



Hotel Industry Movers & Shakers

Hazel Rigler

Director of Marketing and eCommerce • Grand Chancellor Hotels, Wellington, NZ

What makes Hazel Rigler successful? Her extensive hospitality experience across a number of properties, cultures—even crises—has taught her to set realistic but challenging goals. “It’s important, I believe, to understand what motivates me and my team to reach these results and enjoy doing it along the way. It’s not about what I can do, but what we can achieve as a whole,” she says.

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Born and raised in Wellington, New Zealand, it was Hazel’s mother who suggested she work part time in the hospitality industry while she was a student at Victoria University studying management and marketing. “She thought I would be well suited for the industry,” Hazel remembers.

It turns out, Mum was right. Straight away, Hazel got a job in the front office as a telephone operator at the Plaza International (now the Amora Hotel) in Wellington, a property of 192 rooms and large conferencing facilities. Upon graduation, a sales and marketing coordinator role became available at the same hotel. It was a terrific fit for the study she’d just completed, and her experience with the hotel had earned her a strong reputation. She landed the position as her first full time role after university and remained there for two and a half years.

Branching out to learn more

Early in her career, Hazel began to think about an “OE”, which is what New Zealanders call the “Overseas Experience.” She left the Plaza, and with her now husband spent a brief period working in the South of France and travelling through Europe before moving on to his mother’s native Ireland. Hazel began working for an Irish tourist publication, but soon began to miss her days in hospitality.

She earned a position in conference and events with The Regency Hotel Group, a family-owned

set of (then) six properties located throughout Ireland. After a couple of years, her husband took a job in London so the couple moved there. In London, Hazel began working for the Bonnington Hotel in a new meeting and events position created for her.

Within two months, Hazel was promoted to a sales and marketing management role and not long after, the role incorporated another property owned by the same group, a 19th century historic hotel on the south coast of the UK. “It was a very different business model from the corporate London market,” Hazel recalls, “with a lot of weddings, events and tour group series.” It was also during a time when revenue management was just coming into the mainstream of the hospitality industry. Hazel helped the team transition the sales and marketing function to one based on revenue management practices.

Returning home with newfound skills

After having spent eight years abroad Hazel and her husband began to think about going back home. She had learned so much while away and expanded her industry knowledge a great deal. She’d worked in corporate environments, had deep experience with revenue management models, and had been exposed to a good deal of relevant technology, including the GDS (global distribution system) that travel agents use, and developed key relationships with the OTAs (online travel agencies).

“I had enjoyed the group roles I’d been in, but wanted to live back in Wellington, even though I wasn’t at all sure I’d find something similar here.” As luck would have it, she did. Today, Hazel serves as the Director of Marketing and eCommerce for Grand Chancellor Hotels. It’s



a group role (as she’d hoped to find), working across 10 hotels throughout Australia and New Zealand.

Today, Hazel oversees eCommerce, online marketing and the CRM systems for the group, setting departmental policies and working closely with the sales and revenue teams. When asked what she enjoys the most about her current position, Hazel is quick to reply: “If you want to think for yourself, make decisions, try new things and learn, this is the right environment for you.”

Tackling ongoing challenges

Indeed, some of those decisions have been tough ones. In all her years in the industry, Hazel recalls that her biggest challenges have been shocking events like the London Bombing of July 2005, and the Christchurch earthquake of 2011. “Our property was the tallest building in the city when the earthquake hit,” she recalls. Thankfully, no one in the hotel was injured, but the ongoing work with emergency management, the press, concerns for the safety of guests and staff, and how to handle all of this within the team was what Hazel remembers as one of her greatest trials. “It’s taught us to give a lot of thought to risk management,” she says.

Today, Hazel’s team and peers are enthusiastically on board with Revinate and regularly dig into surveys, competitive information and reviews, but nearly six years ago, it took a little while for the whole group to

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participate in managing online reputation. “There was trepidation in the early days of managing online reviews because often only extreme views were posted back then. These days with a larger volume and more balanced perspectives, there is massive focus on reviews at the property level—from celebrating success and analyzing trends, to engaging with our guests during all parts of their stay,” she says. “I see GMs wanting problems solved and guest sentiment turned around within the same visit,” she adds.

Hazel goes on to add, “Revinate reporting also makes it to the Board of Directors meetings. It creates the right discussions at the right level. It’s easier to get a refurbishment proposal across the line if you have market data to back it up.”

Overall, Hazel’s overseas experience has given her a great range of experience with different types of hotels and different hotel teams. Her desire to bring that experience home, along with the bravery to experiment with new technology and different management styles, has resulted in her great success and broad career experience.

Revinate Heroes is a series of articles profiling successful hoteliers who are moving the hospitality industry into the future.