

Through the Keyhole

Deborah Clark-Rust leaves the Novotel Toronto Centre to join G.A.P. Solutions as a consultant... **Kevin Porter** is promoted to general manager of the Toronto Don Valley Hotel & Suites (formerly the Crowne Plaza Toronto Don Valley)... **Katie Fitzgerald** moves from the Radisson Suite Hotel Toronto Airport to Travelodge Canada as National Sales Assistant ... **Toni Frankfurter** leaves the Hilton Garden Inn to become director of sales and marketing at the Novotel Mississauga... **Shannon Hill** moves from the Holiday Inn Toronto Airport to join The Old Mill as director of sales... **Warren Challis** leaves the Four Seasons to join the Ritz Carlton as director of national account sales... Warren is replaced at the Four Seasons by **Adam Bussell**, who leaves the King Eddie... also joining the Ritz Carlton is **Sudheer Joshi**, formerly of the Fairmont Royal York... **Stephanie Snowball** leaves Niagara Hotels to become director of sales at the Holiday Inn Yorkdale... **Rebecca Bartlett Jones**, formerly with Hazelton Lanes, becomes key account manager with InterContinental Hotels Group's group sales

office... **Monika Radicevic** leaves the Marriott Bloor Yorkville to become sales manager at the InterContinental Toronto Centre... **Judy Mahoney** departs the Eastons Group to become director of sales and marketing at the InterContinental Toronto Yorkville... **Ina "Luci" Lucia** is sales coordinator at the Hilton Garden Inn Toronto Downtown... **Stephanie Whitemore** leaves the Hyatt Regency to become account executive, association market, with the Direct Energy Centre/ Allstream Centre... **Amanda Poujade** moves from the Residence Inn Downtown Toronto to become event meeting manager at The Fairfield Inn & Suites Toronto Airport... **Colin Sines** leaves Vintage Hotels to become executive director of the Niagara Culinary Trail... **Peter Sternberg** leaves AVW-TELAV to join CCR Solutions as general manager... **Marsha Jones**, CMP, CMM has launched a site-selection service company called The Spot Inc... **Christine Mulligan** and **Maria Chung** are handling sales for the new Thompson Hotel on Wellington Street West.

What's New

The Crowne Plaza Toronto Don Valley is now the **Toronto Don Valley Hotel & Suites**.

Skyline Boutique Hotels, owners of the Pantages and Cosmopolitan Hotels, are in due diligence to purchase the King Edward Hotel.

Thompson Hotel, one of a NY-based independent company's properties will open on Wellington Street West in March 2010.

The **Hilton Garden Inn Toronto City Centre** (formerly Comfort Suites City Centre) at 200 Dundas Street East opened its doors in August 2009.

Easton's Group of Hotels opened the new **Hilton Garden Inn Toronto Airport West Mississauga** in August 2009.

The new 125-room Four Points by Sheraton Cambridge opened in October 2009.

The Days Hotel Downtown Toronto has closed temporarily for a major renovation and reflagging to a Holiday Inn in early 2010.

Congratulations

Samantha Smith (Dancap Productions) married Michael Shaw on September 12, 2009.

Katrina Woodhouse (Toronto Marriott Bloor Yorkville) and her husband Lorne welcome baby daughter Elle Kennedy on November 15, 2009.

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General Managers Night

Thursday, January 28, 2010
4:30 pm – 9:00 pm

The Old Mill Inn & Spa CELEBRATING 30 YEARS!



Winter 2010 Issue

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KEY access

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A Message from the President

By Colleen Curran-Fotopoulos, CHSP
President of CHMSE,
Radisson Suite Hotel Toronto Airport

Hello 2010!!

As we creep up on the end of 2009 and face entering our 30th year as an association, I look at the daunting task in this small note of inspiring, provoking thought or simply entertaining. But the only words that come to mind are the ones that have been said by sales managers all across the GTA over the past 12 months.

Let's take a moment...shall we?

To the Association Managers: Lucky You! Booking that business five years out has its benefits! The only phrase that you had to say was: "Do you see our attrition policy located on page 3 of your contract?"

To the Corporate Group Managers and Tour Managers: Repeat after me: "You want what rate???"

To the Athletic and SMERF Managers: "Can I get you a bag of chips to go with the free breakfast, parking, 20% commission, and 1 per 10 comp policy? In fact, how about we pay YOU to stay with us!

BT managers will remember saying this: "So, when do you think the travel freeze will end for ABC Inc? "

Joking aside, this has been a tough year and one reason why the association felt that it should cut out everything but the core programming which our membership depends on to assist them in their daily work. If the program was not immediately relevant and task focused than we put it off for better days. Justifying expenses this

year has been a challenge for everyone, so we made sure that every meeting brought some new kernels of industry knowledge in subjects that we are all struggling to get more information on that could only assist in the pursuit of business for our hotels: social marketing trends, travel trends for the upcoming year, and getting back to basic sales tactics have all been topics of recent meetings.

The board also voted to host a fun event at Polson Pier in August to acknowledge the past year of challenges. This was a good event to touch base and network with our industry peers to see how we were all surviving. Thankfully, the feedback wasn't as bad as I anticipated. We were all generally a positive bunch and shows as an industry that we know how to grit our teeth and knuckle down.

As we enter 2010, I know that we are happy to see the end of a very challenging year and although we are conservative in our expectations of the rebound for next year, I feel a sense of anticipation to get this party started. General Managers Night in January is going to set the tone in starting the year off. This is going to be a fantastic night where we salute some of our industry's finest for their longtime support of CHMSE.

I hope you join us.

For more information, please feel free to contact me directly at **whg4107DOS@whg.com** or **416-242-7400 Ext. 341**

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Mark Your Calendars!

March 25, 2010

DISCOVERY NIGHT 2010

Presented by your
Affiliate Members

Ellen Muir
Assistant General Manager
Residence Inn Downtown Toronto, Past President, CHMSE

As a former member in the DADS committee and long time member and support of CHMSE, I fully understand the nuances of both of these organizations. Both serve a similar purpose and one that I always supported as a Director of Sales & Marketing...industry kinship. The camaraderie I felt with my peers at both of these meetings was what draws many of us to this industry in the first place. A true sense of belonging. Being with people (albeit crazy ones!) who live to serve and give.

Both of these admirable associations are committed to an inclusive membership – the DOSM's have got to great lengths to ensure newcomers to the downtown core are invited to the meetings and CHMSE offers the PAL program to entice those who might be a bit shy to come out to their meetings and be part of the event. There has even been talk in the past of joint meetings with not only these 2 associations but also reaching out to our brothers and sisters in NACE and CANSPEP.

These smaller associations, banded together once or twice a year, would be a great learning opportunity for all.

The Downtown Association of Directors of Sales has always supported CHMSE by sending their managers and coordinators to monthly meetings. They know a lot about CHMSE...read on to learn a little more about them.



Christopher Ashby
DOS&M Sutton Place and Acting Chair, DADS

A Lesson on How Bad Times can Drive Unity

Back in February 2003, I took on the role of DOS&M at The Sutton Place Hotel and two things happened right away which carry importance to this day in my career and the careers of many in my peer-set.

All knew one: SARS hit Toronto like a tsunami wave!

April 2003 will not likely be a date that any Director of Sales will forget. The impact of SARS was both immediate and catastrophic. The fear of this potential health concern carried massive impact, fear can be an immense driver in life. Fear of failure can push people to obtain success far greater than imagined – right? Do we all not have our own examples of that? Fear however can also be devastating – the fear of the unknown causes panic, and panic was a large element of what made the hotel phones ring and the landslide of cancellations to commence. When the “land-slide” was over, Toronto was left like a ghost town and hotels experienced occupancies below anyone’s imagination.

The other item was known to a smaller group.

Ronit Teschner (Keith) called me and said, “What do you think about getting together for breakfast? I want to get DOS’s to ‘the table’ so that we can all share our wealth of knowledge in a manner that stimulates a support network between us, times are tough and we can likely all help each other get out of the mess SARS has served us.”

This call went out to a small group of DOS’s and these calls set in motion what would by July grow into DADS.

DADS = Downtown Association of Directors of Sales (and Marketing). To this day, I still get a laugh out of the fact that our acronym spells a male role and yet the Association is definitely dominated by women!

So what is DADS and why do I state it is important to my and other DOS’s careers?

DADS has galvanized the downtown sales leaders and proved on many occasions that working together as a team, with personal agendas (and budgets) set aside, that we can achieve growth for all.

DADS members meet on a monthly basis and have a standing agenda:

Reviewing upcoming Activities in Toronto

– this is a perfect example of each person knows something another person may not. Many DOS sit on Committees and Boards that aim to bring tourism to Toronto. We also act as “leads” in the winning of large pieces of business. What we learned early in Associations’ life was the importance to openly share knowledge – don’t assume others know what you know.

Tourism Toronto. A meeting has rarely occurred where we did not discuss a sales or marketing activity that either was happening, needed to happen or perhaps questioned. Over the six years we have held meetings, we have come to grow from working without Tourism Toronto to now having them play an active and involved role in our meetings. Again, the primary goal in these discussions has always been sharing knowledge for the growth and benefit of all.

What happening in the "Market Place"?

Trends, new hotels, renovations, economic conditions, pace, hot dates, cold dates, freezing dates....

Staffing. The never-ending challenge to find staff, not just any staff, but great staff!

Our agenda also takes on time sensitive

issues and long-term developments. Each meeting is a round table format. While we have a Chair, the value of the Association has always been that everyone is Key To The Success Of Each Other Member!

It can be tough at times to set aside personal agendas but DADS is a 90-minute window, once a month, where 10 to 25 people do just

that. At the end of each meeting, everyone gains, and everyone gives.

We can thank the drama of SARS for opening the curtain for DADS.



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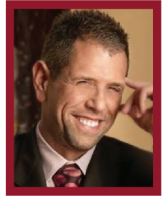
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EVERYONE'S A SALESPERSON



Andrew Freeman

Expand Your Sales Team with Evangelism Marketing

Hallelujah. Feel the love and spread the word. And change your philosophy towards sales.

Your sales team can target an increasing number of potential outlets to book business and fill your hotel nowadays. New sales opportunities, like online advertising and third-party e-channels, are as viable a source of business as traditional targets, like print advertising and corporate event planners. However, this increasing number of potential outlets also means stretching your team's

If you're not passionate about your product, why should anyone else be?

limited resources over a greater area. Trying to develop relationships in all of these target markets can be overwhelming, if not impossible, for any hotel sales effort.

So it's time to take a creative look at how you can extend your team without increasing the number of people with "sales" on their business cards or making your sales budget balloon with added expenses. Sometimes known as "evangelism marketing" or "advocacy marketing," the goal is to turn everyone who comes into contact with your hotel into a salesperson. When you have people excited about their experience or interaction with your

hotel and your brand, the power of their endorsement and recommendation is stronger, greater and farther-reaching than if you were to spend your entire marketing budget on paid advertising or any other sales promotion available to you. Remember, "they tell two friends and they tell two friends and so on and so on." This is evangelism marketing and it is the most powerful method of marketing you have.

Before turning guests, employees, vendors and others into evangelists for your hotel, there are two things you must do: The first is that you must be an evangelist yourself and believe your hotel is in fact everything it claims to be. If you're not passionate about your product, why should anyone else be? The second thing to do is to confirm that your foundation is solid and your concept is clear. Make sure the product concept and services of your hotel are up-to-date, relevant to who you are, and firmly in place. Be certain that your programs and other features are interesting enough to appeal to the different groups of people who come in contact with your hotel. Think of the power the buzz factor holds in building your business as you review all these elements.

Evangelism marketing can be applied to everyone because everyone fits. The most immediate opportunity to turn people into evangelists comes from your repeat guests. Since it's also their reputation on the line when making suggestions, people will only freely refer

something if they believe it is the best. Those loyal guests who come back time and time again believe your hotel is the best for them, so treating them well and acknowledging their loyalty – which is your typical interaction to begin with – provides them the easy opportunity to willingly offer word-of-mouth recommendations and referrals.

Other possibilities to extend your team include everyone else who comes in contact with your hotel:

- **Employees:** Common sense says to keep your staff motivated with incentives and perks as well as a fair and satisfying work environment. If your employees feel happy and are proud of the hotel, their enthusiasm about where they work will positively affect your guests, making them happy, and thus expanding your opportunity to reach more potential guests.
- **Vendors:** In the same way you treat your employees, keep your vendors satisfied by developing fair and mutually beneficial relationships – and giving them your business. They are constantly providing hotel recommendations to their friends, family and business associates – you want these referrals to come to you.
- **Competitors:** As you well know, there is often business you can't accommodate and it goes to your competitors. Treat your competitors well and share busi-

ness with them; on those occasions they cannot accommodate business, you have made it easy for them to send it to you.

- Local organizations and community businesses: Participate in and support local like-minded organizations and nearby community businesses. In addition to the many direct benefits you receive from your involvement, the people from these enterprises also provide hotel recommendations to those they know.

Evangelism marketing is significant enough that incorporating it into your overall marketing strategy should be as organized and focused as the other components in your marketing plan. (There are entire books, seminars and organizations devoted to evangelism marketing.) Once you determine who can be evangelists for you – this is everyone you meet – the next step is to put a system in place to acknowledge them for their referrals of pre-qualified guests and their contributions to your overall sales success.

- Start with a simple “thank you.” Acknowledge how much you appreciate their referral and recommendation, regardless of whether or not the reservation is made.
- Make sure you take care of the guests who are referred, as word will get back to the source (and others) about the experience. Take the time to turn this newly referred guest into your next evangelist.
- Develop some type of rewards program that is focused on what the referrers want.
 - For guest referrals, you can acknowledge them with complimentary appetizers, beverages or meals during their next visit.
 - For employees, incentives can include gift certificates, paid time off or cash bonuses. The goal is to make it about what they want, not what’s easiest for you.
 - For vendors set up preferred programs, such as complimentary meals or gift certificates with so many recommendations. This makes it easier for them to

- refer business to your restaurant, as they believe they have a “connection.”
- For competitors, consider setting up mutual “finders’ fees” for any referred business. While this may not seem like true evangelism marketing and recognition for referrals, your competitors still have their own reputations and goals for getting and keeping customers, including the ones they refer to you.
- For charities with which you’re involved, consider donating back a percentage of any referred business.

While some may only need to hear that simple “thank you” to be motivated to continue evangelizing your hotel, creating some type of rewards program to acknowledge what this newfound extended sales force is doing for you will support your efforts.

Andrew Freeman recently founded Andrew Freeman & Co., a hospitality and restaurant consulting agency based in San Francisco.



Welcome New Members

Hotel

- Elizabeth Ferlatte**, Hilton Toronto
- Debra Henry**, Tourism Toronto
- Shannon Hill**, The Old Mill
- Cristina Massullo**, Tourism Toronto
- Neda Mojgani**, Delta Chelsea Hotel
- Sylvie Pesut**, Metropolitan Hotels
- Debbie Stellinga**, Metropolitan Hotels

Affiliate

- Kristen Goodine**, Frischkorn Audio Visual Rentals
- Shannon MacDonald**, Frischkorn Audio Visual Rentals

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By Diane McClelland
Director of Affiliates

VALUE OF AFFILIATE MEMBERS TO CHMSE ... PRICELESS

Firstly, I would like to thank you for being an Affiliate Member of CHMSE. If we haven't had the chance to meet in person or had the opportunity to speak on the telephone, my name is Diane McClelland, I am the 2009/2010 Director of Affiliates for CHMSE.

Our membership base is what enables us to deliver the high calibre training opportunities and bring knowledgeable speakers with proven skills and experience in sales and marketing techniques, industry trends, information, statistics and forecasts to each monthly event.

WHAT CAN YOU EXPECT FROM YOUR MEMBERSHIP

- unparalleled professional development opportunities which help you add money to your company's bottom line
- monthly training seminars featuring knowledgeable speakers with proven skills and experience in sales and marketing techniques
- your name and company link on CHMSE's website
- exclusive membership benefits
- excellent networking and referral opportunities for the cost is unsurpassed
- amount of hotel members greatly outnumber Affiliate Members giving you the advantage in customer/client access and business contact opportunities
- survey feedback and suggestions/comments to the Affiliate Director are taken to the CHMSE Board of Directors

VALUE OF CONTINUED MEMBERSHIP

- networking and referral opportunities produce results over the long term.

- in tougher economic times, it's even more important to be visible while making the most of every opportunity to network with industry customers and colleagues, one of many reasons it's so important to not only renew your annual membership for the 2009/2010 year but attend meetings/events when you can
- continued opportunities to meet more business contacts as new hotel members are joining every month

WHAT'S NEW/COMING UP!

- focus on current trends for training and development sessions, such as Web 2.0, social networking and social media sessions
- Key Access online!
- sponsorship opportunities at monthly meetings & in Key Access to gain a terrific exposure within the hospitality industry
- variety of meeting formats to meet your schedule, ie. shorter, economical cocktail reception/seminar format with a speaker hosted after work giving members the advantage of limited time out of the office and minimal infringement on personal time
- CHMSE celebrates 30 years in 2010. Lots of industry exposure and activities planned around this milestone!
- with a huge membership drive currently in progress, January's General Manager's Night and March 25th's Affiliates Discovery Night are planned to be the very best yet. We're confident registration for these 2 events will be up more than ever before!
- **Affiliates 'Discovery Night' event.** This annual event is made especially for our Affiliate Members and it's YOUR opportunity to heighten your profile in front

of our hotel members that want to know what you're doing! Imagine the sales calls saved by participating in this ONE EVENT!

Business leaders are keenly aware of the power of opinions and anecdotal information. They stay clear of such, and endeavor to support every suggestion or recommendation with the best quantitative data available. They know that good decisions are based on good information.

Mark your calendar now for Thursday, March 25th for Discovery Night 2010!

Full participation opportunities and venue details of the event will be forthcoming to you by email, so keep checking your inbox!

In closing, I hope that you find the monthly meetings valuable in education, networking and referral opportunities. I look forward to meeting each one of you at a meeting soon. If there is anything I can do to make your membership experience more worthwhile or increase the value of our affiliate memberships, please email me at diane.mcclelland@wotifgroup.com or call me directly at 905-592-4554 with your comments.





Amanda Zappia

Immediate Past President & Chair of General Managers Night Committee

Come join CHMSE to help kick off our **30th anniversary** year with a very special General Managers Night on Thursday, January 28, 2010 at **The Old Mill**. Featured keynote speaker is **The Honourable John Wilkinson**,

Ontario Minister of Revenue, who will discuss the transition to the new harmonized sales tax (HST) [and it's impact on the hospitality & tourism industry](#). The event will also be complemented by the always-popular silent

auction and a very special awards ceremony which will recognize several longstanding CHMSE members and industry favourites.

Students Program at CHMSE

Julia Newlands

Director Of Students

As of November of 2009, the board for CHMSE implemented a revised process for the student membership program.

What has changed?

Individual students are no longer required to purchase annual memberships. Colleges or Universities now may purchase an annual membership, which allows multiple students in existing hospitality courses to access the CHMSE website, and an opportunity attend various CHMSE events held throughout the year.

Why has the student membership

program changed?

Due to a significant increase in the CHMSE Student Membership Program enrolment, the ratio of students to industry members was unbalanced. To help maintain a prosperous environment for all our members, it was decided that a change to the program was required.

What is the benefit?

The revised process now centers around the college or university, rather than the individual student. This allows greater flexibility to the educational institution, by allowing the professors to choose different

students per event. This program also allows greater access to the CHMSE website via the educational institution's specific login information.

For any questions or comments on this revised program, please contact **Julia Newlands** at jn@metropolitan.com or by phone at **416-597-6304**.



PROGRAM SCHEDULE

September 2009	October 2009	November 2009	January 2010	February 2010	March 2010	April 2010	May 2010	June 2010
Back to School-Back to Business The New Sales Curriculum for Recession Recovery Presented by Lisa Leitch, Teneo Results	Generational Selling Presented by Leslie Anne Palamar, Building Tourism Excellence	Web 2.0 – Content is King Presented by Patricia Brusha, A Couple of Chicks	General Managers Night	Professional Development Strategies for the Hospitality Sales Executive	Discovery Night Presented by your Affiliate Members	National Meetings Industry Day	Dinner Training Program	Executive Development Day



CHMSE joins with OTEC to offer Professional Credentials!

Have you always wanted to get professional industry certifications but don't want to go back to school? CHMSE and the Ontario Tourism Education Corporation (OTEC) are pleased to be working in partnership to offer National Emerit Certification programs to members of CHMSE at a special registration rate!

About OTEC:

Established in 1991, OTEC represents the Canadian Tourism Human Resource Council (CTHRC) as Ontario's Tourism Human Resource and Sector Council organization. OTEC works to serve the training, skills, and labour market development needs of the industry; and to raise occupational and professional standards to develop an industry-wide service culture.

OTEC has established itself as a leader and innovator in the development of industry projects and partnerships serving Ontario's tourism workforce and skills development requirements. Over 40 different training programs have been created to meet the needs of industry, and OTEC has won five prestigious "Canadian Awards for Training Excellence" from the Canadian Society for Training and Development (CSTD) in the last seven years. OTEC has provided occupational training to over 138,000 individuals, supported over 500 educational institutions in meeting their curriculum requirements, and assisted over 2000 businesses in meeting their training and human resource needs.

OTEC works very closely with industry in providing the national emerit certification programs to employers and employees alike; to ensure consistency in occupational skills and to provide a means of recognition and advancement. Employees pursue professional certification with the ambition to become industry experts who walk-the-talk. The knowledge they receive from the national standards helps employees to gain a sense of professionalism, increased pride, and enhanced skills to perform to their best. Professional credentialing also creates the

opportunity for employees to share the highest level of skills with their teams and provides a method for building morale in the workplace. The benefits of emerit professional certification to individuals and businesses are significant. Professionally certified employees deliver improved customer service, operational efficiency and consistency as they are rewarded for their hard work, and employers experience reduced employee turnover, increased profitability, and enhance their bottom line through a skilled and more effective workforce. An emerit qualification brings a standard of excellence to each occupation and represents a mastery of the skills and standards required.

OBTAIN YOUR CREDENTIALS AT YOUR OWN PACE AND PLACE!

The national emerit certification process is split into 3 stages:

Stage 1: Occupational Knowledge

This stage involves studying from either a workbook or online learning modules for the chosen professional certification occupation. A proctored exam will be arranged for the candidate at the end of the study phase. Successful completion of the exam will qualify the candidate to receive the emerit Occupational Knowledge certificate as credit towards their certification program!

Stage 2: Occupational Experience

After passing the Occupational Knowledge stage, OTEC will verify the candidates' employment history to ensure that the work experience requirement for the chosen professional certification occupation has been met. This usually requires the candidate to provide a copy of their résumé along with a letter from their current or previous employer as supporting documents to the verification process.

Stage 3: Performance Evaluation

Successful verification of a candidates' employment history is followed by a performance evaluation that takes place in a

real-world setting. Depending on the chosen professional certification occupation, a performance evaluation can consist of written case studies, "mystery guest" observations or on-the-job assessments, and telephone and/or face-to-face interviews conducted by an OTEC volunteer evaluator. If there is more than one performance evaluation component required, the candidate has to pass one component before pursuing another. Candidates who demonstrate mastery of this practical component will then qualify to receive their national emerit professional certification!

In recognition of their efforts and achievement, candidates will receive a congratulatory letter from OTEC, a national emerit professional certification plaque, and a lapel pin bearing the nationally recognized designation of TCP (Tourism Certified Professional), TCS (Tourism Certified Supervisor), or Tourism Certified Manager (TCM), depending on their chosen occupational program. Successful candidates will also join the pan-Canadian alumni of industry certified professionals where they will be given the opportunity to work with OTEC in evaluating other candidates and contributing to the development of the national emerit certification programs.

SPECIAL OFFER TO CHMSE MEMBERS

As part of the CHMSE/OTEC Partnership and national certification offer, CHMSE members will receive a 10% discount upon registration and by quoting the Promotion Code: CHMSE 09. Contact Kamaljeet Singh, OTEC's Manager, Workforce Skills Development today to register and get national recognition for your skills!

Kamal can be reached at **416-622-1975 ext. 217** or **ksingh@otec.org**.





Online Hotel Reviews: The Bane of Hotels' Existence or an Unprecedented Opportunity?

By Daniel Edward Craig

Hoteliers have always worked hard to keep guests happy, in part because we depend on repeat business to fill our rooms, but also because it's hammered into our brains early on that one unhappy guest will tell at least five others. Today, that number has compounded into hundreds and even thousands. With a few clicks of a mouse, an irate guest can broadcast his beef to entire online communities via Facebook, Twitter, TripAdvisor, Expedia, Yelp, or any other of the burgeoning group of social networking forums. Word of mouth has been usurped by word of mouse, a vastly more efficient means of spreading the word.

TripAdvisor, the world's largest online travel community, reports that over 80% of its user reviews are positive. Then why do I often hear hotel managers complain that traveler review sites are the bane of their existence?

Part of the problem is that the voice of one hostile reviewer can drown out a dozen ecstatic reviewers. Hotel managers are perfectionists, and it's hard to admit we're infallible, especially when our shortfalls are broadcast to the world in perpetuity. Whereas a great review can engender the pride among staff the hospitality business thrives on, a bad review can be embarrassing, distressing, and simply bad for business.

Social networking is supposed to be all about two-way dialogue, yet in the hotel industry the dialogue is taking place among consumers while most hotels choose to remain silent. Why? It's daunting enough to write a private apology letter to an upset guest; now we're obliged to answer to an entire online community. Moreover, we can never be as frank as the reviewer. If a traveler accuses us of discrimination for refusing to check him in, we can't post a response explaining that he

arrived at 3:00 AM with no reservation, a wad of cash and three teenaged "nieces". Hotels have always taken the high road when dealing with guest complaints. Social media hasn't changed that.

What social media does provide is unprecedented opportunities for hotels to engage travelers. It is only gaining in influence, and sticking our heads in the sand has never been a prudent survival strategy. However, there's a difference between sites like Facebook and Twitter, where consumers opt in to receive communications, and traveler review sites, where consumers are seeking traveler testimonials, not hotel propaganda. If a hotel weighs in on the conversation, it better have value to add.

When hotel managers do respond to negative reviews, they often only make things worse by sounding defensive, pompous or illiterate, as if they banged out the response between check-ins. Considering that these websites receive far more traffic than hotel websites could ever hope, hotels should be dedicating an appropriate amount of thought and resources.

The key is to strike the right tone. Responses should be conversational and professional, brief and factual, written in a voice that reflects the brand and by a manager with a solid command of the written word. The hotel should thank the reviewer for the comments but should resist the temptation to kick into defense or promo mode with comments like, "We at Hotel X are proud of our sterling reputation for ..." Corporate mumbo jumbo is simply not welcome in any social networking forum.

If the complaint is legitimate, the hotel should apologize and briefly explain the steps it has taken to ensure the issue does not reoccur—or provide a good reason why it cannot be changed. If there's an inaccuracy, the hotel

should set the record straight, albeit diplomatically. In some cases it may be more appropriate to contact the complainant directly rather than battle it out in a public forum. Hotels should never offer compensation publicly; it might encourage negative reviews.

When it comes to a positive review, readers are not interested in gloating "thank you ever so much for recognizing our brilliance" responses from hotels. That said, any guest who takes the time to post a favorable review is a brand advocate and should be treated with proper reverence. A private message of gratitude and a note on the guest profile to upgrade and send a welcome amenity on the next stay is entirely appropriate.

Of course, the obvious way for hotels to avoid negative reviews is to ensure that no guests leave unsatisfied, but even the best hotels get nailed from time to time. No one expects a hotel to be perfect. Online shoppers are a skeptical bunch, and if a hotel's reviews are all glowing, it will raise eyebrows. Moreover, constructive feedback helps set traveler expectations.

Negative or positive, private or public, hotels should be grateful whenever a guest takes the time to provide feedback. It's time hotels took a more active role in the dialogue. The potential for generating awareness and driving business is far too great to ignore.

Vancouver-based Daniel Edward Craig is a hotel consultant specializing in online reputation management and social media strategy. The author of the hotel-based Five-Star Mystery series, he writes a popular blog that takes a lighthearted look at issues in the hotel industry at www.danieledwardcraig.com.



How to Better Merchandise Your Hotel Online

By John McAuliffe, Chief Marketing Officer, VFM Leonardo

Hoteliers typically have the best knowledge of what makes their hotel unique. This is why they play a very important role in complementing the merchandising activities already in place by their chains, representation companies, travel intermediaries and third-party sites - which all contribute to a hotel's online presence in their own valuable ways. Merchandising from the property level perspective using content can complete your hotel's online presence, increase market share and drive more bookings.

Tell your hotel's story

Attention spans are short. Once travel shoppers find your hotel, you only have an instant to make a lasting impression and get on their shortlist. Using visual content is the best way to catch attention, provide information and convey your hotel's story.

- Videos provide overviews of the property or aspects of it, location information, and help establish an emotional connection with the travel shopper.
- Virtual tours help demonstrate size and scope of features and amenities.
- Photos show your hotel at a glance and can highlight finishing touches in detail.

Keep your content relevant, concise and professional

You can count on your guests to produce and post their own videos, photos and written descriptions of your hotel, but this user-generated content should be complemented with your own professional content to give online travel shoppers a well-rounded perspective of what your hotel offers. Hiring professional photographers, videographers and copywriters who know the hotel industry shows that you care about your property and your guests.

- Videos should be focused on one central topic or theme and to a length where

the travel shopper is still engaged. If you have different stories to tell to different travel shopping segments, consider doing multiple short videos.

- Photos of hotels have traditionally been void of the human, experiential element. But now competing for bookings is about more than just price and location - it's about experience and there's no better way to connect with travel shoppers than by showing people like them experiencing your hotel. Where appropriate, include people in your photos and videos.
- Written content should be descriptive and informative without being overwhelming. Short paragraphs with supporting bullet points are most effective when reinforcing imagery or highlighting features that can't necessarily be captured with visual content.

Get your visual content in front of active travel shoppers, wherever they are

Your property is likely already listed on thousands and thousands of online travel agencies and similar websites. These sites have evolved to become more than just booking engines. They are:

- Great sources of discovery, advice, learning and comparing for travel shoppers
- Opportunities to show why your hotel is better and why travel shoppers should book with you
- Valuable lead generating tools to drive more bookings to your hotel's website or brand.com

Therefore, they are channels where you need to have good written descriptions and the right visual content on display. Using a visual

content distribution network is the easiest, most efficient way to ensure that your hotel content is available and consistent on thousands and thousands of sites that travel shoppers use during the travel planning process.

Since travel shoppers typically use a number of different sources of information and websites before making a booking, there are additional activities that you can do to make your hotel even more visible, including:

- Being active on social media sites like Facebook, Twitter, blogs and so on
- Ensuring visual content is available on photo and video sites like YouTube and Flickr
- Develop a search engine friendly, content-rich website that conveys your hotels unique value proposition

To successfully differentiate your hotel from your competition, increase market share and drive more bookings, focus your eBusiness strategies on activities that enhance your current online presence and ensure travel shoppers not only find your hotel but also book it.





Valuable hotel communication is the name of social media game

By Christine Blank, HotelNewsNow.com

WEST HILLS, California—The key to social media marketing success is customized, quality messages, said Kent Schnepf, chief strategy officer for search engine marketing firm EngineWorks. Schnepf talked about social media marketing strategy last week during a webinar for the Boutique & Lifestyle Lodging Association, based in West Hills, California.

“With social media marketing, we don’t want to just put out a bunch of noise,” Schnepf said. “The signals need to be interesting and of value to the people you are targeting.”

Boutique and lifestyle hotels can use social media networks for customer service purposes, as well as for providing valuable information to prospective and loyal guests. For example, instead of sending out a multitude of promotions to social media networks, properties can become experts on their area, which in turn leads to bookings.

“Think of social media not as advertising your brand, but more about the experience of staying with you,” Schnepf said. “If you are top of everything going on in Vail, Colorado, for example, you are the resource that (potential customers) go to.”

There are several other best practices that hoteliers should consider as they form their social media strategies:

– Explore the available social media sites, and determine which are best for the property to focus on. Although Facebook and Twitter boast millions of users, those social media sites are not necessarily the best audiences for all hotels, according to Schnepf.

“Consider what is right for your business, and not what the latest trend is,” he said. “One size does not fit all in social media; it has to be customized to your user.”

Hoteliers first must determine which social media services their target guests are using.

For example, Schnepf uses sites such as tripadvisor.com when researching his vacations in obscure locales that offer saltwater fishing.

“I am so targeted that Facebook may not be the best way to reach me,” he said.

At the same time, many hotel companies and brands have had great success using Facebook. For example, Dots, a young women’s clothing line, has developed more than 11,000 relevant fans on Facebook.

“Their demographics are very strong on Facebook,” Schnepf said. “If they would have tried the same approach on LinkedIn, they would have failed.”

To find out which social media sites are popular by industry and to keep up with social media trends, Schnepf suggested visiting mashable.com, traffikd.com and doshdosh.com.

– Speak the language of the users on each specific site instead of sending out a mass message to all social media sites.

“What works on one site may not work on others,” Schnepf said.

– Optimize the hotel’s profiles on social media sites so guests can find the property’s sites on search engines.

“Social media marketers don’t realize how much (search) optimization can be done to their profiles,” Schnepf said.

For example, on Facebook, hotels can create a URL directly to their Facebook page, which will help the hotel’s Facebook listings show up in search engines. On Twitter, hotels should incorporate key words, such the property’s location, into the biography section. In LinkedIn profiles, hotels can use key words in the user name, create a URL directly to their LinkedIn page, and add up to three additional links in the profile.

– Track the performance of your messages on social media sites. Facebook has a proprietary tracking system, as does Bit.ly and TweetStats.com

– Stay relevant.

“I want you to take advantage of relevant opportunities you encounter each day,” Schnepf said. To keep up the hot topics that people are talking about, Schnepf suggested using services such as WhatTheTrends.com, Google Trends, Google Analytics and Twitter.com.

–Keep it real. For example, Comcast has improved its customer service by focusing on solutions to customers’ problems on its Twitter page, ComcastCares.

“They have focused on valuable communication, not shameless self-promotion,” Schnepf said.

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