

today's hotelier

SEPTEMBER 2023 | todayshotelier.com

Official Publication of AAHOA

Dr. Ruby Dhalla,
CEO and President,
Dhalla Group of
Companies

Maximize Bookings

with Clever
Marketing
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“You can do
100 deals,
but you only have
one name to
live on.”

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Today's Hotelier (ISSN 24174062), volume 23, issue 9, is published monthly by Naylor Association Solutions, for AAHOA, 1100 Abernathy Road, Suite 725, Atlanta, GA 30328. Periodicals postage paid at Gainesville, Florida, and at additional mailing offices. Postmaster: Send address changes to Today's Hotelier, 11350 McCormick Rd #1000, Hunt Valley, MD 21031.

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Today's Hotelier

is the official monthly publication of AAHOA
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Today's Hotelier

is published by
NAYLOR

ASSOCIATION SOLUTIONS
550 SW 2nd Avenue
Gainesville, FL 32601
P: (800) 369-6220
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Opinions expressed are those of the contributors and do not necessarily reflect the policy of AAHOA or Today's Hotelier magazine. Publication of an article or advertisement does not imply approval or endorsement by AAHOA.

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PUBLISHED SEPTEMBER 2023/AAHOM0923

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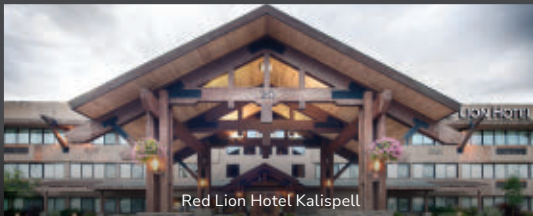
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5 Things to Know About AAHOA This Month

1 AAHOA TO SHINE BRIGHT AS PLATINUM SPONSOR AT THE LODGING CONFERENCE

Thousands of influential hotel owners and executives, including AAHOA leaders, will attend The Lodging Conference, September 18-21 at The JW Marriott Phoenix Desert Ridge Resort & Spa in Phoenix, AZ. In 2022, the conference drew more than 2,600 attendees. AAHOA is proud to support this renowned event as Platinum Sponsors have its leadership team in attendance, and is hosting an AAHOA reception on

Tuesday evening. Register to attend: [LodgingConference.com](https://www.LodgingConference.com).



2 SWING INTO ACTION AT THE NORTH PACIFIC CHARITY GOLF TOURNAMENT

Join AAHOA North Pacific Regional Director Ankit Panchal and local Ambassadors at the prestigious Bay View Golf Club in Milpitas, CA, on September 26, 2023. You'll enjoy breathtaking views of Silicon Valley while you swing into action and make a difference in the North Pacific region. Space is limited. Register today: AAHOA.com/Golf



3 SUBSCRIBE TO AAHOA'S YOUTUBE CHANNEL

Elevate your AAHOA experience by subscribing to AAHOA's YouTube channel to join a vibrant community of 2K subscribers and access 500+ videos. These videos cover industry insights, education, and exciting event recaps. Subscribe today for new videos every month: [@AAHOA](https://www.youtube.com/@AAHOA)

4 FIRST-EVER COMMERCIAL STRATEGY CERTIFICATION PROGRAM

AAHOA is honored to partner with Kalibri Labs, HFTP, and HSMIA to help make the Commercial Strategy Certification Program a reality. This certificate program will help many hoteliers navigate the evolving world of digital customer acquisition. The Commercial Strategy Certification Program is projected to launch by the close of 2023. For more information, visit: KalibriLabs.com



5 AAHOA'S BRAND-NEW WEEKLY WEDNESDAY WEBINAR SERIES

Just last month, AAHOA launched the Weekly Wednesday Webinar Series, which aims at bringing you relevant and informative industry education. Designed exclusively for hotel owners in 2023. We invite you to join us every Wednesday: AAHOA.com/Webinars





BHARAT PATEL, CHO, CHIA
AAHOA CHAIRMAN (2023-2024)

Owning and managing the future

“

Whether it's the growth of chatbots, how different types of content engages users in local search using hyperlocal experiences, or the ongoing importance of image optimization and tagging, there's a new world out there in which your hotel can generate sales.”

WHEN I WAS A KID, HELPING MY PARENTS AT THEIR HOTEL PROPERTIES, I remember filling the vending machines with Coke cans. When the time came to tackle the monthly revenue, I remember calculating the tax all by hand. This was before calculators were widely used.

Back then, the way we generated revenue and made sales looked very different than it does today.

In today's world, marketers have more information about prospects and customers than ever before. On top of this, the way guests search the internet to find certain hotels and, ultimately, book a particular hotel has changed.

Data science and AI are rewriting all the rules. So, how do you help your hotel stand out from the crowd to gain new guests and retain existing ones? Is there a magical algorithm?

It all starts with search strategies and promoting your product.

Google AI algorithm updates may affect search outcomes. Whether it's the growth of chatbots, how different types of content engages users in local search using hyperlocal experiences, or the ongoing importance of image optimization and tagging, there's a new world out there in which your hotel can generate sales.

Digital and social marketing have never been more important or easier – whether you're an independent or a franchised hotel owner.

By maximizing your hotel's online presence through local search and SEO, you can create stronger content marketing, generate business through social platforms, and drive ROI through digital media advertising.

The options are endless when it comes to hoteliers building businesses digitally and winning the game of profitability, ultimately saving on your bottom line.

With today's technology, especially in the hospitality industry, it feels like what used to take a year now takes months of change.

I believe technology is the key to driving business, whether it's used for marketing, promotion, or sales. The saying used to be, “Build it, and they will come,” but these days, if you don't promote or market your product, someone else will beat you to the punch.

I think it's really key in this era and the next 20 or so years. The key is, whoever owns and manages the distribution channel is going to own and manage the future. ■



LAURA LEE BLAKE, ESQ.
AAHOA PRESIDENT & CEO

Increasing revenue streams in today's market

“Stopping advertising to save money is like stopping your watch to save time.” - Henry Ford

“

I have said it before, and I will say it again, there is no place like AAHOA to expand your professional knowledge, achieve new goals, and make a real difference for the hotelier members and the industry at large.”

BEFORE I BECAME PRESIDENT AND CEO OF AAHOA, I WORKED AT THE ASSOCIATION for 10 years. This started in the early 2000s, and the way we did business was a bit different than how it is done today.

One thing that has remained constant is the work ethic and business acumen of the AAHOA Members.

Back then, their work ethic and business acumen was obvious, and to this day, everyone involved with AAHOA is constantly working to educate themselves and evolve with the times to keep up with the ever-changing landscape of the hospitality industry.

I have said it before, and I will say it again, there is no place like AAHOA to expand your professional knowledge, achieve new goals, and make a real difference for the hotelier members and the industry at large.

To keep up with the times, AAHOA has worked hard over the past few years to hone in on the educational tools needed to ensure our members and industry partners stay up to date on what is driving revenue growth for hotels and their businesses.

There is a strategy to marketing, promotion, and sales, which are all needed in today's market to increase revenue streams.

To help your businesses stay visible and thrive, AAHOA hosts workshops around the country, allowing an opportunity for in-person instruction and learning, networking, and learning from other hoteliers with similar interests.

AAHOA also regularly hosts live webcasts with leaders in the industry on relevant topics that impact hotel owners. Hundreds of webcasts are archived and available on-demand for members on the AAHOA website.

AAHOA has various certificate programs – whether it is sanitization and hotel industry analytics or human-trafficking awareness – that can help you be a better leader, improve your business, and even impact your community.

AAHOA provides you with the tools needed to be successful in the business, but it is up to you how you use those tools to market your business. By simply participating in AAHOA events, networking, attending regionals and webinars, and paying attention to the member benefits, this will help you learn how to reach out to prospective guests and customers to promote your business. ■

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A conversation with politician, philanthropist, and hotelier Dr. Ruby Dhalla, CEO and President of the Dhalla Group of Companies

by CARTER DAVIS

A S A TRAILBLAZER, POLITICIAN, policymaker, doctor, and entrepreneur, Dr. Ruby Dhalla is a champion of change who has dedicated her life to making a difference. She made history when she was elected as a Member of Parliament in Canada and became the first woman of Indian origin to be elected in the Western world as an MP. Most recently, she was one of 10 global Indians honored by the Prime Minister of India and has been the recipient of numerous awards for her accomplishments and global humanitarian work. Due to the tragic and sudden loss of her brother, Dr. Neil Dhalla, Dr. Ruby has recently taken on new responsibilities as CEO and President of the Dhalla Group of Companies.

As the visionary CEO and president of the Dhalla Group of Companies, she embodies leadership that inspires and empowers.

As one of the fastest growing companies in Canada in the sectors of healthcare, real estate, and hospitality – with a portfolio spanning the globe – Dr. Ruby is navigating the business landscape with resilience, innovation, and determination. Guided by her vision, and dedication to champion her brother's legacy of passion, purpose,



Dr. Ruby Dhalla, CEO and President, Dhalla Group of Companies

trailblazer
History—

and philanthropy, she's leading the Dhalla Group to new heights as it creates a hotel fund and acquires hotels in the U.S. and European markets.

From her groundbreaking achievements in politics to her accomplishments as a hotelier, Dr. Ruby's journey is an inspiring testament to the power of faith, vision, determination, and courage in the face of adversity.

Here, we delve into the milestones of her journey, the challenges she has overcome, and the impact she continues to make in empowering communities and uplifting lives.

WHAT INSPIRED YOU TO TRANSITION FROM POLITICS TO THE HOSPITALITY INDUSTRY?

The transition was a result of tragic circumstances in which my brother suddenly passed away hours after signing documents for the purchase of a new hotel in Miami. Amidst the shock and profound grief, I was forced to become knowledgeable about the various aspects related to the hotel industry and was left with no choice but to prepare for the opening of the hotel weeks later – a role always undertaken by my brother in our family business.

HOW DID YOU APPROACH THIS NEW CHALLENGE?

Life is always the greatest tool to learn and one has to rise to the challenge. My mother however gave me one of the best pieces of advice a few months after my brother passed away when she suggested I attend a hotel conference. At my first conference I connected with individuals and organizations who became my teachers and

provided guidance, support, and advice. Attending and listening to the experts at the seminars, while meeting fellow hoteliers, brokers, and vendors – and conversing with the CEOs of the brands – was invaluable. My second hotel conference was AAHOACON, and I'm grateful this community welcomed me with open arms.

Whether it's politics or the hospitality industry, my brother's life philosophy from the book "The Secret" has held true in this new challenge: "Ask for it. Believe it. Receive it."

HOW DO YOU SEE THE FUTURE OF THE HOSPITALITY INDUSTRY?

The industry's future is bright, however it's important to be prepared for upcoming uncertainty regarding the economic climate. Whether that entails securing financing, budgeting for PIP costs, or managing HR, all stakeholders – brands, owners, and vendors – must work together in cooperation and collaboration to share best practices for greater operational efficiencies, value additions for positive guest experiences, and increased margins for ROIs. As a technology lover, I believe automation and artificial intelligence will have a greater role to play in increasing efficiencies, productivity, and results of KPIs for hoteliers and their properties.

WHAT ADVICE DO YOU HAVE FOR YOUR FELLOW HOTELIERS?

It's important to choose your partners wisely. Transparency, honesty, and integrity are important in any partnership, but it's vital to have agreements that clearly outline roles, responsibilities, and expectations for partners and management companies. During the acquisition of the hotel properties, the focus is often on

the ADRs, occupancy rates, and financing; however investing in an experienced lawyer at the onset also is vital to ensure comprehensive agreements address the rights of each shareholder for access to documents, participation of shareholders in decision-making and any potential scenarios that may arise. Regardless of who your partners are, it's paramount to have independent and experienced lawyers and accountants. Monies invested in professionals at the onset ultimately result in savings both in time and money. As the industry is relatively small and everyone mostly is known to each other, directly or indirectly, word quickly spreads on reputation in the hotel space hence it is best to operate with the highest level of business ethics. My mom always taught my brother and I that you can do 100 deals, but you only have one name to live on.

WHAT HAS YOUR PROFESSIONAL BACKGROUND TAUGHT YOU ABOUT OPERATING A HOTEL?

People and public service have been at the core of my other professional pursuits, including politics and healthcare. From both of those journeys, I've been taught the values of reputation, and respect, the skills of communication, efficiency and team building, and the mindset of always having faith, thinking big, making the impossible possible, and creating positive change.

I believe operating a hotel requires these values, skills, and mindset for a positive guest experience, growth, and success as a hotelier.

Whether it's politics or hotels, an entrepreneur must always be guided by passion, purpose, faith, integrity, drive, determination, and vision. "Ask for it. Believe in it. Receive it." ■

—maker.

CREATIVITY in flight

Clever marketing strategies are helping hotels reach core customers and find new ones

by NICK FORTUNA

DON'T LET ANYONE TELL you TikTok is just for teenagers. The legally imperiled Chinese app reached a milestone in March when it announced that it had more than 150 million users in the United States, proving that a sizeable percentage of American adults were glued to their smartphones too.

Shanna Soares, director of marketing for New York City-based Pod Hotels, recognized the potential of TikTok earlier than most and used it to supplement her one-woman marketing department. In 2022, Pod Hotels allowed six social-media *continued on page 17*

SLAM DUNK events

In today's attention-driven economy, it's challenging for hotels to stand out from the competition. But, one clever property is making waves by establishing a new competition-based event that makes use of underutilized space.

Height doesn't matter in this NBA (the National Blocking Association), the TWA Hotel's new league for Jenga players.

In March, 44 teams totaling more than 100 players packed into the New York hotel's 50,000-square-foot event center for the 2023 NBA Jenga Tournament. The competition awarded \$14,000 in prizes to the teams that could best remove and stack the small wooden blocks from a tower without toppling them over.

After the tournament, competitors and spectators enjoyed a party in The Sunken Lounge, whose theme captures "the spirit of the glamorous '60s, with retro cocktails and swizzle sticks once enjoyed in-flight," according to the TWA Hotel. The Jenga sets used in

HARRY KASYANOV/SHUTTERSTOCK.COM

“

Companies are stripping down their websites to make them perform better and to have better [search-engine optimization], so social media is where you get the opportunity to really showcase the hotels and being out and about in the city.”



competition were donated to the Boys & Girls Club of Metro Queens, the hotel said.

Other hotels have held special events aimed at becoming a social gathering place and showcasing their amenities. In 2018, partnered with the dating app Bumble. The deal made Moxy Hotels “BumbleSpots,” places verified by Bumble as “inclusive environments to bring a Bumble date.”

Guests could get food discounts and two-for-one specialty cocktails for showing the Bumble app on their smartphones to servers upon ordering, and games were available to help break the ice.

And, while the partnership with Moxy and Bumble has since ended, some creative hotel promotions have blossomed with age. When the Hotel Sorrento launched its Silent Reading Parties in 2009, admission was free, and you didn't need a ticket. Fast forward to 2023, and online tickets to the wildly popular events range from \$10 for a barstool to \$50 for a table of three or four.

There's also a \$20 food-and-drink minimum per person, making the parties, held on the first and third Wednesdays of each month, powerful revenue-generating opportunities. Attendees simply bring a book and grab a seat in the Fireside Room, where a pianist plays while everyone else reads, or pretends to read while scoping out the other singles.

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influencers to live in separate Pod Pads, the company's 45 New York City apartments that can be rented month to month.

The creators posted videos to their TikTok accounts showing off their apartments as well as New York's many tourist attractions and activities. Among those influencers was Dylan Mulvaney, who has more than 10.7 million TikTok followers. In one post, Mulvaney takes viewers on a tour of her Pod Pad before venturing out to Times Square, a video that generated 670,000 likes.

In that post, Mulvaney gives viewers a discount code for Pod Pads, but Soares also made the code valid for the company's four New York City hotels. To her surprise, there were more sale conversions for hotel rooms than for apartments.

Pod Hotels has had success advertising and posting on Facebook and Instagram, but as one of the only hotel companies in New York that rents rooms to 18-year-olds, "It was a no-brainer to get on TikTok," Soares said.

"It's a great platform to really showcase video content," she said. "I think if something is aligned with your brand, you need to be present and take advantage of it."

CREATIVITY IS KING

Pod Hotels has created more than 40 of its own TikTok videos. Some are meant to show that although the guest rooms are small and budget-friendly, they're also clean and comfortable, and the amenities are well-maintained, Soares said.

High-end hotels with luxurious rooms and amenities could employ the same strategy, she said, giving prospective guests a taste of what they can expect. In the TikTok world, users tend to gravitate toward authenticity more so than highly polished sales pitches, so hoteliers needn't invest in production value to have an impact, Soares said.

Other videos from Pod Hotels provide tips for things to do in New York, businesses that give discounts to Pod guests, and interesting places tourists typically

miss. Those videos cater to the brand's core customer – price-conscious travelers who don't need luxury accommodations because they plan to spend most of their visit exploring the city, Soares said.

"Having branding and a [call to action] really visible on social media has resulted in us driving a lot of last-click conversions from social media, which is really good," she said. "I think it's because companies are stripping down their websites to make them perform better and to have better [search-engine optimization], so social media is where you get the opportunity to really showcase the hotels and being out and about in the city."

Amid the debate about whether TikTok should be banned regarding ties to the Chinese government, Soares chose not to do a similar promotion with creators in 2023. But, next year is a possibility, she said.

"I'm glad it's still here, as of now," Soares said. "We get a lot of people reaching out to us on social media, so it's important to be there and responding to the audience – not just creating the content but being responsive – and that applies to TikTok as well."

HIRE AN EXPERT

General Manager Daniel Abrashoff said he considered a number of solid candidates before hiring Mark Hengen this past spring as the second naturalist in the history of the Weekapaug Inn. Hengen used to teach sustainability and environmental studies at Johnson & Wales University in his home state of Rhode Island, making him an ideal candidate to guide nature lovers at the hotel in Westerly, RI.

The Weekapaug Inn is a luxury hotel nestled along the Atlantic Coast, right next

to a large saltwater pond and a barrier beach. It was named the No. 1 hotel in the Northeast by Condé Nast Traveler and is on the National Register of Historic Places.

As the inn's naturalist, Hengen "helps guests discover and engage with the surroundings" through guided beach walks, boating excursions, biking, birdwatching, stargazing, and other activities, Abrashoff said. To do the job, you have to be able to explain the difference between a great egret and a green heron while kayaking on the Quonochontaug Pond.

Scheduled activities, led by Hengen, are free to guests, many of whom come to the hotel seeking meaningful experiences with nature, Abrashoff said. The lesson for hoteliers is, if there's something special about your hotel's destination, own it. Hiring a naturalist isn't cheap, but it's a worthwhile expense if it enhances the guest experience, Abrashoff said.

"It's a vital position, and I see it as an amenity guests want to use," he said. "Our guests are extremely interested in our nature activities, so we have to have somebody with the credibility and knowledge to speak about the pond intelligently. Guests want to leave here knowing more than when they came." ■

Full speed ahead!

Driving direct bookings in the era of integrated systems

by ADAM and LARRY MOGELONSKY

IN AN IDEAL WORLD, YOUR HOTEL WOULD TURN off distribution to online travel agencies, sourcing all guests from direct channels and maximizing net revenues. But, in reality, OTAs today are likened to a necessary evil to both raise awareness with new customers and generate bookings from guests who have no previous experience with your brand.

Now, however, new advances in property-level systems are enabling hotels to rethink how they incentivize direct bookings, learn more about guests from owned channels, and, ultimately, drive traffic away from the commission-heavy OTAs. Importantly, any resultant increase in net revenues from this concerted effort will be needed as financial wiggle room for future capital expenditures in the face of a rapidly changing hospitality landscape.

And, the term “concerted” is applicable because this is more than just technology; it also involves marketing strategy, on-site team training, and other operations. While there’s lots you can do – and indeed, guest intelligence and agile hotel marketing are subjects for an entire

masterclass – here are three main “rules” centered around data integrations to consider prioritizing to realize significant gains in direct bookings for the rest of 2023 and into 2024.

RIGHT NOW?

It’s a given your hotel is making far less off from an OTA booking than from a reservation made through an owned channel, with commissions varying depending on what you negotiated. What you have to remember is an OTA customer isn’t your customer – yet!

When an OTA guest checks in, their email is opaque – aliased – which makes it difficult to enroll them in your loyalty program or communicate with them for upselling additional services like room upgrade or F&B. While you’ve undoubtedly

workshopped several different “mouse-traps” to get these guests to hand over some more personal information, the risk right now is the OTAs are doing a really good job keeping their customers loyal to them. Once habits are instilled, they’re very difficult to change.

Namely, Booking.com and Expedia both have their own rewards programs prioritizing destination over property or brand, meaning even a specific hotel search may yield competitive offers that behaviorally deter even the thought of hotel brand loyalty. More recently, the OTAs have become trendsetters with deploying new technologies like GPT-based travel-planning plugins to imbue additional layers of convenience into their platforms.

In other words, it’s almost getting to be too late; the user interface on the OTAs is too robust, too flexible, and too valuable for guests to bother looking elsewhere except maybe Airbnb. Some hotels may end up doomed to rely on hefty commissions eroding gross margins, a disloyal customer base they know little about and constant problems with cancellations, no-shows, chargebacks, and reconciliation issues.

IT TAKES A VILLAGE

As trite as it may be to say, hotels are all in this fight together. It’s often far too easy to fall into a prisoner’s dilemma type of attitude whereby, in anticipation of your

RULE #1:

NEVER GIVE GUESTS AN EXCUSE TO BOOK ANYWHERE ELSE

Rate parity means you can’t undercut the OTAs on price, but there are ways to get creative and still abide by the terms of these agreements. It’s never a one-size-fits-all approach, so here are some ideas to ensure your hotel can compete on price with the OTAs while still adding value to the direct booking as well as the direct booking experience.

- Promoting your *best rate guarantee* is a half measure because it requires an extra morsel of time on the part of the guest to bring to your attention. You need a clear and real-time picture of when the OTAs are running promotions – both those your revenue director controls and those the OTA runs themselves – so your direct channel lists the same price as what’s on an OTA and nothing higher. This will require good intelligence from your revenue management system (RMS) and perhaps some AI-based automatic rate adjustments to make happen.
- Another important aspect the leading RMS vendors can now offer is the

interpretation of vast sums of *forward-looking demand data* so your rates can remain nimble with respect to the comp set or any compression events. You must be able to react in an instant to optimize revenues and not drive traffic to the OTAs because they’re displaying a slightly lower price by being just a touch faster.

- Next, consider your *channel manager* and which room types and room packages you send to the OTAs. Yes, your contract says you must give them the same rates as what you list on direct channels, but there may be some room to breathe (pun intended) around which specific room categories you push out. Notably, you may decide to keep all the premium rooms and suites for direct guests, then combine this with an extra non-price incentive, like offering same-day complimentary upgrade upon availability. Other areas where value can be added, depending on the terms in your OTA contract, include prepaid noncancellable rates, free breakfasts, all-inclusive rates, or packaged specials that bundle local attractions.



to level the playing field against OTAs

competitors undercutting your rates, you preemptively lower your rates, then your competitors do the same, and the entire market spirals down into commoditization.

Instead, understand there are passive cooperative benefits to enhance your efforts to drive direct bookings. These efforts undoubtedly will help other hotels – in your comp set and in other markets – but their efforts also will boost your own direct reservations ratio in the long run as the average consumer slowly but surely

becomes more aware of why booking direct is always the best way to go. It's a bit like karma, and you have to trust if

everyone works together on this problem, it will course-correct, and every hotel will realize healthier net revenues. ■



Together, Adam and Larry Mogelonsky are the world's most published hospitality writing team, with more than a decade's worth of material online. As the partners of Hotel Mogel Consulting Ltd., Larry focuses on the hotel operations and marketing, while Adam specializes in technology and wellness. Their experience encompasses properties around North America and Europe, with a focus on independent properties of all sizes. Their work includes seven books, the latest focused on increasing profits from wine sales in an environment of tight labor markets. You can reach them at adam@hotelmogel.com to discuss your business challenges or to book speaking engagements.

RULE #2:

KNOW YOUR GUESTS AND THEIR LOOKALIKES

It's not like the problem of opaque information from OTA guests is new, and tech vendors have made incredible strides during the past few years to let you hone the leisure transient funnel and enhance each phase of the customer journey so you can still get a good picture of what motivates your guests. Furthermore, what we learn about our guests is invaluable toward developing lookalike personas and microsegments to guide marketing efforts and future promotions.

- Outside any discussions of programmatic advertising or other top-of-funnel awareness campaigns, the first real touchpoint with your guests is the website. Whether you have control over any modifications to the front-end design, it's nevertheless important to know about the latest enhancements to the *website booking engine* (WBE). Not only are user interfaces becoming more adaptable, but you have more user behavior data to tell you where customers are dropping off as well as what additional incentives are working to lock in the bookings when those shoppers return.
- If you have control over your front-end website and can add a prominent Book Now button, then absolutely do that. But, as a bolt-on to the site, adding *live chat functionality* may be more likely as an approvable project. Guests will

have questions, and the more you can answer them and engage them, the more likely they are to prefer the direct channel. And, for efficiency's sake, you can deploy a chatbot trained to answer most of the repetitive questions before handing over the reins to a live agent to complete the booking or handle complex requests.

- While those familiar with the industry know quite well the benefits of loyalty programs, numerous other "average consumers" have no clue, nor do they see a long-term future with your brand. They're mercenaries who want immediate gratification. Luckily, there are a handful of *rewards platforms* that can help entice direct reservations in the moment while remaining compatible with your loyalty program.
- Ultimately, *integrating systems* is a must. This can improve the performance of the rewards you present, the intelligent guidance your RMS gives you, and the packaging flexibility you are able to present within the WBE. The more you clean and combine the data, the more actionable insights you will have to see what's working. Even broader, think in terms of revenue per guest, wherein additional integrations from the point of sale (POS) can tell you what's driving ancillary spend to further refine those guest inferences that will guide the messaging to lookalike audiences.

RULE #3:

INFORMATION CAPTURE FOR THE ON-SITE EXPERIENCE

This is likely to be your best chance to get the guest's real email, phone number, or social media account for future marketing efforts. It goes without saying this largely depends on how good the on-site experience is, but a great stay is no guarantee the OTA guest converts into one of yours.

- Outside of all things tech, *online staff training* is your ace in the hole, both by delivering exceptional guest service to build positive rapport as well as treating every customer interaction as a way to remind them to book direct. Are they prompting guests about your loyalty program? Do they know the specific advantages so they can speak about them passionately? Are you incentivizing your front-desk agents to obtain the real email address from OTA guests by offering them, for example, 10% off their next stay? While a lot of this can be done in person, facilitating this education through an online portal is more efficient and scalable.
- Another great point to discuss the loyalty program is through *digital signage*, be it in the display, a public area display, or a check-in kiosk. All can be configured to raise awareness or even include a specific mousetrap like a QR-code-based promotion for a free drink at the bar that requires a real email address to be activated.
- A third area that may need some retooling is the *Wi-Fi login portal*. Most already are set up to show a host of available add-ons, but there are now a few upselling platforms that can be bolted on to A/B test different offers and incentives to see what's working to drive ancillary spend.

Capitol -centered

Catch up on recent AAHOA advocacy activity

compiled by EVELYN HOOVER and OLIVIA STORY



UPDATE: CHANGES TO SBA 7(A) LOAN PROGRAM

AAHOA Members have long been advocating for an increase of the current maximum 7(a) loan amount. Earlier in the summer, AAHOA Treasurer Kamalesh (KP) Patel spoke with Congressional staff on Capitol Hill about the need to increase the limit on the SBA's 7(a) loan program from its current cap of \$5 million. This maximum amount is set by statute in the Small Business Act. It will require Congressional action to change that cap, or to change the cap on the maximum outstanding guaranteed loan amount to any one borrower and its affiliates, which is set at \$3.75 million.

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AAHOA PENS LETTER IN SUPPORT OF INDIA PRIME MINISTER NARENDRA MODI TO SPEAK DURING JOINT CONGRESS MEETING

AAHOA wrote a letter to The Honorable Kevin McCarthy, Speaker of the House of the United States House of Representatives, in appreciation for his friendship to the hotel industry and the Indian Diaspora that serves as the heart of it. In the letter, AAHOA encouraged Congressional leaders to exhibit our nation's commitment to the United States-India relationship by inviting India's Prime Minister, Narendra Modi, to address a joint meeting of Congress during his visit to the nation's capital from June 21-23, 2023.

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AAHOA MEMBERS MEET WITH KENTUCKY GOVERNOR ANDY BESHEAR

AAHOA Members had a chance to meet with Kentucky Governor Andy Beshear and discuss issues impacting hoteliers. Governor Beshear heard how the labor shortage continues to affect hoteliers in Kentucky, where AAHOA Members own 68.2% of hotels.

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AAHOA: NEW JERSEY LEGISLATURE TAKES A STAND FOR FAIRNESS IN FRANCHISING

New Jersey lawmakers voted in favor of legislation to help restore balance to the relationship between hotel Franchisors and Franchisees, advancing a bill backed by AAHOA that would ensure greater fairness in the system and strengthen protections for franchise businesses.

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AAHOA TREASURER KAMALESH (KP) PATEL SPENDS DAY ON CAPITOL HILL TO DISCUSS AAHOA ADVOCACY PRIORITIES WITH CONGRESSMEMBERS

AAHOA Treasurer, Kamalesh (KP) Patel, spent Wednesday, May 10, in Washington, D.C., on Capitol Hill meeting with Members of the United States Senate and United States House of Representatives, discussing strategic AAHOA advocacy priorities relating to access to capital and building coalitions with industry leaders to save fees for AAHOA members. Specifically, he spoke with Members and Congressional staff about the need to increase the limit on the Small Business Administration's 7(a) loan program from its current cap of \$5 million.

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AAHOA UNDERSCORES IMPORTANCE OF FAIR FRANCHISING IN FTC COMMENT

Earlier this summer, AAHOA communicated its concerns about one-sided franchising practices in response to the Federal Trade Commission (FTC)'s Solicitation for Public Comments on Provisions of Franchise Agreements and Franchisor Business Practices.

AAHOA has long been committed to advocating for adequate protections for its Franchisee members in their relationships with hotel brands. Beginning in March, the FTC, citing reports of "unfair and deceptive practices" that harm Franchisees, solicited comments from business owners regarding how Franchisors "disclose certain aspects and contractual terms of the Franchise relationship, as well as the scope, application, and effect of those aspects and contractual terms."

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AAHOA INFORMATIONAL VIDEO HIGHLIGHTS ITS 4 PILLARS OF FRANCHISE ADVOCACY

An informational video about AAHOA's 4 Pillars for Franchise Advocacy has helped advance the organization's mission as the foremost resource and advocate for America's hotel owners. The 4 Pillars for Franchise Advocacy represent the primary issues for which AAHOA advocates on behalf of member hoteliers.

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MAY 31, 2023, DECLARED LOUISIANA ASIAN AMERICAN HOTEL OWNERS ASSOCIATION MEMBERS APPRECIATION DAY AT THE STATE CAPITOL

On Wednesday, May 31, Rep. Gerald “Beau” Beaulieu and the Louisiana House of Representatives adopted HR 184, declaring May 31, 2023, as Louisiana Asian American Hotel Owners Association Members Appreciation Day at the state capitol. In addition, AAHOA celebrated May 31 as Tourism Day at the Capitol with its partners at the Louisiana Travel Association, which had Convention and Visitor Bureaus from around the state showcasing their specific areas and discussing the importance of tourism to the state officials.

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AAHOA STATEMENT ON CALIFORNIA SENATE BILL 403

In June, AAHOA made it known that it strongly opposes any form of discrimination, including caste. AAHOA, however, opposes California Senate Bill 403 (“SB 403”) due to a concern that it could lead to improper and unlawful racial profiling, targeting, and attacks on individuals of Asian American descent and/or who practice the tenets of Hinduism. Adding “caste” to the anti-discrimination categories outlined in Section 51 of the California Civil Code and other Education Code and Government Code sections is unnecessary and will cause more harm than good.

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SURVEY OF FRANCHISEES UNDERSCORES THE NEED FOR FAIR FRANCHISING

A poll of franchisees – owners of hotels, restaurants, retail stores, and other small businesses – revealed highly concerning data about the status of current franchise relationships and the need for increased fairness across all industries.

AAHOA, which represents the vast majority of all U.S. hotel owners, the American Association of Franchisees and Dealers (AAFD), and the Coalition of Franchisee Associations (CFA), conducted the survey after a webinar with Federal Trade Commission (FTC) Chair Lina Khan. As part of its mission to promote competition and protect and educate consumers, the FTC is soliciting comments through June 8 about issues that affect franchisees and their workers.

Scan to read more:



AAHOA’S “IS FRANCHISING FAIR? FRANCHISEE CONVERSATIONS WITH FTC CHAIR, LINA KHAN” WEBINAR IN THE NEWS

AAHOA joined the American Association of Franchisees and Dealers (AAFD) and the Coalition of Franchisee Associations (CFA) to host the webinar, “Is Franchising Fair? Franchisee Conversations with FTC Chair, Lina Khan.” This productive webinar drew coverage from HospitalityNet and feedback from attendees.

During the webinar, nearly 800 attendees heard how the FTC is using its authority to improve oversight and education within the franchise industry. The AAHOA Officers, CFA Chairman John Motta, and AAFD Chairman Robert Purvin also made statements protecting franchisees and spotlighted suggestions on how fairness might be addressed through oversight and education.

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Using marketing to convince lenders a financing transaction is worth their time and money

Put your best foot forward

by RUSHI SHAH

COMMERCIAL REAL ESTATE IS AN INEFFICIENT AND OPAQUE BUSINESS. Players are at all levels of sophistication, transaction sizes vary widely, and the value of an asset or loan is in the eye of the beholder. In other words, the person or committee writing the check ultimately determines a project’s viability and probability for success. Getting commercial real estate transactions done can be more of an art than science. As a result, commercial real estate business needs a way to bring efficiency to the table. That mechanism is a financing broker or intermediary who creates a unique micro-market for each financing deal.

PREPARING FOR SUCCESS

An expert intermediary will use all available data and facts surrounding a transaction to develop a narrative that convinces decision-makers this is the best use of their allocation of dollars. Like anything, money usually is the most constraining resource, with fewer dollars chasing many deals. This is why relationships and a knack for marketing can be key differentiators between an average deal that gets passed by and a great deal that gets to the closing table.

A great deal isn’t just one that’s harder to get done on the surface and executes smoothly; it’s also great because it gets done at better-than-market terms. This could be a combination of many things, including amortization, pre-payment penalty, recourse or non-recourse, amount of proceeds, and flexibility of who will service the loan. A good intermediary who follows a disciplined marketing process always is cognizant of getting the best terms for a client, and successfully checking as many boxes as possible.

UNDERSTANDING THE BIG PICTURE

A good marketing process needs to incorporate all available data points. This includes the asset’s most recent financial performance, as well as how the asset fared during tougher economic cycles. In other words, how did the asset (a hotel, for example) perform during both good and bad times? The process also must take into account the more subjective elements of an asset, such as current or future effects of any recent capital expenditures and improvement in revenue management.

The intermediary then uses this analysis to identify and effectively demonstrate to lenders any upside for the asset’s financial performance.

Evaluating how an asset’s potential compares to its competitive set and the local market also is extremely important. If there are shortcomings in how the asset is performing, a good marketing process will output a convincing explanation that can bridge those gaps and present the management team, owners, and asset in the best light possible. This is an extremely important step in ensuring the best capital sources become interested in the deal.

Overcoming any negatives in the asset’s local market is another critical step in marketing a financing deal. These can include a high crime rate, low labor availability, asset being on a ground lease, or presence of labor unions. An effective marketing process will frontload these issues and provide sufficient mitigants to make the deal more financeable.

PACKAGING THE DEAL

The greater the institutional quality of an asset, the higher its chance of it getting financed by coveted capital sources such as life insurance companies or lower rate institutional balance-sheet debt funds. An intermediary can position a deal as institutional by preparing full-fledged offering materials, an effective financing memo, a complete financial model with valuation of the asset justified by different metrics and showcasing the quality of the management team, and a detailed track record of similar transactions. To garner interest in a transaction

from hard-to-please sources such as credit unions, regional banks, and life-insurance companies, the deal must be marketed to demonstrate to a potential capital provider this sponsor is in it for the long game – that the borrower isn’t just interested in a one-and-done transaction. This incentivizes the capital source to spend more time and dig in deeper on a transaction because more will be coming down the pipeline.

Because capital sources have limited time to evaluate transactions, they will prioritize those with the highest probably of getting approved by their committee and the highest probability of producing a term sheet the sponsor will accept. This is where an effective marketing process conducted by a serious, experienced intermediary with proprietary knowledge, a proven track record, and deep relationships comes into play. The quality of the entity presenting the deal also reflects on the quality of the deal. As a result, the same deal presented by a lower level shop may not get as good a reception as it would being presented by a shop with superior relationships, superior track record, and superior structuring prowess.

Bottom line: How a deal is marketed is what gets deals to the closing table. ■



Rushi Shah is Principal and CEO of the commercial mortgage and real estate investment banking firm and AAHOA Allied Member Mag Mile Capital. As a leader in

hospitality financing, Shah specializes in structuring and placing high leverage, nonrecourse 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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Build your property's identity with the right tools for the job

by TANMAY PATEL

THROUGH ADEQUATE PLANNING AND CREATIVE deployment, marketing can play a crucial role in establishing a hotel's brand identity, reaching its target audience, and allowing a property to stand out in a competitive market. However, for small businesses, limited financial resources pose a challenge when it comes to investing in marketing and advertising initiatives that can drive sales growth. To overcome this obstacle, independent hoteliers can implement new strategies to make a difference in their business.

Social media marketing has transformed the way we connect with customers directly, and it provides independent properties the same tools as the brands, democratizing the process and providing a modern approach to understand customers' travel interests. Especially for independents, it's vital – and a bare minimum – to create a user-friendly website that highlights a property's unique features and amenities, while also regularly sharing

visually appealing content, promotions, and updates about local events or attractions on social media platforms.

IT'S WHO YOU KNOW

Although not easy, content marketing holds great value, and it can be especially beneficial for independent properties. Sharing blog posts or articles related to travel tips, local attractions, and unique experiences in the area can yield positive



Social media marketing has transformed the way we connect with customers directly, and it provides independent properties the same tools as the brands.”

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results, and forming local partnerships will help strengthen ties, and your network, within a community. For example, a collaboration with restaurants, tour operators, or event organizers – offering joint promotions or package deals – can help attract visitors to the property.

It's also valuable to build relationships through email marketing. By working with local businesses and sharing a customer base, independents can develop a loyalty program that rewards repeat guests with exclusive discounts, upgrades, or additional perks – and encouraging guests to refer friends and family can boost word-of-mouth referrals.

Ultimately, it's important to remember trial and error play a significant role, as strategies will vary based on the area and available resources, so don't be afraid to experiment with different approaches. By combining these tailored strategies to a property's specific needs and target audience, independent hotels can effectively market, promote, and drive sales to their front doors. ■



Tanmay Patel is an independent hotelier and is AAHOA's Young Professional Director, Western Division.

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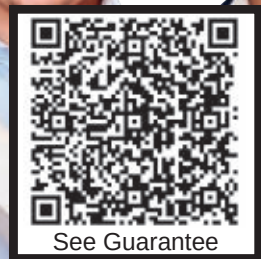
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EMPOWERED

Exploring the role AAHOA and its members are playing in creating opportunities for women in the industry

by EVELYN HOOVER

THEY'RE AT REGIONAL Conferences & Trade Shows, networking with numerous exhibitors and industry leaders. They're at the Town Hall meetings, listening attentively to regional directors share region-specific updates. They hold influential positions within AAHOA's Board of Directors, with Arti Patel serving as the Central Midwest Regional Director, Purnima Patel and Tejal Patel serving as Women Hoteliers Director Eastern Division and Western Division, respectively, and Laura Lee Blake leading AAHOA as President & CEO. They proudly advocate for the industry at the local, state, and federal levels. AAHOA has witnessed a powerful surge of women who have overcome obstacles and embarked on a remarkable journey to make their mark in hospitality.

A RISING TIDE

While the waves women are making at the association may seem like new triumphs,



Nancy Patel, front and center in the cheerful red jacket

AAHOA has been at the forefront of empowering and uplifting women hoteliers for quite some time, proactively launching projects and programs to address the gender imbalance early on in the organization's history. In the early '90s, AAHOA selected women hoteliers to serve on a committee. Nancy Patel, former North Georgia Regional Director (2007-2009) and AAHOA Lifetime Member, remembers the ripple effect this committee created among women more than three decades ago.

"As a result of the Women's Hotelier Committee, the representation of women at various levels of the organization significantly improved, giving them the ability to influence the future of AAHOA and hospitality," Nancy said.

OPENED DOORS

The Women's Hotelier Committee immediately started steering the organization's future, playing an instrumental role in helping other women hoteliers feel seen and heard. As was the case for Priti Patel, who served as a former director at large in the '90s and is currently an AAHOA Member. Priti joined AAHOA as a staff member while helping her family launch a hotel business in the Atlanta metropolitan area. AAHOA leadership noticed Priti's unwavering commitment to both of her industry roles.

"I was 26 when I was elected female director at large. I learned and grew a lot," Priti recalled. "The entire experience was exciting and fun. I enjoyed it."

The Women's Hotelier Committee signaled the start of opening doors for women in hospitality. It encouraged greater participation within AAHOA and brought attention to the challenges experienced by women in the industry. Over time, AAHOA incorporated educational programs catered specifically to the needs of women hoteliers.

"The committee acknowledged that women hoteliers frequently encountered unique obstacles," Nancy explained. "As a result, AAHOA started women-focused conferences, webinars, and leadership summits. These events gave women hoteliers insights into hospitality as well as management practices and business tactics."

The momentum continued into the 21st century. AAHOA Member Surekha Patel, former AAHOA Board Member, was inspired



Priti Patel

to join AAHOA after attending an event in Dallas, TX.

Surekha Patel, a chemist by profession, ventured into the hotel industry with her husband after visiting San Francisco in the 1970s, where they met other hoteliers.

"In 1976, we purchased our first hotel together in Dallas. In running this property, I discovered I have a natural passion for the hotel industry," Surekha said. "My husband and I also enjoyed the financial independence that came with being self-employed."

Surekha Patel eventually went on to serve on the AAHOA Board for six years.

"During the past several decades, I've seen women who were normally involved only behind the scenes come up to the forefront and become hotel owners and operators," Surekha said. "AAHOA has offered many courses for women through the years that have given women the knowledge and confidence to pursue their dreams in the hotel industry."

STRONGER TOGETHER

There's no doubt that AAHOA's support for women hoteliers has evolved through the years and moved the needle forward. Last year, AAHOA launched HerOwnership: Opening Doors for Women in Hospitality, an initiative aimed at elevating, educating, and empowering the women hoteliers of AAHOA and across the industry.

"There're so many layers in the hotel industry. It's not just the ownership side," Priti said. "As a hotelier, you're touching so many people, and you need so much



Surekha Patel

support along the way because you can't just do everything by yourself."

As part of the initial launch of the HerOwnership initiative, AAHOA hosted a Women Hoteliers HerOwnership Conference & Retreat in Cincinnati, OH, where nearly 300 women attended the two-day event. It quickly became one of the association's highly anticipated events. This year's HerOwnership Conference & Retreat is November 2-3, 2023, in Dallas, TX.

"It's my sincere wish that each attendee experiences the power and support of the HerOwnership community," Nancy shared. "I hope everyone leaves with a strong sense of belonging and camaraderie. ■"

AAHOA MEMBERS IN ACTION



AAHOA Chairman Bharat Patel, Treasurer Kamalesh (KP) Patel, and Secretary Rahul Patel met with #TeamAAHOA in Atlanta, GA, and received updates from each department regarding projects and activities.



[L-R] Andy Ingraham, CEO of the National Association of Black Hotel Owners, Operators & Developers; Sheila A. Johnson, founder & CEO of Salamander Hotels & Resorts; and Bharat Patel, Chairman of AAHOA at the 2023 NABHOOD Summit in Miami, FL.



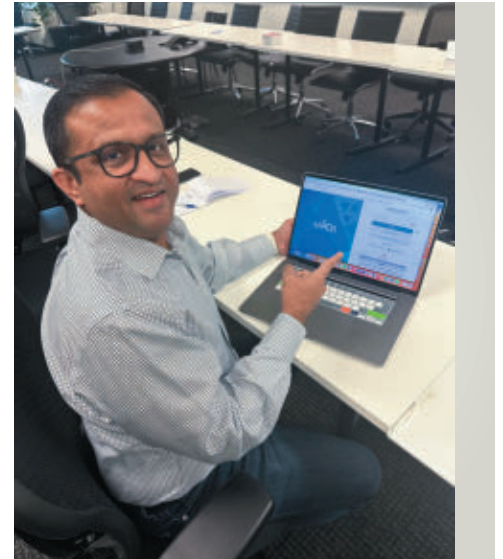
Lina Patel, former AAHOA Women Hoteliers Director Eastern Division (2017-2023), moderated a 30-minute session with Central Midwest Regional Director Arti Patel (second from left), AAHOA Member Mayuri Patel (third from left), Women Hoteliers Director Eastern Division Purnima Patel (fourth from left), and Women Hoteliers Director Western Division Tejal Patel (fifth from left), where they discussed women's unique perspectives to leadership roles due to their versatility and problem-solving capabilities.



The AAHOA Mid South Region's Charity Golf Tournament connected more than 80 golfers and vendor partners for a day in the sun where attendees raised \$50K for local causes.



[L-R] Mid South Regional Director Harikrishna (HK) Patel, Vice Chairman Miraj Patel, North Carolina Regional Director Pinkesh Patel, North Carolina Senate Majority Leader Paul Newton, Chairman Bharat Patel, Secretary Rahul Patel, Northeast Regional Director Preyas Patel, Director at Large Eastern Division Pinal Patel, and South Carolina Regional Director Fenil Desai showed strong support for hospitality at the North Carolina Regional Conference & Trade Show.



AAHOA Secretary Rahul Patel worked alongside the AAOHA Technology & Innovation Ad Hoc Committee and #TeamAAHOA to launch the brand-new MyAAHOA.com.



[L-R] AAHOA Member Mayuri Patel, Director of Strategic Franchise Initiatives at Red Roof Inns and former Women Hoteliers Director Eastern Division (2017-2023) Lina Patel, Women Hoteliers Director Western Division Tejal Patel, Central Midwest Regional Director Arti Patel, and Women Hoteliers Director Eastern Division Purnima Patel attended the BITAC Purchasing & Design East in Fernandina Beach, FL.



[L-R] Hitesh (HP) Patel (Past Chair, 2018-2019); Vinay Patel (Past Chair, 2021-2022); Bharat Patel, AAHOA Chairman, Chetan (Chris) Patel, Florida Regional Director, Allen M. Thomas, Regional Administrator, Southeast United States, U.S. Small Business Administration; Stephen Benjamin, Senior Advisor and Director of the White House Office of Public Engagement; and Andy Ingraham, President, Founder, and CEO of the National Association of Black Hotel Owners, Operators and Developers (NABHOOD).



AAHOA Chairman Bharat Patel (fourth from left) welcomed hoteliers to the Mid South Region Charity Golf Tournament.



During a Town Hall meeting, Vik Zaver, AAHOA Georgia Regional Director (fourth from left), showcased the great work the association is doing to build relationships and develop open communications with local elected officials and the sheriff's office in Augusta-Richmond County.

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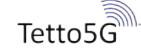
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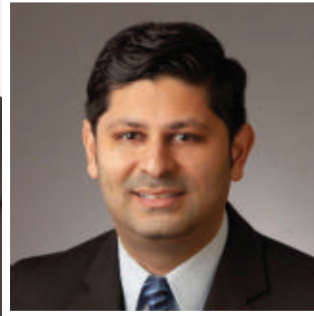
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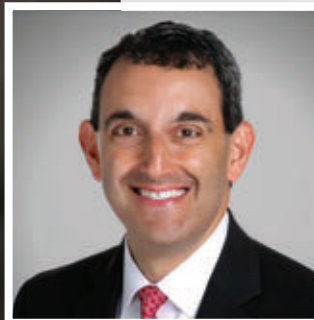


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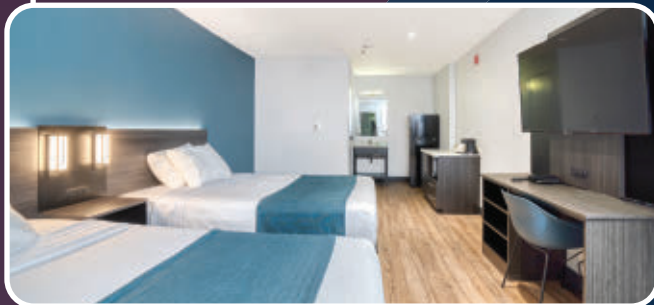
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