



Reservations

by Mirna Rackov

Four-step formula for converting calls and increasing rooms reservations

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Many people think that the first chance to make an expertly, service-oriented impression on a guest or prospect is when he or she walks through a hotel's front doors. However, that first chance actually happens when the potential guest calls the property to, essentially, do business with the hotel. Front desk agents and/or reservationists face a hugely important task every time they answer a phone to take a reservation – they are responsible for turning inquiries into a sale.

Although the assignment sounds simple enough, there is an innumerable amount of potential revenue lost each time the sale is not executed correctly. There are many steps front desk agents and reservationists can follow when taking a phone call in order to effectively build a competitive edge and increase revenue for their property. But four steps are the most critical to achieving success. When this formula is committed to entirely and used on a regular basis for each customer that calls, the resulting increase in closed sales, profits, and level in service is undeniable.

Being able to close a sale is one of the most important skills anyone taking a reservation call must master. When a potential guest calls a hotel only to be greeted by someone who does not make them feel valued and does not meet, let alone exceed, their expectations, then more times than not, that employee will not close the sale. The person hangs up the phone with every expectation that if they were to stay at the property, the level of service they would receive in person mimics the poor level of service they just experienced on the phone.

1. Make the caller feel valued

This is why the most important thing a front desk agent or reservationist can do is to make the prospect on the other end of the line feel valued. Make them feel like the time they are taking to call your property and inquire about a possible stay is the reason you are at work. To do this, it is imperative to engage that person in a conversation about your property and about the reason for their call. The most tasteless and, yet, one of the most common reservation calls involves a prospect inquiring about a date or set of dates just to be hurriedly told that a room is available and their information is needed. The flipside to that ineffective conversation ends with the front desk agent or reservationist simply telling the customer that the property is sold out, end of story. Closing a sale is nearly impossible with the aforementioned tactics; the caller needs to feel appreciated, they need to know what the hotel has to offer, and they need to know that their business, be it one night or one week, is important to the hotel, as represented by the person who handles the inquiry.

The first essential step to taking a successful reservation call is to answer the phone promptly. If possible, never let the phone ring more than three times. If the front desk agent or reservationist is busy, they should still answer the phone. Let the customer know that their call is extremely important and then give them options. If they want to be put on hold, give them an approximate time range and proceed to put them on hold. Otherwise, tell the customer that you are assisting other callers or hotel guests at the



moment and that you do not want to rush their call. Ask if you can take their name and number and call them back in fifteen minutes. Be honest with the time range you give them. If you think you will be tied up for another twenty or thirty minutes, let them know. So many customers do not actually believe that they will receive a callback, so when they do, their first impression is tremendous.

After answering the phone, make sure to let the prospect know whom they are speaking with. State the name of the property and your name as well. The customer will listen to your greeting and then, if making a reservation, will let you know what dates they are looking to stay. Make sure not to sound robotic or monotonous, as you will let it be known that you have been there all day taking the same call over and over again.

2. Find their motivation for calling

After the dates are stated, recite them back to the potential guest. Along with the day or days of the month they gave you, reiterate them with the coinciding day or days of the week. This way, both the caller and the clerk will be absolutely sure of which dates are being inquired about. If the hotel is affiliated with a frequent stay program, ask the customer if they are a member. This will save the hassle of having to find this information out when the guest comes to check into the hotel. More importantly, having the guest's member status updated when they check in will make them feel important.

The next step is one that many front desk agents and reservationists may feel is invasive and unnecessary; but it helps to convert the reservation! After matching the day with the date, ask the customer what is bringing them to the area and if they have stayed with the hotel previously. More often than not, the person on the other end of the line will love to share why they are staying at your property. This personable question makes the customer feel like a person with a purpose for staying at your hotel, rather than just a number with a name. It will also enable the hotel to maintain a useful record on why guests stay at the property; and if noted on the reservation, it gives the front desk clerk something to discuss with the guest as soon as they walk through the door. This will undoubtedly impress arriving guests.

3. Personalize your responses to what is important to the caller

Now back to the reservations process. Once it has been ascertained that there are rooms available in the inventory for the dates the caller are seeking, make sure to personalize three or four benefits the hotel offers and state these to the guest before revealing the rate. For example, if the potential guest is in town for business, stress that the hotel offers complimentary wireless Internet access and a business center. If the customer is in town for a family getaway, inform them about the hotel's swimming pool and close proximity to a public park. This will entice the guest to take the rate into less consideration when making their decision.



4. Ask to book the reservation and close the deal

Finally, try to upsell the room by offering one or two room options available for a slightly higher rate. Ask the customer if they wish to confirm the reservation. Once they confirm, proceed to collect their personal information and guarantee method and enter the details into the reservation system. It is imperative to read back to the caller all the details of their reservation to include day and dates of stay, number of people, type of room and bed configuration, smoking preference, guarantee and cancellation policies, and the confirmation number. Answer any final questions they may have and then thank them and hang up.

If the caller hesitates accepting the offer to book the reservation or indicates that they will continue looking elsewhere, you have the ability to stop them! Ask them if there is anything else about the hotel or area that you can answer, or if there is something they are looking for that they may not have mentioned. Stress that the availability for the dates is limited, even if it may not be. If a customer feels that this may be their only chance to close the sale, they may change their mind and decide to make the reservation. If the guest decides not to place a reservation, always guarantee satisfaction and offer them a lower cost accommodation if it is available and in line with the current selling strategy. Before letting them go, ask them if they would like to confirm a second time. If not, always make sure to thank them for their time, and let them know they are more than welcome to call back with further inquiries.

In the case that the hotel is sold out for the dates the caller is asking about, do not simply inform them of the unfortunate situation and let them go. Give them alternatives. Never let the guest ask if there are other dates that may accommodate them, make sure you do the asking. Find out if the customer is flexible with their dates, and offer them an alternative available date. You can also offer them the telephone number of a sister property or nearby hotel to capture the overflow. If they are interested in the alternative date make sure to describe benefits before revealing the rate, and upsell if possible! Then continue with the aforementioned formula.

Conclusion

Turning a potential customer into a satisfied guest, and then a satisfied guest into a loyal one is the ongoing goal of the hospitality industry. The first step into turning that potential customer into that satisfied guest is getting them to the property. Mastering the aforesaid formula will turn any hotel's front desk agents and reservationists into the confident frontline the property needs to be able to sell their product. The increase in confidence will inevitably be followed by an increase in revenue and overall raised standard of service. ✧

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