

For Hotel, Resort, and Casino Food & Beverage Professionals

# Hotel F&B Executive

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## OUT OF THE BLUE

Genuine Menus at IHG's Hotel Indigo

In Indigo's Golden Bean, from left, Gabriele Webster, In-Keeper; Lesley Maxwell, lead In-ter-tainer; and Jim Anhut, senior VP brand development, InterContinental.



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Maxwell, lead In-tertainer, works the menu, fiddles, and modifies it)—Indigo radiates a tasteful whimsy that stops just short of incongruity. After all, this is a hotel, not Never-Neverland. But that's the point. Its sense of imagination and improbability is, Indigo hopes, what will set it apart from its competition.

Indigo is unto itself: an original among clones. "[It] offers a place for renewal and rejuvenation. Color, space, and design converge to bring order and balance to an otherwise hurried world." Spas have the nerve to make that claim.

All of this is OK, fitting. Indigo is a happy place full of the happy faces of employees whose smiles and eagerness to help are genuine, a marked and purposeful difference from the robotic welcomes and memorized spiels that are the hallmarks of lots of hotels and hotel companies out there.

Risky?

Jim Anhut, IC's senior vice president of brand development, who, together with Tom Woodward, director of brand development, brainstormed Indigo and spearheaded its launch, doesn't think so.

Indigo was borne of research showing a growing trend among consumers to trade up to affordable luxury (C-Class Mercedes, not S; Starbucks, not instant) and, says, Anhut, "a

strategic overview of the brands the company already had on the market." Past overviews led to the launches in 1995 and 1997 respectively of IC's extended-stay brands, Candlewood and Staybridge Suites.

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**CONSUMERS CRAVE PRODUCTS** that not only do what they're supposed to do, but satisfy, gratify, and make one feel good about the purchase . . .

According to trendwatchers everywhere—from *American Demographics* magazine to B-schools to a growing number of website consultancies—consumers crave products that not only do what they're supposed to do, but satisfy, gratify, and make one feel good about the purchase, and that do not break down when the warranty expires.

Says Anhut, "We have opportunities in our

portfolio, 'gaps,' if you will, in our product offerings that dovetail with what we unearthed when we looked at consumer buying trends. Stores such as Starbucks, Restoration Hardware, Crate & Barrel, and an increasing number of lifestyle centers cropping up everywhere cater to delivering the 'experience' of a product beyond its intrinsic, functional value and use."

And that prompted the launch of Indigo or, at least, a consideration of something like it?

According to Anhut, when you accept (read, "believe") consumer trend research and apply it to the obvious market reality that the hotel industry is a mature industry, you do what he did: combine those prevailing truths to look at whatever market niches remain and focus on developing products that accommodate specific needs for a specific occasion.

Therefore, Indigo?

### PSYCHOGRAPHIC SKETCH

According to Anhut, "The psychographic sketch of the Indigo customer shows us that he or she is not a number: certain age, income, size of family, zip code, gender, that sort of thing. Rather, we look at what this person likes to do, what he or she wants to experience. It's clear to us—at least it became clear to us after looking at the Indigo profile as we developed it over a two- to three-year period—that the customer attracted to Indigo is not impressed with gimmicks. He or she is very interested in what is genuine and real as opposed to what is fake and artificial, beige, bland, and boring."

Just as so many retailers sell quality products the consumer can trust and depend on (isn't that what 'repeat business' is all about?), so, too, does Indigo provide an experience that pleases and, almost without much effort (intrinsic value), exceeds the guest's expectations.

"An affordable indulgence," says Anhut. "Our guests settle in, relax, breathe deeply, and enjoy. Indigo is not a three-minute show of 'ooohs and aahs' when you walk in the door."

Take Indigo's front desk. It isn't. It's there all-right, but it's not in your face. We'll let Gabriele Webster, In-keeper, explain: "Much as you'll find in many finer retail stores, the sales person (in this case our front desk person) greets you long before you make a move to the counter to greet him or her. At some hotels, the moment you hand over your credit card, the transaction is finished. You've paid for your stay before you've had a chance to enjoy the space. The focal point of a good retail store is not where you pay—that's the final moment of the experience.

Indigo's focal point is the space—our lobby and café—where you have an opportunity to relax."

If you're interested in marketing a product—

### FLICKER WITHOUT THE FLAME

**Y**ou can ask Fred Pozin what is funny, but he may tell you it is not just all the money he saves using Smart Candle flameless candles. Pozin is VP and GM of the Ramada Mandarin Inn & Comedy Zone in Jacksonville. He uses Smart Candle to illuminate his nightclub and sees both money in the pocket and safety.

Smart Candle manufactures rechargeable, battery-powered, flameless candles and a variety of colored glass holders to adorn tables safely while retaining an elegant look. The candles actually "flicker without the flame." So, what is missing? As Smart Candle states, just the wax, the smoke, and the mess.

Pozin realizes a return on investment in about nine months. The only complaint is that some customers like the candles so much they take them home! "I have no idea what they do with them at home. I have the charger, but from time to time they disappear."

Smart Candle will soon have logos available, just one more bright way for their customers to market. The battery-powered, rechargeable candles also help save labor dollars in the long run. How many establishments pay hourly wages for staff to scrape and wash glass candle holders in order to rid them of wax?

And the feeling of safety? It cannot be measured, but the presence of flameless candles in a crowded nightclub has certainly given Pozin peace of mind that comes with security.—Keith Branche

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