

Do I Have A Deal For You - 'Green' In All Shades - By J. Ragsdale Hendrie

2007-11-14

'Psst, Mister, I got something you might like.' We've heard the come-on, our interest is always piqued. Those shadowy characters, once in the shady alleyways, are now in our foyers and lobbies, hawking their snake oil solutions.

Fake Rolexes, knock-off Prada goods, Florida land deals - what could it be? We cautiously approach, intrigued, watching those beady eyes, the nervous tics, as the con artist haltingly begins to open his tawdry raincoat, giving us a quick glance at the interior lining. And, we see our means to ride the gravy train - stickers, proclaiming 'Green'.

The 'Green' Scam snares another hotel, another restaurant, another Hospitality business. Let's manipulate the latest craze and parlay the fad - who really can tell the difference between the real and the fake product. Faux is good, the consumer will never know the difference, and we can market our supposed 'Green' commitment quite handily. The Emperor's New Green Clothes! Who could and would tell?

After all, 2007 has been a banner year - RevPar up, development booming, bean counters beside themselves with joy. What the heck, we really do not have any Industry standards, it is a sellers market, and we can ride this Baby for years. 'Green' is only the latest trend, we surmise. Remember 9/11 and security, or Legionnaires Disease and safety, or black lights uncovering hygiene problems, gosh, even natural disasters. We shall prevail. 'Green' is good, faux is even better. Caveat Emptor takes a dramatic turn.

We have always had opportunists, those who try to slice reliability and integrity ever so finely, believing that the Public is quite stupid, uncaring and easily duped. Politicians make this mistake all the time, even Detroit automakers have yet to recover. Reliability, a quality product, commitment to Brand Integrity, value and price drive any market. We seek sustainability, faux equals whoa!

We do not make our decisions in a vacuum - they are typically driven by the dollar, the euro, the ruble and yen. The argument may be open to the extent of our environmental challenge, but no sane person would agree to maintaining the status quo anywhere in the world. But, change is driven by economics, so let's consider a few leading indicators, beyond the sanguine argument that we are all Stewards of limited resources. Money talks!

The power of the Meeting/Convention Planner.

As a group they are pretty timorous, but watch this change, for they have new mandates. Safety and Security. We still live in a dangerous world. Whether it be sensational incidents, natural disasters, or the amorphous spectre of terrorism, Planners will demand to know what the Emergency Preparedness strategies are, and Destinations must be in a position to demonstrate the Plans for community evacuation, triage, communication and leadership. Track Record. In researching potential sites, astute Meeting Planners require a "Report Card" for prior group experience. Large Convention Hotels and some CVB leaders tend to be myopic on the question of Destination Performance, not fully appreciating that Guests do leave the host hotel(s) and partake of activities within the greater Hospitality community. Any business which "touches the Visitor" is either a partner or a suspect. Issues of Quality/Lack of Standards. Fundamental delivery on product, service and facility is uneven and varies greatly. Successful Meeting Planners are not "dumbed down" with low expectations. Their livelihood and reputation rest upon a Destination's delivery on the promise. Presumption of 'Green'. This is now a check list item for many. Meeting Planners may be pleased with your conservation efforts, as posted, but a placard saying you have a linen reuse program will not be sufficient. They want to see your standards and data, verified by a reputable source. The IACC (International Association of Conference Centers) created a Certification Program earlier this year, attempting to get their arms around some performance reliability. "The idea behind the IACC Seal", said Officer, Rodman Marymor, "is that the IACC name carries a high level of equity for each of its members... it means something specific and it says something significant about who the member is, how the member operates their business, and helps define the kind of expectations of which customers may be assured when doing business at an IACC center." You simply do not want to lose that group and convention business, and 'Green' is prominently on the agenda.

Your Government at work.

In the US, the Government, which controls a great deal of travel monies, will make it worth your while to "go Green". The Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) will be asking Hotels and Conventions Centers, which are bidding for their business, to meet certain environmental considerations. The EPA spends \$50M on travel annually. The General Services Administration (GSA), which sets policy for all government travel, is suggesting that Meeting Planners consult with the EPA Environmental Checklist. The US government spends \$13.5 billion in annual federal spending for travel. As Thomas O'Connell, the EPA Procurement Director, said, "We can use our purchasing power to influence behavior, and to strengthen the link to our mission of protecting health and the environment." On the State and Local level, your political leadership will demand that new building and development, as well as any renovations, fall under Green Standards. Your efforts, beyond your 'purposeful intent', will need to be verified. This is not a coming movement, it is here.

National Policy for Sustainability.

Headline: "Climate Report Predicts Heat Waves, Floods, Species' End in Europe". The Boston Globe reported earlier this year, "Dying dolphins in the Mediterranean, reduced livestock in Britain, the extinction of plants in the Alps, and frequent heat waves across the Continent - this is what is awaiting Europe in the next decades because of climate change..." In the undeveloped countries of the world, the risk is maximized with drought, flood and famine for the unprotected, undernourished, and vulnerable populations. This makes for good copy, yet, even for doubters, this is a portent. Island governments in the Caribbean understand sustainability, looking to Tourism as a driver to their Economic Development, as well as a depleter of their limited resources. 'Green' becomes more than sustainable, it is life determinant for many parts of the world.

A simple statement of Legacy.

Rob Katz, CEO of Vail Resorts enunciates the mission of Rock Resorts with clarity. 'What defines each of our Rock Resorts properties is the natural beauty that surrounds them, and in essence, our product is the great outdoors. As such, our environmental efforts are part of our responsibility to protect the very product we sell. It also serves as an opportunity to deepen our relationship with our guests around their connection to the environment'. They will be launching comprehensive sustainability initiatives across the full spectrum of its operations, including energy and water conservation, renewable energy, construction, guest rooms, meetings and events, cuisine, local community outreach, education and guest activism. The scale is extraordinary, but sustainability efforts also can be seen in an urban setting with the Lenox Hotel in Boston.

Not all shades of 'Green' are equal.

Fool me once, shame on me. Try to fool me twice, you and others will hear about it. I am your Guest, your Customer, and your Patron - the Ultimate Consumer! Make no mistake, we applaud any discernable effort for conservation, but the marketplace is full of pretenders. 'Green' is real and verifiable. Embrace certifiable standards, and stop 'short sheeting' the beds.

The Author believes that Remarkable Hospitality is the portal to the Memorable Experience. Seek solutions at: www.hospitalityperformance.com.

This article comes from Hotel News Resource

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