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# Hotel sales tips from real-world meeting planners

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Insights from interviews with meeting planners include ideas for how hotels can personalize their RFPs and event experiences to boost bookings.



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The hotel sales environment has changed dramatically in recent years. Anyone in the industry can easily recognize that an ever-increasing number of meeting planners inquire electronically by sending emails, or by using electronic request-for-proposal tools and CVB-sponsored websites.

As a result, it is now more important than ever to stand out from the competition via a prompt response, but also by responding with personalized correspondence and proposals that are tailored to need. As my frequent HNN readers know, I often address these issues in my monthly column and provide tips based on my experience in working with the "supplier" side of the industry as a hotel sales trainer.

Recently, however, I had a chance to gain insights into the "buyers" side of the equation when I caught up with Junvi Ola, who is a professional meetings industry and hospitality marketing speaker and also an accomplished copy writer.

In researching a travel industry conference presentation she calls "Think Like A Planner, Book Like A Boss!" (<http://hospitalitycontentstudio.com/speaking/>) Junvi interviewed 57 real-world professional meeting planners from all categories including association, corporate, third-party, city-wide and non-traditional. Rather than just using a bubble-in survey form, Junvi collected more insightful results via a combination of personal interview techniques including email question exchanges, phone interviews, video interviews and in-person meetings.

Looking at the results of Junvi's interview, it was wonderful to directly hear real-world planners asking for the same types of responses from hotel sales professionals that I have advocated for in recent years. Here are some highlights of her findings and some recommendations from the planners:

### Show examples

Thirty-nine out of the 57 meeting planners said they want hotels to post photos of actual past events held at the venue. This includes past events held by a company within the same industry. For example, a tech industry meeting planner wants to see what another tech client has done using the same space. Also, showing various set-ups in the hotel's different event spaces gives ideas of the flexibility of the rooms. One planner said, "Show me how my attendees will remember the event, not just attend it."

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**A personal touch**

All but five of the meeting planners said they want hotels to customize their responses, rather than offering generic proposals. So, stop focusing on canned, pre-written sales proposal copy, and be a personal advisor instead. Offer valuable advice and targeted solutions that will help them achieve their event goals. Most meeting planners have alpha personalities. They don't like waiting for information.

Make it easy for meeting planners to contact a specific sales manager. Forego the impersonal forms to fill out and offer more than just one central number to call (the planner knows they will be filtered by a sales administrator). If your brand allows, share your sales managers' headshots, full contact details and markets, so planners know who they will be working with.

Zero in on what makes you unique from the hotel down the street. Think like a planner. They are likely sourcing several other hotels from your destination, so make your hotel easier to distinguish from the group by making your "it factor" obvious. One planner said, "Give me the compelling reason why my attendees should interrupt their schedules to attend an event here."

Here are some other direct quotes from meeting planners who were surveyed:

"Give me a convincing reason to place my well-traveled attendees in your meeting space. Attendees are not impressed by listings of square footage."

"(Pictures of) empty ballrooms are boring. Show me how to utilize and leverage your space."

"Meeting planners only want to partner with people who are trustworthy and who aren't afraid to be honest and upfront. It's okay to say, 'No, we can't do that, but here's what we can do.'"

"Take time to partner with me on my objectives, not simply offer cookie-cutter solutions."

"Don't block me from calling you directly. I don't have time for the runaround."

"Forge personal relationships with clients. This will set you apart, even from co-workers. #relationshipsmatter."

"Please don't send me all the menus. That's just lazy."

"Map out the site inspection for my goals, not yours."

"Think like a planner and equip your website with everything we need."

Doug Kennedy is president of the Kennedy Training Network, Inc. a leading provider of hotel sales, guest service, reservations and front desk training programs and telephone mystery shopping services for the lodging and hospitality industry. Kennedy has been a fixture on the industry's conference circuit for hotel companies, brands and associations for more than two decades. Since 1996, Kennedy's monthly training articles have been published worldwide, making him one of the most widely read hospitality industry authorities. Visit KTN at [www.kennedytrainingnetwork.com](http://www.kennedytrainingnetwork.com) or email him directly [doug@kennedytrainingnetwork.com](mailto:doug@kennedytrainingnetwork.com). He is the author of "So You REALLY Like Working With People? - Five Principles for Hospitality Excellence." ([https://www.createspace.com/6608751?ref=1147694&utm\\_id=6026](https://www.createspace.com/6608751?ref=1147694&utm_id=6026))

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**Vivian Anagnonu** October 4, 2017 4:42 PM

Very current informative article on hotel sales.  
Good one there.

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