

# Sales academy drives **profitable growth** at Rezidor





One of the fastest-growing hotel companies in the world, the Rezidor Hotel Group is a major success story in today's leisure industry. The company opened its first SAS Royal hotel in Copenhagen over 50 years ago and now operates more than 400 hotels in 64 countries across Europe, the Middle East and Africa under four distinctive brands, including Radisson Blu and Park Inn.

Over the past decade, this rapid growth has brought with it some major challenges. *“Through the process of expanding across very different geographies*

*and cultures, it became clear that we needed a consistent way of approaching business development if we were to compete effectively with much larger global competitors,”* says Rezidor people development director, Jan Spooren.

*“To meet those requirements, we established the Business School @ Rezidor, which provides group-wide training across all aspects of customer service, business planning and sales development.”* Rezidor has worked closely with Huthwaite International to develop its highly successful sales academy, which

combines a common sales approach based on identifying and satisfying customer needs with the flexibility to meet the individual objectives of each brand within the regions that they operate.

Each year, up to 300 Rezidor sales staff attend training courses based on Huthwaite International's methodology. The current series of improvement initiatives, which includes sales, sales management and negotiation, continues to expand, with a new account development programme currently underway.

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## **Selling on value**

*“We had to move away from a focus on selling features, making assumptions about what customers needed and offering them unwanted functionality,” recalls Spooren. “Rather, our sales teams had to develop a deeper understanding of our clients’ requirements, in order to propose solutions which aligned more closely to their business challenges. In a world where personalised products and services had become more commonplace, this approach to selling was now essential with both our corporate and individual customers.”*

*“We were looking for practical skills improvement which would deliver a better customer experience. Huthwaite International also practised what it preached, by working hard to understand our business and its challenges before putting together an appropriate recommendation that would meet this objective.”*

Each year, the training programmes involve sales teams across the company’s brand portfolio. *“This sends an important message that, though the precise sales approach for each brand may vary depending on the market, the same high level of customer focus underpins everything that Rezidor does,”* confirms Huthwaite International consultant, Claire Cologne. *“Participants also gain from a valuable cross-fertilisation of different ideas and experiences.”*

In each case, programmes have been closely tailored to the Rezidor environment,

using relevant head office and local specialists to work with Huthwaite International trainers and make sure that the content closely reflects the day-to-day experience of the attendees.

*“One result of this has been that many attendees believe that the trainers are in fact part of the Rezidor team,”* confirms Spooren. *“This is the best possible compliment to the way Huthwaite International understands our business and aligns the training to meet our objectives.”*

## **Blended learning**

So that staff get the most from the training, the two companies have developed a blended approach in which attendees first access on-line tools within Rezidor’s e-learning platform, to prepare for each training session.

*“With a wide range of abilities and experience across the sales teams, this means that attendees understand key concepts at the heart of each skills improvement initiative,”* he says.

Follow-up coaching has also been recognised as a key element within a successful approach to long term skills retention. In the case of negotiation skills, this takes the form of a suite of tools, including a telephone coaching ‘surgery’ for each individual to reinforce key skills and behaviours learned.

Company-wide, during the recent recession, training sessions placed even greater emphasis on how to build value for each Rezidor brand in the face of

unprecedented price pressure. More locally too, programmes were also adapted to address specific problems. For example, new hotels in Johannesburg suffering a significant drop in business immediately after the 2010 World Cup.

## **Success factors**

There are already a number of indications reflecting the success of the Business School approach.

Analysis of post-course questionnaires reflects a very positive response from those attending. Rezidor has also witnessed a demonstrable improvement in staff retention, as employees recognise the company’s increased commitment to their personal development. *“This also feeds indirectly through to greater customer loyalty,”* says Spooren, *“as customers build trust and confidence in longer-serving staff, resulting in stronger relationships.”*

Spooren also points to the close working relationship between the two companies as central to success. *“The Huthwaite International team acts as a ‘critical friend’, challenging us in a constructive way and always offering a remedy with any diagnosis of the challenges we face,”* he says. *“We have also established a valuable degree of trust, giving us the confidence to share sensitive information. The result is that we benefit from a regular flow of valuable business advice designed to drive our company and our sales teams forward.”*





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