

Case Study

Westin Hotels & Resorts



The Client

Westin Hotels & Resorts is one of the most recognizable and highly-regarded brands in the leisure and hospitality industry, and features more than 120 hotels worldwide in a rapidly growing portfolio. The brand is owned and operated by Starwood Hotels & Resorts (NYSE:HOT); in addition to Westin, Starwood brands include St. Regis, The Luxury Collection, W Hotels, Le Meridien, Sheraton and Four Points by Sheraton, accounting for approximately 230,000 rooms in 82 countries worldwide.

The Situation

From its original incarnation as Western Hotels in 1930, Westin has always linked its brand with the concepts of quality and innovation; in fact, Westin is responsible for many industry innovations that have become standard guest expectations over time, such as voicemail, guest credit cards, and refreshment centers, among others. Upon joining the Starwood family in 1998, however, the brand looked to differentiate itself from the crowded full-service four-star hotel landscape. The brand set its course to become the leader in that segment with an ambitious and public series of trademarked service and product innovations that would become the fulcrum of its branding, marketing and advertising activities. In 1999, the Westin Heavenly Bed™ launched the phenomenon, followed in no particular order by similarly branded (and marketed) innovations such as the Heavenly Bath™, Heavenly Crib™, Heavenly Dog Bed™, and the WestinWORKOUT powered by Reebok™.

As it was executing on its innovation strategy, Westin was launching a parallel growth plan, seeking to catapult the brand from a sleepy, Seattle-headquartered collection of “great” hotels to a vibrant international brand. Via acquisition and new construction, the brand began its steady growth in both size and stature. And, typical of any company undergoing a twofold strategy of this nature, Westin was faced with the challenge of ensuring that its very aggressive, well-articulated and public brand promise was being delivered in a consistent, flawless manner across a constantly changing portfolio. In short, how best to ensure that the new guests being drawn to Westin by the bed, bath, gym, service, etc., were developing into loyal Westin customers because the guest experience promised by the brand met or exceeded expectations...every time.

The Solution

The task of brand quality assurance for an enterprise as far flung as Westin is a tricky one, so its leadership sought some outside assistance. In partnership with Westin brand managers, marketers, researchers and operators, LRA Worldwide designed and implemented a dynamic Brand Assurance Program to measure and improve product and service quality and consistency at all Westin properties, with a specific focus around the product and service innovations that have become the brand's signature.

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*Sue Brush, Senior Vice President,
Westin Hotels & Resorts*



In its day-to-day execution, the Brand Assurance Program entails a team of LRA hospitality consultants conducting onsite property visits to observe, assess and measure standards compliance, property cleanliness and maintenance, customer service and compliance with the Starwood Preferred Guest loyalty program, among other key experiential elements. In addition, LRA's consultants help monitor the effectiveness of ongoing training programs at the property level. On a macro level, LRA helps guide Westin's frequent standards review sessions to ensure that the brand's pattern of innovation stays attuned to customer needs and wants and that the Brand Assurance Program nimbly adapts to the latest Westin standards.

More recent Westin product and service innovations have involved high-profile corporate partners such as Reebok, Starbucks and American Express, demanding yet another layer of brand assurance. Not only is Westin compelled to monitor its own brand promise delivery, but it bears a responsibility for how its partner brands are represented in Westin hotels worldwide.

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The Results

In addition to the public relations bonanza that has accompanied the Heavenly Bed and its relatives, Westin has some concrete metrics to measure the efficacy of the program. For one, for the past two years Westin has received the #1 Ranking for upscale hotel chain from J.D. Power and Associates. Perhaps a greater testament to the strength of the Brand Assurance Program, however, was the 30-percent increase in the number of Westin properties rated as AAA 4-Diamond in 2004.

Guests and potential franchisees are voting with their wallets as well. The brand has reported 19 straight quarters where its Average Daily Room Rate (ADR) and Revenue Per Available Room (RevPAR) – two crucial industry financial metrics – have outperformed that of its upscale segment competition. It should be no surprise that the Westin Guest Satisfaction Index has climbed accordingly. Likewise, many new Westin hotels are under development, projecting to grow the brand significantly by the close of the decade. And as these new properties come on line, Westin leadership can rest assured that the Westin-LRA Brand Assurance Program will help them fulfill the Westin brand promise impeccably, leaving one word to describe Westin's future.

Heavenly.



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