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The Importance of Market Research

'At Your Service' Spotlight: Developing hospitality leaders of the future at the Hotel ICON, Hong Kong



Above & Beyond Lounge at the Hotel ICON. Photo courtesy of Hotel ICON

Hotel ICON is a unique teaching and research hotel in Hong Kong that offers a fully integrated teaching and learning approach to education. Officially opened in September 2011, wholly owned by Hong Kong Polytechnic University and an extension of the School of Hotel and Tourism Management (SHTM), Hotel ICON is located in East Tsim Sha Tsui. Envisioned as a 'hotel with a purpose', the hotel is committed to providing an interactive and dynamic learning environment, as well as state-of-the-art educational facilities. The School has fully integrated Hotel ICON into its curriculum by revamping a host of subjects spanning daily hotel operations, event management, financial administration, entrepreneurship, and service quality management, all of which include practical training.

Starting from the ground upwards in 2009, former General Manager Richard Hatter and his team spent 16 months designing and building the ICON brand, from the original brand work that informed the name and the essential essence of business, to the interior design and menu briefs, visual identity, and individual development of all three hotel restaurants: Above & Beyond, The Market and Green. Other key inspirational figures in this journey of formulating the brand identity were the Board Chairman, Victor Lo, the President of the University, Professor Timothy Tong, and the Dean of SHTM, Professor Kaye Chon.

With over 30 years' experience in the world of hospitality as General Manager of five-star hotels in the UK, the British Virgin Islands, Bahrain, Dubai, Indonesia, China, Singapore and Hong Kong, Richard Hatter says ICON's main purposes is to develop leaders of the future. "So we spend a lot of our time around innovation, creativity, looking at new technology, things like service design, basically making sure that our students of the School of Hotel and Tourism management are geared up for hospitality careers." Hatter was recognized as the General Manager of the Year at The BMW Hotelier Awards Greater China 2018, hailed as the 'Oscars' of the hotel industry.

Hatter says the way ICON train staff is very unique. "We don't have manuals that tell them whether or not they can have a tattoo, or how to tie their tie, or what color their hair should be. Instead, our training program called *We Love to Care* incorporates three fundamental areas. One is Operational Excellence – the correct way to do things. The second part is Aesthetic Excellence – if we walk into a restaurant we teach the staff to say 'is it too hot in here?'; 'is it too cold in here?'; 'is the lighting right?'; 'is the music too loud or too soft?' – these are all the soft touches. The third part of our training is Emotional Excellence – creating a memorable experience for the customer that is authentic and localized to Hong Kong. We teach the staff how to talk to the customer – by doing small things that leave the customer with a memory. We then share these stories with the rest of the team and often then see them translated into reviews by customers on TripAdvisor, and so we have a way of measuring our customer service."

Hatter says that technology has helped create these memorable experiences. "If you have all the background information on your customer, all the big data through technology, then you are able to forge together and design a journey for the customer that creates these memorable experiences. For the customer it is completely seamless – they are not aware that it is happening."

Research is taken seriously at Hotel ICON, and management regularly work with SHTM faculty on different research projects. Some guest rooms are used to try new innovations such as temperature-controlled beds. "We experiment and use Hotel ICON as a laboratory," says Hatter. "For example, in revenue management we are partnering with Duetto to experiment with the latest contextualized open pricing where rates are continually responding to shifts and patterns in potential demand from different markets and channels in real time."