

**Hotel & Motel Management
The Sales Clinic
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KNOWLEDGE IS THE KEY TO MAKING THE SALE

For many years the approved way of selling had been “hitting them over the head with product”. That is, keep telling the prospect all about what it is you want to sell them, explaining the “wonderful” features, and using glowing terms about the product. Even today we find many sales people, mostly new staff folks, without the experience or training of sales strategies, still going after probable prospects (and some non-prospects), telling them all about their wonderful hotel property. They explain how big it is, where it is, the amenities, “terrific” service, food, etc., etc. Doing it this way hardly ever got the booking. Potential buyers of hotel services these days do not need to be “pushed” into using a facility just because the sales person tells them how great the place might be for them. What they really want to know is “why”. “Why should I use your property...what will it do for me or my company? What benefit is there in meeting my needs?” Let’s not misinterpret the word “benefit” to mean “rate reduction”. We are doing too much of that in our industry these days. Just giving discounted rates does not answer the question of benefit, all by itself.

Of course, there is always the prospect that will call a property, and proceed to make a group booking without even getting involved with any sales person approaching them. These are the people who already know the property, have used it before, and do not need a sales pitch. What we are really discussing here, however, is the prospecting, the going out after the business. Sales people who take the time to gather information (and we should be doing that quite well via the Internet) before making any sales pitch, have a better chance of confirming sales. Knowledge is power; knowing as much as you can about the prospect; what they need or want, previous experience, how buying decision are made, what properties they have used previously, who makes decisions, what kind of budget they have for rooms and functions, the purpose and objectives of the meeting or group function, and the list

goes on. Sales people should be able to construct their own check list of questions that need to be answered before a sale is attempted.

This whole idea of gathering knowledge is to be able to approach the sale from the standpoint of providing a product that is needed and will benefit the prospect. The idea is not to try to make a presentation before learning as much as possible about the prospective buyer's hidden agenda. It just does not make sense to come in with a presentation that doesn't meet needs or even budget. The point is not to try to sell someone beer if they have a champagne budget. Gently asking open ended questions to get the prospect talking about their organization or group is what is needed to be done. Lead-in questions should start with "how", "tell me", "what..." As a prospect responds to one of these questions, then the opportunity may arise to relate to something about your property that may be a feature that would provide a benefit for the group.

The more knowledge we have about prospects the better chance we have of presenting a proposal that best meets their needs, and the better chance we have of confirming a deal.

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