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Ueberroth: "Our new branding expands the definition of luxury travel beyond the confines of traditional perceptions."

**B**ack in March, Preferred Hotel Group made one of the biggest changes in its history when it unveiled its plan to move from a multi-brand business model to one master brand called Preferred Hotels & Resorts.

The company, which represents independent luxury hotels, also announced that each of its member properties would now be aligned with one of five collections — Legend, LVX, Lifestyle, Connect and Preferred Residences. Each hotel is now defined by experience rather than ranked by stars or tiers.

In addition, the entire portfolio is now represented on one website at [www.preferredhotels.com](http://www.preferredhotels.com). Travelers are encouraged to "choose your own adventure" and a new search interface on the website allows them to browse by experience, location and price point.

Search options include the hotel's settings (beach, lake, mountain or city, for example), amenities, interests (culinary or honeymoon), style (tranquil, hip, stately or eco-friendly), activities (winter sports, hiking or cooking classes) and family-friendly features (babysitting, kids' club or connecting rooms).

It's all part of a new consumer-focused strategy from the family-owned

## A New Direction for Preferred

The rebranded rep firm is revamping its collection of independent luxury hotels

global company, which also announced an ambitious expansion plan to grow from 650 hotels in 85 countries to 1,000 hotels in 100 countries within the next three years.

We spoke with Lindsey Ueberroth, Preferred's president and CEO, about the rebranding, what lies ahead for the company, and how travel agents can maximize their sales.

### What was the impetus for Preferred to create one master brand?

It's definitely a momentous time in our company's history. Since my family bought the company and its family of brands 11 years ago, the definitions of hotel, hospitality and luxury have dramatically evolved, as has the way consumers think about brands and experiences in the world we travel through.

With a clear understanding of these shifts in behavior and the evolutions in the hospitality market, we recognized that becoming more consumer-facing was vital to the success of our company and our hotel partners worldwide. We made the decision to move to one master brand to better connect to consumers with simplicity and clarity, while continuing to strengthen and elevate the core awareness of the Preferred Hotels & Resorts brand. Travelers are showing a rapidly increasing preference for unique, authentic, independent hotel experiences, and our rebranding was designed to satisfy those interests.

### How does the new hotel collection series work?

Our new branding expands the definition of luxury travel beyond the confines of traditional perceptions such as diamonds or stars. We understand that people travel differently depending on their reason for travel and who they are traveling with, so the collec-

tions provide a more intuitive way for our travel agent partners and their clients to identify their ideal accommodations by organizing our hotels based on the type of luxury experience they offer.

Each collection has a set of criteria that focuses on areas such as service levels, physical facilities, amenities, and awards and recognition, as well as a distinct style of luxury, making it easier for travelers to identify exactly what aspects will make each individual trip perfect — whether for business or pleasure. To help agents quickly understand and confidently recommend a hotel to their clients, we've identified the collections in the name field in the GDS.

### What are the standout features of the new website?

The best feature of the new website, PreferredHotels.com, is that it now showcases all of our member hotels, offering immediate access to more than 650 independent hotels in 85 countries.

Travelers who visit the site will find a fresh, new, inspiring look and feel, enriched content, and new search functionality that allows them to quickly search for a hotel by collection or other preferences such as a hotel name, experience, location and price point. Since we recognize that consumers are planning their travel on a variety of devices, the site features a responsive design to ensure that our guests can find the perfect hotel and book a Preferred Hotels & Resorts experience anywhere, at any time.

### What marketing initiatives are supporting the new brand strategy?

We are committed to keeping our partners and guests worldwide informed, inspired and engaged, and will achieve this through an exten-

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sive marketing and communications campaign. On launch day, March 4, we introduced a new #ThePreferredLife campaign that will be a cornerstone of our traditional and social media marketing strategies moving forward. This concept reflects the spirit of personal choice and preferred experience and will allow us to build stronger consumer awareness of the Preferred brand by presenting our hotels and resorts in a much more authentic way.

In the coming months, we will also unveil two new print advertising concepts that highlight the unique experiences travelers can enjoy at our member hotels, embracing both traditional hotel photography and the real vacation memories guests are posting on social media.

### How has the rebranding been received so far?

The response has been extremely positive. In a time when consumers are overwhelmed by the multitude of new hotel brands, our guests and travel agent partners appreciate

the new streamlined approach of one master brand with five distinct collections showcased on one brand website and, for agents, one GDS code. We saw an immediate increase in traffic and bookings through our website and expect this trend to continue, especially as we introduce our new experience-based, inspirational advertising campaigns.

### How does Preferred Hotels & Resorts work generally?

Hotels join Preferred Hotels & Resorts to tap into our global sales, marketing and distribution platform, which provides services that independent hotels could not access on their own, whether due to cost, resources or market expertise.

As part of the initial vetting process before a hotel is accepted into our portfolio, we conduct an onsite inspection to ensure that the property meets our collection criteria and standards of excellence. We provide all of our member hotels with strategic global exposure through our website, our GDS chain code (PH), inclusion

in innovative and engaging marketing, advertising and social media campaigns, and placement in our directories and magazines, which are showcased in every guestroom of all of our hotels.

### What makes the Preferred experience different from its competitors?

Preferred Hotels & Resorts offers more one-of-a-kind independent luxury hotels and independent hotel experiences than any other brand in the world, ensuring that guests can access our portfolio anywhere they are traveling.

Our collections represent every type of luxury from casual to totally immersive, which gives the traveler more to choose from, depending on their needs. For example, family travel has very different needs than business travel or a romantic getaway with your spouse, and our portfolio caters to all types of travel.

Most importantly, the Preferred Hotels & Resorts experience includes access to the only global points-based

program that rewards travelers with points for choosing to stay at an independent hotel.

### You've committed to grow to 1,000 hotels in 100 countries by 2018. Where are you going to focus your growth?

The goal to grow to 1,000 hotels in 100 countries within the next three years is not about quantity, but about having the right hotels in the right locations.

I want to ensure that Preferred Hotels & Resorts can offer guests the independent hotel experience of their choice, whether they are traveling for business or leisure, anywhere in the world. We are looking to achieve a presence in markets where we currently have no presence, such as Chile, countries in Europe such as Sweden, Norway, Croatia and Montenegro, as well as areas of northern Africa. We also see a lot of opportunity for growth in existing markets across South Asia and South America and in secondary cities in China such as Suzhou.

### What new properties have come on board?

In 2014, we welcomed 108 new properties to our portfolio, and from January to March of this year, an additional 22 hotels and resorts joined the Preferred Hotels & Resorts brand. Among the newer properties in our portfolio are both upcoming openings like Palazzo Versace in Dubai, South Beach in Singapore, The Temple House in Chengdu [Sichuan Province, China], and EAST in Miami, as well as strong, long-standing industry names such as The Hollywood Roosevelt in Los Angeles and Dhara Dhevi in Chiang Mai.

### How do you work with travel agents and what is your commission policy?

Preferred Hotels & Resorts values the travel agent community, and it is important to us that we reward agents for being loyal to our brand and to our hotels. Agents who book with Preferred receive standard 10 percent commission for every booking, including those made through

our iPrefer [frequent guest] program, whether for a standard stay or one taking place with a Reward Certificate redemption. We also host dozens of [hotel] showcases around the globe, which give agents the opportunity to interact directly with our hotels, as well as periodic fam trips.

### What are the key sales points that will help travel agents sell Preferred to their customers?

Our two-part Integrated Quality Assurance program provides travel agents with a seal of approval, indicating that every hotel represented within our portfolio meets high standards of excellence.

The iPrefer program provides instant perks upon every stay such as complimentary Internet, early check-in/late check-out and space-available upgrades at more than 550 member properties worldwide, as well as points, which can be redeemed for cash-value Reward Certificates that are accepted toward free room nights and other expenditures at any participating hotel. 🌐