



Room with a View

With a fifty-year history and a strong brand identity, German hospitality specialist Lindner Hotels has some exciting plans for the future. We caught up with CEO Arno Schwalie to talk about the need for innovation and adaptation in ever-changing times.

ARNO SCHWALIE
CEO @ Lindner Hotels



Founded by the visionary architect Otto Lindner in 1973, headquartered in Dusseldorf, and with a family DNA, Lindner currently operates 31 hotels across seven European countries. Their inspiring design, casual flair and sustainable orientation appeal primarily to city and business travellers who want to combine living, working and celebrating. Meanwhile, link-ups with local partners from the fields of gastronomy, music and art have provided guest experiences involving pop-up kitchens, innovative events and sustainable products.



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Opening a new door

Current CEO Arno Schwalie took the reins from Otto Lindner in March 2022, following an executive career mixed between hospitality, technology and the care sector. In some ways, the opportunity could have been seen as a daunting one. It would be, after all, the first time in the company's history that its direction had been decided by anyone other than the founder. However, it was one that Mr Schwalie grasped with relish.

"The hospitality sector has always played a big part in my life," the CEO explains. "Even from my student days when I worked in bars and restaurants. Back then, I used to organise events, even big house music events in Augsburg, so you know, these elements, music, people, food and beverage have been very central to my story. So straight after finishing my studies, I became a director at Design Hotels, and that has set my course ever since."

Following successful appointments at a number of other companies, including well-

We are closely involved in the strategic planning of communication measures at Lindner Hotels and can place our recommendations at an early stage. The Lindner board sets clear goals for corporate communications but always has an open ear for us. In this respect, we feel that cooperation is a real team play.

CARSTEN DEUSTER
Managing Partner @ SKM
Consultants

known Swedish hotel chain Radisson, Mr Schwalie found himself in a reflective mood after the coronavirus pandemic. It was, of course, a difficult period for many business sectors, but hospitality was one of the hardest-hit, with many hotel sites simply unable to operate for long periods during national lockdowns. While all these uncertainties played out around him, a headhunter put the Lindner opportunity on the table. It was one which immediately appealed.

"It was put to me that I would be the first non-family executive at Lindner, and I saw this as a great opportunity, to be the first external influence on the company's leadership," Mr Schwalie recalls. "It was a way to place my stamp on something, and it excited me straight away. It's a mid-sized company, German-based, very focused on Germany, that has been able to grow to a level but reached a point where a decision was needed. Did Lindner want to stay a mid-sized German player or to grow into more of an international brand? This was the decision →

the company faced when I arrived, and that choice between two paths intrigued me.”

Building on a strong foundation

Shortly after taking up his position, the new CEO was able to identify a number of key strengths. The company clearly had a very loyal and energetic team. Its hotel sites were in prime locations in renowned cities, and there was also the backstory of its fifty-year legacy to build on.

“The heritage was such a key factor for me,” the CEO explains. “So many companies have to reinvent brands and labels for themselves, but Lindner was not in that position, although of course, the brand needed to be revamped. So for me, I suppose I thought of the company as being like a raw diamond that I could work with and use all my international experience to bring it to the next level.”

Branching out

Despite having only been in the post for just over a year, the impact of Mr Schwalie’s appointment is already clear. It is also clear which of the two paths he chose to travel.

Since his arrival, Lindner has established a strategic, global alliance with American hotel group Hyatt via a franchise agreement. In this way, the company has been able to realign its market positioning, especially in international terms, while targeting a vast cohort of potential new customers.

“This partnership with Hyatt is ideal for us,” Mr Schwalie explains. “It means that we remain the owners of our operations and brands, while participating in all the commercial services of Hyatt. This is huge for us as Hyatt’s customer base is around 35 million people, so it is a very positive move for Lindner, which completely changes the paradigm of our business.”



Music, people, food and beverage have been very central to my story.

The Hyatt deal also necessitated a technological overhaul, which the new CEO was keen to push through as quickly as possible. The whole of Lindner’s technology landscape needed to be migrated into the Hyatt system, a process which is currently nearing completion.

“Yes, and of course ‘digitisation’ is a buzzword at the moment,” Mr Schwalie laughs, “which lots of people talk about and can mean different things in different situations, but for us, in light of our new direction with Hyatt, it was completely central to what we wanted to do so was something we needed to focus on.”

Room to grow

With a rebranding of Lindner’s pre-existing package also completed, along with four new hotel deals, increasing Lindner’s portfolio by ten percent, it has been a frantically busy period for the company. The new CEO has hit the ground running, placing the business on a strong footing to face the challenges of the near future. In this way, some ambitious plans have been formed.

The company’s boutique, inner-city brand



‘Me and All’, currently comprising six hotels with two more under construction and another three at the planning stage, is due to undergo an ambitious expansion programme. Mr Schwalie’s vision is that there will be thirty ‘Me and All’ hotels by 2028. During a similar timeframe, the CEO expects the regular ‘Lindner’ brand to double its current portfolio to around fifty sites.

“As we push toward the future,” Mr Schwalie says, “we really expect a stronger international footprint, and I can see all the big capitals of Europe as part of our portfolio. Beyond that, you know the sky is the limit. For

the time being, we are focused on Europe, but who knows? New York, Dubai, even the Asian market, these are all possibilities for the future. But we are not overselling ourselves at this stage. We know we must walk before we start to run.”

A strong foundation

Underpinning this bold vision lies a simple message. The way Mr Schwalie runs Lindner, extending from the experiences he gathered before, stems from a simple philosophy. It’s one which informs his dealings with people who work under him and also his management of the supply chain, a crucial element of success within any hospitality business.

“I am a big fan of meaningful relationships,” he says. “I feel it’s probably the strongest currency that we have. When I say that, I refer to all stakeholders, everybody involved in what Lindner does. You know these have been terribly insecure times lately in various ways, and it is the quality of these relationships which enables us to survive and thrive. Everybody should recognise that.”



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Lindner Hotels and progros have been combining a strategic cooperation in supply chain management and digitalisation marked by trust and respect for many years. We are always impressed by the innovative and driving force of Lindner Hotels and look forward to the “next level”, which has now been initiated by the CEO, Arno Schwalie, and his team!

JOCHEN OEHLER
CEO @ progrosConsultants



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Arno Schwalie
CEO Lindner Hotels AG

For many years, progros has been our strategic partner for purchasing optimization, the digitalization of the procure-to-pay process as well as the procurement management (OS&E, partly FF&E) of all Lindner & me and all hotels.



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