



MARKETING MATTERS

2012 sees the arrival of a new columnist who aims to share her extensive marketing experience with you over the coming months.

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Happy New Year and thank you for 'checking me in' to the first of my regular columns in *Hotel Owner*. Over the coming months I will be sharing my experience of marketing to stimulate occupancy for both independent hoteliers and those managing a hotel collection.

Good marketing is frequently getting eclipsed in the era of *Laterooms.com*, which often sadly devalues both the main product and brand. We are witnessing a downward spiral with a focus on discounting above the actual pleasure of the offering. Training is also key – maximising revenue on rooms is often down to staff quality rather than the cheapest deal of the week. I will be commenting on these themes and others in 2012, but this month I am focusing on the hotel database.

We are being threatened with a double dip recession and you will need to think about your offering if your occupancies have dropped. Overheads will continue to go up and you will need to consider what has worked in the past and perhaps call on this again. If you have recorded a good spread of information on your hotel database then you should be able to segment the information to work out an appropriate and enticing offer.

Get back to basics and think about seasonal opportunities or weather considerations and brainstorm a typical stay that might include

shopping, theatre or country walks, then think of a way of combining these with an added value offer. This could be a three-for-two, a discounted midweek/weekend rate or perhaps an added third night at half price. Encouraging repeat trade is so often underestimated. Your database should inform you if the visitor came to you for leisure or business reasons, so you can target the repeat visit offer appropriately. The data may tell you things like the past motivation for a leisure break, such as an anniversary or birthday, so you can target your marketing around these.

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Opening up a marketing communication to previous guests via email is cheap, efficient and perceived as personal rather than a mass mailout. If your hotel is organised, personalised emails can be sent by the reception staff, not forgetting of course to track who has been mailed and how they have responded.

The hotel database should remind you who your target audience actually is. You can also go back and pinpoint how guests actually found you in the first instance and re-examine what worked and what did not. Did your ad campaign last season actually deliver? If not, you will have firm evidence that the money will be better used elsewhere.

You can also use your database to establish your core business. We once worked for a chain of hotels which religiously mailed out a special offer, every quarter of every single year. From that they got a 35 per cent repeat booking. We analysed the data and found the hotel chain was basically giving a 30 per cent discount off the rack rate to a quarter of

the visitors who would have booked anyway! The consumers anticipated the 30 per cent discount and waited for their voucher code.

We then profiled the database, splitting it into under 55s and over 55s. Half of the 55-plus group were sent the normal discount offer and the other half received the same offer but with added value such as entrance to some local tourist attractions. Half the under 55s were also sent a longer three-night break offer and were tempted with a choice of champagne, chocolates and flowers in their room. The result was the added value

offers resulted in an enormous return, while the portion who received the standard discount offer remained static with no increased uptake. Through our experience, many hoteliers assume that a discount brings in repeat bookings but what guests

actually want is added value.

As hoteliers you can only give people booking offers they want by knowing who they are. Receptionists have a crucial role to play here, by taking details from guests – the more information you get and retain, the more you can do. Tailored offers can reward your customers with some kind of additional unexpected extra, whether it's whisky in the bar or a break for their partner at a future date. So to establish who your guests are and get them back to your hotel it's D for database, pure and simple.



ANGIE PETKOVIC is the managing director of apt marketing & pr, an integrated full service agency based in Cheltenham. Angie is an ex-hotelier herself and a well-connected tourism ambassador who understands the business. With a long pedigree in hospitality, spa and tourism client campaigns, Angie's team help their clients boost occupancy, maximise their profile and improve their customer offering by formulating a realistic, cohesive and affordable strategy. Ring Angie for a coffee and a chat on 01242 250 692 or email angie@aptmarketing.co.uk to find out how her expertise in effective communication can help you, whatever your current business situation. For further information go to www.aptmarketing.co.uk