

Transition Management

2048 Kerwood Avenue
Los Angeles, CA 90025
310 689 8993
hospitalityatelier.com

Would you consider yourself a transition expert? Certainly the **concept of adapting to change and embracing it is a part of your daily vocabulary**, unless you have been asleep since 2008. For the rest of us, transition has become an exercise in efficiencies and evaluations, balance and compromise, flexibility and motivation – a familiar hospitality fitness **regimen**.

One of my favorite *a la mode* types of transitions is a franchise property conversion into an independent. Why? Because when I read books, I like the sound of turning pages, because I miss seeing handwritten cards in the snail mail, because my idea of superior service is free of robotic repetitions and generic amenities, and because observing our customers develop a stronger sense of individuality and style, we have an extraordinary opportunity to gain their attention and loyalty.

If you are one of the ambitious hoteliers considering an independent route – congratulations and get ready to surround yourself with some serious energy, ferocious attention to detail and relentless focus. Below are a few thoughts that may be helpful along the way:

- Create a Master plan and a Transition Timeline for every department, corresponding **to each phase of the conversion**. Imagine that you are leading a **hotel opening**, rather than a changeover, and outline all contracts and vendor relationships that may affect the “new” property. Which contracts will need to be renegotiated? Which rates may become subject to change for a free standing property rather than an umbrella affiliation?
- On the Sales and Distribution front, will there be any changes in the GDS and booking engine providers? How about the website hosting? What has been committed in the way of online (and print) marketing materials and ads that incorporate the old name and key word terms? What is the plan for redirecting the inquiries from the old property name to the new one?
- How about the PMS and POS for the Front Desk and the restaurant? Would your vendors’ timeline correspond to your own?
- Will the current system interface and compatibility be affected? Is it time for an upgrade? We are talking 2012 and beyond now and you are still Y2K compliant....
- When reviewing contracts and paying close attention to any rate increases, evaluate the agreements that may have a window for discussion, tied in to the rebranding transition.
- Your list is already hefty, yet use this timely opportunity to exercise bids from alternative vendors – this process, alt-

though time-consuming, is usually worth the effort from an educational and cost-saving perspective.

- What is your plan to announce the new brand? Are all of the players and campaigns – promotional rates and packages, PR announcements, social and print media ads – aligned and clearly communicated internally and externally?
- Now that you are no longer in “business as usual” mode, it is time to venture into high-impact partnerships and promotions to build the momentum and maximize exposure during this product launch.
- How does your team feel about the change? What will their response be when questioned by a customer about it? How about the frequent guests, corporate and leisure accounts, repeat groups – what is official the message to them? How would they be affected? What are some of the key advantages for them to continue supporting the property and to spread the word on your behalf?
- Marketing affiliations – I am sure they are on your explorations list and so should be the hard questions relating to the ROI. Prepare for an unbiased and thorough evaluation of any incremental lift from being a part of their portfolio, understand their performance deliverables, articulate your expectations and measurements, and examine the costs.

The list goes on, but at the end of the tunnel is an exciting, sometimes career-changing experience. As you check into the rewarding independent world, sharpen that eagle eye, ignite

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your creative side, and imagine the impact your property is making on the community around it. Congratulations, I always knew you had it in you!

*Lana Dubovik Boissier
Transition Aficionado & Principal of Hospitality Atelier
Hospitalityatelier.com*