



Home Away from Home

AKA and Home 2 – New Brands for a Newly Re-Thought Segment

By Rebecca Goldberg

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Left to right: The 2nd floor hall at AKA Central Park; the terrace table at AKA Central Park; the kitchen at Times Square

Extended stay hotels have been called the bright spot in the U.S. hotel industry. The segment has few competitors and often targets business travelers, a group that will need to rent hotel space in any economy.

Two new brands have recently entered the market and while their price points may differ, the hallmarks of strong branding, reliability and inventive design are part of the strategy of both AKA and Home2.

AKA

Since 2006, AKA has quietly expanded throughout the U.S. With four locations in New York and several others in major east coast cities, the brand strategy has proven successful and more growth is on the boards.

MJ Paschall, president, describes AKA as an apartment or long stay hotel rather than an extended stay, which does not share the same high-end connotation. At AKA, the guestrooms are referred to as condos. Here, the goal

of brand is to blend hotel service with apartment finishes. To that end, AKA's rooms are outfitted with a kitchen, living room and storage space.

"We want to be something that the industry has not yet offered," she said. "Yet we're viewed as a value though we have not compromised the luxury."

AKA offers its guests all-inclusive amenities from laundry service, meeting room access, to in-room kitchen stocking. The rooms are also twice the size of a typical hotel room. The experience is like staying in a one-bedroom apartment with a butler.

This high-level of service attracts guests who need to stay from two weeks to a year. When a room at AKA is booked for one year, the pricing is guaranteed will not fluctuate like other hotels.

Beyond a comfortable stay and high-level functionality, the hotels are designed to be attractive enough to serve as party spaces. Penthouses typically have large, multi-environment entertaining spaces both indoors and out.

"We like to say that each building has its own design mojo with unique features," Paschall said. "We're picking spaces that have great architectural stories. It's at our guests comfort level."

The brand is looking to expand in major business cities across the country and the world.

"We're eager to do more in New York and D.C. — definitely L.A. and London," said Paschall. "We want to go to the markets that make sense for the end-user; We could certainly open in the BRIC countries."

While AKA hotels has grown by word of mouth and recommendation, with its expansion, word will need to spread carefully.

"The entertainment industry loves our brand and the paparazzi has not quite discovered us yet," said Paschall. "A lot of these folks have cooks and are on special diets so they take advantage of our full kitchens as well."

"Reaching out to those people is a mono-a-mono thing," she said. "It's still very relationship-oriented. The word of mouth is unbelievable for us."

Paschall added that it really does come down to the guest having a satisfying experience, and their human sales effort needs to be its strongest message.

"Our GMs are highly engaged and visible. They get to be the thespian of the property. One of the things about our brand that I think is special the GM must personally check-in each long stay guest. They know they can talk directly to the GM."

SOURCE: <http://www.boutiquedesign.com/article.aspx?ACID=2&AID=1006>