

LODGING



Dare to Dream

20

**innovators &
innovations
for 2011.**

Sant Singh Chatwal,
Chairman & CEO
Chatwal Hotels & Resorts

Editor's View



Creating the New Way

Innovation. Historians will gladly tell you that it's a concept on which our country was built. From as far back as the founding of the United States, through the industrial age of the early 20th century to the technology boom of recent years. And those historians are 100 percent correct in their assessment. But innovation extends far beyond the U.S. to the building of the civilized world as a whole. At some point in time someone imagined the wheel as an easier means to transport goods.

As the saying goes, there's no reason to reinvent that wheel. But there is ample reason to dare to think the unimaginable. That reason is a better future. And the hotel industry is no different in that respect.

Tomorrow's hotels may have the basic tenets of quality service and a clean room to stay in as the basis of their business for eternity, but how they deliver those and other basic aspects of a guest experience will need to be a different, more cost-effective, and more efficient means to that end. As always, hoteliers are up to the challenge.

This month we present our annual Innovators issue, highlighting 10 innovative minds and ideas within the industry. These creative ideas may one day form the basic tenets of hotel operations, design, food and beverage service, and overall business management that future generations of hoteliers will take for granted. But today, they are innovative thoughts that are ahead of their time.

This year we've added 10 innovations into the mix. Many products and services are debuted each year, but these 10 stand out in order to help hoteliers achieve their futures.

As always, we would like to salute all of these creative ideas and look forward to many more years of innovative ideas to brighten the hotel industry for current and future generations of guests. ■

ONLINE

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When Vantage Hospitality Group Inc. began in 1999, its principals were on to something innovative. Using a membership model as the basis for a new hotel franchise called Americas

Best Value Inn, the new company—today, it's the 10th largest hotel company in the world—began a journey to market a truly original way of running a brand. One of the founding partners and the man who would spearhead a marketing campaign for the new model was Peter Frantz.

Today, Frantz still runs marketing for the company while operating his own Cleveland, Ohio-based marketing firm that serves the hospitality industry. The start of ABVI was heady times when it came to marketing. With a tight budget in those days, Frantz says the company, “relied heavily on public relations and sales efforts. The bottom line was we believed in our membership model.”

The membership model itself presents a distinctive opportunity for marketing. “You can call this a team effort overall,” Frantz says. Vantage Hospitality touts its model as a way

for members to play an integral part in the management of the overall company. As such, it also operates an advertising council and advisory board for both ABVI and The Lexington Collection, the company's other main brand. (Vantage also operates Canadas Best Value Inn, Chinas Best Value Inn, and Value Inn Worldwide.)

“We get together and present the plan to the board,” Frantz says. “They give their opinions and input. It's truly a team effort that leads to the success.”

A long way from those start-up days, today Frantz oversees a multi-platform marketing campaign for the fast-growing company. “We use plans online and offline like other brands, but our model is different,” he says. “With lower fees and membership, we try to put the power of marketing into our members' hands. They can direct their marketing dollars toward specific niches and audiences for them. From a brand standpoint, where we try to be unique is to multiply the marketing dollars.”

That includes strategic alliance and cross-promotion. For example, the company recently cross-marketed with an alliance with the Skin Cancer Foundation, offering tips on screening and protection from the sun.

Frantz and the members of Vantage Hospitality are building a fast-moving company with a unique brand of marketing.



MARKETING

Peter Frantz

President, JCF Marketing; Marketing Director, Vantage Hospitality Group



Eco Serendib Villa and Spa, an eight-suite eco-friendly, luxury villa, debuted on St. John in the U.S. Virgin Islands in June. Harith Wickrema, president of the Philadelphia-based communication and event production company Harith Productions and a faculty member of the School of Tourism and Hospitality at Temple University, is the owner and visionary behind the property.

Wickrema wanted to create an environment that would minimize the property's carbon footprint by incorporating sustainable practices, while also providing an educational experience for guests. “The villa showcases how you don't necessarily have to sacrifice luxury and modern conveniences to live a greener existence,” he says.

Wickrema brought together a select group of companies that are committed to the environment. For example, ESA Renewables installed Suniva rooftop solar panels, which significantly reduce Eco Serendib's carbon emissions and energy costs. The property has three separate 20,000-gallon cisterns to collect rainwater, the pool is filled with saltwater, and the outdoor furniture was produced using sustainable plantation management systems. Other eco elements include water-conserving bath products, a gray water irrigation system, and energy-efficient kitchen appliances.

Eco Serendib is the first property Wickrema has developed and managed, but perhaps not the last. “As things are fine-tuned and perfected, we would certainly consider expansion with the right investor group,” he says.

SUSTAINABILITY

Harith Wickrema
Owner, Eco Serendib Villa and Spa

