



# Legendary Local Culture Contributes to Distinctive Brand

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## ORGANIZATION DETAILS:

Major Caribbean Hotel

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## INDUSTRY:

Hospitality

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## SIZE:

1000 staff

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## OTHER:

- Developers built two new hotels, plus totally refurbished the existing hotel to become a major resort with casino and state-of-the-art golf courses
- Brand image was designed by a major UK brand design agency to feature the culture of the native Indians, who were renowned for their hospitality
- The resort was marketed to three types of tourists; family, convention, and five-star butler service
- 80% of tourists were from the US; senior management were predominantly Europeans

A run-down hotel was acquired by a major developer and given a complete overhaul. The new owners of the resort understood that it needed to capture the passion of the resort staff, in order to succeed in crafting a distinctive brand that would differentiate this resort from the many others.

This exciting project faced many challenges; 47% of the staff were illiterate, and it took months to tackle petty theft and instill a sense of respect for others property.

## OBJECTIVES

- To shape the defined brand promise and values developed by the brand agency, into a communication experience that the local population would embrace and deliver.
- To apply the high standards of European hoteliers to the resort, while inspiring local Bahamians to take ownership of their brand.
- To differentiate the resort experience from any other resort in the Caribbean, so that guests' exposure to the resort would be distinctive, unique, and memorable, resulting in a desire to return.
- To integrate the resort's brand position and values into every service touchpoint.

## BACKGROUND

One of the leading UK brand imaging companies was contracted to define and design the brand image and values of this new resort.

The legendary culture of friendliness and sharing handed down from the native Indians was incorporated into the brand idea. An "experience of participation" was created so that guests felt welcome to interact with the distinctive population of this island.

## IDENTIFIED ISSUES

- To personalize the brand values so that staff felt empowered to live and deliver these values.
- To incorporate the spirit of the island and its history into everyday service delivery as defined by the brand image.
- To mirror the local culture of sharing, language use, and friendliness, so they became part of the experience delivered at every customer touch-point within the resort.
- To live the values internally with each other so that the behaviors became "the way we do things around here."
- To bridge local values and those of guests, through understanding and co-operation.

## INTERVENTIONS

- Meetings among resort management and all external agencies to ensure the brand message was clearly understood, and consistent delivery and cooperation between all parties could be assured.
- Site visits by the consulting firm leading the branded service education program (TMI US.)
- Anonymous all-staff audit.
- Two management briefings for senior managers on the staff audit results.
- Three-day training workshop for 24 internal Brand Champions, including enhanced training in project management, communication, and presentation skills.



Some of the European senior management merely paid lip service to the defined brand values, which undermined trust and had serious demoralizing consequences, resulting in absenteeism and staff defections.

- Support for Brand Champions to establish their own mission, vision, and values, and to set up action points for internal brand engagement project.
- Office and budget made available to the Brand Champions; branded clothing provided to Brand Champions so they were instantly recognizable at the resort.
- Design and delivery of a two-day brand implementation program for all staff called "All A We Is One Family," which means in the local patois, all the family pulling together to get the house ready for relatives or guests.

#### CHALLENGES

- The island on which the resort was located was not a preferred tourist destination. The challenge was to create a distinctive brand that would distinguish this resort, so tourists would begin to see it as a desirable vacation location.
- To take the defined brand promise and values developed by the brand agency, and shape them into a communication experience that the local population would embrace and consistently deliver.
- Professional European hoteliers predominantly managed the resort. Many of them treated the locals as their personal servants.
- 47% of the staff were illiterate.
- The majority of resort clientele were American, with different values about time than the local population.
- The family is number one for the local population. Therefore, if a child needed to be collected from school, a staff member would just leave work to pick up the children at whatever hour, without seeking permission or notifying their supervisor.
- Petty theft was common; it took months to instill a sense of respect for others' property.

- Low salary levels resulted in many staff working two or three jobs, resulting in exhaustion.
- Some of the European senior management merely paid lip service to the defined brand values, which undermined trust and had serious demoralizing consequences, resulting in absenteeism and staff defections.
- Some of the senior manager's personal style was based on intimidation. Although the building and development of the resort was completed in record time, many staff feared and avoided senior managers to the extent that, when the resort opening ceremony took place, less than 200 of the 1500 staff attended, incurring greater wrath from, and punitive action by, the CEO and senior team.

#### OUTCOMES

- Personal ownership by local staff in service delivery positions. One staff member addressed a public meeting describing his thoughts about the brand positioning of the resort. With tears in his eyes, he said, "It's not just a resort, it's my resort." Numerous staff members expressed that sentiment time and time again.
- Personalized individual creativity utilized in service positions: e.g. bartenders created distinctive resort beverages; engineers left personalized notes for guests when repairs were completed; spa staff utilized native remedies in guest treatments; housekeepers left personal notes together with a local flower on guest pillows for the turn down service, etc.
- Increased punctuality and a greater understanding of guests' requirements for accurate timeframes. For example, by the third brand intervention program, 95% of staff arrived on time or ahead of time, and informed the program leader if they needed to leave early.

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### OUTCOMES (CONT)

- Greater cooperation between departments and increased friendliness, affection, and courtesy between individual staff members.
- Twelve months after the brand process was instigated, personnel changes were made that ensured a less intimidating management style at the resort.
- Several members of the Brand Champions team traveled the world as publicity officers. This not only raised their visibility, it also enhanced their public speaking expertise, and most were promoted to more senior positions.

### LESSONS LEARNED

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No matter how brilliant and well thought out a brand identity is, without senior management commitment and support any brand intervention process becomes a major struggle, regardless of the commitment of, and buy in by individual staff members.

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Getting staff to feel genuine ownership of the business is essential to their delivery of the brand.

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Top down commitment needs to be demonstrated constantly by applying the same brand values to internal staff as to guests.

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To further embed the brand values, small top up sessions need to be implemented yearly. Brand values can never be a quick fix and need intermittent energizers to be sustained.

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A management style that runs counter to the brand needs to be pointed out early in the process.

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