

SAVING THE PLANET

Imaginative eco-friendly apartments are an attraction for young expats

Ambitious entrepreneurs should know that entering the serviced apartment market is not as simple as renovating a property and advertising it.

The full story involves a to-do list only the diligent can complete on time, especially when trying to be eco-friendly.

While it could take between six and nine months from identification of the property to launching it,



Dinesh Nihalchand

Dinesh Nihalchand, a founding partner of Serviced Apartments, said his company was able to do it "because we are incredibly hard working".



Alex Bent

The to-do list also includes calculating the risks of filling the building, creating a design brief, planning a design strategy, talking to contractors,

negotiating prices, making sure people deliver what they promise and on time, creating a project time line and building operations platform (including employing the right housekeeping and maintenance people), ensuring the branding strategy is correct and then advertising.

"It takes a lot of imagination," Mr Nihalchand said. "The basic underlying formula is intimacy through the power of design. Build a budget around that base, one shareholders are happy with, and you've got a business you trust will translate to young expats who will come and pay for that lifestyle and, in fact, they have."

Kush serviced apartments has found that power in providing trendy, eco-friendly accommodation to young expats. The company keeps the impact on the environment low whenever possible and provides tenants a place to live that they can feel good about.

Green practices go a step further than simply asking guests to hang gently used towels to save on washing.

All electrical appliances are rated to European standards,

including an eco-water kettle that only heats enough water for the amount of coffee desired, and reusable shopping bags in all units. Toiletries are made from all-natural ayurvedic products from India in stainless steel, refillable containers. No plastic is used.

All cleaning materials, although costing a bit more, are environmentally friendly.

Co-founding partner Alex Bent said finding a supplier, who could provide all the products needed, was quite an effort.

But now the company benefited from one-stop shopping.

Kush has gone the extra step to work with a laundry provider that uses bags made of recyclable materials instead of plastic and a paint supplier in the mainland that offers products to ISO 14000 standard, thus aiding the air quality in the units.

From an energy-efficient standpoint, the interior design incorporates light sensors in common areas and dimmer switches for lighting in the flats. But it has not all been smooth because of an apparent lack of co-operation from the government on certain issues.

"Creating an environmentally friendly business, including recycling programmes, has been difficult. Recycling programmes cost a lot of money. We tried to do as many things as possible as we could," Mr Bent said.

"In all seriousness the government is not being helpful. Government should have financial incentives or tax rebates [for recycling] but they don't. They can issue all the advertisements they want but I don't know what [if any] effect they have," he said, referring to recent full-page newspaper ads about the government's recycling scheme.

"The Hong Kong government is doing [nothing] for the environment. When we launched this building they were going to charge us to pick up stuff we wanted recycled. [So we] haven't initiated that yet. That will be the next phase of building our environmental policy."