

NEWS

Is Virtuoso too big? How this exec leverages Kempinski's strengths

By Mary Gostelow on 8/20/2019

GOSTELOW REPORT—"As a single-brand luxury company, how do we position ourselves? How are we using our resources to best advantage to get through to those who still do not know about Kempinski?" asks Amanda Elder, chief commercial officer of Kempinski Hotels, headquartered in Geneva, Switzerland.

With 76 open properties in 31 countries, she generally considers Kempinski small enough to be agile and move quickly. When it comes to Virtuoso Travel Week (VTW), however, nine months of planning is required for the Las Vegas event, which finished on August 16.



"Some are questioning whether Virtuoso Travel Week is getting too big but, just like the proverbial elephant and the mouse, I think VTW, with its 6,515 delegates, and Kempinski, which has 16 hotels

Amanda Elder at Sadelle's, in Bellagio Hotel & Casino, as Virtuoso Travel Week draws to a close

that are Virtuoso members, can co-exist," the Australian declared.

This year she had four general managers among her total complement of 25: The number included, from Hotel Vier Jahreszeiten, Munich, Germany, not only the hotel's managing director, Holger Schroth, but also its executive chef, Christopher Engel, and Maike Menzel, 29, who has a Michelin star for her cooking at Schwarzreiter restaurant.

"We now claim a specific slot, culinary, before the main activities begin. This year, as we have done for the last three years, we brought over one of our highly accoladed chefs and hosted 20 Virtuoso travel advisers on the Saturday to a

gourmet dinner, this year presenting Maike's new-Bavarian cuisine," she explained. The guest list, which included only four advisers who were at the 2018 dinner, consisted of some of Kempinski's best adviser partners, plus some whom are considered influencers in specific markets, and some new blood.

"On the Sunday we hosted a come-when-you-can Oktoberfest brunch, timed for 12 noon through to 3 o'clock. There was lots of competition at this time slot as several companies host brunches, but this year we had 150 travel advisers come by for really authentic Oktoberfest dishes, and beer in big glass tankards."

Then come the main work sessions of VTW. Monday to Thursday are always day-long speed-dating slots, four minutes in the morning and 10 minutes in the afternoon. Travel advisers stay put, at their designated tables, and it is the hoteliers who have to move from one table to another.

"I leave the hoteliers to do that, though I did a specific speed-dating for the media which was tremendously useful. I got two great opportunities for Cabrits Resort & Spa Kempinski Dominica, which opens this October," said Elder.

Her hoteliers are free to network or entertain as they want on most evenings, though there was a small cocktail one night. Come the Friday, Kempinski started thanking its guests for finding time to come to its events during such a busy period: It is reckoned that during the entire VTW there are well over 850 events, plus probably an equal number of unrecorded cocktails.

When it was all over Elder went on to a gathering of meeting planners, in Colorado, after which she headed back to Europe.

"In November, I will begin planning for next year. I have a very good relationship with Aria, one of the three VTW host properties. I ask them which new and exciting venue they would suggest (this year its Catch restaurant was a natural choice, and we were able to add a few decorations to make it seem more Oktoberfest)", she admitted. Having sorted her 2020 venues, for the Saturday and Sunday, she will bring Kempinski's hotels into the planning picture. Guest lists are compiled, and in the spring save-the-date notes are sent out.

"2020 will be something special. We already have another Michelin chef to profile, and it will also be the 10th birthday of Kempinski's signature ladies-in-red social hostesses," she smiled.

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