

MULTICHANNEL

Starwood seeks multichannel environment to foster creativity

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Starwood's Starlab

By NANCY BUCKLEY

Starwood Hotels & Resorts Worldwide has revealed its New York-based Starlab, an innovation studio that will help funnel the brand's design teams into an omnichannel environment.

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Luxury Daily

The 46,000-square-foot office in the Garment District will bring together the company's design, digital and luxury brand teams into one space. The new initiative will attempt to combine high-touch with high-tech to bring guests an unique and modern experience across all its brands.

"We have reached a tipping point where it is more important than ever for our teams to think differently about our business: from the unique design of our hotels, to the thoughtful programming that brings our brands to life and the leading-edge technology that enables us to deliver personalized service consistently around the world," said Mike Tiedy, senior vice president of global brand design & innovation at [Starwood Hotels & Resorts](#).

"Social connectivity is reshaping global business, so we brought digital and social content to the forefront of Starlab's design," he said. "Our digital chandelier runs a live ticker of

guests' tweets and a digital feed frame in the communal dining area showcases guests' Instagram feeds, which aims to inspire water cooler conversation for our associates. By incorporating these digital features and flexible workspaces – such as huddle spaces, The Library and our branded conference suites – we're hoping to promote cross-functional collaboration and foster creativity which will ultimately lead to ideas, programs and initiatives to enhance our guests' experience."

New work environment

The high-touch business will combine with the high-tech thinking of the hotel brand to bring team members together and keep up with the digitally connected consumer.

Starlab's design indicates its innovative goals. The smart mirror in the entrance is also a digital display showcase of Starwood's latest video news, photography and user-generated content.

A digital chandelier serves as a news ticker of Twitter comments, and five digital feed frames rotate guests' Instagram photos in the dining area.

The Tech Lab within Starlab will host the company's latest digital innovations.

Starlab's omnichannel approach aims to foster creativity. There are few spots of privacy in the office as most of the layout is open air and encourages employees to sit, stand or balance on stability balls as they work.

Semi-private meeting areas, such as the Library, provide bleacher-style seating and flexible tables and design boards and projectors.

The conference room takes inspiration from Starwood's top lines such as The Luxury Collection and St. Regis.

A digital Starlab is available for guests to stay up-to-date on its own [Tumblr page](#).

"Starwood's Starlab in New York is purpose-built to foster innovation among the company's employees," said Taylor Rains managing partner of [Flugel Consulting](#), Charleston, SC. "By developing a space so conducive to creative thinking, employees are more likely to develop new and interesting offerings for guests."

"In addition, real time social integration and displays throughout Starlab allow the team to see firsthand what guests are saying about the brand, ultimately making them more responsive to guests' needs and wants," he said. "It essentially brings feedback directly into the office, which is bound to have a positive impact on guest relations."

"Starlab itself is an innovative approach to corporate office space. By adopting this model, Starwood positions itself on the leading edge. The ideas bound to come out of the new office structure will also serve to benefit the brand in the long run, as guests share their experiences with their network."

Look at everyone

From executives to entry levels, department heads to factory workers, every individual in a company has insight that can better the brand, but many are overlooked in decision making processes which prevent companies from reaching their highest potential, according to an executive from The Line at eTail West Feb. 20.

Collaborative thinking can slow down a company's decision making, but hearing the perspective of every individual, even if they are not the final decision makers, can help those who do make decisions for the brand to have an educated opinion. Whether a company has 10 or 10,000 employees incorporating everyone can lead brands to fixing problems previously unbeknown to executives ([see story](#)).

Also, traditional online storefronts no longer meet consumer expectations as ecommerce has evolved, according to panelists at Luxury Interactive 2014.

To meet the expectations of consumers, marketers must be consistent across channels and work to blend content with commerce to create concise engagement. According to panelists at "Content for Commerce Mixology — Become Your Brand's Mixologist," as the ecommerce game changes brands will need to adapt omnichannel strategies full of rich touch points to cater to the sentiments of millennials ([see story](#)).

Accommodating internal structures to match external goals can assist companies looking to release innovative campaigns.

"From a brand perspective, this year St Regis is working across functions (marketing, PR, guest experience and brand design) to continue developing the St. Regis Family Traditions program, as family becomes more and more important to our business; just in the last year seeing more than a 20 percent increase in family travel," said Paul James, global brand leader, Starwood's luxury brands: St Regis, The Luxury Collection and W Hotels Worldwide.

Final Take

Nancy Buckley, editorial assistant on Luxury Daily, New York

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