

Web 2.0 And Hotel Sales Strategies For 2008 - By Carol Verret

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What Are Your Clients Saying About You?

So you think your clients aren't out there talking about you? You think that clients and potential clients don't exchange their thoughts about the experiences they have had at your hotel? Think again!

If the term Web 2.0 has you scratching your head, you are not alone. However, it is important that hotel sales departments get up to speed on the concept. Web 2.0 is the trend to User Generated Content, that is, the use of social networking, hotel review sites and blogs dealing with the user experience.

Sales and marketing strategic plans for '08 that ignore this shift in travel marketing do so at their own peril. A PhocusWright study earlier this year that indicated small group travel such as weddings, family reunions, etc. will be dominated by web based sourcing and booking of room blocks. This was just given additional credibility with the launch of Priceline's new group travel functionality.

Travelocity just launched a new review functionality on its site that will allow users to sort through reviews by destination interest and travel preferences so that there is no need to wade through all of the reviews to locate the ones that pertain to a shoppers travel preference. A Yahoo study last week revealed that travel reviews are driving buying decisions more than price.

How do you plug into and take advantage of this seismic shift in the world of hotel sales and develop strategies for success in this arena for 2008?

Design a strategy for the hotel's online presence. As part of the sales and marketing plan for '08, develop a strategy with Action Plans to monitor and influence the online presence of the hotel. Evaluate it through the eyes of a potential travel and meeting planner. There are products out there to assist you such as Chatter Guard that will monitor every new online review and reference to the property. A cheaper alternative is to set Google alerts which are free and will alert you with an email you every time your hotel is mentioned in an online review, blog or other online media.

Hotel Web Site and Property Descriptions. Review the web site with the eyes of the travel planners and meeting planners. Expedia states that for every dollar spent on their site another dollar is spent on the property web site. If you have a franchise site, ensure that you are changing up your property screens to reflect market segment seasonality for transient travelers and good information for meeting planners. Remember, this is often the first contact that the planner has with your hotel.

Online RFPs. If you participate in online RFP site such as Star Cite among others, review how you are presenting your property on the sites and the way the sales department responds to RFP request. Participate in the small group planning sites such as Travelocity, Grooble, Hotels.com, etc. Again, ensure that you have listed the amenities that are important to these small social groups. Check out the sites for the competitions' amenity profiles and rates. Put an online RFP page on your web site. (Stay tuned for another article on this subject).

Respond to Online Reviews. Instead of just groaning about a negative review, evaluate them as to the validity of their issues. If it is an operational deficiency, bring it to the attention of operations so it can be addressed. Respond to the review in a balanced and professional way that indicates you listen to your customers' comments and respond to their concerns. Yes, there are the 'wacko' reviews about stupid stuff beyond your control, but the customers that are checking out the review sites are usually smart enough to factor those out.

Participate in the Chatter. If organizations and associations that you belong to have a blog, monitor them and post comments - positive and constructive comments. Many local business journals now have blogs as does MPI nationally - your local chapter may have one as well. Build a blog where your clients can give you feedback and you can monitor and participate in online conversations with them.

These suggestions are just a few of the ways to plug into Web 2.0 in your sales and marketing strategies for '08. Your clients live online and how you plug into their concerns and decision making processes will dictate the success of a hotel property. Get on the radar screen!

Web 2.0 is not going away - if anything it will become more important in all travel segments. Ignore it at your peril!

Carol Verret And Associates Consulting and Training offers training services and consulting in the areas of sales, revenue management and customer service primarily but not exclusively to the hospitality industry. To find out more about the company click on www.carolverret.com. To contact Carol send her an email at carol@carolverret.com or she can be reached by cell phone (303) 618-4065.

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