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ANATARA

Transforming an authentically Thai resort experience into an award-winning global hospitality brand.



Overview

When the first Anantara Resort & Spa opened in Hua Hin, Thailand in 2001, it was designed to be a unique hospitality experience that would immerse guests in an authentically indigenous Thai experience while still including all the amenities and services of a luxury resort. Ahead of the boutique resort wave that would soon emerge in the Thai hospitality market, Anantara was unique in offering guests a more personalised experience of affordable luxury that would celebrate its surroundings, rather than present a whitewashed five-star hotel environment. Both the resort and spa's service cultures were grounded in the warmth of the local culture, while the graceful architecture was designed to be reminiscent of a traditional Thai seaside village.

As Anantara opened resorts and spas in the Golden Triangle in Thailand's far north and the southern Island of Koh Samui, it continued to take inspiration from its Thai setting. Tying itself to the local Thai culture surrounding each resort, Anantara became known and respected both domestically and abroad as an indigenously Thai brand that celebrated the traditions, architecture and culture of its destinations. From its name, taken from the ancient Sanskrit, to its logo featuring traditional Thai symbols of hospitality, Anantara was firmly grounded in its Thai heritage.

This strong indigenously Thai branding, which had worked very well for Anantara as it grew in Thailand, presented a dilemma in 2005 when Anantara decided to open its first resort and spa outside Thailand – Anantara Maldives. At the same time, the resort brand was exploring further projects in the Middle East, while its Anantara Spa brand was expanding into China and Africa to operate in non-branded resorts. At this crossroads, Anantara came to Keen.

The Challenge

Global expansion of the brand demanded a globally applicable brand identity – one that would be instantly identified as Anantara but not be seen as specifically Thai.

One of the original Anantara brand's greatest strengths was its unique combination of affordable luxury and sophisticated interpretation of indigenous Thai culture. The challenge with re-branding Anantara was to create a brand built for global expansion that still did not lose that local touch and feel. Furthermore, the new brand identity needed to have flexibility to include more than just resorts – the company was already looking into more diversified developments including serviced suites, residences, private villas, and other opportunities. How could Anantara build on the strengths of its existing brand and introduce itself on the international stage?

A crucial part of this global expansion included the need for a new internet and website strategy. Beyond just refashioning the brand identity, Anantara needed to become more tech-savvy and web user-friendly. Its online identity, created when the brand launched in 2001, was now at risk of becoming outdated as web technology had evolved to include greater capabilities than the current site was offering.

In order to remain competitive in an increasingly online-focused marketplace and to ensure the success of an increasingly diverse portfolio of properties, Anantara's web platform and presence needed to be overhauled and adapted. To promote and utilise its new identity, Anantara needed to be on the forefront of web-based hospitality strategy.

The Solution

Seeing as Thai and Asian elements were inherent to the Anantara brand – from the logo design to the philosophy of service – Keen decided to ensure that those roots remained intact by grounding the brand in Thailand's famously warm service culture and retaining Thai elements in different outlets (a Thai restaurant, Thai-based spa treatments, Thai cooking classes, etc). Along with these elements, the brand also began incorporating distinct flavours of each destination into that specific property. Instead of being a strong indigenously Thai brand, Anantara became a strong indigenous brand, specific to the location. Local traditions, foods, architecture, décor excursions and more are now integral to the Anantara offering.

One part indigenous experience, one part Asian hospitality, one part luxury resort – with this recipe, Anantara's new identity became an ideal platform for capturing the emerging soft adventure/luxury traveller segment of the marketplace. This new group of travellers sought experiences that were authentic and allowed them to engage with the local culture – while still providing luxurious amenities at the end of the day. As part of the positioning to appeal to this group, a brand culture developed around the idea of creating one-of-a-kind stories during your stay at any Anantara resort. Beyond such expected details as impeccable service and luxurious décor, the brand was positioned as experiential, offering guests a chance to turn their time at the resort into a personally tailored interaction with the destination and all it had to offer.

The experiential and accessible nature of the refreshed branding did not apply just to the end user. When creating the new website and strategy for web presence, Keen made sure that the accessibility and personalisation extended to this area as well. For instance, the website was founded on a rich content management system with multiple levels of access – making the site a powerful and easy-to-use tool for the group's marketing, PR, development, spa, and property teams. In addition to internal access, a web portal for travel trade professionals, called TravelPro, has recently been set-up to allow trade partners to manage bookings, find exclusive promotions and more within the Anantara website itself.

On the front end of the Anantara website, the focus has been on creating the opportunity for rich online journeys. Through the website, a guest's Anantara story begins from the first click. From an editorial tone of voice filled with specific details and experiences to interactive content like blogs by staffers, webcams of local flora and fauna, and dedicated microsites to destinations, weddings, and meetings, the website was designed to immerse the user in the Anantara experience before they even step into the resort's lobby.

Finally, the new web strategy for Anantara included an e-marketing strategy that incorporates, among other web tools, ongoing search engine optimisation techniques and action plans to maintain the website's prominence in Google's page rankings.

Keen continues to serve as a consultant on SEO and e-marketing strategies, helping to set targets, benchmark and monitor online revenue in tandem with the resorts' teams. Through monthly work-in-progress meetings, Keen and Anantara collaborate to ensure that Anantara's website is constantly taking full advantage of the many new tools and methods available online, as well as continuing to provide design and editorial support for brand collaterals and ongoing consultancy on strengthening and evolving the brand's image.

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