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Harry Wheeler - Collaborative design approach overcomes economic obstacles for hotel owners and investors

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Once a booming market, the hospitality industry has surely felt the impact of rising economic prices and the decline in global and domestic travel. This has put a damper on the hotel industry over the past three years and resulted in many owners and investors in New England and across the country scaling back or placing new builds and renovations in a holding pattern.

Despite recent forecasts that predict a sunnier outlook for the industry as the marketplace remains solid and improving, there are still challenges to overcome. Design firms can be a key player in the game to ensure owners and investors get a high return on their investment from existing and new properties.

Group One's architectural and interior design success during these tough times is based on our collaborative relationships with clients. More so than any other time in our firm's 40-plus year history, we must put on an "owner's hat" to create a design that fits within all of the economics of the project. Alongside our clients we determine how a design or redesign can be smartly approached to achieve visual, functional and positive economic impact. Asking the right questions at every step of the planning and design process and critically evaluating each phase of the project ensures that time and money are most efficiently utilized. From factoring in design elements on a room-to-room basis, to developing the base project scope, and even helping to create the project budget, at Group One we approach each project as if we were writing the check. This collaborative strategy allows us all to work smarter to create an innovative yet practical design that enables projects to: a) get financed and b) to provide a high ROI.

In several instances over the past year we've been able to use this approach to create profitable, smartly designed spaces for our clients. One example is the Sheraton Boston located in the city's prestigious Back Bay area, which was completed in early April 2011. Here Group One provided property evaluation and helped define and recommend the project scope to the client. Upon approval of both, we provided architectural and interior design services for more than 100,000 square feet of meeting and public space. Transforming the existing property into a high-end meeting space with increased social functionality, we were able to increase the hotel's revenue with these more intimate, well-designed spaces.

The Sheraton Needham Hotel in Needham, Mass., is another example of where Group One provided property evaluation and worked with the client to help identify and recommend the project scope. In this case, we provided architectural and interior design services for the renovation of all public spaces, guest rooms, function spaces, the exterior entry and a complete restaurant redesign. This effort converted the existing property into an upscale facility with all of the current amenities and technology requirements that guests have come to expect. The next phase, still in the design process, is to upgrade the entire hotel experience with a new design for the function spaces along

with creating an entirely new restaurant concept.

A new build of the Six South Street Hotel in Hanover, N.H. is one last example of Group One's collaborative approach to project management and design. In this project we took the client's vision of a contemporary and hip hotel environment and turned it into a reality. After first understanding the level of comfort and quality that the client wanted, Group One developed a theme of rich woodwork, color accents and unique furnishings that were carried throughout the design of the property from the front door down to the bedding in the guest rooms. Since the property opened in February 2011, the hotel and its restaurant concept have received rave reviews and high praise from the community.

Understanding the project economics and design to create upside value is critical to attaining client satisfaction in this challenging economic market. Spaces must be functional, imaginative, and yield a high ROI for the client. At Group One, we continue to work hard to align with the client's vision on every project and to add to that with a creative approach that achieves project goals and well positions our clients to ride the wave toward an improved business climate and increasing revenue streams.

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