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Gus Sarff - Just how and when do you go about planning to furnish your hotel?

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The architect is on board, the designer is hired, but what are the options for the hotel furnishing buyout? A prominent Boston architect requested a presentation on FF&E Purchasing 101 to the owner, operator, and design team for a pending Boston suburb renovation and hotel repositioning. No problem. "The caveat is," he confesses "the owner does not want a purchasing company, and my design team believes purchasing companies 'knock off' and reduce quality of designers specified product." So this audience is hostile? "Yes."

I liked the challenge of this presentation. After describing the purchasing services, the owner asked me why he can't buy furnishings from IKEA and why he needed GSA. I told him he could and he didn't, respectively. There are many ways hotel owners can buyout furnishings, fixtures and equipment

Why shouldn't a hotel owner buy from the in-line market? Nearly every property is unique having different spatial foot prints. This usually makes in-line furnishings inappropriate from a dimensional standpoint. Much like buying clothes that are too big or too small. They don't fit and it is noticeable. Interior furnishings are fabricated differently for commercial use to withstand constant public use, meet operator standards, and public fire safety codes. Professional hospitality designers are hired to create functional, timely, property specific and regionally appropriate interior designs. It is our agenda to implement those designs within the value and quality parameters of the Owner and Operator. Further, Boston Fire Department has stringent fire codes requiring testing, copious documentation, application and certification. Had our reluctant owner bought his furniture from IKEA, he would not have been able to obtain the certificate of occupancy.

Bias aside, we happen to think that honest purchasing companies specializing in FF&E are the best and most cost effective option to buy out a hotel's FF&E needs. The services of a hotel FF&E contract purchasing company go well beyond issuing orders. We are an equivalent service to construction management, only for interiors. We are a fee based consultant contracted, as agent, directly to the Hotel ownership to provide competitive bidding, transparent cost analysis, quality control, value engineering, and logistical planning from concept to completion. Services cover management of shipping, staging, installation, fire code certification, operations and construction integration and turnover.

Addressing the interior designers I advised that we are contracted to the owner to provide quality and cost options concurrent with meeting design intent. We are respectful of intellectual property rights and proprietary specifications throughout. Designer's specifications are digitally downloaded into our web based software and bid to the global and local market for contract manufacturing. Interior Design interaction and approval is an integral part of assisting the owner in making final decisions.

How much time do you need to buy and install a hotel? If a hotel project is a renovation or repositioning, FF&E is critical path. A project team should not assume that there are materials in stock. Fifteen years ago someone invented the "just in time" supply chain and manufacturing began to move East. Woven carpets take 16 weeks to produce and ship. Custom chandeliers can be 20 weeks. When you can find in-stock materials for critical schedules, they are usually a compromise to style, quality, design and budget. It takes 5 to 6 months MINIMUM from the date of approved design to procure, produce, ship and install a 4 or 5 star hotel. The process for designing, budgeting, programming, should start earlier so that enough time is left for success.

Ultimately we won over the reluctant owner and design team and were awarded the FF&E purchasing contract resulting in a successful renovation.

Gus Sarff is the president of GS Associates, Inc. Newburyport, Mass.

New England Real Estate Journal - 17 Accord Park Drive #207, Norwell MA 02061 - (781) 878-4540