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THE DEFINITIVE GUIDE TO SUCCESSFUL HOTEL MANAGEMENT

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Volume 14 | Issue 3 | APRIL 2022 | ₹100

**BIG
INTERVIEW**

OLIVIER BERRIVIN, MD,
WORLDHOTELS ASIA
PACIFIC



CREATING A CULTURE OF CARE

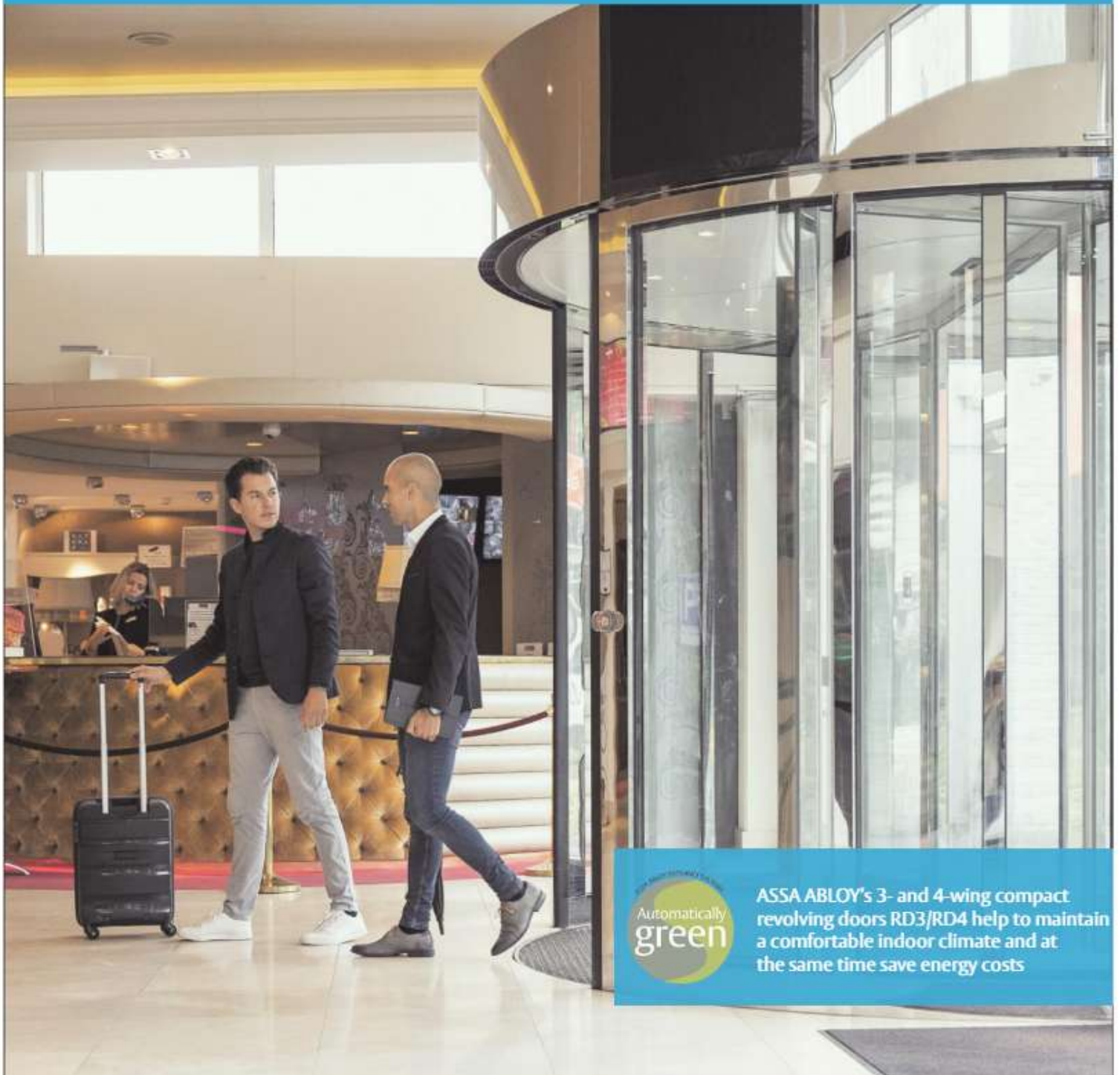
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Subscription is subject to scrutiny. Subscription is limited to hospitality professionals above 18 years of age.

Printed and Published by Bishor Srivastava, 11/502, Seawoods Estate, NRI Complex, Palm Beach Road, Near Delhi Public School, Sector-54/56/58, Noida, Near Mumbai - 400 706, on behalf of ITP Media (India) Pvt. Ltd, printed at Indigo Press India Pvt. Ltd, Plot No. 1C / 716, Off Dadar Khandoba Cross Road, Between Saur and Rethwala Ind. Estate, Byculla (East), Mumbai-400 022, India and published at ITP Media (India) Pvt. Ltd, Fortune 2000, 103-A & 103-B, C Wing, 1st Floor, Bandra Kurla Complex, Bandra East, Mumbai 400 051, India

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Published by and © 2022
ITP Media (India) Pvt. Ltd
RNI no. MAH/ENG/2009/34648
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CHANGING SHOES WHILE RUNNING

That is precisely what most hoteliers did over the past 24 months. After three waves of the pandemic, most have a reasonably good idea of what to expect going forth. But several are still flying blind.

While expressions like the 'new world' have become commonplace, there is an urgent need for the industry to prudently come up with ways to ride the business recovery on the horizon. Enter the 'GM Summit' by Hotelier India. We conceptualised and curated this series of events to help hoteliers comprehend the changes happening in their ecosystem and then map their business plans.

During the first leg, held at St Regis Mumbai on 22nd March, leading hoteliers shared their experiences and well-thought analyses on the future of hospitality. Please read all about it

in our cover story to know how to succeed in this precarious environment.

Hotelier India also organised the 'Pillars of Procurement' webinar in March, which saw the attendance of a large number of participants. During the interactive session, procurement heads of leading hotel companies shared their insights on the need for advance planning, benchmarking and collaboration with local vendors. Following these practices will help hoteliers augment their existing efficiency while future-proofing their brands to better absorb the impact of unexpected incidents, like the outbreak of COVID-19.

The pandemic highlighted how independent hotels are increasingly, and worryingly, exposed to financial loss. Many hotel companies are exploring soft brand agreements that will allow

independent and boutique hotels to implement solid sales and marketing strategies. In the 'Big Interview' column, Olivier Berrivin, MD of World-Hotels Asia Pacific, sheds light on how hotel owners can negotiate flexible terms with the industry players as they will benefit from the association with an international brand.

This is just a glimpse of some of the enlightening and exciting articles in this issue. So grab a cup of coffee, and settle down for some happy reading.

Until next time!

Vinita Bhatia

VINITA BHATIA

Editor

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➔ Vinita Bhatia & Hemendu Saha (centre), Sr. Vice President & Business Head, K2B, LG Electronics India, felicitated the panelists of Panel 1.

CREATING A CULTURE OF CARE

The GM Summit underlined why hoteliers need to have the confidence that their teams can deliver exceptional experiences, efficiently

BY VINITA BHATIA

Business recovery is the buzzword in India's hospitality industry. Hoteliers are gearing up for a quick reboot to make up for lost business over the past couple of years. At the same time, they have learnt some tough lessons, which they do not intend to forget in a hurry.

Hotelier India conceptualised the 'GM Summit' series to dissect these learnings and help hospitality leaders share their experiences to benefit their peers. The first edition was held at St Regis Mumbai on March 22, and will soon roll it out in Kolkata, New Delhi and Bengaluru.

The GM Summit saw the attendance of over 170 leading hoteliers who gathered in to understand how different brands reacted to the pandemic. The illuminating panel discussions helped them gain insight into the innovative dimensions adopted by top brands to survive and succeed. It included discerning ways to create new business models based on external resources, the need for collaborations and adhering to entrepreneurial thinking.

While launching the GM Summit, Bibhor Srivastava, MD, ITP Media India, said that Hotelier India has always endeavoured to create new and meaningful platforms that allow knowledge sharing





➔ Bibhor Srivastava and Anish Sharma (second from left), Regional Project Manager-West, Kohler Co., felicitated the panelists of Panel 2.



for the benefit of the industry. "The evening is dedicated to General Managers (GMs), who supported the staff and worked with their owners to safeguard the fiscal health of their properties," he said. "GM Summit is dedicated to these stalwarts and is a salute to their resilience." He also thanked Kohler, LG Electronics, AH International, Maharashtra Tourism and Hafele for supporting this much-needed initiative.

Vinita Bhatia, Editor, Hotelier India, said that despite the challenges brought in by the unpredictability past two years, many GMs innovated their business models to provide a first response. "The industry continues to be vulnerable to changes in their business environment due to workforce scarcity and spiralling costs. They also lack clarity of how and where they can get started when tweaking their existing models," she noted.

SOMETHING FOR EVERYONE

The Summit began with a fireside chat between Dr Dhananjay Sanwalkar, Joint MD, Directorate of Tourism, Maharashtra govern-



The evening is dedicated to General Managers (GMs), who supported the staff and worked with their owners to safeguard the fiscal health of their properties."

– Bibhor Srivastava

ment. It was followed by panel discussions on 'Digging deep to build stronger business foundations' and 'Acid Test – Caring for people, property and profits'.

Speakers shared their experiences in responding to the pandemic with simple yet smart ways to bring about positive change, which could spill over beyond the crisis. This included empowering internal resources and devising intelligent ways to help them deliver new offerings and services. They also spoke on how they tweaked their value proposition to prepare their brands to deal with unexpected challenges.

Some invested in creating partnerships with existing and new business partners. This approach brought in new resources, knowledge and opportunities, which can go a long way in helping hoteliers tackle long-term opportunities in their environment.

Post these enlightening sessions, all attendees interacted with each other in an informal setting. Several of them had captivated conversations on ways and strategies they would embrace for their respective brands to get the highest returns post-crisis.

TOP PRIORITY FOR MAHARASHTRA GOVERNMENT



● Vinita Bhatia in a fireside chat with Dr Dhananjay Sawalkar, Joint MD, Directorate of Tourism, Maharashtra.

Maharashtra, the third-largest and the second-most populous state in India, is an attractive destination for tourists nationally and internationally. The state's tourism department is giving a huge policy push for mega infrastructure development projects to fuel tourism sector. In a fireside chat with Vinita Bhatia, Editor of *Hotelier India*, Dr Dhananjay Sawalkar, Joint MD, Directorate of Tourism, Maharashtra shed light on the state government's plans to partner with the hoteliers to turn these plans into reality.

"We have an incentive scheme to attract new capital investment in tourism. It has provisions like exemption from stamp duty, refund of state GST and waiver for water and electricity charges," he said. During the pandemic, INR 70 crore was disbursed under this scheme. "While this is a great opportunity, not many hotel companies have taken benefit of this scheme," he added.

NATURE'S BOUNTY

The state government's Tourism Vision policy encompasses sub-categories that leverage its natural resources. "Last year, over 500 units registered under the agro tourism. Moreover, since the state has 720 km of coastal line, we are endorsing adventure tourism," Dr Sawalkar added.

Moreover, the Directorate of Tourism has come up with a beach shack policy, taking an inspiration from Goa. Eight beaches have been identified for this initiative, including those in Raigad, Sindhudurg and Ratnagiri.

"This policy is already in the final stage of approval. We have identified the land to be acquired and permissions to be granted and are now waiting for the governmental consent, which should come within four to five months," he revealed.

The state government recently submitted a proposal to UNESCO to include some of the 30 forts in Maharashtra as world heritage destinations. It has also outlined an adventure tourism policy to promote these structures.

THE ROAD LESS TRAVELLED

Religious tourism in Maharashtra has seen a huge uptick in the past couple of years across the country. The plan now is to buffer the overall infrastructure to support this increase in tourist traffic. Recently, INR 100 crore was earmarked for this initiative with the support of Maharashtra State Road Transport Corporation (MSRTC).

The Directorate of Tourism is also giving a massive push for caravan tourism in the state. "We have exempted vehicle tax for caravans and already 10 caravans are operational in Maharashtra. To encourage more players, we are offering subsidies to new entrants," Dr Sawalkar added.

The agency is also creating caravan parks on Maharashtra Tourism Development Corporation (MTDC) land, including Nashik, Kalra and Malshej. MTDC, the commercial wing of the state's tourism department, has 4000 acres of land. The government has come up with a PPP model to encourage the participation and collaboration of industry stakeholders to build properties in these lands.

Dr Sawalkar said the response has been heartening and five properties have come up already in areas including Mahabaleshwar, Matheran and Ajanta. "In the second phase, we want to establish 30 properties and want hoteliers to come forth to make Maharashtra the go-to travel destination in the country, and the world," he added.

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ACCELERATION, DECELERATION, INTRODUCTION



Panel 1: Digging Deep to Build Stronger Business Foundation was moderated by Anshu Sarin.

Typically, when faced with a crisis, especially something as prominent as the pandemic, most professionals step back, pause, and relook at everything. It could include how they do business, conduct themselves, how they can prioritise their time, etc.

Diving straight into the session 'Digging Deep to Build Stronger Business Foundation', moderator Anshu Sarin, CEO of Keys Hotels, asked her fellow panellists about that one thing that they doubled down their efforts on, processes that they eliminated and concepts that they introduced. Responding to this, Ranju Alex, Market VP-West India, Marriott International, said that the hotel chain doubled its efforts for efficiency.

"In the Indian hospitality sector, luxury plays a huge part in our lives. Often when business is good, we take this for granted. As a result, the number of people employed to do different jobs takes a different meaning," she elaborated. "The pandemic compelled hotels to relook at their manning levels to do things better."

The hotel company cut down dramatically on various traditional frills, including workforce and HLP to survive the tough times. Currently, the industry is on the cusp of converting survival into thriving. This presents the perfect opportunity for hoteliers to move forward while remembering the learning for the last two years.

LOOKING INWARDS

Many luxury brands were very significantly impacted during the pandemic, but companies with a portfolio mix of economy and mid-scale properties were able to hold their own. Narotam Singh, Area Director - West at Lemon Tree Hotels Limited, explained how the group decided what strategies should be adopted for survival while caring for people.

"We were very clear that we will not lay off anyone. So starting from the MD, Patu Keswani, to general managers, everyone took a salary cut," he stated. "Additionally, the leadership team would have a weekly review on Wednesday to discuss steps to take to weather this storm."

Sarin noted that as an industry, hoteliers often tend to slip into silos, not just at individual units but also at the corporate level. The pandemic brought a synergy into the system and got everyone on the same page. While hoping this status quo would stay for a longer time, she asked Koustuva Mukherjee, Regional General Manager of Pride Plaza Hotel Ahmedabad, what was the one thing that the company decided to toss out of the window.

He stated that the mandate was not to close any of the brand's hotels in Gujarat for a single day. "We decided to stay operational throughout, even make employees stay onsite and avoid salary cuts," Mukherjee claimed. "The properties had an average of 72% occupancy throughout the pandemic."

Interestingly, Pride Plaza Hotel Ahmedabad is located close to several automobile companies. During the first wave, the focus was to provide accommodation to professionals from these organisations and media people travelling to the city. During the second wave, this was expanded to house health-care professionals. These initiatives helped the property to achieve 46% EBITDA.

MEN AT WORK

The pandemic forced most hoteliers to challenge the existing state of affairs. "We were already talking about relooking at manning levels across many areas, even pre-pandemic," Rohit Dar, Regional Director, Operations - India (South) at Hilton, pointed out. "But the last 24 months forced us to take hard decisions in this space."

Dar added that it is unlikely that any hotels will revert to the older manning levels as things work fine with the current ratio. "I am not saying we will not ramp up, but it won't be at the pre-pandemic level because many of us have realised the efficiencies and ways to leverage it," he reiterated.

Atul Bhalla, Area Manager - West, ITC Hotels and General Manager, ITC Maratha Mumbai, noted that in addition to changes in manpower structures, cost structure also underwent a re-



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haul. "We deliberated a lot on how to bring the cost down to a level to be better prepared for future contingencies. This is how we launched our sleep amenities and F&B verticals, which have become successful enterprises in their own right," he added.

The end game was to future proof the hotels for any unforeseen eventualities without impacting customer expectations about the brand. Thinking out-of-the-box became par for course for most hotel companies, be it food delivery or tapping new clientele. Those that did this seemed to do better than their peers. In fact, F&B business breathed life into the revenues of most hotel brands. And most of them are likely to continue focusing on this segment increasingly going forth.

Anant Leekha, Cluster General Manager for ibis Navi Mumbai and ibis Vikhroli recalled how his earlier property, ibis New Delhi

Aerocity was the first to offer a quarantine facility to international travellers. And it prepped for this business within 24 hours. "Since I was personally heading the hotel, I remembered how I spent the initial days convincing and training associates to cater to this new business vertical," he reminisced.

With many people becoming pet parents during the lockdown, ibis turned all its 20 properties into pet-friendly hotels. The hotel brand also introduced Cinema@ibis, showcasing movies over the weekend. "Over a week, we see more than 150 new guests coming to the hotel because of these initiatives," Leekha added.

While frugality has become the game's name, hoteliers have realised that they need to revisit their strategies as business starts picking up. They continuously seek ways to optimise their current operations by unearthing newer means to remain efficient.

UNITY IN ADVERSITY



Panel 2: Acid Test - Caring for People, Property and Profits was moderated by Jaideep Dang.

Jaideep Dang, MD, Hotels and Hospitality Group, South Asia, JLL, flagged off the discussion on 'Acid Test - Caring for people, property and profits' with a simple question - how did the recent adversity bring the industry together to make business more sustainable in the long-term. Sanjay Sethi, CEO of Chalet Hotels, pointed out that the collaboration that occurred in recent months was significantly missing in the past.

"The integration that happened in the past couple of years has not happened in the past five decades," he added. "The solidarity that we see across the industry is phenomenal. We could put our minds together to roll out recommendations to

government agencies for mobilising policy changes that will benefit the industry."

Jaideep then prodded the panellists to share the top three learnings from the pandemic pertaining to people, property and performance. When it boiled to people, Anuraag Bhatnagar, COO, The Leela Palaces, Hotels and Resorts, claimed that the most significant realisation was the need for communication.

"During the pandemic, associates were extremely worried - they feared for their health, wellbeing and job security. It was imperative for leaders to show up, even if it is virtually, to assuage these qualms," he stated.

The hotel chain used the downtime to revisit its CAPEX initiatives and decided to upgrade properties by investing in technology and strengthening distribution partnerships when it came to products. "On the profits side, we did not take too many dramatic steps since we are still in the growth stage," Bhatnagar said.

WRITING A NEW PLAYBOOK

The most significant learning was transparency while communicating with owners for Sudeep Jain, MD, South West Asia at IHG Hotels & Resorts. "There was

no precedence to the pandemic, so we did not know what was going on," he emphasised. "We built patience and confidence with the ownership community by telling them that let's figure out the playbook together, which works mutually."

He recalled how conversations kept changing as the situation unfurled. During the first wave, many owners were reluctant to take up quarantine business as they were worried that regular guests would not visit the property when business reopened.

"During the second wave, the same owners welcomed this clientele with open arms," Jain recollected. "The reluctance disappeared within three months! Of course, this was on a property by property basis since there was no universal answer to the situation."

Navjit Ahluwalia, Senior VP and Country Head, Hilton India, noted that it quickly became evident that everyone was in different boats as the weeks passed. "Each stakeholder has different equity debt issues. So, it became apparent that we can't have one rule-book for everything and everyone," he claimed.

Ahluwalia added that Hilton had some strong owners who sought to support their long-standing associates, while other owners wanted to sack everyone in one night essentially! "We had to balance these two opposite scenarios judiciously," he explained. "Since Hilton itself is a strong organisation, which has always been pro-people, today it has become a far efficient entity that is well regarded globally."

THE ART OF EMPATHY

The biggest insight for Accor was the need for empathy. When no one knew how to deal with the pandemic or ways to slam the brakes on slowing business, the one thing that people would never forget is how any organisation treated them.

Puneet Dhawan, Senior VP-Operations (India & South Asia), Ac-



Attended by over 170 people, the audience listens enrapt to the discussions on stage.

cor recalled how the company announced a \$200 million Heartist fund in April 2020 to help employees globally who were unable to pay for their basic sustenance. "In the last two years, we disbursed more than \$1 million in India, benefitting around 3000 Heartists somehow," he elaborated. "Of course, transparency and communication were important, being humane and having empathy was paramount."

At the same time, Dhawan added that several tough decisions had to be taken, keeping owners' expectations in perspective. So wherever possible, Accor focused on driving topline growth. This called for collaboration with industry stakeholders like airline and OTA brands to drive business into the hotels.

Sharing his perspective as an owner, Sethi pointed out that engagement levels at Chalet Hotels went up exponentially. "We became support systems for hotels – be it for brainstorming, acting as sounding boards or decision making," he noted.

When it realised that the pandemic would not be limited to China in 2019, the real estate company went for a hiring freeze in January 2020 and a variable cost watch soon after. This helped Chalet Hotels post positive quarterly figures in the following year.

During the past two years, hotel companies were compelled to become creative when attracting business – be it offering quarantine facilities to international travellers or accommodation to health-care professionals. At the same time, they had to identify new and ancillary revenue streams like F&B delivery and virtual events.

This was also when hoteliers had to truly walk the talk as their relationships and integrity went through a trial of fire. Those who stood with industry partners and employees during tough times are now reaping the benefits of brand loyalty, respect, or higher credibility. Putting the money where the mouth is was probably the toughest lesson they learned, but this realisation has become the bedrock for all business decisions. ■

MOMENTS OF GLORY



MOMENTS OF GLORY



THE SOFT APPROACH

As a soft brand, WorldHotels is trying to appeal to independent hotel owners by offering them increased autonomy around operational aspects and design while benefiting from distribution and loyalty networks

BY VINITA BHATIA



This pandemic highlighted how independent hotels are increasingly exposed to financial loss. A soft brand agreement will allow independent and boutique hotels to implement solid sales and marketing strategies.

Further, they can negotiate flexible terms with the industry players as they will benefit from the association with an international brand. Owning companies don't need to sell up or enter into more complex agreements (either franchise or management), and they traditionally cover the higher end of the market.

Keeping this in perspective, the BWH Hotel Group recently underwent some changes designed to build its new image as a hotel chain that can offer everything from midscale up to luxury. The WorldHotels properties, for instance, want to retain their identities, independence, and freedom while leveraging sales and marketing support.

This is along with the distribution level only a major international player can offer, and this is where the soft brand option makes sense. Olivier Berrivin, MD of WorldHotels Asia Pacific, explains to Vinita Bhatia why BWH Hotel Group is increasingly focusing on its softer brands and what this means for WorldHotels and independent asset owners.

Were softer brands like WorldHotels more fortunate in weathering the pandemic than their branded counterparts?

The first component that owning companies like in a soft brand is the lack of design and brand requirements, which obviously have a financial impact. As we target the luxury sector as a priority, we are



When you deal with a conversion, mandatory brand standards can sometimes be a deal-breaker as owners don't want to make massive investments to make the property compliant."

— Olivier Berrivin, MD, WorldHotels Asia Pacific.

trying to appeal to independent hotel owners who have been running their properties for years un-branded. The soft brand offer provides them with increased autonomy around things like operations and design while still benefiting from distribution and loyalty networks.

Moreover, the absence of conventional 'brand standards' and additional requirements you would typically have under a standard franchise or management agreement is helping those properties control their operational costs better. It is, therefore, no surprise to see the current level of interest with soft brands as an alternative option.

In addition to these limited requirements and to support better our partners during the pandemic, we implemented a series of measures. These include fee waivers, reduction of loyalty points charged back to properties, an increase of hotel redemption compensation, and waiving of co-op marketing fees. This move resulted in a very low number of properties leaving the network as we are into this together.

How, and why, are softer brands like WorldHotels becoming increasingly appealing in today's environment, be it with developers or travellers?

The soft brand model gives more flexibility to the developers because of the minimal number of brand requirements. When you deal with a conversion, mandatory brand standards can sometimes be a deal-breaker as owners don't want to make massive investments to make the property compliant.

From a customer's perspective, we can see a rise of 'lifestyle' expectations as travellers want authentic, local experiences, not just a stay in a hotel room that will look exactly the same, regardless of your destination. These travellers are now considering alternative booking channels as they don't only focus on money well spent but also on time well spent.

How is WorldHotels expanding its footprint in the Asia Pacific, especially in India?



☉ A resort in Bali, Phuket or Nha Trang will need more support on the leisure side,

The past two years have obviously been slower when it comes to pure brand development and the focus was actually on the retention of our portfolio. We have several offices in the APAC region (Bangkok, Beijing, Shanghai, Singapore, New Delhi, Tokyo, Sydney) and increasing our footprint is one of our top priorities.

We are witnessing a surge in projects, more specifically 'green fields', especially in Vietnam, where we expect some activations over the next couple of months. Conversions will probably take a while longer to materialise as owners in APAC want to see the situation stabilising before making a contractual commitment.

India is definitely a priority market because of its size and potential. We already have some partner properties there and we expect our portfolio to grow further in 2022, thanks to the support of our New Delhi BWH office.

Currently, WorldHotels has four collections – WorldHotels Luxury, WorldHotels Elite, WorldHotels Distinctive and WorldHotels Crafted. What are the differentiating aspects of each of them for developers and travellers?

Each Collections correspond to a need and target different customers. 'Luxury' celebrates iconic establishments that are recognised as a local landmark. The 'Elite' Collection targets upper-upscale properties recognized for the elevated level of service. We then go to the 'Distinctive' collection for upscale hotels delivering a welcoming lifestyle and unique experience in the most desirable locations. Last but not least, our recently added 'Crafted' Collection, an all-inclusive concept that captures the spirit of the destination through design and creativity resulting in an emotional connection.

Most hotel owners and developers were in survival mode throughout the pandemic. How are you working with independent and boutique hoteliers in India and small, regional chains of-

“

Conversions will probably take a while longer to materialise as owners in APAC want to see the situation stabilising before making a contractual commitment.”

— Olivier Berrivin, MD, WorldHotels Asia Pacific.

fering them the safety umbrella of larger hotel brands?

Our current portfolio in India is four properties. International travels have not resumed yet, and those hotels rely primarily on the domestic market for their production. We prioritise supporting them with our local representative office and our sales team until the situation returns to normal. Thanks to our global sales network, we'll be focusing on international corporate, MICE, and consortia segments once traveling becomes a reality again.

How is WorldHotels highlighting that it can offer asset owners and developers superior revenue based on the property's location?

Our office in New Delhi supports the Singapore regional office with leads and negotiations as direct communication is a must and nothing can replace efface-to-face negotiations. We target conversions of upper-upscale and luxury properties as a priority.

We also have several newly-built projects being discussed as those properties will open over the next couple of years and contribute to our expansion in India and the whole of APAC. The existing partnership with the Lalit Hotel Group is an additional selling tool to support our growth in such a big market and we see plenty of opportunities as we move forward in 2022 and beyond.

What kind of support do you extend to these hotel developers and owners to improve hotel profitability?

We support independent luxury hotels by delivering revenue generation services, business data, and optimisation tools through our global network of performance and revenue organization with flexible soft branding options. Our partnership is not a management agreement, and we do not involve ourselves with the day-to-day operational requirements as that lies with the hotel team.

Many independent hotels in India constantly battle the perception that they might not have the same



WorldHotels will focus on international corporate, MICE, and consortia segments once traveling becomes a reality again.

high standards as global brands. How are you helping them counter this perception?

In the luxury segment, many independent brands recognised worldwide are actually located in India (The Taj Group of Hotels, The Oberoi Group or The Leela Palaces, Hotels and Resorts). These independent groups have constantly received awards in the luxury segment for years. The Indian luxury sector has clearly nothing to prove as they deliver outstanding performance when it comes to service, and their properties are stunning. The current perception about standards might actually be something independent hotels experience more in the midscale segment vs. international brands competing in the same category.

Has it become easier to convince owners of standalone hotels to go for branding as they see the gradual shift of customers from non-branded space to branded space?

Globally, we're seeing an increasing number of independent owners who finally acknowledge the benefits and importance of joining a network for a series of obvious reasons and this applies to India as well to some extent. I'm referring to properties who rely on their respective domestic markets and try to increase ROI or ADR by tapping into the international inbound, be it corporate or leisure, depending on their locations and markets.

The international MICE sector is also a component that will motivate the properties with adequate facilities to feature themselves as the main providers of such events. India has plenty to offer when it comes to combining work and leisure activities, and all opportunities will have to be maximised to make the country a relevant choice.

When you get these independent hotels in your portfolio, how are you migrating unorganised hotel room inventory to organised segments so that these conversions add tremendous value to all the stakeholders?

In case of a conversion, the hotel has been running independently for years. They're often very well established in their respective markets, and most achieve a decent business level. Due to changing trends and increasing competition, both branded and unbranded, they have to reconsider their business model and enter an affiliation agreement under a soft brand to remain competitive.



WorldHotels' Indian portfolio encompasses four properties.

We're very flexible with the technical approach to ensure that their existing PMS can be connected to our own Central Reservation System without any significant investment and guarantee an optimized flow of business in a very timely manner. The owner will see the actual benefits of global distribution and increased exposure in a very concrete way.

We obviously provide recommendations regarding room types and market segmentation before the actual system migration. Still, it's ultimately up to the management team at the property level to acknowledge our PRO's recommendations and implement accordingly.

Do you think most of these conversions or rebranding will occur in the leisure space?

The locations of the various projects, whether it's a CBD property in New Delhi or a resort in Bali, will dictate the segmentation. Historically, we have always focused on corporate, MICE, and consortia segments as they're the ones with the better return and are less subject to seasonality. A resort in Bali, Phuket or Nha Trang will need more support on the Leisure side, and our global sales teams are also using all their resources to deliver on that front. ■

ABOUT OLIVIER BERRIVIN

In February 2021, Olivier Berrivin was appointed the Managing Director of WorldHotels Asia Pacific. He is responsible for all aspects of the operation of the brand in the region and will focus his efforts on hotel development and growing WorldHotels presence and brand awareness.

Prior to that, Olivier was overseeing all the franchised and managed properties for BWH Hotel Group in the South East Asian region, including the development of their 14 brands.

Olivier started his career in Asia back in 1993 as a management trainee with Nikko Hotels in Japan. He joined Accor in 1994 and was subsequently assigned to China, with the Novotel Brand. He stayed with Accor until 2008 and held various positions all over Asia, ranging from pre-opening and running properties, to re-brandings, mainly with Novotel and Sofitel. In 2008, Wyndham presented him an opportunity of holding a cluster role in Dubai, which he held for two years, before moving back to Thailand to open the first 'Ramada Encore' in the region. Olivier returned to Accor in 2014 before being appointed to his regional role at BWH Hotel Group in March 2015.

THE PILLARS WHO PROPPED PROCUREMENT

Advance planning, benchmarking, collaborating with local vendors – leading procurement professionals share how they adopted newer and improved processes to augment efficiency

BY PRANITA BHOSALE



While the pandemic unraveled traditional hospitality processes and practices, there was one department that stood strong and ensured that business continued as usual. These heroes, belonging to the procurement department, ensured that their hotels could over-

come supply chain challenges, manpower shortages and rising prices. What's more, they also managed to champion the cause of sustainability, which helped enhance resource ef-



We started taking payment status from vendors since we negotiated with them and they look up to us to support them in their payment terms.”

**— Basil Massey,
Corporate GM -
Purchase,
The Leela Palaces,
Hotels & Resorts**



Meeting a supplier and negotiating with them is only 10% of the procurement business.”

**— Bharanidharan
Ramaswamy,
Director of
Procurement-
APEC,
Marriott
International**

Managers Forum and he was joined by his peers Basil Massey, Corporate GM - Purchase at The Leela Place, Hotels and Resorts, Bharanidharan Ramaswamy, Director of Procurement, APEC at Marriott International, Hariharan NV, Associate VP-Materials at Indian Hotels Company Limited (IHCL) and Sudhir Gupta, Head - Procurement at ITC Hotels. During this session, the panelists addressed pertinent topics, including digital transformation in procurement, supply chain challenges, sustainability and working with local vendors.

THE ABC OF PROCUREMENT

Nagrle flagged the session by quizzing Ramaswamy about the changes Marriott implemented to keep pace with market dynamics. The latter stated that the hospitality company focused on the ABC principle, which encompasses advance planning, benchmarking and collaboration. While advance planning was challenging during the pandemic when things kept shifting constantly, adhering to this principle can help save substantial money, time and effort.

“Meeting a supplier and negotiating with them is only 10% of the procurement business,” Ramaswamy pointed out. “We need to do our homework on what, when and how much has to be purchased, which is part of advanced planning.”

While inflation drives up prices constantly, it also puts a cost pressure on hotels, especially when revenues might be low. Hence, benchmarking of products and identifying different options and sources can help alleviate this challenge. Ramaswamy suggested that benchmarking could include various factors, including past purchase prices or market indicators for different brands. In addition to benchmarking and standardisation, Marriott also used the downtime clean its internal database with vendor credentials to that the procurement team is ready to hit the ground running when business recovers.

Collaboration, according to him, is critical and it requires staying in touch with suppliers constantly.

➤ Benchmarking of products and identifying different options and sources can help alleviate the challenge of cost management.

efficiency along with cost savings, while also attracting the rising tribe of eco-conscious travellers.

To understand the road ahead, Hotelier India organized the ‘Pillars of Procurement’ webinar on 11th March, 2022. The virtual event was curated by Nitin Nagrle, Founder of Hospitality Purchasing

Moreover, it is important to not overlook the human element of this business and refrain from treating vendors merely as sources for products and services.

MORE TO OFFER

Massey shared that The Leela Place, Hotels and Resorts started organising town halls for vendors. "We give them a brief about our current operations and future plans," he added. "After all, they too underwent tough times. We started taking payment status from them because ultimately we negotiated with them and they look up to us to support them in their payment terms."

Nagrale approved this move since most hotels were cash-strapped themselves. He stated, "The purchasing manager must get involved in the payment cycle and prioritize payouts to help the supply partner to some extent."

Massey added that the hotel chain also undertook consolidation efforts, so that suppliers also get significant business, which in turn encourages to give good price quotes. "Moreover, this consolidation and offering several product requirements on a platter will inspire them to get more vendors on the platform," he pointed out.

Hariharan noted that the relationship between a vendor and a hotel are two sides of the same coin – if either fail then the coin has no value. "If we are strongest brand in the industry today, then it is partially because of our vendor partners," he emphasised. "These partners helped us tremendously during the pandemic situation. They went out of their way to offer us the best commercial terms, be it in terms of discount or product options. Hence, they are a very valuable chain in the ecosystem."

BEST OF BOTH WORLDS

When Nagrale asked the panellists on how their procurement



If we are strongest brand in the industry today, then it is partially because of our vendor partners."

**— Hariharan NV,
Associate VP-
Materials,
Indian Hotels
Company Ltd**

strategy resulted in driving competitive advantage for your business, Gupta stepped up to the plate. He stated that even when hotel operations came to a standstill, vendors emerged as the lifeline. "These partners helped, and supported, the business to run during difficult times and propelled transparency in supply chains," he claimed. "In the wake of these disruptions, a lot of flexibility was required to keep operations running and a lot of focus shifted to risk management."

He added that procurement professionals spent a better part of their day looking at trends based on historical data, coordinating with suppliers to get products on time, and

INDUSTRY VOICES

- Basil Massey, Corporate GM - Purchase, The Leela Place, Hotels and Resorts
- Bharanidharan Ramaswamy, Director of Procurement, APEC, Marriott International
- Hariharan NV - Associate VP-Materials Indian Hotels Company Limited Mumbai
- Sudhir Gupta, Head - Procurement, ITC Hotels
- Nitin Nagrale, Founder, HPMF (Moderator)

LIVE WEBINAR
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Pillars Of Procurement

EMINENT PROFESSIONALS PRESENT FRESH IDEAS
FOR AUGMENTING PROCUREMENT IN HOSPITALITY BUSINESS

11TH MARCH 2022

PANELLISTS



BASIL MASSEY
Corporate GM - Purchase
The Leela Place, Hotels & Resorts



BHARANIDHARAN RAMASWAMY
Director of Procurement, APEC,
Marriott International



HARIHARAN NV
Associate VP-Materials
Indian Hotels Company Ltd, Mumbai



SUDHIR GUPTA
Head-Procurement
ITC Hotels



NITIN NAGRALE
Founder
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Nitin Nagrale
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Vinita Bhatia
Editor, Hotelier India



Basil Massey
Corporate GM - Purchasing, The Leela Palace, Hotels and Resorts



Hariharan NV
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Director of Procurement, APFC, Marriott International



Sudhir Gupta
Head - Procurement, ITC Hotels

Procurement professionals should create a larger network of suppliers, which also gives them the power to negotiate better and get faster delivery.

this opened their minds to identifying risks. "We all paid attention to issues like capacity constraints since many vendors are also dependent on subcontractors. This realisation made us rethink existing strategies and future-proofing it for any unexpected disruptions," he mentioned.

Moreover, this enhanced visibility into procurement practices has helped augment the relationship between procurement heads and suppliers. The former also realised the merits of localised and reasonable sourcing.

Gupta noted that under normal conditions, procurement professionals would not look into these alternatives, but they were compelled to explore it during the pandemic. "For instance, whether it is groceries or amenities, the perception is that big chains always have so many international and regionals contracts, which they can leverage for volume purchase. But we were forced to have some kind of relationship with local vendors if we wanted to survive during the pandemic," Gupta noted.

Ramaswamy added that vendor development also includes listening to suppliers and understanding their pain areas. "During tough times, some vendors might want to reduce, or even exit, the business.

DEVELOPMENT PRACTICES

Often, suppliers also need assistance in terms of what products to introduce, how to do it or sell them to hoteliers. Nagrale stated that these development practices can have a bearing on a hotel's performance and invited panellists to elaborate about this.

Massey recalled how earlier, consultants for linen and upholstery would showcase swatches and ask procurement professionals to import them from Singapore or another global city. This was the industry practice till the pandemic struck.

"Today, we work with local vendors and not only save money and get a good price for the material, but we also benefit from faster delivery time. We could also monitor that production personally. This has become a landmark shift across most product verticals," he reiterated.

So, while earlier many hotels would procure furniture from China for their properties, today local vendors are able to match the design, price, delivery and even offer better quality.

Interestingly, vendor partner development is not merely about replacing a product or creating it locally; it also encompasses hand holding the supplier to bring them up to the level of expectations



In the wake of these disruptions, a lot of flexibility was required to keep operations running and a lot of focus shifted to risk management."

**— Sudhir Gupta,
Head - Procurement,
ITC Hotels**



The vendor partner first needs to understand what the hotel company wants and then they need to be educated on how to reach there."

**— Nitin Nagrale,
Founder, HPMF**

for the organisation. "The partner first needs to understand what the hotel company wants and then they need to be educated on how to reach there," Nagrale explained. "This could include overhauling their existing production practices or enhancing their technical knowhow."

Adopting the role of a mentor helps to break the tendency to work with singular vendors. Procurement professionals can instead create a larger network of suppliers, which also gives them the power to negotiate better and get faster delivery.

Hariharan added that in addition to developing a setup of local suppliers, IHCL has also helped these vendors to export their products, be it fabrics or furniture. "For one of our international projects, we imported from India, which gives the Make in India initiative a massive fillip."

All panellists agreed that the ongoing Ukraine war, escalating fuel costs and rising freight charges have also increased import duties. At times like these, the only way to control costs and have continual supply of products is by aligning with local vendors.

The pandemic might have thrown several curveballs at hoteliers. However, it also shed light on newer practices that could be adopted to make them efficient and agile. Check out Hotelier India's YouTube channel to list to the panellists of 'Pillars of Procurement' and see how these professionals pivoted the challenges by adopting innovative strategies. ■

THE EVOLVING FACE OF HUMAN CAPITAL IN HOSPITALITY

The report by JLL and The People Network sheds light on emerging trends, challenges, and outlook for the hospitality sector with a specific focus on HR, during these unusual times

The hospitality industry is currently adapting to the new world order where the transformation of culture, people, technology, and organisational processes are amalgamating and progressing rapidly. The revamping of the workforce is real, and the leadership is changing forms.

Well-defined new age values and shared beliefs will ultimately augment profitability and shall replace archaic management structures. A research by JLL India and The People Network indicates internal alignments and collaborations with key stakeholders will be vital to achieving greater heights.

The pandemic has forced industries to innovate and re-imagine all the existing processes, which are likely to last beyond the era of social distancing. From simpler check-in experiences to more efficient energy management systems, most of these changes will stay with us and break the chain of traditional service and operational standards.

The last two years have given industry leaders enough time to re-evaluate the long-established standards of human capital management and helped them move toward leaner and more efficient staffing models. Broader, more-interesting jobs will lead



PRODUCTIVITY MANAGEMENT STRATEGIES/INITIATIVES

Ranked in the order of priority



1

Empowering staff through upskilling and dual responsibilities



2

Strengthening the training, SOP and MIS systems to consistently deliver target



3

Incentives and dynamic compensation, and career path strategy to facilitate a higher rate of talent retention



4

Better work-life balance



5

Retention of skilled manpower at Staff level

to stronger employee engagement and possibly even higher wages and leaner staffing structures – making it a win-win situation.

SURVEY RESULTS AND INFERENCES

This study attempts to evaluate the sentiment across stakeholders and decision-makers of the hotel sector and outline the offerings that companies are providing to re-establish



the sustained focus they have on employee retention and engagement.

Over the last few months, most hotels that are still in the game have been fully operational, albeit with 20-30% fewer staff than in the pre-pandemic era. This is because staff absorbed by other industries over the last two years have not returned to the hotel industry. With several new openings on the horizon, the Indian hotel industry is now grappling with the shortage of skilled talent and the resultant increase in demand for trained workforce that has spiked the pressure on retaining key talent across the hotel industry.

Over 68% of the sample set voted that multiskilling and up-

skilling would significantly impact the traditional organisation structure. This translates and points to the other two key takeaways. The first is digitisation, the most effective and quantifiable method of imparting learning at the fingertips and can be made accessible anywhere on demand. The second is that leaner organisational structures can be accomplished more easily only when critical skills are

separated from critical roles, and staff members are equipped to perform on more than one competency via dynamic learning and development tools.

At this most critical juncture, the industry needs to reinvent the hospitality model, starting from its core foundations - structuring more efficient operations and taking lesser people to execute. The industry needs to invest more strongly in its workforce and cultivate the backbone of the industry. The considerable role of cross-training cannot be understated. There are opportunities for companies to combine tasks, skills, and responsibilities to deliver a superior hospitality experience around fewer and better-compensated jobs.

Having survived the thick of the lockdowns, over 78% of responses have also embraced leaner organisation structures as a business strategy that is here to stay. The same would be achievable through strategic digitisation of select, non-guest facing roles combined with outsourcing of select unit and/or cluster level functions.

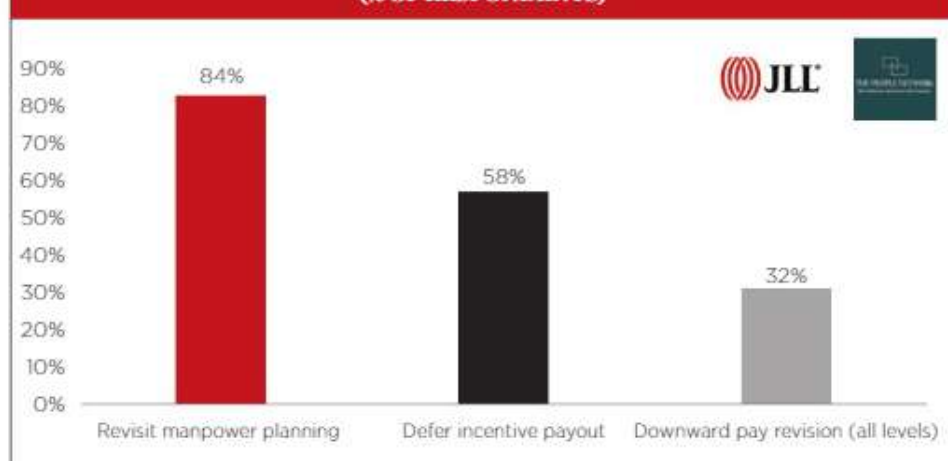
When asked about managing human capital productivity, over 65% of responses have echoed empowerment through

KEY TAKEAWAYS FROM THE SURVEY

- Flatter organisation structure: Emergence of centralisation & clustering of roles as a key business strategy
- Learning and development: Continued focus on empowering staff through upskilling and dual responsibilities, separating critical skills from critical roles
- Salary normalization: Restoration of compensation to pre-COVID norms with traditional pay structures and increments
- Career path: Define a clear and distinct career strategy to boost talent retention
- Brand building across the organisation: Rebuilding organisation trust and culture towards enhancing employment branding.

The survey results have echoed learning and development opportunities, enhanced digitization, and leaner organizational structures as the central theme of their human capital strategy.

LONG TERM INTERVENTIONS CONSIDERED IF THE COVID-19 SITUATION PERSISTS (% OF RESPONDENTS)



training combined with dynamic compensation and career path strategy as promising avenues of talent retention.

The other motivations that reinforce the benefits of learning as a valuable offering are the cross-applications of service industry training. The last few years have witnessed a significant boom in the service business industry and general service standards expectations across other industries, which have also become distinguishing factors for guests. At such times candidates with holistic hospitality training and experience make valuable recruits across various sectors, making their skillset applicable in multiple ways.

In light of this, the majority has voted for the compensation strategy hereon to align with pre-pandemic norms, with traditional pay and increments structures. However, almost 40% have voted for the restructuring of compensation with deferred variable pay structures and a focus on performance considerations that include financial parameters and long-term strategic goals.

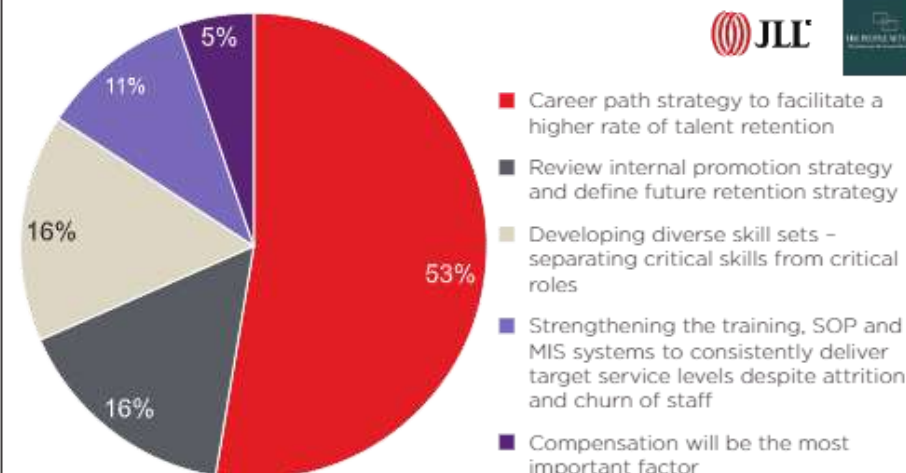
EVOLUTION OF BUSINESS STRATEGY DURING THE PANDEMIC



FUTURE MANPOWER REQUIREMENTS

JLL is tracking a pipeline of approximately 52,000 keys in various

TOP FOCUS AREA THAT WILL DEFINE AND DETERMINE THE FUTURE OF THE HOSPITALITY SECTOR FROM A PEOPLE PERSPECTIVE



GOING FORWARD: (RANKED IN ORDER OF PRIORITY)

- 1** Rebuilding organisation culture & employment branding
- 2** Adopting artificial intelligence tools and robotics technology to reduce human interaction
- 3** Need to review Ratio of permanent employee Vs contractual employee
- 4** Creating awareness and Implementation of ESG initiatives

stages of development to be realised over the next 3 - 4 year period. Tier 1 cities have always dominated business investments over the last two decades as they provide world-class infrastructure, connectivity and attract the best talent from all over India. The hotel industry also has the largest inventory in Tier-1 cities for the same reasons, amounting to approximately 47% of overall supply.

However, as key markets mature and business and leisure interest spread wider, the hotel industry is witnessing a significant shift in upcoming hotel supply, with approximately 43% of the planned pipeline concentrated in Tier-2 & Tier 3 markets. While staffing in these locations will require a significant effort and

commitment from the industry to train and upskill local talent, it also presents a huge opportunity to encourage and contribute to social and economic development in new regions.

With staffing ratios seeing some rationalization, we expect direct workforce requirements for the hotel industry to be 100,000 - 150,000 hotel professionals, apart from the huge boost to ancillary travel and trade industries.

LOOKING AHEAD

According to us, the leaders and managers in the service-hospitality space will have to walk the extra mile to regain professionals' confidence across the cadre. Instilling a sense of pride and creating an environment of trust will be paramount in the upcoming few months. During this time, the success and failure of any organisation will be determined by one singular and essential factor, i.e., "culture and quality of talent in-house". Furthermore, success in any business depends not only on attracting, retaining, and motivating superior talent, but also on creating a robust compensation structure that is competitive and equitable with other service sector jobs in the market.

With a determined focus, all stakeholders in the larger eco-system comprising hospitality companies, hospitality educational institutes, various associations, and trade bodies will have to work more cohesively to demonstrate a collective spirit for reshaping the industry, thereby creating a story of success for the service - hospitality sector.

Employees of this era will judge potential employers and leaders with a microscopic lens and ultimately be guided by their emotional conscience and wisdom. We need to use technology and data not to drive numbers but to wisely build the ground rules to effectively change the internal dynamics of power and relations. Finally, successful organisations of tomorrow will have to be in a constant state of evolution. ■



→ Owing to the number of apps and high volume for aggregators, restaurants have seen an increased need for integrations to manage all their third party connected operations from the PoS.

TAKING MATTERS INTO THEIR HAND

F&B establishments are increasingly adopting their online ordering platform to take direct orders without a large upfront cost and without paying commissions to aggregators

BY PRANITA BHOSALE

While many F&B establishments had online ordering even in the pre-COVID era, the pandemic forced them to embrace this wholeheartedly as their very survival hinged on it. However, most of them leveraged third-party platforms for better and wider customer reach.

However, Parthiv Patel, Co-Founder and CEO of Petpooja, pointed out that they can develop their ordering platform without investing too much finance, time, and effort. Multiple platforms operating on a SaaS model offer a monthly payment module (SaaS) for restaurants to create their ordering website.

So, while earlier these establishments had to pay a developer upwards of Rs 1 lakh to design everything from scratch, they can get their ordering website for fewer than INR 1000 per month from companies like Thrive or Petpooja.

Patel cited how Noshi, a pan-Asian restaurant in Delhi and Gurugram, has seen good business results since adopting the online ordering platform (OOP). Not only have their large base of their loyal

customers shifted to direct ordering from the brand instead of opting for aggregators, but they can also take direct orders without a large upfront cost and no commission. He believes this is just the beginning; soon, more restaurateurs will follow suit.

During the pandemic, many restaurateurs were bogged by high rent, but even more, they were affected by inventory costs. How can they leverage technology to reduce this continual financial strain?

The first step for optimising any process is knowing where you currently stand. There are two key features in

this regard that allow restaurants to know their accurate inventory and food costs and take appropriate action.

The first is the Variance Report, which allows restaurant owners to know the difference between the defined recipe and the actual consumption of raw materials. Suppose 150 grams of cheese is mandated in a pizza. But often, using this report, restaurant owners find that 180 or even 200 grams is used on each pizza. This discrepancy takes away the margin and the customer's experience since there is a deviation from the original well-researched recipe.

The second is the Food Cost Report that shows the cost of the last dish sold in the restaurant. Raw material prices keep fluctuating, especially for perishables. Hence, it becomes imperative to know the live food cost to adjust the menu item price for any price shocks in raw materials.

To navigate the pandemic's changes, many restaurateurs turned towards the POS system. Have their expectations from this technology changed over the months, be it ease of use, affordability, and reliability?

Three significant shifts have happened regarding what restaurateurs want from their PoS. The first is the need for simplicity. Due to a temperamental labour market, billers and staff turnover have increased, which led to the need for a simple system such that the staff can adopt it within a short timeframe.

Moreover, restaurateurs have understood the need for a cloud-based system to manage their outlets. Since outlet owners don't sit at the billing desk anymore, they need a cloud PoS to know what's happening in the restaurant.

There has been a significant proliferation in B2C apps to help customers interact with restaurants, be it for loyalty, online, or table ordering. Online ordering volumes have also significantly increased. Owing to the number of apps and the high volume for aggregators, restaurants have seen an increased need for integrations to manage all their third-party connected operations from the PoS itself.

What are the merits and challenges of an in-house OOP?

Marketing is the most considerable challenge for an in-house ordering solution. Most restaurateurs believe in the 'build it, and they will come' approach. That is just not true. Restaurateurs have to put a lot of effort into marketing to shift their loyal customers away from aggregators and into their OOP.

The second issue is logistics. It's a Catch-22 since unless there are a lot of orders, it doesn't make sense to have your fleet, and unless you have that, you won't be able to deliver orders.

Some third-party hyperlocal logistics players have been gaining ground. But they find it challenging to offer riders more than 70% of the time.

How can they make it more lucrative for customers to opt for their in-house OOP?

Firstly, prices on a restaurant's OOP has to be lower than on aggregators. Offering discount codes on total orders or reducing menu prices directly, or conversely having higher prices on aggregators, which

is more prevalent, is one way to do it.

However, we believe a more sustainable approach is offering



“A 5% increase in diner retention can impact restaurant revenue by over 40%.” - Parthiv Patel, Co-Founder, and CEO, Petpooja

loyal customers a few exclusive dishes only available on the restaurant's OOP. If it has ten bestsellers, they can offer four as exclusives only on their OOP and keep rotating them. Diners who want those items will have to order off the restaurant's website only. It's a sustainable, albeit a little harsh, way to push customers to experience direct ordering.

Ahmedabad's Lollo Rosso is an excellent example of this. Its buffalo chicken sushi wasn't available on aggregators for the longest time. I loved that dish. Every time I wanted to eat it, I had to order from its OOP. Since I now have a complete profile on their ordering module and don't need to enter my information every time, all my orders are now placed on their website.

How can integration of loyalty programs with their POS help convert first-time diners into regulars and regulars into promoters?

Loyalty programs significantly increase retention if used correctly. The integrations allow billers to allocate and redeem loyalty points easily, removing friction from the process.

A 5% increase in diner retention can impact restaurant revenue by over 40%. Hence loyalty and marketing automation to stay on top of customer's minds must be a principal focus for restaurants.

How can F&B players boost their customer spend with targeted marketing campaigns that seamlessly fuse these campaigns into their POS systems?

The first step to marketing is knowing your customer. With customer order preference and average spending, restaurants can create buckets for classifying diners. They can then send targeted notifications via email, SMS, and WhatsApp to stay on top of mind.

For doing all of this, PoS system data is a must because it gives a rich customer profile. For sending automated campaigns also, PoS integration is a necessity since a PoS will give the trigger on when and to whom to fire the campaigns to. ■



THE BEAUTY OF BOUTIQUE

A look at how luxury boutique hotels have used design and personalised experiences to stand out and compete with larger brands

BY EKANSH SAXENA, CO-FOUNDER, TOUCH DOWN EARTH

In the 1980s, a few small hotels in metropolitan cities like London and New York started what is now termed as the boutique trend. These small hotels, which weren't affiliated with any chain, offered an intimate service to their guests.

40 years on, this trend has become a successful working model for hotels worldwide. In fact, the luxury boutique segment has become increasingly popular in the wake of the pandemic.

When people started traveling again, they were cautious of their hygiene and safety. The boutique hotels, with their personalised approach, gained their guest's confidence due to curated service and a lesser number of rooms.

DISTINCTIVE FEATURES OF BOUTIQUE HOTELS

While there are no clear check-boxes that hoteliers have to tick to earn the 'boutique hotel' title, a few principles that guide the

category include:

- A boutique hotel doesn't have more than 80 rooms and is located in the city centre or a very trendy area.
- A boutique hotel offers a personal touch to every guest.
- It has an artistic architectural style and features designer decor along with the availability of the newest technological gadgets.
- A boutique facility gels with the local culture. For instance, local traditional cuisine is offered at boutique hotels.

- Boutique facilities work independently and are usually not part of a chain of hotels. However, with the success of the boutique concept, major hotel chains are now offering their own intimate boutique brand.

In India, successful boutique hotels offer bespoke hospitality, authentic Indian décor, tailored menus, luxury services, refreshing greenery, and what not. These include Bari Kothi Heritage Hotel in West Bengal, RAAS Hotels & Rohet House in Rajasthan, and Glenburn Tea Estate & Glenburn Penthouse in West Bengal.

BLURRING LINES BETWEEN BOUTIQUE AND LUXURY HOTELS

Like luxury, boutique hotels also cater to an affluent crowd and don't compromise on professionalism. Despite being 'small' in terms of the number of rooms as compared to their luxury counterparts, boutique hotels also have an unconventional personality.

The biggest USP of a boutique hotel is its personalised experience. They cater to the specific needs of their repeat clients. For instance, a boutique facility understands the room and meal preferences of its repeat clients.

Also, rooms are customised in accordance with the needs of the clients. So, a family room may have bunk bed facilities and a room for a gym enthusiast is likely to have yoga mats and workout machines. To ensure that the clients feel valued, guests are greeted with their names (Hello! Mr Saxena) rather than a formal 'Hello sir'.

MONEY MATTERS

Renowned American poet Maya Angelou once rightly said, "I've learnt that people will forget what you said, people will forget what you did, but people will never forget how you made them feel." This also holds true in the context of hotels. Luxury isn't necessarily how much money you spend on your stay, but your experience after the money you spend.

In the past few years, travellers have shown a great inclination towards boutique hotels due to a more individualised approach and in the foreseeable future, they will seek more memorable experiences. To this end, boutique hotels must provide the comforts of luxury accommodation along with ensuring a fully customised stay. While being more agile in providing customised and personalised services, boutique hotels should also not discount luxuries like spas, lavish meal spreads, and other such offerings.

Without going overboard with their prices, boutique hotels must lean towards providing elegance and luxury. Investment in decor is a must for boutique spaces.

Their hotel rooms may include artwork, wallpaper, funky paint colours, eclectic light figures, antique furnishings, and more. Unlike the identical rooms of a chain hotel, every room can have a different look and feel in a boutique facility.

Attention to detail gives a distinguished personality to these spaces. Such establishments often play with themes that run throughout the hotel. They also offer a great selection of things to do for travellers depending upon the area they are located in. Boutique spaces should incorporate details of their city through what they offer and serve to their guests. However, in contrast to luxury hotels that usually rely on providing incredibly luxurious amenities, boutique hotels should focus on curating services and offerings to offer an elevated experience to their guests.



Ekansh Saxena, Co-founder, Touch Down Earth.

“In India, several boutique hotels have successfully adopted the low-waste model, promoting the 'green travel' trend.”
— Ekansh Saxena, Co-founder, Touch Down Earth

RE-AWAKENING OF LUXURY BOUTIQUE HOTEL SECTOR

In India, several boutique hotels have successfully adopted the low-waste model, promoting the 'green travel' trend. Rather than going for a tie-up with global brands, these hotels offer a collection of indigenous organic toiletries.

Over the years, boutique hotels have created a niche among millennials and baby boomers who enjoy a creative and 'Instagram-worthy' space. An ideal boutique hotel should combine the excellence of a four or five-star hotel with the personality of a bed and breakfast while offering a customised experience.

From the owner's perspective, running a boutique hotel is challenging as most of these facilities don't have the backing of a global brand. Not to forget, guests at these hotels look for a more intimate experience and loyalty perks. This requires a serious effort by the staff. However, it is also rewarding as customers greatly value the personalised service that a 'cookie-cutter' property can hardly boast of. ■



APPEALING TO A NEW GENERATION OF BUYERS

Here are three quick ways to prepare your sales team for tapping this dynamic audience

BY KEN SHANLEY, FOUNDER, VINDOW

Today's buyers don't need slow, high-touch service, delivered in an overly obsequious tone. They love facts and straight-talking salespeople.

As business analysts dissect the latest numbers regarding the ongoing labour shortage, commonly known as 'The Great Resignation', they're uncovering some startling trends that suggest the problem is far from over. According to a Goldman Sachs survey referenced in a Forbes article of the 40% of workers who say they plan to quit their current job in the near future, two-thirds of them are actually retiring, and they say they're not coming back.

So, hotels need to get ready for a new way of doing business because a new generation of buyers is entering the marketplace – and your sales team better be ready!

You may be thinking: "Why would I need to change my sales strategies and processes to suit these new buyers? I've been using these strategies for years and they've always worked!"

Here's why. Today, nothing is the same as it was two years ago, full stop. The new generation of group accommodation buyers – corporate planners, government/association agencies, travel managers, meeting/event planners, third-party sourcing agents, etc. – are younger, tech savvy and expect on-demand answers.

Hence, hoteliers need to align their sales strategy to match the way that this new generation wants to conduct business. Making these updates to your sales strategy now is the best way for you to stand out from your competition, earn more bookings and increase revenues from the new generation of buyers.

Convinced yet? I thought so. Now the important question is this: what changes do you actually need to make?



Contracts with overly restrictive terms and conditions won't win bookings from buyers."

1. THE NEW STANDARD FOR SERVICE

The new generation of group accommodations buyers expects a different standard of service; because the way they live their lives is much different – much faster – than their predecessors. They expect their business interactions to reflect those differences.

So, what does that mean, practically speaking, for your sales strategy?

Forget the 'schmooz!' Today's buyers don't need slow, high-touch service, delivered in an overly obsequious tone. They love facts and straight-talking salespeople. To build customer loyalty among the new generation of buyers, hotels must be able to deliver solutions quickly (I'm talking "yesterday"!).

Today's buyer prefers to do business online, whenever possible – from selecting destinations, to putting together an RFP and inviting

hotels to submit a bid, to negotiation and finalisation of the contract – without having to interact with multiple members of your sales and service team, IRL (in real life). Smart hoteliers empower everyone on their teams to react, respond and commit, enabling them to book more business every day, all day.

With the normalisation of work from home (WFH) and preference for doing business online, the new generation of buyer likes to work on their own terms, on their own schedule, in an online environment that allows them to remain incognito and as efficient as possible – which brings me to Tip #2...

2. HIGH-SPEED IS NO LONGER JUST FOR CAR CHASES

Being used to the instantaneous nature of doing everything, online, 24/7, the new generation of buyers expect business transactions to move equally quickly; turnaround times must be shorter on RFPs, with priority being given to hotels who respond quickly, with a complete and competitive bid.

Beyond RFPs, communication in general is expected to be quicker and your sales team will need to be available, both by phone and text/WhatsApp/iMessage/online chat, to provide information immediately when a request comes in – even outside of traditional business hours.

As COVID has made it possible for many people to work remotely, there has been a huge uptick of workers making the move

to become digital nomads, working from their laptops as they travel the world. So, even if you are in the US and receiving an RFP from an American company, the buyer may be physically located in Bali, or Australia, or France, or Spain, meaning that your business needs to be ready to respond in a very timely manner, no matter the time zone.

3. FLEXIBILITY – FINANCIAL REWARDS

As you can see from Tip #1 and #2, the new generation of buyers is all about flexibility in the way that they want to do business with your property – and, their need for flexibility doesn't end there. They will also expect increased flexibility in contract terms and will not respond well to rigidity in any aspect of their business interactions.

Contracts with overly restrictive terms and conditions won't win bookings from buyers when the pandemic has already created so much uncertainty around travel, in general. With new variants popping up regularly, hotels that respond to pent-up demand with flexible terms will fare better than their competition.

In turn, hotels and other suppliers need technology that can help them manage their business more efficiently and with less staff. As the travel industry has been so deeply impacted by the pandemic, updating your hotel's sales strategy will help you prosper in these difficult times and position you for continued success with this new generation of buyers.

The good news is, if you can deliver service and information in the way in which these new buyers prefer to work, they are incredibly loyal; in this scenario, fast doesn't equate to fickle – and investment in updates to infrastructure and strategies will be rewarded with repeat customers.

Think of 2022 as a whole new world, a whole new marketplace, and create a whole new set of sales strategies to ensure that your property is able to survive – and more importantly, THRIVE – no matter how the pandemic affects the travel industry. 📌



➊ The new generation of buyers expect business transactions to move equally quickly; turnaround times must be shorter on RFPs, with priority being given to hotels who respond quickly, with a complete and competitive bid.

CRS + PMS = SUCCESS!

The hybrid CRS+PMS is the future of reservation management for hotels – and the future is now!

BY GREG SWAIN, PRESIDENT-LOGICAL SOLUTION, ZUCCHETTI NORTH AMERICA LLC



Today, hotels expect a quick, easy and turnkey solution and, as such, the solution's UX should be easy-to-use, for even the least tech-savvy person on your team.

Everyone who has been working in hotel technology knows that one of the biggest hurdles for hotels in adopting operational technology is the difficulties in fully integrating all their systems. We've all heard 'we integrate to that' (eye roll).

Integration between systems can be time-consuming and costly. Even once the initial integration is finalised, there can be issues where integration fails, and business losses often happen as a result. Whether it's a lag in the data transfer time that causes an unfortunate overbooking, or an error in either rates or inventory, these tech struggles can wreak havoc on a hotel's operations and guest satisfaction ratings, both in the short and long-term. In fact, the integrations between solutions are the most common "breaking points" in a hotel's tech stack.

Given that this is such a widespread problem for all technology vendors – including those offering CRS, PMS, RMS, Channel Manager, Booking Engine, Business Intelligence, etc. – something must be done to address this issue. I'm here to share an idea that I believe will be the solution to all our problems (at least, for hotels



The PMS' strength is in the management of a hotel's internal operations, but not as effective for managing complex rate structures or inventory types."

and CRS/PMS vendors):

Instead of having a CRS and a PMS, both sold to you by different vendors, imagine having a CRS and a PMS, combined into one solution, offered by a single vendor!?

The hybrid CRS+PMS is the future of reservation management for hotels – and the future is now!

Here's why...

Combining the solutions would eliminate the necessity for integrations, and the 'oh, so common' breaking points that they bring – and the mistakes that follow; this is the most obvious reason that combining the two solutions would resolve so many



➔ The CRS offers much more sophisticated rate options and inventory control for hoteliers, especially for those who want to offer multiple, complex rate types.

frustrations for hoteliers (and, also for the vendors who are responsible for troubleshooting the integration issues that they will inevitably face), but it's not the only one.

We all know that the PMS' strength is in the management of a hotel's internal operations, but not as effective for managing complex rate structures or inventory types. The CRS offers much more sophisticated rate options and inventory control for hoteliers, especially for those who want to offer multiple, complex rate types.

When combined, the hybrid CRS+PMS would provide the internal operational support that hoteliers need to ensure that the guest has the best possible booking experience and the hotel stays profitable and functioning, while pulling accurate rates and inventory from the CRS, in real-time – giving hoteliers the best of both worlds, without all the tech headaches!

Choosing a hybrid solution has other huge benefits, especially if you pick the right technology provider (this is key for your success!). When you're choosing a hybrid CRS+PMS, look for a company that offers a centralized support system that is available 24/7, so you can always reach someone, night or day, if there is a problem or you have questions.

Additionally, the company should offer proper training, both during the onboarding process and, also, as needed when/if a new staff joins the team. Without a proper understanding of how to use the solution(s) properly, you won't be able to get as much ROI

out of your tech spend, so training and support are essential – especially for someone new or early in their revenue management career.

Today, hotels expect a quick, easy and turnkey solution and, as such, the user experience (UX) of the solution is important; it needs to be easy-to-use, for even the least tech-savvy person on your team; this is imperative for your property's success in revenue generation, because you will need to leverage ALL the features offered by your solution to maximize your results and ROI.

So, do I have you convinced?

We could say goodbye to the days of last-minute calls from hotel clients whose integrations have experienced issues, while making the solutions that hoteliers depend upon, easier to use and more reliable than ever before. What do we have to lose?! As an industry, let's all go hybrid! 📌



READY-TO-COOK, READY-TO-EAT, READY TO BOOM

Most HoReCa establishments rely on ready to cook products as it simplifies food preparation and helps streamline the overall operations in a big way

The HoReCa business worldwide was probably one of the hardest hit by the pandemic. The Indian food services market was no exception. According to a report by the National Restaurant Association of India (NRAI), it witnessed a 53% degrowth in FY2021 compared to the previous fiscal year. This contraction in the food services industry was the direct cause of closure of over 25% of food business operators, further resulting in the loss of 2.4 million Indian jobs.

However, the story seems very different from how starkly everything started. There was an opportunity to be explored yet again in the middle of a crisis. Before COVID, restaurants, cloud kitchens, QSRs (Quick-Service-Restaurants) did not rely on many Ready-to-Eat (RTE) or Ready-to-Cook (RTC) products.

This sector's real world dependence on these kind of products was about 8% before the pandemic hit. Two years down, that figure has now rocketed to 40-50% and in the case of bigger brands it's as high as 80%. Post COVID the same kitchens and restaurants are relying entirely on the manufacturers in the RTE/RTC sector.

COMING IN, HELPING OUT

RTC has proved to be a silver bullet in this time of crisis. The entire HoReCa sector had some very tough choices to make. The un-

availability of staff owing to the stay-at-home advisory, added cost pressures, supply chain bottlenecks and several other factors were pushing the sector into degrowth but thanks to the RTC sector, they found a quick fix to these problems.

The entire HoReCa sector has pivoted massively to RTC products after the pandemic hit to adapt to new demand trends and customer expectations. So much so, that RTC products have now become a part of the regular mix of establishments from the biggest of brands to the smallest of outlets.

The segment is expected to grow ferociously and will drive the boom in the HoReCa segment as it simplifies food preparation and helps streamline the overall operations of restaurants in a big way. The stay at

home advisory has given people a chance to expand their culinary palette and bring home the joy of dining out.

Licious, a company that sells ready-to-eat meat spreads, ready-to-cook kebabs, seafood and marinated seafood saw a phenomenal jump in their sales. Amongst other examples, there's one of the fresh packaged food brand - iD Fresh Foods which saw its packaged paratha sales go through the roof.

This goes to demonstrate the sheer number of people cooking and eating at home. People are choosing safer and better quality food products and this shift in consumer behaviour is expected to be long-term, if not everlasting.

GROWTH DRIVERS

The growth in the market has been driven by increasing urbanisation and people moving from tier-2 to tier-1 and metropolitan cities. Changing consumer demographics such as the rise of nuclear families and double-income households coupled with a busy lifestyle have also been contributing factors.

These developments have made it faster and more convenient for consumers to procure better quality, safer ready-to-cook products than before. This change in consumer behaviour has given rise to a new food category - Preservative free RTE and RTC food products.

If you've managed to see Sony Television's new entrepreneurial show 'Shark Tank India', companies like Wakao - an RTE food company that advertises the use of packaged, ready-to-eat and cook jackfruit as a mock meat are on the rise. Grocery delivery companies across different models - from daily micro-deliveries to on-demand and full-stack next day delivery players - have also played



“The lack of digital options to manoeuvre supply chains was a big problem as raw materials were often sourced from multiple sets of vendors, fragmented players and even SMEs.”
—Amit Bansal, CEO, Solv.

a vital role in garnering access and visibility for RTC and packaged fresh food brands. At the same time, it solves supply chain bottlenecks to cater to consumers' needs.

Until now, the major challenge that led to the limited growth of this segment was the lack of infrastructure for the supply and storage of RTC products on the retail shelf. Companies like Solv are solving this problem by providing cold-chain logistics services, making it much easier for Ready-to-Cook manufacturers to grow their reach and business.

OVERCOMING SUPPLY CHAIN CHALLENGES

Talking about the sector from the B2B lens, as traditional supply chains serving Indian businesses dried up amidst COVID-19 imposed restrictions, B2B ecommerce players grabbed the market by coming to the aid of raw material starved businesses. B2B marketplace companies have seen huge percentage growth volumes and revenues since 2020.

The lack of digital options to manoeuvre supply chains was a big problem as raw materials were often sourced from multiple sets of vendors, fragmented players and even SMEs. Traditional supply chains were replete with ad-hoc processes.

There are companies that are helping RTE/RTC companies and manufacturers to not only streamline their supply chains but also offering compelling value propositions in terms of price, variety, quality and conveniences such as door-step delivery all through a simple digital interface - allowing them to focus on growing and expanding their businesses.

Going by the way things stand at the moment, in the days ahead, RTE and RTC markets will develop immensely. The pivot can be considered a breakthrough moment for India's food manufacturing industry and moving forward the demand for these products will only increase going by the current trends. Which gives the industry immense potential to be a major contributor to the Indian economy. ■



➤ Fresh packaged food brand, iD Fresh Foods, has seen its packaged paratha sales go through the roof.



SNACKING KEY TO MIND, BODY AND SOUL: MONDELEZ INTERNATIONAL'S STATE OF SNACKING REPORT

Social media continues to inspire new snack choices as consumers continue to strike a balance between indulgent and nourishing snacks

Mondelez International announced the launch of its third global consumer trends study, State of Snacking report, highlighting the broader role snacking plays in the lives of consumers' along with insights on emerging trends driven by pandemic induced changes. This year again, Indians emerged trend setters as snacking took over traditional meals at a statistically significant pace. With 74% adults preferring small meals throughout the day than large ones, and 81% indicating that they replace at least one meal each day with a snack, consumers are always on the search for the right snack.

The findings from the State of Snacking report not only demonstrate the expanded meaning of snacking in consumers' lives, but also indicate opportunities to fulfill the demand gap in the world of snacking through future innovations across categories. In fact, bite sized moments of flavor and enjoyment are becoming increasingly indispensable.

76% adults mentioned that they could not imagine a world without a sweet treat during their day. Majority of Indians say they feel the same way about chocolate (78%) and birthday

cake (78%). Furthermore, food products ranked No.1, with 75% consumers looking for maximum choice in the category when making a purchase.

Anil Viswanathan, VP- Marketing, Mondelez India, added, "Snacking remains intrinsic to India's consumption culture, enabling everyday social moments, being a source of comfort and providing needful indulgence. However, with the evolving role that snacking now plays in our lives, Indian consumers are getting a lot more experimental. Going beyond variety, taste and accessibility, our study indicates a clear connection between snacking and wellbeing, with consumers acknowl-



→ Bite-sized moments of flavour and enjoyment are becoming increasingly indispensable.

edging indulgence the right way. With it is also the growing demand for judicious purchase choices- right from the ingredients, manufacturing to packaging. These insights only strengthen our purpose to empower people to snack right as we lead the future of snacking."

Here are the key highlights from the India report:

SNACK- FOOD FOR MIND, BODY & SOUL

Consumers are seeking a variety of snacks that can ultimately deliver a balance between functional and indulgent foods. The parameters for physical, mental and emotional health vary and there is no one snack fits all approach

- Snacking is a key exponent to nourishing each of these areas as consumers say they are looking for snacks to improve emotional (88%), mental (86%), and physical (83%) health.
- 8 in 10 also say they are looking for snacks that help them improve their social health, craving bite-sized ways to connect with others.

SNACK CONTINUES TO REPLACE MEALS

- 81% Indians claim to replace at least one meal each day with a snack, as opposed to 62% globally
- 78% look forward to snacks (eaten h/w or instead of meals) during the day, more than the meals
- In fact, 74% prefer to eat many small meals throughout the day, as opposed to a few large ones

HONORING INDULGENCE THE RIGHT WAY

While the pandemic has given way to more indulgence, as per the 2021 State of Snacking report, 9 in 10 Indian adults (88%) shared they are snacking more, a 20% jump from the global average.

- Consumers are striving for a healthy balance between taste and health. 77% consumers agree that certain snacks can be reserved for the enjoyment of snacking rather than worrying about nutrition.
- Portion control and labeling are also gaining notice for consumers with 86% stating say it is important for them to have control over the portion size and ingredients in their snacks.

SNACK ON DEMAND

The report tracks purchase patterns of consumers revealing that 82% Indian consumers expect to buy their choice of snacks whenever they want and 83% agree that it should be a channel of their choice.

- Convenience (80%) and Variety (86%) take the front seat for purchase of snacks. Consumers are now also open to newer avenues of shopping and have widened their palates.

SOCIAL MEDIA AS A SNACKING INSPIRATION

It's an era of rapid change and consumers are now open to taking new risks with snacking experimentation. 90% of Indian consumers say they "look forward to trying new snacks".

- Majority of this risk-taking attitude is inspired by social media, as 9 in 10 adults mentioned that they prefer their social feeds to be as appetizing as their plates. Topping their list of priorities with food content rich with sensory experience, interesting food trends, grocery hauls. The 2021 State of Snacking report, developed in partnership with consumer polling specialist, The Harris Poll, and supported with trends intelligence from Nextatlas, complements Mondelez International's robust snacking trends data bank with rich insights from among thousands of consumers across 12 countries, including India. 

MOVERS & Shakers

DOUBLETREE SUITES BY HILTON BANGALORE APPOINTS AJITH CHERUVATTATH AS EXECUTIVE CHEF



DoubleTree Suites by Hilton Bangalore had appointed Ajith Cheruvattath as its Executive Chef. Having an experience of more than two decades in food production, he possesses extensive culinary knowledge in international and Indian cuisine.

Prior to joining DoubleTree Suites by Hilton Bangalore, Cheruvattath was the Executive Chef at Sarovar Group of Hotels, Bangalore. He has also worked with brands including Radisson Atria Bangalore, Trident Kochi, ITC Fortune Bangalore, Le-Meridien Bangalore and Carnival Cruise Lines.

Having an innovative approach to setting the stage for a customised dining experience, Cheruvattath was a part of the pre-opening team of two Indian restaurants in New Zealand where he was also overseeing operations as a Head Chef.

In his new role, Chef Cheruvattath will be responsible for supervising smooth functioning of the F&B outlets and managing culinary operations at the hotel. Armed with B.Sc in Hotel Management with Bharathiar University, Coimbatore and numerous other professional trainings, Chef's major focus is to create incredible dining experiences for his guests through exclusive Food Festivals that incorporate unique flavors and charisma.

Given his busy schedule, Cheruvattath likes to play cricket, going on long drives, spending time with his daughter and experimenting with fusion dishes.

AMIT JAIN IS HOTEL MANAGER AT RENAISSANCE LUCKNOW HOTEL



Renaissance Lucknow Hotel has appointed Amit Jain as the Hotel Manager. Armed with him 15 years of experience in hospitality with leading hotel companies, he has an intrinsic understanding of hotel operations and finance.

Jain spent his early years in finance at The

ABHINAV SAXENA IS DIRECTOR OF SALES AT COURTYARD BY MARRIOTT NASHIK

Courtyard by Marriott Nashik has appointed Abhinav Saxena as Director of Sales. In his new role, he will play a pivotal role in strategically leading the business development goals and overseeing all aspects of sales and marketing strategies of the hotel to attain greater heights.

Saxena brings over rich 13+ years of experience with international hotel chains like The Leela Palaces, Hotels & Resorts, Marriott International, Hilton Hotels, IHG and Taj. He started his career with Taj Lake Palace in 2008. Eventually worked with IHG & Hilton as Sr. Sales Manager. He moved to Le Meridien Jaipur in 2017 as Account Director. His last assignment was with The Leela Palaces, Hotels & Resorts as Associate Director of Sales- Domestic Leisure- India.

An extremely organised person in dynamic environments, persistence and unwavering focus has always been his key strengths. Apart from his expertise in this field, Saxena is passionate about music and travelling.



Oberoi and Leela Group of Hotels. Having successfully completed his assignments in three years, he was embarked on his journey with Marriott International in 2010 at Renaissance Convention Center and Marriott Executive Apartments Mumbai where he was appointed as the Finance Controller. He later joined Courtyard by Marriott Mumbai, MHRS Whitefield Bengaluru and JW Marriott Hotel Kolkata as Director of Finance.

In 2019, Jain was promoted to the role of Hotel Manager at Courtyard by Marriott Siliguri. In his last role, Jain led the team brilliantly to achieve strong balance scorecard results while maneuvering through the pandemic situation during the year 2020 and won the elite appreciation guest voice award.

ANANYA BANERJEE IS THE MARKETING AND COMMUNICATIONS MANAGER OF JW MARRIOTT BENGALURU



JW Marriott Bengaluru has appointed Ananya Banerjee as the Marketing and Communications Manager. She possesses over eight plus years of experience where she will be spearheading marketing, public relations, digital and social media activities for the hotel.

Banerjee has previously been associated with brands such as Hyatt and IHG and worked on various accounts and brands while working with country's top PR firms such as PR Pundit and Value 360 Communications. In her previous stint, she Ananya has a proven track record of increasing social media engagement, conceptualizing and executing IPL marketing, developing marketing campaigns for new menu, new chefs and restaurant launches.

In her new role as the Marketing and Communications Manager at JW Marriott Bengaluru, Banerjee will be responsible in elevating and sustaining hotel's brand positioning, creating invigorating marketing campaigns aligned with hotels key goals, drive additional revenue through tactical campaigns.

HYATT REGENCY CHANDIGARH APPOINTS ANKITA PATHAK AS THE CLUSTER DIRECTOR OF REVENUE



Hyatt Regency Chandigarh has appointed Ankita Pathak as the new Cluster Director of Revenue. A strategic and perceptive leader, she brings 14 years of experience in hotel revenue management and reservations. She would be responsible for the strategic revenue management

and planning for Hyatt Regency Chandigarh and the upcoming Hyatt Centric Sector 17 Chandigarh.

Pathak began her professional journey after completing her Bachelor's in hotel management from Mangalore University. She followed through on her passion for hotels by undertaking challenging roles in revenue management with brands like The Park hotels, Marriott, and Lalit Group of hotels.

She then joined the Hyatt family in 2014 and got the opportunity to work for Hyatt Centric Bangalore, Hyatt Place Hampi, and finally overseeing the revenue management for all Hyatt hotels in Pune. She was also awarded the Revenue Manager of the year for India in 2019 by Hyatt.

THE WESTIN PUNE APPOINTS AASHISH KUMAR ARORA AS DIRECTOR OF SALES



The Westin Pune has appointed of Aashish Kumar Arora as Director of Sales. He will be responsible for the hotel's commercial growth, brand reputation, and devising initiatives to boost the hotel's positioning.

A dynamic team leader, in his current role, Arora will be focusing not only on the business recovery of the hotel post the pandemic, but

MOVERS & Shakers

would also work towards the reinforcement of the brand and its core ethos. He will also be working to create a new and sustainable business stream for the hotel.

Arora comes with a rich experience, spanning over a decade, where he excelled in hospitality, business development, strategic management and knowledge of various market segments. He commenced his hotel career with IHHR Hospitality as a Sales Executive in 2011, and has since moved on to work with Hyatt Hotels, Starwood, and now The Marriott, in the Unit and National Sales verticals. Prior to this, he worked in Sales for Citifinancial Home Loans, and after a year, he moved on to pursue his post-graduate studies in the United Kingdom.

In addition, his drive to over achieve targets and sincere dedication to his role, has earned him an internal recognition within his current organization as "Leader in the Making 2019", awarded during his tenure in The National Sales at Marriott National Sales Organization.

Hailing from Pune, Arora secured his MBA from Heriot-Watt University, UK and started his professional career a decade ago. He loves spending time with his family and friends, reading, and streaming new series on OTT platforms while he is not working.

HILTON MUMBAI INTERNATIONAL AIRPORT APPOINTS DEEPAK KUMAR AS GENERAL MANAGER



Hilton Mumbai International Airport has appointed Deepak Kumar as General Manager. He has over 20 years of experience and extensive operational knowledge across multiple hotels and brands. His last assignment was as General Manager, Holiday Inn Cochin, where under his guidance the hotel has performed exceedingly well across all parameters including guest experiences, commercial performance and operational performance.

Prior to working at the Holiday Inn Cochin, Kumar worked with Holiday Inn Mumbai International Airport and Holiday Inn New Delhi International Airport, completing nearly a decade with IHG. As

HILTON CHENNAI APPOINTS AVIJIT DEB SHARMA AS EXECUTIVE CHEF

Hilton Chennai is delighted to announce the appointment of Avijit Deb Sharma as the new Executive Chef. With over 19 years of culinary expertise, he has worked with leading luxury hospitality brands such as Oberoi Hotels and Resorts, Accor, Marriott Hotels, The Leela, Hyatt and Hilton Hotels & Resorts bringing in a range of experience to his new role.

Hailing from the eastern part of India and having travelled across the globe, he has a flair to articulate the culinary story on a plate. Sharma's style of preparation is modest but elegant with an amalgamation of varied flavours and local produce.

As the Executive Chef at Hilton Chennai, he will oversee culinary operations of all the restaurants at the hotel, in-room dining and the banquet kitchen. He is passionate about both cooking and plating and has a persistent quest for culinary excellence. When not in the kitchen, he uses his surreal vision to capture nature, architecture in addition to curating culinary stories.



a hotel and marketing management graduate, he has also undergone Six Sigma Certification and Strategic Management Certification at IIMA.

SAYAJI HOTELS APPOINTS GIRISH MENON AS ASSOCIATE DIRECTOR - DEVELOPMENT

Sayaji Hotels has appointed Girish Menon as Associate Director - Development.



An alumnus of Hospitality and Tourism Management from UK's Edexcel, he is a passionate hospitality professional with over 15 years of experience in guest relations, marketing, operations and business development.

Prior to this, Menon was associated with Lords Hotels & Resort as Business Development Manager. He was also the Business Head of Vignette Hospitality private Limited. In the past, he has worked with reputed hotel groups, including Kamat Group of Hotels and Great London Hospitality.

HARKARAN SINGH APPOINTED AS GENERAL MANAGER AT HYATT REGENCY DEHRADUN

Harkaran Singh has been appointed as the General Manager for Hyatt Regency Dehradun (Pre-opening). This will be the first 5-star hotel in Dehradun and the largest luxury hotel in the state of Uttarakhand.



Singh brings with him 15 years of varied experience across Marriott and Hyatt hotels in India. He began his journey with the Hyatt family 12 years back and has worked across Hyatt Pune in 2010 to Hyatt Hyderabad Gachibowli, Hyatt Regency Kolkata and was General Manager at Hyatt Raipur, before taking on his latest role at Hyatt Regency Dehradun.

Passionate about delivering above-and-beyond moments for guests & colleagues, Singh is financially disciplined and result-oriented with a repertoire of exceeding expectations of all stakeholders. In his role as the General Manager, he will lead the multi-cultural team of the 263-key hotel.

IHG APPOINTS IMIT ARORA AS GENERAL MANAGER, HOLIDAY INN JAIPUR CITY CENTRE



Holiday Inn Jaipur City Centre has appointed Imit Arora as the General Manager. He shall spearhead the operations of the hotel in the Pink City with 172 keys along with enormous options for dining, banqueting and events, and recreational activities.

Arora has over two decades of experience and over seven years as a General Manager with The Lalit, Chandigarh. Having worked across varied luxury brands like The Leela Palaces, Hotels and Resorts, Taj Hotels, and The Lalit, he has established a strong foothold as a seasoned hotelier and true hospitality professional.

Drawing on his leadership skills, experience with diverse brands and expertise in operational departments, his vision is to sustain the hotel's existing strong positioning and raise the bar even higher by curating strategic initiatives to ensure the highest levels of guest engagement, profitability, and reputation of Holiday Inn Jaipur City Centre.

Arora is a Hotel Management graduate from Welcomgroup Graduate School of Hotel Administration, Manipal and is passionate about fitness.

HYATT REGENCY PUNE HOTEL & RESIDENCES APPOINTS KARAN THAKUR AS EXECUTIVE CHEF



Hyatt Regency Pune Hotel & Residences has appointed Karan Thakur as Executive Chef. He moves from Hyatt Regency Chandigarh, in the same capacity, to enhance the culinary experience at the Pune hotel.

Takur started his hospitality journey with

MOVERS & Shakers

the Marriott Hotels, under the HOT programme at JW Marriott, Renaissance and MEA in Mumbai soon after he completed his Culinary Arts in 2005 from IHM, Aurangabad. His passion for good food and creating experiential events was evident throughout his career in brands like The Ritz Carlton and The Address Hotels + Resorts as well as Westin, Sheraton, Le Méridien and Four Points.

Takhar has worked in key Indian cities like Mumbai, Gurgaon, Ahmedabad and Chandigarh, in addition to international markets like Dubai, Doha and Urumqi (China). Known for his drive and a keen eye-for-details, he will focus on strengthening the food strategies of the hotel, while overseeing the launch of various contemporary F&B concepts.

In his spare time, Karan enjoys discovering new trails as an exploring motorbike rider and travelling.

NOVOTEL CHENNAI SIPCOT APPOINTS MAHZARINE BARIA AS FRONT OFFICE MANAGER



Mahzarine Baria has been appointed as Front Office Manager at Novotel Chennai SIPCOT. She began her career with Accor as a

Guest Service Associate in the Novotel Pune pre-opening team in 2013 and quickly rose through the ranks to become the hotel's guest experience manager. Later, she joined Novotel ibis Chennai OMR hotel complex, where she shadowed the department head and was in charge of a large and busy operation.

Baria's current responsibilities include overseeing overall Front Office operations, with a special emphasis on guest experience and loyalty development, as well as instilling the Accor Live Limitless culture in the team. She would be crucial in managing guest sentiment toward the hotel while focusing on increasing revenue streams for the hotel.

Baria is a Bachelor of Hospitality from the Bharati Vidyapeeth's IHMCT in Pune. She enjoys exploring new and uncharted destinations on her own and is an avid solo traveller.

MANUJ BAHU APPOINTED GENERAL MANAGER AT HOWARD JOHNSON BY WYNDHAM UDAIPUR



Howard Johnson By Wyndham Udaipur has appointed Manuj Bahu as General Manager. He brings an incredible

track record of over two decades of experience in the hospitality sector, having essayed roles in various renowned companies like Leela Palace & Hotels, Hyatt Hotels, Starwood, Radisson and Kempinski.

Bahu's expertise lies in hotel operations which he garnered along his decades long experience across various roles, geographies and hotel segments. His last stint was with Shipra Hotels where he was instrumental in driving revenues, guest experience, quality, learning and development and employee engagement. His journey with Shipra began as Cluster General Manager in April 2019, leading a team of 700 plus team members to reposition the two unique hotels carrying Mosaic flag in Noida and Mussoorie. He was also responsible for operations and leasing aspects of Shipra Mall Indrapuram.

In his new role, Bahu will focus on enhancing the overall guest experience, revenue growth and overseeing the management of the operations team at the 94 rooms Howard Johnson By Wyndham Udaipur, managed by NILE Hospitality.

Bahu studied at the Srinivas College of Hotel Management and started his hospitality journey with Leela Palace & Hotels in 2001.

P HERALD ROBINS IS HR MANAGER AT HYATT REGENCY, CHENNAI



Hyatt Regency Chennai has appointed P Herald Robins as its HR Manager. He brings with himself 16 years of

experience in human resource and hygiene management. He will overlook the strategic planning, recruitment policy design & implementation, talent management and associate engagement.

Having a strong background in Microbiology and completing his MBA with specialisa-

tion in HR Management, Robins gained immense knowledge working with brands such as, Intercontinental Doha, Holiday Inn Cochin, Park Hyatt and Hyatt Place Hyderabad. In his tenure, he coordinated with senior managers to ensure smooth activities are completed and issues addressed to reinforce an assertive outlook of the organisation, championed communication with necessary use of compensation systems, tools, programs and policies, facilitated learning and development sessions and other key strategies.

In his leisure time, Robins enjoys cooking and spending time with his family and creating memories with his little one. He also is an avid sports person with strong skills in volleyball, basketball, football, cricket, badminton and table tennis.

PANKAJ GUPTA JOINS CROWNE PLAZA NEW DELHI MAYUR VIHAR NOIDA AS GENERAL MANAGER



IHG Hotels and Resorts has appointed Pankaj Gupta as the General Manager of Crowne Plaza New Delhi Mayur Vihar Noida. An indus-

try veteran with over 20 years in the hospitality industry, he has holistic experience including strategic leadership, guest experience, and expertise in revenue analysis, yield management, and sales & marketing. He started his career as a Front Office Associate and later held various senior positions including General Manager with leading hotels chains like Accor Hotels, Marriott International and IHG.

Gupta's achievements include opening a brand new hotel from the ground up and set up the entire operations. He has moved to this role from Holiday Inn Jaipur, where he was also responsible for the associates' performance, culminating fine guest experience and achieving the company's vision for the hotel.

THE WESTIN PUNE APPOINTS CHEF VIKRAM KHATRI AS DIRECTOR OF CULINARY

The Westin Pune has appointed Chef Vikram Khatri as Director of Culinary. In this role, he will



focus not only on providing guests with a curated and immersive dining experience, but will work towards redefining the hotel's

gastronomic offerings, by recognising unique blends of creative flair and passion for food, balanced by strong business acumen.

Chef Khatri comes with 21 years of experience in hospitality, working alongside international chefs. He joined the kitchen brigade in 1999 after finishing the Culinary School from Bangalore. His first stint was at The Metropolitan Hotel, New Delhi, where he spent seven years learning the craft, nuances, and technique behind a good professional kitchen.

He then joined Olive Group as a core team member, initiating various standalone properties for the group. After a short stint at Australia's modern Gourmet city, Sydney, he returned to an Olive project in Delhi. Hailing from Delhi Chef Khatri acquired his Bachelor in Hotel Management (B.H.M) from S Nijalingappa College, Rajaji Nagar, Bangalore, in 1999 and later went on to undergo 6 months training at 'Ocean room' in Sydney, Australia, where he attained Global exposure in Oriental gourmet cuisine. In addition, he then went on to attend The World Gourmet Summit 2010 and F&A 2010 in Singapore, and also attended a workshop on kaizen management and well-versed with HACCP.

In each of his prior responsibilities, he has made significant contributions for which he has brought home many awards which include 'Chef of the Year Award' at the 7th International Chef Awards organised by the PHD Chamber & Indian Culinary Forum (ICF), along with Indian Federation of Culinary Associations, 2010, and the 'Culinary Excellence Top Chef Award' at the Delhi Gourmet Club 2015. He also mentored the team of Chefs who bagged the first and second prizes at the 'National Sushi Championship 2016' organised by JETRO, a Japanese trade and investment promotion organisation under Ministry of Economy, Trade and Industry (METI), along with Indian Federation of Culinary Association (IFCA).

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