

The why, when and extent of hotel repositionings

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Story Highlights

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With new development and funding more difficult each passing year, an obvious opportunity exists to reevaluate your portfolio and consider a market repositioning. Though most can be more difficult than an actual opening, there are varying degrees of asset improvement to make them more relevant to the marketplace.

'Soft' repositioning

A "soft" repositioning merely can mean that you step back and examine your property through a critical new lens: What is still effective (e.g. restaurant or meeting space)? What is no longer appropriate (e.g. room inventory and pricing)? Are room categories and descriptions dated? Perhaps your suites can be better described as "Grand Deluxe Rooms," while keeping the rates the same though changing guests' perceptions.

In most cases, these are internal changes that require an educational process with your staff rather than sending an entirely new marketing message to the outside world. Be sure, however, to edit collateral materials, your website, mobile devices, sales and press kit and all channels of distribution so there are no mixed messages, outdated descriptions and photography to add confusion.

The bedding configuration might no longer match your market mix as more leisure clients insist on king beds rather than queens. With more multi-generational groups and friends traveling together than in years past, promote the fact that you have connecting rooms and flexible accommodations to meet their needs. Suites no longer should be sold just to VIPs, for hospitality purposes or for upgrades.

Property refresh

While you might not wish to go the full extent of a total repositioning with a new name, logo, collateral identity, room refurbishment, etc., I suggest considering a "refreshed" image—an updated color palette, a more stylish font, and a tag line to differentiate your facility from your competition can all be done in a quiet manner, yet reach a new audience that might not have otherwise considered your property.

Still maintaining your current, loyal client base comfortable with the original version can be challenging. But if done correctly, you can marry the past with the present.

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Many owners contemplate whether a substantial investment in their asset is going to be justified and to what extent. Keep in mind the traveling public is no longer loyal for the most part as they climb up the corporate ladder and upgrade their lifestyle choices. Your property should speak to them in a more modern, seamless voice that is more in harmony with their current status. Perhaps taking a small percentage of accommodations to the next level in a first-step phase is more appropriate.

Property 'enhancement'

With a property "enhancement," the addition of new accommodations or residential units is also an opportunity to graduate your original inventory to a higher level so there is not such a wide disparity between the two categories. This will allow your reservation and sales staff to up-sell into



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the next category more easily and eventually eliminate the lowest rates.

Full repositioning

If a full repositioning is the best solution, be prepared to walk away from a percentage of your initial client base who might not be pleased that their favorite hotel has undergone a new affiliation, image and price point. In many cases, a new management team is put into place that is not acquainted with this clientele and their specific needs. Many legendary properties have been transformed to such a degree that it appears as though the good bone structure endures, but the soul and essence of what made them famous and successful is no longer obvious. Has this repositioning occurred because of owner ego at the expense of the property's integrity?

With competition coming into the market and much rebranding occurring, the platform is set to analyze your facility, clearly convey your differential advantages and offerings to the customer, while clearly portraying a new personality and increasing your revenue stream. Be open to expanding your business base. Take ownership of a new market niche that will appreciate your revitalized hotel and accept an enhanced pricing structure because your restored offering is now more in synch with specific requirements and taste levels.

Lastly, be certain your front line staff has fully embraced the new image and speaks in an edited vocabulary complimentary to the reinvention of your property. New uniforms can be instrumental to ensure they invoke a fresh outlook in their daily interaction with guests and take pride of ownership.

Linda Bruno, Managing Director of Consulente International is based in Greenwich, CT. and is a long standing member of the International Society of Hospitality Consultants. Ms. Bruno's reputation is based on the development and repositioning of luxury, boutique properties. Some of her signature projects include Meadowood-Napa Valley, Post Ranch Inn-Big Sur, San Ysidro Ranch-Montecito, luxury designer villas on the island of Mustique, The Elysian Hotels & Residences-Chicago, The Allison Inn & Spa-Oregon Wine Country.

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