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# Making the most of direct voice channels for booking

13 DECEMBER 2017 8:19 AM

Boosting direct bookings via voice channels can be as simple as encouraging more people to call, and as complicated as using the proper metrics for measuring results.



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Like most hotels, chances are your lodging operation is looking to increase contribution margins from the direct channels, including voice. If so, here are some considerations and training tips.

### Encourage more inquiries

Where is your hotel's phone number posted on your website? Check to make sure it is displayed prominently. Also check the mobile version of your website to ensure it is easy to "click to call." Let prospects know if you have in-house reservations experts by adding a label that says "Call our in-house reservations specialists now."

Update your after-hours message to commit to a prompt callback. Hotels and resorts—especially those with higher average daily rates, longer stays and extensive outlets allowing for more-revenue-per-guest opportunities—should encourage agents to send personalized follow-up emails to those who are interested but not quite ready.

Resorts in particular seem to get an increasing number of reservations inquiries by email. If so, encourage your agents to personalize the response and not just use a template. Also, have them follow-up by phone if a number is provided.

If you have in-house agents, train them to sound like the local area experts they should be! Encourage them to ask the most important question circa 2018 to move the conversation from an "order-taking" to an "order-making" scenario which is: "As I'm checking those dates, are there any questions I can answer for you about our location or amenities and services?"

Train in-house agents to be "local area experts" so that they can sell travel experiences and not just be "room renters."

If you use a third-party call center, make sure you have selected one that is committed to training its agents to provide personalized, caller-focused sales and service style and not an overly scripted approach.

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### Proper metrics

Make sure you are measuring the right metrics to identify and track agent sales performance. Most hoteliers only look at "total revenue sold," which can sometimes be misleading. The reason is that some agents routinely rush indecisive callers through the call and re-direct them back to the website to grab the next "ready-to-book" caller. Make sure you also look at the following metrics:

- **Call conversion:** Track manually if you have to. Track "raw" conversion," which is total of all calls received vs. reservations booked, and also "actual" conversion, which is total of reservations inquiries received (excluding calls for sold-out dates) vs. reservations booked.
- **Average revenue per booking:** One really easy metric to check to ensure that agents are taking time to sell higher-rated rooms and suites is to look at revenue per booking. Calculate this by taking the total revenue sold divided by the number of reservations booked.
- **Revenue sold per work hour:** If your reservations office has both full- and part-time staff, or if you have agents who also process side work such as group rooming lists, use this metric to measure how well agents do at sales when they are available for calls. Divide total revenue sold by total available hours (from payroll or from log-in reports from the phone system.)
- **Mystery shopping reports:** In addition to the above metrics, it is a good idea to measure what agents are routinely saying to callers and how well they are following your call-flow process by using a telephone mystery-shopping service.

### Implement a staff recognition and incentive program

The actual incentive plan I would recommend would be based on the size of your team and also your inventory of accommodations. Here are some examples:

- **Team incentive:** Total transient revenue sold as compared to the monthly goal, which should be based on the numbers from the most recent forecast prior to the start of the month and not on the original budget, is probably less accurate.
- **Individual incentive based on upselling success:** Rather than only incentivizing agents to sell top-tier suites and the very best rooms, which can be difficult to track, set a goal for average revenue per booking" as indicated above and incentivize all who meet or exceed it.
- **Individual incentive based on mystery shopping scores:** This should not be the main incentive, which should be based on revenue, but rather a secondary incentive.

In general, it is best to have several incentives running simultaneously rather than trying to wrap everything together into one complex incentive program.

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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