

LODGING

2011 Innovator: Peter Frantz, President, JCF Marketing; Marketing Director, Vantage Hospitality Group

By Len Vermillion
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Peter Frantz

When Vantage Hospitality Group Inc. began in 1999, its principals were on to something innovative. Using a membership model as the basis for a new hotel franchise called Americas Best Value Inn, the new company – today, it's the 10th largest hotel company in the world – began a journey to market a truly original way of running a brand. One of the founding partners and the man who would spearhead a marketing campaign for the new model was Peter Frantz.

Today, Frantz still runs marketing for the company while operating his own Cleveland, Ohio-based marketing firm that serves the hospitality industry. The start of ABVI was heady times when it came to marketing. With a tight budget in those days, Frantz says the company, “relied heavily on public relations and sales efforts. The bottom line was we believed in our membership model.”

The membership model itself presents a distinctive opportunity for marketing. “You can call this a team effort overall,” Frantz says. Vantage Hospitality touts its model as a way for members to play an integral part in the management of the overall company. As such, it also operates an advertising council and advisory board for both ABVI and the Lexington Collection, the company's other main brand. (Vantage also operates Canadas Best Value Inn, Chinas Best Value Inn, and Value Inn Worldwide.)

“We get together and present the plan to the board,” Frantz says. “They give their opinions and input. It's truly a team effort that leads to the success.”

A long way from those start-up days, today Frantz oversees a multi-platform marketing campaign for the fast-growing company. “We use plans online and offline like other brands, but our model is different,” he says. “With lower fees and membership, we try to put the power of marketing into our members' hands. They can direct their marketing dollars toward specific niches and audiences for them. From a brand standpoint, where we try to be unique is to multiply the marketing dollars.”

That includes strategic alliances and cross-promotion. For example, the company recently cross-marketed with an alliance with The Skin Cancer Foundation, offering tips on screening and protection from the sun.

Frantz and the members of Vantage Hospitality are building a fast-moving company with a unique brand of marketing.

