

HOTEL Yearbook 2014

FORESIGHT AND INNOVATION IN THE GLOBAL HOTEL INDUSTRY

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IH&RA in 2014: Protecting the interests of the industry

Interview with **Casimir Platzer** 

In mid-2013 Casimir Platzer took over the reins of the International Hotel & Restaurant Association (IH&RA) as its new President. The Hotel Yearbook caught up with Casimir to find out about the organization's goals for 2014 and how he sizes up the key issues the industry is facing.

The Hotel Yearbook: Casimir, you've been president of the IH&RA only since April of 2013 – not a long enough time to have made huge changes yet, but long enough to sense the lay of the land. What have been your priorities during this first phase of your leadership of the organization?

Casimir Platzer: During these first seven months in office, I've placed a lot of emphasis on visiting association members – primarily national hospitality associations - to get feedback from them about what IH&RA should focus on in the next few years and how we can best work together. It's been a very productive few months.

HYB: Can you already tell us what your strategic focus will be in 2014?

CP: It seems clear that one thing we absolutely need to do is grow our membership base. So activities to market the IH&RA to new beneficiaries, and also win back some who have left us, will definitely be a high priority next year. An important part of this effort will be to redefine the benefits of membership, to make sure that participation is attractive and valuable. In addition, we have in mind modifying the membership structure and fees, which we hope will make it a clear “must” to be part of the IH&RA – for both new and long-standing members. **HYB:** What about sources of revenue for the association? Are you looking at new ways of making money to support your activities?

CP: Absolutely. We are exploring several ideas, and there will be more to say on this shortly.

HYB: Let's talk about the industry itself. One of the key missions of the IH&RA is to lobby on behalf of the hospitality industry concerning regulatory issues and other environmental factors that affect the hotel and restaurant business globally. In the conversations you've had with your counterparts in the various national hospitality organizations over these last few months, what are you most frequently hearing as the tough challenges facing the industry ahead?

CP: We certainly do face some interesting challenges! One of the biggest that we want to contribute to solving is the issue of sustainability. I think the industry has been making great progress toward becoming greener and more sustainable over the last few years, but there is more work to do. One thing that will help is to clean up the confusing proliferation of sustainability labels and tools in use around the world. All of these are well-intentioned, but as they are not coordinated or particularly transparent from one market to the next, the situation has become messy and in need of some harmonization.

HYB: The growth of OTAs must also be an issue on people's minds...

CP: You're absolutely right. The hospitality industry is one of the largest sectors in the global economy, if not the largest. International travel alone accounts for about \$800 billion every year, and if you add in the purely domestic expenditures that aren't counted in that amount, the figure would probably triple. However, a larger and larger part of that money is being siphoned out of the industry every day by OTAs. Of course they are bringing a lot of business to member



***Casimir Platzer** graduated from the Ecole hôtelière de Lausanne in 1987, working as manager of the Blue Lake resort in Kandersteg from 1987 to 1989, then of the Belle Epoque Hotel Victoria in Kandersteg, which he has owned since 1992. Casimir has been the President of the Hotel Association Bernese Oberland 2000 - 2008, President of GastroBern 2003 - 2012, on the Board of Directors of Switzerland Tourism since 2004, the Board of Directors of GastroSuisse since 2012, and since April 2013 is the President of the IH&RA.*

hotels, but they are taking a lot of money in commissions. We need to find ways to stop this bleeding and retain more of “our” money in the industry. It is billions we are talking about here. This is capital that is needed for investment in new infrastructure, renovations and refurbishing, expanding employment – all for the good of local economies as well as the hospitality industry and its guests. We must find ways to retain this money within the industry rather than watch it being channeled into the hands of the OTAs.

HYB: What other issues are concerning your members?

CP: I’ll mention two briefly. First, it’s difficult – in any business – to find skilled, talented staff. Possibly this is going to get even more difficult as time goes on because of the long-term demographic trends playing out. But what we are seeing which is a critical issue for many hotel companies is that they hire people and train them, but when a new hotel company moves into the same market and cannot find sufficient staff on their own, they simply hijack employees from the hotels that were there before them, paying a little more to entice them to jump ship. We ought to be able to prevent this practice, as it does real damage to the existing businesses.

Second, the hotel industry is seeing increased competition from well-coordinated packagers and distributors of private accommodation. This is an issue of unfair competition, because the playing field is not level at all. Hotels have to meet very strict regulatory standards in many areas of our business – for example pass health inspections, just to name

one of the more obvious requirements we face. All these regulatory hurdles increase the security of the guests, but they add to our costs. Private accommodation can be offered on the market without meeting any of these regulatory requirements, and we don’t think this is fair – nor is it in the best interest of the consumer.

HYB: It sounds like you are going to have your hands full in 2014!

CP: Yes, there will certainly be busy – but interesting – times ahead!





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