

Don't Wash Your Profits Down the Drain

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New research shows a custom linen and towel reuse program increases guest participation.

Door hangers and folding cards encouraging hotel guests to reuse their bed sheets and towels over the course of their stays have been around for years. Recently, as the green movement has really taken off in all facets of the economy, even more hoteliers are asking their guests to participate in these towel and linen reuse programs that save water, energy, labor, wear and tear on linens, and reduces the amount of chemicals used in washing cycles.

But how well do linen and towel reuse card programs work, and how can hotels make them work better?

According to a study from the University of Chicago, published in the Journal of Consumer Science, the most-effective linen reuse card program lets guests know their fellow travelers also are taking part in the program.

Here's how it works: The researchers used and recorded results from several different cards asking guests to take part in linen reuse programs. Some cards urged guests to 'help save the environment' by returning their towels to the bathroom racks. Others saw a customized sign that cited their room numbers - saying, for example, '75 percent of the guests who stayed in this room have reused their towels.' Other signs prompted guests to join their fellow 'citizens' or 'men and women' in helping preserve the environment.

The standard signs elicited a response rate of 37.2 percent. However, when the customized signs were used - giving statistics about that specific hotel or room - 49.3 percent of guests joined in on the program. Knowing that others were doing their part to help the Earth - and not wanting to be the weak link in the growing chain of environmentalism - was the strongest motivation for guests.

Just think, over the course of a year, each of those participation percentage points could be hundreds of guests, saving thousands of gallons of water. Considering the water use, labor of laundering linens, and rising detergent and energy costs, can you afford not to take the extra step and provide a linen and towel reuse program?

Pineapple's custom cards

Pineapple Hospitality (www.PineappleHospitality.net) now offers fully customizable linen and towel reuse cards. Cards are 4 inches by 6 inches, printed on 80 percent recycled paper with minimum 40 percent post-consumer content coated stock with vegetable and soy-based inks.

Pineapple Hospitality offers multiple categories of stock designs for its custom linen and towel reuse cards. Most colors and fonts can be changed. Layout of images and text also can be changed. The card size can be customized as well. If that's not enough, Pineapple's graphic design team can create something new just for your property - be it posters, front-desk tents or other environmental marketing materials.

'Our custom linen and towel reuse cards educate your guests on the benefits of preserving natural resources while saving you significant money on labor, water and energy costs,' says Ray Burger, President of Pineapple Hospitality. 'Most guests will participate in linen and towel reuse programs if the right message is delivered the right way. This is the most universal environmental initiative in the lodging industry. Some studies show that more than 80 percent of U.S. hotels have versions of this program in place. It makes sense to maximize the benefits to the bottom line and our planet.'

Pineapple's custom linen and towel reuse program offers several categories of designs with multiple options in each:

Floral

Modern

Eco

Regional (Coast, Mountain, Tropical, etc.)

Designs to match décor,

Seasonal,

Bed & Breakfast,

Simply text,

Color themes, and

Hotel chains.

For completely customized cards, these are changes that can be made:

Customized size and shape of cards,

Any quantity of cards,

Option to have Pineapple stock your cards for easy re-order,

Any image of your choice from our library or yours,

Any wording adaptation, suggestion or customization, and

Any new or unique idea you have!

'We've seen the research that cards customized to a specific hotel, or even a specific room, can make all the difference in getting your guests to act,' Burger says. 'That's why we offer almost unlimited options through our custom linen and towel reuse program. As more and more guests and hotel staffs become educated to the importance of these programs, the savings really will add up for you and for the planet. 'It's truly amazing the bottom-line impact one little card can make.'

Cards are shipped direct from Pineapple Hospitality. For a limited time, Floral Design custom linen and towel reuse cards are just 70 cents. Visit www.customlinenreuse.com for details.

Savings add up

How quickly can the savings from a linen and towel reuse program add up? Once the cards are in place and your staff is properly educated, the savings begin immediately.

'A typical 100-room hotel can reduce its water usage by 72,000 gallons and detergent usage by 480 gallons, saving up to \$20,000 per year,' Burger says. 'And this doesn't take into account savings associated with housekeeping, laundry labor, and linens and towels purchasing.'

Several industry estimates point to savings of up to \$6.50 per day per occupied room. With utilities costs rising rapidly, those numbers are sure to grow.

'An ever-growing number of environmentally-conscious travelers prefer to stay in hotels and other destinations that share their outlook on going green,' Burger says. 'And most people don't wash all of their sheets and towels every day. Why should that change when they are traveling? Our custom linen and towel reuse program is the first step in letting your customers know that you are making the environment a priority and have taken action to prove it.'

More research - a reciprocal approach

Noah J. Goldstein of the University of Chicago - one of the researchers of the study cited above - said people are sometimes most easily persuaded by narrowly directed appeals. In this case, that refers to customizing a linen and towel reuse card that speaks directly to the individual occupant.

But another method in the study was almost just as effective. The authors called it a reciprocation approach. For this approach, they used a card that said, 'Partner with us to help save the environment. In exchange for your participation in this program, we at the hotel will donate a percentage of the energy savings to a nonprofit environmental protection organization. The environment deserves our combined efforts. You can join us by reusing your towels during your stay.'

However, this approach did not increase guest participation beyond the average 38 percent.

As the authors explained, 'Perhaps the guests didn't trust the hotel's promise. Or perhaps they didn't trust the hotel to choose an environmental cause for them.'

The problem became that the hotel was asking the guests to act first. But when the researchers turned the tables, they saw different results.

They reworded the message to read, 'We're doing our part for the environment. Can we count on you? Because we are committed to preserving the environment, we have made a financial contribution to a nonprofit environmental protection organization on behalf of the hotel and its guests. If you would like to help us in recovering the expense, while conserving natural resources, please reuse your towels during your stay.'

The program change was minor, but in this case, the hotel took action first. The result was an almost 47 percent success rate, significantly greater (25 percent higher!) than the cooperation condition.

'With research backing us and numerous hotels already participating in our program, Pineapple Hospitality will work with you to create the most effective custom linen and towel reuse program possible,' says Burger. 'We have the knowledge and expertise to customize a program specifically for the needs of your property and guests. If you aren't using a custom linen and towel reuse program yet, you are simply washing your profits down the drain.'

Source: Invoking Social Norms: A Social Psychology Perspective on Improving Hotels' Linen-Reuse Programs. Authors Noah J. Goldstein, Vladas Griskevicius and Robert B. Cialdini. Abstract available at cqx.sagepub.com/cgi/content/abstract/48/2/145.

About Pineapple Hospitality

Headquartered in Saint Charles, Missouri, Pineapple Hospitality(TM) is The Co-Founder and Host of the ANNUAL GREEN HOSPITALITY CONFERENCE, an EPA ENERGY STAR(TM) partner bringing fresh ideas to hospitality guests' doors and owner/operators' bottom lines - including FreshStay(R) (www.freshstay.com), EcoRooms(R) & EcoSuites(TM) (www.EcoRooms.com) Environmentally Sensitive Amenities(TM), EO(R), Neutrogena(R) and greenSPA(TM) amenities and AVIVA dispensers, Energy Efficient Lighting and Controls, Custom Linen & Towel Re-Use Programs, Green Key Cards, Energy Management Systems and Controls, High Performance showerheads, the Nature's Mist(TM) deodorization system, Zero Odor, and dozens of other products and programs. For more information, please visit www.pineapplehospitality.net, or call us at 636-922-2285.

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