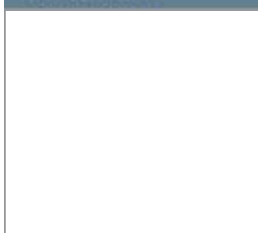


## Listen and Learn

10/21/2011 | by Len Vermillion



### ACTIONS >>



With more than 1,850 properties already and a vast pipeline that stretches from the U.S. to Asia, Hampton is looking forward to next year and beyond. The midscale Hilton Worldwide brand has been a staple of the North American suburban scene for 28 years, but now it's looking a little more urban and a little more international as it heads toward what Phil Cordell, global brand head of focused service and Hampton brand management, says is "another strong 28 years and more."

### RELATED >>

[4 Questions for Michael Achenbaum, Gansevoort Hotel Group](#)

[60-Second Profile: Evens Charles, Frontier Development and Hospitality Group](#)

[Back on Track](#)

[Back to Business as Usual](#)

[Change is Around the Corner](#)

[Connecting Through Art](#)

[Handling Bed Bug Complaints](#)

[Hotel Design in 3D](#)

[Keeping Tabs](#)

[Listen and Learn](#)

In Miami, Fla., this week, Hampton leaders showed the recently opened Hampton Inn & Suites Brickell, and discussed the brand's overall growth plans both at home and abroad. The new Miami property, developed by Bernard Wolfson and his company, Hospitality Operations Inc., which now owns five Hampton properties in South Florida, and managed by General Manager Eduardo Chapoval, is in many ways atypical of what people might expect from a Hampton Inn & Suites at first glance. For starters, it's a new-build property plopped down in the middle of Miami's growing and chic Brickell area, where financial professionals roam the streets during the day and partygoers take over at night.

But don't be fooled. Cordell quickly points out that the hotel—with its Perfect Mix Lobby and breakfast area, as well as its guest suites—represents the design and service culture of Hampton down to the last detail. "It's very well executed," he says of the property.

In some ways, the high-rise building and the urban location offer a glimpse of the growth opportunities for Hampton in the U.S. "For a long time it was about a suburban location," Cordell says. "About seven or eight years ago we realized there was a great opportunity for the brand in urban locations." Today, the brand boasts 70-80 urban hotels, including 12 in the ultimate urban location, Manhattan.

As far as locations are concerned, North American cities aren't the only opportunities for Hampton. Already, Hampton has established a presence in Western Europe, particularly in the U.K. and Germany. And, it's done so in relatively short order.

"It's only been three years since we've been able to grow outside the U.S.," Cordell says, referring to the joining of Hilton in North America and Hilton internationally into Hilton Worldwide, which opened the door for its brands to cross the seas. "Hampton was one of the biggest questions outside of the U.S. The midscale market in Europe had been mostly independent. Places like the U.K. and Germany were mature enough in segmentation."

Going overseas, Cordell and his team knew it wouldn't be as simple as plopping down a Hampton Inn & Suites in other countries. "We knew in some ways we'd be creating a new category there," he says. "We added things like food and beverage."

Hampton, which has dropped the Inn & Suites from its name overseas due to the different perception those descriptions carry in Europe and Asia, and added "by Hilton" to better associate with consumers as a hospitality company, is reaching into Eastern Europe. Hampton by Hilton is moving into places such as Poland and targeting eight key markets, including the BRIC countries.

Cordell says that the brand will approve more projects for Europe this year than the U.S., a first in its nearly 30-year history. But Cordell says the brand won't jump right into the perceived hot emerging markets without doing its due-diligence, although it is taking a very close look at places such as China.

"China will take a little longer. Again, it's about creating a new market, because China is still less accepting to branding," he says, noting examples of companies in and out of hospitality that have quickly made the jump only to find hard times. "Our China strategy is to understand the product has to be China focused. Hilton Garden Inn will open there next year, but we're a few years away from a Hampton."

The Hampton team wants to understand more than just overseas markets. In fact, the quest for knowledge of consumers, in particular Gen X and Gen Y travelers, is at the heart of Hampton's growth plans no matter where it takes place. It's a brand that has a history of industry innovations—the first curved shower rod, for example—but Cordell says that type of innovation isn't enough anymore.

"Our industry is sometimes unfortunately focused on stuff, but there's a lot more to it than that," he says. "Great brands are built from the inside out and informed from insights from the outside. It's about listening and then delivering those insights."

All of the members of the brand leadership on hand in Miami discussed the similar idea of searching for ideas outside of the hospitality industry. One way is the brand's "Voice of Guests" initiative. Hampton executives go into cities and talk to frequent guests about their insights of the brand and their thoughts of its competitors. Cordell says many ideas have been born that way.

The senior leadership is also looking at how to keep the brand relevant in the future by connecting with the next generations of travelers. Hampton is a brand that was built on baby boomers and senior citizens. Cordell says listening to younger generations helps prepare the brand to remain innovative in the future. "Those kids don't talk about things like design," he says, "they talk about how they consume media, how they carry a lot of devices, etc."

Those lessons have also affected the way Hampton will market itself. Judy Christa-Cathey, vice president, global brand marketing, Hampton Hotels and Hilton Garden Inn, says that communicating with travelers does require thinking about different channels. "But it has to be authentic," she quickly points out. Christa-Cathey talks often about things such as love and feelings, not your typical marketing talk, but what she's pointing out is that the new way of reaching customers is to develop a product that they become attached to, that they can trust.

"Hampton is more than about fabulous things, it's a way you feel," she says.

It's also about differentiation through service. Gina Valenti, vice president-owner services, says that the brand is working to build and leverage its "people power." "That's where our differentiation is, its culture," she says.

Today's Hampton, whether in North America or overseas, is heading in into the future with plenty of steam and a strong desire to keep itself in a proactive position while it grows. "It's not a one-time initiative," Cordell says of company's activities. "It's a mindset."

## READER COMMENTS

### POST A COMMENT >>

**Name:**

**Email:**