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HOTEL SALES TRAINING

WHAT IS THE MOST IMPORTANT QUESTION YOUR RESERVATIONS SALES AGENTS SHOULD ASK? - BY DOUG KENNEDY

April, 6 2015 Doug Kennedy

If you're like most hoteliers these days chances are you are looking to reduce distribution costs by increasing direct bookings. If so, perhaps it's time to update your reservations sales processes. Based on my experience running a hotel reservations mystery shopping business, I can definitively say that these days the majority of front desk and reservations agents offer little more than what I call 'website search support.'



If you're like most hoteliers these days chances are you are looking to reduce distribution costs by increasing direct bookings. If so, perhaps it's time to update your reservations sales processes. Based on my experience running a hotel reservations mystery shopping business, I can definitively say that these days the majority of front desk and reservations agents offer little more than what I call "website search support." In other words, they do nothing more than what the caller could have done themselves by visiting the website; find out the dates, the number in the party, click enter, and then read off a list of the room types and rates that come up. Perhaps this reflects that their leadership has lost its focus on the voice reservations channel.

Most of those that do attempt to sell the guest are stuck using outdated sales models and processes that were designed from the era when guests had very little information prior to calling. Back then most were looking at a few bullets of features in an ad from resources such as the Hotel & Travel Index or the AAA Auto Tourbook, so it was important to offer what we would now call a "30 second commercial" overview of the hotel's main features and benefits. Today's reservations callers are indifferent or even annoyed at hearing these scripted details. Most have been online prior to calling; others are online while they are on the phone. What they don't want to hear is feature-dumping or a generic sales pitch; there is always a specific reason why they have called versus

clicked.

Therefore, rather than starting off by talking, today's hotel reservations sales agents are more successful when they begin by asking the most important investigative question circa 2015: "As I'm checking those dates, are there any questions I can answer for you such as about our location or our amenities and services?"

If asked, they will then quickly identify the caller's reason for calling and find out what the caller needs to hear to move forward with a buying decision. Many callers have specific questions, having read online guest reviews at TripAdvisor or at an OTA website. Others are overwhelmed by the number of choices in room types, rate options and packages they have seen online. Still others have no questions at all about the "product," they only want to talk about the rates they have seen online and to ensure they are getting the best deal. Some callers have no questions whatsoever and have simply clicked to call-in a booking after doing a mobile search on their smartphone and not wanting to book with their thumbs.

This question helps agents save talk time for the last to types of callers; time that can be used for the first two profiles. It also opens the door for an engaging, caller-focused conversation that is all about the caller's specific concerns and preferences. Agents who only find out the caller's dates can essentially only sell "price." Those who ask this key question are able to "un-mask the caller's story" so that they can then provide details about what really sets their hotel apart from all of the others.

When you think about it, the rooms and suites themselves are generally very similar from one hotel to the next. What really distinguishes a hotel has more to do with its location, its amenities, services and the retail, dining and entertainment options located in-house or nearby. By training your staff to ask this key question, you will help your agents convince more of today's channel-surfing callers to stop clicking and start booking right here, right now!

Doug Kennedy

About Doug Kennedy

Doug Kennedy is President of the Kennedy Training Network, Inc. a leading provider of customized training programs and telephone mystery shopping services for the lodging and hospitality industry. Doug continues to be a fixture on the industry's conference circuit for hotel companies, brands and associations, as he been for over two decades. Since 1996, Doug's monthly hotel industry training articles have been published worldwide, making him one of the most widely read hotel industry training authors in the world. He is the author of Still On The Road to Sales and Guest Service Excellence. Visit KTN at: www.kennedytrainingnetwork.com or email him directly: doug@kennedytrainingnetwork.com

Still On The Road To Sales and Guest Service Excellence



"Still On The Road To Sales and Guest Service Excellence" is a collection of monthly hotel training articles written by Kennedy from 1996 to 2012 and published worldwide in industry trade journals.

Doug's articles, which have inspired hoteliers worldwide, are presented chronologically, allowing the readers to see how training strategies and techniques have evolved over time. Read how emerging technologies, such as online distribution, online guest reviews, and CRM technology have impacted hospitality sales and service training over the years. Although technology changes, Doug's core recommendations starting from his very first article are still relevant today.

The book is available on [Amazon](#).

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