

Vantage Hospitality Adopts Sabre CRS, Sets Growth Goals at Annual Conference

By Stephanie Ricca
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LAS VEGAS--Vantage Hospitality Group is ready to make 2012 the year of mobile technology for its Americas Best Value Inns and Lexington Collection Worldwide brands.

At the membership company's annual conference in Las Vegas this week, mobile is the buzzword, since the company today also announced a partnership with Sabre Hospitality Solutions to use its central reservations system platform. This agreement replaces the company's 7-year relationship with Genares Worldwide Reservation System.

"Our momentum has grown so fast and so large that we now require a different technology platform," said Bernie Moyle, CFO and COO of Vantage.

It's all part of the company's overall strategy to encourage its members to embrace digital technology both in the front and back of the house. "This really brings us to the forefront of technology," said Roger Bloss, founder, president and CEO of Vantage, adding that the partnership "without a doubt" will allow the company to add more properties, particularly in recognizable gateway cities.

Currently Vantage brand website bookings account for 42 percent of total booking revenue.

The switch from Genares to Sabre will happen Feb. 1, and Steve Fitzgerald, COO of Sabre Hospitality Solutions, said the mobile booking application will launch then as well, with additional social media booking apps set to roll out from there.

Moyle called the move "a cost-neutral change." Members will incur no conversion costs to switch to the new platform or take advantage of the new tools.

Vantage currently has 1,043 properties opened or signed, the vast majority with the Americas Best Value Inn brand. The soft brand, Lexington Collection, has 25 properties open. The company's 1,000th property opened this summer.

Additional noteworthy announcements at the conference included:

- Growth in key cities: "We need to be in Chicago, New York City, L.A. and Miami," Bloss said. "Our goal is to get those premier locations." Bloss and Bill Hanley, group president of the Lexington Collection, said the company is meeting with management companies that have distribution in those gateway locales in effort to forge new partnerships, particularly for the soft Lexington Collection brand, which incorporates three- and four-star hotels into categories of hotels, inns and suites based on market niches.



Roger Bloss



Bernie Moyle

- New segments on the radar: Vantage bid on the AmericInn Hotels chain, which was up for sale several times over the past few years but never found a buyer. Still, Bloss said adding a new brand to the company's portfolio "is very much on our radar."

"We have a huge appetite to find an extended-stay brand; we think that would be a great niche for us," he said.

- Product improvement: Vantage drops the bottom-performing 10 percent of its portfolio from the system annually, and 2012 will bring a renewed focus on product improvement at performing locations.

But Bloss warns these aren't your typical brand standards. The company partnered with American Hotel Register Co. to offer a three-level product improvement program to members.

"We know other companies are coming out heavy with strong property-improvement plans," Bloss said. "I don't think we have the right to go into our owners' bank accounts so we wanted to create options for them."

Under the program, members can choose to spend \$1, \$2 or \$3 per day per room inclusive of all costs and choose from several options for upgrading softgoods and more at the three levels. All financing is through the company's vendor program.

"It's a very easy system to justify a very easy ROI," Bloss said.