

A Leadership Role in the Industry

An Interview with Mike Dominguez,
Vice President of Global Sales, Loews Hotels



EDITORS' NOTE Mike Dominguez joined Loews Hotels as the Director of Marketing at Loews Ventana Canyon Resort in 2005. Dominguez is the current President-Elect for the Southern California Chapter of MPI. He began his career in hotels as a food and beverage manager for Hyatt Hotels and Resorts while attending the University of Texas, Austin. His vast experience within hotels led him to become the Vice President of Sales and Marketing for the Palm Springs Desert Resort Communities Convention and Visitors Authority.



Mike Dominguez

COMPANY BRIEF Headquartered in New York City, Loews Hotels (www.loewshotels.com) owns and/or operates 18 hotels and resorts in the U.S. and Canada, including the newest 414-room Loews Atlanta Hotel, which opened in April 2010. The Loews portfolio features one-of-a-kind properties that go beyond Four Diamond standards to delight guests with a supremely comfortable, uniquely local, and vibrant travel experience. Loews boasts some of the industry's most innovative and successful travel programs, including Loews Loves Kids for families and Loews Loves Pets for discerning animals on the road.

Why was your role created and how do you define it?

We have seen some in the industry put less of an emphasis on the face-to-face model. In the Loews culture, started by the Tisch family, part of the cornerstone of our organization is a belief in genuine personal engagement with our customer base. There was a need from a group perspective to organize that initiative and my role was developed to oversee our national sales effort as it relates to building and strengthening relationships with our larger national accounts, our industry, and our third-party vendors. If you're going to build a trustworthy partnership, you can't do that without dedicating the time and effort to get to know people. That is how my job came about.

How have you focused your efforts in this new role?

That has been driven by me being on the road almost 190 days per year so I can be in front of our customers and present at every industry event, as well as by my taking an active leadership role in our industry. We have

a leader in Mr. Tisch who has always taken that to heart. Loews has always had a large footprint in the leadership of the hospitality industry.

I'm on the International Board for MPI; the PCMA Trends and Issues Task Force; and with ASAE, I'm part of the Industry Partner Alliance. Those cover a good cross segment of the industry and positions us to have a voice and develop a leadership role in this industry, which we are passionate about.

The culture of Loews lines up with my own philosophies in that it has always stressed that it is our responsibility to be good industry partners and to commit to our industry. That has been the example set by not only John Tisch, but by Preston Robert Tisch before him. That culture has made it easy for me to run the job the way I would like to and to be fully committed to it.

Is there a clear profile of the Loews client?

The profile has been fairly consistent. At Loews, we have a loyal following from those who have already utilized our hotels. The only challenge we have at times is the lack of distribution, which is why our strategic growth plan is to get into the major gateway cities including Chicago, San Francisco, Washington, D.C., Boston, and Toronto. Those targets would help open up the availability of Loews hotels and introduce more people to the experience.

What is it about your people and your training that has led to such consistent service standards?

Loews has been the only hotel company that has been consistently rated in the top 75 across all companies, in all industries in *Training* magazine each year. Loews Hotels is committed to providing the resources, energy, and talent at the highest levels to the training of our staff and that extends into our sales efforts as well as our operational efforts.

In terms of training from a sales perspective, even when times were tough, the one budget line that wasn't touched was training. The philosophy was there that if you've hired the right people to begin with and you give them the right tools and training, the rest will take care of itself.

At Loews, we make sure we hire the people that have the hotel DNA in them – they want to take care of customers.

Has the meetings business come back and are you optimistic that growth in the meetings space will return?

Where we're headed doesn't jive with where the economy is and what you see in the media. The current economic climate as it's being reported appears choppy than what we see in our group pace moving forward.

The group pace has changed. People are still looking for value and there are still budget constraints that will be hitting those groups through the next year, but demand is coming back full cycle, although rate is lagging. We're also seeing that some of the meetings that are coming back are a bit shorter than they were previously.

We've also entered a time when it has never been more critical for the meeting professionals to be able to validate how the purpose of that meeting fits into the overall objectives of the organization they're working for.

How do you balance the impact that technology has had on the industry without losing the hospitality side of the business?

Hospitality is being able to deliver exactly what people want and how they want it and that doesn't change with technology. You have multiple generations in the workplace and in the consumer space and you have to be able to deliver to all audiences.

We have a huge audience and, especially on the leisure side of our business, they still want that personal interaction – they use our reservations call-in line more than they go online. However, there is an emerging audience that is comfortable with technology and with booking mobile or online, and we have to deliver both. We're living in an on-demand society and we have to create those environments; we can't force them into how we would prefer them to buy it.

Is it tough to get the message out that even while paying more, you may still be getting greater value?

Absolutely. Now that we're on the recovery side of it, value is not necessarily just price – it's the full experience and what you can offer your customer. We resisted the urge during the recession to have a message that was just based on price because, at the end of the day, we're going to give you the deal you need to make the meeting happen – that's the starting point. The value is what else we can bring to the table. ●

Lobby of Loews Ventana Canyon in Tucson, Arizona (left); Loews Don Cesar Hotel in St. Pete's Beach, Florida