Norwalk, Connecticut-based HEI Hotels & Resorts isn’t your typical Cvent customer. Originally working predominately as an owner/operator, HEI changed its business model and has since become one of the leading hotel management companies in North America, with more than 70 hotels under its wing, mostly large, branded properties. (It’s also Marriott’s largest franchisee.)

HEI’s relationship with Cvent started with Diamond listings, Suggested Ads, and other marketing services. But with a greater percentage of the company’s group leads coming from digital channels, Chief Revenue Officer Karl Murphy saw an opportunity to improve.

The Problem
About two years ago, Murphy wanted to take a proactive approach when he noticed a trend. “I was concerned that we were seeing some lumpiness, some real ebbs and flows in group (business). It’s not something that isn’t normal, but as we looked at the outlook for the industry, we felt that it was something we really needed to get our arms around.”

“All we could really think about was conversion, but that was the end of the game. We didn’t know at the start what we should be doing better.”

Before he could effectively work to reverse this trend, Murphy needed more information. Without access to a wide range of data, “all we could really think about was conversion, but that was the end of the game. We didn’t know at the start what we should be doing better,” he says.
Also, although HEI was already a Cvent client, the relationship was managed mostly on a property level. That made it difficult for Murphy to see the big picture across his portfolio.

The Solution

That’s when Murphy decided to work further with Cvent to see how he could get more data — and take full advantage of the insights he gleaned. “The data is clearly, for me, the most important component of what Cvent offers us,” he says. “So how do we take the data and then spend our money on the major components that would help drive a better result?”

First, Murphy had to build a solid business case to convince his executive team, so he got to work. “The starting point for me was to understand what success would look like. For about a six-month period, I spent a ton of time trying to delineate the data that we were (already) getting from Cvent,” he says. During that analysis, he asked, “If we did this differently, or if we did this better, or if we improve this particular key performance indicator by 1%, what might that do to the top line?”

From there, Murphy chose four metrics that, if improved, would help him make a case to present to the CEO. He enlisted the properties’ general managers, showing them how just a 1% improvement in those four categories would boost their bottom line. “The first thing was to get those guys on board, get them a better understanding, and then create a groundswell of support on-property.”

Murphy was also elevating much of the Cvent relationship to an enterprise-wide level, so he could work with the Cvent team to put his strategy into place. Fortunately, the timing coincided with the launch of Cvent’s Business Intelligence Dashboard, and everything clicked into place. “We said, ‘OK, this is exactly what we need. If we can manipulate this to give us the data we want on a regular basis, I think we might have the recipe for success.”

The CEO agreed. “He said, ‘We need to do whatever we need to do. Spend whatever you feel is necessary to make sure this works,’” Murphy says. “And that’s how we got to this point.”

The Outcome

Having the right data — and knowing how to leverage it most effectively — has made all the difference for HEI. “The game-changer product for us, both in terms of our relationship and our ability to drive much better results, has been the Competitive Set Dashboard,” Murphy says.
“We’re now not only able to dig in to specific hotel response data, let’s say, but we have a better understanding of what we’re bidding against. What are we losing to the comp set, what customers should we be focused on, are we bidding the right rates, and are we in a range that makes sense for the customer in that market?”

Now, Murphy says, “we look at our response time, both in percentage compared to our competition and how long it takes to respond to a lead. We look at the bid rate — how many RFPs are we getting, how often are we bidding, how many are we turning down where there’s an alternate date offered? And we’re looking at conversion. We didn’t have that data before.”

Murphy also took advantage of the Cvent Certification program, putting about 100 sales and catering leaders through it to make sure they understood exactly what they needed to do. “That was helpful. There was no ambiguity in terms of what success might look like if you do the right work.” It was so helpful, in fact, that Murphy hopes to put an additional 1,000 associates through the program in 2019.

He also instituted a new sales incentive program based on his teams’ performance in the Cvent metrics. “The Cvent dashboard has allowed us to be really comfortable with the data, have it at our fingertips, and hold our teams accountable to that,” he says.

The use of Cvent products and data has “woven itself into our DNA. Our CEO is now a Cvent advocate himself, talking to principals at other organizations, both in brands and other management companies, about Cvent,” Murphy says.

“I don’t like that, because he’s kind of giving away our special sauce a little bit,” he adds facetiously, laughing. “He’s very proud of the work we’ve done in partnership with Cvent, and we are seeing the results consistently.”

As a bonus, Murphy and his executive team are just starting to use Cvent data to help guide their investments. They can study markets where they’re considering adding hotels to their portfolio and approach the deal with a much better picture of the opportunity.

“Now that he got the ball rolling, Murphy isn’t about to slow down. “We want to continue to make sure that the data we’re getting is what we need. We want to expand upon that and understand what else we should be looking at with Cvent to drive a better result.”
He is piloting a program to centralize what he calls a “Cvent response group” in HEI’s corporate office, with analysts dedicated solely to responding to every lead. In addition, he’s looking into new possibilities. “I think Cvent Business Transient is a massive opportunity for us, particularly (with) the way the brands are consolidating.”

Ultimately, Murphy credits much of HEI’s increased success to its collaboration with Cvent. The key is moving from a vendor relationship to a true partnership. “Even just three or four years ago, … we were simply (Cvent) users,” he says.

“That was helpful, but there’s a real difference when it’s woven through the culture and there is partnership. With Cvent, they are willing to listen to our thoughts around product usage innovation and how that can help drive the important things for us.

“When we look at vendors, we look at how much money we spend. When we look at Cvent, we see how much money we could potentially make.”

“Outside of our brand partnerships, we probably see Cvent as our deepest partnership,” he says. “When we look at vendors, we look at how much money we spend. When we look at Cvent, we see how much money we could potentially make.”