



Client Spotlight: Amanda Saye, Vice President Of Franchise Operations, GreenTree Hospitality Group

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Contributed by **Paula Perrin**, Sr. Market Analyst, SHR

Did you always know that you would work in hospitality?

No, not at all. I was born in New Mexico and grew up in Arizona. My grandfather was a podiatrist. As a child and teen, I'd visit him during the summers and sit in with him while he tended to his patients. So, I really thought I would grow up to be a doctor, or even a teacher. But honestly, there was just too much blood involved with it for me. You have to be true to yourself, after all. So, when I got to college, I started taking different courses, but unlike a lot of people who do what I do now, I took no courses in hospitality. I tried finance, which was great, but not for me as a full career. I came to realize that one of the biggest values of a college education is finding out where your passions really lie, and how you need to dabble and figure things out. So, I made a sideways move, and took business courses, which led to marketing courses. I found that I loved marketing so much, it became my major at Northern Arizona University. After college, I pursued my passion for marketing in a general role in a B2B multi-media publishing company, where I went into audience marketing. This experience was really important, because it helped me understand audience segmentation, which turned out to be foreshadowing for what was to come.

So how did a humble marketing major end up being chosen as Hospitality Sales & Marketing Association International (HSMAI) Arizona Professional of

the Year, and receive their President's Achievement Award in 2017?

Good question! Being new to the hospitality industry, I wanted to join industry-focused organizations to be able to network with other professionals. Once I joined GreenTree in 2016, I became a member of the Arizona Chapter for HSMAI. There, I immediately joined a committee, and within a few months, there was a board member position opening for their Director of Communications. That let me transition from a committee member to a board member, and continue to develop key relationships. Making that decision opened up all the networking with other professionals who were involved at a hotel level in sales, marketing, and revenue management. I'm proud to say I'm now in my second year as Vice President and third year as board member for HSMAI.

How did you find GreenTree?

I wanted something new, challenging, and a company in which I could continue to grow and develop my career. I saw that GreenTree had an opening in marketing. It was a small, entrepreneurial-focused organization, where I had the opportunity to create our brand literally from scratch. There had not been a marketing role prior, which was exciting. I became their Marketing Manager. In that short period of time, I immersed myself in our entire operation. We started to build and create our brand identity, launched our GiveBack Rewards loyalty program, and went through various system conversions and integrations to build our franchise platform. I was lucky that GreenTree tends to hire outside of the hotel business as well as inside of it, as they feel it helps ensure a high level of diversity and different mindsets among our team to keep things fresh.

How did you earn your role as VP of Franchise Operations?

I found myself being drawn to the actual onboarding of our franchisees, their concerns and challenges, and I started immersing myself in that area. I really enjoy what we're doing in operations and building the platform as we continue to grow our team here in the U.S. Making things happen speaks to me. Our platform has and keeps evolving over time, and our group is growing and changing, so having an impact on those decisions is extremely exciting. I eventually became Director of Marketing. In that role, I became part of more operations conversations and involved

with more and more properties. Now, I oversee the franchise ops team. From a systems standpoint, I help them troubleshoot. As we grow, we're laying the foundation for new initiatives and identifying partners. Ten hotels, soon to be twelve. I love growing our team and platform as we continue to scale.

Let's talk about the state of hospitality tech today. How do you see it?

I think there's a lot of good technology out there, but I think there are key considerations we need to be aware of, especially with us being in the limited service segment. We have to ask, what's going to make the biggest impact for our franchisee and the guest? There are so many fancy things at some of the industry tradeshows, but what is really useful and cost-effective? We are always making sure that everything integrates. I believe that you need to really know your systems well BEFORE you buy anything.

What led up to you looking for a new CRS solution?

We had a large-player PMS and CRS. But we were a small fish in their very big pond. It wasn't the type of partnership that we were looking for. And we absolutely need a partner who aligns well with our values; transparency, support, and cost effectiveness. Who we partner with has a direct and powerful impact on our franchisees, and how they see our capabilities in helping them. If they don't have the confidence in the systems we choose, then we're in trouble.

How did you make your final decision to go with SHR?

We went through a rigorous new vendor vetting process to find a better solution. HITEC 2016 was where we started. We talked to other clients who had Windsurfer. We eventually switched our PMS to SkyTouch because they were local here in Phoenix. Then for the CRS, it came down to the second-largest player in the CRS field versus SHR. In the end, it was the partnership and SHR being smaller that tipped the scales, plus the price was great for our franchisees. Also, our old vendor's tech was so outdated, and we felt like there was not much we could do about it. So, the ability to evolve over time and have a voice in that evolution was also a big deal.

Did your expectations about SHR onboarding meet the reality?

When we were making the switch, we were standardizing a lot of our systems, preparing to scale. We had more challenges with that on our end. We had our hiccups, but we expected that. To help smooth things out on our end, we spaced out our hotels time-wise intentionally to give us more time to handle any issues. We manage via our PMS mostly, so how SkyTouch and Windsurfer work together was paramount. We had weekly calls with the SHR Implementations Team, who were all really sharp and responsive. We find the Windsurfer system itself so intuitive, it really helped make the transition almost painless.

What advice do you have for people in hospitality today?

Being new to the industry, I was very lucky to have some really great mentors along the way who have helped tremendously in my professional and personal development. Because of that, I've been able to meet and establish relationships with many hospitality professionals, many of whom I would consider to be life-long friendships. So, my advice is to immerse yourself in every facet of hospitality that you can as fast as you can. The more you can understand about each department, each aspect, the better. It seems natural that people who graduate from hospitality programs would expect to be GMs right away. Always, and I mean always, be willing to learn and do ANY job. If you take advantage of everything that comes your way, and never shy away from opportunities to learn new tasks, you'll be on your way to a strong career built on a foundation of life-long learning.

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Amanda Saye



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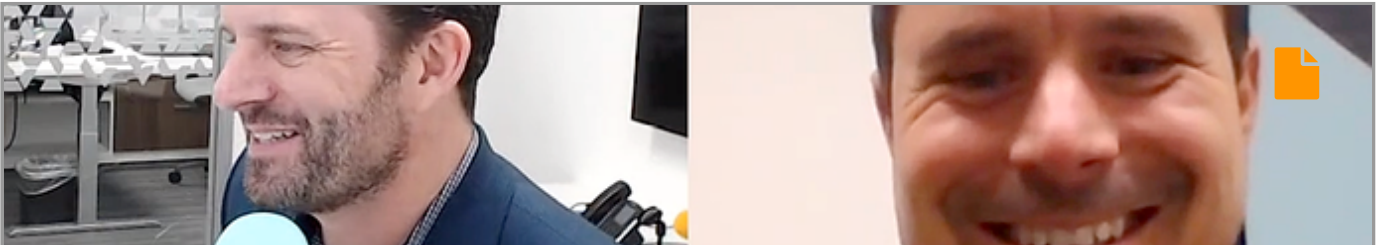
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