



Hotel Industry Movers & Shakers

Nicholas Diego

Director of Marketing • Mountain View Grand Resort & Spa

“Hospitality is so much more than a room,” says Nicholas Diego, Director of Marketing for the Mountain View Grand Resort & Spa in Whitefield, N.H. “Great hotels provide unique experiences.”

Although he didn’t intend to make a career in hospitality, it’s in his genes. His family all work in the sector, and his first job was as a beach attendant for a resort in Cape Cod. After achieving a master’s degree in economics, the hotel business drew him back.

“Great hotels provide unique experiences”

“Although I don’t have any formal training in hospitality or marketing, I think that my background in economics and math provides me with a unique perspective on both,” Nicholas says.

He began working at Mountain View Grand as a financial assistant in 2010, and, minus a one-year stint as a college mathematics instructor, quickly rose to director of marketing, where he applies his philosophy of doing things differently.

No assumptions

“I don’t have any preconceived notions of what I should be doing. I have a fresh approach, that’s led to our success in the last few years and allows us to stand out,” he says.

For example, every resort has activities—but how many have lumberjack competitions? One of the grounds crew competed in such contest, that involve throwing axes and quickly felling trees. It seemed like a cool thing to add to the property’s repertoire, so the resort began allowing guests to throw axes at wooden targets. It became the resort’s most popular sport. “Some people would probably advise against doing this, but it became our signature activity,” Nicholas says.

Another example is Mountain View Farm, a working farm that’s now focused on raising

fiber animals—goats, sheep, alpacas and angora rabbits. Guests can visit the farm, help shear the sheep and take felting classes.

“We aim to provide a unique, more personal level of hospitality”

“Because I’ve never worked in a hospitality environment like a city hotel, my approach is far more experience-based,” he says. And, because the hotel is a three-hour drive from Boston, with many other resorts along the way, “People need a compelling reason to drive here.”

Historic revitalization

Mountain View Grand opened in 1886, and it’s seen frequent expansions and renovations, but it’s about to embark on still more modernization, including replacing all windows, re-carpeting and refurnishing. One big upgrade will be the installation of a new elevator to replace the manually operated one. The elevator has been one of the most requested additions to the property, along with a grab-and-go café in the lobby and handicap-accessible ramps. Nicholas finds guest surveys are an excellent way to uncover the improvements that will please guests the most.

Large and independent

Because Mountain Grand View is an independent hotel, it doesn’t have the deep pockets of chains, but Nicholas sees more advantages.

“We aim to provide a unique, more personal level of hospitality,” he says. Much of his staff has been with the resort for decades, and as such are often able to develop ongoing relationships with repeat guests.

Guests, too, tend to come back, sometimes many times a year, drawn to the casual but upscale environment and a familiar sense of home.

Winning the booking

Nicholas acknowledges another challenge for independent properties: Groupon and OTAs. While Mountain View Grand has been able to negotiate favorable commissions with them because of its size, commissions and fees still take a large bite out of revenue. “It’s great for consumers, because they have lots of options. But for hospitality, it’s very hard,” he says.

That makes customer retention critical. “Say someone books on Expedia. It’s great to see them, but we never want that to happen again. We need to make sure people really want to come back—and contact us directly,” he says.

Therefore, the hotel also is upgrading its business systems. New revenue management software will improve pricing and forecasting. That information will inform marketing campaigns, offering appealing promotions at the right time to the right customers.

Another benefit is that the PMS system will now be integrated with the hotel’s email platform. Marketing campaigns can be targeted to different customer groups and tracked to the email database. Nicholas sees this as essential for helping the property overcome slow periods without having to offer deeply discounted promotions through Groupon.

In addition to continually attracting new guests, Nicholas says, “We want to do a better job of leveraging our loyal customers who like the property and come frequently. There’s lots of opportunity to optimize that process.”

True to yourself

Having found success by embracing what’s unique about his property, Nicholas has advice for other hoteliers:

- 1. Ignore industry talking heads.** It’s important to understand trends, but how you apply them to your own property should be unique. Identify what makes you stand out and create a tailored strategy to exploit that.
- 2. Use free wisely.** Five times a year, Mountain View Grand raffles off a free night’s stay. This promotion is hugely successful, gaining as many as 12,000 entrants, so it’s a great marketing tool to generate interest in the property and generate buzz on social media. Its impact is big, but the cost is little, just five free room nights a year.
- 3. Marketers must be involved in revenue management.** Marketing is more than creating ads and compelling copy; it’s key to generating money. Marketing activities should be integrated with revenue management.
- 4. Digital advertising rules.** The resort’s ad mix used to be 80 percent print and 20 percent digital; that’s been reversed. Nicholas sees a 10X return on investment from digital ads. That said, print is useful for brand awareness, and certain print publications, such as bridal magazines, remain essential.
- 5. Integrate your technology.** “Running a business with siloed systems is a nightmare,

Nicholas says. Switching out legacy systems is expensive, but it will enable you to optimize the business—and generate even more revenue.

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