

THURSDAY CAREERS CHATS

Date of Session: 2/24/2011 Title of Session: Careers in Hotel Sales & Marketing

Alumni Presenter: D.C. Becker Class Year: 1981

Title: Senior VP of Sales and Marketing Employer: Interstate China

Notes from Session:

DC has always been in sales and marketing in the hotel business. Started working with the Hilton right out of college. His original passion for the hospitality business came out of hotel work he had done around his home. He had thought about hotel programs at schools like Cornell or Michigan, but after doing research found that all the major hotels have significant training programs (they still do) and felt an education at Dickinson would give him more flexibility.

His career progression has been as follows:

- Senior Vice-President, Sales & Marketing/Interstate China at Interstate Hotels & Resorts
- Principal at Titan Group of New York, LLC
- Senior VP, Sales & Marketing at Wyndham Hotels & Resorts
- Senior Vice-President/Marketing at Flag Luxury Properties, LLC
- Corporate Director of Sales & Marketing at Lodgian
- Regional Director of Hotel Sales at Interstate Hotels & Resorts
- Director of Sales & Marketing at Hilton Hotels Worldwide

He has moved from doing sales and marketing for individual hotels to overseeing sales and marketing for up to 20 hotels to managing it for large chains to having his own consulting firm to now building Interstate Hotel's presence in China.

What is Interstate Hotel? - It is a 3rd party hotel management company. Many Hiltons, Marriotts, etc are owned by companies, such as insurance companies, banks, etc.; organizations that do not know how to manage a hotel. While Hilton provides the brand and standards, 3rd party management companies like Interstate are hired to provide the day to day management of the hotel. Interstate manages 300 hotels mainly in the US of all varieties. It also manages hotels in Russia, Ireland and India. Currently have 3 hotels in China, looking at 12-15 within 3 years and eventually 50 to 60 throughout China.

Third party management has not existed in China until very recently. Hotels are owned by manufacturing companies, oil companies and banks owning and trying to run hotels. There is a tremendous market for companies like Interstate. Interstate was recently purchased by a combination of a US company and Jin Jiang, a very large Chinese company with many facets. They created Interstate China to bring 3rd party management to China. D.C. had a very successful consulting business going but was offered the chance to develop and lead the sales and marketing efforts in China so has put his consulting business on hold for three years to do this work.

Are there entry level opportunities in China? - It can be a challenge for Americans to get jobs in China due to the fact that they must pay Chinese and US taxes (not the norm for most countries). Therefore compensation is higher to account for that. There are opportunities for returning Chinese nationals.

What are the entry level opportunities in sales and marketing in the US? - They would be working for individual hotels. It used to be that you would work at one hotel, now it is not uncommon to have a

Hilton on one corner and a Hilton Garden Suites on the other. So now, often, the sales departments for those hotels would be combined and you would represent both. . . .

What is a typical day? – It is never a dull business. Hotel sales and marketing is all about filling hotels and generating revenue: corporate stays, weddings, meetings are all targets. There are very sophisticated components and very fundamental ones. The field breaks down to several areas:

- Marketing Research – Determining how to attract new customers and keep the old.
- Marketing and Advertising - Developing ways to attract customers – has shifted from print to new media
- Revenue management – How to price competitively. This has become very sophisticated with complex data models.
- Direct Selling – The fundamental part: building relationships with people who can fill hotels, such as corporate travel organizers.

How much traveling did you do in your first job? – Very little, was focused on clients around hotel. Once DC hit the regional level overseeing 20 hotels, traveled 70%-80% of the time.

Can you start in marketing or do you have to work in other parts and work your way up? No, you can start in marketing and work your way up. While he has stayed in sales, many people move off of that into hotel management; not something D.C. ever wanted to do. Experience working a front desk or the like can be a good thing to have, but as long as people are bright, can think on their feet, are creative and personable; they can be successful in the field. Hotel management is not rocket science; it can be learned, especially by the type of intelligent person that attends schools like Dickinson. It is about being able to think and make good decisions. Communication is a critical skill and you need to have a passion for the hotel and hospitality business. It is all about serving the customer and giving them a good experience; one they will be willing to return for.

Are there other entry level areas? –One growing area is consulting. Marketing research is becoming more complex and there are many consulting firms such as Jones, Lang and Lasalle that are filling that niche. There opportunities there for people interested in doing that type of research and analysis. They consult on financial feasibility and market research, often focusing on where to build and the type of hotel to build.