



Front Office

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

Wake-up call standards vary by segmentations and service levels

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Deciding on the appropriate standard of service for delivering wake-up calls to guestrooms is something that every rooms division manager or front office manager will consider at one time or another. Much like a clean guestroom, freshly laundered towels, and a comfortable bed, it is one of the small amenities that guests have come to expect when staying away from home. Sure the vast majority of hotel guests travel with cell phones that have an alarm clock feature. But, it is just one of those little amenities that guests like to take advantage of whenever possible.

Some guests rely on a wake-up call as their primary means of waking in the morning; others use it as a “back up” in case their cell phone or the alarm clock in the guestroom fails to go off or wake them. The nice thing about a wake-up call is that a real person, namely the front desk clerk or PBX operator, instead of a machine that depends on electricity or batteries, will take responsibility for ensuring that a guest has answered the wake-up call. Everyone has experienced missed alarms at some point in their life because of power failure, dead cell phone battery, or because they set the alarm clock incorrectly. And with the myriad of different types of guestroom alarm clocks used by hotels, many guests do not even dare to attempt to set their own alarm; it is far easier to just pick up the guestroom phone, dial 0, and ask for a wake-up call.

While it costs very little to record and place wake-up calls, hotels accept significant responsibility and potential legal liability when choosing to offer this service. Failing to place a timely wake-up call can result in a guest missing their early morning flight, critical appointment or business meeting, or perhaps even taking vital medicine (such as insulin) on time. Hence, attention to details and follow-through on requests by hotel personnel are necessary.



“I’d like to leave a wake-up call for high noon.”

Manual vs. automated calls

When choosing to offer wake-up call service, hotel Management must decide whether to offer personalized service or automated service. Most modern hotel PBX systems allow guests to directly request a wake-up call from their guestroom by pushing a button labeled “wake-up call” on their guestroom phone. This connects to the telephone system where an automated voice instructs the guest how to type in their request for a wake-up call using the keypad on the guestroom phone. Later, the same phone system automatically dials the guestroom back at the requested time and plays a recorded message. If the guest does not answer the phone by a pre-set number of rings, a second phone call will automatically be initiated to the guestroom. The positive aspects of this automated system are that there is no use of hotel personnel. Thus, labor costs and the chance of employee error are removed from the equation. Of course the drawbacks are the opportunity for guest errors when typing in the time of the call and certainly the lack of personalization and human interaction.

Pros and cons of each

Non-automated calls are more personal in nature. Guests typically dial "0" for the PBX operator or front desk to request a wake-up call. This affords the opportunity for interaction with hotel staff, the chance to offer the guest a "follow-up" wake up call ten minutes later (sort of like hitting the "snooze" button on an alarm clock), as well as the opportunity to inquire if the guest would like to place a room-service order for breakfast or ask if they might need any other services (e.g., shuttle van service or valet car brought to the front door at a particular time).

As a general rule of thumb, four-diamond and five-diamond rated hotels always offer personalized wake-up call service while limited-service, select-service, and full-service hotels that are not of four- or five-diamond caliber typically choose to offer automated service. There are several reasons for this. Most limited-service and select-service hotels do not employ dedicated hotel operators and often, very few front desk personnel. At peak times, a front desk clerk can become easily overwhelmed multitasking between phone calls, guests attempting to check-in or out, cashiering duties, etc. Nothing is more frustrating for a guest than calling the front desk to request a wake-up call and there is no answer. The same inundated front desk clerk could easily forget to place a timely wake-up call in the morning if he or she is overwhelmed with other responsibilities.

Full-service hotels on the other hand employ a greater number of employees that tend to specialize in certain aspects of guest service, thus enabling them to focus on delivering a higher and more personalized level of service to guests. Additionally, AAA and Mobil standards require hotels seeking to be rated at the four or five diamond/star level to offer personalized wake-up call service where the guest's name is used when accepting and/or placing the call. Please see the inset box to learn the AAA wake-up call standards for four-diamond and five-diamond rated hotels.

Missed calls

On occasion, some guests will not answer their wake-up call. This could be because the guest is a heavy sleeper, is in the bathroom or shower, or there is a phone problem in the guestroom. When this occurs, it is imperative that the hotel immediately place a second phone call. If again the guest does not answer, the front desk should dispatch a security officer, bell person, or front desk agent to the guestroom door to knock and announce the wake-up call. It is always important to get verbal confirmation from the guest before logging the call as successful.

For recordkeeping purposes, keep a record of all wake-up calls requested and placed for a minimum of 60 days before disposing, in case a claim arises later that a requested call was not placed and the guest suffered as a result. On the log sheet, always record the name or initials of the employee who received the request and who successfully completed the wake-up call. A sample wake-up call log sheet is enclosed. ✧



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AAA Four Diamond and Five Diamond Standards for Wake-up Calls

Four Diamond Expectations

- Wake-up call service is available 24 hours a day, seven days a week
- Wake-up call requests are answered within three rings
- Operator uses a warm and sincere greeting, using guest's name when call is requested
- Operator asks appropriate questions and replies in a professional manner
- Operator offers a warm and sincere closing
- Automated or personal call wake-up call is received within five minutes of requested time (Note: Service may not be automated for five diamond hotels)

Five Diamond Expectations

Five diamond properties must meet all the four diamond expectations plus:

- Operator asks if there are any other ways to be of service when accepting wake-up call requests
- Operator addresses guest by name during closing of wake-up call requests
- Live, personal wake-up call is received within five minutes of requested time
- The wake-up message includes a warm and sincere greeting with use of guest's name
- The wake-up message includes the time of the call
- The wake-up message includes other pertinent information such as weather
- Operator asks if there are any other ways to be of service when placing wake-up call
- Operator offers a warm and sincere closing when placing wake-up call
- Operator addresses guest by name during closing of wake-up call
- Evidence of personalized service exists

Source: AAA Lodging Requirements & Diamond Rating Guidelines