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## Brand Revitalization

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In this essay, we discuss brand revitalization in the context of a revitalization process undertaken by one of India's iconic hotel brands: The Park Hotels. The leadership team of The Park Hotels, in collaboration with well-known brand-consulting firm Landor, undertook a two-year process to revitalize an already well-established brand in the face of severe competitive threat and changing customer tastes. This article presents a seven-step process for The Park's brand revitalization effort, which begins with strategy and ends with implementation. The seven steps are (1) conduct a comprehensive brand audit, (2) determine the brand position, (3) develop the brand platform, (4) establish the brand beliefs, (5) evoke the brand experience, (6) develop the brand voice, and (7) launch the new brand. This essay, the first ever to lift the veil on a proprietary hospitality branding project, depicts how The Park addressed its particular strategic approach of tying together a set of distinctive boutique hotels with a unifying and inspiring brand position.

## **Keywords**

hospitality branding, marketing, advertising, service innovation, service experience training

## **Disciplines**

Hospitality Administration and Management | Marketing


## **Comments**

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Chekitan S. Dev<sup>1</sup> and Kevin Lane Keller<sup>2</sup>

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## Abstract

In this essay, we discuss brand revitalization in the context of a revitalization process undertaken by one of India's iconic hotel brands: The Park Hotels. The leadership team of The Park Hotels, in collaboration with well-known brand-consulting firm Landor, undertook a two-year process to revitalize an already well-established brand in the face of severe competitive threat and changing customer tastes. This article presents a seven-step process for The Park's brand revitalization effort, which begins with strategy and ends with implementation. The seven steps are (1) conduct a comprehensive brand audit, (2) determine the brand position, (3) develop the brand platform, (4) establish the brand beliefs, (5) evoke the brand experience, (6) develop the brand voice, and (7) launch the new brand. This essay, the first ever to lift the veil on a proprietary hospitality branding project, depicts how The Park addressed its particular strategic approach of tying together a set of distinctive boutique hotels with a unifying and inspiring brand position.

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Every brand risks the possibility that it will lose its vitality, no matter how powerful and successful a brand may be. Because of this, the world's longest lasting successful brands all need to revitalize their concept and message from time to time to adapt to changing trends, meet the needs and desires of contemporary consumers, and deal with new competitive threats. Brands that fail to do this often fade quietly from the marketplace and are soon forgotten.

One key to brand revitalization is to stay ahead of the curve—that is, to begin the renewal process long before the brand actually begins to fade. That is the situation in this study, which demonstrates how The Park Hotels, one of India's leading hotel companies, revitalized its brand in recognition of current and future strategic and competitive challenges. Our analysis of this effort rests on a seven-step brand revitalization process, which has been developed over time.

Many researchers and consultants have proposed and applied various brand revitalization processes. Light and Kiddon (2009), for example, applied a six-step analysis of a brand revitalization by McDonald's. Those steps were (1) refocus the organization, (2) restore brand relevance, (3) reinvent the brand experience, (4) reinforce a results culture, (5) rebuild brand trust, and (6) realize the global alignment. Murane (2012) proposed a seven-step process: (1) agree on the problem, (2) negotiate the time horizon to fix the problem, (3) acquire resources, (4) align to trends, (5) bet on winning technology, (6) reframe the brand strategy, (7) develop effective marketing communications. We see the value of the thirteen steps mentioned in these two

frameworks, and our seven-step process includes many similar actions. But the steps in the above frameworks seem uneven in terms of sequence and work to be done. For instance, Murane's step six, reframing the brand strategy, is by itself a driving force in brand revitalization that includes many steps. However, several smaller steps in these frameworks can be combined, as we explain below. Valuable as these multistep processes might be, we demonstrate that brand strategy must be the starting point for the brand revitalization process.

## Brand Revitalization: The 7 Steps

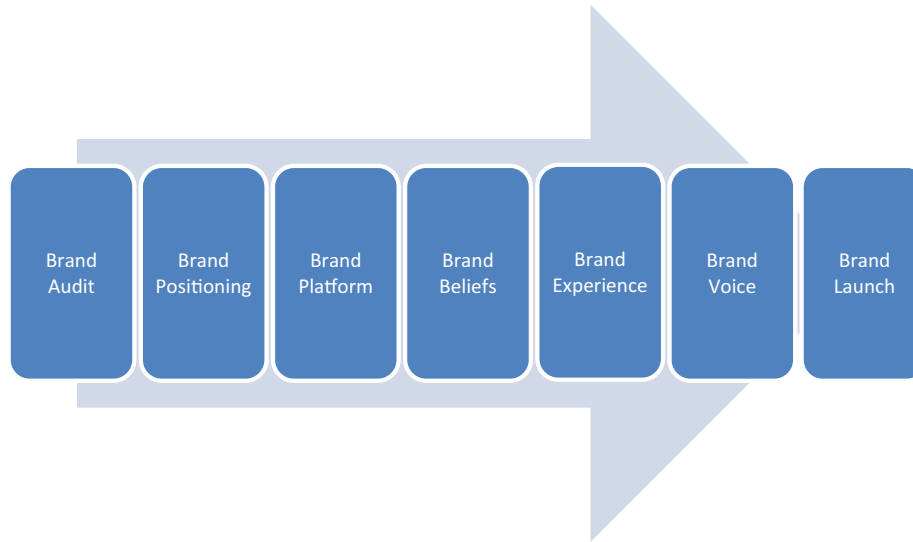
As we said, the brand revitalization process adopted by The Park Hotels comprised seven steps, designed to build upon determination of a new brand strategy and then continue by developing tactics to make that strategy operational. The seven steps to brand revitalization as they were applied by the brand team at The Park Hotels are as follows: (1) conduct a brand audit, (2) determine the brand position, (3) develop the brand platform, (4) establish the brand beliefs, (5) evoke the brand experience, (6) develop the brand voice, and (7) launch the new brand. We see this process as logical

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**Exhibit 1:****The Seven-Step Brand Revitalization Framework.**

and incremental, as each step depends in part on what is accomplished in the preceding step, gradually modifying and refining the revitalization until it achieves the desired objective. We depict the seven-step approach in Exhibit 1.

**Step 1: The Park's Brand Audit**

Any major rebranding effort must begin with a brand audit, which creates a thorough understanding of where a brand has been, where it is now, and how it got there. A brand audit is a comprehensive examination of a brand to assess its health, uncover its sources of equity, and suggest ways to improve and expand on that equity (Keller 2013). The Park's brand audit, conducted by the branding firm Landor, began with a thorough review of every facet of The Park's history and current operations, focusing on its brand communications and positioning.

**History.** The Park Hotels was a division of Apeejay Surrendra Group, a multisector corporation with a history dating to 1910. Privately held by the Paul family, Apeejay Surrendra had interests in trading, shipping, tea, retail, real estate, construction, and steel, in addition to its hotel business. The Park Hotels came into being in 1967 with the introduction of The Park Kolkata, a landmark property which was named after one of the city's iconic streets (Dixit and Manikutty 2001). For years, Surrendra Paul ran The Park, but in 1990, he was tragically killed in a terrorist attack. As a result, his daughter, Priya Paul, found herself in charge at the age of twenty-four. At that time, there were two other hotel properties under The Park name (Gupta and Ramachandran 2010).

**Current operations.** The Park opened its first truly boutique hotel in Bangalore in 2000, although Paul had already begun distinguishing her properties with innovative service and design elements, such as an intimate guest departure experience, a more casual, friendly approach to employee–guest interactions, a trendy, gourmet Chinese restaurant with a distinctive design, and a vibrant, popular nightclub featuring live music. The next boutique property converted the famous Gemini Film Studio's building into a hotel and enlivened the South Indian movie capital of Chennai by incorporating cinematic themes throughout. New boutique hotels in Navi Mumbai and Hyderabad followed. In the meantime, existing properties in New Delhi and Kolkata were renovated to embrace the boutique approach as well (see Exhibit 2). The Park continued to expand during the first decade of the 2000s, so that soon after passing into its second decade, the firm's portfolio would expand to thirteen properties (see Exhibit 3). The expansion was planned to continue under a strategic approach it called "Twenty by Twenty" (i.e., twenty properties by the year 2020).

Each of its properties exhibited, or would be designed to exhibit, their own qualities of Indian culture and its interactions with the world. For example, The Park Bangalore incorporated the Indian silk industry into its design, while each floor was made to represent a distinct facet of the urban landscape. The Park Navi Mumbai embraced an East-meets-West theme to represent the city's history of cultural fusion, while The Park Hyderabad stood out with striking design elements representing the Nizam jewels and the state's distinctive textiles. For its part, The Park New Delhi's design incorporated the five elements of the Indian space design science of *Vastu Shastra* (akin to Chinese Feng

## Exhibit 2:

### The Park Hotels in New Delhi and Kolkata.

#### The Park, New Delhi

Rejuvenated by Conran & Partners, UK, the hotel's design is inspired by the five elements of nature, that combine luxury and comfort with chic decor.

The five inspirational elements are:

- Fire
- Earth
- Air
- Water
- Space



The Park Hotels

#### The Park, Kolkata



The Park Hotels

Designed by Conran & Partners, London, UK the hotel is conceived in theme of Chakra energy.

Hinduism links the seven body chakras to the seven spectral colours, which are used across the hotel.

- Violet for Crown
- Indigo for Third Eye
- Blue for Throat
- Green for Heart
- Yellow for Solar Plexus
- Orange for Sacral
- Red for Base

Shui). The renovated The Park Kolkata expanded its night-life and restaurant offerings.

**Brand communication.** The Park's thread-theme logos attempted to capture in one image—or set of images—what made each of the properties distinctive and what they had in common (see Exhibit 4). Soon after taking over management of The Park Hotels, though, Paul understood that the properties needed better coordination. So, the company issued common service manuals to employees at all properties, held frequent meetings with representatives from all property management teams, and introduced a common reservation system (Dixit and Manikutty 2001). The boutique model was taking shape and providing The Park with the differentiation it sought.

As the first decade of the 2000s played out, The Park grew its portfolio to thirteen properties. By comparison with other brands in its several markets, The Park held its own and in some categories, such as occupancy and

revenue per available room (RevPAR), led the competitive set for the March 2012–March 2013 period. Exhibit 5 shows The Park leading in seven categories across three markets. The Park's performance over a longer period when measured across its markets shows similarly strong performance.

**Brand positioning.** While The Park was a major force in the Indian hospitality market, it was facing a new competitive landscape that would soon be flooded with a massive influx of brands, many of which would begin to crowd its space (see Exhibits 6 and 7). For example, Starwood had seven new properties slated to open in India, Hyatt was planning to enter fifteen new Indian markets over a five-year period, Marriott had nearly a hundred new properties slated to open over the same time span, and InterContinental envisioned 150 new Indian hotels by 2020 (Landor Associates 2011).

Based on the brand audit, the branding team identified two areas of concern for The Park brand: (1) the boutique model no longer provided the differentiation it once had, and (2) its desire to make every property distinctive created a lack of central brand focus and inconsistency in the customer experience across the properties.

#### Step 2: The Park's New Brand Positioning

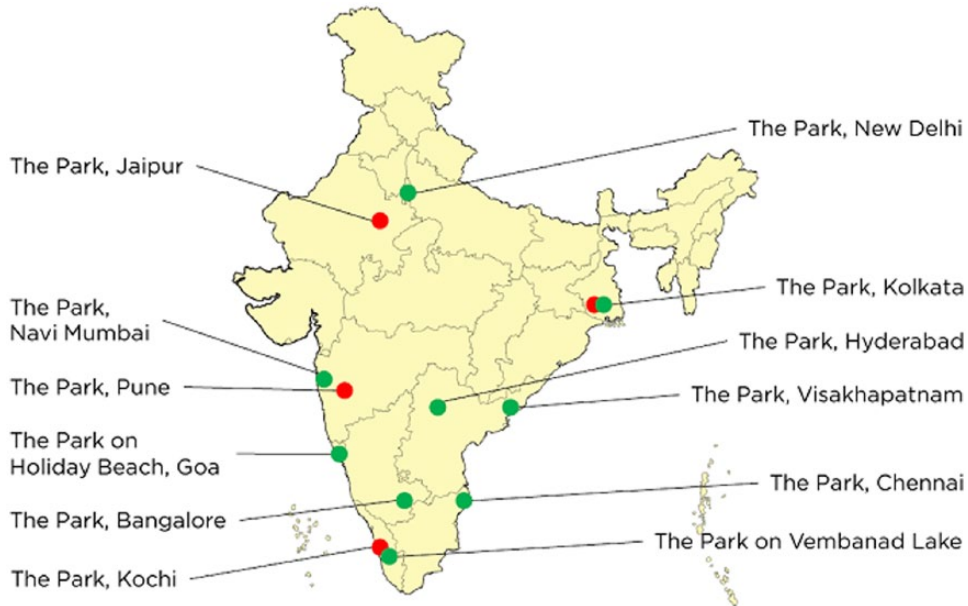
Even though the brand was strong, the audit demonstrated that The Park needed a fresh brand positioning. The Park's first-mover advantage, which had stood it in good stead, was eroding. The broad diversity of facilities and amenities that emphasized style and service worked against the core brand concept in some cases. Moreover, certain enterprises were drawing walk-in customers but not bringing in overnight guests. Among these were the nightclub in Kolkata, Someplace Else, which was marketed as India's premier live music venue, and restaurants such as Zen at The Park Kolkata and i-Italia at The Park Bangalore, which offered innovative cuisine that made them comparatively more popular than the hotels themselves.

The branding team recognized that in spite of the success of The Park's boutique positioning, the company lacked a unified and inspiring brand positioning that could support its plans to expand its portfolio into new Indian markets. Based on this realization, they chose "Anything but Ordinary" as the new brand position (see Exhibit 8).

In the next phase of the project, a full visual audit of all properties and their competitive sets was completed to form a basis for developing options for refreshing the brand and providing all properties in The Park's portfolio with a single brand identity that would bring its hotels' seemingly disparate customer experiences together under one set of principles and its messages under a new brand platform.

**Exhibit 3:**

**The Park Hotel Properties—2013.**



**Exhibit 4:**

**The Park’s Logo Set, Prior to Brand Revitalization.**



**Step 3: The Park’s New Brand Platform**

After reviewing the competitive landscape, global hospitality trends, and emerging consumer segment to identify guests and employees that would be attracted to this brand, the team examined options for a brand platform. A review

of competitors underscored the extent to which the boutique aesthetic and business model were permeating the market (Dev 2012). Brand after brand used boutique-related phrasing, such as Devi, “Boutique, designer”; Neemrana, “Boutique” and “Living with History”; W Hotels, “Confident, Trendy”; and Marriott’s Edition brand, “Luxury,



**Exhibit 5:****The Park's Key Performance Indicators.**

Market share analysis—April 2012–March 2013

Property	Fair share	Market share	ARR	Market leader ARR	Occupancy %	Market leader occupancy %	RevPAR	Market leader RevPAR	PI	Market leader PI	Growth over last year (%)
The Park New Delhi	6.45	8.62	5,762	13,642 The Imperial	78	79% Le Meridien	4,686	9,092 The Imperial	1.34	Leader	-19
The Park Chennai	14.01	14.14	5,098	7,664 Taj Coromandel	61	68% Courtyard by Marriott	3,112	4,577 Taj Coromandel	1.01	1.12 Courtyard by Marriott	-3
The Park Kolkata	25.21	29.54	6,076	7,368 Taj Bengal	89	Leader	5,390	Leader	1.17	Leader	-1
The Park Bangalore	4.66	5.47	5,500	11,632 Taj Westend	65	73% Taj Residency	3,561	8,342 Taj Westend	1.17	1.33 Taj Residency	-11
The Park Visakhapatnam	11.81	17.55	4,278	4,636 Grand Bay	87	Leader	3,712	Leader	1.49	Leader	-6
The Park Navi Mumbai	25.18	24.95	4,147	4,947 Four Points	70	72% Four Points	2,825	3,539 Four Points	0.99	1.04 Four Points	5
The Park Hyderabad	32.91	26.88	4,761	5,976 Taj Krishna	40	63% Taj Banjara	1,898	2,639 Taj Krishna	0.82	1.30 Taj Banjara	14

Note. ARR = average room rate; RevPAR = revenue per available room; PI = Penetration Index.

**Exhibit 6:****The Park's Competitive Set in 2010.****Competitors in India - 2000**

			
			
			
The Park Hotels			

**Exhibit 7:**

**The Park’s New Competitive Set.**

**Competitors in India - 2010 and Beyond**



The Park Hotels

**Exhibit 8:**

**The Park’s New Brand Positioning—“Anything but Ordinary.”**

**BRAND POSITIONING**

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**ANYTHING BUT ORDINARY.™**

**THE PARK HOTELS IS WHERE UNUSUAL EXPERIENCES ARE POSSIBLE.**

Where our DNA of creativity and innovation is expressed in distinctive ways.

Where we draw from myriad cultural and global influences to create a stylish, vibrant landscape, illustrative of contemporary India.

Where a fresh perspective in everything we see leads to the extraordinary in all that we do.

So that when you stay with us, you are continuously delighted, making our luxury hospitality experience, and you, Anything But Ordinary.

**OUR SPIRIT THAT IS ANYTHING BUT ORDINARY COMES ALIVE IN 7 DISTINCT WAYS.**

1. Urbane India
2. Curating Culture
3. Food Reimagined
4. 360° Design
5. Stay (S)well
6. Life: Leisure
7. Ready, Set, Business



**Exhibit 9:****The Park's New Brand Beliefs.****BRAND BELIEFS:****CREATIVELY INSPIRING**

Our creativity expresses itself in every detail—to create experiences that surprise and delight

**SPONTANEOUSLY JOYOUS**

Our actions come from the heart—to make our guests smile (especially when they least expect it!)

**DARINGLY DIFFERENT**

Our attitude is bold and unconventional—we always ask, “How would we do that differently?”

**MAKING THINGS FUN**

Our work involves taking fun to the next level—so that our guests can have the time of their lives at The Park

Boutique.” Clearly, The Park needed to find its way to a new differentiator that would transcend the boutique image and touch all of its properties.

In developing a platform for the brand revitalization initiative, the team examined The Park’s points of parity, advantage, and difference vis-à-vis the competition. The point of parity centered on elements that make a property “boutique.” The point of advantage was the incorporation of Indian elements in its design features, and the points of difference, which provided the inspiration for The Park’s new brand platform, were: not cookie cutter, art, music, dance, literature, fashion scene, urban, trendy, happening, buzzing, and creative.

**Step 4: The Park’s New Brand Beliefs**

As a next step, The Park branding team adopted “Four Brand Beliefs” to bring the platform to life. According to the Brand Beliefs, everything The Park would offer its guests would be “Creatively inspiring,” “Spontaneously joyous,” or “Daringly different,” and all services and products would embody the spirit of “Making things fun” (see Exhibit 9).

Once the branding platform and beliefs were adopted, The Park’s team began to examine how the new brand strategy would produce the new customer experience, which in turn would improve brand perception and customer behavior, ultimately driving improved business performance. Employees were advised that in the path from strategy to performance, the key was an “on brand” customer experience, as we discuss next.

**Step 5: The Park’s New Brand Experience**

To craft the new brand experiences, the team needed to fully understand its target customers. For this they developed,

profiles of the guests that the new brand positioning would target, both domestic and international. The target domestic traveler was an upscale executive capable of becoming a loyal guest on a long-term basis, someone who enjoys luxury, entertainment, and fine food and drink. The target foreign traveler was perhaps a bit younger, equally upscale, and upwardly mobile. These travelers seek out social encounters and local color, and they would be likely to recommend The Park to others.

As part of the brand experience, the next step in the process was to pair the “Anything but Ordinary” concept with the right logo and communications approach. The logo and communications would convey the conceptual space created by the Four Brand Beliefs and the desire to marry contemporary Indian culture with upscale sensory stimuli that would make it fun to stay at The Park. For consistency, the team determined that it was important to embrace the brand name, “The Park,” in a conspicuous way to differentiate it from the scores of other Park-named hotel brands.

The Park’s team decided that they wanted to emphasize the special qualities of The Park, perhaps to remind customers of Paul’s pioneering boutique approach to the Indian hospitality market, but especially to emphasize that The Park brand had a deep history of providing Anything but Ordinary hotel experiences for its guests. They therefore selected the emblem that Landor described as “unexpectedly simple,” a stark block letter logo that emphasized the word “the,” as the differentiator of The Park, as shown in Exhibit 10.

Among the unique amenities and experiences The Park’s team envisioned were the “Work Bed,” which offered the opportunity to conduct business comfortably from the guest room, and “The Park Pad,” a tablet computer to be presented to the guest on arrival that would serve as a “virtual concierge” for the duration of the stay. Some properties would feature curated movie libraries (inspired by The Park

**Exhibit 10:****The Park's New Brand Emblem.**

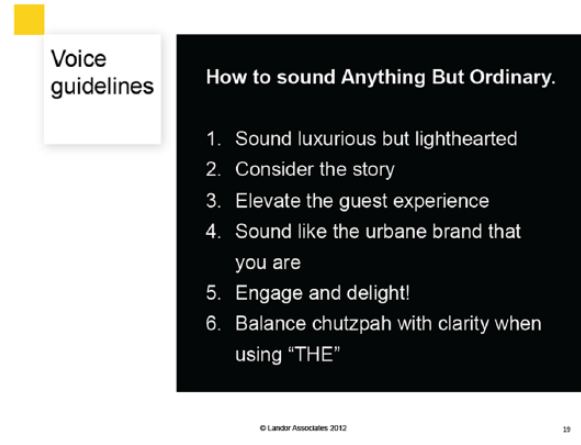
Chennai), while special seasonally and locally flavored popsicles would be offered to guests in the lobby upon arrival to enjoy during the streamlined check-in process.

**Step 6: The Park's New Brand Voice**

Once the brand experiences were defined, the next step was to create a language for the employees to enable them to live the brand. Developing a brand voice helps train employees to talk about The Park in a manner that is consistent with the new brand identity in all customer-facing communications. A set of voice guidelines were developed that employees should follow whenever they interacted with customers and that would guide all forms of communication (see Exhibit 11).

**Step 7: The Park's New Brand Launch**

An important decision that the branding team had to make was when and how to reveal the new brand to the world. In this, the brand team decided to “go big” by launching the new brand at the preeminent global travel event, the Berlin International Tourism Bourse (ITB). The revitalized brand was first unveiled to rave reviews at the March 2013 ITB Berlin. The CEO of Design Hotels, an association of

**Exhibit 11:****The Park's New Brand Voice Guidelines.**

designer inspired hotels, praised Priya Paul for a truly outstanding brand presentation.

**Lessons from The Park Hotels' Brand Revitalization Journey**

Brand revitalization is often a combination of the old and the new, retaining key existing brand elements and adding important new components. The Park Hotels had achieved much success, but in the face of a new competitive challenge the company needed a comprehensive brand audit to determine what to stop doing, what to start doing, and what to continue doing and do it better. The resulting revitalization of the Park Hotel brand provides a number of useful lessons about how an iconic brand should be strengthened and managed in tough times. Here are four of them.

*Strike the right balance.* One of the most important objectives in managing a brand is striking the right balance between features that pull the brand too much in one direction or another. The sweet spot in branding is often devising and implementing “win-win solutions” that overcome seemingly irreconcilable objectives. Critical to The Park Hotel’s success was striking the balance between uniformity and individuality, between consistency and surprise. Different hotel properties had to share enough common elements to support the brand concept, yet also have distinctive characteristics that uniquely reflected their locale and local clientele.

*Create compelling “best of both worlds” positions.* In a related sense, some of the most powerful brand positions cleverly combine two things that do not always

seem to go together. In that regard, The Park Hotels developed a powerful value proposition by blending Indian heritage and a respectful state of mind, on one hand, with a youthful outlook that positively reflected modern Indian life, on the other hand. A classic but contemporary image can create a “timeless” brand with strong appeal to both young and old, Indian and foreign.

*Offer a set of related, but distinct points of difference.*

Strong brands design and implement a cohesive brand positioning with multiple points of difference. Points of difference are strong, favorable, and distinct attribute or benefit associations for a brand that are (1) desirable from a customer point of view, (2) deliverable from a company point of view, and (3) differentiating from a competitive point of view. Multiple points of difference that are related—but also distinct—paint a rich picture of the brand in the minds of consumers. The Park Hotels adopted a powerful branding platform coupled with seven strong differentiators related to their people, the nature of activities at and design theme of their properties, and the portfolio strategy across their properties. Collectively, these seven differentiators provide compelling and unique motivation to prospective or returning guests.

*Inform and enforce the brand with brand filters or guardrails.* Finally, establishing an effective brand position and fulfilling the brand promise requires more than conducting the right strategic analysis. A thorough implementation plan is also critical. In particular, well-conceived and communicated brand filters must guide employees and staff in the organization and help them make better decisions which promote the long-term health of the brand. The Four Brand Beliefs serve that function and are the guardrails to keep the brand moving forward in the right direction.

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