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### Critical Issues for Industry and Educators

Glenn Withiam  
*Cornell University*

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Withiam, G. (2013). Critical issues for industry and educators [*Electronic article*]. *Cornell Hospitality Roundtable Proceedings*, 5(1), 6-15.

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## Critical Issues for Industry and Educators

### Abstract

In a concentrated two-day period, the Cornell Hospitality Research Summit 2012 produced over 80 presentations on a wide variety of hospitality-related subjects, all focused on critical issues for the hospitality industry. The conference was highlighted by two keynote panels, which are summarized in this report. On day one, five CEOs examined the top issues for the hospitality industry. Opening day two, five hospitality education deans analyzed how the industry's rapid change affects college curricula. Given the industry's many moving parts, specialized disciplines, and parallel enterprises, the overall message emerging from the CHRS is the need to engage all stakeholders in the necessary elements that create success for hospitality enterprises: providing service and facilities that satisfy customers, giving operators the tools to expand revenues, and controlling costs to provide a reasonable return for investors. In the process, hospitality executives and academic researchers presented their research on the many disciplines and issues that come to bear on the contemporary hospitality industry, including customer service, distribution, hotel investment and value, human resources, internet analytics, pricing and revenue management, restaurant service and operations, social media, sustainability, and technology.

### Keywords

Cornell, hospitality industry, sustainability, green, supply chain

### Disciplines

Hospitality Administration and Management

### Comments

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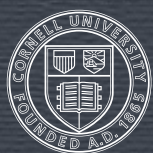
## 2012 Cornell Hospitality Research Summit: Critical Issues for Industry and Educators

by Glenn Withiam

## Cornell Hospitality Proceedings

Vol. 5 No. 1, January 2013

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Cornell Hospitality Proceedings  
Vol. 5, No. 1 (January 2013)

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Cornell Hospitality Report is produced for the benefit of the hospitality industry by The Center for Hospitality Research at Cornell University.

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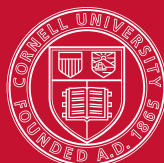
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Cornell Hospitality Research Summit 2012:

# Critical Issues for Industry and Educators

by Glenn Withiam

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## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

**Glenn Withiam** is the director of publications at the Cornell Center for Hospitality Research. The CHRS proceedings series would not have been possible without the notes provided by the following session reporters: Elisa Chan, Nancy Chan, Laura Fraefel, Mathias Gouthier, Arnab Gupta, Rahul Kamalapurkar, Sanghee Park, Kate Loh Qiaoling, Natasha Singh, Kanika Thakran, Matthew Walsman, Jie Yang, Yunzi Zhang, and Enlin Zhou. The session reporter group was organized by Kimberly Schlossberg, CHR conference assistant.





**CEO Panel:** From left, Arthur Adler, managing director and CEO, Americas, Jones Lang LaSalle; Sebastián Escarrer, former CEO and vice chairman, and current board member of Meliá Hotels; David Peckinpaugh, president, Maritz Travel Company; Ted Teng, president and CEO, The Leading Hotels of the World; and Adam Weissenberg, vice chairman, global and U.S. travel, hospitality and leisure leader, Deloitte & Touche USA. *Inset at right:* The panel was moderated by Professor Steven Carvell, associate dean of academic affairs, Cornell School of Hotel Administration.



## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Cornell Hospitality Research Summit featured two keynote panels, one comprising five industry CEOs and the other, five hospitality program deans, both focused on the key issues facing the hospitality industry. The CEOs highlighted the importance of operations excellence as this relates to the creation of value for the hospitality industry and to ensuring customer satisfaction. Both panels agreed that brand management continues to be important for the industry, particularly as hospitality companies continue their global expansion. The panelists also acknowledged the increasing influence of technology on all aspects of the industry. Technology is also radically affecting curricula and teaching methods, as outlined by the educators. A foremost consideration is finding ways to prepare students for the industry of future—an industry that will be increasingly global. This will require a greater focus on critical thinking, far beyond industry job knowledge.

Cornell Hospitality Research Summit 2012:

# Critical Issues for Industry and Educators

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**I**n a concentrated two-day period, the Cornell Hospitality Research Summit 2012 produced over 80 presentations on a wide variety of hospitality-related subjects, all focused on critical issues for the hospitality industry. The conference was highlighted by two keynote panels, which are summarized in this report. On day one, five CEOs examined the top issues for the hospitality industry. Opening day two, five hospitality education deans analyzed how the industry's rapid change affects college curricula. Given the industry's many moving parts, specialized disciplines, and parallel enterprises, the overall message emerging from the CHRS is the need to engage all stakeholders in the necessary elements that create success for hospitality enterprises: providing service and facilities that satisfy customers, giving operators the tools to expand revenues, and controlling costs to provide a reasonable return for investors. In the process, hospitality executives and academic researchers presented their research on the many disciplines and issues that come to bear on the contemporary hospitality industry, including customer service, distribution, hotel investment and value, human resources, internet analytics, pricing and revenue management, restaurant service and operations, social media, sustainability, and technology.





**Arthur Adler:** Investors analyze how the brand affects the hotel's value when they are ready to sell.



**Sebastián Escarrer:** The world's continuing economic struggle clearly has had an impact on the hotel industry.

CHRS 2012 brought more than 230 hospitality industry practitioners and researchers to the Cornell School of Hotel Administration in October 2012. The CHRS was expressly designed by the Cornell Center for Hospitality Research (CHR) to balance input from academic researchers and industry executives, with research-based presentations, keynote panel

discussions, and hands-on workshops. CHRS 2012 was also the capstone event for the twentieth anniversary of the Center for Hospitality Research. In an [anniversary video](#), CHR advisory board members and former CHR directors explained the CHR's development as the foremost source of hospitality research.



**David Peckinpaugh:** The voice of the consumer is a critical. Travelers are seeking authenticity from hotels and destinations, particularly incentive travelers.



**Ted Teng:** Not only must employees know their current job, but they also must have the capability to learn new tasks, as the pace of change accelerates.

### Opening Keynote Panel: Hospitality CEOs

The conference's opening keynote panel of five hospitality CEOs, representing the remarkably diverse enterprises that make up this industry, framed the industry's major issues and created a framework for the entire conference. The panelists pointed out the clear connection between operations

excellence and value creation, as well as the importance of capital investment to maintaining customer satisfaction. The panel also discussed trends in hotel real estate investment volume. Investment in staff training is important, but that training should focus more on capabilities than on specific knowledge about the industry. Perhaps one of the industry's greatest challenges is how to offset consumers' focus on



**Adam Weissenberg: Hotels must analyze and understand consumer data to break through the clutter and create true differentiation.**

price and location in hotel sales, especially given their use of online travel agents. The panel members acknowledged the importance of brands, particularly to hotel investors and to groups that are selecting a meeting venue. At the same time the panel noted that creating real hotel differentiation is a challenging goal in the current environment.

Chaired by the school's Associate Dean Steven Carvell, the CEO panel members were Arthur Adler, managing director and CEO, Americas, Jones Lang LaSalle; Sebastián Escarrer, former CEO and vice chairman, and current board member of Meliá Hotels; David Peckinpugh, president, Maritz Travel Company; Ted Teng, president and CEO, The Leading Hotels of the World; and Adam Weissenberg, vice chairman, global and U.S. travel, hospitality and leisure leader, Deloitte & Touche USA.

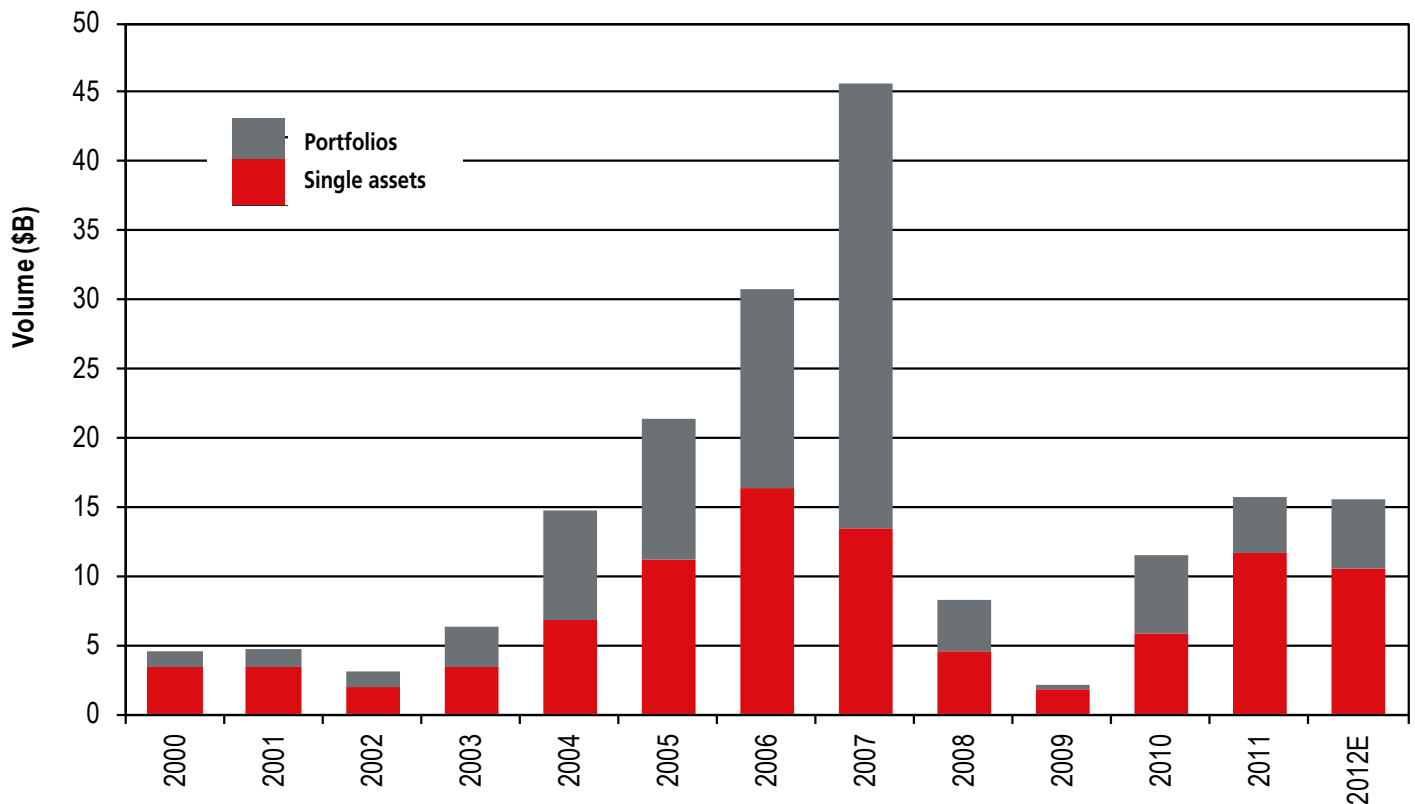
Service is critical throughout the industry, because of the way it drives value, in the view of Arthur Adler, who pointed out that investors consider service excellence important in hotel valuation given how a hotel's profitability directly drives asset value. The Great Recession, however, created a continuing challenge for owners and operators. During the recession, hotels had to focus on covering debt service, sometimes at the expense of furniture, fixtures, and equipment investments. With the recovery in industry fundamentals, more capital is again flowing to property improvement plans. (The graph on the next page illustrates

the recovery of hotel transaction volume.) Adam Weissenberg also noted the importance of making sure investors are focused on setting aside money for quality improvements. Eventually customers will notice any long-term reductions in FF&E expenditures.

The voice of the customer is critical, suggested David Peckinpugh, whose firm manages a substantial meeting and convention business. He suggested that hotels should focus more investments on staff training, but he also noted that an improving economy allows top talent to "escape" to competitors, if a company does not take steps to hold employees. With regard to employee knowledge, Ted Teng pointed to the astonishing speed of changes affecting the industry. One of the chief changes is a shift from an employee knowledge base to a capability base. In addition to knowing their current job, employees must have the capability to learn novel tasks. Sebastián Escarrer pointed to the need to focus on value while keeping in mind corporate values. Services must provide value or they are pointless, but service also must fit into the corporate value system.

Turning their attention to internet-related topics, such as analytics and distribution, the CEO panel members brought out the different facets relating to the value of brands, especially given the volume of traffic now carried by online travel agents (OTAs). Teng observed that OTAs have a general effect of focusing guests on price, and other panel-

## U.S. hotel transaction volume, 2000–2012



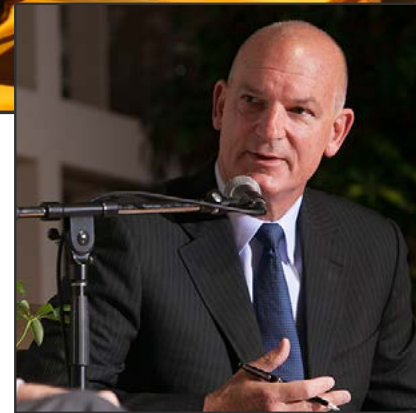
**Notes:** Courtesy of Arthur Adler. Source: Jones Lang LaSalle. Data for 2012 are estimated. Excludes casino and land site sales. Includes transactions of \$5M and above.

ists suggested that the picture is complicated in this regard. Adler agreed that internet-based price competition is not the best thing for the investor or the brand, since some travelers will give up service to get a lower price. Weissenberg pointed out that creating a unique travel experience is difficult for many hotels. A hotel must offer substantial differentiation for customers to notice the difference from one hotel to another, adding that hotels need to understand customer data to find ways to create differential value. For many properties, the customer's choice still comes down to price and location—the industry needs to find ways to move away from that scenario. Peckinpugh pointed to the trend toward authenticity as important to hotel differentiation. Incentive travelers in particular are seeking the chance to “travel like a local,” which is a change from attitudes in years past.

The value of branding a hotel depends in many ways on the property's situation. Weissenberg noted that U.S. hotels are heavily branded, and the brand affiliation question is more a matter for hotels in Europe and Asia. Adler said that the issue of whether to affiliate with a brand comes down to what is the most efficient way to put heads in beds to maximize real estate value. Not only do investors consider the value of a brand during the asset holding period, but they also analyze how the brand affects the hotel's value when they are ready to sell. Escarrer added that one issue for owners is whether they can break a brand or management contract upon sale. Considering the many landmark hotels in his association, Teng said that a brand is less important to long-term investors in established properties. He doesn't see the issue as brand versus independent as much as an



**Educators Panel:** From left, John Bowen, Conrad N. Hilton College of Hotel and Restaurant Management, University of Houston; Kaye Chon, School of Hotel and Tourism Management, The Hong Kong Polytechnic University; Fabien Fresnel, Ecole hôtelière de Lausanne; Bjorn Hanson, Tisch Center for Hospitality, Tourism, and Sports Management, New York University; and Christopher Muller, School of Hospitality Administration, Boston University. *Inset at right:* The panel was moderated by Kirk Kinsell, president, The Americas, of InterContinental Hotels Group. He started the discussion by pointing to the importance of having time to reflect on the industry's future educational needs.



analysis of each property's situation. Noting that brands do deliver, he added that there is also a cost for their services. Looking at the group market, Peckinpugh said that brands are important, and for the hotel owner they maximize the distribution channel over time. Among other factors, group business is influenced by brand loyalty programs.

A final topic for the CEO panel was the recent report from J.D. Power and Associates showing a decline in hotel customer satisfaction for many brands. Escarrer said that it was clear to him that the world's continuing economic struggle has had an impact on the hotel industry. However, if management fails to listen to their customers, both internal and external, hotels will miss the opportunity to gain innovative ideas. Peckinpugh again pointed to a failure to invest in associates' training, and noted that the industry needs to adapt to a changing employee base. Teng also saw the survey as an outcome of turmoil in the capital markets. However, he added that hotels need a long-term focus so that they can improve quality.

### Second-day Keynote Panel: Hospitality Education Program Deans

A panel of five deans of global hospitality programs kicked off the second day of CHRS sessions. Chaired by Kirk Kinsell, president, The Americas, of InterContinental Hotels Group, the deans were John Bowen, Conrad N. Hilton College of Hotel and Restaurant Management, University of Houston; Kaye Chon, School of Hotel and Tourism Management, The Hong Kong Polytechnic University; Fabien Fresnel, Ecole hôtelière de Lausanne; Bjorn Hanson, Tisch Center for Hospitality, Tourism, and Sports Management, New York University; and Christopher Muller, School of Hospitality Administration, Boston University.

In their opening statements, the deans pointed to five major challenges for hospitality education: (1) Managing the effects of technology and social media; (2) the rise of China and other tourism destinations; (3) the effect of branding on hotels, particularly in Europe; (4) the need to continually re-

## *Eight Trends for the Hotel Industry*

CHRS chair Rohit Verma offered the following summary of some major industry trends to help the keynote panelists frame their discussion.

### **Trend # 1: The Expanded Role of Travel Intermediaries and Travel Portals**

The hotel industry's need to determine how to work with OTAs has become only the tip of the distribution iceberg. The industry has seen the growth of major intermediary sites such as Expedia and Travelocity, properties have increased distribution through opaque sites (such as Hotwire and Priceline), and hotel brands have built up their own websites. The entry of Google has added a new dimension to hotel room distribution, since users can book directly from the search results page, instead of clicking through to another site. The challenge for hotels is to avoid being distributed as if they were package goods. Many guests will go to a travel purveyor for hotel rooms, just as they go to a food market for groceries.

### **Trend #2: Mobile Apps and RFID**

Social media continues to grow exponentially, but mobile devices present another potentially big development for hotel distribution and operations. Radio frequency identification (RFID) chips may be of particular interest, since the cost of RFID has plunged. This can break out as its own trend soon enough, and the combination of RFID and mobile apps could allow guests to use their smart phones to book a room, check in, open their guestroom door, and settle their folio—all without direct contact with your staff. Even without RFID, guests' use of mobile devices will create opportunities for innovation by hoteliers, including new services and operating efficiencies. Most critically, the dominance of electronic distribution as summarized in trends 1 and 2 will solidify the major trend of access to and transparency of information.

### **Trend #3: Brand Management and Customer Relationship Building**

Given the strength of third-party distribution portals and the push toward commoditization, the hotel brand will become more important than ever, particularly in the context of developing customers' loyalty. A powerful brand lineup can offset the equally strong forces for commoditization, and the hotel industry can draw from package goods companies' brand strategies. A study of top brands found four critical elements of brand building: having an ideal, focusing on fundamentals to remain true to the brand's heritage, recognizing the importance of leadership (in the form of a brand champion), and seeking engagement with customers.

### **Trend #4: Customers' Search for Value through Social Couponing**

Value comes in all forms, but in the current economic environment, it means special offers and discounts, which are a form of customer engagement. The rise of the daily deal sites, notably Groupon, melded social media with customers' desire to get a "deal." This trend will continue regardless of whether Groupon survives, because dozens of other websites are also offering social coupons. For hoteliers, this means developing packages that will provide value for all stakeholders, including both customers who seek a deal and those who are "regular" customers, as well as the hotel itself. Strategies include creating packages that are not directly comparable to existing services and controlling cost structures so that the social coupon is not a money-losing proposition. Although social coupons do involve some cannibalization of existing customers, recent research has demonstrated that they bring in new customers and encourage infrequent customers to return.

### **Trend #5: Sustainability**

Customers' demand for sustainable hotel operations has taken root and expanded. The hotel industry has taken notice, as demonstrated by a push for consistent reporting standards and industry best practices coming from our industry roundtables in both Asia and North America. In that regard, meeting planners and corporate planners are now requesting that hotels' provide sustainability-related information (such as energy use or recycling policies). Third-party certification of green claims has become an important part of sustainability reporting, as demonstrated, for instance, by Travelocity's Green Hotel Directory, which does not recognize self-certified hotels.

### **Trend #6: Blending of Hospitality and Health Care**

Although health care structures and financing vary substantially from nation to nation, it has become clear that the core principles of hospitality management apply to health care and assisted living facilities just as they do to hotels. In the U.S., for instance, we know of two major hospitals that have managers who were formerly with the Ritz-Carlton Company, and an offshoot of Hyatt Hotels is a major operator of lifecare communities. To maintain profitability, the health-care industry maintains a tight focus on costs and revenues that the hospitality industry could emulate.

### **Trend #7: Next Generation Globalization**

Not long ago, globalization meant that hotel brands from highly developed nations expanded into developing nations. Globalization is also flowing in the reverse direction, as brands from developing nations are expanding globally. To give two examples, Jumeirah now manages the Essex House in New York, as well as properties in London and Frankfurt; and Taj operates U.S. properties in Boston, New York, and San Francisco, as well as hotels in London and Sydney. Thus, globalization will mean that hotel brands criss-cross the globe.

### **Trend #8: Economic Uncertainty**

Although economic growth seems to have returned, it's still not clear that the world economy, which is intertwined to a great extent, has fully recovered. Thus, it appears that economic and political turbulence will continue, and the hotel and travel industry will constantly be facing a "new normal" somewhere on the globe.—*Rohit Verma and Glenn Withiam*



**John Bowen: Hospitality educators must address the rapid growth of technology in the hospitality industry.**

design curriculum to address the industry's changing needs; and (5) the importance of a holistic approach to marketing, human resources, and hotel management.

With the rise of social media, present and future hotel operators will need to understand how to manage the collaboration with customers, said John Bowen (see the accompanying sidebar, page 13). All comments and actions are magnified by social media. Kaye Chon pointed to the rise of China as a tourism destination and source of travelers. This is emblematic of the value of looking at global issues affecting the industry. Independent hotels in Europe are at risk, particularly as branded hotels continue their expansion, suggested Fabien Fresnel. He also sees a need to encourage students to focus on operations, since many want to go into finance or real estate sectors. Bjorn Hanson responded that the significantly higher compensation levels are an obvious reason for students' interest in careers in finance and real estate. He added that New York University refines its curricula every year to respond to emerging issues to prepare graduates for the environment they will face five years and beyond after graduation. He explained the current scenario is for an especially challenging environment: higher material and construction costs, more regulation at all government levels (including sustainability), higher financing costs, increased technology costs such as for social media, many of which may not have an ROI, higher taxes of all forms, and higher

### *Effects of Technology*

A few short years ago, the hotel industry was trying to figure out how to use OTAs and determine the best way to distribute their product over the internet. The position of revenue manager was starting to appear at the property and corporate level. Since then revenue managers have developed an understanding of pricing, electronic distribution, and demand forecasting. Similarly, social media managers are now appearing at the corporate and property level with a goal of realizing the benefits of social media while also managing the potential adverse effects.

Companies must deliver what they advertise, but they must realize that what they deliver is more important than what they advertise. In particular, when there is a service delivery failure, managers must have systems that find customers who do not make a complaint during their stay, but instead choose to use social media to tell others about a company's service failures. Managers must now have service recovery techniques for customers who voice their complaints on social media. By the same token, when they find customers with positive comments, management needs to have methods to communicate these comments internally and externally.

Social media is changing how people communicate, participate, and collaborate. If companies provide poor products, have no service recovery, or abuse customers, customers can use their power via social media as a destructive force. Conversely, if companies provide excellent products, treat customers with respect, and are socially responsible, social media can be positive force.—John Bowen, dean, Conrad N. Hilton College of Hotel and Restaurant Management, University of Houston



**Kaye Chon:** The rise of China as tourism destination highlights the need to teach students about the global issues affecting the hospitality industry.



**Fabien Fresnel:** Independent hotels face a challenge as branded hotels continue their expansion in Europe and beyond.

payroll and benefits costs. Increases for many of these have been constrained by global economic weakness, but even if economic growth is limited, some of these, such as interest costs, are likely to increase significantly. For Chris Muller, educators need to think more about the skill sets that students will require when they will graduate, not as they enter, particularly in regard to technology and gaining a holistic

view of marketing, something BU has addressed by purchasing 80 iPad 2 units for use in mobile laboratories.

Hospitality education is changing, but the industry is changing faster, Fresnel said, and the industry also maintains an overall faster pace than academe. Chon sees a different sort of disconnect between the industry and academe: the industry is not reading what academic researchers are writ-





**Bjorn Hanson:** It's essential to refine curricula annually to respond to emerging issues.



**Christopher Muller:** The hospitality industry needs to open its top ranks to women, especially since women are the majority of students in many hospitality education programs.

ing. Hanson added that part of the issue with research is that many studies address how to shift market share, but the real need is to find ways to increase demand growth. One change that seems slow in coming is increasing the number of women in hospitality management education's top levels, Muller said, pointing out that there were no women on either the CEO or Educators keynote panels. Both he and Chon said

that a majority of students in their programs are women, but the industry's top echelons remain heavily male. Bowen agreed that the industry has been slow to change, but he sees women gradually gaining in a trend that will continue over time. Rather than react to the industry's changes, the deans hope to see educators lead innovation. ■

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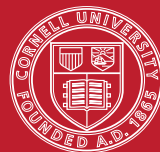
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