

TRAVEL AND HOSPITALITY

Heritage hospitality brands must find renewed relevance

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Waldorf Astoria has released its first digital-led campaign. Image credit: Waldorf Astoria

By SARAH RAMIREZ

NEW YORK Hospitality brands with decades of history need to find ways to reinvent themselves to attract younger consumers as they rapidly acquire more wealth, according to an executive from Waldorf Astoria.

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From its beginnings as a single landmark Park Avenue hotel to rapidly becoming a global portfolio of high-end properties, Waldorf Astoria needed guidance from consumers to learn how to better appeal to a new type of traveler. At Luxury Interactive on Oct. 16, an executive from Hilton's Waldorf Astoria Hotels & Resorts explained how consumer research was the backbone of the brand's first digital-led marketing push.

"We had a very simple objective: how do you make the Waldorf story relevant to today and bring that message to life?" said Dino Michael, global head of [Waldorf Astoria Hotels & Resorts at Hilton](#).

Going live

With its digital campaign, Waldorf Astoria intended to shift its brand from traditional to more youthful and energetic.

The "Live Unforgettable" campaign playfully highlights Waldorf Astoria's commitment to service in three 15-second spots, with each storyline featuring the concierge helping to fulfill customers' offbeat requests. Waldorf's commitment to evolving its strategy around consumer insight with this campaign exhibits the necessity to adapt to the new normal for luxury travel brands, and using data to do so.



The "Live Unforgettable" campaign was filmed at Waldorf Astoria Versailles. Image credit: Waldorf Astoria

Each spot follows the same formula: a guest rings the Waldorf Astoria concierge with a request. The staff is shown helping with the details of the request all inspired by real requests by real Waldorf guests before everything is revealed for the guest and the viewers.

An upbeat score also accompanies each scene, letting the positive customer service experiences speak for themselves. The vignettes also feature different types of guests Waldorf Astoria is appealing to: families, couples and solo travelers ([see story](#)).

It was crucial for Waldorf Astoria to reach new guests without alienating the current client base. For an added impact, the "Live Unforgettable" spots were also recreated with actors of different ethnicities to air in different regions.

As Waldorf's Mr. Michael explained, the brand needed to move away from nostalgia in favor of moving forward. Today's traveler wants to be present and enjoy their experiences, and the campaign's emphasis on service, authenticity and environment are meant to reflect that attitude.

"If the service isn't there, we'll fail" Mr. Michael said. "It doesn't matter what you ask us for, we'll deliver."

Millennials and travel

Waldorf Astoria is one of many luxury hospitality brands that continues to search for fresh ways to capture travelers' attention, especially as millennials and Generation Z accumulate more wealth.

According to a survey from Allianz Global Assistance, about half of millennials say social media influences their travel decisions. Peer-to-peer word of mouth holds the most sway, as 86 percent of consumers trust their own social networks to post accurate content about travel experiences, while 55 percent deem brands to be truthful on social media.

Reflecting their social media inclinations, millennials are the most apt to have posted about a trip on social media. About two-thirds of them do so to preserve their own memories, wanting to be able to look back on a trip fondly ([see story](#)).

As a company that is in the business of making memories, Waldorf Astoria appreciates that influencers help bring the chain's messaging to new audiences. While doing consumer research for "Live Unforgettable," the company studied more than 12,000 social accounts to learn what gained traction.

Since Waldorf Astoria believes that even younger luxury travelers value experiences over accommodations and locations, the brand does not view hospitality disrupter Airbnb as a major threat.

The home-sharing service has announced a number of new services to attract wealthy travelers to luxury homes and hotels. A service called Airbnb Plus will connect affluent travelers with luxury accommodations, blurring the line between Airbnb and other high-end, luxury hotel services ([see story](#)).

"Brands that succeed translate their history to modern relevancy," Mr. Michael said.