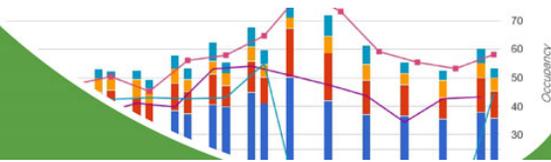




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OPINION ARTICLE

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# How To Follow-Up On Voice Reservations Inquiries With Personalized Emails And Phone Calls

By **Doug Kennedy**

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If you're like most hotel marketing and revenue leaders, chances are that one of your major near term strategic goals is to drive more direct bookings and thus reduce the costs of customer acquisition. Certainly this strategy calls for finding ways to drive traffic to your website and make it easy for them to book there right now. However, while many guests will book online, others prefer to first speak directly with a credible reservations agent. Generally, the higher the rate, the longer the stay, and the more they guest has a personal interest in the visit (such leisure guests) the more likely they are to call.



To convert more inquiries into bookings, it is certainly important to have trained your voice reservations agents to

have addressed in previous training articles.

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Yet regardless of how skilled the reservations agent is, there are always going to be some callers who are simply not yet ready to commit. This is especially true when the caller is traveling with friends or family members who are to be involved in the decision. Another reason callers hesitate to commit is that they want to continue to search online for a better rate, or perhaps they are only calling to double-check the rate they see at an OTA site.

When you consider the marketing costs of making that phone call happen in the first place, and how easy it would be for the caller to hang-up and book your hotel through a costly third-party OTA, or worse yet, to book another property, it surely makes sense to train your team invest a few post-call moments to take sales to the next level which is to use pro-active follow-up action steps.

Now I'm sure that some readers are rolling their eyes and saying "Oh, we'll never have time to do all that!" Ironically, one reason is that many resort reservations agents are short on time is because they are bogged down with admin work involved by entering OTA reservations into their systems, or if the connection is seamless, checking those reservations

potential for additional revenue, not only on rooms but on the total guest spend, it will most certainly be worth at least trying. (Just do the math by calculating the ROI if each agent snags just one more booking a day this way. This should catch your attention, and the actual ROI potential is probably much higher.)

Also, if you do a "time/ process study" you will probably find that this takes less time than you might think, even if you use a completely manual process. The good news is that there are now technology companies out there that are providing call and lead tracking systems specific to the lodging industry that enable this to be done in an extremely efficient manor, and the price has come down considerably in recent years as competition has increased. (Note: email me directly for the names of such companies [doug@kennedytrainingnetwork.com](mailto:doug@kennedytrainingnetwork.com))

Here are some training tips to help your reservations team follow-up pro-actively to convert more voice inquires:

- After first trying to secure the sale and then to overcome resistance by creating urgency and removing barriers to booking, train your agents to say something such as: "Okay, I understand that you'll need to check.... Before I let you go, if I can get your email address I can send you a personalized follow-up on the options we just discussed along with my contact information. That way you will have something to pass along."
- Train your agents to document the essential details (dates, room types discussed) and a few personal details in a CRM system, or on Excel list, or even in a manual tracking notebook. (Better yet, if you have invested in the lodging industry specific systems such as what I recommend above, this will attach right to the

- Next, have your agents send an email that goes beyond just sending a list of the accommodations and rates discussed. It should start with a personalized opening paragraph that paraphrases and re-states the details discussed such as: "Hello Douglas. It was wonderful meeting you by phone today! How excited to hear about your plans to take your daughter and her girlfriends on this beach trip for her last summer before college! I'm sure she is going to be delighted with your plans. Below is a recap of the options we discussed... I've made a note to reach out again by phone in a few days to see what questions you might have and what else I can do to assist you in planning..."
- Trace the lead for follow-up from one to three days later. Start by making a phone call. Chances are that your agent will be leaving a voicemail. Train them to sound enthusiastic, to be succinct and not too wordy! Most voicemails are received electronically these days (especially on smartphones) and the notification indicates the length of the message. Keep it around 30 seconds to entice them to listen. This is like your "30 second commercial."
- Later the same day, or the very next day, resend the original message but with a new, brief remark such as "Hello again Douglas. Just a quick note to see what else we can do to help you plan what is sure to be a memorable trip for your daughter and her friends!"

From what I hear from the companies that provide the enabling technology specific to lodging, the conversion rates are at least 20% and often far higher when agents follow these best practices. Even if you start with a manual process, you will likely show immediate and measurable results and can then justify investing in the systems I recommend in order to do it more efficiently.