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INNOVATING WITH RAY BURGER PRESIDENT AND FOUNDER, PINEAPPLE HOSPITALITY INC.

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The company - Pineapple Hospitality Inc. sells environmentally friendly and efficiency-boosting products and programs to hotels, motels and other lodging providers.

The industry challenge - Hotels want to become more "green," both to attract environmentally discriminating customers and to save money by reducing the use of energy and disposable goods, **Ray Burger** said. But lodging is a very competitive industry and hotels won't do anything that sacrifices services and guest amenities, or makes them appear cheap.

Consumers, for their part, increasingly are seeking travel experiences that don't have a negative environmental impact, Burger said. In an April survey by online travel company Orbitz, 67 percent of the 320 respondents said the "eco-friendliness" of a destination is important; 63 percent said they would pay a little more to rent a hybrid vehicle or stay at a "green" hotel.

But few consumers know how to find or identify sustainable lodging. And many hotels are unsure of the steps they can take to become more green, Burger said.

What he did - On Aug. 7, Pineapple launched EcoRooms & EcoSuites, a program to certify and promote lodging that meets seven criteria for sustainability. The company lists - and books - hotels that stack up at www.ecorooms.com.

The criteria, selected by an advisory board of pioneering green hoteliers, include the use of non-toxic, non-polluting cleaning products; recycled paper goods; refillable amenity dispensers or individual products in recycled bottles; high-efficiency plumbing fixtures; and energy-efficient fluorescent lights. Certified hotels also must offer a linen re-use program, and have recycling receptacles throughout the building.

"We're creating a standard that people can latch on to and understand ... and that is achievable," Burger said. "These are widely acknowledged criteria that anyone - a general consumer, or the greenest tree-hugger you can find - would look at and say, 'OK, this is good for the environment.'"

The aha! moment - A year ago, Burger sat around a table with like-minded lodging industry leaders at a Green Hospitality conference convened by his company. They complained about the lack of hotel sustainability standards, and worried that consumers

would be duped by "greenwashed" hotels that implement a single, obvious program - such as linen re-use - but say they are sustainable.

The conversation capped a "gradual evolution" in Burger's thinking over his 30 years in the lodging industry. "I understood that hotels needed to be more efficient, both economically and from an environmental perspective, a long time ago. I've just kept following my heart toward that goal," he said.

He also realized the EcoRooms program could build Pineapple's business, because the firm provides green consulting and sells the types of products and programs hotels need to become certified.

Progress report - In the program's first couple of weeks, Pineapple has received several calls and e-mails, Burger said. He estimates only 30 hotels nationwide are meeting EcoRoom criteria, and hopes to get all of them to participate and be listed on the website this year - while selling the concept to others.

"It's not a huge number, but it's a start. And others will follow. The hotel industry is a very follow-me business," Burger said. "Somebody's got to be the pioneer, so the settlers can show up."

PINEAPPLE HOSPITALITY INC.

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Founded: 2005

Employees: 4

Websites: www.pineapplehospitality.net, www.ecorooms.com, www.freshstay.com
