

Speaking of Hotel Rooms: When You Turn The Lights Off They All Look The Same - By Doug Kennedy
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Let's face it: the decision to pay today's hotel rates just to sleep 8 hours in a darkened guestroom isn't a rational, logical one. Every hotelier knows that our guests' most fundamental need is four walls and a bed. Well okay, maybe we should add to that list a private bathroom, although speaking from experience there are some very nice B&B's out there with shared baths that are still quite nice. (The good news is you don't have to actually share your bath with anyone - it is just an industry term.)

All jokes aside, the point is that guests' fundamental needs for clean, safe lodging can be met for far less in your area. Whether at a local YMCA, a guesthouse, an international youth hostel, or at an ultra-economy property in your area, chances are your guests can find a place to sleep for a fraction of the rates your hotel is charging.

In other words, from a purely logical perspective, no guest in their right mind would pay the kind of rates mid-scale, upscale, and especially luxury hotels are commanding these days! Especially when you consider that the average guest at most hotels spends less than 4 of their 12 or so hours in the room actually awake, it's really hard to argue logically that it is worth \$20 - \$50 or more dollars per awake-hour.

This fact, coupled with the fact that there are literally thousands of upscale and luxury properties out there generating billions in revenues, tells me that guests must be in their minds buying an 'experience,' when our industry thinks we are renting them a guestroom.

Yet when you call most hotel salespeople these days, what you here most often is a list of facts and features. For example, if you ask salespeople: 'Can you tell me a little about the hotel?' the first thing you get is the number of rooms followed by a list of facts.

'We are a 400 room hotel with two restaurants and one gift shop.' You call the next one, 'We are a 292 room hotel with a restaurant and a gift shop.' The next says, 'We have over 500 rooms...' and you think to yourself 'Oh, perfect! I was looking for a 500 room hotel...' or 'No thanks, I needed something in the 100 room range.'

(Now granted, those planning larger meetings might need this information, but should we not first ask how big their meeting is? Otherwise, if it is a small meeting we might even be turning them off by sounding like too big of a venue.)

Too many salespeople today start their '30 second commercials' and open proposals and outbound sales e-mails by feature-dumping a list of qualitative facts, as if a guest was going to make a decision logically and intellectually. Yet when we come to terms with the principle that guests are making an emotionally-based buying decision, it's relatively easy to think of ways to appeal to their emotions. Here's some training tips for your next sales meeting:

œ Use Alluring Descriptions and Benefits. Whereas salespeople had to inform and educate the caller in the past, when most were looking at no more than thumbnail photos in a hotel brochure, today's callers usually have plenty of information about the features. Many have even taken virtual tours, read user-generated travel reviews; some have even seen real pictures from real guests. What today's caller's usually need more than anything is to be allured and enticed by tempting descriptions of what their experience will be like.

œ Use 'Just For You' Benefits. Help the caller 'buy it' in their minds; bring them into the descriptions you are offering by using a 'just for you' approach. 'As our guest you can enjoy...' 'You'll be able to' 'Your group can all take advantage of...'

œ Offer Needs-Based Recommendations And Endorsements. Use the caller's own stated needs, and those you've discovered through the use of effective ad-hoc probing questions, to personalize recommendations, suggestions and endorsements.

œ Convince Your Own Salespeople Your Rates Are Worth It! Especially today where average rates are tracking upward in most markets, it may be harder than ever to convince your own salespeople its worth it. It doesn't help that most markets also have a low-ball competitor dragging down RevPAR for all and causing them to be beat-up on price again.

œ Help salespeople see the value offered by placing calls within your area/region as well as outside of your market to even higher-priced destinations. Remind them of the guests and groups who are willing to pay your rates every day.

œ Make sure your salespeople never make the common mistake of inadvertently position higher rates in a negative way by saying apologetically 'Oh, we only have our \$XX rate left at that time.' Instead, show them how to create urgency by saying 'Oh good, we still have rooms left for those dates!'

By remembering we are selling to buyers who are making emotional decisions vs. rational ones, and by selling to their emotions vs. their intellect, we can close more inquiries from today's multi-tasking, over-informed callers who have clicked on one too many links.

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