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Sales Performance Improvement

Case Hotel Sorsanpesä

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Thesis abstract

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The aim of this thesis was to obtain in-depth knowledge about the current sales and marketing strategy of the case company, a hotel, and its implementation, as well as the methods and steps to be used to improve the overall sales. The key aim of this study was to propose possible solutions, which could help the hotel increase their potential customers and have stability in their operations.

The theoretical part of the thesis includes the following topics: sales in general and the sales performance of Hotel Sorsanpesä. The empirical part includes research methodology, the results of the statistical data, interviews, observations, and possible solutions.

The results were collected through qualitative approach for the case company: Hotel Sorsanpesä. The primary data were collected by conducting in-depth interviews, personal observations while the secondary data were collected from statistical source from the hotel by analyzing the sales and income statements, guests' surveys, competitor analysis and the CRM tool.

The outcome of this study shows that the hotel was still using the outdated traditional marketing approach. New marketing concept, the need for renovation and new breakfast concept to enhance the sales overall are the must.

With the help of this study, the hotel can possibly come out with new approaches to boost their sales and general performance.

¹ Keywords: sales, marketing strategy, customer experience, average occupancy.

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Abbreviations

SWOT Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Threats.

1 INTRODUCTION

Hospitality means extending a welcome to travelers or offering a home away from home, and the word is derived from the Latin word “hospes” meaning visitor or stranger. The hospitality and tourism industry are vast sector that includes all the economic activities that directly or indirectly contribute to, or depend upon, travel and tourism (EHL Hospitality Business School, 2023).

Hotels are one of the major sectors of hospitality industry. Potential customers tend to pay for the services which they are not able to receive while being away from home which includes, lodging, food and beverage, seminars, and many others.

Being a service industry, the major aim of a hotel is to provide the best value for the customer’s money by offering them the above-mentioned services with top notch customer service.

1.1 Background

Like every other service industry, the hotel industry has also been continually growing round the globe and tends to produce its revenues by adding value to assure repeated visits from its customers. The major product of any hotel is service and is nothing new that the hotel management must implement the marketing concept which calls for total customer focus.

The case hotel is a privately-owned large-scale hotel situated by the riverside in Törnävä, 4 km from the city centre of Seinäjoki. The hotel boasts 134 recently renovated rooms, a full time and two part time restaurants, 10 meeting cabinets and 2 banquet halls. It also has a huge, well furnished terrace bar and a restaurant for summer.

The target customers for the hotel are expatriates, business delegates, company’s seminars and meetings. Apart from that, the focused group during the summers are customers attending summer festivals and vacationists. The target was to dominate the Seinäjoki market by being the best conference hotel in Seinäjoki. It also achieved its target by being elected as the best conference hotel in Seinäjoki in 2019 and 2021.

I endeavor to retrieve the sales and marketing performances of last five years, current state, flaws, and possible solutions to improve it.

To succeed and improve the sales of a hotel, the management must apply proper CRM tools, effective marketing, proper communication, employee and customer retention tactics and sustainability. Above mentioned chores should be implemented in an effective manner to succeed in the hotel industry.

1.2 Research Motive

The reason I selected this topic is because I have been making effort to execute a proper sales and marketing system to assure a certain profitability form the hotel regardless of any market fluctuations.

Like every other tourism sector, the corona pandemic affected the hotel financially and it faced huge losses in the fiscal year 2020 and 2021. The hotel had the occupancy rate of less than 10% during the corona pandemic. The hotel faced every single possible problem because of market lockdown during the pandemic leaving the hotel no other choice but to lay off most of the employees including the sales team.

Had it been a chain hotel, it would have been shut down during the worst pandemic period, but the owner thought otherwise and decided to keep it open even in the most critical phase.

Post pandemic, the management team proposed jobs back to the employees but most of them moved to different hotel and some of them changed their career. Recruiting new employees and the sales team was a real challenge as the labour market for this specific industry was empty. Most of the hotel professionals chose to change their career and moved to different sectors rather than hospitality industry. The hotel invested a hefty sum in recruiting and training new staffs post epidemic but still was not able to recruit a sales team. Lack of staffs and sales expert made it challenging for the hotel to perform smoothly in a profitable manner. It was only during the first quarter of the year 2023, a qualified salesperson was appointed and began working on the marketing and sales strategies.

In this thesis, I endeavour to figure out reasons behind these problems and challenges faced during this period. I have also proposed possible solutions to overcome this situation and gradually lead towards continuous profitability. I have used qualitative approach to study and figure out the problems.

1.3 Terms definitions

In this study, we have used the below explained terms. It's crucial to acknowledge that these definitions have been implemented to best fit the study's objectives and may deviate from typical interpretations.

Benchmarking: This is used to comparing the sales of the hotel with its competitors in the area.

Customer service: This refers to the guidance, support and overall assistance provided before, during and after their stay. A good customer service is the most important and vital key to help enhance the hotel business.

Management: This the way of administering the hotel by upper level or department managers.

Market segmentation: This is used as tool by the hotel to divide the target customers into different distinct groups based on specific characteristics, preferences and needs.

Occupancy rate: The average occupancy rate in a week, month and by year is measured.

Products: This is defined as the hotel's target commodities that it has to offer to its potential clients.

Sales performance: This is used to evaluate and measure the hotel's effectiveness in generating revenue through various sales channels and strategies. It is also used to compare the profit with previous sales patterns in the establishment.

1.4 Scope of the Study

The study emphasized on the assessment of sales of the hotel as a measure of performance. Sales statements from the years 2018–2022 were analysed to measure the performance of the hotel. Benchmarking was also used to compare the average occupancy and sales of the hotel with the competitors in Seinäjoki.

2 THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

2.1 Nature of Hotel Services

Services play a major role in our daily lives as we use it in every aspect of our routine. The growth in service industries is considerable as it contributes significantly to the economic growth and development. Services refer to the intangible activities or processes that are provided to fulfil the desire and the needs of potential customers. Therefore, the characteristics and extent of services present unique obstacles in the service industry. According to Berry et al., (2009), services are actions, performances, and procedures that are offered or collaboratively created by one individual or organization for and with another individual or organization. He emphasizes that services play a crucial role in meeting the needs and demands of individuals and even organizations. They contribute to economic growth, enhance the overall well-being of the society, and foster relationship between service providers and the customers. It could be a simple task, a skilled performance or a complex process, services play a vital role in our everyday lives and form an integral part of our interconnected world.

Bhasin (2023), emphasizes that the services provided by the hotel is mainly intangible whereas the products in the hotel industries are tangible like beds, sofas, chairs, and other physical commodities. He suggests that the service provided by a hotel is a crucial aspect of the overall guest experience. It is intangible and perishable because it cannot be seen or touched, but its absence is quickly noticed if not delivered in a timely manner. For instance, when a guest arrives at a hotel and must wait at the check-in counter without immediate assistance and can feel the impact of the service being lacking. Guests evaluate the service quality based on factors like waiting time for service and the friendly and welcoming treatment they receive. These aspects contribute to the overall evaluation of the intangible service provided by the hotel.

Hotel industries face several challenges due to the exclusive nature of their offerings. These challenges include intangibility, heterogeneity, inseparability, simultaneity, and perishability. Because of these characteristics, hotels often struggle to effectively match supply with demand. This means that it can be challenging for hotels to synchronize the

availability of their services with the fluctuating needs and expectations of their guests (Parasuraman et al., 1985).

2.2 Marketing Hotel Industry Services

When it comes to services, just like with products, it is vital to understand the marketing dynamics. This means recognizing the wants and satisfaction of customers in the hotel industries. By identifying the specific want(s) that a service fulfils, the hotel industry can create a marketing strategy that leads in achieving the target. It's all about designing an approach that aligns with what customers are looking for. This understanding serves as a valuable clue in shaping the most effective marketing tactic. Reid (1989) therefore emphasizes that service marketing brings awareness and deliberation of hotel's product and services to the customers.

The hotel industry is more about providing services to customers. As managers in this sector, it is vital to understand the distinctive nature of these services and how they set this industry apart from other businesses. Marketing services can be challenging at times, but when done well, it becomes a powerful tool for gaining a competitive edge. By effectively creating, communicating, and delivering the services to the potential customers, hotels can stand out in the market and attract more customers. It is all about recognizing the special nature of services and implementing it to the hotel's advantage.

According to VisionEdge Marketing (2023), it is crucial for a service industry to imply service marketing triangle to understand and represent the relationship between companies, employees and customers in order to market the services efficiently and effectively. The types of marketing involved in this strategic marketing models are internal marketing, external marketing and interactive marketing.

2.2.1 Internal Marketing for Hotel Services

Bhargava and Kumar (2015) emphasize that Internal Marketing is the relationship inside a service business with its workforce in order to keep them motivated for serving the customers. The authors states that the front desk employees also known as the front-line staffs

are the one which represents the hotel's face as they are the first person to come in the contact with the customers. The service provided by the front-line staffs play a crucial role in the overall satisfaction of the customer. Beginning from the door boy, receptionist, bell boy, housekeeper, etc., they all get in direct contact with the customer in one way or other.

According to Bhargava and Kumar (2015), these front life staffs are usually lower-level employees in the hierarchy and have a very defined roles since they are in extensive interaction with the customers or the potential customers. Most of these staffs are non-professionals and usually operate with very limited amount of training when first employed. They also have very limited opportunities to innovate the way they work. They have a much-defined job roles, they are in extensive interaction with the customers or public, also there exists a strong hierarchical management structure in them. Most front-line staff hold relatively junior positions within an organization, also their roles are non-professionals. They just receive a considerable amount of structured training when first employed. Also, they have limited opportunities to innovate the ways in which they work. Their major goal is the consistency with the customers rather than forming innovative ideas within the organization.

Internal marketing is not just limited to customer service staffs. Every employee, even those who do not directly interact with customers, can impact the apparent service quality. When employees perform their jobs well, they become a valuable part of the service and product offering. Internal marketing is becoming increasingly important for service sector organizations, as it sets the stage for successful external marketing. If internal marketing is neglected, the organization struggle to deliver the promised service. It is crucial for organizations to have a well-structured internal marketing approach that improves employee relations, competitiveness, and overall performance. Effective communication also plays a vital role in this exchange between employees and employers. It's also important to consider employee motivation, work content, relationships with colleagues and supervisors, and the organization's perceived value by employees. By understanding and addressing these factors, service sectors can create a positive internal environment that benefits both employees and the organization (Bhargava & Kumar, 2015).

2.2.2 External Marketing for Hotel Services

The traditional 4Ps of marketing, which include product/service, price, place, and promotion, are crucial for improving sales in any business. However, promoting a service is dynamic and necessitates specific, measurable, attainable, repeatable, and time-bound (SMART) strategies. Booms and Bitner (1981) proposed additional 3Ps: people, physical evidence, and processes for marketing services. External marketing involves interactions between the company and its customers, where the company commits to delivering high-quality service. The marketing communication mix, encompassing advertisements, sales promotion, personal selling, direct marketing, and public relations, is utilized to convey information about services to customers. In the hotel industry, the services provided play a significant role in sales performance. Hotel service encompasses food, beverages, and lodging that cater to the physiological, psychological, and social needs of consumers. Marketing a service can be more challenging than marketing a product due to the intangible nature of services. The customer experience is pivotal in effectively selling a service as it influences the perceived value of the service. Therefore, it is imperative for hotels to deliver exceptional service to all guests.

External marketing is like the traditional way of marketing where service industries use different strategies and tools to promote their services (Indeed, 2023a). They create advertisements and materials to catch the attention of customers. It's all about building a recognizable brand and connecting with customers through various channels like social media, partnerships, and having a strong online presence with an effective logo and website. The goal is to make customers aware of the company and its services, and ultimately persuade them to choose their offerings. So, it's all about putting the company out there and making a lasting impression on potential customers.

2.2.3 Interactive Marketing for Hotel Services

This marketing tool is one of the vital methods in which not only service-oriented businesses, but any other sector can better meet their market's need by communicating and responding to the needs of customers. Lilyquist (2019) states that interactive marketing involves a unique tactic that engages customers based on their actions. The author further

emphasizes that it is direct response to what they do. It relies completely on the action started by customers.

This method analyzes customer's behavior and then uses it to propose services to the current customers based on the analysis from the previous one. This helps the hotel business to sell their services in an effective manner and retain the customers. The service industry communicates with the customers and recommend them with what other customers from the similar segments usually prefers during their stays. They also remember customer's preferences for the future sales. This leads to customer satisfaction which ultimately creates a value for them by understanding and meeting their expectations. This tactic is about showing the customer that the hotel cares about their needs and demands and are committed to fulfilling them. The quality of services provided to customers and their satisfaction are the two major keys in obtaining competitive advantage and customer retention.

Deighton (1996), states that the benefit of interactive marketing can be significant to any business in present context. He regards that this makes a customer feel that they are heard, understand and receiving customized services based on their demands and needs. This ultimately increases the sales as it assures the customer that the services, they are receiving are best suited for them. They also market the industry by using word of mouth which is one of the most efficient ways of marketing in present context.

This also leads to lower the marketing costs in a significant way. Since interactive marketing is based on actions by customers, they appreciate the fact that they don't have to repeat their demand every time they visit which also leads to customer retention and it is always cheaper to maintain and keep a regular customer rather than creating a new one.

2.3 SWOT Analysis

A SWOT analysis is a framework that helps organizations figure out their strengths, weakness, opportunities and threats. It studies both internal as well as external factors. Internal factors are strengths and weaknesses whereas the external factors are opportunities and threats. The internal factors study in detail about what the organization is good at and what it needs to improve. On the other hand, external factors give the idea about market trends

and competition. This analysis helps organization understand their situation and make proper decisions (Peterdy, 2023).

According to Schooley (2023), it is important to conduct a SWOT analysis before making any changes in a company. It could be about exploring new initiatives, modifying internal strategies, thinking new opportunities, or even altering a plan while it has already been executed. If done properly, the analysis can show the key areas where an organization is performing well and areas where it needs attention.

Raeburn (2023) explains that the most popular and effective method to create a SWOT analysis is to use a SWOT matrix. This is a visual presentation that helps organize the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats into four separate squares all fitted in a larger square. It helps to collect the information needed, document the analysis process and visualize the relationships between various aspects in an easier manner. The matrix can be created by dividing a larger square into four smaller squares. The top two squares represent the internal factors which are strengths and weakness while the bottom two squares are for external factors of opportunities and threats.

It is a simple yet valuable tool in a hotel industry for analysing the internal and external factors. By conducting a SWOT analysis, a hotel can obtain a thorough interpretation of its present position in the market and detect areas for improvement. It helps the management make right decisions, develop effective marketing strategies, and allocate resources wisely.

For an example, if the analysis shows that the main strength of the hotel is the location by the side of a river, the management can target on marketing campaigns highlight this advantage. If a weakness is identified in customer service, the management can invest in training the staffs to rectify it.

The SWOT analysis for the case hotel was conducted and is detailed under the case study topic.

2.4 Factors Affecting Sales Performance of a Hotel

According to IPL.org (n.d.), in the service industry, there are external factors like customer preferences, competitive pricing, and the economic fluctuations that determine the demand for hotels and restaurants. These factors can't be fully controlled by the businesses themselves. Additionally, internal factors such as investment, innovation, business size, and worker costs also impact the sales performance of hotels. Other major factors like location, pricing, reputation, customer service, and marketing strategies can all have a significant impact on a hotel's sales. These factors can affect the number of bookings, occupancy rates, and ultimately the revenue generated by the hotel. Therefore, for the companies in the hospitality industry to thrive, they must offer quality and high-class customer services.

The evaluation of service quality in the hospitality industry depends on how customers identify the service they receive and whether it meets or exceeds their expectations (Robert, 1995). He further suggests that by delivering the basic service and going beyond by being responsive, courteous, and competent, hotels can exceed customer expectations.

Oliver (1999) states that satisfied customers may not necessarily remain loyal, but dissatisfied customers are unlikely to stay loyal if they have other options. He regards that dissatisfied customers are also more likely to share their negative experiences with others, which can harm a company's reputation. On the other hand, there is a positive relationship between customer satisfaction, loyalty, and company performance. Profits tend to increase as the length of the customer relationship grows.

In the hospitality industry, creating a positive image through good customer service is crucial. Service delivery is directly proportional to the service providers, so maintaining a strong provider-client relationship is important. This can be achieved by recruiting the right employees and providing them with excellent training to ensure a skilled, reliable, and responsive workforce.

Another important factor is that the senior management can establish a sales performance culture by actively participating in building long lasting relationships with customers and committing to excellence. This kind of culture helps reduce staff turnover rates and

increases employee satisfaction which leads to the increase in the sales performance of any hotel (Khandelwal, 2023).

3 RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The major and basic concept of research methodology is the way a researcher conducts their research and the way they collect the data required to do the research. According to West and Kahn (1989), research is a systematic and objective analysis and recording of controlled observations that may lead to the development of generalizations, principles, theories, and concepts, resulting in prediction for seeing and possibly ultimate control of events.

The way I chose to do my research is by using mixed approach with the focus on qualitative approach. Quantitative analysis was used for numerical data collection to analyze the sales. The other methods of quantitative analysis were not taken in account because of the nature of the research and my absence from the hotel while writing the thesis. I was on a paternal leave for more than four months which limited me to conduct customer surveys.

3.1 Qualitative Research

According to Mohajan (2018), it is a type of research that aims to explore and understand the complexities of human behaviour, experiences, and perspectives. It goes further than numbers and statistics to obtain different aspects of people's lives.

In qualitative research, researchers use various theoretical methods to gather data. The most common type of qualitative research are interviews, observations, focus groups, and analysing documents or articles. These methods assist researchers to connect with participants directly, providing a deeper understanding of their thoughts, emotions, and motivations (Cornell, 2023).

The paragraph above justifies that the key characteristic of qualitative research is its focus on context and meaning. Researchers seek to understand the social, cultural, and historical factors that shape people's experiences and behaviours. Data are analysed in a holistic manner, looking for patterns, themes, and relationships that emerge from the participants' narratives.

There are also other possible ways to carry out the research. The most common methods and the method used to collect data for this topic are described below.

3.1.1 Observation

According to California State University (2006), observation is one of the important ways to do research. A researcher is supposed to observe the environment very carefully and detect problems from it. It takes comparatively longer time to conduct research by observation, but the gained data is very helpful. For the observer, everything is noted as if it was happening for the first time and everything is the subject to enquiry.

I elected this method because I have been observing the sales strategies implemented, work culture, customer satisfaction reports, marketing trends over the years, relationship between staffs and customers, employees' recruitments and working to improve it all the time for about five years now. The way the progress graph has fluctuated in the past years is the matter of concern in the present context. This whole situation is later discussed in the result and overall analysis part of my empirical data analysis.

3.1.2 In-depth Interviews

Deakin University (2023) defines interviews as the purposeful conversations between the researcher and the interviewee, either one-on-one or in a group setting. They are a key method in qualitative research for gathering in-depth information and insights. In an interview, the researcher asks questions to get the interviewee's perspectives and opinions on a particular research topic. The questions are supposed to be carefully designed to investigate the research objectives and proved detailed responses simultaneously.

Interviews can be structured, semi-structured, or unstructured. In structured interviews, the questions are predetermined and asked in a standardized manner to ensure consistency across participants. Semi-structured interviews have a set of core questions but allow for flexibility and follow-up questions based on the interviewee's responses. Unstructured interviews are more open-ended, with minimal pre-determined questions, allowing for a free-flowing conversation (Bristowe et al., 2015).

Semi-structured method was used to interview the staffs and the management.

3.1.3 Case Studies

Yin (1984, p. 23) defines case study research as an empirical inquiry that investigates a contemporary phenomenon within its real-life context. It is a method that allows researchers to explore complex and multifaceted issues where the boundaries between the phenomenon and its context may not be clearly defined.

3.2 Quantitative Data Analysis

This method is a broad area of scientific methods. Quantitative analysis enables to describe and interpret data statistically with numbers. The data obtained are more accurate and explains the phenomena through numeric variables (UTA Libraries, 2023).

Numerical data from the yearly were collected to compare and study the income statement and provide possible solutions to increase the revenue.

3.2.1 Data Collection

Numerical data were obtained and analyzed from the hotels account records from the period of 2018–2022. The income statement and the profit and loss account for this period are compared and evaluated later in sales analysis of this research. This provided valuable insights into the hotels' sales performance over the years.

The research is done through in-depth interviews with both upper and middle level management at the hotel, observation, and data collection which also included the hotel's financial statistics.

3.3 Validity and Reliability

In a qualitative study, validity means that the results truthfully reflect the phenomena studied, and reliability requires that the same results would be obtained if the study were

replicated (Morse & Richards, 2002). Both are crucial in ensuring the creditability and trustworthiness of the research.

The findings are based upon the careful observation, interviews and numerical data from the hotel. Credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability are four common criteria used for validation of data collected using qualitative approach.

The research methods and data collection techniques align with the research objectives and its motive. The study captured the phenomenon and the concept of the topic. Multiple data collection methods were used to triangulate the findings and provide a comprehensive understanding of the topic.

All the documents and data were directly obtained rather than relying on a third party from the hotel. The methods were clearly documented using standardized procedures for the research and was free from bias and errors over the time. Also, the interview and observation parts are reliable since I have been working with the team in the hotel for over a decade. It was less challenging to verify the reliability of the research.

4 CASE: HOTEL SORSANPESÄ

Hotel Sorsanpesä is a historical hotel inaugurated in 1971 located in Törnävä, Seinäjoki. The hotel is three kilometres from the city centre of Seinäjoki, on the banks of the Seinäjoki river. It is privately owned by Reima Kuisla. Hotel Sorsanpesä has a total of about 20 own employees. Outsourced labours from recruiting companies are used during the high season and large events.

Hotel Sorsanpesä was built by Matkaravinto Oy in two parts, the first of which was completed in 1971 and the second in 1975 (Hotel Sorsanpesä, 2012). The original, circular part of the hotel was designed by architect Kauko Tiihonen. In 1989, an extension towards the river was built which was designed by architect Touko Saari. Apart from the expansion, the hotel's restaurants and the rooms of the original part were renovated during the same time. Renovated again in the 2010s, the current interior is designed by Jaakko Puro.

The hotel has a total of 134 rooms and 256 beds, providing ample accommodation options. The hotel is perfect for hosting meetings, parties, business events, and cultural events, with a variety of group and meeting rooms available for different-sized groups, up to 800 people. Additionally, customers could rent private sauna facilities for their exclusive use. Guests staying at the hotel can enjoy access to the gym, sauna facilities, and swimming pool. Sorsanpesä also offers ready-made accommodation, experience, and meeting packages, which are often customized to meet the specific preferences of their customers. It is one of the most recommended places to have a memorable stay or host a successful event.

4.1 Product and Services

The hotel offers a wide range of products and services to ensure a comfortable and enjoyable stay for their guests. Below are the major offerings explained that can be expected from Hotel Sorsanpesä.

The hotel provides well-furnished and spacious rooms with modern amenities such as comfortable beds, high-quality linens, air conditioning, flat-screen TVs, and complimentary

Wi-Fi. The room categories are further divided into three different standards based on facilities provided and pricing. The hotel also has to offer family rooms as well as suites. Extra beds and baby cots can also be organised depending on the demand of the customers.

Breakfast for the accommodating guests is complementary and has a wide range of selections. Apart from it, the hotel also has 3 on site restaurants and bars. The main restaurant and bar serve on the regular basis whereas the other two are in operated during private events.

The hotel also provides a range of facilities to enhance the guest experience. This includes fitness center, swimming pool, spa and sauna. These amenities are designed to serve both leisure and business travelers.

The hotel has 11 dedicated spaces for hosting meeting, conferences, seminars, weddings and social events. All of these venues are equipped with modern audiovisual technology to meet the needs and requirements of customers.

Apart from the above-mentioned services, laundry and drycleaning, luggage storage and 24-hour reception are the additional services that adds value to the hotel's brand.

4.2 Objectives and Goal

The major objectives and goals rotate around providing exceptional experiences for the guests while staying ahead of the competition. Some of the major objectives and goals of the hotel are explained below.

One of the major and primary objectives of Hotel Sorsanpesä is to create positive memorable experiences for the guests. This includes offers best customer service, comfortable and luxurious accommodations depending on the rooms category and a range of amenities to enhance their stay.

Another factor is that the positive guest's experience can only be obtained through high quality facilities and amenities to ensure the comfort during their stay. This includes well

maintained rooms, modern technology and a variety of on-site services. The hotel has been working continuously to maintain this level of service for the guaranteed satisfaction.

Maintaining the competitive price while providing it's worth to the customers has been another important goal of the hotel. Customers wants to get the value for money during their stay which is possible when competitive prices are set and modified regularly depending on the season and the competitors. Sales department at this hotel assures that the pricings are right and competitively set. In addition, they also come up with different attractive packages which attracts the guests.

Being distinct in this competitive market has been crucial for the hotel. It focuses on creating a unique brand identity that sets it apart from other hotels of same category in this region. This has been achieved through distinctive design which is a circular design with a tail like ending that makes the hotel looks like a duck's nest from above. The English translation of "Sorsanpesä" is 'duck nest', which justifies the name for its distinctive and unique design. The hotel has also continuously put the effort to provided themed experiences and specialized services based on the demands of the customers. The aerial view of the hotel is shown in the picture below.



Picture 1. Aerial view of Hotel Sorsanpesä.

In the present context, the hotel invests considerable amount in modern day and effecting marketing strategies which will later be discussed in the marketing and sales topic of this research. This includes digital marketing campaigns for target customers, partnerships with various companies, booking sites, travel agents and utilizing the social media platform to continuously engage with potential guests.

In hotel sector, a room unsold for a night can never be resold. The sales team works incessantly to maximize revenue by improving room occupancy rates, offering pleasant packages and promotions and upselling additional services to the guests during their visit.

The hotel is aware of the fact about the importance of a well-trained and motivated staffs. It invests in different training programs for the employees to assure high quality service, self-development and a positive working environment. In addition to that, the hotel also offers different kinds of benefits to its employees which includes Christmas presents, gift cards and get together parties to improve the motivation of employees.

The hotel has focused and prioritised the sustainability and environmental responsibility in the current times. It implements eco-friendly practices like using biodegradable shampoo bottles, trash bags. The hotel has also invested in energy conservation by installing light sensors in the hotel.

Creating guest loyalty has been the key goal for the hotel. It aims to provide such superior experiences that the guests are compelled to become repeated customers and advocates for the hotel which would eventually lead to positive word-of-mouth and increased bookings.

Regardless of all these above-mentioned objectives and goals, there is always room for improvement. Therefore, the hotel is always attempting for improvement to sustain in this market. Feedback from guests via different mediums, continuously monitoring the trends in this industry and making required adjustments and improvements to enhance guest satisfaction are always observed and implemented.

4.3 Marketing and Sales in Hotel Sorsanpesä

The hotel has a strong marketing strategy to attract and retain customers. The marketing and sales concept is modified at least once in a year depending on the need to rectify. I along with the sales manager and her team are responsible for the overall merchandising and branding of the hotel. As of 2023, below explained key factors were considered and implemented.

4.3.1 Branding

The hotel has been in operation for more than fifty years now and always had a unique brand image but somehow the rebranding of the hotel was needed. Our team created a plan to highlight the exclusive features provided by the hotel for the potential clients. We also showcased our services and amenities.

4.3.2 Marketing Campaigns for target groups

Our team also developed targeted marketing campaigns which included intensive digital marketing on social media and email marketing by sending regular newsletters about our offerings and services. The newsletters and digital marketing are regularly monitored and modified according to the need of the target audience. We also hired a tech company to optimize our web search engine to attract more visitors.

4.3.3 Individualized Customer Experience

A special reservation management software has been rented which assist us to look into the customers feedback and create a personalized service for their next visit. This software also helps us to anticipate the guest needs beforehand and make their stay pleasant by taking care of their needs and demands. This is done by asking them few automated questions via email after the reservation.

4.3.4 Partnerships and Collaborations

We have collaborated with a considerable number of companies in Etelä-Pohjanmaa region in the year 2023 who keeps organizing their seminars, accommodations and dining for their guests in our hotel. The number has been higher than that of last year. Majority of the companies have already renewed their contracts for the year 2024 which has enhanced the hotel's reputation. Furthermore, we also got deals with local football and other sports clubs. They accommodate their players in our hotel every time there is a game in and around the city of Seinäjoki.

4.4 SWOT Analysis of the Hotel

This chapter is dedicated to the Hotel Sorsanpesä situation analysis. Analysing the strength, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats assisted to know about the current situation of the hotel and what might could be done in a better or different way to overcome the challenges. It gave a clear picture of what the hotel is good at, possible need for improvements, potential areas for further growth and internal as well as external factors that might impact the success. This assessment helped in making tactical decisions, improve its competitive advantage to stay ahead in the market.

4.4.1 Strengths

The unique architectural design with a history of over fifty years is one of the major strengths. A survey conducted by the hotel's front desk team showed that above 60% of inhabitants over 40 years of age have visited the hotel at least once in their life. The purpose of visits differed from accommodation to attending seminars or weddings. The reputation of being unique and luxurious and not being owned by any chain hotels have created positive impact in the guest's mind. It has set the hotel apart from the competition up to some extent and has given a distinct identity. Guests value the individuality and personalized experiences that they receive while staying at this independent but upscale hotel. The individuality of the hotel has also motivated the properties of the hotel to invest in high-quality amenities and services for the guests.

The location of the hotel also plays a vital role in creating a strong brand reputation for the hotel. It is located about 3 kilometers from the city center and its hassle on the bank of the river. The beautiful and exquisite view from the hotel while not being far from the city helps the hotel to stand out from its competitors and attract more clients.

The staffs are well-trained and professionals in their respective departments. They are trained to provide high end services which includes interactions with guests, problem solving attitude and attention to detail which lead to guest satisfaction. These employees are efficient in their roles which helps the business to run efficiently while cutting the operating costs and improving the productivity of sales at the hotel. Each of the staffs in customer service department are trained for upselling and extra revenue generation. They are able to identify the opportunities to enhance the guest experience by offering additional paid and also complementary services.

4.4.2 Weaknesses

Maintaining a well reputed private hotel is costly and comes with significant expenses. The cost of providing premium experience to guests can be uneconomical if the revenue generated is lower than the cost. Compensating a dissatisfied hotel guest is not cost effective at all.

Since the hotel is more than five-decade old, regular maintenance of the properties demands considerable amount of money. This has affected the yearly profit in a negative way.

The intense competition from other chain hotels in the area has also made it challenging to differentiate itself from its competitors.

The hotel market has been more sensitive in last few years because of the pandemic which led to economic fluctuations and changes in consumer behavior. During this downturn and times of uncertainty, the occupancy rates decline and becomes challenging for the hotel to keep up with the operating costs.

Managing revenues and the occupancy levels during low season has also been challenging for the hotel with the same operating costs.

4.4.3 Opportunities

The hotel can allow more flexibility in branding and positioning than chain hotels. It can focus on few specific target markets which will later set it apart from larger chain hotels.

Personalized service rather than going by the book can intimate the experience for the guests. The hotel has the freedom and possibility to be agile and more innovative in its operations. Market adaption can be quicker in compared to the chain hotels which are time consuming and requires many decision makers. By providing tailored services to best suit the demands of the guests, it can increase its ratings.

The hotel also has the advantage of being connected to the local community and its cuisine. It can provide local cuisine in a traditional way for the immersive guest experience.

4.4.4 Threats

One of the major threats has been the presence of major chain-hotels in the region that offer similar services at a more competitive price. They have a separate team dedicated for competitive pricings which allow them to benchmark the rates and set a competitive price on a regular basis. Hotel Sorsanpesä lacks this because of the limited number of staffs in this private company. The sales team is responsible for setting the price which is not possible on a regular basis because of other responsibilities that they need to fulfill.

The rises of alternative accommodations in the recent years are another threat for the hotel. The demand for home sharing platforms and private rentals with comparatively cheaper rates have increased. These private rentals provide similar amenities and facilities for a budget price. This has led to change in customers preferences and travel patterns mainly after the pandemic.

5 EMPIRICAL AND DATA ANALYSIS

Empirical analysis refers to the process of collecting and analyzing data through observations, experiments, or surveys. It involves gathering factual data to test hypotheses or answer research questions (Indeed.com, 2023b).

Data analysis implies examining and interpreting the collected data using statistical techniques or qualitative methods. It helps to draw conclusions, identify patterns, and make meaningful insights from the data.

5.1 Data Analysis

Income statements were gathered for the period of five year from 2018 to 2022 for data analysis. Occupancy rates and yearly daily rates were also obtained from the channel managing software to measure the sales patterns and trends.

The graphical figure of income statement from the year 2018 to 2022 is shown and explained below to study the market situation and factors affecting the fluctuations.

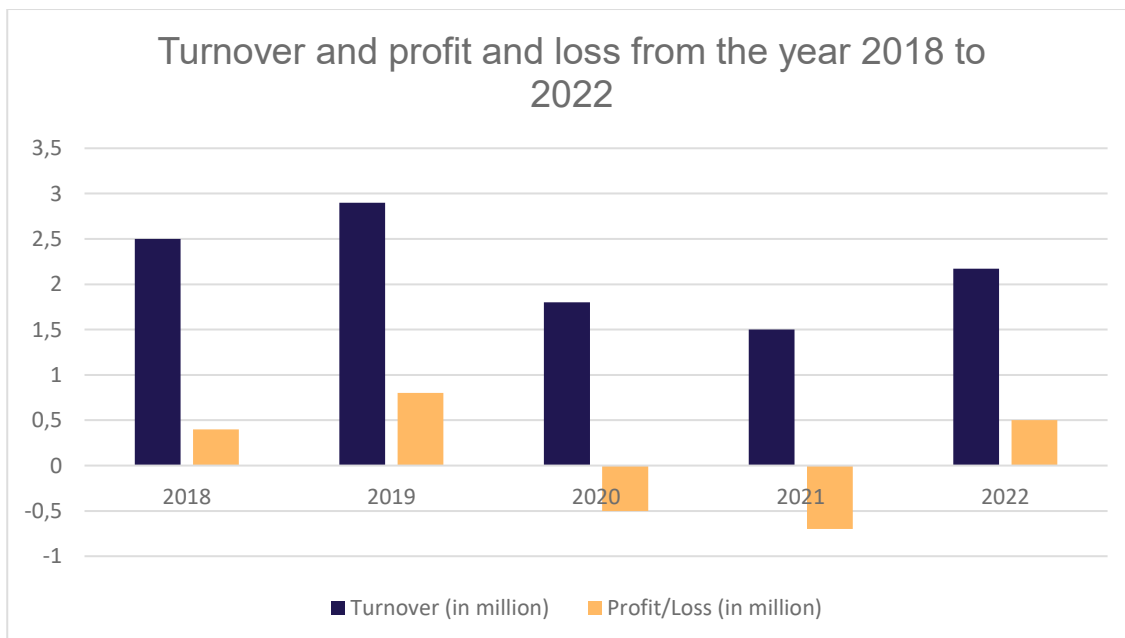


Figure 2: Turnover and profit and loss from the year 2018 to 2022.

As of the figure above, the turnover and the profit increased from 2,5 million to 2,9 million euros and 0,4 million to 0,8 million respectively. The drastic decrease during the year 2021-2022 was solely related to the pandemic. The closure of seminars, restaurants, and limited gatherings made the hotel experience significant loss. The turnover went down to 1,8 million euros in 2020 and further below to 1,5 million euros in 2021 and the hotel dealt with the loss of 0,5 million euros and 0,7 million euros correspondingly. The year 2022 and onwards showed momentous increase in the sales and profit. The sales for the year 2022 was 2,17 million euros and the profit made was 0,5 million euros.

The occupancy rates and yearly average rates also experienced a significant decrease, as illustrated in Figure 2 below.

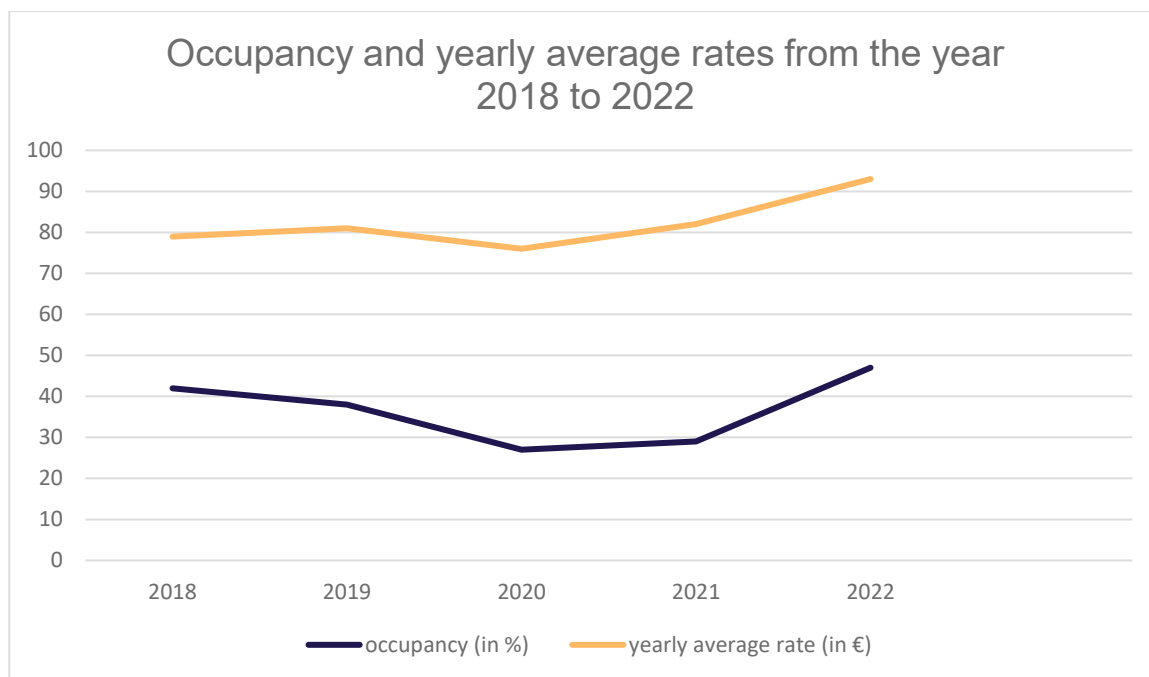


Figure 3: Occupancy and yearly average room rates from the year 2018 to 2022.

In this figure, the occupancy rate during the year 2018–2022 had been 42%, 38%, 27%, 29% and 47% respectively. Likewise, the yearly average rate for a hotel room were 79€, 81€, 76€, 82€ and 93€.

The graph illustrates the downward trend in both occupancy rates and daily average rates during the year 2020 and 2021. This indicates a significant decrease in the number of

occupied rooms and the average price per room over the given period. The decline in these key metrics shows the challenging situation for the hotel, reflecting the impact of the pandemic and the resulting closures and restrictions on the hotel industry. The graph started inclining upwards post pandemic from the year 2022.

5.2 Analysis of Sales

Sales analysis was mainly done through in-depth semi structured interviews and personal observations.

5.2.1 Semi-structured Interviews

The General Manager and the Sales Manager were provided with a set of questions and interviewed together. The interview mainly included the sales performance of the hotel previously, in recent time and what measures are being taken to improve the performance in the upcoming years.

According to the General and Sales Managers of the hotel, the sales performance of the hotel was comparatively better before the corona pandemic and is accelerating again after the epidemic. The hotel being owned by a private entrepreneur, experienced a substantial financial setback resulting in significant losses during the corona era. Since the situation was same for all hotels and resorts, the managers did not take this into consideration and focused more on the post pandemic and current situation.

The hotel has been performing well and the sales are considerably better than before. The improved performance of the hotel can be attributed to its successful organization of numerous events and seminars. These activities have contributed to increased occupancy rates, enhanced sales in the restaurant and bar, and effective promotion of the hotel.

The sales performance of the hotel is measured by monitoring the occupancy rate, average room rate and customer feedback. The sales manager is responsible for responding to customers feedback and conveying the messages to the department managers for the possible improvement.

5.2.2 Personal Observation

As a hotel manager, I have monitored the market trends in the recent years to identify the emerging opportunities and combine it with the hotel's offering and market strategies accordingly.

I have also been tracking our Key Performance Indicators such as occupancy rates and average daily rates which has provided insights into the hotel's sales performance.

Observation of the hotel's sales and marketing endeavors have helped me evaluate their efficacy. This encompasses monitoring the performance of various marketing channels, analyzing conversion rates, and assessing the success of promotional campaigns.

5.3 Analysis of Customers

According to Paddle.com (2019), Customer analysis is a combination of both qualitative and quantitative research collected from customers with the purpose of better understanding them to draw meaningful conclusions that will aid in marketing and outreach efforts.

Customer analysis plays a crucial role in understanding guest preferences, needs, and behaviours. The way this analysis was conducted are detailed below.

5.3.1 Guest Surveys

As mentioned previously, a structured questionnaire was not constructed to conduct guest surveys. However, customer reviews were obtained from all the booking channels including booking.com and the hotels personal reservation channel. Additionally, feedback was also obtained from email and social media platforms.

5.3.2 Competitor Analysis

The services, offerings and guest experiences from the competitors were also obtained via booking sites which helped to benchmark the industry trends and guest expectations and eventually help the hotel to identify areas where it can differentiate and improve.

Customer analysis is an ongoing process and should regularly be reviewed and analysed to identify trends, patterns, and opportunities for improvement.

5.4 Result

The hotel has implemented new marketing strategies. The management have decided to move their focus from traditional methods like newspapers and newsletters to digital and social media platforms. They are now putting more effort into promoting and marketing the hotel through online channels.

In addition to the marketing changes, the management have also recognized that there are areas where improvements can be made throughout the various departments. They have identified these areas as opportunities to enhance the overall performance of the hotel.

One specific area that the hotel should prioritize is improving the quality of their complimentary breakfast. Customers have expressed concerns about their experience with the breakfast, and the hotel should take steps to address these concerns.

Another aspect that needs attention is the need for renovations. It has been challenging for the sole owner to invest in the renovation because of the pandemic and loss faced during the time but it is vital at the same time to update and maintain the facilities to ensure a positive guest experience.

The concerns raised by customers regarding the perceived value for money could be influenced by these two main aspects: the quality of the complimentary breakfast and the need for renovations. By focusing on improving these areas, the hotel can work towards providing a better overall experience for their guests and addressing these concerns.

6 CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

6.1 Theoretical Contribution

The hotel with the history of over 50 years had a monopoly in the last century. The main reason being that it did not have any competitors in this area. The unique facilities and features it offered was not available in any other hotels. It went bankrupt in the beginning of this century at was later obtained by the new owner and put to operation with the same facilities that were provided before bankruptcy. In the current years, almost every hotel is providing same facilities which challenges Hotel Sorsanpesä to be in the competition.

The overall performance of the hotel was analysed as an author and as a manager, few major areas need to be rectified and worked in order to enhance the sales performance of the hotel. They are described below.

6.1.1 Improving Guest Experiences

The hotel can prioritize in offering more tailored services for the guests for personalized experiences. This includes anticipating guest needs and ensuring prompt and efficient service.

6.1.2 Renovation and Upgrading Facilities

Investing in regular maintenance and renovations can keep the hotel up to date in order to compete with the chain hotels. This includes updating guest rooms. common areas and meeting rooms.

6.1.3 Improving Dining Options and Restaurants Opening Hours

Enhancing the quality of breakfast can significantly impact guest satisfaction. The two most important things for a guest in accommodating are clean room and good breakfast. Everything else comes after these two priorities.

The restaurant at the hotel has limited opening hours. The kitchen is open from 17-23 except Sundays. Prolonging the opening hours and marketing the restaurant separately can help boost the sales of the hotel.

6.1.4 Streamlining Check-in and Check-out processes

The hotel uses the traditional way of check-in and check-out process till date. The only option for guests is to complete this procedure is via reception which creates hassle during high seasons. The hotel in addition, should provide online check-in and check-out for customers. This requires minimal amount of investment and can speed up the process.

6.2 Managerial Contribution

This study not only assisted the author but also the hotel to analyse, forecast and work on the current flaws by utilizing the available resources. The hotel has allocated a certain amount to renovate standard grade rooms during the first quarter of 2024. These rooms are the ones which are occupied the most. The customers accommodating are workmen you regularly accommodate for a longer period during their work weeks. The management has also agreed to invest in other renovations after third quarter of 2024.

6.3 Limitations

The success percentage of this research was limited because of the economic conditions after the pandemic which impacted the sales performance in an unexpected way thus making it challenging to isolate specific factors. Seasonality after the corona pandemic has also been very unpredictable as the hotel's occupancy rate was one of the highest during the quietest season in the year 2022 and the busiest of the season was just above 50%.

The other limitations were not being able to retrieve enough data from the hotel as this research was conducted during my paternal leave period.

6.4 Suggestion for Further Studies

This study was conducted for a private hotel in Seinäjoki municipality. Therefore, future research can focus on investigating the evaluation of factors affecting the sales performance of similar types of hotels in this area. Additionally, there is a need to assess strategies that enhance customer satisfaction and boost sales performance in the hotel industry, particularly in the context of this hotel's development as a full congress hotel. It is also important to note that critical factors have not been identified or documented, making it necessary to study the assessment of these factors.

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APPENDICES

Appendix 1. Interview questions with Juha Tiainen (General Manager from 2019-2023) and Anita Jokilehto (Sales Manager from 2023 onwards).

Appendix 1: Interview questions with Juha Tiainen (General Manager from 2019-2023) and Anita Jokilehto (Sales Manager from 2023 onwards).

- How the hotel has been performing sales wise recently in general?
- What are the key factors that is contributing to the hotel's success?
- How does the hotel is performing in comparison to its competitors?
- What are the most popular packages and promotions that are helping to boost the hotel's sales?
- How to you measure your efforts in the success of the hotel?
- Can you provide any insights into the hotel's target market?