

Positive energy

Rezidor was an early adopter of a formal sustainability platform, and last year devised a new initiative targeting energy consumption and carbon emissions. Jim Banks talks to **Inge Huijbrechts**, the company's vice-president of responsible business, about the challenge of implementing an ambitious strategy across a large network of hotels in the context of an asset-light business strategy.

Due largely to its Scandinavian roots, Rezidor was among the first hotel groups to implement a sustainability policy, which it has consistently developed since 1989. In 2001, it added a social dimension to this platform; last year saw the launch of the Think Planet initiative, which aims, by 2016, to reduce energy consumption by 25% across the operator's network of 440 properties in 76 countries spanning Europe, the Middle East and Africa.

Rezidor intentionally set such an ambitious target as a way of pushing engagement across its expanding footprint and encouraging employees at every level to get involved. >>



"We looked at what our best practice hotels can do and used that as a basis for setting our goals," explains Inge Huijbrechts, vice-president for responsible business at the Rezidor Hotel Group.

asset-light by adding profitable management and franchise contracts to that portfolio. Following a strategic decision in 1997, it sold off all of its owned real estate and has since reduced

“ The Think Planet initiative aims to reduce energy consumption by 25% across the operator’s network of 440 properties by 2016. ”

"Yes, it is very ambitious, but it's certainly possible. Reducing energy consumption reduces our costs, so it also improves profitability. You have to be ambitious in order to motivate people."

One of the world's fastest-growing hotel companies, Rezidor has a portfolio that features brands Radisson Blu, Park Inn by Radisson, Hotel Missoni and Regent. Its strategy is to become increasingly

the proportion of leased properties, while increasing the proportion of managed and franchised hotels.

Think Planet is a group-wide energy-saving initiative that is intended to ensure Rezidor remains a sustainability leader by building on the progressive, environmentally friendly measures that some of its properties have already introduced and extending

them across the entire network, as well as investing in new energy-saving technologies and practices.

"For six years, we saw a continuous drop in energy consumption, but with the economic recovery that began in 2010, our business started to grow, so energy consumption first stagnated, then started to rise," explains Huijbrechts. "In many countries energy prices have also risen and in markets like the UK, where we have over 40 hotels, there is also a carbon tax. So, we are again focused on energy consumption as an area for investment and operational change."

Pillars of progress

Think Planet was developed by and driven through a specially formed, interdepartmental and cross-regional team made up of representatives from technical services, operations, purchasing, finance and responsible business. Their first task was to perform an energy audit, on the basis of which they developed a general Energy Action Plan listing the group's top energy priorities.

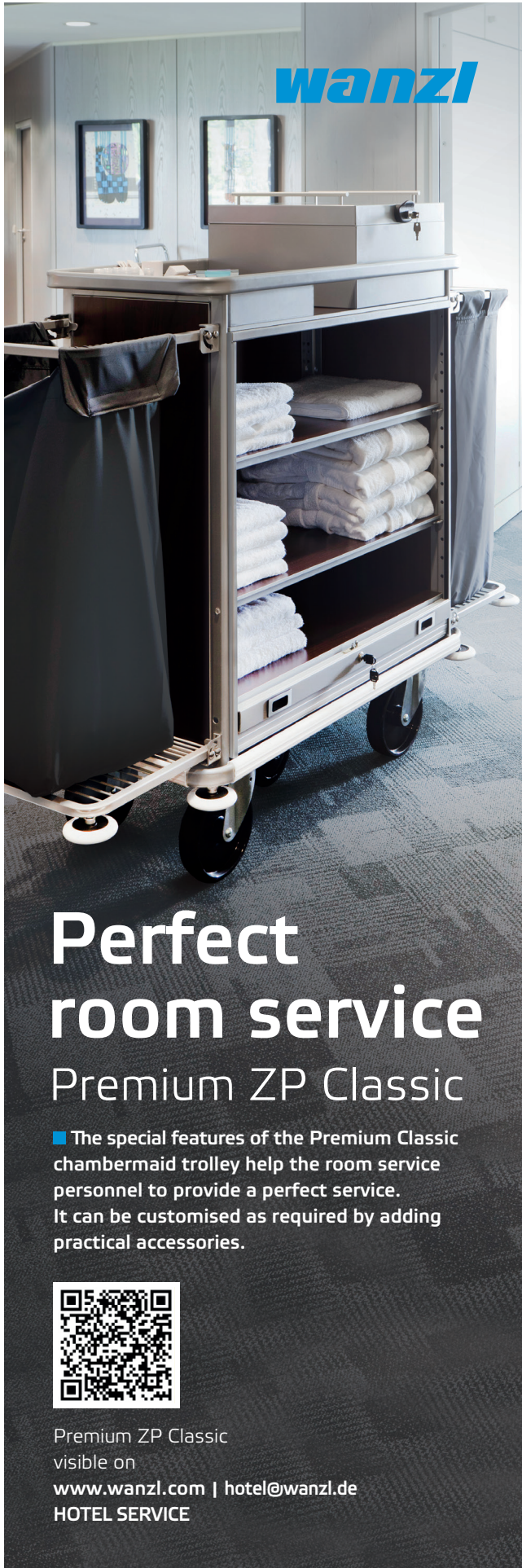
The plan rests on key pillars, the first being to improve employee awareness. The sharing of best practice, as well as the injection of some healthy competition, has already started to reap rewards.

"We have to show that everyone can be involved in saving energy and that it can be fun," says Huijbrechts. "We have our firefly mascot Lumi, who is the face of the initiative, but we also have a lot of training tools for staff in every part of a hotel, from the kitchen to the technical engineering teams.

"We also have the Go for Gold competition, in which hotels compete to see which one can save the most energy compared with the 2011 baseline. We are a people company and we want to build that innovative, fighting spirit among our employees.

"As part of the employee engagement programme, Lumi is touring our hotels getting employees to take pictures of innovative ways of saving energy, which we share with others. We also communicate data to our staff about energy usage and monthly costs. For example, to show them where they are in terms of how much energy they





Perfect room service

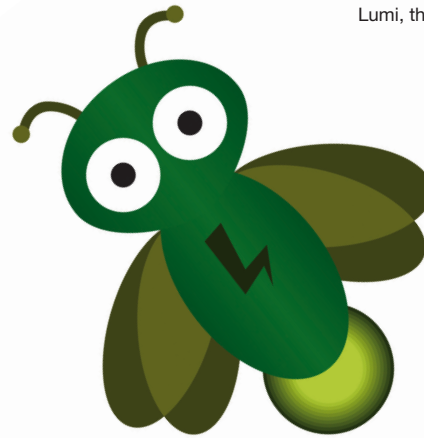
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Lumi, the mascot for Rezidor's Think Planet initiative.



save. It is about education and awareness, but also about fun," she adds.

The project's other pillars focus largely on capital investment in tools and technologies, which initially target those that have a quick return on investment (ROI). The biggest energy consumers in hotels are heating, ventilation and air-conditioning (HVAC) systems, lighting, sanitary hot water and cooling in the kitchen. Naturally, these are the areas where the biggest savings can be made by optimising the technical installations, so the group has looked at quick wins such as renewing insulation on pipes and optimising motion sensors that control lighting.

Larger capital expenditure projects also feature in the action plan, including a long-term lighting refit to move the group's leased and managed properties to LED technology. The group is also testing new technologies in key properties to test their effectiveness before rolling them out across the network.

“ In Germany, we have installed 20 intelligent ventilation systems in our hotel kitchens which save us three million kilowatt hours every year. ”

“We did a lot in 2012 in terms of testing technologies,” notes Huijbrechts. “At the Radisson Blu in Frankfurt, for example, we added an insulating film to the windows. This is a huge glass building and this technology has made a big difference. It delivers a million kilowatt hours of energy savings in a single year just at that one hotel.

“In Germany, we have also installed 20 intelligent ventilation systems in our hotel kitchens, which save us three million kilowatt hours every year; the ROI on that is less than a year. We are looking at every aspect of our operations. One of the things we are testing now is pool covers to keep the heat in the water.”

Learning lessons

The spirit of Think Planet lies in creating smart energy habits, such as turning off lights and equipment, switching heating and cooling systems to eco-mode, reporting energy-related issues and encouraging preventative maintenance. That is the basic

Inge Huijbrechts, Rezidor's VP for responsible business.

Blu since 2009,
Green since
1989



platform of any responsible energy policy, but this initiative goes further by encouraging innovation at every level.

"We have a top-down and bottom-up approach," explains Huijbrechts. "Ideas can come from the central team or they can come from individual hotels or regions. We have a network of 19 Think Planet champions who are at the level of general managers or above, and they drive the project in their countries or regions. We are setting up a comprehensive database of best practices that includes information on technologies, procedures and suppliers, and that everyone in the network can share.

"We get best practices from the best performing properties and we also look at those hotels that are the biggest consumers of energy and develop specific action plans for them. Some hotels have led the way, such as one property in St Petersburg, where the action plan has been broken down into specific plans for every area and, in some cases, individual staff members.

There are departmental and personal targets for energy saving.

"We are also working with specific owners, who are our partners to do individual energy audits on their properties," she adds.

Incentivising all of its 35,000 employees and working closely with property owners is key to making the Think Planet initiative work alongside the asset-light model that Rezidor has developed. So, too, is a consistent process for monitoring progress.

"With the size of our network we can't control everything in every property, but we can issue guidelines and educate people," says Huijbrechts. "We also look at essential KPIs, which are kilowatt hours per square metre and per occupied room. We have been tracking those measures since 2006 across all of our hotels and we look at the rankings on a monthly basis. This means that performance is constantly at the top of people's minds."

Although Think Planet has a long way to go before it can achieve its

Quick wins for Think Planet

- In Germany, Switzerland and Austria, the installation of intelligent, on-demand kitchen ventilation in 20 hotels saves three million kilowatt hours of energy a year and reduces annual carbon dioxide emissions by 700t.
- The installation of invisible reflective foil on the 4,000m² glass façade of the Radisson Blu Hotel Frankfurt insulates the building, reduces energy use by one million kilowatt hours a year and cuts annual carbon dioxide emissions by 400t.
- The installation of frequency controllers on guest and staff elevators at the Radisson Blu Royal in Brussels has saved energy and improved user comfort. Combined with the €240,000 installation of two condensation boilers and the retrofitting of 80% of its lights with LED bulbs, this cut the hotel's energy use per occupied room in 2012 by 16.5%.
- Optimal use of the building management system and fine-tuning the operating times of plant equipment has saved one million kilowatt hours at Radisson Blu Hotel Stansted Airport.
- The Radisson Blu Hotel Waterfront Cape Town reduced energy use by 28% in kilowatt hours per square metre and 17.5% in kilowatt hours per occupied room during 2012 by focusing on preventative maintenance, optimising the hotel's environmental controls, investing in speed drives for its two cooling towers to regulate chiller demand, and installing 1,396 LED bulbs in standard rooms and public areas.
- In 2012, the Radisson Blu Hotel Sandton Johannesburg reduced energy use by 25% by changing all 12V down-lights to LEDs.

targets, quick progress has already been made. The key is to build momentum by ensuring company-wide staff engagement; from that platform, real innovation can flourish. ■