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## Editorial

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'When it comes to the future, there are three kinds of people: those who let it happen, those who make it happen and those who wonder what happened ...' John M Richardson, Jr.

*Research in Hospitality Management* has a target readership comprising both academics and professionals, and aims to examine topical issues within the multitude of facets of the international hospitality industry. Our approach is to provide a topical overview with in-depth analysis and commentary which is of direct and immediate benefit to both the practitioner and the academic.

For some time, hospitality has been synonymous with the hotel industry and, as such, new directions in the hotel business have far-reaching implications on an otherwise extremely diverse and amorphous industry. As an industry, hospitality is faced with issues which could rapidly become a matter of survival for hotels, such as considering what could be regarded as an opportunity for a traveller. In this context, therefore, it is no oversimplification to suggest that the emerging concepts in the hotel industry reveal an atmosphere of stiff competition.

The past five years have brought changes to most companies in the hotel industry. While many may feel as if these changes have made their lives and their businesses more difficult, it can be argued that the stimulation of competition has been good for the industry. Many major companies have taken significant ownership positions when previously they were either only franchisers or management companies. As a result, management companies have become major players in the ownership arena.

This first issue of *Research in Hospitality Management* covers a wide range of interesting topics. To begin, Peter Klosse highlights why taste is not as subjective as has long been thought. He presents a theory which enables one to describe taste or flavour objectively. This theory also leads to a new approach in terms of food and wine pairing based on contracting mouthfeel, coating mouthfeel and flavour richness.

The phenomenon of travellers becoming increasingly informed, and increasingly demanding, arises largely from the evolution of the Internet. Industry professionals suggest that an increase in the trend of reviewing properties online will make travellers less forgiving as they are able to post about their travel experiences. Such an overemphasis on the Web may even lead to stiff competition and price reduction strategies, where only large players may be able to survive. Wouter Hensens, Miemie Struwig and Oren Dayan compare the ratings of TripAdvisor with conventional rating to answer the question: Do social media display correct conventional hotel ratings?

To ward off such threats, the small business owner is now turning towards opening a boutique establishment as an alternate to 70s-style motels. Such niche properties are popping up worldwide and are advertising a more personalised 'home away from home' kind of experience. The introduction of such boutique properties has also given rise to the popular and widely accepted theme of modern hostels. These hostels are keen to provide a clean and safe environment for budget-conscious travellers. Against the backdrop of such threats, the concept of 'home exchange' is gaining momentum within the industry. After having considered the historical intermediation processes, membership profiles and the role of the media, Alexander Grit and Paul Lynch state that processes of specialisation and differentiation have changed the home exchange intermediation landscape.

Also noteworthy is that the hotel industry gives employment to a very large proportion of part-time workers who, after gaining substantial experience, leave for other lucrative jobs at restaurants and outdoors. Low wages in the hotel industry is one of the primary reasons for low retention rates. With this in mind, hotel industry analysts are already thinking of ways to attract and retain qualified workers by increasing the pay scales and by reducing the long working hours. Similarly, pundits across the globe are attempting to devise constructive methods which will retain the existing workers by sponsoring education and creating attractive career paths. Clearly, the hotel school has a role to play here, and research into best practice is essential. In a fascinating study, Tjeerd Zandberg focuses on the influence of middle managers (students) on strategic decision making and shines a light on the practical training system of the Hotel School of Stenden University.

With growing awareness and the resultant concern over environmentally friendly services, the industry is seeing a move towards green and eco-lodgings. Recent surveys by trade associations such as Partnership Travel Industry Association and online retailers such as Yahoo! have shown that nearly seventy per cent of tourists are willing to pay extra for environmentally friendly lodgings. Interestingly, these surveys further revealed that these guests will pay anywhere from nine to ten per cent premium on the already advertised prices.

It is noted that hotels are presently facing severe shortages in occupancy rates, which are at their lowest since 1971. Clearly, such a crisis and lack of funds hampers, for example, any efforts to install appliances that comply with the LEEDS (Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design) standards. Some observers are of the opinion that a trade-off may lead hotels to remove free amenities such as little bottles of shampoo, jams and free baskets of fruit; all of which are the hallmark of these eco-lodgings.

Rising construction costs and a struggling real estate market have prompted hoteliers to use pre-fabrication as a cost-effective solution in the construction of new hotels. In fact they are fighting back by producing highly efficient designs that utilise a greater proportion of space for revenue-generating purpose. It is suggested that future trends in hotel construction will seek to maximise the use of building area, by constructing multi-purpose facilities which will include casinos, shopping outlets and theatres. Some have argued that the stand-alone hotel concept is likely to vanish, as the new properties will be constructed as mixed-use developments which provide guests with diverse facilities. Such a variety will ensure that guests remain in one spot, which will help to generate

revenue for the entire hotel complex.

Branding remains a hot topic in the hotel sector, reflected by several high-profile appointments by hotel companies of executives from the fast-moving consumer goods (FMCG) sector. A brand is more than a name or logo; it is about a narrative. When consumers buy into a powerful brand, they are buying into a set of values; so any successful brand must be one that makes an emotional appeal to the consumer. Marketing has traditionally been based on the four Ps: product, price, place and promotion. Offer a superior product at a lower price, manage the sales and distribution channels and promote the product, and success should follow. In the belief that all decisions are entirely objective, the sentiment is that brand-building is only for the makers of shampoo, jeans or soft drinks.

However, in an increasingly competitive environment, the four Ps are no longer the keys to success. They have become just the basics that every operator must master simply to stay in business. Even in the B2B arena, the power of the brand is just as relevant – to create a perceptual value in the minds of their customers. In this context, Maaïke de Jong examines the branding strategies of Qatar and therewith the strategic approaches in the local social, cultural and political context to reveal ‘destination branding’ opportunities. Moving outside the ambit of hotels, Radu Mihailescu provides the reader with a clear insight into charter airline benefits in the Caribbean, which he translated into opportunities for the Eastern Cape, South Africa. Finally, contributing to the discussion, and based upon literature and interviews with 23 senior hospitality decision makers, Sjoerd Gehrels and Jaochim de Looij give a number of suggestions which are formulated to implement ‘employer branding’.

For some, the future is a scary place. For others, it is one full of wonder and possibilities. Clearly, for the hospitality industry, it can be either one depending on individual viewpoints. With so many advancements having been made in such a short period of time, the ability to stay on top of all the changes can be challenging. However, embracing the change that is to come and seeing in it the comforts and conveniences, the future becomes more secure. Not surprisingly, the hospitality industry is already harnessing the power of change to bring about a better experience for our guests.

**Don Craig**

*Editor-in-Chief*