

Marriott Bedding Program

Marriott International Uses Project Management to Upgrade Bedding Worldwide

Headquartered in Washington, DC, Marriott International, Inc. is one of the leading hospitality companies in the world with more than 2,400 properties in 68 countries and territories. As a management company, Marriott is responsible for daily operations in both company-operated and franchised properties. Marriott has an extensive portfolio of brands including full-service hotels and resorts, limited-service hotels like Fairfield Inn by Marriott and corporate housing such as Marriott ExecuStay. In 2004, Marriott International set out to upgrade their bedding across all Marriott brands by providing new sheeted duvet covers, soft linens, down pillows and pillow-top mattresses for their customers.

Background

The Marriott Bedding Program set out to develop and implement a bedding package for over 628,000 beds across 10 Marriott lodging brands in two years, giving Marriott a new look and more comfortable amenities. The US\$190 million global renovation required seamless coordination of resources from interior design, operations, finance, owner relations and public relations.

In addition to transforming the Marriott brand, the finished product gave the company an important advantage and unique selling point over competitors. As bedding choices became a focal point of lodging industry competition, it was imperative for Marriott to conform to a tight project timeline with strong compliance across the Marriott system in order to reap the rewards of competitive advantage.

The new bedding was part of a comprehensive initiative to transform the look and feel of all Marriott brands to create a more comfortable hotel experience for all guests. Thus the project team, composed of Project Management Professional (PMP®)-certified project managers managed by a program manager out of Marriott's Lodging Program Management Office (PMO), conducted extensive market, product development and product and operational testing research to get inside the minds of their customers and affirm that the linens products adhered to their requirements.

The program manager was strongly supported by the Lodging Program Management Office. Her duties included maintaining communication among all parties, conducting regular team meetings with clear agendas covering upcoming milestones, identifying issues or risks and recognizing major accomplishments. She facilitated communication between the various headquarters' teams, regional teams and properties, identifying and employing the most appropriate method of communications depending upon the type of information being conveyed and the urgency of the message.

Challenges

One of the most ambitious projects undertaken by Marriott International, the Bedding Program produced several challenges on a global scale that the company had to overcome throughout the project lifecycle if it was going to prove successful in the end.

Marriott had an existing bedding standard prior to the Bedding Program initiative in 2004. However, with the differing ages of hotels and different brands came a great deal of variation in bedding specifications. In some cases, mattresses, especially in limited service hotels, were of various heights. In order to comply with the new standards, some properties had to purchase new mattresses. Other properties had to order special linens for higher mattresses. Box springs were different heights off the floor so properties had to precisely measure bed heights from the floor to the top of the box spring in order to purchase bed skirts of the appropriate length. King-sized beds existed in three different sizes, impacting the length and width of sheets that had to be ordered. With so many moving parts and dependencies and 21 internal project teams, the project scope became a clear challenge. Project teams had to work across time zones, languages and a variety of cultures and government regulations to achieve a successful outcome, making effective and efficient communication and coordination a significant challenge.

Stakeholder endorsement of the Marriott Bedding Program was essential for implementation since owners and franchisees would bear primary responsibility for the necessary financial investment. Owners and franchisees are required to comply with Marriott standards and the introduction of new operational measures, but if they are not supportive of a change, the implementation process can be significantly delayed. In addition, at the time of the Bedding Program, some properties had just opened and the new bedding standards required them to dispose of relatively new linens, which posed a financial burden for some.

With more than 143,000 employees worldwide and over 200 direct project associates, implementation of the bedding program required significant changes in hotel management processes. Thousands of people including housekeepers and laundry associates had to learn how to switch the new bedding out and also maintain the new standard form for each room and each linen change. Training had to be specific to the bedding packages designed for different brands. Additionally, property management teams needed to be educated about the rationale for the bedding change and the linen ordering process. Other training complications centered on a language barrier between property managers and housekeeping and laundry associates and the need to train all staff at the same level. In addition, some properties experienced staff turnover during the implementation process, requiring additional training for new personnel.

Much of the bedding Marriott sought was manufactured and distributed from overseas companies. This created a six-month lag time between the time an order was placed and when linens were delivered. In addition, across all brands the Bedding Program involved over 1,850 different products such as mattresses, pillows, sheets, pillow cases, etc., which posed a challenge of tracking and distribution.

Solutions

In order to address the challenges brought on by such a multifaceted project, Marriott's PMO needed to set forth specific processes and procedures to keep the lines of communication open between the different departments and levels of involvement in the project.

The massive scope of the Bedding Program presented a challenge in itself. To bring the project down to size, the team implemented several project management techniques, the most important being communication. Project teams used meetings, emails, status reports, memos, conference calls, conferences, wordless videos, how-to videos and pamphlets,

photos, the internet and Marriott intranet to communicate to the global audiences affected by the program. Solid record keeping and documentation also played a large part in keeping the team organized with the numerous elements of the project.

In addition, the project had several levels and processes, all depending on project teams and milestones, thus it was important to ensure that dependencies between project teams and key milestones were identified in a timely manner. For example, a priority for one project team might require the support of a second project team, but might not be a priority for the second team. The program manager had to help facilitate these issues in order to keep the project within the set objectives - timeframe, budget and expected results. Project requirements were documented and publicly discussed at the very beginning of the program. As the project progressed, new requirements or additional scope changes were evaluated against the initial requirements and risks identified.

To combat the challenge brought on by variations in product sizing and mattress heights, Marriott asked individual hotels simple questions and converted the answers into a database that helped the Procurement Team create a preliminary order and cost estimate for each hotel. This information also aided the team in planning, manufacturing and distribution needs. Properties were trained in the use of the inventory model through telephone conference calls.

With over 10 different brands, Marriott had to devise a plan to adapt the bedding to each brand's identity. To do this, two core bedding teams were established: one responsible for Marriott's full service brands and one for the limited service brands. These teams were in charge of identifying the new bedding concept for each brand, developing the specifications to support those concepts, projecting system-wide implementation costs and on-going operating costs, conducting market research with consumers, testing products in hotels, establishing the new bedding standards, creating training and implementation materials to ensure proper execution and conducting conference calls with properties during implementation to provide assistance and monitor progress.

Customer research proved critical to gaining the support of owners and franchisees as it demonstrated the compelling guest desire for new bedding. Additionally, product testing in properties was essential to show that the new bedding could be properly implemented in hotels of various sizes. Negotiating competitive pricing was important, especially to

those hotel owners who opened a new property within a year of the Bedding Program. Marriott negotiated with vendors to obtain the best possible pricing so that owners would be encouraged to use

Marriott's procurement process. The negotiation process proved to be a challenge itself since Marriott could not forecast the volume of bedding purchases until the orders were placed, but owners would not commit to purchasing the bedding without price quotes. The procurement team negotiated preliminary pricing, prepared property-specific quotes for all properties and then obtained signed agreements from the owners. Continuous communication proved invaluable to gaining the support from property owners and franchisees.

To resolve the challenges brought on by Marriott's complex procurement process, Marriott contracted an outside distribution company to receive, repackage and ship the bulk of the bedding to the properties. This allowed the properties to receive complete orders - a Marriott requirement that reduced the risk of storage complications at properties that received items piece-meal. Within Marriott, each distribution team was responsible for tracking actual and projected shipments and shortfalls by item, by week. The distributions and procurement teams met with vendors every week to review manufacturing schedules and overseas shipping status reports and plan how to address shortfalls.

To overcome language barriers while training staff, the project team developed wordless training videos and job aides with photos to demonstrate how the beds should be made. To keep up with staff turnover, Marriott leveraged an intranet web site where department or initiative information could be posted and easily accessed. Additionally, the project team conducted property conference calls during the ordering process and when the linens were shipped to reinforce written communications and ensure no confusion was created by a change in managers.

In addition to the transformation of all bed linens across all Marriott brands and properties, the company saw an opportunity to save money and become more environmentally friendly through the establishment of a linen reuse program. The program mandates linens to be changed only as needed, upon guest request and between stays. This allows the hotels to conserve energy and water as well as reduce energy costs.

Results

With the help of more than 200 employees worldwide participating in the program as members of specialized project teams, the Marriott Bedding Program completed the conversion of 628,000 beds into a fresh, white, luxurious yet modern ideal of comfort on March 31, 2006, two years after commencement. The project came in under budget at US\$190 million with 95 percent of properties converted over by the end of Q1 2006.

Marriott Bedding Program Key Achievements

- The project accomplished sponsor goals of large improvements in guest satisfaction and revenue improvement. Market research has shown that increases in guest satisfaction translate into customers' intent to return to the hotel for another stay, resulting in higher revenue.
- The individual property owners are pleased with the results as they are seeing higher revenue at their individual hotel properties.
- With the help of the Marriott public relations team, the project received a large amount of media exposure in addition to several awards for their initiatives.
- Through the linen reuse program, individual properties are achieving an 11 to 17 percent savings on hot water and sewer bills in addition to helping conserve energy and water.
- The Marriott Bedding Program was a top three finalist for Project Management Institute's 2007 Project of the Year award.