

Marriott International

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 \$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.