



Marketing

by Bill Flor

Don't leave revenue on the table... Internal sales – The art of the conversion

*Another great article from The Rooms Chronicle, the #1 journal for hotel rooms management! ***Important notice: This article may not be reproduced without permission of the publisher or the author.*** College of Hospitality and Tourism Management, Niagara University, P.O. Box 2036, Niagara University, NY 14109-2036. Phone: 866-Read TRC. E-mail: editor@roomschronicle.com*

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The trend of potential guests making hotel accommodation reservations by way of e-commerce channels is clearly evident. Brand websites, self-booking tools, online travel agents and property proprietary websites are capturing approximately 50% of the business. This percentage varies somewhat as it pertains to specific market segments. Recent reports relay 57% of leisure travelers make reservations online – leaving 43% who do not; approximately 47% of government travelers make reservations direct, and the largest growing demographic on the Internet, mature adults (11.5 million users), are twice as likely to book accommodations direct.

Owners invest a tremendous amount of capital to build hotels. Money is then allocated to ‘marketing’ – brand affiliation, e-commerce tactics, direct sales, advertising, organizational networking (e.g., COC, CVB) and the like – all with the ultimate goal of renting overnight sleeping accommodations. Why then, for the most part, are front desk associates not trained to sell rooms?

Try this experiment

“You can observe a lot just by watching” – Yogi Berra. Baseball player, coach and philosopher.

Call competitors as if you were a guest seeking to book a room; see how the call is handled. Next, have a friend go by these properties to speculate booking rooms and report on what occurred. Now, shop your property. What’s the conclusion?

If yours’ concurs with my personal findings after shopping hundreds of hotels, then you too realize that front desk associates need training to learn how to sell rooms and subsequently optimize revenue. Thousands of dollars are being ‘left on the table’ due to hotel employees not being able to convert property direct telephone inquiries to reservations and walk-ins to guests.

There are reservation resource companies that offer formal training and monitoring programs. You may want to check with your brand to see if they have established programs. The Educational Institute of AH&LA (800.349.0299) is always a good resource. Additionally, you may be able to find area concerns that conduct point of purchase sales training. Or, perhaps a training program can be developed on the unit level. My decades of experience show the process must remain simple to be successful. The following tried and true ‘building blocks’ will assist you in achieving higher conversion rates and revenue.

Welcome

Always answer the telephone with enthusiasm. Start selling right then with a property tag line such as, “award winning hotel”, “we welcome your call”, and the like. For walk-ins situations, always stand, smile, welcome and engage the guest the second they walk into the lobby.

Qualify

Quickly identify the inquirer’s specific needs (i.e., dates, bedding, special requests, etc.). This is the foundation on which you will match requirements with property features.

Features

As the process rapidly unfolds, the sales agent needs to give a brief commercial, “While I check availability, allow me to relay that we offer...” Now state those features that will likely satisfy the special requests that you just learned are important to that prospective guest. Emphasize other positive price/value major amenities such as free breakfast, health club, swimming pool, free Internet access, etc.

Trial close

This is where most sales are lost. Agents are apprehensive to simply ask for the business. With a friendly smile (that is also ‘seen’ over the telephone) state that you have their preferred accommodation available. Quote the rate and say, “May I reserve that room for you?” If you don’t ask for their business, chances are you won’t earn it.

Adapt

If the guest balks, identify what their concern is and address it. With experience, the front desk or reservations agent will become adept in overcoming resistance to booking the room. Make up various scenarios with your agents and practice until it becomes second nature. It is most important that the skill of rate quoting and the subsequent permissible latitude of adjusting rates during the reservations process is fully understood by all front desk and reservations personnel. Again, ask the guest for their business after objections are met.

Conclusion of interaction

Once the inquiry is converted to a reservation, always reinforce the guest’s decision to choose your property by being courteous. Showing gratitude by simply stating, “Thank you for choosing our inn; we look forward to being of service” will clearly demonstrate this to the guest and reassure to them that they made a wise choice.

If the inquiry cannot be converted, smile and say, “Thank you for checking with us; we hope to be of service in the future.” This will extend to the prospective guest a positive feeling, even if the sale did not occur. In today’s society of discourteous service and minimal manners, it will also leave a lasting impression in the prospective guest’s mind. ‘Top of mind’ status may generate future reservation inquiries from that person or their friends and family.

This conversion process, replete with uncomplicated sales scripts and guidelines adapted to the individual associate’s personality, when coupled with ongoing positively-reinforced training has shown remarkable increases in conversions. Don’t leave your hotel’s potential revenues ‘on the table’ for your competitors! ✧

(Bill Flor possesses over 30 years of extensive sales & marketing experience in the lodging industry from the individual property level to the corporate level. He is currently based out of Jacksonville, Florida. Excerpts from his sales guide, Proactively Using Sales & Hospitality and other resources offered to the lodging industry may be viewed at www.no-vacancy.com. He can be reached at 800-477-5762 or via e-mail at: info@no-vacancy.com.)