

Distribution and Customer Relationships Important Factors in Changing Economy

2008-09-15

HSMAI Hotel Sales Strategy Conference Panelists Emphasized Value of Profession, Investment in Sales Team and Knowledge of Customer

Today's economy has hospitality sales and marketing professionals evaluating the efficiency and effectiveness of distribution channels, locally and globally.

Leading off HSMAI's 2nd annual Hotel Sales Strategy Conference, John Parke, CMP president and CEO of Leadership Synergies, Inc. presented five trends that will impact sales professionals in 2009: use of executive-level concepts and language among sales professionals, the unstable economy changing buying behaviors, the impact of supply and demand build-up after a down economy, the evolution of the sales organization's focus, and the effectiveness and efficiency of sales force deployment.

'The role of the sales and marketing professional is evolving,' said Parke. 'To create value for their efforts and ultimately achieve success, professionals should stay close to customers, proactively respond to sales growth opportunities, inspire their team and make decisions leading into 2009.'

The discussion continued in the second session lead by Cindy Estis Green, managing partner of The Estis Group and author of the HSMAI Foundation's Demystifying Distribution 2.0. She noted that the small and mid-sized business meeting segment, with an \$83 million market share, presents the greatest opportunity in the coming months for marketing and sales professionals.

Both Parke and Green agreed that travel marketing is driven by the convergence of the distribution strategy in three key areas, demand creation (marketing), demand capture (sales) and demand management (revenue management).

Even with the state of the economy, marketing spend is being refocused to benefit the marketing professionals noted Cindy D'Aoust, senior vice president of Strategic Meetings Management, Maritz Travel, transitioning to a conversational marketing model versus a traditional model.

'Change is constant, there isn't a new approach to achieve success,' said D'Aoust. 'You need to embrace change and invest in learning within your sales force to help them recognize 'new customers,' understand purchasing behaviors and strengthen relationships.'

The overall theme in agreement amongst all panelist was the importance of 'knowing your customer' to maintain, grow or develop a relationship.

'Our customers' impressions are being affected differently than in the past,' said Pam Streeter, vice president for electronic distribution/marketing Interstate Hotels & Resorts. 'Technology, the online conversation, leaves a stronger impression on our customers and presents a new challenge for sales and marketing professionals.'

Conference partners included American Express, Cendyn, TIG Global and TravelCLICK. The 3rd Annual Hotel Sales Strategy Conference is planned for March 31, 2009, in conjunction with HSMAI's Affordable Meetings Mid-America in Chicago.

About HSMAI's Hotel Sales Strategy Conference

The HSMAI Hotel Sales Strategy Conference is organized by HSMAI and HSMAI's Hotel Director of Sales and Marketing (HDOSM) SIG Advisory Board. The HDOSM SIG provides information, leadership development, and a variety of other resources specifically relevant to hotel directors of sales and marketing, to sales staff who aspire to one day be directors of sales and marketing, and to other industry professionals interested in developments within hotel sales. Their vision is to establish a resource-rich environment in collaboration with the HSMAI membership that is indispensable for the career professional in hotel sales and marketing. Visit www.hdosm.org for more information.

About HSMAI

HSMAI is an organization of sales and marketing professionals representing all segments of the hospitality industry. With a strong focus on education, HSMAI has become the industry champion in identifying and communicating trends in the hospitality industry, and bringing together customers and members at annual events, including HSMAI's Affordable Meetings(r). Founded in 1927, HSMAI is an individual membership organization comprising more than 7,000 members worldwide, with 40 chapters in the Americas Region. For more information on HSMAI, contact the Hospitality Sales & Marketing Association International, 1760 Old Meadow Road, Suite 500, McLean, Va. 22102, (703) 506-3280, fax (703) 506-3266, or visit the website at www.hsm.ai.org.

This article comes from Hotel News Resource

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