

Hard Rock Hotel Chicago: Competing with the Big Brands

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APPROPRIATE USAGE

This case is best used with multiple groups of 5-8 members. Instructor should assign group members based on a distribution of skills and assign a leader and project manager for each. This case teaches the use of research, collaborative analysis and iterative problem solving. It is best used in advanced MBA Business Architecture courses students take after having completed their core courses. Instructors are highly encouraged to invite other faculty, past students and industry experts to attend final presentations and serve on the jury. This jury of experts helps to ensure that students are working at a professional level, successfully communicating their ideas and accessing real-world expertise.

CLIENT-SPECIFIC CONTENT

Content describing the Hard Rock Hotel, its market and its challenges have been supplied by Justin Natale, Ecommerce Manager, Hard Rock Hotel Chicago.

Introduction

Hard Rock Hotel Chicago opened its doors in 2004. Located at a prime intersection—N. Michigan Avenue and South Water Street—the hotel is positioned as a key hospitality player in downtown Chicago, with 381 guest rooms and 9,500 square feet of meeting and event space.

A AAA Four-Diamond property, Hard Rock Hotel features everything considered as an upscale hotel, from bellmen and concierges to an on-site restaurant (China Grill), in-room dining and a fitness center. Most recently, the hotel has welcomed Angels & Kings Chicago, the rock-inspired and celebrity-affiliated bar/nightclub, to occupy its lobby; the bar had been previously located in Chicago's River North neighborhood. In addition, all 381 hotel guest rooms are in the process of being updated/renovated with new carpet, paint, décor and lighting. This large investment in guest accommodations is scheduled to be completed in Spring 2011.

Housed in the Carbide & Carbon Building, Hard Rock Hotel's physical location is amongst its greatest assets. The building's Art Deco details complement the musically inspired hotel of the present. The building was designed by the Burnham brothers, sons of famed Chicago architect Daniel Burnham and was completed in 1929. The creation myth states that the building was created to replicate a champagne bottle, with a green body and gold accents upon the tower. Sort of fitting, right? After a lengthy restoration prior to becoming Hard Rock Hotel Chicago, the Carbide & Carbon building was deemed a Chicago Landmark in 1996. In 2007, the City of Chicago honored the building's architectural contribution to the city skyline; the golden tower of the building has been illuminated at night ever since.

Hard Rock Hotel Chicago and Becker Ventures

The hotel is owned by Becker Ventures (BV), operated by Becker Lodging (BL), and branded by Hard Rock International (HRI). BV owns the real estate and the operating business. BL is responsible to the owner and the brand for the day to day operations of the asset. The hotel licenses the Hard Rock brand from HRI. As a licensee, Hard Rock Hotel Chicago must operate within the brand guidelines of Hard Rock International, including marketing and certain operating and service brand standards.

Becker Ventures, LLC, was established in 1998 by Charles E. Becker (owner and Chairman) with the purpose of investing in a variety of business ventures, including manufacturing, real estate and services industries. Since its founding, Becker Ventures has expanded both professionally and geographically, investing in industrial, private equity placements, marketable securities, and the development, management and marketing of income producing real estate. One of its many investments, Hard Rock Hotel Chicago, is located in the fully restored Carbide and Carbon Building on Chicago's magnificent mile. Becker Ventures ensures stability and success to each new investment by bringing a wealth of operating insight, financial expertise and proven leadership. Also under the Becker Ventures umbrella is Becker Entertainment, which explores the creative and innovative opportunities that exist by virtue of Becker Ventures' real estate assets and Becker Lodging which provides owner-centric hotel management services.

Becker Lodging, LLC was created in 2005 when Becker Ventures took over management of the Hard Rock Hotel Chicago. The goal of BL is to manage properties from an ownership perspective maximizing profitability.

Hard Rock International - With a total of 169 venues in 51 countries, including 133 cafes and 15 Hotels/Casinos, Hard Rock International is one of the world's most globally recognized brands. Beginning with an Eric Clapton guitar, Hard Rock owns the world's greatest collection of music memorabilia, which is displayed at its locations around the globe. Hard Rock is also known for its collectible fashion and music-related merchandise, Hard Rock Live performance venues and an award-winning website. In addition to the two flagship Seminole Hard Rock Hotels and Casinos in Tampa and Hollywood, Fla., Hard Rock Hotels/Casinos are located in Las Vegas, Biloxi, Orlando, Chicago, San Diego, Pattaya, Bali, Macau, Penang, Singapore and Punta Cana. Additional hotel and casino projects have been announced in Panama, scheduled to open in 2012; and Hungary, Dubai and Abu Dhabi, scheduled to open in 2013. Hard Rock International is owned by Seminole Hard Rock Entertainment, Inc.

Hard Rock Hotel Chicago - Located on Chicago's famous Michigan Avenue, Hard Rock Hotel Chicago gives guests a hotel experience unlike any other with a combination of rich architectural legacy and contemporary amenities. Located in the historic Carbide and Carbon Building, Hard Rock Hotel Chicago is one of Hard Rock International's only urban locations under its umbrella of 169 venues in 51 countries, including 133 cafes and 15 Hotels/ Casinos, making Hard Rock International one of the world's most globally recognized brands.

Primary Contact

Your primary contact will be Justin Natale, Ecommerce Manager, and dynamo. Justin has a lot on his plate, so please be respectful of his time.

Please use the forum in CRTeacher to ask your questions. This way, Justin's answers can be read by all students, saving him time. Justin is also available by appointment.

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Case Statement

Our students will act as a single Business Architecture consulting firm challenged with showing the Hard Rock management a vision for increasing market share and profitability 20%, which is firmly supported with hard empirical data. We will illustrate the changes and adjustments to their current structures and processes that are necessary to achieve this vision, prepare a roadmap for getting there, provide a detailed projection of the expected costs and revenues over the next five years, and include anything else that is necessary for the Hard Rock Hotel leadership to feel confident in making an immediate decision to proceed.

Glossary

Opaque: Websites like hotwire.com, where you don't see which hotel you're booking

GDS: Global Distribution System; used by travel agents, Preferred Hotel Group, etc.

Extranet / OTAs: Online travel agencies (Expedia, Travelocity, etc.)

The Hard Rock Hotel in Context

Hard Rock Hotel Chicago is a true independent property, which creates advantages and challenges.

Our Advantages

As an independently owned and operated property, Hard Rock Hotel Chicago has advantages that global chain competitors don't:

We can think! This may sound silly but our decisions are not based on corporate policies that are meant to be one size fits all. We can evaluate a situation and do what make sense. We can try, try, fail, try, and try again. We can move quickly and make decisions that have a real impact.

All of these things can be done *quickly*. Without the bureaucratic red tape, the process of thinking outside the box and implementing new ideas can occur with a speed that global hotels can't match.

Ultimately, we can think for ourselves, act on our ideas, evaluate their success and keep the good while purging the bad....all at our own pace. Hard Rock Hotel Chicago's partnership with DePaul is case-in-point.

Our Challenges

Our property has 3 main challenges:

- Competing with the big brands
- Brand expectations
- Property awareness

As an independent property how do we compete with the big brands? The big brands have significant advantages when it comes to marketing/advertising, distribution, and loyalty programs. How do we compete with the multi-million dollar marketing campaigns of Hilton, Hyatt, Marriott, Starwood? Hotels with a major brand can count on 30-60% of the reservations coming from the brand via a global sales team and branded website. Without this distribution channel, how do we achieve our market share or more? Independent hotel can look to the online travel agencies (OTA's) like Expedia, Orbitz, Priceline but they are a very costly channel. Is there another way? With thousands of hotels worldwide the major brands have millions of loyal customers they can count on through their loyalty programs. Can we steal any of these customers? How can we incentivize them to try our hotel? Or are we just wasting our time.

Hard Rock is one of the top 10 recognized brands in the world. What do you think of when you hear Hard Rock? A café? Memorabilia? Hard Rock Vegas? It's fantastic to have such a globally recognized brand and the advantages are clearly significant. When guest arrive on property they are often surprised by what they see. They know Hard Rock but what does that mean to them? Many guests comment that

our property is much nicer than they expected. Others are disappointed that we do not have a café on property and don't have more memorabilia. Some arrive expecting a party like Vegas or a more leisure based property as Orlando. Compared to any other Hard Rock Hotel, Chicago is uniquely historic and cosmopolitan. No pools. No casino. No palm trees. The Chicago market is diverse and unique. We need to secure corporate business during the week and still be able to attract the weekend leisure guest. How do we find the right customers who love our brand? How do we meet their needs and expectations when they arrive?

Although the Hard Rock brand has been around for 40 years the hotel division is still very new. Most people do not know we exist. Without spending millions of dollars on advertising, how do we let people know we are here? When we launch new programs at the property how do we communicate it to the public? How do we capitalize on the Hard Rock brand recognition?

Our Culture

Our People

Hard Rock Hotel Chicago is not defined by diamonds nor stars. It is not a thread count, broadband speed or designer uniform. Hard Rock Hotel Chicago is an attitude and a confidence. It's a passion for service and love of the arts. It's the substance behind the bling of a 100 million dollar building. Hard Rock Hotel Chicago is people. Good, soulful people. Hell bent on giving our guests an unforgettable hotel experience.

Our Plan

Embrace the Hard Rock brand. Rock out or get out.
Drive revenue by creating value through experiences on and off property.
Emphasize the "and" and not the "or".
Convert every hotel guest into a Hard Rock fanatic.
Identify our market and speak to them...Online...And often.
Create a culture of "thinkers" (attitude & capability). Use your brain, not your computer.
Own the Chicago music and entertainment scene. No excuses.
Try. Test. Experiment. Fix. Try again. Keep what works. Keep on trying.
Track everything. EVERYthing.

Our Purpose

To cultivate a team and environment united by an unprecedented spirit for service and excellence that manifests into exceptional experiences for our guests and each other.

Key Opportunities

Below are a few specific areas where we think we have opportunity that we have yet to fully capitalize on.

- Converting OTA guests to our own! Using the OTA as a distribution channel and a marketing tool are keys to our success. How do we convert these customers to our own? Once a guest from Orbitz arrives on property how do we turn them into our customer so they book direct next time?
- Capitalize on our F&B outlets. Our new bar AK is bringing in thousands of people each month to our property. How do we convert them, their friends & families, and their companies to our guests?
- Social Media – We recently completed a contest on facebook to win tickets to our AK grand opening party with Pete Wentz. This led to over 2 millions tweets. How do we convert tweets and facebook users to customers? How do we track?

Demographic Information

Competitive Set

We were going to share this with you but on second thought... Who do you think our competitive set its?

Type of Business

Transient – 65%

Group – 35%

Sources of Business

Extranet (OTAs)

Opaque OTAs

Hotel Website

GDS

Voice

Group Sales

Research Tools

<http://www.strglobal.com/>

<http://www.hvs.com/>

<http://www.choosechicago.com/Pages/default.aspx>

<http://www.stayillinois.com/>

The New Channels

The world of business discovered social media in 2009. Business professionals are setting up professional Facebook pages, groups and fan pages for themselves and their companies in a way they never did with LinkedIn, MySpace or Plaxo. Those with public profiles are Twittering, and all are experimenting to understand how these highly engaging methods work and the role they will play in a well-structured

personal/professional communication program alongside the more traditional video conferences, phone calls, letters, emails, meetings, dinners, events, etc.

Each is a superb game-changing tool that promises to enable the business professional to maintain many more quality relationships than was ever previously possible. Overuse can cause distress among those who receive excessive or wrong communications, while leaving little time for work, especially as more and more tools become available.

A balance must be struck and an architecture must be adopted that identifies which of these social methods to use when, with what audience, with what frequency, using what messaging schema, in combination with which other methods, using which interface, providing for what new capabilities in the future, etc. Those who master this **Social Architecture** will enjoy great efficiencies of effort and outdistance their competitors. A social architecture for the client is an expected part of your deliverable.

Your End Deliverable

A presentation to the leadership of the Hard Rock Hotel Chicago describing your vision and supporting information, as described in the [Case Statement](#) section above.

The students will act as a single consulting firm of highly-trained professional Business Architects. They will take a holistic view of the Client's organization, performing a global scan and then narrowing down to the areas of specific concern identified by the Client.

Students will work individually and on both research teams and solutioning groups as described below. Each will have numerous deliverables throughout the quarter. Students will be assigned to teams and groups in class.

Careful Wording

You will need to be extremely sensitive to your client's personal feelings and political challenges. While you are compelled to present your honest views—it's what the client is depending on, you are also compelled to present your views in a way that will be most palatable to the client. This will keep the doors of dialogue open and allow inspired solutions to progress and take hold.

Process & Intermediate Assignments

Tackling an open-ended problem like this requires primary research, client interaction, information sharing, freeform thought and detailed data creation. It can seem daunting at first if you don't have experience doing this.

The process we will follow is designed to break the problem down into smaller, predefined steps due on a weekly basis.

Have you ever turned in an assignment and wondered if what you said made sense and was correct? It's hard to build on knowledge in which you are not confident. This quarter, we will write short papers about our brainstorming ideas and the Five Models, and also review and evaluating each others' to

broaden our own view and understanding the opportunities and challenges more deeply. This will help to lessen our anxiety and make sure we are on the right track.

Pattern for the Quarter

Week 1.

- a. Welcome students, introductions, explain quarter
- b. Students assigned to Groups*, which will solve the Client's needs.
- c. Each Group member is also assigned to a Research Team*.
 - i. These Teams will perform research and analyze one of the '5 Base Models' for the Hotel, and then bring their expertise back to their Groups. The Research Teams' assigned model is found on the Powerpoint slide shown at the end of class.
 - ii. The Teams will communicate with the Client over the next several weeks, requesting information, talking to stakeholders, etc. (Students will schedule these contacts with Justin Natale, the single point of contact for the Client.)
- d. *One student is asked to serve as a Research Assistant for the class. The Research Assistant will:
 - Collect, collate and distribute students' papers and presentations.
 - Determine how papers and presentations will be formatted and submitted. (Must accommodate images, tables, links and attachments.)
 - Provide general support for the online classroom.

Week 2.

- a. Client will attend the last hour of class to talk about their marketplace and organization, charge students with the work to be done and tell them who to talk to about what.
 - i. Group Leaders will meet and greet the Client beforehand during the break.
 - ii. Group Project Managers and Research Assistant will meet with Justin Natale during the break to coordinate site visits and information gathering needs.
 - iii. Format: Student introductions, Client introductions. Client presentation. Questions.

Week 3.

- a. **Brainstorming Paper due (Individual):** Each student will attempt to solve the Client's needs, providing a "Vision Story" for their future.
 - i. 1-2 pg papers due electronically to Research Assistant before class in the way the Research Assistant has requested it.
 - ii. Research Assistant will assemble, collate, number, remove names and make papers available to students so they can do next week's assignment.
 - iii. The Research Assistant will send a copy with names to the Client as an "Idea Bank".
 - iv. Grading Rubric:
 1. Does your solution solve all of the Client's needs?
 2. Does it reflect the expected conditions in the marketplace five years into the future?
 3. Is it a correct and practical solution given the contextual information we have been provided?

4. Have you provided empirical support for your recommendations?
5. Does your solution help to move the discussion forward?
6. Does it provide us with a path for moving forward?
7. Does it illustrate unstated needs, barriers and opportunities?
8. Is your paper concise and communicated well?

Week 4.

- a. **Brainstorming Evaluation due (Individual):** Students will critique other student's papers, and identify areas of deeper knowledge that Groups must possess to fully address the Client's needs. These missing areas of knowledge will be assigned as research topics to the Research Teams.
 - i. Students will each evaluate 3 papers, the numbers of which can be found in the updated Team-Group Chart found in CRTeacher.com. (If a paper you are to evaluate is not available, or if it is your paper, choose another at random.)
 - ii. Evaluation Criteria: If you were CEO, would you give it the go-ahead, did it solve the problem, will it be easy to implement, will it be a profitable solution, does the client have the skills and resources in-house to be able to implement this, what research is needed to inform this solution?
 - iii. Length: 1-2 pages total
 - iv. Due electronically to Research Assistant before class in the way the Research Assistant has requested it.
 - v. Research Assistant will assemble, collate and distribute papers to students and Client.
 - vi. Grading Rubric:
 1. Is your evaluation comprehensive?
 2. Does it identify weaknesses in the paper's solution, practicality and empirical support for the Client's needs?
 3. Does your critique identify new opportunities not previously considered for moving forward?
 4. Does your critique identify needed areas of knowledge?
- b. Each Research Team will be assigned a research topic in class.

Week 5.

- a. Model and Research Topic information gathering

Week 6.

- a. **Base Models Paper due (Research Teams):** Research Teams will create one of the Five Base Models describing the current state of the Client's organization. (Some models are easier than others. The teams assigned harder models will be assigned lighter research topics.)
 - i. See Team/Group Chart in CRTeacher.com to learn which model has been assigned to your Research Team.
 - ii. Paper Length: As needed to explain your model.
 - iii. Papers will include a definition of the model, explanation of what your model is, what it does, how it works, the information it provides and how this model should be used.

1. Teams can read the several assigned articles about the models found in CRTeacher, and perform other research as necessary to understand the nature of their model.
- iv. Teams should make a note of any part of their model that doesn't make sense, or doesn't apply to the client's situation.
- v. Models:
 1. Superscape Model: The competitive landscape within which the Hotel operates.
 2. Business Model: How exactly does the Hotel make a profit? – target audiences, channels, products and services, supporting operations, value proposition, differentiation from competitors, profit evaluation financials, key performance indicators (KPIs)
 3. Operational Model: The major structures, processes and operational business rules – e.g., reservations, housekeeping
 4. Organizational Model: Job descriptions, cultural norms, reporting relationships – formal and informal
 5. Corporate Governance Model: How you manage this organization – how you talk to the various people within the organization, compensation, benefits, incentives, monitoring and performance measurements, corporate business rules, etc. – whatever it takes, whatever works
- vi. Due electronically to Research Assistant before class in the way the Research Assistant has requested it.
- vii. Research Assistant will assemble, collate and distribute papers to students and Client.
- viii. Grading Rubric:
 1. Does your model include all of the components necessary to properly portray a complete picture of the organization from your model's point-of-view?
 2. Does your model faithfully portray a correct description of the Client's organization from your model's point-of-view, given the contextual information we have been provided by the Client?
 3. Does it provide sufficient detail to tell the full story?
 4. Is your paper written concisely?
 5. Have you identified parts of your model that don't make sense, or don't apply to the client's situation?

Week 7.

- a. **Base Models Evaluation due (Individual):** Each student will write an evaluation of the other four Base Models, those their Research Team did not create.
 - i. 1-2 pg papers
 - ii. Inquiries
 1. Is each model described so that it makes sense to you, including a definition of the model, explanation of what the model is, what it does, how it works, the information it provides and how the model should be used. If not, what are some of the weaknesses?
 2. Does each model correctly capture the Client's current state? Is anything included that shouldn't be or is something missing?

3. Do the 5 Base Models, taken together, provide a complete picture of the Client's organization? If not, what information is not provided for and what type of 'frame' would be created to capture it?
 4. What additional knowledge areas do we need to research in order to provide our Client with the best possible solutions?
- iii. Due electronically to Research Assistant before class in the way the Research Assistant has requested it.
 - iv. Research Assistant will assemble, collate and distribute papers to students and Client.
 - v. Grading Rubric:
 1. Is your evaluation comprehensive?
 2. Does it identify weaknesses in the model descriptions or the models themselves? What additional frames do you suggest?
 3. Does your critique identify needed areas of knowledge?
 4. Is your paper written concisely?

Week 8.

- a. **Research Papers due SUNDAY EVENING (Research Teams):** Research teams will research topics assigned to them from time-to-time during the quarter and report their findings.
 - i. Due electronically to Research Assistant before class in the way the Research Assistant has requested it.
 - ii. Research Assistant will assemble, collate and distribute papers to students and provide to the Client by end-of-day MONDAY so they have sufficient time to read the papers before their visit to the class.
 - iii. Grading Rubric:
 1. Does your paper include all of the research topics assigned?
 2. Is the research supported by empirical fact from academically valid sources?
 3. Does it provide sufficient detail to tell the full story?
 4. Is your paper written concisely?
 5. Have you identified areas that require further research and analysis?
- b. Client will attend the last hour of class to answer students' questions, brainstorm ideas with students and arrive at final assignments for the 4 Groups.

Week 9.

- a. Group work

Week 10.

- a. **Practice Presentations at the School (Groups)** in front of a mock audience. Not all group members need to present.
- b. Note: It is very risky, and often costly, for an organization to embrace a new course. To provide comfort to decision-makers, the group will provide empirical data to support their recommendations, as well as a list of potential risks to implementation with an associated strategy to mitigate each risk.
- c. Process:
 - i. The Research Assistant will present an overview of the assignment (10 minutes), including the decision context, the Client's needs, the approach taken, the structure of the presentations and anything else a person who has no prior

knowledge of the case needs in order to participate knowledgeably and to share their expertise fruitfully.

- ii. Each Group will, in turn, have 20 minutes (of presentation time followed by Q&A) to:
 1. Introduce its members and discuss the applicability of their skillsets.
 2. Give their presentation, which must include:
 - a. The solution.
 - b. Revised Base Models.
 - c. Additional frames needed to tell the story.
 - d. 5-Year Financial Analysis: Illustrating the cost of implementing the changes contemplated and the sources of offsetting cashflows that prove these to be wise investments.
 - e. Implementation Plan: high-level plan showing the steps involved in implementing your solution. (simple Gantt chart)
 - f. Risk Analysis & Mitigation Plan.
 - g. Communication Plan.
 3. Distribute a one-page, single-sided handout at the end that the CEO can use as a “dashboard” for the implementation of your recommendations. It should include:
 - a. Recap of the findings
 - b. The questions the Client will need to answer to validate the group’s assumptions
 - c. Next steps.
- iii. Grading Rubric
 1. Have the students demonstrated a holistic understanding of the organization in the context of its environment?
 2. Does your solution solve all of the Client’s needs?
 3. Have you shown the changes that will be necessary to the 5 Base Models?
 4. Have you presented the additional frames necessary to fully illustrate your solution for the audience?
 5. Is it a correct solution given the research?
 6. Is everything that is necessary to achieve the solution, and no more than is necessary, been included in the presentation?
 7. Are the recommendations actionable, sensible, affordable, well thought out and correctly scaled for this organization at this stage of its development?
 8. Have you provided empirical support for your recommendations?
 - a. Financials showing sustained profitability
 - b. Risk analysis and mitigation plan
 9. Is the financial analysis realistic?
 10. Does your solution provide the Client with a path for moving forward?
 11. Does it address unstated needs, barriers and opportunities?
 12. Is it ready? (i.e., will the Client be able to bring it to their Board of Directors and expect to receive an approval?)

Week 11.

- a. **Final Presentations at the Client's location (Group):** Same as practice presentation. Please submit an electronic copy of the presentation and handout prior to the beginning of class.
 - i. Audience: Client's leadership, several past Business Architecture students, invited guests
 - ii. Grading Rubric:
 - 1. <Rubric items from the Practice Presentation>
 - 2. Has there been clear Improvement since the Practice Presentation?
 - 3. Concepts are communicated well, questions handled well.
- b. Thank you to Client.
- c. **Contribution to Team/Group Evaluations (Individual):** Students fill out.
- d. Reception afterward to allow Client to ask additional questions, hear about other opportunities identified along the way that didn't make it into the final presentation

Within 5 Days.

- a. Research Assistant will provide the Client and Professor a binder with all of the research and presentations from the quarter.

Appendix: Sample Group/Team Table

This chart is set up for 26 students. Just adjust number of rows and double up in cells to accommodate differing class sizes.

	ResearchTeam A • Superscape • _____	ResearchTeam B • Business • _____	ResearchTeam C • Operational • _____	ResearchTeam D • Organizational • _____	ResearchTeam E • Governance • _____
Group 1	Leader: 1,2,3	16,17,18	5,6,7	20,21,22	Project Manager: 9,10,11
Group 2	Project Manager: 4,5,6	Leader: 19,20,21	8,9,10	23,24,25	12,13,14
Group 3	7,8,9	Project Manager: 22,23,24	Leader: 11,12,13	26,1,2	15,16,17
Group 4	10,11,12	25,26,1	Project Manager: 14,15,16	Leader: 3,4,5	18,19,20
Group 5	13,14,15	2,3,4	17,18,19	Project Manager: 6,7,8	Leader: 21,22,23

Research Assistant: _____

1. Collect , collate and email to client the Brainstorm, Base Models and Research Papers and Evaluations
2. Give introduction for audience at the Final Presentations