



# Hotel industry 'faces increasing challenges'

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THE hotel sector in Northern Ireland faces increasing challenges when it comes to competing for business, a leading industry expert warned yesterday.

Michael Williamson, director of ASM Horwath, told delegates at a conference in Belfast that while the performance of the hotel sector in 2006 was the best on record, the Northern Ireland hotels market is still an immature one and faces strong competition if it is to sustain recent growth.

Addressing the conference at the Hilton Hotel, Mr Williamson said the Northern Ireland market had to differentiate itself by offering innovative design solutions which improve the experience for the consumer.

"Research shows that between 2003 and 2006 the profit per room has increased by 69 per cent.

"The luxury and first-class end of the market has experienced major growth, with an increase of 353 per cent between 1995 and 2006.

"Coupled with the dominance of branded hotels, which represent over 50 per cent of hotel stock in Northern Ireland, hotel owners face increasing challenges in competing for business.

"In order to compete, hotel owners need to offer the same comforts that people enjoy at home – such as wireless internet access and standalone showers as well as unique design concepts."

The seminar was organised by Belfast-based firm Douglas Wallace Architects.