

Participation In Trade Associations Key To Professional Development - By Doug Kennedy

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In the fast-paced business climate which most hoteliers operate in these days, where e-mails flood our in-boxes and meetings over-stuff our schedules, the last thing most hotel management professionals want to think about is voluntarily taking on any more 'optional' responsibilities. Yet somehow the top professionals in the lodging industry manage to carve-out time to participate in the many professional societies and/or trade associations available to virtually every discipline within our industry.

Just take a look at the lists of officers and board members for any industry association, and you will see a virtual 'who's who' of the top minds in their profession, representing the top companies in their market segments.

Why are these top performers willing to invest time and energy in participating? Why are their companies willing to make the investment in association fees and costs to attend conferences, meetings, and events? Do these 'top producers' bring value to their companies by participating?

As a 20+ year member of several hospitality trade organizations, I myself have asked these questions from time to time, especially during January each year when I receive renewal invoices for my annual membership dues. For me, I continue to find during my annual re-assessments that my active participation is worth the total 'investment' many times over.

Depending on the discipline you are working in, participation in trade associations provides many different returns on our 'investment' in time, energy, and our company's money.

Sales/Marketing Associations:

There are numerous hospitality sales and marketing related trade associations and professional societies available to career-minded sales and marketing managers, with the most famous being the Hospitality Sales & Marketing Association International (see www.HSMAI.org), which has over 7,500 members worldwide and has been around more than 75 years. HSMAI has expanded its scope over the years to serve the needs of a wide range of sales and marketing professionals. Through its numerous Special Interest Groups (SIG's), HSMAI has created professional societies for Revenue Managers, Internet Marketing Specialists, and Resort Marketing Specialists, to name a few.

One benefit of membership in HSMAI is that you automatically receive several publications including the quarterly Marketing Review and the monthly eConnect updates. These publications will ensure that you are up-to-date on the latest 'best practices,' consumer trends, and futurist's predictions.

You will also have the option of participating in national, regional and local events such as Annual Strategy Conferences, regional HSMAI University training workshops, and local HSMAI chapter events. In addition to the educational benefit of attending these events, you'll have a great opportunity to brainstorm and network with your industry colleagues and to explore with them what works and what doesn't in the real-world.

Besides HSMAI, there are lots of other excellent hotel sales and marketing associations such as:

- Hotel Electronic Distribution Network Association (HEDNA) www.hedna.org
- International Association of Reservations Executives (IARE) www.iare.com
- Central Reservations Association of Destination Resorts (CRADR) www.cradr.org

Hotel Management Associations

There are also numerous associations targeting hotel operations and general managers. Depending on the destination you are working in, there are likely to be a local hotel & motel associations as well as a state hotel or tourism associations. By participating in the state and local associations, you'll make sure you stay up to date on local business trends, co-op marketing opportunities, and keep abreast of any potential regulatory/legislative changes that might have a negative impact on your business. (Many of these associations are also involved formally or informally in lobbying their regional and state governments on tourism-related interests.)

Other benefits of participating in state and local associations is that you can receive frank and honest input on how industry vendors and suppliers perform, which is extremely helpful in making future buying and contract decisions.

Perhaps the most well known national association is the American Hotel & Lodging Association (see www.AHLA.com). By participating nationally in the AH&LA events, you'll make sure you are kept up to date on the latest consumer trends, newest technology systems, and that you'll not be caught off guard by any unexpected changes that might come down the line.

Besides the AH&LA and your state and local hotel associations, there are groups serving other niches of the lodging industry such as:

- International Resort Manager's Association (IRMA) www.resortmanagers.com
- American Resort Development Association (ARDA) www.arda.org
- Caribbean Hotels Association www.caribbeanhotels.org
- Vacation Rental Manager's Association (VRMA) www.vrma.org

Other Hotel Industry Trade Associations. Besides hotel management and hotel sales/marketing, virtually every profession within the lodging industry has its own associations. Here are examples:

- American Culinary Federation www.acfchefs.org
- Association of Catering & Event Professionals www.acep.com
- Canada Tourism Human Resource Council www.cthrc.ca
- Council of Hotel & Restaurant Trainers www.chart.org
- Hospitality Financial & Technology Professionals www.hftp.org
- International Association of Conference Centers www.iaconline.com
- International Council on Hotel, Restaurant, and Institutional Education www.chrie.org
- International Hotel & Restaurant Association www.ih-ra.com
- International Society of Hospitality Consultants www.ishc.com
- National Association of Catering Executives (NACE) www.nace.net
- National Concierge Association www.nationalconciiergeassociation.com
- National Restaurant Association www.restaurant.org

Again depending on your profession, the benefits of participating include discovering best practices, staying abreast of legal changes, and establishing networking relationships with what are likely to be the top minds your profession.

Getting The Most Out Of Participation:

While simply joining an association will provide some benefits, such as access to newsletter, publications, and special reports, active participation will yield the most benefits. Here are some tips for maximizing the return on your investment of time, energy, and money:

œ Maintain participation over the long-term. Understand that the longer you participate, the more your relationships with other members will grow and the more they will be willing to network and share their insights with you.

œ Join a committee or the board. Although not everyone has time to be an officer or President, participation on a committee or task force helps you establish new relationships and contacts that can later serve as resources for you when you are checking references on a vendor or job applicant.

œ Reach out to new members and prospects. Over time you will no doubt make numerous friends, and it becomes easy to spend the entire meeting catching up with those you already know. Yet by looking for those 'new member' nametag ribbons and making it your job to welcome them, you'll continuously expand your network of professional colleagues.

Lastly and most importantly, make sure you participate in industry trade associations for altruistic reasons and not look for immediate, direct benefits. Surely you will find that when you give back to the industry, the benefits come back to you in many unexpected, indirect ways, with the pay-backs always exceeding your investment many times over.

By Doug Kennedy

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Doug Kennedy, President of the Kennedy Training Network, has been a fixture on the hospitality and tourism industry conference circuit since 1989, having presented over 1,000 conference keynote sessions, educational seminars, and on-premise training workshops for diverse audiences representing every segment of the lodging industry.

His articles have also appeared worldwide in more than 17 prominent international publications including the HSMIAI Marketing Review, eHotelier, 4hoteliers, Hotel News Resource, Hotel Online, Human Assets - Dubai and Hong Kong, Hsyndicate worldwide, BAHA Times - U.K., Hospitality - Maldives, and the Hotel Expert Magazine Hong Kong.

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