

Checking In

THE LATEST INDUSTRY NEWS FOR HOTEL EXECUTIVES FROM CANADA AND AROUND THE WORLD



HAC CELEBRATES CENTENNIAL

Technology was a big topic at the association's annual conference

BY ADRIAN BELL



Hank Stackhouse,
chair, HAC

With its 100th anniversary celebration as the backdrop, the Hotel Association of Canada (HAC) held its annual conference at the Hilton Toronto hotel Feb. 5. The one-day conference provided a mix of seminars and a tradeshow.

Missing from the celebrations and conference was Tony Pollard, president of HAC, and an integral component of HAC's success over the past 20 years. Pollard suffered a concussion just before the Christmas holidays and is recovering in Ottawa, but his message was highlighted through a video presentation at the gala anniversary dinner, the night before the conference.

Stepping in to fill Pollard's absence was Hank Stackhouse, chair, HAC. "The conference gets hoteliers away from the daily grind to think about the industry, moving our industry forward for the next 100 years," he told *Hotelier* magazine at the conference. "Right now we're pushing for increased demand in Canada, and we're enjoying growth in our backyard, but it's local, so we have to think broader."

The conference, which attracted 340 key leaders and hoteliers from across Canada, covered topics such as OTAs, revenue management, social media's impact on the hotel business, foreign workers and marketing initiatives aimed at growing business. Commenting on a session spotlighting technology, Stackhouse said, "We can't push technology in the corner, we have to come to grips with the fact that 70 per cent of users are going mobile, and that's the wave of the future. So [it] plants a seed in a CEO or GM's mind to think forward."

Helen Marano, VP, Government and Industry Affairs, World Travel and Tourism Council (WTTC), presented a talk on Canada's place in world tourism and the WTTC's approach. "It focuses on three strategic priorities: one is "freedom to travel," with a focus on visa facilitation, the second is "policies for growth," with fair and equitable taxation, and the third, is "sustainability" — tourism for tomorrow, she said.

Marano said Canadian hoteliers need to support the strength of the industry and the economic contribution and community development it provides. She said the WTTC embraces hoteliers. "We're here to show the level of support and advocacy we're doing globally, to help governments better understand how to make business healthy for the expansion of our industry."

Moving forward, Stackhouse believes the big concern for HAC, and hoteliers across Canada, is demand. "That's why we're here today talking with OTAs — because demand is not where it needs to be," he said. "We need to press to see a bigger share of the global market. We can't do it all in our own backyard." ♦

Notable Quotables

A HAC session about the role of OTAs was one of the most widely acclaimed of this year's conference. Below are a few interesting stats and comments from the panel, which featured Travelzoo, Google Canada and Expedia.

- 83 per cent of travellers trust the recommendations of friends and family.
- 27 per cent of consumers now have a tablet.
- 25 per cent of consumers would prefer to give up their TVs instead of their smartphones.
- "Ultimately the web will be everywhere. You should invest in all channels. It's critical."
- Content is king. Make sure you incorporate reviews on your website.
- Ensure your local web pages and directories are updated and accurate and that you feature a description of your amenities.
- Mobile users are starting to eclipse desktop users.

