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international travel market:

CHINA

Ventures

THE MAYOR OF HGV

Kim Kreiger, senior vice president of Club
and Resorts for Hilton Grand Vacations

THE SECONDARY MARKET

Industry practitioners share their thoughts
about the state of the secondary market

DOES YOUR BRAND YOUTUBE?

One billion visitors a month.
Is your company missing out?

TABLE OF CONTENTS

● IN BRIEF

- 06 **By the Numbers**
Survey says: return to growth
- 08 **Travel Trends**
The human touch;
Plugged in but still on vacation
- 08 **Events Calendar**
Industry events around the world

● IN DEPTH

- 10 **The Mayor of HGV**
Kim Kreiger, senior vice
president of Club and Resorts
for Hilton Grand Vacations
- 14 **The Secondary Market:
A Primary Focus**
Three industry practitioners
share their thoughts about
the current state—and future—
of the secondary market

● IN DEVELOPMENT

- 18 **\$102 Billion USD in 2012**
China is now the world's
number one source market
for international tourism *and*
the largest domestic travel
market. Vacation ownership is
poised to get its share of the ¥

● INNOVATION

- 24 **Technology**
Does your brand YouTube?
- 27 **Industry Solutions**
RCI's Inventory Analytics
Advisory service

“Embracing the
hospitality philosophy
and operational acumen
of Hilton Worldwide has
transformed our timeshare
organization.”

—KIM KREIGER,
senior vice president of Club and
Resorts for Hilton Grand Vacations



The Mayor of HGV

Having spent 30 years in the vacation ownership industry—including more than two decades at Hilton Grand Vacations—

Kim Kreiger, senior vice president of Club and Resorts, talks about the early days of timeshare, why everyone should be an IT guy and what it takes to build a brand from the bottom up

BY CATHARINE FLEURY

PHOTOGRAPHY BY BETSY HANSEN

THIRTY YEARS AGO, when Kim Kreiger landed his first job in vacation ownership, timeshare was generating a lot of buzz. “It was a new and exciting industry in its infancy,” Kreiger recalls. “Here was a practical approach to vacationing. It was a propitious time, and I was intrigued by the pursuit of a new frontier.”

Kreiger spent the first decade of his career building a foundation for the fledgling industry, beginning with Captran Resorts International as vice president of interval resort management, then with the Mariner Group of Affiliated Companies, where he ultimately served as vice president of Mariner Services Corporation. “We were involved in writing legislation and creating a framework and structure for vacation ownership. The challenges presented by balancing consumer needs with the business objectives were undoubtedly daunting, but I’ll never forget the feeling of accomplishment that came after defining strategies that set cornerstones for industry growth.”

It was a formative period for Kreiger, too. “I came to learn and appreciate the ability to deal with issues in a public forum,” he says. He also learned the power of listening. “Industry expertise and experience are essential qualities,” he says, “but being able to listen and respond thoughtfully are traits that have served me equally well for decades.” But perhaps the greatest take-away for Kreiger was learning “to focus on big-picture concepts and then developing the tactical procedures and policies to support them.” And in the 1980s, one big-picture concept was rising above the rest. “We were evolving from the fixed/fixed timeshare environment and transitioning into the flexible points programs that lead today’s industry. The timeshare product was becoming more consumer-centric—becoming less about the developer and more about creating value in the vacation experience for the customer.”

For Kreiger, this consumer-first mind-set would become the hallmark of a legendary career.

From IT on up

Nobody knows Hilton Grand Vacations better than Kreiger. He has been with the company since its inception, in 1992, and is fondly known around the office as the Mayor of HGV. Kreiger owes much of his knowledge to HGV’s IT department, where he spent his first 12 years with the company. “Initially, I was part of the core management team that created Hilton Grand Vacations Ltd., and my focus was implementation of our technology systems,” he says. He worked his way up through the department, becoming vice president in 1998, and grew very familiar with HGV’s products along the way.

“During the time I was in IT, we were literally building the Club program, and its functional operation was defined in

the technology,” Kreiger says. By the time he transitioned to Club and Resorts operations, in 2004, he knew the Club program inside and out—an advantage that continues to inform his work today. “As a result of my time in IT, I am fluent in the capabilities of the technology, I know how to navigate the system, I know how to access data—and I know just how far we can expand our club offerings within the considerable reach of our technical capabilities,” he says. “Taking conversations beyond the what-if stage to the what-is-possible realm has proven to be a very practical asset.”

Today, as senior vice president of Club and Resorts, Kreiger leads all facets of Hilton Grand Vacations Club and the Hilton Club (including product development, delivery, inventory and global owner services); oversees the governance of 42 HOAs and the operation of 36 HGV-managed resorts; and interfaces with Hilton Worldwide Hotel Operations for HGV-developed resorts.

Kreiger has been especially busy with Las Vegas, a key market for HGV and the site of several recent high-profile deals. Resort Finance America appointed HGV to rebrand the former Westgate Resorts tower at Planet Hollywood; the property reopened as Elara, a Hilton Grand Vacations Club, in 2012. HGV’s rebranding responsibilities included resort operations, HOA management and sales of timeshare intervals—and the work paid off. “From owners who purchased with Hilton Grand Vacations Club, responses to the property are outstanding,” Kreiger says. “We are also receiving positive feedback from owners who purchased prior to our involvement in the project.”

Six months after Elara made its official debut, HGV announced its plan to acquire 300 condo units at Trump International Hotel Las Vegas and convert them to luxury timeshare accommodations. Consumer response has been strong—sales are ahead of projections—and the units will open for occupancy by owners in January. “With this project we are appealing to a uniquely cosmopolitan demographic, offering urban design and amenities,” Kreiger says. He believes that the partnership is also strengthening the timeshare industry at large: “We see this relationship as a validation of vacation ownership. Beyond its hotel and residential business lines, the Trump Organization found our timeshare model a compelling addition to their real estate portfolio.”

Building a team—and a brand

Hire great people, give them the vision, and let them do what they do best. That’s Kreiger’s management strategy, and it has served HGV well. “I’ve seen rookies with great potential become leaders within our company,” he says. “And I’ve seen great people leave great brands for the opportunity to work for Hilton Grand Vacations. That tells me we are truly a team worth being a part of.”

P.O.V.

“Beyond its hotel and residential business lines, the Trump Organization found our timeshare model a compelling addition to their real estate portfolio.”





Asked what it takes to build such a successful brand, Kreiger goes back to one of the core lessons from his early days in the timeshare industry: Owners first. “At HGV we have always prioritized our focus on the customer and remain committed to the consistent quality of our Club program. Creating and maintaining the guest experience and accommodations and delivering on expectations keeps us constantly focused on excellence. We strive to evolve, listen to our customers and, to the best of our ability, mitigate circumstances that surprise us.” It also helps to have an outstanding, and hands-on, parent company. “Embracing the hospitality philosophy and operational acumen of Hilton Worldwide has transformed our timeshare organization,” Kreiger says. “We are proud to strengthen one of the most recognized and respected brands in the world.”

There’s still more building to do. The HGV brand will continue to pursue growth in urban markets, Kreiger says,

as they have been performing exceptionally well. (New York City has been one of HGV’s highest-performing destinations since HGV entered the market, in 2001.) Global expansion is also high on the agenda, especially in the Asian-Pacific region, where HGV has 40,000 Club members in Japan alone. “These markets are extremely important to us,” Kreiger says. “For us there is tremendous growth potential and expansion opportunity in the APAC region.”

In a way, vacation ownership looks a lot like the frontier that lured Kreiger 30 years ago. “As I felt at the beginning of my career, I believe that this is an industry filled with possibilities and growth,” he says. “There still exists a thriving entrepreneurial spirit. And it’s still a fun place to work.”

Spoken like a true pioneer. ♥



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