

Ramada Brand Launches Second Phase of Repositioning

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Ramada President Keith Pierce, addressing franchisees at their conference here today, announced the launch of Phase II in a systemwide repositioning that aims to establish the brand as the 'global leader in mid-market lodging.'

Phase II focuses primarily on enhancing the brand's bed and bath experience through new standards for mattresses, box springs, pillows and linen thread-count as well as heavier and larger bath towels, a modern shower head and curved shower bar with hookless curtain. Target for implementation is April 2006.

"My mission is to reposition the Ramada brand in the mid market domestically, grow its international hotels and resorts and make it the global leader in mid-market lodging," Pierce said. The repositioning is based on research last year that showed most consumers consider the Ramada brand to be a strong, mid-market option.

The stage for the Ramada repositioning was set last year with the termination from the system of consistently substandard properties and the introduction of a new image and quality, service and amenity standards.

In a concurrent initiative to strengthen the core domestic system, a new 21-person field team dedicated to the Ramada brand was sent into the field to teach owners and managers how to better manage their rates and inventory so as to yield maximum potential revenue.

Phase I of the repositioning was introduced with new logos for Ramada Worldwide and the Ramada and the Ramada Plaza brand tiers.

The "fresh and contemporary" logos are critical to the repositioning because they "more clearly communicate the brand's position as a strong mid-market competitor," Pierce said.

Phase I also included mandates for high-speed Internet access, continental breakfast and upgraded bathroom amenities. It also brought attention to "simple things" including ensuring the hotel staff's professional appearance and providing a daily newspaper.

Considered together, Phase I and Phase II of the repositioning will, "over the course of the next 12 months, elevate Ramada to a product offering that is far more consistent with the desires of the mid-market guest than our current offering," Pierce said.

To ensure Ramada's new logos are presented consistently, Cendant Hotel Group is offering financial assistance to help qualified franchisees pay for signage changes, which are due for replacement by January 2006, he said.

Meanwhile, the Hotel Group is helping to jumpstart Ramada development by creating a \$10 million development advance fund to build new properties and attract and convert high-quality hotels - especially in center city, gateway and airport locations - now operating under other brand names or as independents.

"We plan to get more aggressive with new-construction development," said Pierce. To guide the quality and completion of new-construction hotels, the brand has developed a prototype design complemented by architectural drawings and interior design schemes that "redefine and reinvent the Ramada experience," he said.

Pierce told the conference that four new-construction properties recently opened in Clairemont and Airdrie, Alberta; East Moline, Ill.; and Lowell, Ark. Ground was broken on another six projects, and 17 agreements additional have been signed.

As part of its efforts to enhance the franchisee value proposition, the Ramada brand recently implemented a training initiative called Strategic Training for Exceptional Performance, which features an improved version of the brand's general manager orientation and an online assessment for creating a personalized training agenda.

The Ramada team is holding Strategic Training for Exceptional Performance classes throughout the country.

The program, which began earlier this year, covers a wide range of topics, from yield management to providing a quality product and services. Franchisees are asked to complete the online assessment questionnaire prior to enrolling. The results of the questionnaire determine the appropriate course track.

The program also offers professional certification from the Educational Institute of the American Hotel and Lodging Association.

Working in cooperation with the Educational Institute, the brand will introduce online training programs for franchisees through two resources, CyberCinema and CourseLine, which offer hundreds of courses and videos that can be used to create training programs for hotel employees.

CourseLine features hospitality management courses, quizzes, a chat room for students and instructors. CyberCinema, designed for line-level staff, offers more than 100 videos on nine hospitality topics in multiple languages.

Beginning this month, the brand will offer an interactive property management system training course to all franchisees that provides instruction on how to load rates and inventory.

The CyberCinema and CourseLine programs and property management system training course are available to Ramada franchisees at a discounted rate the first year.

Another enhancement designed to be a resource for franchisees is the brand's new Intranet portal, called MyPortal, which "takes the often complex and confusing amount of brand information and places it all in a single, easy-to-use location," said Pierce.

According to Pierce, there are several benefits to My Portal, including a single point of entry for all applications and tools, one password, high-level security, e-mail access with up to five addresses for each property, a "new and improved" spam blocker and eventually the ability to change rates and inventory remotely.

To ensure compliance with updated brand standards, an "electronic, interactive" manual will be available on My Portal. "This platform will allow franchisees to search for a standard via a 'word search' and specific tabs will drill down to provide details on any standard," Pierce said.

Ramada Worldwide Inc., a subsidiary of Cendant Corporation (NYSE: CD), is a mid-to upper-mid market chain of 982 properties worldwide. Reservations can be made by calling, toll-free, (800) 2-RAMADA or online at www.ramada.com.

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