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## **View From the Top: Hotel Business Magazine**

Inverlochy Castle Management International (ICMI) is on a mission to transform the hotel industry. Hotel Business caught up with the group's MD, Norbert Lieder, to get the lowdown.

Comprising of some of the most influential figures in the hospitality industry, including the highly regarded chef, Albert Roux OBE and Conde Nast editor Darius Sanai, ICMI is set to take the hospitality sector by storm over the next few years, seeing some of the country's best-loved establishments given the opportunity to return to their former glory.

Originally from Germany, Norbert Lieder certainly knows a thing or two about working in the hotel industry. Having completed an apprenticeship in Hamburg, where he was asked to do everything from fold sheets and wash laundry, to work in the bar and help in the kitchen, he spent several years working in his homeland, before moving to the UK. Working in hotels across the globe, including properties in Jakarta, St Lucia and Germany, he eventually settled in Scotland, and helped form the ICMI last year, where he is now managing director.

The company, which has already helped transform Inverness' Rockpool Reserve into one of the UK's top holiday destinations, seeing its restaurant win the highly-coveted 'best newcomer' award at the prestigious Scottish Restaurant Awards, is committed to helping the owners of under-performing small and medium sized establishments improve their prospects for the future by taking complete control of the management and running of the properties in question. This includes everything from dealing with the company's finances, to handling all recruitment processes within the hotel.

Commenting on the reaction to the adventurous project, Mr Lieder says, "The response has been fantastic and we have had a lot interest from hotels of all sizes and ratings. The past year has definitely been challenging for many people in the hospitality sector, but I do think we will begin to see a light at the end of the tunnel over the next 12 months.

"There is not really a secret to being successful; it often simply comes down to hard work, commitment and an unwavering determination to be the best," he reveals. "As a business owner, it is vital to ensure you are always looking for new ways of improving your revenue, whether that be through carefully-planned sales and marketing, or by re-evaluating what you currently offer."

Explaining that slashing your rates could do more damage than good, he adds, "While lowering your prices might seem like a great way of attracting new business in the short-term, it could be detrimental to your business, not to mention its takings, in the long-run. In this industry, the way people perceive your property is crucial, and while it is important to offer your guests the best possible value for their money, it's also vital to make sure your rates are in line with the style and image of the hotel as well. "

"In the current economic climate, businesses need to view their sales and marketing as an investment, rather than an unnecessary cost and actively promote their hotels as much as they possibly can, whether that be through contacting local travels agents and companies directly, or by actively increasing the amount of marketing they do," he continues. "Recruiting the right people is

also of utmost importance, as these will ultimately be the individuals representing your establishment to the world, so it is essential to make sure that they are dedicated to the industry and passionate about your enterprise.”

He adds, “The market has changed enormously over the past few years and a lot of the larger establishments that previously attracted a lot of custom from corporate clients are now moving into the leisure sector, meaning smaller enterprises will need to work that much harder to generate new business over the next year.

Speaking about his plans for the future, he says, “We had been planning to do something like this for quite some time and it has been amazing to see the huge difference we have made to our clients' businesses over the past year. Looking ahead, we are hoping to find other small and medium sized enterprises we can assist and hope to eventually have a whole portfolio of hotels we have helped rescue. While I am sure the next 12 months will be tough, I believe hard work, determination and a pro-active attitude will ensure we all have a better year.”