

Bob Gilbert EA (00:02):

Welcome to Tourism Heads and Their Tales. This is a podcast series that explores with travel and tourism leaders. Their take on key issues of the day. My name is Bob Gilbert, general manager for the tourism and destination marketing practice at the award winning strategic marketing agency, Eddy Alexander. Looking back, I've had the privilege to have worked with a number of iconic global brands. I'll be chatting with those that are helping shape the future travel and tourism industry all with their own unique tales to share. Today, we sit down with Bob Gilbert. Bob has led hospitality, sales, and marketing international HSMAI for 26 years. His knowledge and experience in hospitality are second to none. Bob and I discussed the challenges and changes in the world of hospitality hitting on key topics that include distribution, channel management, technology, revenue optimization, and talent acquisition. So please join the two Bob Gilberts on Tourism Heads and Their Tales.

Bob Gilbert EA (01:08):

Welcome to a new episode of Tourism Heads and Their Tales. And I am delighted this morning to be able to introduce a guest that, um, it's kind of interesting. We both have the same name, so I've never interviewed Bob Gilbert, but I am honored this morning to be able to chat with Bob Gilbert, who is president and CEO of what is universally known as HSMAI, but the Hotel Sales and Marketing Association International who are headquartered in McLean, Virginia. I have known Bob for gosh, pre-HSMAI from his hotel days when I was back in my hotel days. So welcome Bob, and by way of introduction, why, why don't you, you give the audience an overview of HSMAI, and what it does today. Number of members it's, uh, reach around the world and then we can jump into some questions.

Bob Gilbert (02:05):

Sounds good, Bob. Well, right back at you on the, on the interview, uh, it's, it's nice to talk to the other Bob, as people have confused us in the industry over the years, um, I just always say I'm the one that's much younger and I don't have a British accent <laugh>

Bob Gilbert (02:22):

But it has been quite a journey over the years. We've known each other. I've been at the helm of, of the Hospitality Sales and Marketing Association International for 26 years now. And certainly the organization has continued to evolve as the industry has changed so dramatically in the time that you and I have known each other. To give you quick overview, Our, our mission globally is simply to enable hotels and their partners to grow revenue through sales, marketing, and revenue optimization. So as these core disciplines have evolved into what is mostly accepted as these univers-, uh, commercial disciplines today is sales, marketing, uh, revenue now, distribution and loyalty, and all the other facets that are critical to the revenue generating functions of hotels. We've continued to provide resources to educate hoteliers and their partners around the world in how to do that better and more efficiently. And I feel like we've been at a running pace for as long as I've been here, but that's the way the industry has evolved, uh, because these disciplines are so vital to, to the hotel industry and the technical aspects of these disciplines have continued to become more and more complex. So hoteliers need to have the professional society that objectively looks at how do we do this better? Uh, and that's what we do.

Bob Gilbert EA (03:46):

So how many members do you have now?

Bob Gilbert (03:49):

We have a little over 5,000 members globally. We're, we're structured, uh, in four different regions around the world where we operate with events and, and program educational programs, uh, here in the Americas, uh, as well as Europe, uh, middle east and AsiaPac. And ironically the middle east has been the fastest growing area for us right now. Uh, I think there's so many, uh, hotel brands, management companies, ownership groups that are emerging in that area. They really have come to appreciate the level of finesse that we could help them optimize their revenues and their profits through some of our education certification programs. And that's relatively, relatively new to that region.

Bob Gilbert EA ([04:29](#)):

So over the 25 plus years that you have been leading the organization, you've seen a lot. You've seen situations that range from 9/11 to SARS to uh you- You name it, um, couple of, of Gulf wars, the oil crisis, and, you know, the one constant has been that the hospitality industry has learned and bounced back. Now, the last couple of years, we've had something that we have not seen before, and obviously a, a challenge across the board, particularly impacting, you know, travel and hospitality. So, post pandemic, what is the landscape for the hospitality industry? What behaviors have changed and what has remained the same that you see from, from your membership, from your, uh, hoteliers?

Bob Gilbert ([05:29](#)):

Well, well, you're right. This really has been the perfect storm for the travel and hospitality industry. There, there's no question about it. And I think through some of the research that we've done, clearly, there's probably five or six key things that have really changed dramatically. Things the industry has talked about for many years, but the, the pandemic has really, you know, forced the issue. And I'd say one of those is silos have clearly disappeared. Uh, there was used to be a lot of talk about how silos existed between sales, marketing, and revenue, at least in, in our wheelhouse mm-hmm <affirmative>, but during the pandemic, those silos just disappeared. I think the other thing that's happened is communications improved, which is part of the byproduct of those silos because people had to communicate in the moment to address every single changing issue that was going on.

Bob Gilbert ([06:18](#)):

And fortunately, we see that sustaining. I think that the third thing that we've seen change is the sense of urgency in the ROI focus. I mean, those things were talked about a lot before, but there was never anything that created a sense of urgency about what was gonna generate demand for your hotel, except when the bottom dropped out as it did, uh, you know, during the early onset of the pandemic. Um, I think the fourth thing that was really interesting that the industry shifted, um, is the willingness to try and test this industry has been criticized frequently for historically, for not being very innovative. Well, when, when there's, when you're backed in a corner and there's no demand out there, what do you do? There has to be that willingness to try and test and, and be innovative in different strategies. And that certainly has been experienced over the last, uh, last couple of years.

Bob Gilbert ([07:11](#)):

I think if there's a fifth area that we've seen is really an acceleration of the adoption of technology. Prior to the pandemic, a lot of people talked about it. They were investing in different things. They might have been trying a couple of things, but the actual utilization was forced in many cases because the customer needed it. You know, the customer in the moment needed the content on the website to absolutely be current. They needed talk, talk, somebody at the hotel that knew whether or not the restaurant was opened or whatever the specifics were. Um, and so technology, for example, that enables the guest to

talk to somebody live or text them at a specific hotel. Those types of technologies just really accelerated in terms of utilization, QR codes. They've been available for years, but now they're just commonplace. So those are to couple examples of where technology's accelerated.

Bob Gilbert (08:01):

And I think that the last major theme, if you will of change, that really gets me excited, is the legitimate focus on the customer, again, as sales and marketers for, for decades, we talked about, oh, the focus on the customer, but never, is there a laser focus when you only have one customer in, in the hotel in some extreme situations and all of a sudden, every single one that comes in one at a time, I've heard the story where the front desk lady celebrates every time somebody came in at, at the height of the, the demand crunch. So people really began to appreciate in, in one, understand what drove that particular travel. So I think there's a lot of the basics of sales and marketing and revenue optimization that companies have fallen back to. But I think it's all been for the better, because it reminds everybody as the why these things are so important.

Bob Gilbert (08:55):

We have to understand the customer. We have to leverage technology. We have to be innovative and try and test. We have to have a sense of urgency and always an ROI focus communication across the disciplines has to be, you know, at the top of its game. And there's no room for silos and departmental egos when it comes to having a clear revenue strategy that everybody buys into is in a, and is in alignment with. So, I mean, those are a number of different themes, but I think we're all gonna come out as better, uh, commercial professionals based on the experience we've all been through.

Bob Gilbert EA (09:30):

So with innovation and technology as two distinct themes, are they connected is innovation, is technology advancing due to innovation, the, the try and test, and is that in turn driven by the changing guest expectations as well?

Bob Gilbert (09:51):

The they're not always connected. I mean, certainly the, the focus on data analytics. And then if you look in the, the revenue optimization discipline, you know, certainly technology has, has accelerated a lot of that. People aren't just doing spreadsheets and plugging in, you know, rates and inventory anymore. Uh, the, the, the use of, of data analysts today have, have really technology's really enabled that, but I think innovation can be separate. Innovation starts at the top of the organization where somebody is willing to either invest in a particular, uh, strategy initiative market segment, or, or hybrid of a market segment and, and try a specific campaign so that they can be connected, but not always, I think in, in terms of keeping up with the guest expectations, that this has become increasingly difficult guest expectations coming out of the pandemic, we're seeing, uh, if you look at any of the research that's out there, guest expectations are the same, or they're even higher than they were pre pandemic.

Bob Gilbert (10:53):

And again, there's an another perfect storm going on over there in the hospitality industry right now with the labor challenges that make anybody who's a service industry vulnerable. And you add layer on top of that, the fact that, that all direct costs and, and obviously rates are, are gonna be higher that makes managing guest expectations, especially challenging. But I think if for the, for the savvy marketers and operators, if they are in tune and in sync with their guests, they're communicating properly in the

marketing, the, the pre-arrival experience, the on stay experience. Then you can keep guest satisfactions in check and, and keep guests happy. But in many markets right now where even during the pandemic, when rooms were selling for Uber premiums, because you happen to have a beach or the word resort in your name, managing guests expectations, uh, what was, was critical across the industry. You know, guests sat rates definitely. You took it a bit of a hit, but I think they're back on the upswing now, but you know, a lot of operators are still need to find that perfect balance of, uh, of the labor, the higher cost, and what's the right marketing to manage that guest expectation.

Bob Gilbert EA (12:09):

So you, you mentioned that perfect storm where you have an increased expectation from the guest, but with a, I guess, a supply issue from a workforce perspective, you're having hotels and resorts doing or learning tr- and learning, trying to, to do more with less, how significant is the workforce issue and is it different in various segments within hospitality?

Bob Gilbert (12:38):

Well, I think it's still significant, but keep in mind, the hotel industry is not unique to this labor force challenge that we're seeing. I mean, there's been a huge societal shift, not only in the us, but in many markets around the world about people that have been mentally impacted by this pandemic and are looking for, you know, life changing decisions or habits, or that they're looking at work life balance differently now. Yep. Um, and they're saying, is it really worth it for me to, you know, do this and do that, is the commute here or there and for a certain wage. So, so a lot of people are, I think, are going through those self-assessments in terms of what their career is in the hospitality industry and outside of the hospitality industry. So it, it makes labor much more competitive, but we're already seeing, you know, salaries are going up dramatically in the hospitality industry, company cultures, and, and the work going on in their human resources department is, is, is dramatically changing to put more focus on the employee as well.

Bob Gilbert (13:43):

And again, that's something the hospitality industry has not, uh, had a, a robust or stellar reputation for in the past. And I think one of the benefits of the pandemic is we're gonna come out of that much stronger as an industry, as we, we address not only the, the labor and the workforce issues for, for our industry, but also the guest expectations. So it it's, it's, it's not unique to us, but it will still be, it will take a while for everything to be cut, fall into equilibrium. I think there's probably still at least another six to 12 months before we can get back to normal staffing standards, you know, but some of the changes going back to your previous question where you see so many hotels now just offering housekeeping, you know, every third day or whatever, in many cases, if, if the guests understand that on the front end, many guests have come to accept that as it's okay, uh, for certain product types. But again, you've gotta communicate that and manage that expectation.

Bob Gilbert EA (14:41):

So would you agree that a career path within hospitality is still a worthwhile career for folks to follow? I, I asked that question, you know, very recently somebody, we both know David Kong who was CEO president at Best Western for, I think about 20 years, mm-hmm <affirmative>, um, you know, he started out and this story is not unique, uh, to David, um, but washing dishes, mm-hmm <affirmative> and progressed through a career path to become, you know, the CEO and president of, uh, one of the

largest, um, if not the largest hotel brand on, on our planet. So it, it is, is a career in, in Hospitality still, uh, worthwhile?

Bob Gilbert (15:31):

Uh, yeah, absolutely. Bob, I speak to a lot of hospitality students and schools, uh, across around the globe and because they they've all, you know, had, have been raising doubts or their parents have been raising doubt about, is this the career you really want to get into? The reality is the demand for those hospitality students over the next two to five years is huge. I mean, the, the industry is gonna be growing at a pace we've probably never seen before because of the baseline we're currently at. And so not only do we need, um, the talent, but we'll need that specialization of, of hospitality students. So I think the career path is definitely there that people that are in hospitality and most of 'em they're in it because they've got a passion for travel. And when somebody enters the industry, they usually know early on that, Hey, they're either gonna love it, or they're not.

Bob Gilbert (16:20):

And the people that love it, do it for the passion, they do it because of the experiences they're, they're able to encounter over their career, particularly in sales and marketing and revenue, the opportunities to be creative and, uh, and meet different customers and different customer types and, and travel to those customer events and trade shows and be able to, to shape the, the development of a brand or design a marketing strategy. I mean, those are not routine jobs that are repetitive. I think people that have a passion for the, the ability to be creative and have latitude and, and, and have a passion for the industry, they work in those careers are always gonna be robust. And those people are gonna be able to accelerate to whatever degree they want within the, the massive ecosystem called travel and hospitality. Hotel is just one part of that. And even within hotels, you've got management companies and brands and, and ownership groups that all value, uh, particularly the commercial functions of sales, marketing, royalty revenue, distribution, and so forth. So I think career paths will continue to be robust, particularly in the commercial space. Uh, but, but there's still many, many opportunities in the service space that can be the entry point for a, a long and robust career in operations or any other area as well.

Bob Gilbert EA (17:47):

So

Bob Gilbert (17:47):

I may be biased, but I'm Obviously bull

Bob Gilbert (17:49):

Bullish on it because yeah, be you look at some of the other, you know, global consumer sentiment has nothing to do with our industry, but when you ask the entire population of this planet, you know, you know, travel is something everybody aspires to do. And, and there has to be an industry to support and develop that. And so, so many people in every nationality around the world aspire to travel and they believe that's a right that they have. So that will always feed the industry.

Bob Gilbert EA (18:19):

Yeah. I think the last time I looked travel tourism hospitality, you know, that service industry represented the, the first, second or third employer in every state mm-hmm <affirmative> mm-hmm <affirmative>. And, and I don't think, uh, despite the pandemic that, that has changed.

Bob Gilbert (18:37):

Despite the pandemic, I'm not sure the statistics are, are out globally yet, but we're still the number three employer globally as an industry. So I think, and, and within travel and hospitality, again, that ecosystem is so diverse, whether it's hotels, destination, marketing, organizations, airlines, car rentals, cruise lines, and the agencies that support, you know, all of that. And the technology companies that are dedicated to hospitality and travel the, the intermediaries. I mean, the, the list just goes on the ecosystem is so huge. Not many people realize that until they're into it, how many career opportunities there are.

Bob Gilbert EA (19:15):

Right. And the more brands that are being developed, then that increases that, uh, that career opportunity as well. So. And so with branding, I mean, will it ever stop <laugh>, I mean, we're at an all time high in terms of brands by the, um, you know, the major flags around the world. And I recall when, when I was at Best Western, you know, 20 years ago, or so they had one brand now they have almost 20 mm-hmm <affirmative>. So is, um, you know, what fueled that branding? And I have to say that the first brand that was from a hotel chain was Comfort Inn that was the first brand off of a major brand itself. And that, that was my gosh in the eighties, when the rest of the leadership in other hotel companies said it was the fad, it, it wouldn't last and here we are 2022, and it, it has not stopped what fueled branding?

Bob Gilbert (20:17):

Well, I think will branding ever stop? The short answer is not as long as you've got consumers that range the entire spectrum of what they're looking for in a trip experience. And at the end of the day where you and I may stay when we take a son or daughter to, to college versus where we may go on a, you know, a romantic getaway with just a spouse, uh, or where we may stay on a business trip, that trip purpose will always drive what the customer expectation is. And ideally what a product can be best suited to serve. So you've got consumers along that entire continuum of, of trip experiences that will continue to drive different product types and product developments. What will drive the brands will obviously be their desire to grow and to have multiple product types under one umbrella. So you can bundle in loyalty and, and one customer expectation if you will, over a variety of, of brands in that family.

Bob Gilbert (21:16):

So, so I think that will continue to exist, but you still have a customer though at the other end of the spectrum that, you know, wants to take risk and, uh, is looking for that independent or that boutique hotel. And there's a market for those as well. I mean, travel's such a huge market. I think marketing and marketers will differentiate who is successful and who is not, but will branding ever stop? Um, it will, it will probably slow down relative to the growth that we've seen in new brands over the last 20 years, but I'm sure there's always gonna be somebody else that's experimenting or testing a new niche product, or type that tries to fulfill a certain customer experience or a certain customer type, you know, so I think we'll always see innovation coming in that area,

Bob Gilbert EA (22:00):

Right? I mean, we, we have seen and witnessed the growth of Airbnb, VRBO and, you know, particularly in the last couple of years, pandemic driven that has changed some behaviors. How are hotels competing with Airbnb and VRBO and the, the short term rental market?

Bob Gilbert (22:23):

Well, I think, I think right now, the common denominator for success across all product types is, is clearly the leisure market. And that will likely be the case for at least the next year or so across all different product types. But I think what, what will really define the success and the ability for the traditional hotel brands or the legacy brands to compete with some of the shared vacation product is gonna be diversification of their product type. I multi-generational travel is booming and will continue to, to create demand for the suite, the Villa, the home products that are out there. There are certainly a, a larger proportion of the population that wants something more than just the traditional legacy hotel room. And I think that's why you've seen more of the brands add more product type to their, their inventory or through acquisitions. They've brought in different consortiums of, of the home, suite, villa type products, all suite products, those types of things.

Bob Gilbert (23:18):

So I think that they are competing in a way that is still makes sense for them financially to do so based upon, you know, what their customers are telling them. So I, I think they are competing to some degree, but the legacy home sharing, you know, products are, are still very different and, and most consumers know how different they are and they either they want it, or they don't, if they want the trust of a, of a known brand with the, the legal protections that come with it, safety, security, all those things. Those are things that if you, and I just decide to rent a home, we may happen, you know, the upper peninsula of Michigan, um, a typical consumer is gonna have a lot of questions. Some maybe we'll take the risk, but the others are not.

Bob Gilbert EA (24:00):

That's interesting. And we'll, we'll see how that plays out in the, in the future. As things become, become accustomed to, you know, some of the changes in, in behaviors and, and needs. Revenue optimization. I, I think that HSMAI yourself were at the forefront of recognizing that particular discipline very early on. It really, I think, started within the, the more upscale marketplace. Um, I may be wrong and you can correct me, but today it's become an art. Well, art and science <laugh> I guess, what are the changes that have occurred within revenue management, revenue optimization over the last five and, and the last couple of years as well, did hotels when they had to reduce their work workforce, were, were the revenue managers impacted or were they that rare breed that needed to remain on post?

Bob Gilbert (24:57):

Well, well, certainly there's been a lot of change. The discipline of revenue optimization has evolved tremendously over the years. I think you can say it originated in the front, probably a front desk clerk at a resort at some point in time that realized we didn't need a rate of, you know, for the year we needed a rate for the season. And it just kept getting more and more analytical ever since then to the point where people could try to forecast the demand by day by market segment, by origin, by distribution channel. Now, I think the biggest change over the last five years has been both the, the, the industry's ability to trust the technology that does a lot of the forecasting and the pricing, and that has allowed the discipline to become more, more focused on the data analytics. Owners clearly learned early on that there was a lot of money being left on the table by not having a proactive revenue optimization or an analytical focus.

Bob Gilbert (25:51):

So that has not gone away. So to do your answer about during the pandemic, no, these people, they were still there. There may have been some trimming, like there were in a lot of areas and some staff, but these were critical. People had to make sure that their distribution channels were plugged into, and these are the people that need to make sure the right decisions are being made to optimize whatever we could do. I think that the, the most profound changes in the last couple of years have really been the, the true scientific analysis of the channels, the different channels that, that feed business to hotels, so that the companies can leverage the most profitable channels that has become an exact science. Now forecasting over the last couple years has obviously been extremely difficult, but when people are, are doing the analytical analysis with technology tools, they're able, able to watch consumer behavior in real time. And when you watch, you know, consumer travel through the funnel almost in real time, you're able to really optimize your ability to convert that particular, you know, shopper into a real live booking via whatever channel you want. And the people that have perfected that will continue to do very, very well. They'll probably always have premium occupancies and profitability levels compared to the industry at large. So right now it's all about the, the data analysis and the analytics and, and doing it in real time by channel. And, and that those people are in high demand.

Bob Gilbert EA ([27:22](#)):

So distribution, I believe that the hospitality industry really took the lead way back in understanding distribution and, you know, that has become more fine tuned over the years, especially the, the recent years. And you mentioned at the beginning, the themes of technology, innovation and distribution, how has distribution and the, the channels of distribution changed? And is there a change in the relationship with hospitality, with hotels and resorts and OTAs, the old question whose, whose customer is it and has that changed at all? And what does that relationship look like today?

Bob Gilbert ([28:07](#)):

I think, I think it's evolved. I mean, the original premise of a lot of the OTAs and a lot of distribution channels, period, OTAs just being part of that distribution ecosystem was to be able to reach customers that an individual marketing effort was not able to reach cost efficiently and drive trial and, or, or provide a, a, a booking, you know, channel for a resource that a individual hotel or a brand might not otherwise have access to. Of course, that that was the origin. The, the evolution of it now is that that same premise still applies. And certainly hotels always, you know, are, are striving to get customers to book direct. But the reality is even in a best case scenario, if you can get all your bookings direct and you're still running 60% occupancy, then one go say, what do you do with the other 40% of a vacancy you've got?

Bob Gilbert ([28:55](#)):

So there's always an opportunity to optimize something unless you're running a hundred percent occupancy. And that's where channel management comes into play. How can you leverage partners or of any channel OT and otherwise to help you find some incremental business? So the agent long debate will always continue of what's incremental and attribution. And those types of, of things are what some of these revenue analysts are, are looking at. You know, what, where, where can we find that incremental business and how much of a premium are we willing to pay for that through the different channels? So I think that will always be part of what the science of revenue optimization is all about. It's optimizing those channels, identifying where can you find incremental reach or incremental volume that's gonna increase your, your occupancy and, or your profitability. And that premise really hasn't changed. I think the sophistication of the distribution partners that are out there, and there are many different types and shapes and sizes that that's, that's the relationship they've gotta find with the, the

brands and the management companies, and the hotel is direct. That will always be, be a work in progress.

Bob Gilbert EA ([30:03](#)):

So within that realm of distribution channel management, attribution, how, how has attribution modeling progressed? You know, it was always been the holy grail to be able to definitively find out that source of booking. Where did that originate that, that attribution model, how has the science progressed over the years?

Bob Gilbert ([30:28](#)):

Well, I think that that science in particular has progressed significantly because you have so many, um, business intelligence providers that have real data from both the, all the online web traffic, uh, and they can view the customer, as I mentioned before at every part of the, of the buying funnel. And so that, that was analytics and that technology and the data that's available to benchmark yourself or to watch it in real time is what's really changed. I mean, never before, have we been able to look at, for example, group booking pace, you know, 12 months in advance across an entire industry or in crisis entire market, or a state, or just the city of Chicago, you know, now that enables the revenue teams to be able to, you know, forecast much more accurately, what channels they wanna turn on and turn off there's analytics that they'll tell you specifically, by channel what's going into this competitive set of ten hotels in New York City that can tell you, are you getting more or less than your fair share of that channel? And when, when is too much, one is too little or when do you wanna shut it off? So, so the analysis that's available today is much more robust than it's ever been in our history. That's where technology's playing a role, revenue analytics plays a role and distribution is basically what they're managing.

Bob Gilbert EA ([31:49](#)):

Is is this across the board in terms of segments, whether it's, you know, luxury to budget?

Bob Gilbert ([31:55](#)):

Yeah. Yes, it is across all product types.

Bob Gilbert EA ([31:57](#)):

So are these tools individually purchased by the hotel owner or are these services now provided perhaps at a cost by the, the hotel corporation, the, the flag?

Bob Gilbert ([32:10](#)):

<laugh> Typically, these are third party business intelligence companies that the hotels either are part of, or, or can subscribe to. So that's clearly, it's a business intelligence resource that's not been available before.

Bob Gilbert EA ([32:22](#)):

Gotcha. So talking of the upscale segment or segments, the mice market, how is that coming back today?

Bob Gilbert ([32:34](#)):

Um, interesting, I just saw a report yesterday that said right now, the booking pace for the second half of 2022 is at the highest rate of growth that's been in the last, you know, two years. So I'd say it's growing faster. And right now it's growing faster than corporate. There's still a lot of debate about how the corporate market will rebound, but certainly the, the, the meetings and incentive markets is, is looking much better than it has for the last couple years. And that that's very encouraging. I believe the international will still lag a bit and there are still different variables and different parts of the world, but certainly domestically in the US and where, you know, restrictions have been, have been lifted, or it's easier for people have traveled to that will come back next. But, you know, Vegas, for example, is one of the first, you know, major group markets to see a quick rebound, you know, after a year or a year and a half of almost every market having to book and rebook and rebook and rebook salespeople got tired of that. Now people are actually convening the attendance at meetings may still only be at that 80, 60, 70, 80% range of pre pandemic levels, but the, the planners are coming back. So I think that's, that's gonna rebound clearly within the next year. We'll be back to where we will be for, in terms of group travel.

Bob Gilbert EA (33:51):

Is there a difference between, um, state meetings versus national events or they, is, are they pacing?

Bob Gilbert (34:01):

Don't have any, yeah,

Bob Gilbert (34:02):

I don't have any specific data on that, but I, I would venture that they're, they're pacing about the same, I think where there's pace variables is based upon the industry sector, for example, what is pharmaceutical during versus insurance versus financial and so forth? Mm-hmm <affirmative>, and, and again, I, I don't have those off top my head, but there's certainly data available that will, you can drill down in to see which meeting types are growing faster than, than others. There's clearly some industries that are leading and there are others that are lagging.

Bob Gilbert EA (34:34):

Are there any regional preferences that are being seen or is this pretty much across the board?

Bob Gilbert (34:41):

I think it's pretty much across the board. I mean, what we've seen so far in, in actual occupancies to date is still the central business districts that are still lagging in terms of their total occupancy recovery. When you look at the top 25 markets, it's still the leisure destinations that are way ahead of before, but that's all because of the abnormal spike in, in leisure demand. It's not really related to groups of meetings yet, but I think that will, that will begin to normalize as we navigate through the next, you know, six, six months or so.

Bob Gilbert EA (35:13):

Right. You have your different committees. Um, mm-hmm, <affirmative> you have your sales leader forum coming up in, uh, Frisco, Texas in, in October, October 20th, I believe. And with your various committees, what are the recurring themes or issues that are raised with those different hoteliers, those different hospitality leaders that make up your different committees? What, what is it that keeps them awake at night?

Bob Gilbert (35:45):

Well, we, we'd, we'd need another hour for that!

Bob Gilbert EA (35:47):

<laugh>,

Bob Gilbert (35:48):

But, but in, in a nutshell we have three major advisory board in each region around the world, the sales advisory board of marketing advisory board, and a revenue advisory board. And then we have a global distribution advisory board. So they're, they're living in the real time, right? So that really enables us to keep our pulse on a lot of what's happening. And that's how we publish our insights and they generate the content for all of our conferences around the globe. But I think that the things right now that are keeping them up at night, a lot of conversation around this whole, um, analytics conversation, we talked about that that applies in sales, marketing, and revenue, technology, the, the integration of tech stacks and, and new technology evolutions certainly is, is it relevant in sales, marketing, and revenue and distribution? Uh, the other thing we've already talked about, but talent, how do we attract and retain and engage talent in, in our industry and the HSMAI foundation, which is actually the philanthropic arm of the association, their mission is totally dedicated to talent.

Bob Gilbert (36:50):

So we're working with all the hospitality schools, the faculty that teach sales, marketing, and revenue, as well as students in those classes, we have a number of rising leader councils around the world. That's that whole 30 something, you know, generation of people in the industry. How do we keep them and retain them as well as we're doing some research in the DEI area of diversity, equity and inclusion of talent and sales, marketing revenue. So, so there's a lot of things that we're trying to address through a lot of different, you know, vehicles and platforms that we have. But at the end of the day, when we produce those events, like the sales leader forum, or our marketing strategy conference or rock, which are the three signature events for the three disciplines, um, whatever those advisor boards have told us are top of mind for that particular stakeholder will be front and center, those particular events.

Bob Gilbert EA (37:40):

So, so basically what keeps them up at night is what keeps you up at night as you serve your membership?

Bob Gilbert (37:47):

Absolutely, absolutely. And, and constantly, how do we, how do we respond to those needs and how do we continue to realign the resources of, of a nonprofit association, like HSMAI to best service and fulfill and develop those initiatives that, that that's a constant, constant change that we've seen in the tenure that I've been here. And I suspect we will build for a long time. HSMAI is a couple of years away from celebrating its hundredth anniversary. Believe it or not, we've been around for almost a hundred years. And I think the association has survived because we've continued to adapt with the needs of these critical revenue generating teams that are so vital to the hotel industry.

Bob Gilbert EA (38:30):

Wow. As you said before, we could add at least another hour to our, to our chat here today, but I just wanna thank you so much, Bob, for your insight and telling us your, your tales. And again, we, we have been chatting with Bob Gilbert, president and CEO of the Hospitality, Sales and Marketing Association, International Bob, thank you so much

Bob Gilbert ([38:54](#)):

Right back at you. Thank you, Bob. Hope to see you somewhere soon.

Bob Gilbert EA ([38:56](#)):

Thank you. We hope you enjoyed today's episode, please like, thumbs up, subscribe and leave a review. You can also visit eddyalexander.com to learn more about our tourism marketing and destination management services and read some of our recent case studies. Finally, if you'd like to suggest future guests or podcast discussion topics, or to sign up, to get an email alert, when we drop new episodes, please do so at eddyalexander.com/thatt.