

MANY SALES OPPORTUNITIES ARE BEING MISSED IN GROUP BOOKINGS

Year, after year, in surveys conducted by meetings trade publications, as well as by Meeting Professionals International, hotel sales people come up short in one big area. The number one issue that many meeting planners always have with hotel staffers responsible for booking groups is that they do not respond in a timely manner or even not at all.

Today, especially these days, with electronic messaging, things seem to be worse than ever before in this area of sales people responding to inquiries. Although the issue still remains with telephone calls, and email messages, the problem is very heavy in regard to RFPs (Request For Proposal). Understandably, some properties, more than others, receive a very huge batch of these on a daily basis. Most come electronically, either directly from the people actually responsible for planning meetings or from Independent Planners seeking to locate facilities for clients, and probably many come through a variety of software companies that provide a service for their users.

To some extent, this is a burden to some sales offices with a lack of staffing. Further, Sales staffers claim that a very large amount of these electronic RFPs are “just a waste of time” since information is being requested from properties that do not even have the facilities to meet the needs of the group functions being considered, so “why bother to respond” ? Of course, the answer to that question, we all know, is that the inquiry could be coming from some person or business or organization that could be a prospect for some other business, in the future, for the property. Anyway, common courtesy dictates that all inquiries should have a response; it is just a good business practice. Just recently the publication received an email message from a meeting planner complaining about having sent out RFPs to 21 hotel properties in specific cities in Pennsylvania and Texas. After two weeks he received 9 responses, and no others have even acknowledged receipt of the inquiries. Of the 9 that responded, none have followed up by phone.

In current times when hotel properties are all in need of business it is almost unbelievable that something like this would even exist. What are sales people thinking about how to handle RFPs? It would seem that this would be a priority. There is so much group business going down the drain because of lack of response to inquiries. In addition to problems meeting planners have with sales people not responding to RFPs, there is also the complaint about sales people not being available by phone; that there are too many voice-mail messages also not being returned.

The big issue in regard to this is sales training. There probably is not enough of training going on. Sales staffers need to better understand time management, priorities, and that their best prospects are those that come in to them via the RFPs. Further, the three best tools for booking business are: Follow-up; Follow-up; Follow-up.