



The AHC 2016 Conference Review

Wednesday 12th October

Opening Key Note Speech - Thomas Dubaere, COO HotelServices – AccorHotels Uk & Ireland

- “I chose to disrupt”
- Determined, passionate and obsessed by great customer service
- Highlighted the importance of listening to millennials but that disrupting is a mindset for all ages to empower your business
- “I encourage you not to look at your hotel as property with a certain number of rooms but as business with 1,000s of customers”

Economic Overview - Trevor Williams, University of Derby

- For the hotel and catering industry, Brexit is good news as it will be cheaper for inbound tourists to visit the UK. There will also be more staycations.
- Stemming of migration has cost implications as it may lead to increased wages in the unskilled sector
- Post fact world, the economy is in good shape and there are reasons to be cheerful

David Bailey - Market Overview

David took us through his hotly anticipated economic overview, providing the audience with a state of the nation update that identified the key highlights and issues relevant to the hotel industry.

- Trading landscape remains challenging but has slightly improved.
- Profit growth outstrips revenue growth as operators find greater efficiencies - this means healthy increases for the bottom line
- Strong performance growth has attracted an increase in development activity in the regions



Opening Plenary – Tomorrow’s World - Presentation from BDRC

- Younger consumers are moving away from hotel brands and more towards user generated content
- James asked the question, should we let the sellers sell?
- Have we reached peak brand? Should some of the turkeys be introduced to Christmas?
- Are the preferences/behaviours of Generation Y here to stay?

Opening Plenary - Tomorrow’s World – Panel Discussion

- New entrant to the marketplace, Doris and Dicky saying their focus was on creating authentic experiences and human connections and enabling people to meet and engage with the local culture
- The hotel brands haven’t historically been strong enough at pushing the “book direct” message to customers and this is their current focus
- Cris Tarrant said: “I very much think AirBnb is a threat and it worries me when CEOs of international hotel chains don’t see it as such”
- Google’s perspective is that Gen Y is merely a catalyst for the behaviour we are currently seeing in travel



Thursday 13th October

Small Tweaks Big Wins moderated by Terence Baker

- The pressing, increasing need to analyse costs on a weekly, no, daily, basis
- It's all about management, management, management, and if that is in place, the manner in which savings can be attained and revenue bolstered will be understood and appreciated by everyone along the food chain
- Be realistic and truly comparable with benchmarking, and have it done by people who understand the market in which the asset lies
- Wages will be even more so top of the pile when it comes to getting a grip on costs and the revenue left on the bottom line

Perpetual Motion moderated by Andrew Sangster

- Our industry is a robust and solid industry which continues to grow very fast despite a series of global shocks and perpetual motion
- The consumer is looking for ease – more than 3 clicks (in a search or booking process) and you have lost them
- Migration, of both skilled and unskilled workers, is absolutely critical for our industry

Make it Count moderated by Richard Candey

- Plenty of hotels to be developed – a 5% increase in room stock over the next 3 years
- Franchising has fast taken over from direct brand management
- Debt finance is available but brand structured development still seems to find favour
- There is a today greater brand palate to select from making selecting hotel partners easier.



Make Them An Offer They Can't Refuse, moderated by Katherine Doggrell

- How the lending environment is conservative but not that changed since Brexit
- The importance of good cashflow to lenders
- The relevance of brands to lender security
- There are now alternative lenders in the market

Value in Design moderated by Catherine Martin

- Create an emotional connection with the city you are staying in
- Part of where you stay is part of who you are
- You have to design a space that staff can change around depending on the requirements. Designers are often too aware of what the guests need, rather than what the people running the hotel need the space to do.
- People create energy and energy creates spend

Traditional or Digital? It's Time to Choose moderated by Michael Prager

- There is room for both traditional and digital
- Brand remains as important as channel and media
- Spending money on research, understanding your customers, would be a really good idea!

Maligned to Refined moderated by Harry McKinley

- Hotels need to be more nimble in how they approach F&B, setting aside some of the cumbersome corporate mentality to compete with the high street.
- Whilst there's still a place for brand standards, hotels can learn a lot from independents and need to focus on creating relevant, authentic and location specific F&B concepts.



- Luxury is evolving, driven by a changing consumer. Casual is back and F&B guests now want to feel at ease and comfortable in a space, versus the intimidating and stuffy F&B spaces that have for so long dominated the high end sector.

Double Take – The Debate moderated by Michael Northcott

- The importance of the hotelier owning the data, even if the customer has come through an OTA, in order that they can convert to a direct booking next time
- If someone signs a franchise agreement today, they are signing a 40-year-old agreement but there no incentive on the brand to change these agreements
- The importance of sticking to delivering an amazing guest experience – which is often forgotten

Keep Your Eyes on the Prize moderated Joni Smith

- Hotel value is one measure of success but on a day to day basis operating profit is the real prize.
- Brands can help support value but the key to driving profits (and value) is service delivery - a brand is just a promise of that service delivery.
- Alignment of interests of different parties - investor, whether short or long term, and operator - is critical to maximise value.

Closing Plenary – Break on Through to the Other Side – Panel Discussion

- “We are an industry of people serving people” said Stephen Cassidy from Hilton Worldwide
- It’s so important for visitors to feel like they are still welcome to the UK (post Brexit)
- “We are still a country that is under exploited in terms of tourism activity” Deirdre Wells OBE, UKinbound
- “‘Storytelling’ will be the next buzz word” Robin Sheppard, Chairman, Bespoke Hotels
- “There is so much to celebrate in the UK” Deirdre Wells OBE, UKinbound



- “If you stand up and tell people it’s great, eventually people will believe you”
- Wyndham Hotel Group say they are democratising travel through offering a wide range of brands to the customer
- – this is what Stephen Cassidy from Hilton sees innovation – both in terms of customer experience and also the way hotels are managed – as a key area for the immediate future of the hotel industry
- Robin Sheppard, Chairman of Bespoke Hotels called for “an upgrade to a disabled room” a reference to the poor quality of disabled rooms available throughout the industry
- Deirdre Wells OBE, UKinbound said that allowing students to drop the option of learning any modern foreign language at the age of 14 means it’s not surprising they can’t deal with inbound tourists when they enter the hospitality industry. A call to look at wider areas, e.g. education, in searching for improvements within the industry

Closing Key Note Speaker – Professor Martin Elliott - Professor of Cardiothoracic Surgery at Great Ormond Street Hospital (GOSH) for Children

Martin talked through the complex process involved in his work and the synergies discovered with the Formula 1 industry. Through learning practises from the world of motor racing, they have dramatically improved their processes.

- “A clear rhythm and defined order”
- Relentless pursuit of excellence
- "The model of leadership you chose will rapidly become the culture"