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Voco Hotels' success and its position as IHG's fastest-growing brand

Matt Walton, senior director of development UK and Ireland at IHG Hotels and Resorts, explains what sets Voco apart from other IHG hotels and what the brand's plan is in terms of expanding its presence in the UK and worldwide after recently signing its 100th hotel

Cynera Rodricks 2 days ago Last Updated: Wednesday, 29 March 2023, 15:15

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Can you tell me about the history of the Voco brand and IHG's idea behind its inception.

We launched Voco Hotels in 2018 to further strengthen our brand offering in the upscale segment – a \$40bn (£32.7bn) sector that just continues to grow. In particular, Voco was launched to focus on conversions, giving owners the opportunity to quickly plug into IHG's enterprise to drive returns at speed.

What segment and customer is Voco targeted towards?

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Voco plays in the upscale segment, where we are seeing huge growth. We listened to our owners and heard that they wanted an opportunity to plug into IHG's strong enterprise quickly with less upfront cost. The conversion opportunities offered by the flexibility of Voco give owners that option.

Voco guests are travellers who value social occasions with friends and family, as much as work and professional success. They know what they want and are prepared to pre-plan to create the trip they want, on their terms, making Voco the perfect fit as it opens up new locations worldwide with the safety of staying at a recognised brand.

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opportunity to connect and socialise. We feel that this provides guests with a dependably premium experience.

What factors contributed to Voco Hotels' success and its position as IHG's fastest-growing brand?

The rapid expansion of our Voco brand is a reflection of the confidence our owners have in its proposition, as I mentioned earlier. All of that is supported by the strength of IHG's enterprise platform through which hotel owners can grow their business by being part of our distribution channels, a relaunched app and transformed IHG One Rewards programme.

For our guests, Voco is an incredibly unique brand that has an offering unlike others. Guests are looking for a premium experience that still offers that human touch and a focus on sustainability. I think what sets Voco apart is that we develop hotels – whether they are new builds or conversions – that we know guests will fall in love with. Seeing how well the brand has been received by consumers has been instrumental in driving our growth.

Considering Voco launched in 2018, which is just two years before the pandemic, how did Voco fare compared with IHG's more established brands during and immediately after the pandemic?

Of course, there were restraints caused by the pandemic worldwide across many industries, that's not something that was unique to IHG or our Voco brand. What we have seen for Voco is phenomenal growth and strong recovery across all our brands, in all segments from luxury with Kimpton and InterContinental, right across to our essentials collection, including the Holiday Inn brand family.

The newness of Voco meant that actually, a large proportion of the portfolio sits in the pipeline, yet to open. As you might expect, that means there have been delays to opening dates due to the nature of the world over the last few years, although we did still continue to sign and open hotels throughout the pandemic.

For Voco, a large part of its attraction is sustainability. We know that guests value the sustainability of a brand – in fact we know they're willing to pay more to stay at a hotel they can see is more sustainable – and Voco was created with a focus on sustainability. From leading the way with bulk amenities to bedding materials made from recycled plastic bottles and local initiatives, the brand is on a journey to bring us towards a more sustainable future.

How do you target areas and hotels to add to the Voco brand and what is the brand's plan in terms of expanding its presence in the UK and globally?

We're continuing to drive momentum to achieve our target of 200 hotels within 10 years of launch. In the UK, we are taking a data-driven approach to growth to ensure we're landing the right brands in the right locations. We've recently implemented a new data analysis tool, which enables IHG to understand consumer movements in a specific micro-location and understand what and where the demand lies.

In the UK, Lythe Hill Hotel in Surrey, will complete its rebrand to Voco Lythe Hill Hotel and Spa in a few months' time. Further out in Europe, our team in France is supporting the conversion of a Holiday Inn property to Voco Paris Porte De Clichy in the north of the capital. Other new-to-market hotels for Voco are set to open in Japan, Kenya, Spain and India.

How is Voco dealing with the ongoing recession, cost, and energy crisis?

We can't ignore the challenges of construction in the current climate – costs, supply chain and labour have all been affected. In times like this, relationship management is key. Finding the right partner with the right asset is what helps our brands continually expand. Working with a data-driven approach also helps us make the right strategic business decisions in tougher times, from understanding new locations to adapting to customer behaviour.

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