

Five Ways to Increase Your Sales and Marketing Momentum in 2008 - By Leora Lanz

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A resolution for 2008 is to think about how to maximize hotel revenue in ways other than increasing room rates, and continue to show value for our rooms and the hotel experience.

If last year's escalating room rates continue to trend upward, we may scare guests into looking for alternative travel accommodations. We need to think about how to maximize revenue in other ways and continue to show value for our rooms and the hotel experience.

Jump-start your selling efforts for 2008 by avoiding the post-holiday slump and being proactive now. Think about how your year looks and what your customers want. Assess how best to use inventory to maximize revenue -- this includes meeting space, fitness facilities, restaurants and anywhere else in the hotel there's an opportunity to share an experience with your guest. Take advantage of the current travel trends to be creative with your offerings and reward guests for their patronage and loyalty.

Following are ways to get your sales and marketing juices flowing:

1) With family travel predicted to continue growing in 2008, it's time that hotels truly cater to families.

Guarantee adjoining rooms. Consider charging a \$20 surcharge to do this, and be assured that this value is important to families and worth paying for as they will readily look elsewhere at condo hotels or apartment hotel options.

When offering complimentary breakfast, make sure it is for the whole family. Chances are if the 'family' is staying at the hotel, that means the kids too, who also need to eat breakfast. Consider charging \$5 for the third or fourth child.

Free in-room video games are a tremendous value-add for pre-teen and teen markets. Many kids travel with their Nintendo controllers and complimentary games would certainly make their parents happy! Consider offering a free game with every room service order.

Have a separate, sensible children's menu in your restaurants. But don't call it a 'kid's menu' if the items are not child-friendly. And DO offer healthy options for kids - not just fried chicken fingers and French fries.

Consider providing a menu of children's spa services with adjusted pricing. This is how our world lives today - with little girls getting manicures and pedicures, and tweens and teens getting massages.

2) Last-minute getaways will continue in 2008.

No need for your suites or rooms to go empty if you keep abreast of inventory. If suites are unoccupied, create a suite package. Make sure it's clearly accessible on your website and search engine optimized. Run a concise email-blast and promote the last minute deals. Invest in a pay per click campaign as well.

Suburban hotels with indoor swimming pools have a natural opportunity to promote themselves as last minute getaways. Consider an inexpensive investment in brightly colored beach balls, umbrellas, pails and shovels to dress up the pool area. Package it with an indoor barbecue and voila -- you have a seasonal package.

You can also market them simply as 'last minute getaways.' Looking for that 11th hour special is how people are traveling.

3) Guests want deals on food and beverage too, especially if they're already spending lots of money at your hotel.

Consider offering a dining credit of \$25 or \$50 if the guest is spending at least \$200 on the room.

Offer the credit for the next night's stay to keep the guest on property rather than looking for alternative dining experiences.

Look at your current dining options and change them around. Add some variety, i.e. bring a grill to the outdoor courtyard area for a wintertime barbecue, or offer different themed dinner buffets.

4) Vacationers are staying closer to home and traveling by car.

Consider helping guests with parking fees. Offer complimentary parking if you don't already do so, at least for one night. Parking charges add up quickly and this gesture will be greatly appreciated.

Gas is expensive and this offer can also gain you significant press coverage, due to the timeliness of the deal. Offer to reimburse guests for their gas if they traveled by car, say, up to \$40? Have the guest present the gas receipt (stamped within 24 hours of arrival) to take advantage of this special.

Suburban hotels - use your underutilized van. Have the van loop around key areas of your vicinity, on a schedule, to pick up and drop off guests at the local mall, museum or other attraction. Guests will be grateful not to have to use their vehicle during their stay.

Consider advertising more locally than you traditionally would.

5) Share your news. If you're creating a new offering, value or package, promote it. Get your name out there frequently, and connect with guests.

Use e-mail to send personal and customized offerings to loyal guests. Share links to your website and allow guests to reply to a specific email address for more information. This makes the communication more personal. Make sure the special offering is on your website so that guests can find information quickly.

Communicate your packages internally so that employees know about specials before the guests.

If you're affiliated with a brand, be sure your brand's 800 number has accessibility to the package, can see it clearly and can book the package too.

Don't be afraid to take chances. Now is the time to be creative and show flexibility in your offerings. HVS Sales & Marketing Services can assist you in uncovering new and unique ways to bring in revenue. For more information on how to create and implement programs similar to those above, contact Leora Halpern Lanz at llanz@hvs.com.

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