



Front Office

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More than ever, front desk responsible for verifying guests' identity

*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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With the ongoing threat of terrorism and as news circulates throughout the media and within hotel circles about the vicious rape of a hotel housekeeper working an overnight shift at a posh hotel in New York City in early January, now is the time to review hotel policy on ascertaining guest identity during the check-in process.

Every state and most municipalities have enacted ordinances requiring hotels to maintain a registry of current and past guests as well as to ascertain the identity of those individuals who are checking in. Since the majority of hotel guests choose to pay for their guestrooms and hotel services using a credit card, few hotels opt to require government-issued picture identification from guests upon arrival. While this practice is not required by law or credit card companies, this is a good policy to institute. It demonstrates to guests that the hotel is serious about guest safety and that it is committed to preventing potential credit card fraud.

Too many times front desk clerks swipe a guest's credit card and return it to them without evening looking at the imprinted name on the card, let alone comparing signatures on the registration card with that on the back of the credit card. Just because the hotel has received credit card authorization does not warrant that the credit card is not stolen, nor does it vouch for the character or identity of the presenter.

Think about it. Hotels implement all kinds of steps to improve security: reprogrammable door locks, security patrols, close-circuit television surveillance, restricting access to guest floors to those who hold a room key. Yet, some hotels fail to check the identity of the person to whom they are issuing a room key to. Does this make any sense? Certainly not to the hotel guest (or employee) who is the victim of assault. And certainly not to the jury who will assuredly find that the hotel has violated its legal duty to protect guests and its employees (a.k.a. *negligence per se*).

While hotels are considered places of public accommodation, innkeepers must do their part, both in a legal and ethical sense, to protect those from whom they accept money for services. Always check the identity of arriving guests; compare the signature on the registration card to that on the back of the offered credit card. If the credit card is not signed, ask for government issued picture ID and compare the picture and signatures. Record the ID number and expiration date on the back of the registration card. And if guests object or complain, tell them why. It is for their protection. ✧