

Emotional connections build brands

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Hotel & Motel Management

Define the experience. That's how hotel brands create brand recognition and gain loyalty, according to brand development consultants.



The marketing message and the property's message must be consistent to enhance a guest's experience, said Tom Horwitz, principal, FRCH Design Worldwide.

Hotels must clearly define what they are and what they want to be in the eyes of their guests and their employees, said Lisa Moroni-Hall, managing partner, Brandevotion, a branding company that has worked with Fairfield Inns by Marriott.

"There are a lot of hotels out there, and it's hard to tell one apart from the other," she said.

Hotels can differentiate themselves through the experience they offer, which is synonymous with emotional connection, Moroni-Hall said.

"People buy based on emotion, and people rebuy based on an emotional connection," she said. "Part of that involves their branding community. We all have a community of people that when we experience something truly wonderful, we tell our friends about it. Then they seek out that product based on our advice."

Hotel companies should define three to four key guiding behaviors that are delivered by employees on a consistent basis to create an on-brand experience for guests, Moroni-Hall said.

"It's one thing for a hotel to say they want to do this, but employees need to clearly understand how to deliver that experience," she said.

Brand loyalty is maintained by offering guests a consistently excellent experience, said Lance Rutter, creative director for Tanagram Partners, a firm that worked with Preferred Hotels & Resorts.

"The guest's experience encompasses everything from the ease of online reservations to the tone and manner of the hotel concierge to the appearance and quality of all aspects of the hotel's design—the hotel's logo, Web site, advertisements, architecture, interiors, etc.," Rutter said.



Moroni-Hall
BRANDEVOTION

Branding also should connote something unique to guests.

"It is crucial that hotels understand as much about the perception and needs of the marketplace as possible and that, even more importantly, this research is shared across a team of design and marketing specialists," Rutter said.



Roberto LRA
WORLDWIDE

Touchpoints

The guest experience is comprised of a series of touchpoints—opportunities for the hotel staff to interact with guests, beginning at the sales process or reservation all the way through the visit and checkout, said John Roberto, executive v.p., LRA Worldwide, which has worked with hotel companies such as Starwood Hotels & Resorts.

"It's achieved by making sure associates are aware of what kind of memory they are trying to create," Roberto said. "I'm not talking about a scripted standard, but guidelines that help staff excel in being warm and caring and committed to customers."

IDEO, a firm working with Marriott International on the guest experience, spends a lot of time shadowing guests on what it calls the "customer journey." IDEO breaks the journey into a story and draws out touchpoints that will be memorable for guests.

One example is the moment guests first open the guestroom door.

"It's not something Marriott at first thought of as operational—there's not a team out there about opening the door—but from a customer point of view, we found out how to design around that opportunity," said Dana Cho, who is leading the Marriott project for IDEO.



Cho IDEO

Beyond transactional



Horwitz FRCH
DESIGN

An astute brand manager will make the connection between campaigning—the messaging to enhance consumer loyalty and connection—and what is at the property, said Tom Horwitz, principal, FRCH Design Worldwide, which worked on Hampton Inn's Make it Hampton initiative.

"The more you can tie those two together, the better your message is, the more powerful it is, the more consistent it is," he said. "If you're telling me something on the TV and there's no message at the property telling me the same thing, there's a disconnect."

The definition of creating an experience is when the relationship with the customer is less perfunctory and less transactional.

"If I'm in a limited-service hotel and I check in and I stay and I check out and leave, that's pretty transactional," Horwitz said. "But if the hotel thought about some of my needs before I expressed them or they pleasantly surprised me, that is what starts to make an experiential event instead of a transactional event."

This is happening in upper-upscale and luxury properties, but creating the experience is more difficult in limited-service hotels because of the smaller staff, he said.

For Hampton, making the guest's stay more experiential might include offering a wake-up call or dinner suggestions before he or she asks.

All the decisions for Hampton were tested against a brand personality that was expressed in character words, such as passionate, anticipatory, charismatic and authentic.



Hampton Inn's brand personality is described as passionate, anticipatory, charismatic and authentic.