NIKO NICKOLAOU

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Global experiential entertainment leader with 20+ years designing and scaling immersive consumer experiences that blend storytelling, technology, and brand IP. Proven track record developing large-scale experience platforms serving 2M+ annual guests and generating $250M+ in portfolio value. Trusted C-suite partner leading multi-disciplinary teams across creative development, product strategy, operations, and commercialization.

- Leads portfolio roadmaps from concept to operation for marquee programs (ICE!, Mission: Save Christmas, Universe of Light), scaling attendance to millions of guests while sustaining satisfaction and profitability.
- Owns end-to-end commercialization, from pricing and retail/F&B integration to marketing alignment, forging licensing partnerships with global IP holders.
- Builds high-performing teams of 2,500+ and governs vendor contracts and procurement to drive double-digit cost efficiencies while maintaining quality and safety.
- Trusted C-suite partner at Ryman Hospitality, aligning creative vision with financial goals to deliver on-time, on-budget openings that lift occupancy and per-cap revenue.

CORE EXPERTISE

Creative Leadership & Storytelling
Global Experience Development
IP Translation & Activation
Multi-Market Experience Strategy
Immersive Entertainment Design
Guest Engagement & Experiential Marketing
Global Licensing & Brand Partnerships
Scalable Attraction Platforms
Vendor & Partner Relations
Capital Planning & Project Delivery
Consumer Experience Strategy
Revenue & Commercialization Models
Change Management & Organizational Development
Operational Efficiency & Cost Control
Interactive & Technology-Driven Experiences
Cross-Functional Team Leadership

KEY ACHIEVEMENTS

- **2025** — Led strategic expansion of ICE! across eight destination resorts, surpassing 2M annual guest visits and establishing one of the largest seasonal experiential entertainment platforms in hospitality.
- **2025** — Directed creative development of new immersive experiences including Mission: Save Christmas and Universe of Light, expanding IP-driven storytelling across the portfolio.
- **2024** — Delivered record-breaking attendance across ICE!, Mission: Save Christmas, and Universe of Light, engaging 2M+ guests across eight nationwide properties.
- **2020** — Conceptualized and executed the award-nominated *I Love Christmas Movies* COVID pivot pop-up, sustaining portfolio-wide guest engagement and revenue during market disruption.
- **2020** — Spearheaded the Augmented Reality Wildlife Rescue experience, blending technology and storytelling to elevate guest interaction and brand immersion.
- **2019** — Set brand attendance records with the debut of The Polar Express ICE! experience, attracting 257K attendees and driving incremental room revenue.

EXPERIENCE

Gaylord Hotels & JW Marriott 2005 – Present

Senior Director of Special Events & Experiences 2021 – Present

- Lead creative and product development strategy for ICE!, a flagship immersive entertainment experience generating $250M+ in portfolio value and engaging 2M+ annual guests across eight destination resorts.
- Oversee multi-property programming across eight resorts, directing 2,500+ full-time, seasonal, and contracted staff in large-scale events and activations delivered on time and on budget.
- Developed and activated global entertainment IP partnerships with Disney, Warner Bros., and Universal, translating franchise narratives into immersive physical environments and fan experiences.

- Implemented strategic procurement and vendor governance processes that achieved 40% cost savings without sacrificing quality, safety, or guest immersion.
- Drive revenue optimization strategies integrating ticketing, retail, and F&B to increase per-capita spend and maximize portfolio profitability.
- Led innovation initiatives introducing augmented reality, interactive storytelling, and hybrid digital-physical guest experiences across the portfolio.
- Guide concept-to-execution lifecycle for new guest experiences, aligning creative storytelling with enterprise-wide business goals in partnership with senior executives across Marketing, Revenue Management, and Development.

Creative Director, Gaylord Hotels / Director of Special Events & Entertainment 2015 – 2021

- Scaled national holiday programming, expanding ICE! and related events across multiple properties and growing attendance from 700K to over 2M guests.
- Negotiated and managed high-profile IP licensing agreements with global partners, safeguarding brand standards and activating properties with multi-sensory storytelling.
- Partnered with Marketing and Revenue Management to integrate pricing, ticketing, retail, and F&B strategies that optimized per-capita spend and drove record occupancy during seasonal activations.
- Directed creative strategy and execution for marquee experiences including the Wildlife Rescue AR app, the SpookEasy Bar, and the award-nominated *I Love Christmas Movies* pop-up.

Director of Guest Services, Gaylord Palms Resort 2005 – 2015

- Directed all Guest Services departments for a 1,406-room resort and convention center, overseeing front office, concierge, and guest experience operations.
- Led cross-functional teams to top satisfaction scores, strengthening guest loyalty across leisure and convention markets.
- Spearheaded the Front Office transition to a new Property Management System and implemented service programs that lifted upsell, streamlined service recovery, and boosted RevPAR.

Social Pie LLC, Orlando, FL 2011 – 2017

Founder + CEO

- Founded and scaled a digital marketing and experience agency, achieving 200% year-over-year growth through innovative client acquisition and service diversification.
- Designed and executed data-driven social media and experiential marketing programs for high-profile events and clients.
- Delivered large-scale brand activations including the Orlando Chili Cook-Off (+15K attendance) and launched Social Pie Cares, raising $67K for nonprofits over a three-year board term.

EARLY CAREER

- Attraction Operations Leadership, Universal Resorts Orlando (2000 – 2006)
- Founder, NAAN Entertainment, entrepreneurial music management company (2000 – 2003)
- Front Office Leadership, Gaylord Palms Resort & Convention Center (2005 – 2013)

BOARD LEADERSHIP

- Board of Directors, Themed Entertainment Association, Eastern North America (2023 – Present)
- Board Member, Boys Town of Central Florida (2017 – 2020)
- Board Member, Orlando Day Nursery (2015 – 2017)

ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

Affiliations: Member, IAAPA & Themed Entertainment Association

Industry Leadership: Speaker and contributor on experiential entertainment, immersive storytelling, and IP-driven attractions.

Author: *The Greek Work*; *Bee Brave Today*; *Pomp, Snow, & Cirqueumstance* (award-winning children's book, Brown Books).

Interests: Soccer & football fan.