



Affinia Hotels Launches Tender Loving Comfort Movement

Quinn & Co. Public Relations and Affinia Hotels, Jan 1, 2013

Summary: 2013 Silver Anvil Award of Excellence Winner — Marketing Consumer Services — Travel and Tourism / Hospitality

Affinia Hotels, a boutique hotel collection with properties in New York City and D.C., launched the Tender Loving Comfort® (TLC) movement to reinforce its brand positioning while increasing guest satisfaction. This customer-centric movement focuses on making guests' stay most enjoyable, and comfortable. TLC has generated more than 800 placements and 1.3 billion media impressions, including a USA Today cover story and an interview on Fox Business, in addition to increasing customer satisfaction across the brand. Affinia Hotels' revenue has increased 15% year-over-year since TLC was implemented.

Marketing consumer services includes programs designed to introduce new services or promote existing services to a consumer audience.

Full Text: SITUATION ANALYSIS

Affinia Hotels, a collection of six hotels in New York City, and D.C., has a brand positioning of comfort. For many years Affinia had been using the tagline Comfort by Design, and they wanted to enhance and bring back its positioning while increasing guest satisfaction across the brand. In addition, the hotel company wanted to find a way to talk about hotel service that was authentic, relevant and defining. Affinia wanted to differentiate itself from other specialty hotels.

RESEARCH

Affinia Hotels conducted focus group of associates, from various departments and properties, to measure the level of understanding of the Affinia brand, the idea of "comfort," the ability to deliver on comfort and to guide future training around the comfort messaging.

From the internal focus group, Affinia found associates strive to deliver comfort to hotel guests. Trainings would hone these skills, resulting in improved service and reinforcing the brand promise of delivering Comfort by Design.

We also researched brands that excelled at service and met with the author of "Brains on Fire." We were influenced by Best Buy's Geek Squad and Zappos' Jedi staff trainings. From "Brains on Fire" we learned that people respond to movements, not programs.

Prior to the launch of the **Tender Loving Comfort® (TLC)** movement, Affinia commissioned a survey to understand what comfort means to consumers. According to STUDYLOGIC's survey of 1,000 Americans, 80% of people would rather stay at a friendly mid-priced hotel than a luxury hotel with mediocre service. During the launch, Affinia also worked with PortiCo to conduct in-person interviews with Affinia guests. These interviews found that guests want interactions to be warm and comfortable, not formal.

PLANNING

Affinia created a comfort task force made up of internal marketing and operations folks as well

as the advertising and PR partners. Over a series of months, with many meetings and much brainstorming, the team produced the **Tender Loving Comfort® (TLC)** movement. We called it a movement instead of a program based on the principles of “Brains On Fire,” and to underscore the fact that we were redefining the hotel service product by discarding the canned and stuffy structure and replacing it with something more fluid and in tune with what would make our target audiences of business and leisure travelers feel at home. The overall TLC launch budget was \$70,000.

Tender Loving Comfort® (TLC) includes:

Chief Comfort Officer: Realizing that we needed to provide leadership, we created the position of Chief Comfort Officer. We appointed Chrissy Denihan O’Donovan, granddaughter of founder Benjamin “Bud” Denihan and a naturally caring and outgoing young woman. She was the perfect candidate.

TLC Trainings: To provide comfort-focused service, we conducted one-of-a-kind, all staff TLC Trainings. Body-language expert Patti Wood taught the staff how to read body cues. Dushan Zaric, an acclaimed bartender trainer, taught them the art of being present with guests.

TLC Crew: To bring TLC into each hotel, we developed the TLC crew made up of enthusiastic and talented staff members at each hotel. The TLC crew works directly with the Chief Comfort Officer and liaises with guests and hotel staff on everything related to comfort, including collecting guest feedback on all initiatives and programming.

Comfort Cart: To source comfort products, we produced **Comfort Carts** with items, such as special pillows and tech gear, for guest testing.

Comfort Hour: To deliver feel-good experiences, the TLC crew and general managers host **Comfort Hours** where guests mingle and provide feedback on their experience.

TLC VIP package: To create stays filled with TLC, we created the **TLC VIP** package filled with goodies to help guests relax and feel at home, including: upgrade, cupcake, wine, late checkout.

EXECUTION

TLC launched on Oct. 17, 2011 with a one-page ad in T-magazine and display banners on Affinia’s website and social networks. Quinn & Co. was charged with communicating TLC through traditional and social media. Kick-off events were held on the same day in NYC, D.C. and Chicago with select media in attendance. Q&C also encouraged Facebook fans and Twitter followers to interact throughout the event with a hashtag: #AffiniaTLC and live tweeting.

- In NYC there were than 50 attendees, including eight journalists who mingled with the CCO and TLC Crew. Media included: USA Today, Smart Money, HotelChatter, ShermansTravel and more.
- The announcement press release was picked up by more than **230 media outlets** and garnered **85,974,375 media impressions**.
- Media highlights: USA Today ran a **COVER** story on TLC on October 25, 2011. Patrick Denihan, co-CEO, Denihan Hospitality Group (parent company) was interviewed on Fox Business Live about TLC.
- The events in Chicago and D.C. were also a media success. Affinia Chicago had approximately 35 people in attendance, including Time Out Chicago. The Liaison Capitol Hill, an Affinia Hotel in Washington, D.C. had 50 attendees and social-network buzz including a retweet from Thrillist DC.
- Q&C tweeted throughout the day on Oct. 17 and live-tweeted from the event with #AffiniaTLC. There were more than 40 tweets, with participation from Chef Art Smith, Amy Alipio of National Geographic Traveler, syndicated travel columnist Eileen Ogintz, Kyle McCarthy of Family Travel Forum and more.

In June 2012, Affinia launched phase two of TLC with a second training. They hired a bartender to train hotel staff on ‘The Spirit of Hospitality: The Art of Being Present.’ Dushan

Zaric, widely known for his out-of-the-box mixology seminars for bartenders, trained the entire staff on how to be present and that how they feel when they are doing their jobs has a powerful effect on guests.

EVALUATION

Over **800 placements** and **1.3 BILLION media impressions including the most popular story on USA Today.com**, Chicago Tribune, Forbes.com, WABC-TV, and Travel + Leisure. Ad equiv. of USA Today front page: not available. Other placements named here: \$2.5 million. **60% of the impressions were secured in 2012.**

Since TLC launched, Affinia showed the largest gain of any brand to become the 2011 winner of customer satisfaction among upper upscale hotels, according to Market Metrix.

Quotes/Accolades:

- **Travel Weekly 2012** - "The proof seems to be in the pudding. Market Metrix, which measures guest satisfaction through surveys, rated Affinia tops in service in the Upper Upscale category in its most recent report"
- **Forbes.com 2012** – Chief Comfort Officer Chrissy Denihan is ranked among the seven dream hotel jobs.
- **Huffington Post 2011** "The luxury hospitality world has long aspired to read the minds of hotel guests. But now, with a little help from a body language expert, one boutique hotel group might not be far off."

TLC VIP booked \$1.2 million, becoming Affinia's best-selling package to date. Affinia Hotels' revenue has increased 15% year-over-year since TLC was implemented.

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