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HD EXPO Explores Hotel Retail Programs

LAS VEGAS – The growing number of hotel companies developing retail components is a hot topic at this year's Hospitality Design Expo, taking place at the Sands Convention Center here.

In a session entitled "Hospitality Goes Retail," a panel of experts gathered to explain to attendees the many benefits of hotels exploring the retail avenue.

Catharine Arnston, CEO of HOTELUXURY, detailed how her company works with numerous hotels to develop online retail stores that sell the products found in hotels. Arnston noted today's consumers want their homes to have the designer look of their favorite hotels. "Six percent of the population uses interior designers, but 100% want great design," she said. "Consumers are more affluent and design sophisticated, but they're too busy to shop around."

Thomas Holtzman from the Nine Zero Hotel in Boston was also present at the session to discuss how the hotel has benefitted greatly from its partnership with HOTELUXURY. "It's a great service for guests, but it's important it be done professionally and properly," he said.

Tery R. Young, vice president creative operations of Boxport, noted having a way for guests to purchase hotel products is natural since, "design is about the consumer...in the past, hotels have been nice, but not memorable. Now they are so design focused and consumers want quality, luxury and style, but also convenience. This allows them to pick and choose what they want."

Anna Mancebo, vp spas and retail service for Marriott International, told attendees if they were considering a retail program, now is the time. "Marriott has traditionally been conservative, but we're reinventing ourselves," she said, discussing some of the highlights of Marriott's reinvention, called "Revive." One component of that reinvention is a retail program. "Marriott is operating its own retail program. Customer demand reinforces the brand and keeps us meaningful to our customers...They want exclusive, custom items." Mancebo reported Marriott is about to launch its retail program internationally and that its Renaissance brand will be the next to have a retail component. "Make sure you stand for something," she said in conclusion. "Don't just be another hotel selling bedding online."

The entire panel encouraged attendees to explore the possibility of a retail component and noted the benefits are numerous. "You will find people buying from you that haven't even stayed at your hotel," said Arnston, adding one of the

most crucial components of a retail program is making guests aware. "You have to have a strong way to let guests know they can buy things found in the hotel."