

*Global Executive Search Case Study*

**Marketing Director – Hospitality and Property**

*Challenging economic environment requires sourcing exceptional people with exceptional skills*



psd  
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## The Company

During the 00's Island Capital<sup>1</sup> managed and developed a number of premium luxury golf resorts in Europe. During this period, Island successfully developed the world's leading brand, Quinta Do Lago (Portugal), and PGA Catalunya (North Eastern Spain). Since its launch in Oct 1999, PGA Catalunya Resort has been about representing the finer things in life, with a distinctive character. With two championship courses, it has developed into one of the world's premier golfing destinations. Island had a clear ambition and vision for PGA Catalunya's development – to create another leading luxury golf resort in Europe to match Quinta. A two phase strategy was put in place to realise this vision: Phase 1 focused on developing the golf product, and associated resort facilities, into one of the leading in Europe. The *Top 100 Golf Courses in the World* voted the *Stadium Course* at PGA Catalunya, as the No 1 course in Spain in 2012 and third in continental Europe. Phase 2 of the strategy was to create the leading residential real estate development in the sector, in Europe.

<sup>1</sup> The investment arm of Irish entrepreneur & philanthropist - Denis O'Brien owner of PGA Catalunya and Quinta Do Lago



PGA CATALUNYA RESORT

*“We had used Eugene Ivory to help source an exceptional marketer for our Quinta Do Lago resort in Portugal, and based on that experience we were confident that PSD Partners would deliver with the highest level of professionalism in a discreet manner”,*

Richard Strappe  
Investment Director  
Island Capital (owners of PGA Catalunya & Quinta do Lago Golf Resorts)



## The Task

PGA Catalunya's real estate portfolio was launched in 2009. The development is a showcase for leading edge, contemporary and sustainable design. This echoes and extends the positioning and values of the PGA Catalunya brand in a very exciting and dynamic way. The real estate portfolio was launched into a challenging market. Against this backdrop, Island recognised the need to develop an exceptional executive team that would successfully realise the next phase of development. Having already started a search for a new CEO; the final piece of the 'leadership jigsaw' was to find a new Head of Marketing.

The task was to identify a marketer with a luxury brand track record, ideally in the real estate or the real estate/hospitality sector and who had a clear record of achievement in generating sales in a premium brand context. This was also an 'end to end' sole ownership marketing role. This person would be required to support the achievement of stretch targets whilst working with tight budgets. The commercial edge, drive and flexibility to thrive in a fast moving, small entrepreneurial team environment was essential. According to Eugene Ivory of PSD Partners, *"the individual literally had to have the range and flexibility to stretch from presenting plans, under robust scrutiny from the board, to drafting website content to changing light bulbs at an event venue"*. The individual also had to be both fluent in Spanish and English. The team at Island Capital had been trying to find the right individual for some time. The boom in the Spanish property market up to 2008 made it an even trickier task.

Island Capital's Investment Director, Richard Strappe, summed up why sourcing the right individual with the track record and maturity for such a mission critical position was a difficult challenge; *"We knew and understood the success of our competitors in the market, but found it difficult to separate out those who had benefited from the market highs, enjoyed in the luxury property sector in the '00s, and those who had actually made things happen."*



## The Resolution

PSD Partners, a Dublin based global search firm, was asked to assess the situation, propose a solution, and locate the right person: A person with exceptional skills, not only as a hospitality marketer but also with deep understanding of the residential luxury real estate market in Europe. Given the extraordinary growth in property sales in the 00's, the challenge was to find someone who had actually made a difference to sales rather than just benefiting from the property market's surge during the period.

*"We had used Eugene Ivory to help source an exceptional marketer for our Quinta Do Lago resort in Portugal, and based on that experience we were confident that PSD Partners would deliver with the highest level of professionalism in a discreet manner", says Richard Strappe. "The challenge we had set this resort business was a big one and unless the fit was really right, we would not hire."*

PSD Partners met with the key principles of Island Capital/PGA Catalunya and the stakeholders in the position and developed a detailed profile of the individual required.

A key part of the initial stage of the process according to Ivory *"was to ensure that all stakeholders were aligned to what was required and expected. Our process that was somewhat complicated because a new CEO at PGA Catalunya started with the organisation, half way through the search". Ivory maintains that "listening very carefully was critical. Understanding the challenges of running a privately backed growth stage business was key. Also, regular two-way communication and calibrating our findings from the market against the expectations of each stakeholder, proved critical to the success of this search".*

PSD initiated a thorough international search, with a primary focus on Western Europe. According to Ivory, *"We worked with 7/8 respected industry sources, initially, from our own global network. This provided an excellent start for generating names and organisations to target. Ivory goes on to say, "one of our challenges was separating the 'wheat from the chaff'. We directly targeted most of the premium resort and luxury real estate marketing organisations that were active in the Iberian Peninsula. We were able to canvas 3<sup>rd</sup> party opinions through our network before making an approach. This enabled us to hone in on the right individuals"*



## The Outcome

An exceptional person was identified. She was working as Marketing Director for a boutique luxury hotel chain based in the Canaries when PSD Partners made their direct approach. As a former regional Marketing Director for a major global luxury hotel group and Marketing Director for a luxury golf resort in south eastern Spain, the individual had a considerable track record in marketing both a leading global luxury hospitality brand and one of Spain's leading luxury golf resorts. According to Richard Strappe, *"in addition to deep domain experience, what really appealed to us about the candidate was that she had a significant track record in linking marketing to real commercial outcomes, in other words driving sales"*. *"PSD began with 112 candidates and shortlisted 6, we culled that to 3 and then a hire"* says Strappe.

PSD Partners conducted this global search entirely from their base in Dublin, according to Ivory *"our client, was keen that we controlled costs, -initial candidate interviews were conducted via video calls to facilitate this"*. This was a particularly challenging search that took 4½ months to complete. The fact that the client had been trying to fill this position for some time made the outcome particularly satisfying.





## About PSD Partners

PSD Partners works with companies across the globe. We help our clients to build their human capital. We find the best talent for their most important executive roles, helping them to build world class teams, and help them fund sustainable growth. We source the best, not only those seeking a role on the market at a particular time.

Our Executive Search assignments typically focus on Executive Officer, Vice President and Board level roles. Our engagements come from either international corporations expanding in Europe, company founders or investors in early or growth stage businesses.

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