

ISSUE 19

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PORTFOLIO



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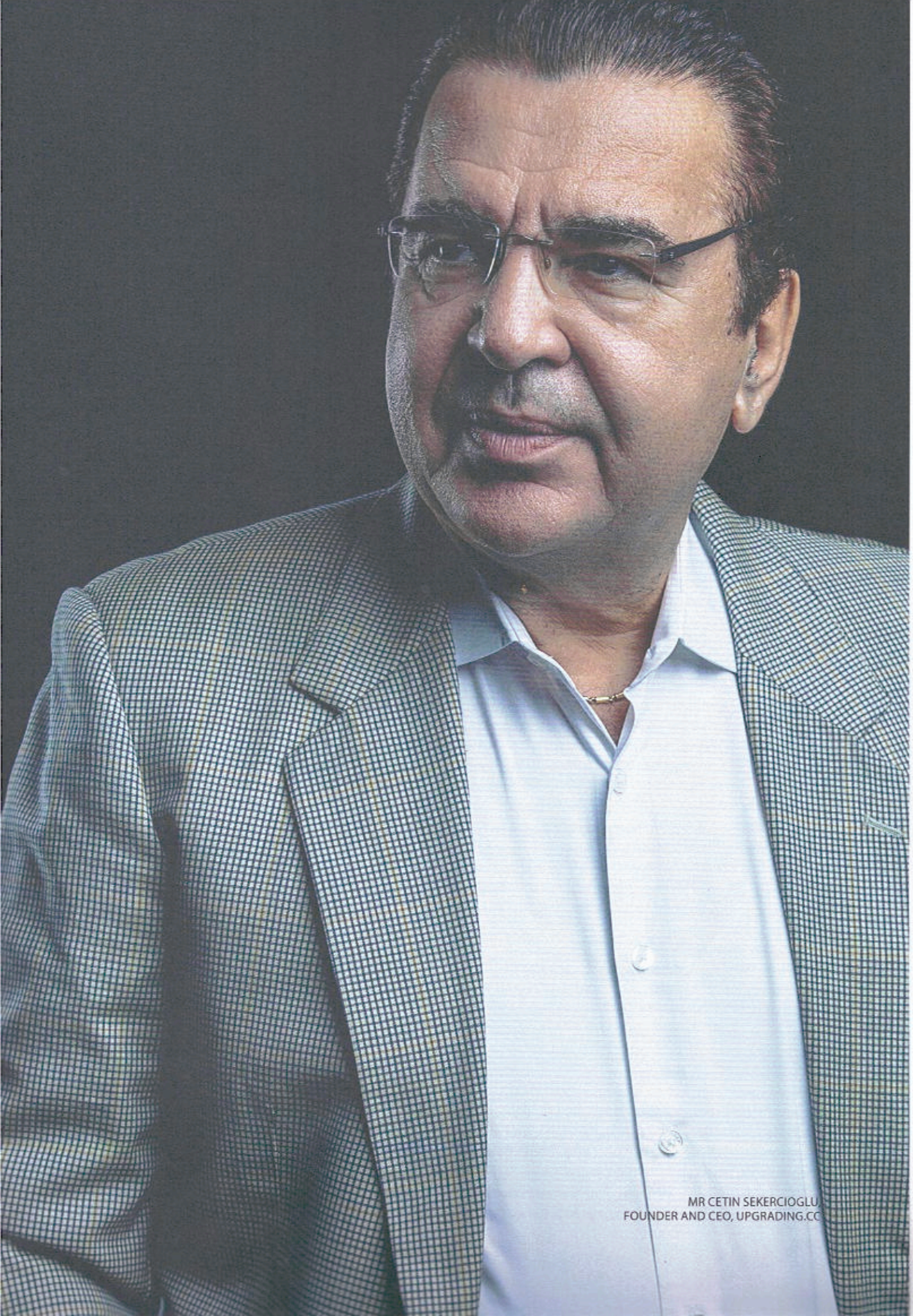
WHEN AN UPGRADE IS A VIABLE OPTION

CETIN SEKERCIOGLU

Upgrading.cc promises to make purchasing upgrades more efficient - bringing benefits to both customers and the businesses that serve them. The sharing platform allows partner hotels to list their upgrade offers, which the users can take up

BY LI HAOHAN

PHOTOGRAPHY BY CHINO SARDEA



MR CETIN SEKERCIOGLU
FOUNDER AND CEO, UPGRADING.CO

A hospitality industry veteran, Mr. Cetin Sekercioglu has a long and distinguished career marked by key leadership positions at Shangri-La Hotels & Resorts where he was EVP Southeast Asia, and at Millennium Hotels & Resorts, Asia Pacific where was president. Well-regarded as a leader in strategic direction and an advocate for innovation and technology, Mr. Sekercioglu has founded a new company that seeks to bring tech-led innovations to the process of purchasing hotel upgrades.

Called Upgrading.cc, the new company has an online platform where guests can purchase upgrades for accommodations, and access to facilities and services to make a hotel stay more convenient and comfortable. The facility allows upgrades to be completed online anywhere from three months to even a day prior to travel instead of on arrival at check-in counters. "You are assured of an upgrade when you reach your hotel, instead of taking chances purchasing one on arrival," Mr. Sekercioglu says.

Upgrading.cc will also help hotels sustain positive growth in terms of revenue per available room (RevPAR), Mr. Sekercioglu says, adding that most hotels are not focused on upselling, which can potentially add anywhere from 40 to 90 per cent revenue gains.

Portfolio caught up with Mr. Sekercioglu to go over the features of the Upgrading.cc platform, and how it will help both customers and businesses.

Portfolio: What prompted you to start Upgrading.cc?

Mr. Sekercioglu: I've been observing the amount of time it takes hotel guests to check in at the front desk, and realized that it takes longer than it should when the staff upsells a room. Upselling can bring a lot to a hotel's income, but many of them have left this niche market untapped. A lot of hotels focus on selling rooms in lower categories based on Best Available Rate; although it helps move the inventory, it leaves rooms in higher categories unsold.

By delivering upgrade service with the help of technology - by offering it online - it becomes more convenient and therefore more attractive. Customers are assured of an upgrade before they travel

and enjoy faster check-in; hotels gain more revenue from selling premium rooms.

What are you doing to make Upgrading.cc platform attractive to customers?

Upgrading.cc has simplified the process of purchasing upgrades. The customer can use his preferred channel to make his bookings, and then go to Upgrading.cc to upgrade his room, check out promotions for clubrooms and suites, and enjoy a host of perks applicable to the upgrade.

The customer can also create his own price alert. Here he can list down the price that he is willing to pay for a better accommodation. If there is a change in prices that match his budget, this function will notify him, thus ensuring that he doesn't miss out on any chance for an upgrade.



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The screenshot shows the Upgrading.cc website interface. At the top, there is a navigation bar with the logo 'upgrading.cc' on the left and links for 'About Us', 'My Price Alerts', 'Lounge Access', 'Club and Suite Promotions', 'My Account', and 'ENG'. Below the navigation bar is a large banner image of a breakfast table set on a balcony overlooking a blue sea. A green text box on the left of the banner reads: 'Breakfast at the club lounge. When you book Suite and Clubrooms, you will get to enjoy your breakfast at the hotel's club lounge with your loved ones or colleagues.' Below the banner is a search interface for hotels. It includes a 'HOTELS' tab, a 'Country' dropdown set to 'Singapore', a 'Hotel (Booked)' input field with a placeholder 'Hotel Name', a 'Room Type (Booked)' dropdown set to 'Nothing searched', a 'Check-in' date field set to '30/08/2018', and a 'Check-out' date field set to '31/08/2018'. A 'SEARCH FOR HOTELS' button is located below the search fields. At the bottom of the page, there is a blue banner with the text 'Upgrade Your Next Hotel Experience' and a 'Live Help' button.

Our platform is highly consumer-driven. Many travelers today, especially the millennials, conduct transactions on their mobiles. We believe that this will disrupt the traditional hotel upgrading process.

What benefits does Upgrading.cc bring to businesses?

Upgrading.cc helps hotels upsell their rooms without investment. They sign up with us as partner hotels, and their upgrade offers become available to the users of our platform. This provides the opportunity to unlock potential upselling revenue gains of 40 to 90 per cent.

(Upgrading.cc offers three partnership tiers for hotels, which determine the level of engagement they can have with the platform users.)

Walk us through the process of buying an upgrade on your platform.

Users can access the list of upgrade offers from the site's partner hotels. After booking a hotel accommodation using his preferred channel, the user can visit Upgrading.cc to search for available upgrades. Once he finds a suitable offer, the user can either sign in (returning users) or sign up (first time users) to Upgrading.cc and proceed to make a payment.

The site accepts a prepayment of 10 per cent of the total upgrading fee; meanwhile, the remaining 90 per cent will be payable at the hotel front desk on arrival. After completing this transaction, the user will receive an e-mail confirmation, the details of which can be viewed under 'My Account'.

A user can also list down the amount that he is willing to pay per night for an upgrade; he will be notified if an upgrade that matches his budget becomes available.

Access to lounge facilities, as well as club and suites promotions are also listed on the site.

How do you plan to grow the business?

Our goal is to sign up 1,000 hotel partners.

Where else do you plan to take Upgrading.cc in the future?

We are now testing our app that will notify customers of the best upgrade deals -from an upgrade to a higher room category, to purchasing hotel lounge access and promotions on hotel club and suites. 