

CASE STUDY

WaterColor Inn

ACHIEVED AAA FOUR DIAMOND STATUS



IN BRIEF

Background

WaterColor Inn and Resort is part of The St. Joe Company, one of Florida's largest real estate companies and the state's largest private landowner. With nearly 250 employees, WaterColor started utilizing Signature Worldwide's Customer Experience Edge™ program in early 2006 to achieve the designation of northwest Florida's only Four Diamond hotel as recognized by AAA.

Challenge

WaterColor needed to achieve the AAA Four Diamond designation for its inn and restaurant, while also elevating the service levels to match property amenities. The management team also sought to embed the WaterColor culture into every customized customer experience.

Solutions

WaterColor employees began utilizing Signature's Customer Experience Edge training program, an organization-wide approach to creating a customer service culture focused on customizing experiences. Employees learned to create customer loyalty by delivering legendary service through awareness, building relationships and taking ownership. Just nine months into the training program, WaterColor Inn decided to invest in an additional 12 months of training in order to achieve its goals.

Results

Signature's Customer Experience Edge training program elevated customer service levels throughout WaterColor. Compared to the same time period from a year before, advanced bookings were up dramatically, RevPAR was up, ADR was up 20 percent and occupancy was up 25 percent. WaterColor also achieved AAA Four Diamond status, as well as being recognized in many prestigious, industry publications.

Background

WaterColor Inn and Resort is part of The St. Joe Company, one of Florida's largest real estate companies and the state's largest private landowner. With Approximately 850,000 acres of land, The St. Joe Company has created truly exceptional places for people to live, work, discover and escape.

WaterColor is a 499-acre Southern coastal resort and residential community in northwest Florida, directly on the Gulf of Mexico. The WaterColor Inn, designed by David Rockwell, combines the warmth and hospitality associated with traditional southern grand hotels, the intimacy of bed-and-breakfast inns and the charm of classic beach houses. All of the boutique resort's 60 rooms face the beach, which sets the tone for what WaterColor would call "A Vacation to Remember."

With nearly 250 employees, WaterColor started utilizing Signature Worldwide's Customer Experience Edge™ program in early 2006 to achieve the designation of northwest Florida's only Four Diamond hotel as recognized by AAA.

Challenges

Achieve AAA Four Diamond Level for Inn and Restaurant: In order to be selected for a diamond ranking evaluation, hotels must first meet 27 essential requirements based upon AAA member expectations, including comfort, cleanliness, security and safety. Hotels must also adhere to the high quality guidelines required to be "AAA Approved." After establishing eligibility, a ranking of one to five diamonds is assigned based on categories including service, hospitality, accommodations, physical attributes, amenities and attention to detail.

Guest service is a major differentiator between three-diamond and four-diamond properties, which is why the WaterColor management team needed a training program to help its employees deliver top-notch service options tailored to meet the needs of every guest.

Elevate Service Levels to Match Property and Amenities: WaterColor needed to elevate the level of customer service to match the award-winning resort's features and amenities. According to Stephen Hilliard, vice president resort and club operations, many of the employees came from the panhandle region and had never worked for a four diamond resort, considering that WaterColor is the only resort in that area. The management team needed to elevate service levels quickly, while providing the employees a clear and understandable roadmap for success.



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“The Santa Rosa Beach area was quickly gaining a reputation for providing a resort-like atmosphere and WaterColor needed to raise the quality of operations accordingly,” Hilliard said. “Achieving four diamond status would not only bring visibility to WaterColor, but to the entire panhandle region.”

Embed the WaterColor Brand into Every Customer Experience: St. Joe and by extension, WaterColor, strives to create places that inspire people and make the northwest Florida region an even better place to live, work and play. WaterColor was created with a focused understanding of the needs and wants of the customer, and is planned and developed to deliver to that high standard. In order to surprise customers by exceeding their expectations, the WaterColor staff needed a training program that gave them the skills necessary to customize each customer experience.

Solutions

Comprehensive, Tailored Training with Customer Experience Edge: WaterColor employees began utilizing Signature’s Customer Experience Edge training program in March 2006. The program provided an organization-wide approach to creating a customer service culture focused on customizing experiences. Employees learned to create customer loyalty by delivering legendary service through awareness, building relationships and taking ownership.

“The program worked so well because it was created just for us!” Hilliard said. “We chose Signature and Customer Experience Edge training because it was the only comprehensive program designed around the customers’ needs and desires, and not the typical departmental training process.”

Just nine months into the training program WaterColor Inn decided to invest in an additional 12 months of training to

continue elevating service levels while embedding the WaterColor brand into every tailored, customer experience.

Results

Elevated Service Levels: Hilliard credited Signature’s Customer Experience Edge training program for elevating customer service levels throughout WaterColor. Compared to the same time period from a year before, advanced bookings were up dramatically, RevPAR was up, ADR was up 20 percent and occupancy was up 25 percent. “Our guest comment feedback was phenomenal, which may be the most important measurement of all,” Hilliard added.

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Four Diamond Rating Achieved: Before even completing a year on the Customer Experience Edge program, WaterColor Inn and Resort achieved their goal by receiving their AAA Four Diamond status for their inn and restaurant.

The AAA acclamation followed an award-winning year for the WaterColor Inn and Resort:

- Recognized by the readers of Travel + Leisure as the seventh best hotel in North America
- Voted number one family friendly resort by the readers of Travel + Leisure Family
- Named among Forbes Traveler’s list of the world’s top 400 hotels and resorts
- Selected as one of the 25 Best Family Golf Resorts by Golf For Women.