



Fresh and Relevant

An Interview with Deborah Yager Fleming,
Chief Executive Officer & Partner,
Acqualina Resort & Spa on the Beach



Acqualina Resort & Spa (left); the tranquility pool (above);
Himalayan Salt Wall at the Spa (below)

EDITORS' NOTE Deborah Yager Fleming joined Acqualina Resort & Spa on the Beach in March 2004 after having served as Vice President, Sales & Marketing at Island Outpost, where she managed marketing campaigns for 12 boutique hotels, including The Tides in Miami. She also garnered valuable experience in New York at Leading Hotels of the World where she held senior management positions and implemented the design of worldwide sales strategies and innovative marketing programs.



Deborah Yager Fleming

we utilize technology. Technology is a very important part of any business, and we have to look at how we're utilizing the opportunities it provides to become more customer centric as a brand.

Those are things we have heavily focused on this past year and the result speaks for itself because we have seen tremendous growth. Much of this is a result of increasing the value proposition for the customers, but also because of our increasing the engagement of our staff and continuing to get better and better, which is critically important to us.

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How important is it that technology is used to better enable the employee/guest relationship and that it does not take away from the personal interaction?

For the employees, we are always looking to increase efficiency so we can give them more time to interact with guests. They enjoy having the time to create conversations beyond just the pleasantries.



As a five-star service brand, we abide by standards and provide the necessary five-star components, but also must be sure to converse with our customers as we find that they love to converse with our team members.

Giving them technology efficiencies that allows them to do this is a tremendous benefit for us in all areas. For example, in housekeeping, technology allows our staff to do their jobs more efficiently and we need to make sure we're giving the leaders in this area the tools they need to gain efficiency.

From the guest perspective, our customers are interested in being in control all the time, so we're looking at the use of technology in regard to the room offerings. These are things that are important to our customers because they want to be in control of certain things.

Using technology to enhance the guest experience in terms of the engagement is important, but using it to lessen the personal interaction with the guest is something we want to avoid.

So it's really about going above and beyond the obvious and gaining an understanding of how the guests are utilizing technology so we can know which new amenities or technologies to add in.

You are focused on having engaged employees, which leads to return guests which, in turn, leads to financial results. Is the focus on employees first?

I do look at employees first. They are the ones who deliver on the brand promise. It's so important not only to have passionate employees, but also curious employees. Curiosity is exceptionally important in a hotel experience and for me to have team members that are curious and interested in asking customers questions is huge. I also want them to be willing to collaborate with fellow team members.

It's important for them to be insightful, to observe and explore and to be willing to address what doesn't really make any sense – the more they do that, the more information I get so I can improve what we're doing here. I am careful to always give them recognition for that.

This approach definitely translates into financial success because the guests are the ones who eventually benefit from it.

Are you happy with where the product is today and are there changes on the horizon?

I'm happy in that we are an owner-operated entity, so we're constantly investing in our property. We have the opportunity to make decisions and get things done because we're present at the property and, if we see something that needs to change, we will move forward on that. That is the advantage of being independent.

However, we're always striving to be better. It would be foolish of me to say that I'm sitting back and coasting. We have to constantly be improving. Our mission is to constantly strive to do better at every level here. ●

Will you discuss the strength of Acqualina's business and has there been growth in the market?

We actually had a very successful year partly because the market in general in the luxury sector has had growth. There is room for all the new entities that have come here, and for us, we have focused on the repeat business which remains 50 percent for Acqualina.

That is remarkable and we do that by developing services and amenities and keeping in mind the current and future needs of the customer. Keeping the property fresh and relevant has helped us hold on to our repeat business.

Building our infrastructure is important for us, not only in remaining true to the brand and empowering us to create personalized experiences, but it also impacts how we are engaging with our employees as an organization and how