay markets and corporate apartments. These rentals typically are more generously sized and provide many features of full kitchens. In addition, thinking ahead on the floor plan designs can allow the ability to eventually combine two rooms into one free-flowing space. This will provide possible opportunities for easier conversions to uses outside of the lodging space.

When thinking about current room layouts for future flexibility, consider where the placement of the plumbing and electrical service will occur. It would be advantageous to correlate vertical plumbing piping to where a future kitchen and bathrooms can be added and to locate electrical mains and panels in areas where they would not be impacted if walls were removed. This works particularly well with guestrooms that feature the bathroom vanity outside the bathroom or where electrical panels are located in the guestrooms.

There also could be opportunities to construct walls in a manner that creates a section that's easily removable to combine two rooms into one unit.

Review the design of systems in a soon-to-be-constructed hotel. Electrical components and HVAC units can be located to adapt to apartment design by proper preplanning. Also consider bringing in the correct amount of utility requirements on the front end.

Another consideration is rethinking public spaces for conversion to another use such as street-side retail. For future uses, public spaces may need to be reconfigured to allow for new areas that may not be required in the current footprint. For example, vending areas could be converted to additional guest laundry rooms.

One critical area every hotel developer should consider, no matter the future use of the building, is forthcoming technological innovations. There will always be a technological evolution, so include the ability to easily switch out older, outdated equipment. In today's environment, the ability to update data streaming or provide wireless connectivity is an important part to meet future needs.

As a long-term holder, it is important to be forward thinking of the investment's future. With some visionary modeling, protecting the investment by making it easier to readapt its use can provide longer-term profitability. ■



Stephen Siegel is principal of H-CPM (Hospitality CPM) and a proven professional in the areas of design, engineering, contractor negotiation and project management for new construction and renovation projects. He earned both a bachelor's and master's degree in construction management from the University of Florida.



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From the ground up

How independent hoteliers can use technology to build their own brands

by CHRIS SPEARS

IF YOU ARE GOING IT alone or considering going it alone, you must recognize that technology has a massive role in your hotel empire. To be truly successful, you need to make technology selections that cover digital experiences, marketing communication, customer and prospect data, guest management, revenue management, accounting software, and physical technology. These technologies break down into two groups: booking focused and operational focused. Let's start with the booking-focused technologies, which tools should be considered critical, and what you should consider buying vs. building.

BOOKING-FOCUSED TECH

The entire booking experience is enabled by technology. Think of it as a journey beginning with a customer (consumer or business) looking for a room. Spend a minute and envision every step they go through to accomplish their goal of booking a room. Think about the variables they are considering: cost, location, ambiance, etc. How can technology support the whole journey?

Typically, it starts with a Google search and visiting a few websites (brand and OTA), then deciding whether to continue through booking online or calling to book, some e-mail communication, and maybe a mobile app to check in ahead of time. All of these systems and tools provide you an opportunity to provide a great customer experience or a risk of creating a terrible customer experience. By leveraging the best-in-class templates for web design, e-commerce funnels, email campaigns, and check-in experiences, hoteliers can save a significant amount of money. These software vendors are in the business of designing the most efficient and highly converting website they can. They have data across *all* of their clients that prove what they are doing is working. You are going to get the best result when you take advantage of the extensive research and development these software partners have built into their systems based on years of customer feedback and analysis.

TRUST THE PROS

Often, there are runaway projects at independent hotels that require software partners to create special exceptions in the product to support the property, such as changing the way a booking button looks. This is where you as the hotelier must choose your battles carefully and consider why you hired the partner in the first place. Take a moment to consider what expertise your choice in tech company has over your own experience.

Ultimately, if you follow those standard processes and designs, you are more closely aligned to customer expectations formed by experiences across travel and non-travel purchases. They understand what to expect next and how they move forward with the process. The advantage an independent hotelier has is to leverage these tools in a fairly off-the-shelf way and dramatically outperform the massive brands. Utilize standard websites, standard loyalty and communication campaigns, and the default check-in process. The advantage independent properties

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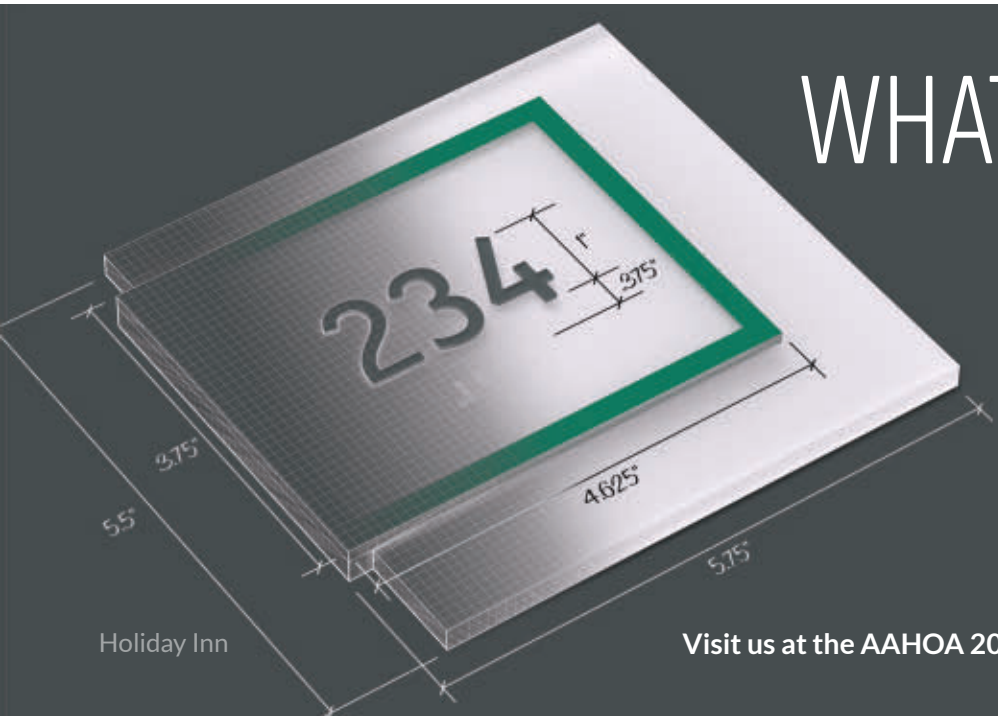


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Leverage what you control

Let the professionals handle the tech specs, but hoteliers can control the narrative around their brands:

- Make sure every word on your website, in the OTA descriptions, and in the email communications is precise.
- Look at every room photo you find online about your property. Is it the best you have? Could you get a better image?
- Read and respond to every review online, regardless of platform, and regardless of how positive or negative the guest might have been.



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have is not being weighed down by legacy systems, integrations or processes, and having an easy-to-understand brand promise and customer experience.

KNOW WHERE TO MAKE YOUR MARK AS A BRAND

How is that possible? First, focus on what you have control over and what can make your property stand out and be noticed. It is important to utilize existing technology and not reinvent the wheel. Improve the things you control: the photography of the property, the online reviews, and the written descriptions of services and rooms. Make sure every word on your website, in the OTA descriptions, and in the email communications is curated and of the highest quality. Look at every room photo you find online about your property. Is it the best you have? Could you get a better image? Read and respond to every review online, regardless of platform, and regardless of how positive or negative the guest might have been.

COMMUNICATE WITH YOUR AUDIENCE AND GUESTS

While all of this technology has made it infinitely easier for brands to communicate with consumers, we are finding it less and less. If a guest stayed at your hotel a year ago, they should not be receiving a weekly email about your property or specials. On the other hand, if they came for an annual festival, then you could target them with a special around the event. Small modifications like this to your check-in process and the guest data you store can have a significant impact on your bottom line. Maybe not in year one, but what about year 10, when you have thousands of names of people who came into town for the festival that you can market to effectively? They are loyal repeat customers who will pay a package rate since they know the service and experience they will have at the property. That is the true power of how an independent hotelier can leverage technology. Win locally and win the heart and mind of the guest by leveraging technology.

Finally, avoid buying "aspirational" solutions that include more functionality than you will need in the next two to three years. More often than not, these software or services that include unique capabilities rarely get used. Impressed by a website vendor who can personalize the web experience? Will it produce enough content and images to take advantage of that feature? Impressed by the extremely sophisticated revenue management or reservation management system? How far into the future (or more hotels) would you need before taking advantage of those capabilities? When tasked with reducing software and IT costs, it is always easy to look at the software with 100s of capabilities and 10 of which the hotel actually uses. Be pragmatic in your approach and your brand will flourish. ■



Chris Spears is co-founder and chief marketing technology officer at Arke, a digital demand and revenue consultancy.

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Setting the table

How your hotel's restaurant identity elevates the hotel brand

by THOMAS CONRAN and WILLIAM KOHL, PRINCIPALS, GREENWOOD HOSPITALITY



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MANY HOTEL ROOMS ARE booked by local decision-makers who have never had the opportunity to stay in the hotel they are reserving for their inbound travelers. Frequently, their impression of the hotel's quality of service and facilities is formulated by their experience in the hotel's restaurant or banquet facility. Individual business travelers also seek out hotels that offer compelling food and beverage experiences. The popularity and the increasing influence of celebrity chefs, the Food Network, and social media have raised the bar for our guests' expectations of our restaurants. Done correctly, your hotel's restaurant can be the signature element for the hotel and enhance its position in the market.

Can you remember when hotel restaurants and bars were the most popular dining destinations in a market? Unfortunately, they have slowly gained a reputation as a necessary evil in hospitality. They frequently lack imagination or personality. Too many operators view their restaurants as a cost center rather than a signature element of their hotel. When opening a new property or renovating an existing one, they often neglect to identify the dining preferences of their guests or to complete a comprehensive market study of the most popular local restaurants. This usually results in an inability to capture in-house guests or to attract area diners who are lost to the best local, freestanding restaurants. As a result, the hotel restaurant flounders due to a lack of relevance. Hotel F&B has the potential to be a profit center as long as it establishes and penetrates a niche in the local dining scene, tells a compelling story, and continually works to stay relevant in its delivery of quality food, beverage, and service.

Take, for example, the Reikart House in Amherst, NY. This historic Tribute Portfolio hotel completed a full restoration of the former Lord Amherst property in 2017. During this period, a decision was made to position the hotel's food and beverage offerings as a freestanding restaurant venue adjacent to the property. The vision was to enhance the hotel's attributes and offer the local community a compelling restaurant option.

This decision could have been viewed as a potential risk. Amherst, the most affluent suburb surrounding Buffalo, NY, is already home to a robust selection of high-end restaurants. In the end, the Reikart House's new restaurant, Jazzboline, was concepted to take full advantage of the Reikart storyline while filling a void in the existing restaurant offerings in the market.

BATTLING EXPECTATIONS

In the 1940s and '50s, hotels were host to some of the finest dining rooms in the marketplace. Unfortunately, over time this distinction has faded as a wave of homogenization dampened the impact of hotel



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F&B. Today, hoteliers are conflicted regarding their emphasis on a la carte dining and the requirements to support it adequately in order to find success in a crowded and heavily scrutinized market. The question hoteliers must ask themselves is, "Can I conceptualize a restaurant to fulfill a need the market is not currently providing?"

The goal of any hotel restaurant today should include an appropriate capture level of in-house guests as well as an ability to attract a significant level of traffic from outside clientele. One limitation that hoteliers will face is high costs associated with purpose-building a restaurant with social space. However, there are many elements that can be incorporated into the concept to position it favorably against its local, free standing competitors. Obviously, it has to start with quality food and great service that is appropriate for the level of the restaurant. Also consider elements such as a dedicated entrance from the outside (separate from the hotel's) so guests do not have to walk through the hotel lobby, a vanity website, compelling craft cocktail programs, curated wine lists that complement the cuisine, extensive wine-by-the-glass programs, relevant costumes (uniforms), appropriate music and lighting, and sophisticated but not stuffy service. Not all concepts can be positioned to be 4-star or high-end, so make your selections appropriate for the concept and strive to be "best in your class."

TELLING A STORY

When developing a signature restaurant that just happens to be in a hotel vs. a hotel restaurant, it is important to establish a relationship to both the property and the local area. Tying these threads together is the first step in creating an effective concept that will entice guests and local visitors because the restaurant has a compelling story. For the Reikart House, ownership embraced the legacy of Dolly and Frank Reikart, who were entrepreneurs, vaudeville performers, musicians, and luthiers. While examining their life for inspiration, it was discovered that Dolly and Frank were known in Amherst as the area's ambassadors of hospitality. They frequently hosted parties to welcome new residents to the area to introduce them to



When developing a signature restaurant that just happens to be in a hotel vs. a hotel restaurant, it is important to establish a relationship to both the property and the local area.
PHOTO COURTESY OF REIKART HOUSE

friends and neighbors. A colorful couple, the Reikarts were performers and Frank even had a capuchin monkey as a constant companion. Frank Reikart invented the jazzboline, an instrument resembling a banjo that can be strummed or played using a bow. This was ultimately drawn upon as the platform for the branding of the restaurant.

Next, ownership was tasked with identifying the ideal concept for Jazzboline. Because the local area is already host to multiple high-end dining options, the menu was crafted to serve what ownership imagined the Reikarts would offer to their own guests in 1920s in upstate New York. The menu consists of comfort foods and nostalgic American cuisine utilizing regional ingredients and modernized for today's discriminating palate. Menu items are crafted from a vertical rotisserie oven and a hearth oven and are served in the form of small plates designed for sharing with a selection of traditionally sized entrees as well as some family-sized platters.

By combining the Reikarts' penchant for hospitality with their colorful personalities and their invention of the jazzboline, the rare opportunity arose to create a compelling brand story. The brand story transcends both the hotel and the restaurant, which allows for delivery of consistent messaging and service rituals between both the hotel and restaurant. Now, the property offers two distinct businesses – a high-end hotel and restaurant experience – that ultimately share the same brand, theme, and personality. This look and feel was achieved through impeccable interior design, and the strategic, yet subtle placement of photos and artifacts specific to Frank and Dolly. The brand story was then completed by extensive staff training designed to deliver hospitality worthy of the Reikarts' legacy and to be able to bring their story to life.

STANDING OUT

While it is possible to run a successful hotel restaurant with an identity that is totally separate from your hotel, this strategy fails to take into account the power of a strong unified brand and vision. Some hoteliers have pivoted from combining the identity of a hotel and its restaurant due to the negative perception hotel restaurants have garnered over the years. As a result, they are forced to market two separate businesses, and attract two diverging groups of customers. Your restaurant's identity can be a huge asset, and it should be used to bolster your hotel's reach within its local market and beyond.

If hoteliers are not going to spend the time to create an exciting, unique space for dining it may not be worth the effort to add a restaurant to their property. Diners are among the first consumer groups to look for alternatives, and if the best alternative is next door to your property, their decision is easily made. Without an identifiable concept, high-quality menu, and consistent service, these customers will look elsewhere.

Too many hoteliers also gloss over the importance of tapping into their local marketplace. In many cases, consumers in your marketplace will never see the inside of your guestrooms, but they are also your primary endorsement for word-of-mouth business. If locals have a positive experience at your hotel's restaurant, it will translate into an endorsement of your overall guest experience. Become the local watering hole and "go to" dining establishment for the locals and it will translate into incremental sleeping room and social business. ■

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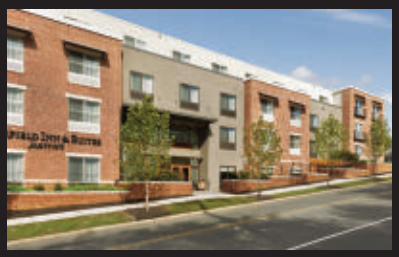


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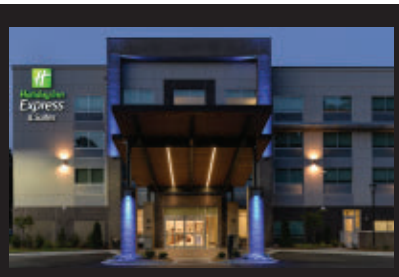
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Increasing Florida's minimum wage will only hurt those it is intended to help

by CAROL DOVER

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IN FLORIDA AND ACROSS THE NATION, PEOPLE ARE TALKING about minimum wage. Here in Florida, there is a proposed constitutional amendment that voters will see on the ballot this November that will nearly double our minimum wage to $15 an hour. Not only would this be devastating and irreversible for Florida businesses but it will hurt the very people it is intended to help.

WHY IS THERE A MINIMUM WAGE?

As the discussion grows about minimum wage, it is important to first acknowledge what the minimum wage was intended to do. The minimum wage was never meant to be a "living wage." It was designed as a starter wage that employees earn as they build their skills to reach higher employment. Think about your first job as a teenager or maybe even a young adult. Maybe you worked in a restaurant or at the front desk of a hotel like I did. It felt great to have that first job, earn money, develop professionally, expand knowledge, and move up in business. That is exactly what



> We know this battle is winnable and we will not stand by and let the hospitality industry and its team members be used for feel-good politics that do not actually benefit them."

was intended for the minimum wage – to be a starting off point. With the economy doing well and businesses expanding, they are able to create more jobs, hire more people, and earn more for their businesses. As they do so, they can invest in more growth, which means more jobs. This benefits the employees, the business, and the greater community.

WHAT HAPPENS IF THE MINIMUM WAGE IS INCREASED?

To increase the minimum wage to $15 an hour in Florida has a lot of feel-good appeal, but behind it lies the truth that it will come with a plethora of unintended consequences. If passed, Amendment 2 in Florida would result in a 75-percent increase in labor costs over the next five years. In addition to increasing the minimum age, the proposed ballot initiative does not address Florida's tip credit, which is currently frozen at $3.02. So, if passed, tipped employees will earn a cash wash of $11.98 an hour. In reality, most of Florida's tipped employees already earn well over the minimum wage. The simple truth is that the vast majority of Florida's businesses cannot afford these increases. As the number-one industry in Florida, tourism and hospitality will certainly suffer from an increased minimum wage. This would have devastating effects on the state's economy overall as tourism makes up for other less-performing areas of the economy.

Business owners will be forced to find solutions to stay in business, and these solutions will have a direct impact on our state's 1.5 million hospitality workers. The most obvious solutions include reducing the number of employees, reducing the number of hours remaining employees work, reducing benefits, and seeking labor alternatives like automation. When business owners are forced to make these tough choices to keep their doors open, everyone is hurt. Entry-level and opportunity jobs will be more difficult to find, and the path to the middle class narrows.

> If people don't know the truth, they very well may vote for the amendment and vote themselves out of job."

The men and women of the hospitality industry are the face of Florida's tourism industry, and they are the ones who create the memorable experiences that keep visitors coming back for generations. It is imperative that we preserve their jobs and protect the opportunities afforded to those who ensure our state is warm and welcoming for all who visit.

INCREASED AUTOMATION

We are already seeing a move to automation in other states that have drastically increased their minimum wage, so it is more critical than ever that we band together to protect hospitality jobs in Florida and across the nation. Employees are starting to raise their voices on this issue as well, recognizing that this increase will not be good for them. In Florida, we are working hard to spread the message to "Save Florida Jobs" and that "Florida's Amendment 2 Hurts You." We know this battle is winnable and we will not stand by and let the hospitality industry and its team members be used for feel-good politics that do not actually benefit them.

Now is the time to act. Talk with your employees, your neighbors, and your elected officials to educate them about how raising the minimum wage would negatively impact them. If people don't know the truth, they very well may vote for the amendment and vote themselves out of job. A $15 minimum wage would be devastating for Floridians, our communities, and our fellow hospitality industry professionals across the nation.

For more information on our fight to defeat Amendment 2, raising Florida's minimum wage to $15 an hour, please visit https://frla.org/minimum-wage/. ■



Carol Dover is the president & CEO Florida Restaurant and Lodging Association (FRLA).

The Lodging Conference 2020

Stay Well - See You In September

Dear Friends and Colleagues,

As this issue goes to print, our nation, and our industry are reeling from the effects of COVID-19. I've been on the phone with industry leaders from AAHOA, AHLA, as well as hundreds of hotel owners, and service providers. It is clear to me that our industry leaders are doing everything they can to ensure the viability and survival of our great hotel industry.

Our industry went through a similar test in the wake of 9/11. The result was that a resilient industry emerged even stronger. On September 11th, we had to postpone The 7th Annual edition of The Lodging Conference which was to begin on that day. The result was an even larger conference just months later. Similarly, the industry emerged stronger after the financial crisis of 2008. With this in mind, I have no doubt that we will survive and emerge stronger.

We look forward to seeing all of you this September in Phoenix where we can gather, engage, exchange strategies, hold up a glass and toast each other and our extraordinary hospitality industry. Until then, please stay out of harm's way and do whatever you can to help AAHOA, AHLA, your employees, colleagues, and clients. We are all in this together.

As always,

Harry Javer
Founder, The Lodging Conference

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What is causing labor shortages and wage increases, and what you can do about it.

by JAKE CLOPTON

HOTEL OPERATORS TODAY ARE FACING a perfect storm of events that is making finding, retaining, and paying for labor significantly more difficult and costly than it was 10 years ago. Let's take a look at what is causing the shortages and higher wages, then move on to what operators can do about it.

Four main factors affecting supply and cost of hotel labor:

- The federal government's position on immigration has caused a significant impact on the supply of labor to the hospitality industry. According to a report by The Chicago Council on Global Affairs, immigrants make up an outsized portion of the labor supply to hotels. While immigrants are only 13 percent of the U.S. population, they make up 31 percent of the labor in the hospitality industry. While the government has limited visas to hire foreign-born workers, it has also cracked down on undocumented workers with ramped up workplace raids.
- According to the jobs report that came out Friday, February 2, the unemployment rate in the United States remains close to an all-time low, currently at 3.6 percent. Meaning there is a general backdrop of tight labor supply throughout the entire economy.
- Minimum wages have risen substantially in some states. For instance, if you operated a hotel in Arizona, you saw an increase in minimum wages hourly rates from $7.90/hour in 2014 to $12/hour in 2019, representing a 52-percent increase in just five years. If you were in California, you saw a 33-percent increase for the same time period (data pulled from Dept. of Labor website). As hotels tend to employ a lot of labor on the lower end of the pay scale, this can cause a significant increase in wage expenses for vmany operators.
- The hotel industry itself has been booming. During the past several years, thousands of new hospitality properties have been added, significantly increasing the overall demand for hotel labor.

What these factors show us is that hotel operators are being hit from all sides when it comes to labor.

Ultimately, the real question is what if anything can be done about it. There is not much an operator can do to change what is going on in the economy or government, but there are things that can be done on the operations side that can help mitigate turnover and help keep labor costs to an acceptable level. CUSA Hospitality Management gave the following advice on how operators stay on top of the game:

- Ensure that you are constantly shopping your competitors wage rates and benefits. CUSA does this quarterly at each of our properties. As an employer in the hospitality industry you need to sell yourself and what your company has to offer. Constant recruiting, even when you don't have immediate needs, will ensure that you have individuals ready when the need presents itself. It's important that owners and operators are on the same page relating to pay rates and benefit packages in keeping with their surrounding competition. Hiring, training, and retaining a candidate with the right "attitude" pays off, even if it costs you more in the short term; it is revenue management for your wage rates with a short- and long-term strategy!
- Ensure that you are providing a "value added" concept for employment. This includes offering your employees additional paid time off, flexible working schedules, educational reimbursement, and incentives for achieving goals above your projections in both revenues and cost centers. It's important that all team members know of all the "value added" benefits your company offers, not just their wage rate; this should be part of your associate orientation process.
- Finally, ensure that you are recognizing your staff in meaningful ways. It's all about developing a relationship where your employees understand how important they are to the overall operation, what they bring to the table, and how important they are to you as their employer.



> The hotel industry itself has been booming. During the past several years, thousands of new hospitality properties have been added, significantly increasing the overall demand of hotel labor."

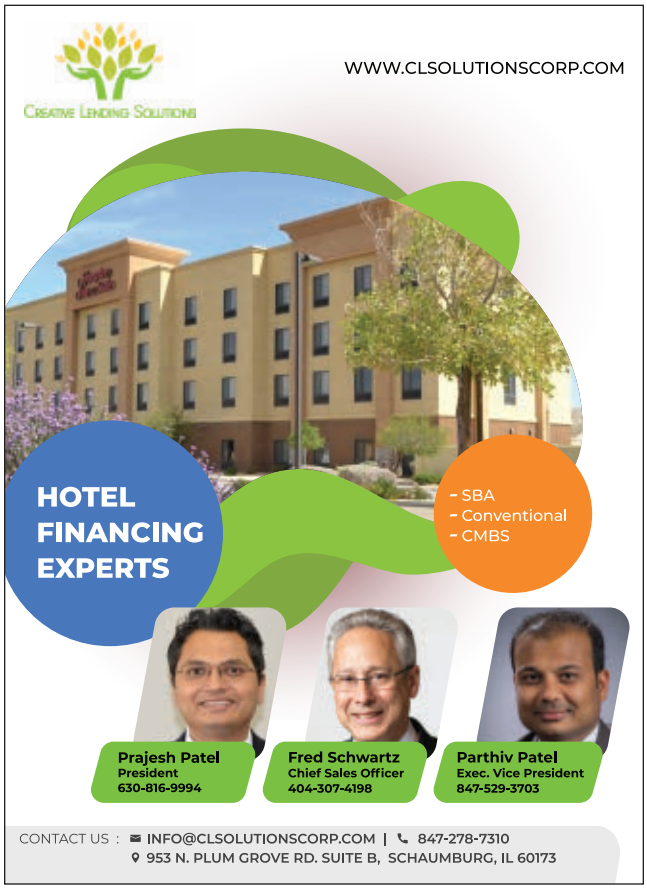
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It's no secret that finding and retaining workers in the hospitality industry has become a major challenge in recent years. There seems to be no shortage of positions that need to be filled; just a shortage of workers to fill them. As a result, the industry has had to voluntarily increase wages or, in some states, dramatically increase wages with mandatory minimum wage increases. The bottom line for owners and operators is higher costs in payroll and benefits with turnover remaining a constant reality.

Having an operational approach that is focused on people can greatly help to mitigate the risks associated with easing wages and labor shortages. Focusing on labor not just as a commodity, but as an important asset to the business can help operators navigate the increasingly competitive labor market and ultimately save your bottom line. ■

Jake Clopton is CRE capital markets – debt & equity for Clopton Capital. He can be reached atjclopton@cloptoncapital.com or 312-775-0233.







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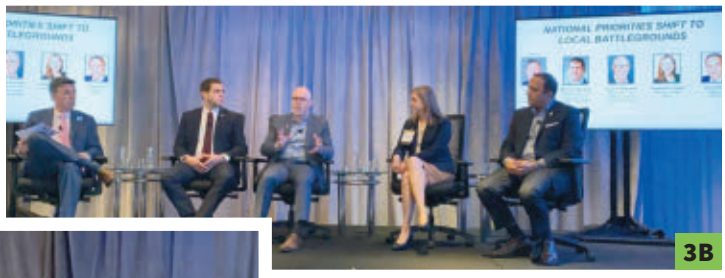
1. AAHOA President & CEO Cecil P. Staton was joined by Florida Gov. Rick DeSantis and our friends at the Florida Restaurant & Lodging Association during our Town Hall in Tallahassee.
2. Congratulations to AAHOA Lifetime Member Twinkle Patel on being unanimously selected by the Board of Aldermen to become the new alderwoman in Maggie Valley, NC.



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3A



3B



3C



3D

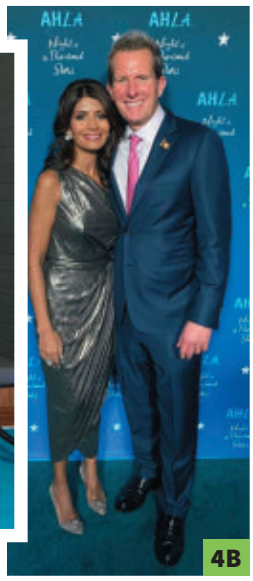
3A. President & CEO Cecil P. Staton spoke to the general session and moderated the development outlook panel at Americas Lodging and Investment Summit (ALIS) in Los Angeles.

3B. Treasurer Vinay Patel sat on the "National Priorities Shift to Local Battlegrounds" regulatory panel for a discussion about state and local advocacy at ALIS Law.

3C. At ALIS Law, COO & VP of Franchise Relations Rachel Humphrey moderated a roundtable of hotel general counsel, where the consensus was that 2020 will be a year of increased acquisitions.

3D. COO & VP of Franchise Relations Rachel Humphrey also joined other women executives for a discussion on diversity and inclusion in hospitality and ways women can help pave the way for other women to advance during AHLA's ForWard at ALIS: Women's Leadership Forum.





4B

4A. AAHOA Chairwoman Jagruti Panwala, Vice Chairman Biran Patel, Treasurer Vinay Patel, Secretary Nishant (Neal) Patel, President & CEO Cecil P. Staton, and COO & VP of Franchise Relations Rachel Humphrey were all on hand to congratulate Jon Bortz, President & CEO of Pebblebrook Hotel Trust, who succeeds Wyndham Hotels & Resorts President & CEO Geoff Ballotti as chairman of the American Hotel & Lodging Association (AHLA).

4B. AAHOA Chairwoman Jagruti Panwala congratulated Wyndham Hotels & Resorts President & CEO Geoff Ballotti on a job well done as chairman of AHLA the past year.



5



6

5. President & CEO Cecil P. Staton joined Illinois Gov. JB Pritzker, Chicago Mayor Lori Lightfoot, AHLA President & CEO Chip Rogers, and countless others in the fight against human trafficking during a No Room for Trafficking regional event.

6. Gulf Regional Director Nick Zaver and Female Director Eastern Division Lina Patel hosted nearly 60 attendees at a Women Hoteliers Town Hall in Lake Charles, LA.

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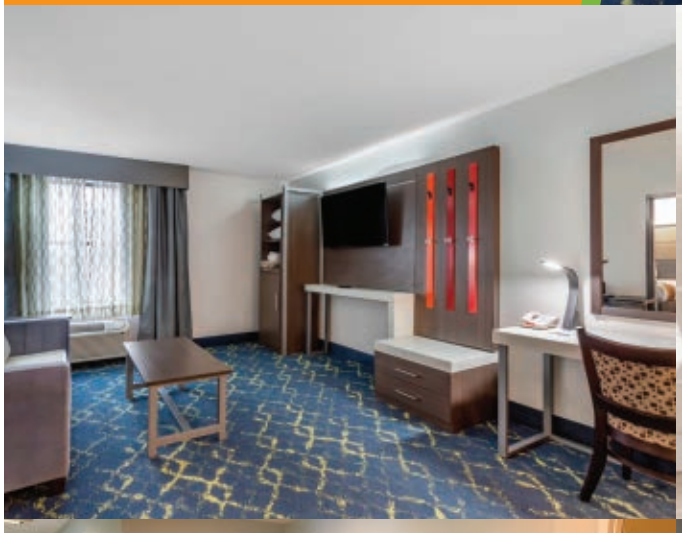
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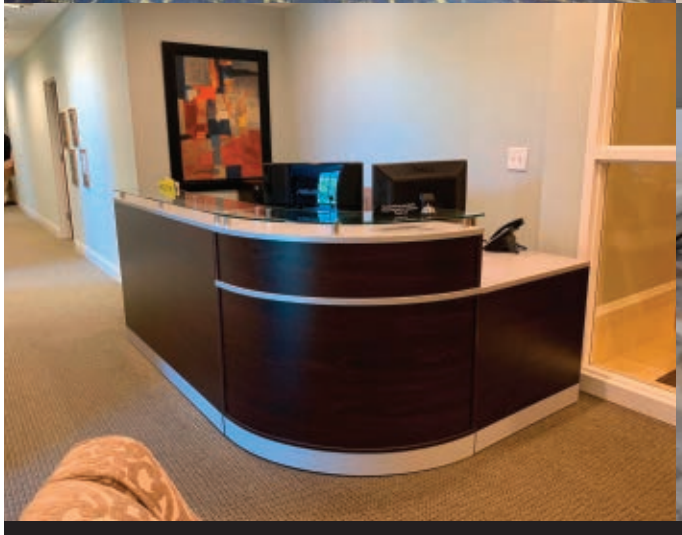
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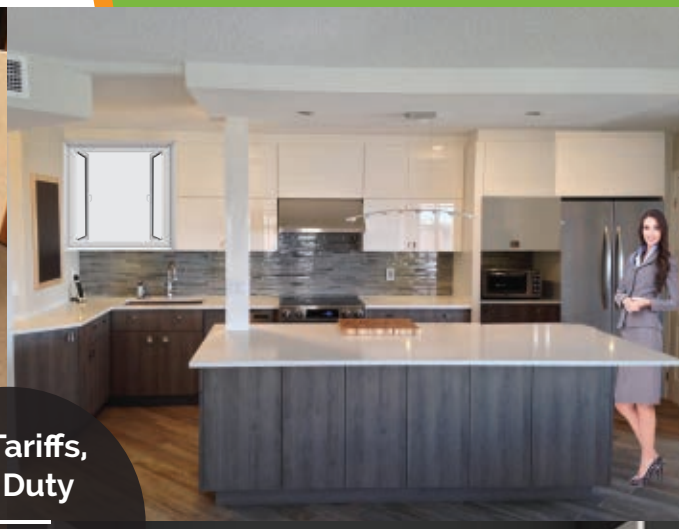
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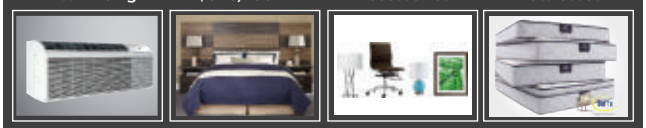
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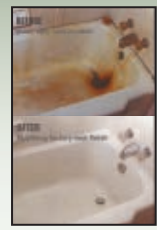


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