

IN-STORE

Waldorf Astoria exec: Luxury hotels face off against competitors' experiences

June 27, 2013



By ERIN SHEA

NEW YORK – A Waldorf Astoria executive at Forrester Research's Forum for Customer Experience Professionals East 2013 said that luxury hotels compete against one another with guest experiences.

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During the session titled "From High-Touch to High-Tech: Personalizing Service Delivery for Today's Luxury Traveler," the executive discussed the changing expectations of the luxury traveler. Now, hospitality brands should focus on creating unique guest experiences since affluent travelers are looking for exclusive offers.

"We have the other traditional luxury hotels as competitors to Waldorf Astoria," said John Vanderslice, global head of luxury and lifestyle brands for [Hilton Worldwide](#).

"We are competing with [other hotels'] experiences," he said. "These are the kinds of choices that people are making."

Old versus new

Mr. Vanderslice stated that the goal for his brand is to have the fastest growing and most innovative luxury hotels in the world.

Even with this goal, Hilton will not cut its traditional promotions in lieu of innovation.

In addition, since Hilton has two luxury hotel brands, Waldorf Astoria and Conrad, it is able to cater to two different kinds of luxury consumers.



Waldorf Astoria in Chicago

“Waldorf is older and Conrad is younger,” Mr. Vanderslice said. “Waldorf is more traditional leisure.

“Conrad is more urban, when those guests arrive they want to be part of the surrounding environment,” he said.



Conrad New York

However, the two kinds of guests still seek the same kinds of experiences out of their hotel stays.

“We are seeing old luxury consumers have the same sensibilities of the new luxury consumer,” Mr. Vanderslice said.

Upping exclusivity

Many luxury hotels are attempting to outdo one another by upping the adventure and exclusivity factor in offers.

For instance, The Leading Hotels of the World is catering to adventurous, affluent travelers through a partnership with The Shackleton & Selous Society to offer vacations and safaris in exotic destinations.

The hotel group's Leaders Club members have insider access to nature preserves and protected regions that is not offered to the public. To celebrate the partnership, the hotel group will host the first Leaders Club Invitational Southern African Safari Nov. 22-29 ([see story](#)).

Furthermore, private jet operator Intrav is targeting adventurous affluent travelers with new global travel itineraries that can be customized to create a unique experience.

Through the eight offerings, guests are able to tailor their packages with different activities such as exploring wildlife, taking a hot-air balloon ride or island hopping in a yacht. Luxury travel brands should cater to affluent consumers who want personalization and one-off travel opportunities to keep them intrigued ([see story](#)).

Although unique experiences are crucial for hotels to provide great customer service, employee mentality will help improve the guest experience as well.

"All of our teams know our culture and know that those one or two moments that they will have with a guest have to be great," Mr. Vanderslice said.

"We make sure that the culture [of our hotels] is right and that all the team members know discipline, so when I can't be there to make every decision, they will make them how I would make them," she said.

Final take

Erin Shea, editorial assistant on Luxury Daily, New York