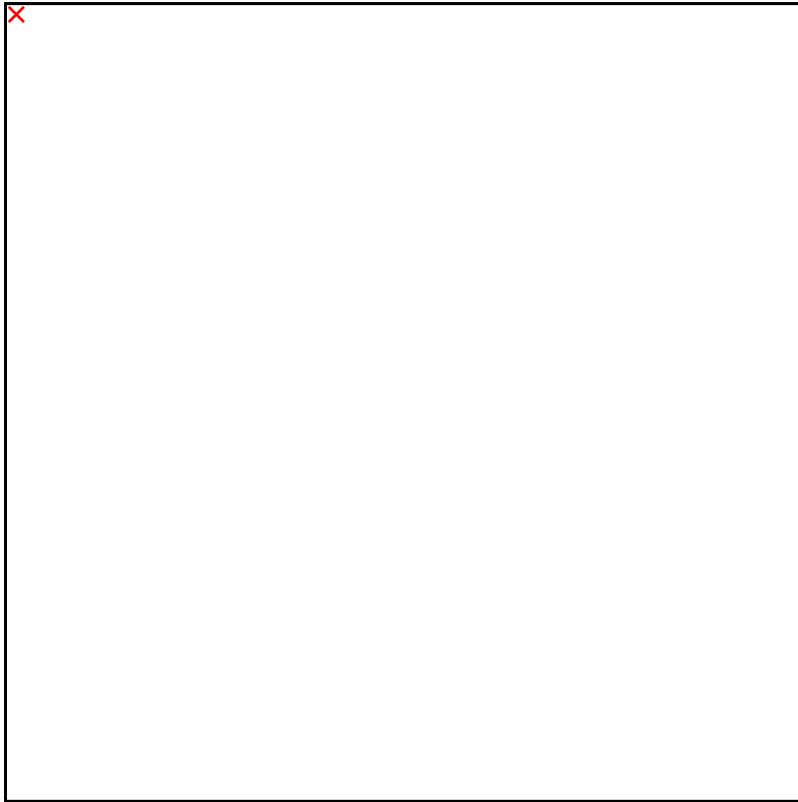


BENCHMARK® Makes Strategic Investment in UK's etc.venues, Expands Reach to 80 locations, Three Continents

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The Woodlands (Houston), Texas , June 4, 2018 ... [BENCHMARK®, a global hospitality company](#) , and its capital partner, Gencom, have made a strategic investment in the UK-based [etc.venues](#) , a pioneering non-residential day meetings company with 15 properties in London, Birmingham and Manchester. The move and positioning significantly increases Benchmark's global footprint and creates exceptional opportunities for international expansion for both companies.

The partnership means that Benchmark will now operate across three continents, with a total of 80 properties in North America, the Caribbean, Japan and the United Kingdom. Recognized in the UK and on the international stage as an award-winning and particularly innovative training and events firm, etc.venues will complement Benchmark's four hospitality services brands: [Benchmark Resorts & Hotels](#) , [Gemstone Collection](#) , [Benchmark Conference Centers](#) and the [Benchmark Owner Advisory Group](#) .

"The combination of hospitality and award-winning workplace services, spanning three continents and focused on hotel and office real estate investments, is truly unique in the industry," according to Benchmark's CEO Alex Cabañas. "Benchmark's leadership in group sales and in delivering exceptional meeting experiences aligns perfectly with etc.venues' sophisticated meetings and events space in the UK market."

etc.venues' facilities, strategically located in key business districts around London and in the commercial centers of Birmingham and Manchester, are known for stylish contemporary design, technical expertise, outstanding business services and premier food and beverage focus.

Investment and transaction structuring efforts were led by Benchmark's capital partner, Miami-based Gencom. Gencom led an investment consortium, which included an investment fund managed by Colony Northstar as corporate preferred equity provider. "The investment in etc.venues is consistent with Gencom's strategy to grow the Benchmark platform and position the company for dynamic and global growth not only through operations management but also through a dedicated real estate investment platform," said Karim Alibhai, Principal of Gencom. "Gencom will continue to explore opportunities in the real estate markets as a result of this transaction and will look to align itself with strategic investment partners on both single-asset and programmatic basis," Mr. Alibhai added.

The new collaboration will spur the global expansion of Benchmark and etc.venues in urban and destination sites within Europe and the United States, notes Alastair Stewart, managing director of etc.venues. "This is a winning combination. Benchmark will be perfectly positioned to pursue hotel management business in Europe, while etc.venues will have the financial, sales & marketing and operational support it needs to establish new venues in the US."

"US expansion of etc.venues is a key part of the strategy," says Mr. Cabañas. "Benchmark is evaluating gateway cities such as New York, Chicago, Los Angeles and others. We will look to further growth opportunities in Europe for our management, operational and asset management services."

Benchmark's interest in the etc.venues business is rooted in a long history of leadership and strategic opportunity in the conference center and corporate real estate services space. Both CEOs are well-acquainted through their involvement with [IACC](#), formerly known as the International Association of Conference Centres.

Several important trends in both travel and real estate influenced this new partnership. Consumer preferences are trending towards experiential travel, on demand services/amenities, and shared/collaborative spaces. As office buildings and commercial real estate evolve with "guest-centric, hotel-like" services, this mixed-use platform aims to attract real estate owners and managers looking for a diverse-portfolio, one-stop-shop operator. Conference planners and potential hotel owners will also find many new options and advantages.

"Consequently, career opportunities for our teams will be enhanced," says Alex Cabañas. He highlights that both Benchmark and etc.venues are committed to employee engagement and development and to strong programs of community involvement at every property. "Culturally, operationally and sales & marketing-wise, Benchmark and etc.venues are a perfect fit."

Photography Link Here: <https://www.dropbox.com/sh/hetaiofbf6qmpdkv/AACYTXYP-fFuJjo4QVedBPlya?dl=0>

L to R: Alex Cabañas, Alastair Stewart

Photo credit, Matthew Joseph

About etc.venues

etc.venues is a leading provider of contemporary city centre non-residential venues. It has 15 UK venues and specialises in the conference, meetings, training & events market, hosting 750,000 delegates a year at 17,000 events in over 250 rooms. In 2017 it opened 68,000sqft of conference and event space at London's iconic, listed riverside venue County Hall, and opened its first Manchester venue. www.etcvenues.co.uk/

About BENCHMARK®, a global hospitality company

[BENCHMARK®, a global hospitality company](#), is a trailblazer in the development, management, marketing and owner-advisory services of resorts, hotels, conference centers and exclusive private clubs. In addition to the company's iconic [Benchmark Resorts & Hotels](#) portfolio, the [Gemstone Collection](#) is a distinctive luxury portfolio of independent hotels & resorts in highly preferred destinations. BENCHMARK'S distinguished and proven reputation is deeply-rooted in core values that are focused and aligned with exceeding ownership and stakeholder performance expectations. The combined portfolios feature nearly 70 unique and distinctive properties domestically and internationally. The company leadership and valued employees are passionately committed to delivering the industry's most authentic, enchanted, soulful, vibrant, unrivaled and memory-making experience. BENCHMARK'S progressive "Be The Difference" culture and values are a cornerstone to the company's nearly 40 years of extraordinary achievement and prosperity. Many properties have been recognized with the Benchmark Conference Centers® mark of meeting excellence. BENCHMARK, a global hospitality company, is based in The Woodlands (Houston), Texas, and has regional offices in Park City, Utah; Miami, Florida; New Brunswick, New Jersey; Seattle Washington; and Tokyo, Japan. www.benchmarkglobalhospitality.com To become a fan on Facebook, visit www.facebook.com/BenchmarkResortsandHotels www.facebook.com/GemstoneHotelCollection Follow us on Twitter at www.twitter.com/BenchmarkHotels, www.twitter.com/GemstoneHotels, on Instagram at www.instagram.com/benchmarkresortsandhotels www.instagram.com/gemstonehotels, and on Pinterest at <https://www.pinterest.com/benchmarkhotels/gemstone-hotels>. At LinkedIn, <https://www.linkedin.com/company/benchmark-a-global-hospitality-company>.

About Gencom

Founded in 1987 by Karim Alibhai, the Gencom family of companies is one of the industry's leading domestic and international real estate investment and development firms with experience owning, developing and operating across multiple industry segments and asset classes. Gencom focuses on executing distressed, turnaround and repositioning opportunities and actively invests in single-asset and portfolio assets, branded residential projects and hospitality operating platform strategies. Headquartered in Miami, Florida, Gencom is also fully integrated and highly diversified, with expertise in virtually every aspect of development, acquisition, capital markets and asset management. Today, Gencom's portfolio of owned assets, whether directly or through joint venture partnerships, consists of over 1,500 keys and includes the award-winning Ritz-Carlton, Key Biscayne, Four Seasons Resort Costa Rica and the Rosewood Bermuda at Tucker's Point. www.gencomgrp.com

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