



Guest Services

by Thomas Phelka

Want to create better guest service? Learn the surrounding area of your hotel!

*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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Hotel teams can be so focused on getting guests into their hotel that they forget about how important it is to promote the surrounding area of the hotel. Hotels and their communities are in a heterogeneous relationship; a hotel brings people to a city, but a city attracts people to need a hotel in the first place. A hotel contributes to the economy of a city, but the city's economy directly impacts a hotel's success. Hotels and their surrounding communities are in a co-dependent relationship and both must be cared for in order to create success.



Why it is important to know the surrounding area

Guests are not going to stay on property the entire duration of their stay; most will want to explore the new and exciting location they are in. One of the most basic aspects of travel is experiencing new things, and as such, travelers tend to not be familiar with the area they are in. Guests will not differentiate their experience based upon time spent inside and outside of the hotel; therefore, a bad experience outside the hotel is as bad as one inside the hotel. By being provided a thorough understanding of the surrounding area, guests are comforted and able to have their expectations met, resulting in a one of a kind stay.

Hotels are ground zero for travelers; they expect to find answers to all of their questions and solutions to all of their problems from one central point. A guest may be looking for some place to eat, but it is not as simple as giving a favorite restaurant; the guest may be looking for a budget meal or a luxury meal, they could be looking for Greek, American, Italian, vegetarian, etc. They could be traveling with a family or be a couple looking for a romantic setting. A hotel that has a complete understanding of its community can find the perfect solution to a guest's request, but a hotel that does not will be left with an unsatisfied guest.

While guests often expect hotels to take care of their every need, it is not possible for one establishment to accomplish this; spreading too thin is a surefire way to fail, and the support of a community is one hundred percent necessary. Hotel staff should not tell a guest looking for a jewelry repair shop that the hotel does not offer that service; they should explain where one can be found. At the same time it is not expected that the hotel offer this service, to do so would not be beneficial to the hotel. By having a complete understanding and support of the community, the hotel can offer the service without providing it on property, thus creating infinitely more services available than before.

How to communicate with the outside world

The methods used to communicate with the community are as important as the reasons for communicating in the first place. Communicating with outside vendors can be done in countless ways. Some common ways are through concierge services,



visitor bureaus, or vendors coming to the hotel. Many vendors will take advantage of the large amount of guests at a hotel and approach the hotel to promote their services, but it is still important to actively seek resources that will be beneficial to guests.

Smaller properties will utilize front desk agents for concierge services while larger properties will staff a full time concierge. Regardless of who performs the service it is important that an internal individual keeps up to date with new businesses, changing businesses, and closed businesses outside of the hotel. It should not be assumed that all useful businesses will come to the hotel for help. It may also happen that the hotel itself needs help. Having strong contacts within local businesses can be invaluable when it comes to time sensitive problem solving.

How to communicate services to guests

No matter how many resources are available in the community and known about by a hotel, they will not be beneficial to the guests if they have no way of learning about them. It is important to create a central system or database to keep track of the services outside of the hotel of use to guests. This system will create a standard of knowledge for all employees of a hotel and create a consistent service for guests. This database must be kept accurate, easy to use, and current.

Guests will be obtaining recommendations of services to be used from many places within a hotel property. One of the main ways will be from employee's recommendations. The wide range of different services requested, combined with multiple businesses to satisfy each service and the contact information, make it nearly impossible for employees to remember all of the important information. By creating a common, consistent compilation of the information, employees will be able to pick out and contact the perfect establishment for guests' personalized needs. It is important that this information be easy to use so that the employee is able to quickly find the proper organization. To facilitate such a task, companies such as GoConcierge and Gold Key Solutions offer concierge-oriented software designed to improve guest services and staff communication for hotels of all types by creating orderliness and accuracy throughout the entire concierge process.

Another very common and useful way that guests gain information about surrounding companies is through menu books. These are commonly found either in guestrooms, or in the lobby of a hotel. Menu books present a variety of restaurant styles in the local areas and provide the menus, prices, and pictures of dining venues in an easy to use and convenient format. Menu books are useful but only for a limited time. Restaurants change their menus and prices frequently, which will result in inaccurate and therefore useless information in older menu books. Constant vigilance and monitoring must be used when menu books are offered.

The area surrounding a hotel offers support and services far above and beyond those that are possible to be offered within the hotel. Proper utilization of these services will result in a superior guest experience while poor utilization will leave guests confused and displeased. Doing something even as simple as compiling a list of current businesses within close range of a hotel can be a huge benefit for guests. But the most important dimension of any successful concierge program is retaining guest service employees who have extensive knowledge of the surrounding area of the hotel and the city in which it is located.

From the TRC archives:

The following related article has appeared previously in *The Rooms Chronicle* and is available for download from the TRC website at www.roomschronicle.com:

- "Hoteliers can derive revenue from menu books for guests seeking F&B choices". Volume 17, Issue 2 (Mar./Apr. 2009) ✧

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