

PR Provides ROI For Hoteliers

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When seeking to build brand awareness for a hotel or resort, whether new or established in the market, one of the smartest moves a hotelier can make is to find a PR agency that specializes in travel public relations.

Those agencies that are familiar with the industry, such as Abelow PR, have the ability to recognize what is new and different that will peak the interest of the media. That applies to both traditional media such as the New York Times and the Wall Street Journal and influential travel magazines like Conde Nast Traveler as well as online sites like Trip Advisor and CNN.com.

The credibility of having your hotel or resort covered in the media is an excellent return on investment when compared with advertising. For example a full-page story in National Geographic Traveler with a circulation of 5.3 million would cost \$60,000. A PR agency, and one that specializes in travel public relations, which is usually a boutique firm, charges \$50,000 to \$150,000 per year depending if it is an individual property or a hotel company. Obviously, if the agency gets repeated mentions and features in the press, the return on investment is excellent, not to mention the credibility factor from the endorsement of the media.

How much coverage should you expect from a travel public relations agency on an annual basis? While results vary from firm to firm, targets should cover print, broadcast and online media. Every month the agency should turn in a report, highlighting coverage that has appeared and stories that are in the works. After the PR campaign gets underway, a hotelier should expect to see several mentions and full features every month in each of the categories.

That said, the hotel must provide rooms and meals for reputable journalists the agency sends to experience the property and treat them like VIPs. A media relations specialist with experience in travel PR knows who are the journalists that will produce the feature best stories for the 'A list' press. In fact there are select journalists who write for multiple publications, and those are the most sought after. It is important to plan well in advance because the top editors and writers book months ahead, particularly for the trips to international destinations. At the same time, an agency with a concentration in travel public relations will know which journalists do not produce stories, and intentionally keep them off the invitation list. It is important to see a track record from any journalist the agency wants to send to the property so you know they are productive and positive in their reviews.

A comprehensive PR plan should be written by the agency, which spells out monthly press releases, and pitch letters that they will distribute to the media. Creative angles should be exploited. An example is when Abelow PR sent out a release on the 'Martini Master' at the Leela Palace Bangalore, who is renowned for over 200 different martinis, and a fixture in the hotel's Library Bar. When the agency can coin a phrase like that tremendous mileage can be gained. In the story about the 'Martini Master,' online media picked up the story and three pages of Google entries resulted. The press release was also sent to the agency's proprietary media lists - the lifeblood of the agency.

Media lists of print, broadcast and online press should be the agency's property, and maintained and updated on a daily basis. The editors and freelance journalists in those lists must be people the agency knows and has worked with over the years so they are reputable and produce stories regularly. While agencies are required to provide the names of publications and target editors, the actual contact data is their property. You as a hotelier are paying for the agency's personal relationship with the journalist, and that kind of rapport is built over years in the industry.

That is another reason to higher a PR agency that specializes in travel public relations because then their contacts are concentrated in the media you want your property to appear in. Few agencies know the editors at the top publications on a day-to-day basis.

Building the hotel's image is a delicate process. It is important that the descriptions are consistent and conjures up an upscale picture of the hotel in the reader's mind. You want press releases that create a positive aura around the hotel, highlighting what makes the property unique, the employee's service minded and the offerings inviting. You should review all press releases for accuracy, but it is important for the PR agency to have the latitude to describe the hotel in a way that makes it attractive and special.

There are a handful of PR agencies in the U.S. that specialize in travel public relations. If you Google 'travel public relations' that will bring up some of them. You should read case studies and see how creative the PR agency has been as well as evaluate the scope of the coverage they have achieved for other clients. Another method is to go to the Hotel Sales and Marketing Association and find out which ones get awards. Then request a proposal from a few agencies, see which ones you like and meet them to make sure the chemistry for a successful relationship is there.

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