



Hotel Industry Movers & Shakers

Mark Anderson

Deputy General Manager – Commercial • Royal Garden Hotel, London, UK

How did Mark Anderson end up as a Deputy General Manager of the Royal Garden Hotel in London? “I fell into hospitality,” he remembers. “When I left school, I wasn’t sure what I wanted to do.” At first he took various office-based jobs and worked in pubs part-time for extra money. While working in one such pub he became friends with a Greek colleague who invited him to help run the bar in his family owned 50-room hotel. Mark soon found himself doing so in Halikidiki, in northern Greece, where he ended up returning summer after summer.

“I alternated between London and Halikidiki and discovered that I loved working in hotels,” Mark says. He decided to study hospitality management and attended Thames Valley University (now the University of West London).

After an internship in Beaver Creek, Colorado, Mark returned to London to work as a corporate sales executive at the 482-bed White House Hotel. Afterward, he came to the Royal Garden but stayed just a short while. An assistant director of sales position had come up in Dubai and Mark was off to the Emirates Towers Hotel

where he would spend the next three years running the sales team.

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It was at the Emirates Towers that Mark was presented one of the biggest challenges of his career—arguably one of the biggest challenges the hospitality industry has faced. “Immediately after 9-11, European and US traffic to the Middle East slacked considerably,” Mark recalls. “We learned a tough lesson — that we had depended too much on one market.” In order to build a more balanced business going forward, Mark changed his sales strategy to that of an “international hotel with lots of feeder markets and segments.”

Mark remained at the Emirates Palace for three years, which he enjoyed thoroughly. But when a particular opening came up at the Royal Garden Hotel back in London, he jumped at the chance to return. He stepped into the role of director of sales and marketing. Today, Mark is a Deputy General Manager at the Royal Garden and he attributes much of his success to a continued focus on segmentation strategy.

How did he do it? “We really do a great job with families,” he says. “We know the names and ages of children before they arrive. They get a room key that looks different from Mom and Dad’s. We have goody bags for them, tons of toys, and Frisbees and scooters they can take over to Kensington Gardens and Hyde Park. Families really remember us.”

Recall, though, that Mark learned his lesson after 9-11: Don’t rely too much on one segment. “We wanted to be known for something across several segments,” Mark says, “so we worked to understand our guests and their needs.” They discovered a certain unique differentiator — friendly, casual service — was what their guests responded to the most passionately. The Royal Garden Hotel, though located in the heart of

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traditional London, was a welcome alternative to nearby hotels, which required that a jacket be worn for breakfast, for instance.

“We encourage our staff to be personable to everyone and treat our guests as friends, not customers,” Mark says. The approach has built long-term repeat business not just with families, but other segments as well. “The Australian cricket team has been staying with us for 20 years,” he says. “Also, globally touring famous musicians who shall remain nameless.”



When it comes to building loyalty, Mark’s philosophy sounds a lot like, “Stay loyal to your friends and they are more likely to stay loyal to you.” This maxim is exemplified by his strategy during the London 2012 Olympics when his competitors were taking opportunistic advantage. “Many hotels got greedy and gouged their customers, but we did not,” he says. Indeed, the strategy was fruitful. Today the Royal Garden enjoys a repeat booking rate of 40%.

Knowing the market and his customer remains top of mind for Mark. How does he characterize the modern traveler? “The old business and leisure model is disappearing,” he says. “It used to be that Monday through Friday we served business travelers and over the weekends, families. Today, corporate business travelers bring their families along for ‘bleisure.’”

As the ‘bleisure’ market unfolds, the Royal Garden Hotel looks to Revinate for help

in developing a full understanding of this emerging segment — and the degree to which his competitors are serving (or not serving) it well. And while the staff of the Royal Garden continues to forge true and friendly relationships with their guests, but some are more reserved. The staff doesn't get to know them as well as they'd like to, but "Revinate has helped us to be more consistent by getting feedback from the people with whom we don't have a relationship," says Mark. He adds, "Revinate has also allowed us to target repeat guests with special messaging and nurture relationships with those who are already loyal."

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