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Boosting the Competitiveness of Hotel Business Operators in Current Conditions

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Abstract:

This paper is devoted to developing a set of techniques for boosting the competitiveness of hotel business operators under the conditions of today. The authors substantiate that hotel business operators need government support in ensuring the interoperability of documentation relating to strategic and territorial planning at all levels of governance and in developing hospitality industry infrastructure in recreationally attractive regions. It is established that of special relevance is implementing in the management of domestic hotel complexes the latest efficient management models that are consistent with world standards. Some of the key activities suggested to be undertaken to enhance the domestic hotel sector include building new hotel complexes, renovating existing ones, and boosting the level of service provided by hotels. The study helps identify a set of priority vectors for the development of hotel business operators, including the development of the material base of hotel enterprises through attracting additional investment for renovations and new construction projects.

Keywords: competitiveness; operator; hotel business; tourism; effectiveness; management; enterprise

JEL Classification: L89; D41.

Introduction

The rapid development of the hotel business has brought about the need to enlist professional hotel operators to manage one's hotels. A hotel operator may be a management company engaged in the centralized management of an independent hotel or a group of hotels with a view to boosting their efficiency, profit margins, and

competitiveness through the provision of qualified services related to consulting on, managing, and coordinating a hotel's activity for a certain fee.

This kind of interaction may result in synergetic effects, while joining standalone enterprises within the hotel business up into territorial-production complexes fixed to a specific location may produce a multiplicative effect.

The authors suggest considering the possibility of a hotel operator operating both at the level of a region and at that of the country as a whole. In particular, a regional hotel operator may represent a management company engaged in the centralized management of both a standalone hotel and a group of hotels, which concurrently are engaged in both interaction and competition with one another in providing hotel services, as well as engaged in interaction with regional authorities and various adjoining infrastructural organizations.

Today, one is witnessing a sharp increase in the number of hotels that are united for management by hotel operators, with the number of standalone hotels is declining accordingly. Even in Europe, dominated by standalone hotels, the number of hotel enterprises united under a single operator has risen in recent years to 25% of the overall number.

A hotel operator will, normally, possess cutting-edge achievements in the area of managing the hotel business and market, which it continually enhances, and employ highly professional personnel. One of the key benefits of this kind of partnership for the owner of a hotel is access to the generalized experience of many hotels and a knowledge base relating to the market's operation, as well as highly professional management which helps save the owner time and money due to the operator's well-oiled system functioning as a single organism every step of the way – from purchasing inventory to serving hotel guests per se.

Research into issues related to boosting the competitiveness of hotel business operators has been conducted by scholars E.S. Kurbonov (2015), E.S. Maksimova (2016), A.N. Petrov (Petrov, Kurochkina, and Sergeev 2016), A.A. Safronova (Safronova and Danilova 2015), E.L. Shaginyan (Shaginyan and Bespyatykh 2015), and others.

However, the conceptual foundations of improving the competitiveness of hotel business operators remain equivocal, with the methodology of the strategic development of hotel business operators having yet to be developed more widely and certain key characteristics of hotel business entities being factored in insufficiently in putting together long-term programs for their development. All this makes it hard to purposefully pursue boosts in the competitiveness of hotel business operators in practice.

1. Methods

Methodologically, this study is grounded in the following general scholarly methods: analysis and synthesis, employed to analyze existing theoretical and methodological approaches and tenets and research insights related to enhancing the competitiveness of hotel business operators; the structural-logical method, utilized to systematize the factors influencing the development of companies within the sector; factor analysis, used to determine the impact of those factors on levels of consumer satisfaction with the quality of service provided.

The study's information basis is certain statutes, laws, and regulations, statistical materials from federal and local authorities, and research publications by domestic and foreign scholars related to issues of boosting the competitiveness of hotel business operators (Agamirova, Agamirova, Lebedeva, Lebedev, and Ilkevich 2017, Kurbatskaya, Dobrotvorskaya, and Ustin 2015, Zaitseva, Kozlov, and Nikolskaya 2017).

One of the study's key objectives is to develop a set of techniques for boosting the competitiveness of hotel business operators in regions, provide a rationale for a set of strategies for the social-economic development of hotel business operators, and develop the foundations of a strategy for their development. In addition, the authors undertake to provide a rationale for a set of techniques for assessing the competitiveness of hotel business operators and determine and formulate some of the key areas for the strategic development of companies within the hospitality industry at the regional level.

2. Results

Some of the key benefits hotel owners may derive from working with hotel operators include: expertise and reliability; sound personnel training and management; the use of a full range of tools and tactics for boosting a hotel's profit margin, etc. A possible effective way to remediate the current lack of professional managers and the inability to properly organize the work of hotels in the Russian Federation in order to enhance the operation of the nation's hotel business is to let regional hotel operators handle it. Hotel operators could play a major role in the process based on the use of their knowledge and experience, including best international practices.

A hotel operator is capable of finding faster than anyone else an internal resource for tapping into novel management technology, will take care of training and apprenticeships for personnel, and may enlist professionals

from other countries to help facilitate the professional growth of local personnel. For instance, the French operator Accor is empowered to make decisions in relation to selecting personnel for Russian hotels across such key positions as General Manager, Director of Sales, Director of Food and Beverages, Senior Chef, with all senior staff at the hotels undergoing regular career enhancement training at the Accor Academy.

Hotel owners who lack knowledge of all the tricks of the trade may have hard time maintaining control over the hotel's cash flows and assessing the performance of hotel managers, so the other area where hotel operators come in handy is maintaining control over the operation of all the units within a hotel, which is handled by highly professional staff. Hotel operator activity may also serve as a source of know-how within the area of effective international marketing.

Based on the findings from the authors' research, operators are currently penetrating into the market for hotel services at a level of less than 1%. The share of international hotel operators could double to reach 260 entities by 2019. As of the late 2017, the Russian market featured most major international hotel operators, offering both direct hotel management and franchising. The way in the Russian market is currently led by Carlson Rezidor Hotel Group, Accor Hotels, Intercontinental Hotel Group, and Marriott International.

As far as domestic hotel operators, the recent 10 years have seen the emergence of quite a number of companies which, having gained some experience working with international chains, were able to come up with quality control, promotion, and sales systems of their own, and are now competing with international chains in the Russian market. All Russian chains are ranked among the top ten among 23 chains operating in Russia at the moment (Table 1).

Evidence from practice indicates that a key focus in the development of the hotel business is currently on democraticity, transparency, and openness. Add to that the nation's convenient geographic location, picturesque natural complexes, rich historical heritage, rich culture, and inimitable national flair – what is not attractive about it to tourists? Having said that, a uniform, standard approach taken by foreign operators in running a hotel, to which everyone is used to and which everyone would like to be followed everywhere, is not likely to facilitate getting to know the country to the fullest.

Therefore, it is domestic hotel operators that are expected to align the use of the latest technology, a focus on the quality of service, and compliance with relevant technical standards with Russia's national characteristics.

Table 1. International and Domestic Hotel Chains in the Market of the Russian Federation

Hotel chain	Brands featured in Russia	Number of hotels
Russian hotel chains		
AMAKS Hotels & Resorts	AMAKS	18
AZIMUT hotel chain	AZIMUT	15
Cronwell Hotels & Resorts	Cronwell Inn, Cronwell Resort, Cronwell Park	10
Heliopark Hotel Group	Heliopark	10
Intourist Hotel Group	-	5
International hotel chains		
Rezidor Hotel Group	Radisson Blu, Park Inn	25
Accor Hotels	Ibis, Novotel, Mercure	19
Marriott International	Marriott, Renaissance, Courtyard, Ritz-Carlton	14
Intercontinental Hotels Group	Holiday Inn, Crowne Plaza, Indigo, Holiday Inn Express	13
Hilton Worldwide	Hilton, DoubleTree, Garden Inn, Hampton	12
Kempinski Hotels	Kempinski	4
MAXIMA Hotels	MAXIMA	4
Sokos Hotels	Sokos	3
Hyatt Corporation	Hyatt	3
Starwood Hotels & Resorts	Sheraton, W	3
Wyndham Hotels Group	Ramada	3
Four Seasons Hotels & Resorts	Four Seasons	2
Golden Tulip Hospitality Group	Golden Tulip	2

The benefits for an operator that will work in Russia have to do with serving not just foreign but domestic guests, as well as preparedness to accommodate the wishes and needs of domestic clients based on knowledge of their mentality and tastes should facilitate greater efficiency on the part of the operator itself. In addition, enlisting national hotel operators, which are better knowledgeable about the local conditions and the situation in the market

than foreign ones, may help minimize significantly a hotel's operating expenses, when it comes to renovations and use.

The authors suggest viewing the activity of hotel operators through the prism of functions they perform in their work. Some of the key functions performed by a hotel operator include: professional management; the use of a centralized booking system; systemic personnel selection and training; optimized spending; a focus on maximizing revenue.

Control is a highly important function performed by a hotel operator. Checks on compliance with standards have to be performed 2 to 4 times during the year. A hotel will not be barred from being managed by a certain operator should it violate corporate norms, but that may require remediating imperfections in work and even replacing some of the managerial staff.

It may be stated with confidence that benefits are especially tangible and convincing where there is an operator running the show already. This can be felt at the micro- and macrolevels, with these benefits being of a general (benefiting the entire region) and of an individual (benefiting the hotel) nature (Table 2).

Table 2. Key Benefits from Management by a Hotel Operator

Benefits from an operator's activity		
Implementation	Result	
	of an individual nature	of a general nature
1. Enhancing the level of service and the performance of a hotel's personnel	Greater profit from suites	Improved infrastructure in the region
2. Enhancing the sales system	Improved hotel occupancy	Increased tourist numbers
3. Maintaining control over and optimizing expenditure	Greater quality of inventory purchased for hotels	Greater tax receipts for the region
4. Boosting financial receipts	Upgrades to the hotel's material-technical base	Greater business activity in the region
		More jobs
		Greater pay
5. Simplifying the process of attracting investment	Greater return on investment	Improved integration processes in the region
		Economic multiplicative effect (construction, development of the public dining sector, boosts in tourism, boosts in air and rail travel)

Some of the key benefits owners may derive from enlisting a hotel operator include: professional management based on extensive practical experience; systemic personnel selection and training, which should ensure high levels of professionalism among staff; the use of a centralized booking system, which should simplify the work of hotels and make it easier for tourists to move about the country; optimizing spending through economizing on advertising and procurement expenses, which should help increase the hotel's profit margin; directing major resources toward working out a marketing strategy for the hotel and developing new products and standards.

3. Discussion

The possible benefits for the national economy from implementing the above techniques for boosting the competitiveness of hotel business operators in present-day conditions include: increases in investment in Russia's hotel sector; greater tax receipts for the state based on the tax base getting larger; boosts in the quality and declines in the cost of services within the hotel sector owing to professional management.

The current political and economic situation in the Russian Federation has had a negative effect on tourism demand and activity within the hotel industry. It may be possible to minimize the impact of external factors, with a view to boosting the competitive advantage of the hotel business, through implementing the following activities: hotels and other lodging facilities may need to enhance their techniques and mechanisms for attracting clients through the creation of new key competencies, which should have a positive effect in terms of developing new quality standards and service technology; investors may be better off building 3-star hotels to ensure faster returns on investment owing to steady occupancy; the hotel industry may need to work more robustly with the government in a concerted effort to develop ways to counter the recession.

However, recession may motivate hotel operators to seek novel solutions, open new vistas for partnerships, and encourage creating unique service technology, like dictating one's terms in selecting top personnel in the labor market; continually improving the quality of service; implementing novel marketing approaches and developing

effective channels for the sale of hotel services; developing and implementing mechanisms for cooperating with other players in the market for hotel services; taking advantage of opportunity to obtain assets at good prices.

Commonly, recession is expected to have a mostly positive effect in terms of boosts in competitiveness, facilitate carrying out efficient search for new clients, encourage the unification and formation of hotel chains, and encourage enlisting hotel operators to ensure effective management.

Evidence from practice suggests that it is impossible to stimulate the development of the hotel business without developing the tourism sector as well. It may be required to implement a broad array of activities to ensure the most efficient use of the hotel sector's potential.

Firstly, it will help to work out a competitive concept on the development of the hospitality industry. A strategic concept on the development of the market for hotel services could consist of the following stages: determining the potential volume of tourism flows and their structure; identifying target client groups; analyzing the structure and volume of the current hotel supply factoring in the target client groups; putting together the hotel product for the target client groups factoring in the target volume and structure of tourism flows; determining the need for creating various types of hotels and basic infrastructure.

Secondly, it may be required to also identify some other issues not related to infrastructure which are impeding the development of the hotel business (lack of personnel, corruption, organizational barriers to the development of small entrepreneurship, etc.).

Thirdly, it may be necessary to work out a marketing plan and a set of activities aimed at attracting private and public investment and ensure control over the implementation of adopted strategies and over the development of the hotel business.

Fourthly, it is promoting the services in the tourism and hotel markets.

Research suggests a key characteristic of the hotel product is that the major part of it is made up of the historical-cultural component, recreational services offered, and such components of the natural-biological subsystem as a region's landscape, flora, fauna, and climate. An effective means of cultivating an image at the regional level is territorial marketing, i.e. marketing in the interests of the specific region and internal and external business entities associated with it.

Best practices attest to the following being an indispensable element in putting together a hotel product: organizing all manner of fêtes, fairs, festivals, concerts, and sports activities (Annaeva and Saimaganbetova 2015, Lomova *et al.* 2016). An essential method for fostering a proper image is creating and implementing regional and local programs for the development of the hotel business in the area.

Conclusion

To conclude, the hotel business is currently faced with the following major issues: disproportions in the territorial placement of hotel business operators; poor service quality; the subpar condition of the material-technical base; lack of R&D and advertising-information support for promoting hotel services; low levels of professionalism among personnel; failure to use lodging facilities and land property as intended.

Hotel business operators need government support in ensuring the interoperability of documentation relating to strategic and territorial planning at all levels of governance. Government support is also needed in developing hospitality industry infrastructure in recreationally attractive regions and in creating and filling with content a state information database for quantitative and qualitative assessments of the development of the hotel business.

Of special relevance is implementing in the management of domestic hotel complexes the latest efficient management models that are consistent with world standards. Some of the key activities to undertake to enhance the domestic hotel sector include building new hotel complexes, renovating existing ones, and boosting the level of service provided by hotels.

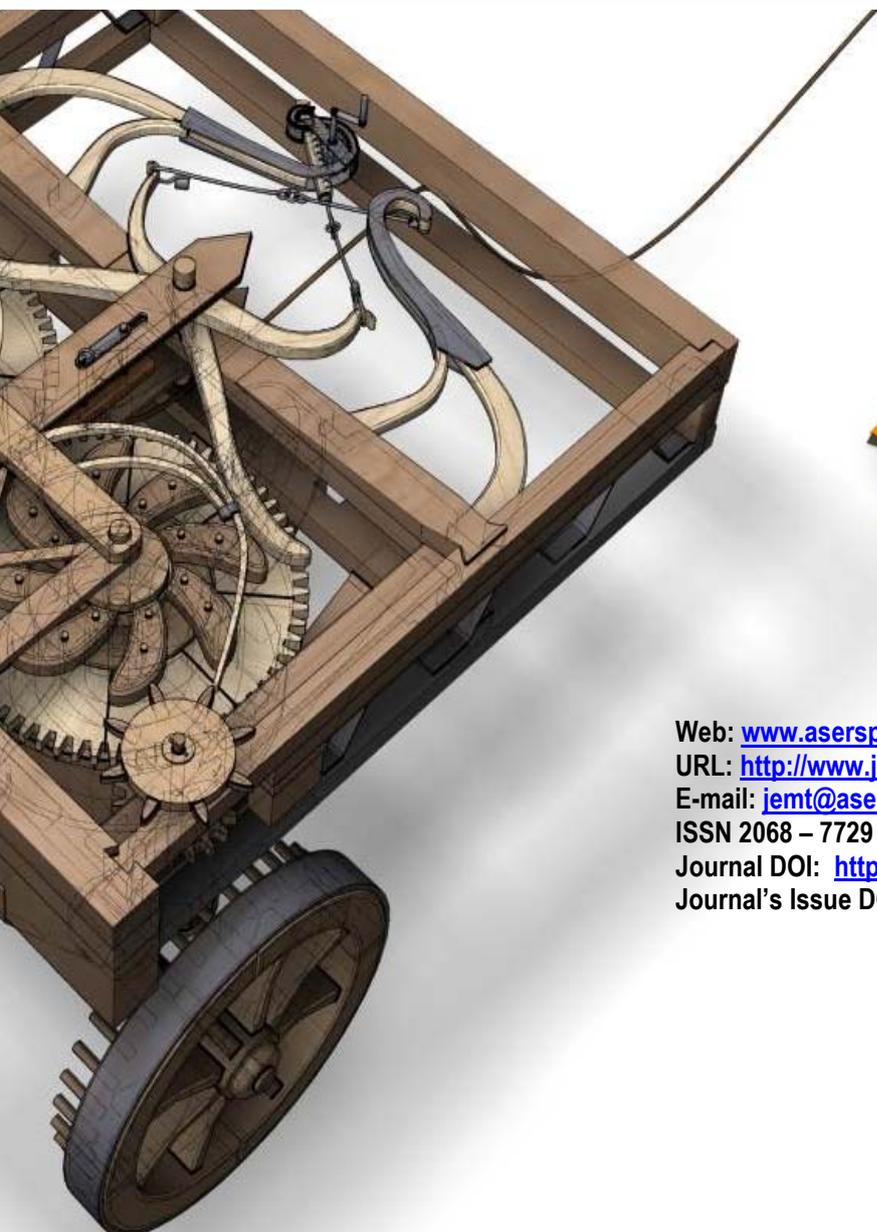
The study has helped identify a set of priority vectors for the development of hotel business operators, which are as follows: developing the material base of hotel enterprises through attracting additional investment for renovations and new construction projects, promoting specialization within the hotel business, which will enable a clear-cut focus on specific consumer segments based on different types of tourism, and boosting the diversity, comprehensiveness, quality, and safety of services provided by hotel operators.

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