



Risk Management

by Stephen C. Barth, J.D., CHE and William D. Frye, Ph.D., CHE

Safety dictates that room service “door menus” have outlived their usefulness

*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*

Notice: The ideas, opinions, recommendations, and interpretations presented herein are those of the author(s). The College of Hospitality and Tourism Management, Niagara University/The Rooms Chronicle® assume no responsibility for the validity of claims in items reported.

Let's all remember that just because something makes money, doesn't necessarily make it the right thing to do. Indeed travelers have been exposed to a greater number of surcharges, promotions, and questionable practices by the hospitality and travel industry in an effort to prop up bottom lines. Think airline baggage fees and fuel surcharges, hotel overbooking and early departure fees, and of course the incessant barrage of target marketing efforts and social media outreach that companies engage in to help sustain or promote their bottom line.

But what about hotel marketing efforts that possibly compromise the delivery of guest service, or more significantly, pose a danger to the safety and wellbeing of their guests? Today, with the intense pressure on the bottom line, hotel managers must not lose focus that it is still their responsibility to protect guests against “foreseeable dangers” on hotel premises.

One example of such a marketing initiative in hotels that poses a foreseeable danger is the Room Service for Breakfast Door Hanger. These rascals have lots of information on them, especially information that a perpetrator would love to have before committing a wrongdoing. In addition to the menu selections, typically, the hanger asks for the name of the guest and the room number, how many people the service is for, and the time the delivery should be made. Then the hanger is placed on the exterior door handle, ostensibly for hotel staff to come by and pick it up at some point.

There are a few potential problems with this protocol. First, the guest has no idea if the hotel actually picked up the hanger. Accordingly, neither party knows if a 3rd party came by and removed it from the door. Since most hotels do not retrieve the breakfast menu hangers until late in the evening (1am-3am), guests' information is potentially hanging on doors for all to see for long periods of time.

Second, the hotel has no idea if a guest really put a hanger out on their door. It could always be placed there by someone else as a prank. All breakfast menus are similar and are distributed to every guestroom. They are not unique to a specific guestroom. Also, room attendants leave small piles of new hangers sitting on the top of their housekeeping carts alongside other supplies while cleaning the inside of a guestroom with the door closed. Any passerby could grab a handful of blank hangers and wreak havoc on the hotel.

We hope you see the service and security issues that arise when this occurs. If a prankster retrieves the menu, the hotel will never know that the guest is expecting a breakfast delivery until it is too late and the service equation is seriously interrupted. If a prankster emplaces the hanger, food and time is wasted and the service equation is still adversely affected.

Of even greater concern should be that if a person with criminal intent picks it up, they are now loaded with intelligence: the guest's name, a good probability that someone is alone in the room (assuming the guest indicated service for one), and a time frame when the occupant is expecting a delivery in the early morning...so the occupant's guard may be down when there is a knock at the door. All of these valuable pieces of information, if known to a potential perpetrator, are an open invitation to attempt a guestroom crime. It could be a forcible knock and “push in” at the expected arrival of breakfast, a sexual assault by a criminal dressed as a room service clerk, or even a burglar realizing that the room will likely be unoccupied two hours after breakfast delivery but guest personal items may remain on stayover reservations.

If the hangers were ever safe, with today's technology, they have certainly outlived their usefulness. It is time for hotels to stop using room service door hangers. If they want to



continue a room service for breakfast program, then have the guest place the order directly with room service on the phone. This way the room service captain can ascertain that the guest is actually requesting the service and also suggest additional add-on or breakfast upgrades.

As an alternative to door hanger menus, consider posting room service menus on the television's interactive request system. This would work in much the same manner as a guest ordering an on-demand movie or completing a guest satisfaction survey. Finally, consider offering room service ordering through the Internet (accessible only through the guest's hotel loyalty account) or from a guest's PDA or handheld mobile device and linked to their hotel loyalty account. Think about it. If guests can check into a hotel online today by using their mobile device, why can't they order room service and have it ready for delivery upon their arrival or return to their hotel room?

All of these options offer greater security to both guests and the hotel and increase the quality of service that can be delivered because of the two-way interaction that is afforded. Door hanger menus are impersonal, unsafe, and so yesteryear. ✧

(Dr. Stephen C. Barth is a professor of law and leadership at the Conrad N. Hilton College of Hotel & Restaurant Management at the University of Houston and the founder of HospitalityLawyer.com, a valuable resource for hoteliers that brings together legal, safety, and security information, resources, and solutions for the hotel industry. Dr. William D. Frye, is an associate professor of hotel management at the College of Hospitality and Tourism Management at Niagara University and the executive editor of The Rooms Chronicle. E-mail: sbarth@hospitalitylawyer.com, wfrye@roomschronicle.com. Website: www.hospitalitylawyer.com)