



Sales & Marketing

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Hotel sales blitzes and a not so new technique for building sales and awareness

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The word “blitz” does not have any direct synonyms in a thesaurus. The dictionary would likely define it as:

- a rash of air raid attacks
- football rush at the quarterback
- an assault or military maneuver or
- a fast and intensive campaign

It is the last definition that matters to us. Regardless of the size (or lack of size) of your hotel’s sales team, it can get tired or lethargic at times. The concept of a hotel sales blitz is a remedy that brings a great deal of enthusiasm to those responsible for selling, as well as a good amount of potential business.

The hotel staff’s primary involvement includes a pre-blitz orientation dinner, providing collateral material, arranging for incentive awards, and providing the service of a sales manager each evening of the blitz period. Each day, upon the return of the blitzers, the sales manager reviews each blitz call report to determine the number of calls and leads that were turned in.



How to arrange a sales blitz

A sales blitz is an intensive survey of a given geographical area to determine its market potential. The idea is to lay the groundwork for a sharp increase in business by gathering the information sales staff need to do their job well.

The key to a successful blitz is to completely canvas an area in as little time as possible, with as few people as possible. To make that happen, proper organization is essential.

The real key to a successful blitz program is proper motivation. Management and owners need to be behind the program as much, if not more, than the participants in the program. The blitzers need to be animated and psychologically motivated throughout the program. Breakfasts that incorporate music, signs, banners, awards, and other “mood elevators” will help bring in great results.

Who are the “blitzers”?

Anyone with a pleasant personality on a hotel’s payroll can participate. Since the objective is not to sell but to gather information, the blitz team needn’t be limited to members of the sales department. The idea is to extend the department’s reach, not overload it with a new responsibility.

There’s one critical thing to remember: the same people have to be used throughout the length of the blitz. Switching horses in midstream will only complicate matters as momentum will be lost and enthusiasm diluted.



The staff members chosen to participate have to be under the firm and direct control of one person. The Director of Sales is a good candidate, but that needn't be the case. The prime consideration is finding a "blitz director" who can keep things under control.

The blitz director needs to start planning the operation 30 days in advance of the blitz date(s). Logical days to select are Tuesday, Wednesday and Thursday, when the contacts are more likely to be in town. Three days of blitzing should be the maximum. For small properties with limited amount of blitzer time available, a one or two-day blitz could be satisfactory. In fact, a one-day mini-blitz would be a good place to start experimenting with the process.

How many calls?

The answer for a full-blown blitz would likely be 30 calls a day. In six and a half hours each person should be able to conduct "30 calls". Depending on the area assigned, the number of calls will vary. In a downtown office building

in a medium to large city, a higher number should be made, while in smaller or outlying industrial areas, far fewer calls could result.

For a three-day blitz, each person may be assigned 100 calls. Logically, in a business area of any city the calls would be located right next door to each other — or in the case of office buildings, all in the same building, with the blitzer going floor to floor.

End of day activities

After the day's calls are completed, a blitz recovery period should be scheduled. It is during this time that the forms are turned in and reviewed by the blitz director or a member of the hotel's sales department. It would be appropriate to serve refreshments and snacks to the blitzers to help them unwind and discuss the day's work.

Grades are also assigned at the period when the forms are reviewed. A score chart is kept where each blitzer is credited with the number of calls and number of leads developed. Once tabulated, a daily winner of the "contest" should be announced and a prize should be awarded. After the last blitz day, a dinner may be planned with the spouses and guests of the blitzers included in the festivities.

Since the objective of the blitz is to develop sales leads, a good deal of time and money would be wasted if a poor follow-up job was done. After each day's calls have been tabulated, the blitz forms need to be sorted by the "grades" given each blitzer. The highest grades are obviously given to the forms with the best potential leads, these are usually the ones that require immediate attention. The Director of Sales should determine which leads need to be followed up the very next morning and arrange the remaining forms in priority order for follow-up calls based on the information received. Even while blitzers are out the next day, sales department personnel should start on the follow-up of the previous day's work. It is important to check files first before the follow-up to see if more information on the prospect might already be available.

Although a successful blitz requires time and effort on the part of the management team, it always produces excellent results. Besides developing leads, it helps promote the property to the business community. In addition, it becomes a motivational tool for the staff members that have participated in a team effort, which creates a healthy, cooperative attitude that lasts a long time.

Blitz preparation

In organizing the calls to be made, the most helpful system is to use a city directory. The directory lists all addresses in a city by street designation. It is important to concentrate calls in one small area at a time so the blitzers aren't spread too thin.

Index cards should be used to record the names and addresses of all the calls that need to be made. These cards are then assigned to the participants based on geographical territory.

An adequate supply of collateral material and forms are necessary. Padded blitz survey forms should be plentiful (you will need at least one per call). In addition, property brochures, fact sheets and promotional material (about the entire facility including meeting space, restaurant, lounge, etc.) should be given out on each call. Low-cost "promotional or advertising" gifts may be distributed, but they're certainly not necessary.

In today's competitive market, many brands and management groups band together and "attack" an area or market believed to have potential for the brand or group of hotels. Convention and Visitors' Bureaus, Chambers of Commerce, and national sales teams have had excellent success with this tactic of reaching a large number of potential clients quickly with a motivated team of interested professionals.

But there is one other technique to implementing a sales blitz that your hotel may want to consider that is very cost effective and can render positive educational benefits for the next generation of hotel managers.

The student blitz

We all know what a sales blitz is: a group of people fanning out after sales leads, making as many calls as possible in a limited area within a short span of time. With the recent growth of hospitality education programs across the world in the last generation, the hospitality industry has been introduced to an effective, low-cost type of sales blitz known as the “student blitz”.

Energetic college blitzers can cover a lot of ground generating sales leads by face-to-face contact. The students fill out fact or prospect survey sheets that the hotel’s full-time sales staff should follow up on later. The blitzers can also “scatter” around promotional flyers on a hotel’s food and beverage offerings.

Howard Feiertag, my friend and co-author of *Lessons in the Field: A Common Sense Approach to Effective Hotel Sales* has shared with me examples of such blitzes a number of years ago in major cities sponsored by major national chains that generated hundreds of firm sales leads made by as few as 10 motivated students. He has statistics on immediate results totaling more than \$200,000 of potential business for properties! This does not mean actual business as the student blitzers only identified specific prospects and real business leads, but the foundation was set. Howard, who has been a member of the faculty at Virginia Tech since 1989, shared with me as recently as last month that the students in certain sales classes continue to participate in organized sales blitzes, working with area hotels and management groups.

How do you find such a marvelous resource?

It is not totally free, but can be very cost effective. One variation to student blitz programs is to engage the services of an outside source, for a fee, to handle the entire operation. This takes the administrative burden of doing a blitz away from the hotel’s sales staff, thereby allowing them to continue their usual daily sales activities without taking time away from selling.

These are frequently hospitality or marketing professors at universities in your general marketplace. The professor will recruit a number of interested students for the project who may receive academic credit or fulfill a practicum or work experience requirement. Real world interaction is essential to students.

In addition to development of the leads, the amount of goodwill and promotion benefit for the hotel is virtually immeasurable. From the students’ viewpoints, the experience gained by making the calls and the exposure to hotel operations could only benefit the students in their future studies and career paths. From the universities’ perspective, there is “real world” connection and relevance to the marketplace, as well as the potential for obtaining business contacts and potential guest speakers.



How can this work?

There are several ways, and I will share two approaches:

The first approach is for a management group, brand or hotel group to contact a hospitality education program and initiate a plan:

- The sponsoring hotel group or chain involved provides the students five double rooms for three nights, as well as meals, incentive awards, and mileage reimbursement.
- An unexpected plus connected with using student blitzers is that a student can, in many instances, get in doors where an experienced salesperson may not be able to.
- A smiling, semi-nervous student can disarm secretaries and executives by appealing to parental instincts or by convincing subjects that the cause of education is at stake. This is not meant to sound misleading or dishonest; the truth is that these hotel or marketing majors are learning valuable lessons about what it takes to be successful in real life business.
- Usually, a group of 10 people can make 1,000 calls within three days. It is important that time isn’t wasted by indiscriminate running around. Calls must be planned, routes marked out, assignments made, information sheets developed, collateral material selected, briefings given and participants rehearsed. Out of 1,000 calls, typically 200-300 will result in some type of sales lead. Although students are doing the legwork, it is important to have full-time sales staff follow-up. If well planned and implemented, a student blitz can keep your sales team working with clients in the hotel while highly motivated students identify sales leads for guestrooms, group and social business.

The second approach is for a university with an established hospitality program to work with various hotel companies or brands in an organized fashion that maximizes productivity, interaction between students and industry sales professionals, and gives the students “real world” experiences:

- After an earlier article I wrote on the topic of blitzes, I was contacted by Gregory L. DeShields, who is the Senior Director for Corporate Relations at Temple University’s School of Tourism and Hospitality Management. Greg is also an adjunct faculty member and for the past eight years has taught a comprehensive class on Hospitality Operations. The class syllabus is quite detailed and says the class “focuses on an integration and application of planning, implementation, operation,

maintenance of accommodations, including hotels, motels, and resorts. The physical aspects, capital investments, layout, and design will be included with the operational component.”

- Greg, who is an experienced hotel manager with assignments at a number of major properties, explained when we talked that 10% of the student’s final grade in the class is based on their efforts and attitude in a University-Industry collaboration that includes a Student Sales Blitz.
- The Spring 2011 project was a joint effort with the Hyatt Regency Baltimore, which provided an orientation/information dinner class and accommodations. Sales managers from the Hyatt Regency reviewed the sales blitz goals and objectives, expectations, and distributed information packets. On the following day, Hyatt Regency sales representatives established “Temple Sales Teams” to conduct direct sales calls visiting various assigned establishments to solicit business. Students performed sales calls and gained an intimate knowledge of the sales process and realistic sales initiatives.

Like a good number of us in the hospitality field, we all hope that graduates of hospitality programs will be well prepared and aware of the challenges facing us. I was very impressed that this course on *Hospitality Operations* not only addressed capital investments, R&M and design, but it also incorporated the sales blitz into the classroom curriculum to demonstrate accountability of performance and to provide students an intimate introduction to significant elements of Sales & Marketing. This demonstrates the tremendous win/win potential of this kind of collaboration between hospitality academic programs and hotels. And it is pretty cost effective for the hotel as well! ✧

(Dr. John Hogan is a successful hospitality executive, educator, author and consultant and is a frequent keynote speaker and seminar leader at many hospitality industry events. He is co-author of the book Lessons in the Field: A Common Sense Approach to Effective Hotel Sales and co-founder of a consortium of successful corporate and academic professionals delivering focused and affordable counsel in solving specific challenges facing hospitality today. www.HospitalityEducators.com is a membership site offering a wide range of information, forms, best practices and ideas designed to help individual hoteliers and hospitality businesses improve their market penetration, deliver service excellence and increase their profitability. E-mail: john.hogan@hospitalityeducators.com.)