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Girl meets world

Since graduating from Griffith University, Jacqueline Cox has accrued close to 20 years' business-to-business marketing experience in the hospitality sector, yet none in her hometown of Brisbane. And while her career ladder has circled the globe, she can't help but wonder whether her experience would be valued here in Australia.
By [Jaci Burns](#).



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I am so incredibly grateful,” beams Jacqueline Cox over breakfast at Manhattan’s Quin Hotel. “Every morning starts with a 15-minute walk through Central Park to my office. It’s so relaxing, so refreshing – stunning at any time of year.”

Brisbane born and bred, Cox is director of sales and marketing at The Quin, a luxury hotel on West 57th Street at Sixth Avenue in midtown Manhattan. Her workplace oozes elegance, albeit with a hint of decadence owing to the property’s colourful past as a residence for artists, performers and musicians. It’s a live-in art gallery.

Cox studied international business at Griffith University – a degree that was equal parts economics and marketing, and which culminated in a three-month internship in Asia. She chose South Korea, where she worked for a local sugar and commodities producer and trader.

“It was during the Korean winter, so it was my first awakening to extreme cold and an incredibly different culture,” reflects Cox. “I elected to be billeted with a family so I could have an immersive experience even though I didn’t study Korean and they didn’t speak much English.”

On completion of her internship, and her degree, Cox stayed on in Seoul. She was approached about a marketing role with a company that imported and distributed wines, spirits and beers, including Foster’s.

“The Australian Embassy asked if it was something I’d be interested in and – as you do when you’re young and adventurous – I said, ‘Sure, why not!’,” laughs Cox. “It was so, so hard, so absorbing, but I was excited by the experience. I look back now and wonder why I didn’t think about it more.”

Culture and language weren’t the only challenges Cox faced in that role. Her dotted reporting line into Foster’s in Australia at times created tension with her Korean employer. “We would have discussions on vision and brand activation and, as an Australian, I would completely understand what we needed to do, but I didn’t always see eye to eye with my Korean company, which would sometimes reprimand me: ‘You’re only saying that because you’re Australian. You work for us, not for them. Just remember that.’”

With Seoul’s upmarket hotels being her company’s primary distribution channel, it was not long before Cox was headhunted by one of her clients. With her company’s blessing, and advice from the Embassy, she joined InterContinental Hotels. And so began Jacqueline Cox’s career in hospitality and hotel marketing.

“During this period I found my other true calling: to make a difference in somebody’s life professionally and, I hope, somewhat personally.”

Over the years, Cox has worked for large international chains (InterContinental and Accor), multi-brand groups (Viceroy), small boutique chains (Gansevoort) and, now, a single property brand (The Quin).

In her first role with InterContinental, Cox was responsible for marketing the restaurants and bars within two of that group’s properties in Seoul. Her performance was measured purely by any incremental increase in food and beverage revenue that could be attributed to her campaigns and promotions. This was before social media, so the tactics Cox employed were email marketing, online, website and collateral to connect with hotel guests.

For personal reasons, Cox later moved to London where she secured a position with the Accor Hotel Group, selling guest rooms and function space. This was her first foray into sales.

“Marketing and sales are very different disciplines. They rely on each other, and they’re symbiotic, but the skill set for each is distinct. I knew that I wouldn’t get far in my career without the sales experience. I needed to know both marketing and sales.”

Cox describes this period in London as “professionally very challenging”.

“I had very specific goals tied to revenue and you either met them or you didn’t. You developed new accounts or you didn’t. As an outsider, I could spend months or years in London trying to crack the shell of a client, and have a deeper relationship. And maybe I would get there, but it would take a long time. It was almost impossible to break those barriers.”

Vote to leave

After several years in the UK, Cox moved to Los Angeles to head the team representing the Viceroy Hotel Group's portfolio of eight hotels in the US and Mexico.

"I noticed the difference immediately when I moved to LA. It was a faster process. People were more open and willing to share information about their business and how we could partner together."

She speaks with fondness about her time at Viceroy. "I wholeheartedly loved our company, the vision and the product. But I think during this period I found my other true calling: to make a difference in somebody's life professionally and, I hope, somewhat personally."

Leading a team was a defining moment for Cox, who pledged to share everything she had learned, "in a more powerful way than any of my leaders had ever done". It was a sink or swim opportunity so, in the absence of any formal leadership training, she started reading, found mentors and asked for a lot of guidance.

She's subsequently been exposed to many training opportunities: leadership, how to coach and counsel, and how to inspire somebody to do great work.

The approach Cox has stuck by was the one that she had always desired: "I want feedback. I want it to be direct. I want it to be in the moment. And I want it to be done in a compassionate and humane way," she says.

"We're all learning, we're all growing, and I believe every person is doing the best they can in the moment. If someone in my team doesn't have the information or the tools at hand, but has made the best decision they could in the moment, and could explain that to me, then that's all I ask."

“In the world of sales a lot of people think it's just about price but, I can tell you, in the luxury segment if we ever compete on price we will never, ever win.”

True detective

Understanding a client's implicit needs, and then negotiating a deal, are part of Cox's DNA. "I love the detective work that comes into figuring out what a client truly needs. In the world of sales a lot of people think it's just about price but, I can tell you, in the luxury segment, if we ever compete on price we will never, ever win."

"A client needs a number of rooms for a number of nights for a number of people – everybody can meet those needs, more or less, within a certain set. And they have a budget. OK, great. But what will determine the decision? It's going to be the implied needs – the things they don't tell you about upfront. And if you're very good in this role, you'll draw out those needs in an organic, natural, authentic conversation."

Cox's favourite hotel experiences have almost always been because a person or people somehow affected her stay.

"I've left feeling that that was an amazing experience, an extraordinary experience, but how did they know that about me? How did they remember that about me? Why did they care?"

That's the level of experience that Cox now works to deliver at The Quin. Of course, to achieve that level of personalisation, data is key – and, for Cox, a challenge.

Overall, the hotel sector has been slow to harness systems and data. Commonly, CRM (customer relationship management) systems, if in place, are property-specific, so the opportunity for hotel chains to understand customers and prospects, how to best meet their needs, how they use and interact with their brand, is largely missed. Cox nominates systems as one of the areas she would prioritise if she had unlimited budget.

"I'd improve our ability to gather, store and use our customer information. Our system is very basic and is designed for the operational purpose of the guest stay – the check-in, check-out process. We partner with a marketing automation company for some of the basics – emails, pre- and post-arrival, guest surveys, special announcements, marketing offers – but it's pretty limited."

With additional funds, Cox would also invest in more powerful content for social media.

"Of course, we have professional photography taken at the hotel – the empty room, perfectly set – but we're looking for lifestyle photos that have some engagement happening

inside the photo and those take photography fees, model fees and so on.

“It’s hard to execute our message without imagery. You can have all the copy and content you want, but social is such a visual platform.”

One solution Cox employs is partnerships with social media influencers. They’re engaged to be brand ambassadors who bring their own loyal, engaged following within a niche, be it a demographic or a region, as well as photographer influencers who have a style that speaks to the Quin brand vision and strategies.

“Influencers will come and stay either at a preferred rate or with our compliments in exchange for some deliverables, such as images, social posts, blogs, hotel reviews,” she explains. “Other than the deliverables there are no other restrictions – there’s no direction in voice or what must be included. It must be authentic.”

It’s a wonderful life

To an outsider, Cox’s life looks glamorous – and she admits parts of it are. She’s travelled the world, had some incredible opportunities and experienced things that those outside her industry could only dream of.

Like having breakfast at Tiffany’s with the flagship store’s fine jewelers. Or staying at Madame Clicquot’s chateau and being given a private tour of both the Veuve Clicquot and Krug vineyards and wineries – and having one-on-one dinners with the winemakers of each.

“It was an incredible experience,” recalls Cox. “I almost had to pinch myself. This is for me? How amazing!”

As a student at Griffith University, Cox didn’t have a plan in mind. Mind you, marketing was not her first career choice – her original dream was to become an astronaut.

Top 5

Jacqueline Cox’s recommended reading on marketing, leadership and management.

1. *Good to Great* by Jim Collins
2. *Creativity Inc* by Ed Catmull
3. *Stand Out* by Dorie Clark
4. *Creative Hiring* by Ozan Dagdeviren
5. *Scrappy* by Terri Sjodin

Jacqueline Cox’s favorite brands

1. The Quin
2. Chanel
3. Soul Cycle
4. New York City Ballet
5. Via – the on-demand ride sharing experience

Jacqueline Cox’s favorite influencers who have stayed at the Quin.

1. Nicole Warne @garypeppergirl
2. Alexandra Pereira @lovelypepa
3. Mike Madrid & Gabriel Garcia @CupofCouple
4. Leonie Hanne @ohhcouture
5. Tara Milk Tea @Taramilktea

“I have spent a lot of time and money seeing the space shuttles launch in Florida,” she reveals, as her cheeks turn pink. “When I moved to the United States I was finally close enough to travel to the Kennedy Space Centre and Cape Canaveral. For quite a while, until they ended, I would fly back and forth. If you know anything about the launches, they often don’t happen when they’re supposed to due to technical reasons and the weather, so there are often delays of hours, days or weeks. I had many a disappointing flight! Sometimes I would land and the launch was cancelled and I’d have to fly all the way back because it wasn’t going to be rescheduled for another 12 days. I learned my lesson: only buy a one-way ticket!”

At the time of our interview, Cox is busy preparing for Thanksgiving, The Quin’s biggest day of the year. The world-famous Thanksgiving Day Parade makes its way up 6th Avenue, so the hotel is at capacity.

“It’s spectacular, like no other parade,” says Cox. “The balloons are enormous and fly at great heights!”

She lives right where the parade begins, so every year she watches the balloons inflate the night before. “They’re all strapped down in netting and then you start to see them come to life. You see Snoopy trying to fly away...”

But where will Cox fly away to next?

“I’m struggling with that a little bit right now. Do I stay here in New York, or even abroad, or do I go back to Australia? I left Brisbane at the end of 1998 and so part of me questions whether I could have a great career in Australia. Will people value my experience? It’s been so long that I’ve been away. It’s something I’ve been thinking about for a while, the last year or so. I don’t know the answer. For now, I’m very happy.” **M**