

Printer Friendly VersionWEB LINK - <http://www.expresshospitality.com/20080715/edge02.shtml>**Systems****Passionate about consultancy**

Sunil Khanna, principal consultant and partner of Hotelconsult Orient, believes that the increase in demand for hotels and restaurants will strengthen the demand for hospitality consultants. By Praveen K Singh



While stating that individual hotel and restaurant owners may not achieve high growth rates consistently despite the increase in supply, Sunil Khanna, principal consultant and partner of Hotelconsult Orient, adds that at an individual level, the owners will have to maintain or even reduce prices in spite of rising input costs. "They will need to build very high efficiencies into the existing as well as new properties and bring down project costs by planning better," he says.

As far as consultants are concerned, Khanna says, a key factor will be the extent to which food safety laws will be implemented in India. Another crucial factor will be the extent of influence the international brands will exercise over their local partners with regard to food safety. "We will need to create more and more cutting edge designs while simultaneously reducing our prices and delivery times by becoming more efficient. This would be possible, among other things, by specially designed software and by doing multiple units for the same brands," stresses Khanna.

Looking ahead

In future tense, Khanna wishes for hotels that are far more efficient, economical, offer better value for money and have lower investment, among other things, by having easy availability of land and rationalised taxes. The influx of major international budget brands are going to open up hitherto unknown market segments to Indian hotels which will trigger a growth in demand. Medical tourism, conferencing, and development of unexplored areas of tourist interest will be crucial factors in the growth of hospitality business, Khanna says.

Nevertheless, he expects a good number of major hotel chains to come up in India as "we are working with most of them" and is confident that after the current lot of hotels is designed and the hotel chains possess larger development teams operating out of India, Indian consultants will play a bigger role than the international consultants. "We will introduce better practices and reduce price as well as delivery time of our services. Just as hotel chains have been introducing international consultants to the Indian market, it would not be long before they start introducing Indian consultants to other markets as their partners from India," he exclaims.

As far as the manpower crunch in the sector is concerned, Khanna says, "We have enough work-force in India looking for jobs. Traditionally, the hotel industry has been losing qualified and trained manpower to other sectors. Now, the process can be reversed provided the hotels make the right moves and lure employees by offering them better deals." Improving efficiencies will help hotels reduce the number of people they would need to hire and then by allowing them to pay more to attract the right candidates. Campus placements will improve in privately-run institutes, which exist in large numbers, he declares.

About Hotelconsult Orient

Hotelconsult Orient commenced its business towards the end of

1994 when G S Arora, then GM (Planning) at Quality Inns India quit the company to partner with Sunil Khanna. The late A K Dave - pioneer of hotel consultancy - subcontracted the consultancy work for Radisson-Delhi to the company. Subsequently, Hotelconsult has since then continued to attract talent from the hospitality industry including Rishi Dayal from The Oberoi Group. Today, Hotelconsult claims to have over 250 planning jobs in hand, of which 100 are major hotel projects.

Company focus

As far his company is concerned, Khanna says that the last two years have been phenomenal. "We get an offer to plan a new property practically every week. It is only since the last four months that we have been unable to cope up with the new business and have been forced to favour those assignments that offer bigger challenges and bigger rewards," he says.

Though the company has a fairly large team, it is meeting only a small share of the current demand for facilities planning in the country. "We are growing by focusing more on this business line," says Khanna, adding that the last 13 years have been good for the company. "Initially, we started facilities planning and food service design consultancy as a creative pursuit and the only gain we were looking at was to gather market intelligence. Soon we found that it was a great way to generate knowledge because on one hand we had some of the industry stalwarts as part of our design team and on the other hand we were being paid by our clients for undertaking activities that helped us gain more knowledge," he reminiscences.

His company plans to pick more work as well as workforce in due course of time. "We are not in a hurry to expand our team as we are experienced. It can take quite a few years for consultants to achieve the quality standards we set for our projects. We have no doubt that in the end it is going to be the quality of designs that will help us grow. So we continue to follow a long-term approach to evolve with time," Khanna reveals.

Demand is also associated with increased challenges but Khanna feels it is also a huge advantage to get an insight into the minds of hotel developers, heads of international chains and international as well as domestic vendors. "This kind of knowledge is priceless. Now, doing cutting edge design work is a passion and we get a big high when our designs are praised by Indian and international industry leaders," he admits.