

**Hotel & Motel Management
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The Sales Clinic
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MILITARY REUNIONS AS A GROWING NICHE MARKET

The daily total of military reunion planners continues to grow. The volunteer military reunion planner count of today is about 8,500, according to Paul Spiewak, President of The Reunion Friendly Network. The RFN is the primary (if not the only) organization of volunteer military reunion meeting planners. Of course, there has been some decline in numbers of the active WW II veterans, and Korean War veterans groups. Then there was an enormous surge of growth with Vietnam and Cold War veterans increasing the number of military reunion planners. Within the next couple of years the growth of reunion meeting planners is certainly expected to jump as a result of veterans returning from the current conflicts. The Cold War group has the most reunions today representing about 35% of all military reunions. All this reflex a potential growth of military reunion business available to hoteliers. In simple terms, the Military Reunion market is expected to be a hot market, thereby making this niche market a great opportunity for properties within this next 2010-2012 period. However, right now is the time to start seeking this business.

There are many advantages to sales personnel in going after this type of group meetings. In some cases it is even better than the corporate or association markets because there is very low demand for meeting space; these groups are usually booked during an off-season, and off-peak period; they are very flexible on dates; these are nice, friendly folks with whom to deal. These reunions are mostly family oriented, with members taking a week's vacation with spouse and children to attend the reunion.

According to RFN, the average daily (off-season) room rate paid by veterans groups is about \$100, and the total annual room-night count used by this sector approaches the multi-million per year level. More hotels, CVBs and attractions are getting involved each day in seeking this market. The total spent on hotel rooms only, while about the half-billion-dollar mark, is only part of the economic impact.

Invariably, there are banquets, breakfasts, visits to are attractions, plus substantial shopping. Estimates on additional spending, over and above rooms and food, approximate \$100 per person per day. A substantial portion of this spending could be for alcoholic beverages.

Currently, according to RFN, less than 24% of the Convention Bureaus, and less than 3% of the hotels are active in this market, leaving the field wide open for aggressive sales personnel. Like any other niche market, this requires an investment in time, and marketing. The potential for this business and actual success depends on two basic factors: What a location (destination) can offer military reunion groups in the form of local attractions, and your effectiveness in attracting and dealing with the volunteer planners who represent, and make the arrangements for these groups. RFN manages a series of CONFams all over the country where Convention Bureaus, get together with local hotels, attractions, food service operators, etc to host volunteer military reunion planners for three days to show off their destinations. At the same time during this period RFN conducts meeting planning workshops for the attendees.

There is a new book out by Paul Spiewak, founder of RFN: “Reunion Business: What It Is & How To Get It”. For more information contact:

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