



Front Office

by William D. Frye, Ph.D., CHE

Eight items every front desk should have available for guests

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The front desk serves as the hub of a hotel's operation. This is the area from which guests register and depart, where the current occupancy status of the hotel is maintained, where inquiries are answered and requests for service are dispatched, and for many hotels it may be the only department that is staffed 24 hours each day. This round the clock nature of the front desk makes it a logical focal point for guests to seek out remedies for their immediate problems at all hours of the day and night.

Realizing this, front desk personnel should foresee the need to make available certain items to guests at any given hour of the day or night. Presented here are eight categories of items that every front desk should keep handy to accommodate unexpected or late night requests or emergencies. This list was compiled after consulting with various front office managers, night auditors and the author's professional experience working overnight shifts at hotels.



Pictured left: Cell phone charging kiosks such as the Charge Carte™ use rapid charge technology that will safely charge a guest's mobile device or Ipad up to twice as fast as a standard charger. The Charge Carte stations have been successfully used in airports, are portable and require minimal floor space, making them easy to place in public areas of hotels. These kiosks can charge up to 12 phones at once, accommodate the most popular types of mobile phones, and generate incremental income for the hotel.



Emergency toiletries

Small supplies of toothbrushes, toothpaste, combs, disposable hair brushes, disposable razors (for both men and women), shaving cream, mouthwash, and feminine and male hygiene products should be maintained at the front desk. If the Housekeeping department or a hotel gift shop stocks these items, this is great. But what happens after hours when the night auditor is alone, the gift shop is closed and guests require these items?

A request for these items may be because a guest forgot to pack them or perhaps because the guest's luggage has been lost or delayed. Today's strict rules for carrying liquids and gels aboard an airplane have forced many travelers to check their luggage, rather than carry it with them inside the plane. As a result, a greater number of air travelers are becoming separated from their personal items when traveling.

Simple OTC medicines and supplies

In addition to basic toiletries, front desks should be able to supply guests with over-the-counter medicines such as aspirin, acetaminophen or ibuprofen, non-prescription heartburn relief items such as Tums or Rolaids, Band-Aids, and even contact

lens solution. Frequently guests may require these items late at night when nearby pharmacies and convenience stores may be closed. More significant to consider is that when a guest is seeking these items, they usually are not in a position or frame of mind to do without them or leave the hotel to purchase them.

Batteries and universal chargers and adapters

Batteries never fail to discharge at the most inconvenient time. Consider keeping small quantities of AA and AAA batteries as well as D and C type batteries for electronics. Also stock size 10 and size 13 batteries for hearing aids; these are the most common sizes. Guests will gladly pay a small premium for these items when they need them most.



To accommodate international travelers, many who arrive late at night, maintain a handful of universal electrical adapters, both with and without the transformer, which can be lent to guests. And to no surprise, the item most frequently forgotten by guests is a cell phone charger. Consider stocking a couple of universal cell phone charging cords that can also be lent to guests. Alternatively, contemplate investing in a rapid charge station for cell phones in the hotel lobby. These rapid charge stations can accommodate most current models of cell phones and generate additional revenue for the hotel.

Shipping and wrapping supplies

At times hotel guests will need to prepare small items for shipment via the postal service, FedEx, UPS or other shipping companies, often during late night hours. Maintain sufficient quantities of shipping labels and markers, envelopes, boxes, scissors and tape so the guest can be accommodated, even in the middle of the night. Hotels should make small quantities of postage stamps available for guests to purchase. Know the location, hours and directions to the nearest post office, drop-off box, and other shipping offices. Remember that some travelers may not have time in their busy schedule to visit a nearby store to purchase these items or that these items may need to be packaged late at night. Keeping small quantities of generic decorative wrapping paper, tissue paper and gift bags can also save guests who need to wrap a last minute gift for a friend, relative, spouse or business associate. Sure this may sound unconventional to maintain these items at the front desk, but you will be a guest's hero if you can accommodate them!



Menus for food delivery

If your hotel does not offer 24-hour room service, make available take-out menus from various restaurants that will deliver to guests at your hotel who inquire. Hungry guests who arrive late at night will be grateful. It is important to have some knowledge about the reliability of the restaurant and the quality of the food it serves before recommending any specific menu to a guest. Many hotels will develop relationships with local pizza and sandwich shops to deliver to hotel guests during late hours. Obviously, if a hotel has its own food and beverage outlet still serving, this should be suggested to the guest as the most expedient and reliable alternative.

After-hours medical and professional services

Develop a list of qualified and licensed medical providers and attorneys who are willing to accommodate out of town guests on short notice. Physicians, pediatricians, dentists, chiropractors, mental health therapists, massage therapists, and even veterinarians (for guests traveling with pets). There will come a time when a guest has an urgent care need such as the flu, toothache, dislocated back, or emotional crisis but will not want to visit a hospital or urgent care facility. Perhaps they need an attorney to review a contract or write a legal agreement on short notice. Realize that the guest will ask front desk personnel for a recommendation. Rather than recommend any single provider, or one professional over another, merely furnish the list of professionals and their contact information to the guest and let them choose who they wish to contact. Do not contact the medical provider on behalf of the guest as that can be interpreted by the guest or a court of law as an implied endorsement and possibly expose the hotel to legal liability if malpractice occurs or if the guest's expectations are not fulfilled.

Umbrellas and disposable ponchos

Often guests do not travel with an umbrella or they fail to check the weather forecast for the city they will be traveling to. Hotels can maintain inexpensive umbrellas to be loaned out to registered guests during inclement weather. Don't forget to annotate when a guest has returned the umbrella so they will not be charged for the item. For guests who will not return to the hotel or who might be attending an outdoor sporting event, offer disposable plastic ponchos as a takeaway amenity. These convenient items can cost the hotel as little as 40 cents per poncho and will easily fit into a purse or pants pocket, but it is something that a guest will long remember. Otherwise, don't be surprised if a guest comes to the front desk on a rainy day asking to "borrow" an empty trash bag.



Bathrobe

Always keep a bathrobe at the front desk! As crazy as it may sound, it will become invaluable to preserving someone's modesty should a guest have an unexpected wardrobe malfunction or your auditor is visited by an unclothed sleepwalking guest in the middle of the night. Many guests sleep in their underwear or the nude, and some guests suffer from sleepwalking disorders. Moreover, sometimes guests who are traveling alone quickly step outside of their hotel room to retrieve the morning newspaper or set a room service tray in the corridor and then find themselves in an unusual predicament when the door shuts behind them. The guest is then forced to report to the front desk to obtain another key in whatever level of attire they were or were not wearing when the lockout occurred. For your sake, their sake and everyone's benefit, keep a bathrobe handy for such an emergency. ✧

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