

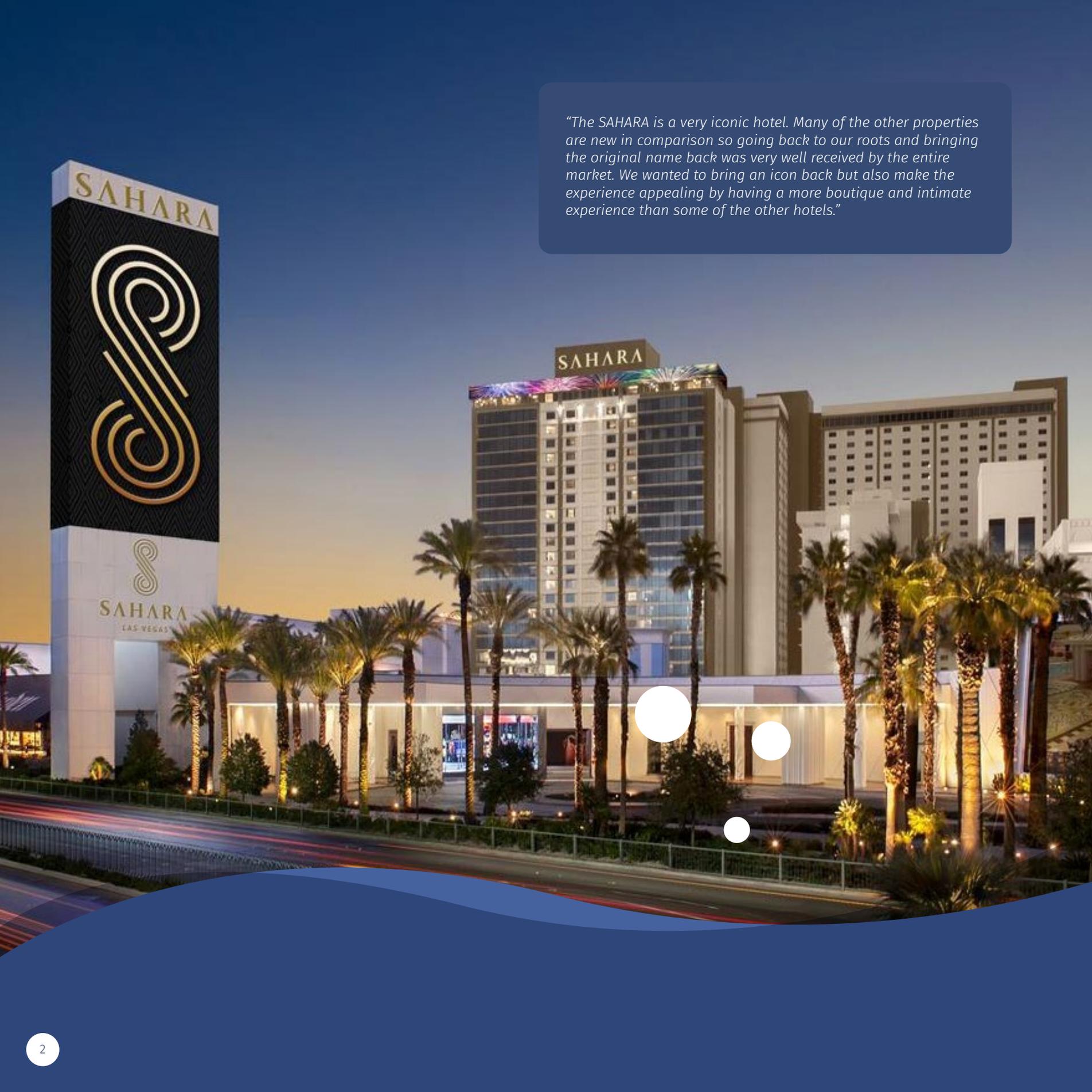
**IMPROVING EXPERIENCE WITH A
NEW ACCESSIBILITY COMMITMENT**



SAHARA
LAS VEGAS

SAHARA LAS VEGAS

CLIENT STATEMENT



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THE RETURN OF AN ICONIC BRAND

The SAHARA Las Vegas is an iconic hotel, casino and resort located on The Strip in Las Vegas. Originally built in 1957, the hotel is part of Las Vegas' history, with a string of famous guests that epitomise the glamour of the city.

Having been through various owners, the property was acquired by the Meruelo Group in 2018 and has recently rebranded back to its original name, SAHARA Las Vegas.

KC is the Director of Digital Marketing, SAHARA Las Vegas. With more than twenty years of experience in the digital space, Carrera joined in July 2019 as the property was rebranding, with a mandate to build a team and ensure that digital channels accentuate the unique brand proposition of the resort. Sitemorse is one of the core tools that is supporting Carrera and her team on this critical and intricate project.

Carrera explains "SAHARA is a very iconic hotel. Many of the other properties are new in comparison so going back to our roots and bringing the original name back was very well received by the entire market. We wanted to bring an icon back but also make the experience appealing by having a more boutique and intimate experience than some of the other hotels."

DIGITAL MARKETING AT SAHARA LAS VEGAS

Carrera's main area of responsibility is saharalasvegas.com. *"Our main platform is the website for direct bookings. I handle the team that ensures traffic to the website converts, and that the site itself is geared for optimal conversions. We also carry out all other aspects of digital marketing, including SEO, SEM, social media, email marketing and any digital advertising, helping to not only promote the property but everything within it including shows, restaurants, and other amenities."*

SAHARA uses a heavily customized CMS platform for the website that was already in place before Carrera arrived. It links out to several SAHARA-branded third-party applications including a travel booking engine, a dining reservations application and a ticketing engine for shows, although Carrera would ultimately like to integrate the services more seamlessly into the experience.

Carrera's first few months have been exceptionally busy and have been driven by a tight timetable for the SAHARA rebranding project. This has involved laying down more robust foundations for digital marketing and website management in preparation for the project; the rebrand involves a new web domain, the full transition over to a new name and brand identity and then a more fundamental website redesign and content refresh, all within the space of a few months.

CHANGING TO SITEMORSE

One of the key measures that Carrera has carried out is changing digital improvement and assessment platforms, moving from SiteImprove to Sitemorse.

Carrera comments *“We were using SiteImprove but every year we go through a vetting process where we’re evaluating and re-evaluating the tools we use. We need a tool in our digital arsenal to make sure our pages are user friendly, search engine friendly, and compliant. Then we came across Sitemorse.”*

*“The decision to move to Sitemorse was value-driven. **We are paying less than we did for SiteImprove and getting more value.** When we were evaluating Sitemorse we found it was more user friendly when it came to the GUI and the presentation of data, and overall it was more competitively priced. That’s something our CFO’s always happy with!”*

So far Sitemorse has proved invaluable to both everyday operations and the rebranding exercise. Sitemorse’s automation runs in the background with Carrera receiving daily alerts that highlight prioritised issues relating to content compliance and quality.

“Web accessibility and staying compliant is something we are very conscious of, and something we’re addressing in the redesign too. Everyone is welcome at SAHARA and we wanted to make sure our website reflected that, as well as meeting our legal and regulatory commitments. “

Another important aspect has been Sitemorse’s service monitoring. Carrera comments *“We want to make sure from a pinging perspective whether we’re up or down. There’s been time when the alerts from Sitemorse have arrived earlier than our actual site monitoring service so we’re able to reach out sooner to our hosting company and our booking engine and find out what’s going on.”*

BUILDING THE FOUNDATIONS

Carrera has also introduced other measures to get the hotel's digital footprint into a better state and revitalise digital marketing efforts, preparing for the more intricate work required on the rebrand. This includes starting to assemble a digital marketing team, changing hosting arrangements for the website so it is easier to control, and changing booking engines. Carrera has also experimented with new content to support the hotel's new brand positioning.

She says "We have a lot of transactional messages out there so we can increase sales, but at the same time we need to make sure we appeal to both the rational and emotional side of the Las Vegas traveller. We made sure we had video assets in place that spoke about the making of SAHARA, calling it the 'For the love of Las Vegas' video series."

Kat Carrera has also made sure that all the reporting and analytics she needs are in place, complementing the metrics already provided by Sitemorse. *"One of the first thing I was tasked with was reviewing the stats and numbers, making sure things like direct bookings are optimal. We need to make sure that all the tracking is in place as this is critical to the rebranding exercise."*

REBRANDING

Most of Carrera's attention is now on the rebranding exercise. At the time of writing this was still underway, with Carrera successfully delivering the changeover and now focusing on the new redesign and content refresh.

She comments "There was a lot of preparation that needed to be done not just on the digital side, but also throughout the whole property. But we have now officially switched domain names and shut everything off relating to the old branding. When we did the transition, we applied 301 redirects and we reskinned the website with new logos, a colour theme and so on. Now we're going through the pages in more detail and making sure they speak more to the new brand and positioning."

Sitemorse has also provided invaluable through the process. *"We've used Sitemorse all the way through the redesign process to show us some of the errors that we have. We've communicated these to the new developers and said these need to be addressed."*

The team have also used leaned in on Sitemorse's LIVEARCHIVE facility to identify any content and assets that need to be switched. *"Sitemorse was extremely useful in being able to identify everything that was part of the old brand that from a legal standpoint we could no longer use. It helped us keep out of trouble in that way and continues to help, as we go through the full rebrand but also change more things like add new restaurants and new shows, removing details of the old ones."*

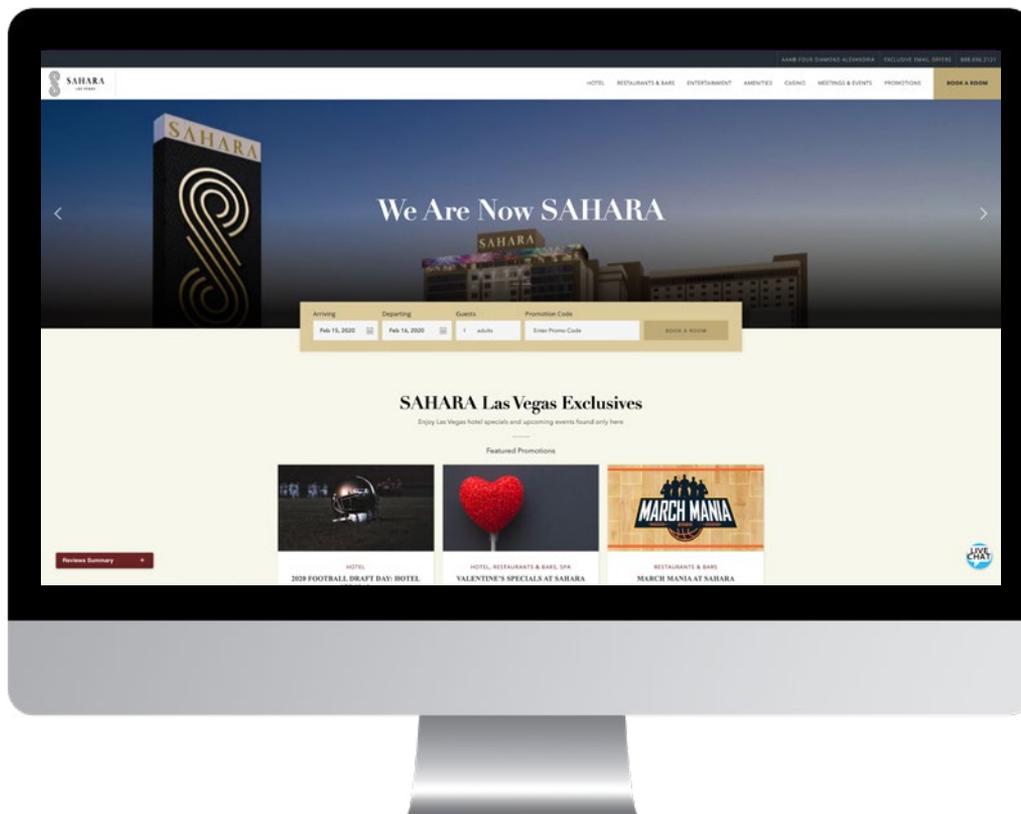
FUTURE PLANS

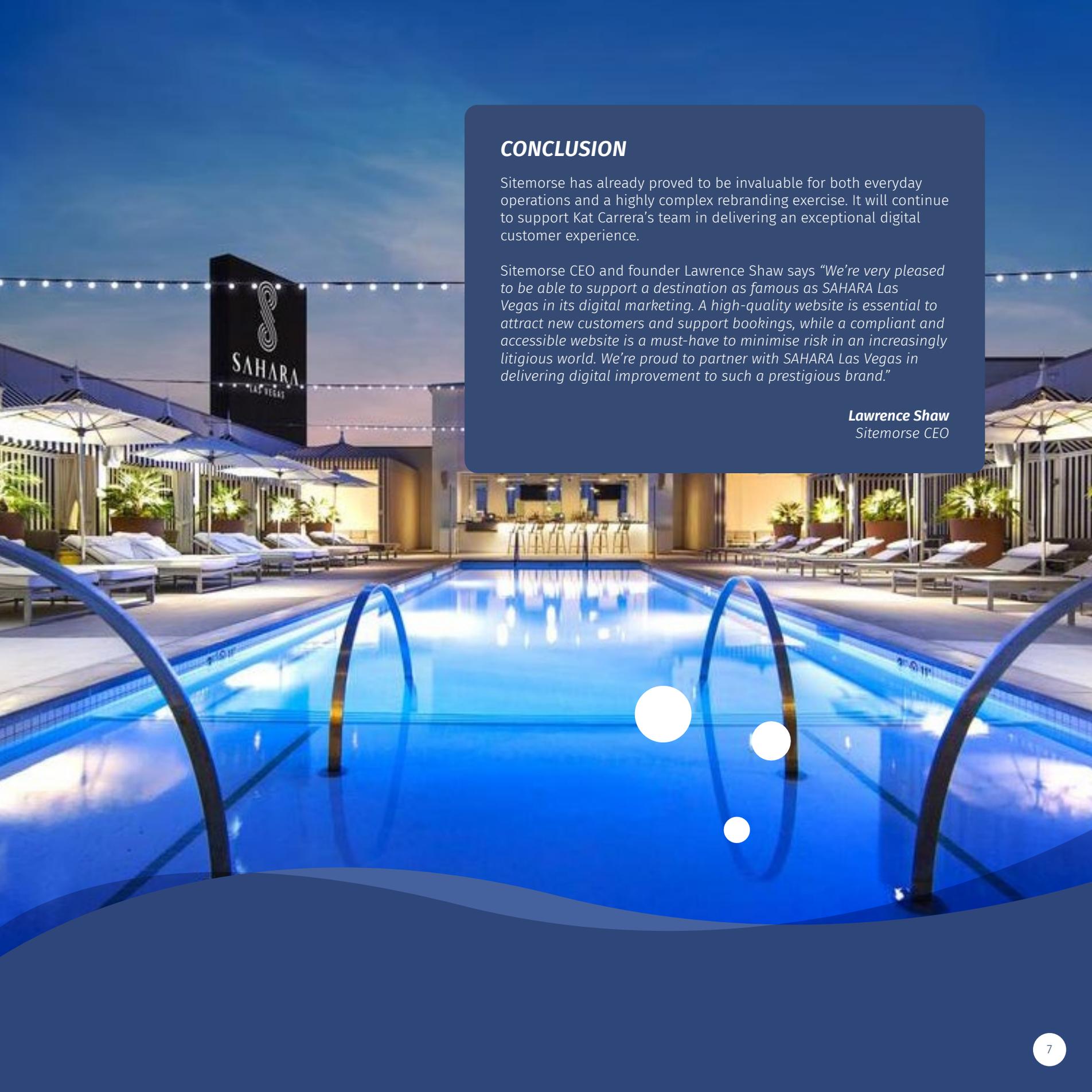
Once the redesign project is over, the digital marketing team plans to expand the use of Sitemorse to help in everyday operations and to track digital improvement over time.

Carrera comments *“We have been very happy with Sitemorse and its capabilities and we want to explore how we can use the tool more. I feel like we’ve barely scratched the surface of what it can do.”* Possible future plans include the ability to integrate the Sitemorse experience directly into their CMS platform, relying more on the role-based notifications of prioritised issues to potentially involve third party developers and also using the INDEX, Sitemorse’s benchmarking service.

Carrera explains *“I see the benchmarking tool as something that will be very helpful. It will be really useful to see where we were prior to the redesign and then post redesign, tracking our progress as we continue to improve our ranking.”*

Sitemorse’s availability monitoring will also continue to be used, potentially expanding to other third-party applications. Carrera comments *“In my world even just a few seconds of our site being down impacts our revenue. Right now, it’s just our main website and room booking engine that we have tied into Sitemorse, but we’ll increase those as we bring on more partners.”*





CONCLUSION

Sitemorse has already proved to be invaluable for both everyday operations and a highly complex rebranding exercise. It will continue to support Kat Carrera's team in delivering an exceptional digital customer experience.

Sitemorse CEO and founder Lawrence Shaw says *"We're very pleased to be able to support a destination as famous as SAHARA Las Vegas in its digital marketing. A high-quality website is essential to attract new customers and support bookings, while a compliant and accessible website is a must-have to minimise risk in an increasingly litigious world. We're proud to partner with SAHARA Las Vegas in delivering digital improvement to such a prestigious brand."*

Lawrence Shaw
Sitemorse CEO

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Sitemorse
48 Charlotte Street
London. W1T 2NS
United Kingdom

www.Sitemorse.com
sales@Sitemorse.com