INTEGRATING SUSTAINABILITY

The UN has made 2017 the year of sustainable tourism, underlining the need for the hospitality sector to place sustainability at the heart of the business model. Xenia zu Hohenlohe, Managing Partner of CSR specialist Considerate Hoteliers, outlines how facilities managers spearhead this change.

In the corporate travel world, more and more businesses are moving towards sustainable procurement that substantiates their economic, environmental and social stakeholder values. As such, they are looking for more sustainability data in the annual Requests for Proposals (RFPs) from hotels when they're looking to place business.

This, together with the fact that millennials, as possible hotel guests or members of staff, are far more keenly attuned to the growing challenges of global warming, means that hotels are coming under greater pressure to demonstrate their eco-credentials.

Yet while there are some who are well ahead with making sustainable practices second-nature, many hospitality businesses are still not managing to integrate them into the business model. Part of the reason is that there remains an outdated perception that green practices are solely a cost centre rather than an aspect of business that can improve the bottom line.

A problem that crops up frequently when we start advising hotels, is the lack of a clear vision and goals attached to sustainability. This, combined with less-than-robust measurement data, then undermines and derails the whole intention of making sustainability a key strand of the ongoing operating business model.

So the first plan of action is always to discuss and set clear objectives such as reducing room night utility costs by 15% over three years or reducing water consumption by 25% over the same period.

After that, there needs to be a thorough audit of the current situation so that a benchmark tailored to the hotel's sustainability goals can be established.

For example, with one hotel client, three variables were established to assess and benchmark the energy performance across the 12 hotels within the group. These were total consumption in kWh, consumption per square metre and consumption per room night.

They used the data management system Con-Serve to track their energy information which was collected at half-hourly intervals through automated meter readings as well as water consumption and room nights' data, which was provided monthly.

The sustainability performance of each of the properties was then analysed after six months. Graphs highlighted starkly the more inefficient properties, enabling the group to draw up an action plan of practical steps to rectify the situation, using Con-Serve to monitor and quantify the savings.

The way the information is presented is a key element of success when it comes to maintaining the sustainability effort. After all, if you make the data meaningful by giving a value to the actions taken, it can suddenly be easier to get buy-in within the boardroom and among staff as it ceases to be thought of as just a cost centre.

For instance, if you can show that an 11.2% reduction in per room night utility costs equates to, say, a saving of £1.50, it becomes far easier to see the impact on the overall bottom line.

Escaping from the short-termism that seems to afflict many businesses when it comes to sustainability does take a comprehensive shift in behaviour and attitude.

This is where the millennial generation can be a powerful conduit for change. Not only is this generation more savvy when it comes to being familiar with renewable energy systems and recycling but they are also less likely to own cars.

If they are members of staff, then their buy-in to the sustainability game plan will make change happen more rapidly. If they are guests, then they're more likely to be interested in the hotel's green credentials so communicating achievements can be worth its weight in gold when it comes to attracting future custom.

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