

People-in-Travel

Tracking Travel's Leaders



From Travel Business Analyst

Interview: Robert Hornman

Managing director of Frankfurt-based Worldhotels (WHs), Robert Hornman, is in effect running a new company.

Until 2008 WHs was owned by member hotels, when there was a buyout including the then-head, Michael Ball, and KP Capital. The WHs group now includes Trust, a reservation system, IFH, a training company, and Nexus, a sales management company. Its main business has been hotel marketing and sales, but now it is adding management services.

The following paraphrased comments follow a one-on-one interview with Hornman.

• **News.** We plan to add a 'Full Licence' model (FLM) to our current affiliation model. This is in effect a new hotel brand, as the name 'Worldhotel' [singular] will be added to the hotel name.

Hotels are not required to standardise their hardware – in the way that, say, a Hilton would – although WH-brand hotels will need to meet WHs' quality criteria. The hotels will be reviewed twice yearly in secret-guest visits.

Five hotels are due to become the first branded WHs. The first, a refurbished hotel in Almaty, Kazakhstan, has just reopened, and is due to be followed by Frankfurt and Vienna this month, then Munich and Hamburg in January. We target 50 branded hotels by 2013, new as well as existing members.

• **Profile.** We have a good global footprint; 450 hotels, of which 250 are in EMEA. If we counted all our hotels we would be 11th largest group in terms of rooms. The 10th largest has about 130,000 rooms; we have 110,000. This year WHs will have added near 50 represented hotels, taking us above 100,000 rooms.

We have dropped our 3-star category; now we have only first class and deluxe. But FLM hotels will just be World-hotels – no category.

• **Philosophy.** To be a real hotel company. We thought why can't we make the brand more prominent? More of our hotels have to compete with group hotels, so many of them want something between franchise and full management. There is a requirement for some standards and some flexibility; but standards does not have to mean standardisation.

• **New brand.** We want the 'Worldhotel' name first, with signage on the roof. Our target is for new hotels, not necessarily existing ones.

Branded hotels will pay a percentage of room revenue; we require a 10-year contract.

It will be good if we can convert 5% of our existing portfolio into the FLM. At end-2011 we will have close to 20 hotels. We hope we will have 50% in Europe and 50% in Asia Pacific.



David Scowsill to WTTC

Last month, David Scowsill took over as president & CEO of WTTC (World Travel & Tourism Council), the private-sector competitor to WTO (World Tourism Organization).

He becomes WTTC's third head after founder Geoffrey Lipman (who, until recently, had moved on to the WTO) from 1990, then Jean-Claude Baumgarten, who took over in 1999. Baumgarten is moving back to Paris, although he is still linked to WTTC as vice chairman.

Scowsill has an impressive CV.

Since 2005, he has been working in private equity and venture capital, during which he held many senior director posts in travel companies, including Private Fly, On the Beach Holidays, World-hotels (see report on this page), Venere. Before that, he held senior marketing positions at Easyjet and Manchester

Airports Group.

Over 2002-04, he was CEO of Opodo, the online travel agency. WTTC says Scowsill built Opodo from start up, but that was actually the work of Giovanni Bisignani, its first CEO, who moved on to a successful period, now ending, as head of IATA (International Air Transport Association).

Earlier, Scowsill was in sales/marketing/IT at the then-separate UK-based Hilton International, and in operations at British Airways in Asia Pacific. He might prefer the BA part of his CV demphasised. It was the period when BA lost its monopoly as the UK airline in the region, and when its service-delivery levels were shamefully low. Worse, at BA he had 'profit responsibility' for TAT/Air Liberte in France and what became DBA in Germany – all three airlines were financial disasters.

At WTTC, Scowsill says he will be representing the interests of travel's "foremost private sector enterprises to governments worldwide...[leading] the organization in addressing the political, environmental, social, and technological factors facing the industry, and [encouraging] the public and private sector partnerships necessary to build strategies and policies for future growth and prosperity.

"[WTTC] has a vital role to play in raising awareness of the true value of the industry – which accounts for 9.2% of global GDP." He offers no further explanation of what he means by 'true value', but we assume this means more of the present – which is continuing to publicise to politicians the importance of the travel business.

If Scowsill has a weakness, it is that he is anglo-centric. Lipman is British but spent much time in Geneva and Brussels. And Baumgarten is French; he made the organisation more international, as would be expected of such a body.

Chairman of the UK-based WTTC is Geoffrey Kent, although this is not a key operating position. Although born in Africa – where his well-respected company, Abercrombie & Kent was developed (there was no 'Abercrombie'; Kent told PinT that he invented this for effect) – he is British in persona.

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