

The Centro Bistro at the Courtyard by Marriott in Jackson, Tennessee



Unprecedented Hospitality

The right hotels at the right time

Last year, Vista Host Inc. of Houston, Texas, hit the nail on the head with female-only floors at upscale hotels to support the hotel demographic shifting to women travelers.

One year later, Vista Host is at it again—listening to its customers and building the right hotels to best accommodate current travelers. This time around, it's the price-sensitive extended-stay business that's out front.

"The big problem that we're seeing right now is the economy," says Michael Harrell, CEO of Vista Host. "Our challenge is to ensure that we secure more than our fair share of the business in every market."

Since its founding in 1977, Vista Host has focused exclusively on the hospitality business, allowing it to keep its thumb on hospitality trends and enact the strategies that would secure business for over 30

years. As a hotel management company, Vista Host has served owners of Hilton and Marriott's family brands—including Residence Inn and Hampton Inn and Suites, among others. The hotels it manages can be found in 11 states across the country.

With in-depth experience in the management of limited-feature hotels, Vista Host is no stranger to finding opportunities wherever they may be—as long as it involves recognizing new and better ways to provide service and convenience to guests.

"We're in the hotel business, so that means we are taking care of customers," says Harrell. "Each segment of the industry we work in is only part of what makes up the hotel business. The markets are very competitive and we're always seeking another point of difference as to why a traveler would choose us over our competitors."



THE VISTA MISSION

The pursuit of success in the hospitality industry can be difficult, but Vista Host has a formula to ensure superior results: blending the science of hotel management with the art of hospitality.

On the science side of things, feasibility studies, STAR reports and up-to-date budget variance reports allow the company to rapidly respond to the market. However, it takes the associates that work at Vista Host—and their talent and experience—to create a truly hospitable atmosphere.

“Our approach to management is very hands-on,” explains Harrell. “I was a manager for a number of years and grew up in the business. I expect our managers to be at the hotels or in the field and not sitting around in the office.”

Vista Host prides itself on strength in four areas: commitment to guest service and satisfaction, general manager involvement and a deep understanding of the sales efforts, the comprehensive training program it has for its sales staff, and its ability to maximize efficiency in labor and operational costs.

The company’s mission is to be the most innovative and resourceful hospitality company with superior service for its customers. It’s right on track.

STAY A WHILE

As noted, Vista Host had a strong 2008 with its focus on female-friendly lodgings. At the time, the Travel Industry Association of America estimated that women accounted for 43 percent of business travelers—and that their expectations for hotels are greater than those of men. As a result, the Hampton Inn in downtown Albany led a trend by devoting an entire floor to female guests.

“We felt that an all-female floor would give us an added benefit for female travelers to select us over our competitors,” says Harrell.

However, over the past 18 months, Vista Host has noted that the strongest segment of the hotel business is the price-sensitive extended-

stay market. Residence Inn and Homewood Suites by Hilton have had the highest occupancy of any brands in the past 10 years.

“We just feel that there’s a need with the way the business environment is changing,” says Harrell. “There are more consultants and third-party individuals out there working because more companies are buying these services rather than hiring people full time to do the work in-house—but these third-party services need to get to where the projects are. However, since they’re going there on limited expenses or per diem, those companies or individuals are not just looking for extended-stay hotels, but price-sensitive ones.”

Vista Host recently completed a prime example of the price-sensitive extended-stay hotel—a TownePlace Suites by Marriott in Shreveport-Bossier City, Louisiana. The TownePlace Suites is the first of its brand Vista Host has built from the ground up. It has managed other TownePlace Suites and plans to open another one in Austin next year.

The TownePlace Suites in downtown Shreveport-Bossier City offers a premier location for its guests—there’s easy access to Interstate 20 and it’s two miles from the casino district, less than one mile to the Louisiana Boardwalk and nine miles to the Shreveport Airport. The four-story hotel includes 101 guest suites, an outdoor pool, an exercise room and a patio with grill. Amenities range from high-speed WiFi to an upscale continental breakfast.

The location also promises a steady stream of guests, with a military base and several gas and oil exploration facilities nearby.

However, a challenge came in working with the Marriott prototype and still inserting Vista Host’s signature customer-friendly design and amenities into the hotel. Luckily, TownePlace Suites introduced a contemporary design, redefining the product.

“It’s a lot more acceptable to the public now than it may have been in the past. It has been upgraded to be more comparable to a Residence Inn,” says Harrell.

The modern updates include full kitchens in every suite and a jackpack in half of them. “With a jackpack, you can hook your computer up to the television so you can work on the TV screen,” explains Harrell.



“So if you’re sitting in your room and your computer screen’s too small, you can hook it up to your 32-inch LCD TV. You can split the screen so you can answer emails while you watch the ball game.”

THE NEW SITES

Currently, eight Vista Host hotels are in planning stages. Texas will see two Homewood Suites and a Hampton Inn and Suites. Pennsylvania will receive two Homewood Suites, a Hilton Garden Inn and a Hampton Inn and Suites. Tennessee has a Residence Inn coming its way.

“Moving forward, our plans are to finish all seven of the renovations we have going on right now,” says Harrell. “Despite the economy, we’re still pushing forward with our plans and renovations.”

Harrell also anticipates a greater focus on leisure travelers in the future. With many hotels directed at business travelers, a large portion of the population is being ignored. “Leisure travel is a segment of the industry that is growing faster than business travel,” declares Harrell.

Always cognizant of a changing market, Vista Host promises to continue giving hotel guests exactly what they want by utilizing the same approach it has for 30 years.

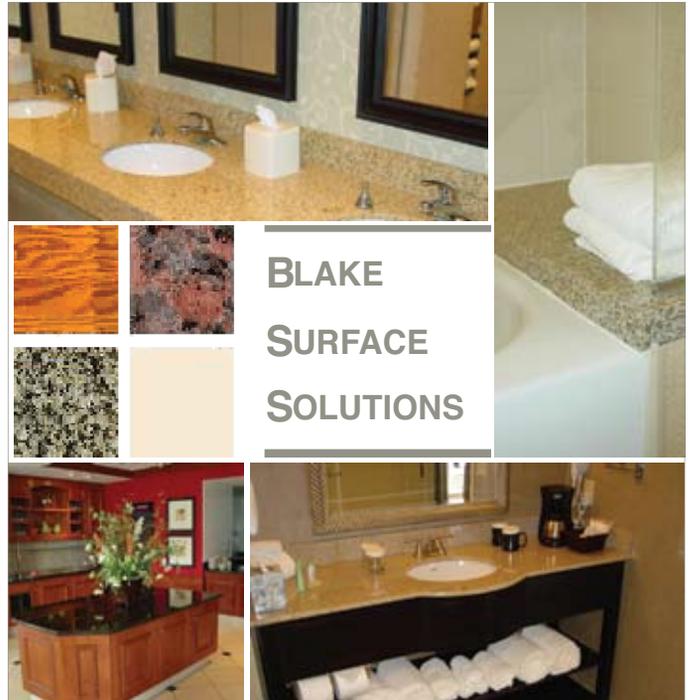
“We have always had strong brands, strong customer service and a strong sales effort,” says Harrell. “And we are continuing to do things the same way.”

BLAKE SURFACE SOLUTIONS

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We congratulate Michael Harrell on his success and for the recognition of his achievements and contributions to the growth of the hospitality industry.

We will never forget that Mike was our company’s first supporter and our most active and vocal champion. Mike, thank you for your friendship and continued support. From everyone at hotel SystemsPro, we wish you good health and continued success.



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