INSIDE A REBRAND

KIM GIGUERE-LAPINE HELPED SMITH & WOLLENSKY KEEP UP WITH THE TIMES—WITHOUT LOSING ITS LEGACY
From the Dean

Dear SHA Family,

One of the consistent themes of Check In is change, and particularly change within the hospitality industry. In this issue, we consider how discrete hospitality institutions market themselves in response to—and because of—the larger trend of change. The way we function as consumers has shifted, and correspondingly, what we want out of life and out of hospitality is dramatically different. In the not-so-distant past, new restaurants opened amid great fanfare and excitement (and still do); existing restaurants would, in response, go through a brand refresh to try to compete with these new establishments, which often resembled them at least structurally. But now, the competitive landscape includes unfamiliar entities that don’t look anything like the existing restaurants. Instead, they take the form of the expansive eat-in section of Wegmans supermarket, for example; or they turn the food court model on its head and transform into Eataly, a huge, gourmet Italian marketplace.

Innovators in the industry are trying to create concepts and projects that offer the types of novel, convenient experiences that consumers crave. One fabulous example is The Lot in La Jolla, San Diego. Behind the façade of a bustling, upscale, casual restaurant is an eight-screen cinema. Its founder, Adolfo Fastlicht (’89), says he is in the business of “lifestyle entertainment,” illustrating that, sometimes, hospitality isn’t just about what the consumer enters for, but also what they find inside to address and fulfill all of their needs. (Read more about Fastlicht and The Lot on page 8.)

The task of rebranding to remain a viable competitor in the current industry landscape is infinitely complex. In our cover story (page 4), respected hospitality brand managers share their stories and help us to understand how best to reinvigorate a brand. I hope you find this useful and informative.

Best wishes,

Arun Upneja
**GRADUATE PROGRAM ANNOUNCED**

**IN SUMMER 2017, SHA will welcome its inaugural class of master’s students.**

The School’s newly launched Master of Management in Hospitality is designed for those with liberal arts or business backgrounds who are ready to switch to a hospitality leadership career. Dean Arun Upneja says SHA’s first dedicated master’s program—undergraduates can already apply for jobs and internships—will bring to our students.

**TEN YEARS ON COMM AVE**

In 2006, SHA moved from BU’s Metropolitan College to its own building—a 26,124-square-foot space designed to feel like a luxury hotel. In the decade since moving to 928 Commonwealth Avenue, SHA has added intimate student lounges and seminar rooms, high-tech auditoriums, a state-of-the-art boardroom, and a career resource center that offers one-on-one coaching. “Having our own building has been critical to the success of SHA,” says Dean Arun Upneja. “Since the entire building is devoted to the School, the hospitality industry identifies SHA as an independent entity within the BU brand, which helps create pathways for industry leaders to interact with the students and faculty.”

In June 2016, SHA celebrated the anniversary of its move with Irma Mann, president of ISMA, Inc., who was president of the Dean’s Advisory Board at the time of the building’s construction. During the celebratory tour of 928, Upneja showed Mann recent upgrades designed to increase the versatility of the classrooms, from webcams to desks that swivel and snap together to encourage student collaboration. “This building inspires students to collaborate with their peers,” says Upneja. “The ability to customize our space means that we can provide specialized instruction and resources to our students. For example, we are able to remotely invite leaders and guest speakers to any of our classrooms by using Skype, offer students high-tech strategies for innovation and collaboration, and improve the overall quality of the education we bring to our students.”

**BUILDING UP CAMPUS LIFE**

SHA has come a long way since moving to 928 Commonwealth Avenue. In the high-tech auditorium, SHA offers students high-tech strategies for innovation and collaboration, and improve the overall quality of the education we bring to our students.

**YOUR DONATIONS**

Your generous donations to the Campaign for Boston University have helped SHA:

- Host workshops, professional development activities, and events
- Send student groups to conferences and events in New York, Las Vegas, and Washington, D.C.
- Fund professional LinkedIn headshots for students
- Provide flights for students interning at Taj hotels in India
- Upgrade classrooms and student lounge technology

Your donations help SHA:

- Apply for jobs and internships
- Post cover letters and résumés
- Sign up for events and programs
- Access Going Global, a database for researching employers and careers in more than 30 countries

Questions about Handshake? Call SHA’s Career Center at 617-358-9577. Established with a grant from the J. Willard and Alice S. Marriott Foundation, the center can help you polish your résumé, practice interview skills, and find professional opportunities. Learn more at bu.edu/hospitality/careers.

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**YOUR GIVING IN NUMBERS**

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Learn more about supporting SHA at www.bu.edu/campaign.

Find more students as they post photos from their internships around the world in SHA’s ongoing Instagram Takeover at www.instagram.com/buschoolofhospitality.

Amanda DeJesus: “I visited Glacier once when I was a kid, and I always wanted to come back. I chose my location within the park (West Glacier Restaurant) because the HR director told me that I would be able to rotate through the most positions, including barista, ice cream scooper, dining room attendant, server, and line cook. I got lots of chances to shadow the assistant dining room managers as well. Serving ice cream is the best part of my job because it is so easy to make people happy. I always joke with my coworkers that I am either serving caffeine or ice cream, so my customers are always glad to see me. Quality is better than speed. You working in food service is quick paced and you have to be good at multitasking, but if you slow down and do things correctly, you will benefit from it. Not only will you be less stressed out at work, but your customers will appreciate your better service.”

Madeline Christian: “I chose The Langham Auckland because I was very interested in hotel events and the luxury market. I spent the first half of my internship working in the banquets department, where I got to work weddings, galas, cocktail functions, business meetings, and large receptions. I spent the second half of my internship in the event sales department. This is one of the setups (inset right top) I helped with for a wedding in the banquet department. It’s crazy how much goes into making sure those large functions are successful. I really enjoyed the experience, and I learned a lot about what goes into ensuring that a bride and groom are happy. One of the best parts of New Zealand is its wine. This photo (inset right bottom) is from a wine tour I did on Waheke Island off of the coast of Auckland at Miri Vineyard. My internship at The Langham really opened my eyes to what goes into the success of a five-star event.”
INSIDE A REBRAND™

How to revitalize an established brand—without losing your legacy

BY JULIE BUTTERS

What sets us apart from the competition?

Brand colors & psychology:
Blue: Trust, dependable, strength
Green: Peaceful, growth, health

Brand Personality
Fresh Classic
Relaxing
Clean
Competent
Premium

Classic font reflects our legacy—can we update to something more modern without compromising our brand personality?

Who is our audience?
Typical customer?
Desired customer?

Business travelers
Younger, modern travelers

UPSTAIRS FROM THE ELEGANT, WATER-VIEW DINING ROOM OF THE SMITH & WOLLENSKY STEAKHOUSE ON ATLANTIC WHARF IN BOSTON IS A WALK-IN FREEZER STOCKED WITH 9,500 POUNDS OF USDA PRIME BEEF. “This is where the magic happens,” says executive chef Matt King. The meat spends up to 28 days dry-aging, a tenderizing technique that concentrates flavor and that King likens to aging wine in oak. Few restaurants in the United States dry-age and butcher their meat on-site, he says. “This is the heart and soul of what we do.”

Just a handful of years ago, however, you wouldn’t have known that from looking at Smith & Wollensky’s website. The web design was antiquated, and the site failed to tell the story of what made the boutique American steakhouse group special, including in-house dry-aging. Ads and marketing materials used a photo of grilled steak—though the restaurant charbroils.

“It was a very old, tired brand,” says Kim Giguere-Lapine, senior vice president of marketing, who made it a priority to refresh the company’s image—starting with the website—when she was hired in 2010.

Rebranding is about more than sprucing up a logo. “Your brand is your entire personality, your story, what sets you apart from others,” says Giguere-Lapine (‘89). It’s what people remember about your company, and it can be conveyed through advertising, location, products, service, and pretty much anything else a customer might interact with. Apple isn’t just hip because it has sleek ads—its products are trendsetting and even its store staff have geek chic. But customer perceptions, whether fair or not, can be powerful for the wrong reasons, too: McDonald’s might have revamped its menu with salads and smoothies, but how many still think about super-sized, calorie-infused meals when they see the golden arches? For legacy brands, companies that are at least a decade old, forging a new identity can be like turning a tanker ship. And in an era where competitors can spring from almost nowhere—Airbnb went from zero to one million bookings in fewer than three years—that sluggishness can prove fatal.

“Companies that are comfortable, that are not taking initiative to go out there and change with the marketplace, are going to be left behind and go out of business,” says Alex Friedman (‘06), cofounder of Ruckus Brewing Company and Ruckus Marketing, whose clients include The Venetian hotel in Las Vegas and HSBC bank. An expert in boosting brand recognition who has written for Entrepreneur and Forbes, Friedman acknowledges that change is a lot harder for legacy brands, “and it costs a lot more money because what they’re trying to do is change an opinion instead of establish one.”

But the effort is worth it. Ruckus launched a marketing campaign for a facilities management firm that had a dated look (Friedman declines to name clients for confidentiality reasons) and convinced...
the company to send staff out with iPads rather than paper forms. The technology conveyed a more modern feel to clients—and saved on data entry costs. Over the next couple of years, the firm grew “probably twice what they’d grown in any year prior.”

CONTENDING WITH NOVELTY

Michael Pereira (’05) knows firsthand how important it is to evolve with the marketplace. From 2013 to 2015, in roles such as head of global brand management, he helped lead the reinvention of Sheraton Hotels & Resorts Worldwide, which includes more than 500 properties in more than 70 countries. The company, established in 1937, is recognized around the globe. “If you saw Sheraton, you knew that there was always going to be a friendly staff member who’s going to welcome you; you were always going to feel at home,” says Pereira, now global brand manager, St. Regis and The Luxury Collection Hotels & Resorts. But that didn’t set Sheraton apart from competitors like Hilton and Marriott—or prevent guests, especially business travelers weary of the status quo, from drifting to flashier upstarts.

The question was, “How do we take on a younger, more modern traveler who’s being enticed by boutique brands, by the new and the glittery, and how do we use our heritage and our legacy to say that we are the best at what we do and we can compete in those areas as well?”

—MICHAEL PEREIRA (’05)

Pereira hired an agency to interview Sheraton owners and guests, who confirmed the need for a refresh. “Our look was dated and a bit traditional,” says Pereira. “People wanted more personality and a more premium experience.” Those findings seem to be backed by the Business Travel News Hotel Brand Survey 2015, which put Sheraton down at number 8 in its Upper-Upscale Brand Satisfaction ranking: “The leading brands in each tier,” it said in its report on the survey, “have made efforts to appeal to modern travelers and millennials, investing in more than just new pil- lows and better breakfasts.” Pereira shared the agency’s research within the company. He says having data like guest sentiment to highlight strengths and weaknesses can help win over internal skeptics, especially those at the top. Executives sweating shareholder reaction and their own job security might be more hesitant to change than those in startups with less to lose. Still, an increase in revenue is “something that most people can get behind,” says Friedman. He suggests winning over any stragglers with small, achievable milestones (like updating a few pages of a website or creating a new sales brochure).

Pereira and his team focused on premium experiences, particularly for business travelers. He rebranched Sheraton’s Travelite program, which enables guests to leave a suitcase of clothes at a hotel for any forthcoming stays; while they’re away, the clothes will be laundered, pressed, and repacked. He also helped debut Paired, dining experiences that offer guests fine wine, beer, and local cuisine—such as Hong Kong Harbour-style roast Iberico pork ribs at the Sheraton Grand Macau—right in the hotel lobby or bar. Pereira says the program drew guests’ attention to Sheraton’s culinary talent. These and other initiatives have boosted Sheraton’s profits, he says. “Anytime metrics are up and you’re looking at double-digit growth, you know something is working.”

Sheraton’s work isn’t over. “Ensuring that we are attracting younger guests while not alienating other travelers is what navigates the con- stant updates and future programs,” says Pereira. He says one of the latest efforts at Sheraton is “looking at what today’s modern traveler expects from a fitness experience, whether it’s a tie-in to your wear- able technology or virtual coaching. Rebranding efforts touch every aspect of the experience,” and rebranding teams need to “reimagine those experiences with a fresh perspective.”

REBRANDING 101

ROUND UP DATA. At Sheraton, Michael Pereira hired an agency to conduct interviews with guests and owners about the company. The data pointed the challenges Sheraton needed to overcome: “It was kind of the fuel that we needed to persevere.”

RALLY STAKEHOLDERS. The challenge of rebranding is sometimes “more about the people at the corporation changing their perspective on their own brand than it is about the look of the brand itself,” says Alex Friedman.

START SMALL, TEST EARLY. Kim Giguere-Lapine trialed a new menu at one Smith & Wollensky location and sparked a distinctive, freestanding brand, while Friedman helped a hotel try a new concept with model units in an existing property. Pereira suggests winning over internal skeptics with small changes like revamping a few website pages.

DON’T FORGET WHO YOU ARE. “You don’t have to lose your brand identity to modernize and bring yourself into the current era,” says Friedman. “And I think you do that by listening to the customer and improving the product, offering to meet their current expectations, and updating styles to reflect what’s current and modern in today’s society.”

FINE DINING IN A RECESSION

Giguere-Lapine’s challenge was similar to Pereira’s: giving a legacy brand (Smith & Wollensky was founded in 1977) a stronger identity that sets it apart in a crowded market. But she had fewer resources to do the job: she started out with just a small slice of the annual budget to spend.
Fancy Flicks

CINEMEX COFOUNDER ADOLFO FASTLICHT (’91) BRINGS AN UPMARKET THEATER EXPERIENCE TO THE STATES

BY ANDREW THURSTON

AN ARTISAN ALMOND CRISPBREAD. Seared filet mignon with a red wine jus. A glass of the 2012 Robert Mondavi Cabernet Sauvignon. And a really big bucket of popcorn washed down with a blue raspberry Icee. At The Lot, a boutique entertainment complex in San Diego’s La Jolla neighborhood, a premium multiscreen cinema sits under the same roof as a fine dining restaurant, a bar, and a café. Some people stop in for their daily coffee, some for breakfast or lunch, some for dinner or a movie.

“The ultimate objective,” says The Lot cofounder and CEO Adolfo Fastlicht (’89), “is that if our clients go there for coffee, they will be back for food, if they go there for food, they’ll go back for drinks; if they’re there for drinks, they’ll go back for coffee. It’s a self-fuelling, positive referral.”

WE LIKE TO SAY WE’RE IN THE LIFESTYLE ENTERTAINMENT BUSINESS MORE THAN IN THE CINEMA BUSINESS.

—ADOLFO FASTLICHT (’91)

The inaugural venue opened in La Jolla in October 2015; the second—also in San Diego—opened six months later. “We like to say we’re in the lifestyle entertainment business more than in the cinema business,” says Fastlicht. “Ours is a business concept that really becomes this hybrid of the two. Instead of us having rooms, what we have is cinemas.”

Within six years, Cinemex had expanded to 317 screens. Forbes later reported that the three classmates had managed to raise $21.5 million—in exchange for a share of approximately $295 million. After later helping a rival Mexican chain, Cinépolis, open luxury cinemas in the United States, Fastlicht thinks he has the opportunity to be among the first to bring the American cinema experience to Mexico.

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Fastlicht and his partners were capitalizing on a gap in the market: for years, Mexicans had been stuck with decrepit state-run movie houses, but in 1992, the government deregulated, selling off theaters to private investors. The Cinemex founders saw a chance to be among the first to bring the American cinema experience to Mexico. Within six years, Cinemex had expanded to 317 screens. Forbes later reported that the three classmates had managed to raise $21.5 million—in exchange for a share of approximately $295 million.

There will always be things that will come out of left field,” he says, “so having a plan is key because at least it gives you a sense of direction. But then being able to modify that plan, to update it, to tweak it, to make it better is key. You need to be nimble enough to react.”

To combat Airbnb’s growing popularity, hotels must better understand what the decision drivers are for their various guest segments. Technology accessibility is essential in selling any good or service in today’s digital world. Airbnb’s website combines rich visuals with limited wording, providing easy browsing experiences. Hotels must maintain user-friendly sites to advertise more enticing experiences and enable quicker bookings. ‘Live there’ is Airbnb’s signature tagline; in boarding rooms, locals, Airbnb advertises a more authentic stay. Hotels are improving on built-in amenities and experience, not just on the rooms at the resort’s dishes. These experiences are not offered or available for guests who book through Airbnb.

“Today, more than ever, given all the choices travelers have—whether staying at a branded hotel, an independent property, or a friend’s or stranger’s home—it is critical for hoteliers to focus on making guests feel connected and engaged with the on-property team, the location, and the overall experience. This is, of course, in addition to understanding guest needs and preferences, and making their experience from start to finish as effortless, flawless, and meaningful as possible. We have to listen to our guests and do our best to exceed their expectations. That’s been true from the very beginning, and it remains so today. We must be fierce competitors, providing the best service, product, and quality in our competitive space.”

WHAT IS THE BEST WAY FOR HOTELS TO COMPETE WITH AIRBNB?

We asked three SHA advisory board members to answer this question for Check In readers.

Warren Fields
Principal & CEO, Pyramid Hotel Group

“When Airbnb first launched, many hoteliers were quick to dismiss the concept, assuming that the company’s target demographic would not be the same as theirs. In analyzing booking data over the past few years, however, we’ve learned this assumption is not true. Airbnb’s largest growing segment of customers is [people] 35 to 44 years of age who are looking for accommodations in a convenient location with good overall value for their money. These consumers are not only considering Airbnb accommodations when booking travel, but are also considering upscale hotels. The biggest benefit that hotels—like Omni Hotels & Resorts—offer against Airbnb is service and amenities; for example, Omni taps into our customers’ desire for local engagement by providing locally sourced food and beverages. At Omni Amelia Island Plantation Resort, the executive chef tends to eight beehives and utilizes the harvested honey in many of the resort’s dishes. These experiences are not offered or available for guests who book through Airbnb.”

Joey Rothschild
Chief Human Resources Officer, Omni Hotels & Resorts

“This is, of course, in addition to understanding guest needs and preferences, and making their experience from start to finish as effortless, flawless, and meaningful as possible. We have to listen to our guests and do our best to exceed their expectations. That’s been true from the very beginning, and it remains so today. We must be fierce competitors, providing the best service, product, and quality in our competitive space.”

Eric Danziger
CEO, Trump Hotel Collection

“I often say that we are in the people business. We are in the business of being hospitable, the business of welcoming people. Our industry is built on service and experience, not just on the rooms in our hotels.”
SUPRIYA DESAI (’91) runs Desai Transformation LLC, a management consulting and executive coaching business that works with companies to develop leadership and operations agility, and helps business leaders implement organizational change programs. Supriya writes that she remembers “my exciting HOFO—what we used to call the School for HoTel and FLoOd Administration—days fondly and think often of my talented friends! Long lost friends can reach me directly at sosuy@yahoo.com. I’d LOVE to hear from you.” She invites fellow SHA alums to learn more about her firm at www.desaitransformation.com.

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THE BOSTON UNIVERSITY
LOYALTY SOCIETY

The Loyalty Society honors BU’s alumni, parents, faculty, staff, and friends who make gifts to the University year after year. Now’s the time to make YOUR impact on BU by becoming a member. It’s easy: just donate any amount to BU for two or more years (or start a recurring gift), and you’re in. Consistent support is what makes Boston University great.

WELCOME TO ALL OUR INAUGURAL LOYALTY SOCIETY MEMBERS!

To learn more about member benefits, and to join the society, visit bu.edu/loyaltysociety.