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Asian Hospitality Leaders at Roundtable Call for Standardization of Services & Metrics



Sales and marketing leaders from the hospitality industry, speaking at the inaugural Hospitality Sales & Marketing Association International (HSMIA) Asia Pacific - CNI Thought Leaders in Marketing Roundtable in Singapore, called for a review of Asian hospitality practices as well as the creation of a body to take charge of the issue of standardizing services, metrics and ratings for the industry.

'This marketing roundtable was a first for the Asia Pacific chapter as it brought together senior executives who recognized key issues around marketing metrics and a need for a common language,' said Professor Judy Siguaw, Dean, Cornell-Nanyang Institute of Hospitality Management. 'The goal is to help these executives find solutions and the discussion provides that opportunity,' she added.

'HSMIA is very encouraged by the participation of such a high level of executives from across the hospitality industry in Asia coming together to discuss crucial issues facing their companies,' said Robert A. Gilbert, CHME, CHA, president and CEO of HSMIA. 'We are very pleased to be able to present this forum as one of our HSMIA initiatives across the globe,' he added.

At the core of the Roundtable was the case for a standardized ratings system for hospitality services in Asia.

'Who decides what is Five Star?' asked Bernadette Dennis, director of DB Concepts (formerly with Marriott International), adding: 'Especially in China, the positioning of the hotel, based on its Web site and brochures, sets expectations, but the property often does not deliver what they say they can. The five star rating should be based on a service level set by a body with authority and not just a rating given to a building.'

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Henrietta Ho, Director of Marketing - Special Projects with Hyatt International, said, 'We need synergy among the hotels in Asia to have an association to come up with service standards, and therefore ratings for Asia to use. No one is taking ownership of the problem.'

Integral to this issue is the matter of marketing metrics. Bigger companies regularly measure customer satisfaction indices but this doesn't always provide appropriate feedback. 'Quality service is lip service unless you can measure the service level,' said Noel Hawkes, General Manager of Hotel Phoenix in Singapore. 'We need feedback and to know that we have the basics right. How else will I know what I need to put in a hotel for the future?' Hawkes added.

'I agree that we need uniform marketing metrics or service standards,' said Carmen Lam, Director, Senior Vice President - Product & Branding, Miramar International Hotel Management Corp. S.A., adding: 'We need to know what the minimum standards are and to be able to localize them. It is causing confusion not only with our customers, but between the hotel management and the hotel owners.'

Much debate ensued over the issue of customer loyalty versus recognition. 'Loyalty programs are important to big chains, as it is about the contribution to return. The hotel operates as a system versus a unit,' said Lam.

The general consensus was that customer recognition was more important. 'Our hotel has no loyalty program and our occupancy is 96%,' said Hawkes. 'It is because of the product location, service and price. We won't waste valuable dollars on a loyalty program that would otherwise go to the bottom line,' Hawkes added.

Participants also called for improved integration of technology to capture information from the time of bookings to greeting the guest, leading to a seamless transfer of information and ultimately, better customer service standards. Most agreed that personalization of service happens manually or by acquiring customer history from hotel stays.

'We think we know our guest profile very well,' said Raymond W.S. Hall, Chief Marketing Officer for the Six Senses Resorts & Spas, adding: 'We do things manually. While customers wait in the departure lounge, they are being scrutinized by the staff and notes are written about them as to their drinks or movie preferences, for example, and then are faxed to the general manager of the resort, who greets them by name off the plane. The first moment is terribly important: the guest feels as if someone cares about them.'

Roundtable participants largely agreed that to maintain service standards, the pool of potential employees in Asia had to grow. Employers are looking the Philippines and countries outside of the region to tap labor.

Cross-training of potential employees in five star service standards was necessary to stop poaching and to improve the overall talent pool. Members fundamentally agreed that the right attitude and a love of people were the essential elements of great

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HSMIA is an organization of sales and marketing professionals representing all segments of the hospitality industry. With a strong focus on education, HSMIA has become the industry champion in identifying and communicating trends in the hospitality industry, while operating as a leading voice for both hospitality and sales and marketing management disciplines. Founded in 1937, HSMIA is an individual membership organization comprising nearly 7,000 members from 35 countries and 60 chapters worldwide.

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employees.

'We all hired from each other because experienced staff usually stands for a certain quality of service,' said Elena Arabadjieva, Director, Marketing Services & Communications of Suntec Singapore. 'Several members of Suntec's Food & Beverage team are now in Macau because they know how to manage that scale of events. We need government bodies to engage in training and to get five star properties to teach their standards.'

Yet participants agreed that natural growth in demand and localization was equally important in recruitment as training in five star methods. 'Don't lose the soul and culture - having the right attitude and embracing the locale and region remains important,' says Lynne Ireland, Vice President, Marketing - Asia Pacific, of the Small Luxury Hotels of the World associations.

The roundtable was widely deemed a success. 'It was a rare opportunity to meet so many industry leaders from outside of Singapore and to recognize our issues as well as give credence to good quality programs,' said Mark Wong, Vice President of Marketing and Development for the Preferred Hotel Group.

'As a result of the roundtable, it was apparent that the highest importance should be given to establishing certain standards that will help push forward service levels,' commented Craig Fong, Vice President, Non-Air Content for Abacus International.

'HSMAI's role is to provide resources to hospitality sales and marketing professionals at all levels of their career,' said Christine Toguchi, Managing Director of HSMAI Asia Pacific. 'For senior executives there were few events, aside from Cornell's PDP programs, that bring them together at a 'peer-to-peer' level and in a thought-provoking session,' she said. 'This is the space we wanted to fill when we launched this marketing roundtable,' Toguchi added.

HSMAI is an organization of sales and marketing professionals representing all segments of the hospitality industry. With a strong focus on education, HSMAI has become the industry champion in identifying and communicating trends in the hospitality industry, and bringing together customers and members at annual events, including HSMAI's Affordable Meetings(R). Founded in 1927, HSMAI is an individual membership organization comprising more than 7,000 members worldwide.

For more information on HSMAI, contact the Hospitality Sales & Marketing Association International, 8201 Greensboro Drive, Suite 300, McLean, VA 22102, phone (703) 610-9024; fax (703) 610-9005, or visit the web site at www.hsmai.org.

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