Signalkart Presents

ISSUE 002

Insightable

CONVERSATIONS WITH LEADERS

In conversation with

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THE LEELA
PALACES HOTELS RESORTS

On Enterprise AI
and Better decisions

QUESTION 01

You've grown from selling individual properties to leading commercial strategy across luxury hospitality brands. What changes most in the way you think when you're responsible for revenue across an entire business rather than just selling rooms?

SUMANA'S PERSPECTIVE

I think the biggest change is that earlier I was more focused on achieving my sales targets and bringing in business. Today, my responsibility is much broader. I must look at the overall business and understand how my decisions impact the hotel.

It is not just about selling rooms. I need to look at occupancy, ADR, RevPAR, F&B, banquet revenue, and profitability. At the same time, I need to make sure that the business we take on is the right business for the hotel.

For example, if we are taking a group, I need to understand whether the rates are right, what additional F&B revenue it can bring, whether we are displacing higher-rated business, and how it fits into our overall strategy.

I also believe that as a commercial head, you cannot work in isolation. You need to be aligned with Revenue Management, Operations, F&B, and the entire team.

For me, the biggest shift is from achieving a sales target to taking ownership of the hotel's overall commercial performance.

QUESTION 02

Hospitality has always been built on relationships. As AI starts influencing lead prioritization, pricing, forecasting, and customer intelligence, where do you think technology genuinely makes sales leaders better, and where should it never replace human judgment?

SUMANA'S PERSPECTIVE

I think AI is going to be very useful for us in hospitality, especially when it comes to data, identifying accounts, understanding demand and helping us prioritise our efforts.

Today, we have so much information available, but sometimes we spend a lot of time collecting and analysing it. If AI can help us identify the right accounts, understand booking patterns and highlight opportunities, it will allow the sales team to spend more time in front of the client.

But I don't think technology can replace the human connect. Hospitality is a people business, and relationships still matter a lot.

For example, a system may show that an account has not generated much business in the past. But if I have a strong relationship with that client and know that they are opening a new office or have a large upcoming project, I would look at that opportunity differently.

Similarly, when it comes to negotiations, handling a sensitive guest situation or deciding how to manage a key client, I believe human judgment is very important.I see AI as a support system that helps us make better and faster decisions, but the final judgment and relationship management will always remain with the people.

QUESTION 03

Every commercial leader is surrounded by numbers occupancy, ADR, RevPAR, pipeline, events, corporate accounts, and guest trends. Which metrics do you instinctively trust first when making a difficult commercial decision?

SUMANA'S PERSPECTIVE

Honestly, I don't think you can depend on just one number. I always try to look at the bigger picture first.

My starting point would be to understand where we stand against budget, forecast and last year. Then I would look at occupancy, ADR and RevPAR to understand what is really happening with the business.

After that, I would go deeper into the segment mix. Are we getting the right corporate business? Is our transient demand strong? What is the MICE pipeline looking like? Are we converting the opportunities that we have?

I also pay a lot of attention to the quality of the pipeline. For me, a pipeline is not just about the number of leads. I want to know how many are qualified, what the potential revenue is, how close they are to conversion and what the chances of closing the business are.

If occupancy is behind budget but ADR is strong, I would not immediately suggest reducing rates. I would first try to understand whether the issue is demand, market penetration, account production, or conversion.

The numbers help me identify the gap, but my experience and market understanding help me decide what action to take.

QUESTION 04

Luxury hospitality is competing as much on perception as on property. What do you think creates lasting differentiation today when every guest can compare prices, reviews, and experiences in seconds?

SUMANA'S PERSPECTIVE

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I believe today luxury is not just about the product or the room. Guests have access to a lot of information, and they can compare hotels, prices and reviews very easily.

For me, the real differentiation comes from the experience we deliver and how consistently we deliver it.

A hotel needs to have a clear identity and a strong product, but that alone is not enough. The guest experience must match what we promise. It starts from the first interaction with the sales team and continues throughout the guest’s stay.

As a sales leader, I also feel that we need to understand what is important to each customer. A corporate client may look for reliability and convenience, while a wedding planner may focus on flexibility, service, and execution. A leisure guest may be looking for a memorable experience.

We cannot offer the same approach to everyone.

For me, luxury is about making the guest feel understood, looked after and confident that we will deliver what we promise. That is what builds trust, repeat business and long-term relationships.

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QUESTION 05

Imagine every commercial signal-occupancy, corporate demand, guest behaviour, events, market trends, and pricing, came together in one intelligent view. Which decisions would become dramatically faster, and which decisions should always stay in human hands?

SUMANA'S PERSPECTIVE

I think having all the information in one place would make our lives much easier as commercial leaders. Today, a lot of time goes into collecting information from different systems and different teams. If we had one intelligent view, we could identify the gaps and opportunities much faster.

For example, we could quickly understand which accounts are producing, where we are behind budget, which dates need more business, and which leads should be prioritised. It would also help us with forecasting, demand analysis and making better decisions around pricing and segment mix.

I think it would make our weekly commercial reviews much more productive because we would be spending less time gathering data and more time discussing the actions required.

But I would not want everything to be decided by a system. There are certain decisions where human judgment is essential.

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QUESTION 05

SUMANA'S PERSPECTIVE

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If I am negotiating with a key client, handling a sensitive guest situation, or deciding whether to continue investing in an account that has future potential, I would want to understand the complete picture, including the relationship and the market situation.

Technology can tell us what is happening and help us identify opportunities, but we still need people to understand why it is happening and decide what is best for the business.

I think the future is about using technology to make our teams more efficient, while ensuring that the human connect and accountability remain strong.

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“Let AI surface the opportunity. Let people make the decision.

Use data to move faster, while keeping relationships and human judgment at the centre..

Sumana Bose Choudhary

JOIN THE CONVERSATION

Where could AI help your commercial team move faster without replacing human judgment?

Share your perspective in the comments .