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Jens Diekmann, Chantal Laliberté et Normand Cazalais

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Les hôtels «Romantik»

by Jens Diekmann, with the assistance of Chantal Laliberté, étudiante en urbanisme, UQAM

Marketing strategy of the Romantik Hotels and Restaurants Group

Market Analysis

Since about the mid-sixties, the European hotel business has been going through a change in structure, which has been initiated by the establishment international hotel chains.

owners. They saw that they had to develop new strategies to face increased competition. Co-operative reservation systems and other workshop groups were founded in order to fight against these highly capitalized chains, but the expected results never arrived.

name which was the trade-mark of the group.

This had an attractive appeal on the customer (guest), the investor and last, but not least, on the city administration. Establishing a whole network of similar hotels in several countries enable these chains to shift the competition into an international level that was not within of the individual establishments.

A co-operative hotel association which wants to successfully complete against these hotel trust, therefore, has to consider the following points:

1. creation of an effective trade-mark in advertising,
2. focussing on a special market,
3. presence in different countries,
4. development of marketable sales programs.

The most important condition for a marketing co-operative the service trade-mark, was realised by only a minority. From the beginning, failure was in sight for most of the co-operatives leading naturally to the (wrong) conclusion that co-operatives are hardly possible or at least very difficult to organize, and that they can only be of limited success since too many different persons and opinions have to be co-ordinated.

Previous studies have shown that international chains with well-known service trade-marks are successful in Europe only if they adapt their marketing program to European consumption habits. This shows, however, that the European hotel business could well compete against these chains, since it has the following advantages:

1. profound knowledge of the regional market,
2. a good image in the home market,
3. and a well trained staff.

In the regional market, the good hotel or restaurant has a strong chance to compete

Jens Dickmann et le groupe Romantik par Normand Cazalais

L'expérience de Jens Diekmann est exemplaire. L'histoire du groupe **Romantik**, qu'il raconte brièvement dans les lignes qui suivent, en témoigne. Elle démontre qu'en se donnant des objectifs clairs et des moyens de coopération efficaces et appropriés, de petits hôtels et des restaurants peuvent demeurer autonomes et personnalisés; elle démontre qu'ils peuvent, ensemble être capables de concurrencer avec succès les conglomérats et grandes chaînes touristiques, tant à l'échelle régionale et nationale qu'internationale.

Selon Jens Diekmann, il importe pour ce faire de se fixer un certain nombre de principes de gestion et de bien les respecter par la suite. Pour le groupe **Romantik**, ces principes peuvent se résumer comme suit:

- garder le nom particulier de tous les établissements participants,
- établir une base de coopération qui implique l'égalité entre tous les partenaires,
- concevoir et diffuser des programmes de vente souples et adaptés au marché,
- mettre sur pied une solide organisation centrale et fournir aux adhérents des méthodes de gestion dynamiques.

En Europe -et cela le sera bientôt en Amérique du Nord-, les hôtels et restaurants **Romantik** sont devenus un label de qualité, une marque de commerce respectée et recherchée. Les gens qui les fréquentent sont en effet assurés d'y trouver les propriétaires sur les lieux, un grand confort, une cuisine remarquable mettant en vedette des produits frais et les recettes du cru, un service fort soigné et un décor exceptionnel à des prix très concurrentiels.

Il m'a été donné de rencontrer Jens Diekmann à quelques reprises, dans le salon d'un hôtel portant avec grâce quelques siècles d'âge ou dans les jardins ombrés d'un restaurant fleurant bon le lilas, et de vérifier sur place le bien-fondé de sa démarche. Son court exposé le dit d'ailleurs clairement: dans le tourisme comme dans tous les autres secteurs d'activité économique, il n'y a pas de solution-miracle ni de formule magique; pour réussir, il faut une solide connaissance du marché, la volonté de mettre sur pied un produit à la fois authentique et original, et l'application soutenue de principes de gestion à la fois simples et très exigeants.

Due to the absence of a marketing plan in the European hotel business these chain were in a favorable position to conquer markets that were out of reach for individual establishments. City administrations welcomed them open-armed, but it was quite the opposite attitude from the local hotel

Most of these co-operative associations misjudged the significance of the name recognition of these hotel chains, thus underestimating their marketing power. The crucial point was not the capital of these chains, in most cases generated by national investors, but rather the well-known



Un hôtel de la chaîne "Romantik"

with the international. However, on the national or even international market, the chain is a lot more competitive.

This weakness can only be overcome by cooperating with similar establishments on a national and international level by creating an internationally well-known image and an effective service trade-mark.

The results of this analysis were the basis for developing a marketing conception for the Romantik Hotels and Restaurants consortium.

Marketing Conception

Because of the size of the independent hotels, a hotel co-operative has better chances in the medium price market. With their personal management style they can offer an alternative to the big impersonal hotels of the chains. From the gastronomical point of view, these establishments should offer a better relation between price and service than the hotels of the chains.

Starting from these basic conditions, it became evident that small historic hotels and restaurants, which were managed by the owner himself and which could offer first-class food and service, might be able to establish a strong consortium. Managed by the owner himself, they offer a guaranty of a long-term continuity of the management as well as a very personal service. The name Romantik Hotel and Romantik Restaurant was developed, an impressive trade-mark was designed, and a special marketing program was prepared, including the following essential points:

1. tailored vacation packages for individual travelers,
2. an extensive public relations and advertising campaign,
3. use of the trade-mark by all members of the Group,
4. co-operation between establishments all over Europe,
5. careful selection of the participating establishments.

Local hotels were encouraged to obtain national protection for the use of the Romantik name. Each hotel had to put Romantik Hotel on all its advertising activities in order to create and to preserve the name and image of the Group, thus promoting the name without expensive advertising.

Since a hotel chain is managed on a profes-

sional basis, it was important that the Group be on a full-time basis, consequently a full-time staff was hired which could think and act with an orientation to the entire market and not only to the individual establishment.

Foundation of the Romantik Co-operative

The preliminaries for founding the co-operative i.e. the development of the marketing program, the search for suitable partners as well as the preparation of a contract of partnership, were accomplished in 1971. At the end of 1971, Mr Jens Diekmann and Mr Alfred Mader founded a limited partnership named "Romantik Hotels and Restaurants Jens Diekmann Betriebs- und Beratungs-KG". Mr Alfred Mader was the first partner with his establishment "Zum Landsknecht" in Rendsburg, and thus the first partner of the co-operative.

A lot of discussion was necessary to win the collaboration of other establishments. After several informative sessions in May 1972, eight establishments had become members of the Group. On this occasion, the newspapers were informed for the first time. An excellent article in the "Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung" resulted in favorable public reaction, this showed clearly that the conception of the Group was correct and would be accepted by the market. At the end of 1972, nineteen establishments were affiliated with the Group, at the end of 1973 twenty-eight, by the end of 1975, forty-five establishments in Germany and seven in Austria were members of the Romantik Group.

In 1975, co-operation with establishments in neighbouring countries started. In July 1975, six establishments in Austria created a group of Austrian Romantik Hotels. These are connected with the Romantik central office by a contract of co-operation. In March 1977, the Swiss Group was founded and in November 1977, two hotels, one each in Denmark and in Sweden, joined the European Romantik Group. So by the end of 1977, the European family of Romantik Group had a membership of seventy-eight establishments. A loose co-operation already exists with a Dutch Group "Romantik" whose aims are similar (Romantik Tafelen).

The most important marketing feature was the development of the Romantik Gourmet Travels. A special reservation system, "Go As You Please" was developed which left the traveller with a great deal of freedom to plan his vacation. These tours have proved to be extremely popular and have received good press reviews. They have also been integrated into the programs of important travel organizations, automobile clubs, air and shipping lines, which led to direct bookings.

Another market future was the development of measurements for sales promotion on the restaurant sector. In Collaboration with the supplying industries, these were very successful not only in regard to the turnover but also in regard to publicity work. At the same time, the purchasing conditions could be improved.

The Romantik group also carried out data, analysis and comparisons of the establishments which brought forth informative local data for the local establishment as well as for the Group, and which led to the improvements of local services.

Summary

The development of the Romantik Group has shown that a co-operative venture of small hotels and restaurants can compete against large hotel chains.

The success of the Group has proved that it can open new markets which cannot be reached by a single local establishment nor by other chains.

It has, however, also become evident that this is only possible under very strict conditions. A successful cooperative is not possible without:

1. an effective trademark used by each co-operating establishment,
2. a strong partnership type of organization,
3. sales programs adapted to the market,
4. and a rigid organization and dynamic management.

Furthermore, it has shown that co-operation beyond national frontiers is essential to success. Such co-operation has considerable advantages in competition with the hotel trusts, since the cooperative is more firmly established in the local, regional and national market. On this basis, it is well positioned to impose limits on the expansion of international chains.

The Romantik Group also promotes the enterprising activities of the individuals, inspiring the safe advancement, increasing effectiveness and helping to get a better judgement of the market. And by comparison with other establishments of the Group, it renders possible an objective estimation of the own establishment.

The Romantik Hotel and Restaurants co-operation is successful and appears to have adopted a sound marketing strategy. It has proved that very different establishments can co-operate with great success under a common name and emblem, and that, together, they are in position to build up an internationally known service trade-mark of high standards, all this without having to become uniform. In spite of intensive co-operation on national and international level, the independence of the simple establishment is preserved and thus the spirit of the individual enterprise. **f**