



Front Office

by Bob Kelly

Using a hotel's wireless connection as a marketing tool to accommodate guests

*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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By now, many hotels and motels have recognized the importance of offering wireless connectivity for their guests. Today's travelers want to be able to use their laptops and mobile devices anywhere they go, at any time of the day. For those hoteliers who understand the importance of offering WiFi for their guests, they might be interested in finding out how they can make this particular amenity work toward their hotel's advantage.

Every time a guest connects and logs on to the Internet during a stay at any hotel, a marketing opportunity is born. Instead of directing users straight to Google or Yahoo's homepage after they log on, why not guide them to your hotel's own information portal?

Much like your hotel's website and homepage is focused on attracting potential guests, this portal would be a marketing tool. But instead of attempting to attract new guests to the hotel, it would cater to those who are already staying at the facility and are looking to enhance their experience. Using your hotel's wireless Internet service provider or website developer to design it, Management can use the portal to do any of the following:

- Offer guests the capability to place room service orders, request a wake-up call, or check out online.
- Stream video and post photographs from local tours or events taking place in or around your hotel.
- Promote various amenities, such as the hotel's spa, pool, restaurant or bar.
- Book reservations for a return stay and offer a discount to those who do it online.
- Gather feedback from guests through an online survey.



Taking the idea one step further, a forward-thinking hotel manager could even investigate barter agreements with restaurants or nearby tourist attractions, inviting them to advertise their business or location on the hotel's portal page for a fee. It is advisable to discuss this option with your hotel's wireless Internet service provider first, as the provider is the owner and operator of the network and may require a share of the advertising revenue.

Another tip to keep in mind is the number of guests who may be accessing the hotel's WiFi system with mobile devices like iPhones. Many iPhone users prefer using a WiFi connection over their phone's network because it is faster. In designing your hotel's portal, or as you upgrade the hotel's wireless system, you may want to accommodate these users by designing an additional version of the page that is easy to view on a small display screen commonly associated with handheld communication devices.

All of these steps will go a long way toward addressing the needs of today's tech-savvy guests who no longer want to have to place a call or walk to the front desk to request a service. There can be significant labor savings too. By permitting in-house guests to schedule their own hotel services through the portal, this will likely reduce the time hotel employees spend addressing customer requests directly at the front desk or switchboard. And it gives each guest a greater sense of comfort and control.

By offering this portal any hotel can literally place services at guests' fingertips – guests who will ultimately reward the hotel with their positive reviews and return visits. ⇄

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