



Hospitality Marketing Efforts Shifting to Regional Level

By Jamie Hansen, CHA, CHDM, Director of Marketing Activation at Best Western and member of HSMIAI's Marketing Advisory Board

On a recent call, 70 percent of HSMIAI's Marketing Advisory Board (MAB) members reported in a poll that they were focusing their marketing efforts at the regional level as opposed to the national (30 percent) or global (0 percent) level. Here is what MAB members had to say about the increasing importance of regional marketing, changes in booking patterns, and how they're shifting their marketing efforts.

REGIONAL MARKETING

MAB members agreed that marketing on a global level is practically nonexistent due in part to the increase in drive traffic hotels are seeing and the different regulations and laws in every region. "I can't see anybody doing anything global," one MAB member said, "unless it's really high-level aspiration stuff."

Members said that right now their focus is on bringing in drive markets via traditional methods such as billboards and radio advertisements. "We joke that we've gone backwards 20 years," one MAB member said. "In some places, you can't travel out of the state or the province, but people still want to get out of their house. Radio has been very successful for them."

Another relic from the past that's becoming popular again: motels with outdoor hallways. "Over the course of seven months, those have become our most requested hotels," one MAB member said. "Because people feel like there are no hallways, there are less germs and less contact with other people."

BOOKING CHANGES

One of the biggest changes in booking patterns that MAB members mentioned is the booking window, which has shortened tremendously since the start of the pandemic. "People are really making those game-day decisions on if they are going to take a trip or not," one MAB member said. "Something like 63 percent of our bookings are within two days of the stay."

Another MAB member said that they are looking at booking patterns in their comp set to examine their position in the market. "We're using BI tools to leverage some of their opportunities with their geo-comp set examination," the member said. "We can go in and say, 'Okay, this is my booking pattern for my hotel. I know my comp set, but who else books similar to our pattern?' And we really had to cross-examine their current position in the market and try to chase that down, breaking it down by channel and always seeing if there any opportunity to try to capture that market share."

Another MAB member wondered if messaging could still be effective in advance of the booking window. “Even if I’m going to book a few days out, I’m still thinking about it for weeks,” the member said. “So, if you could hit me with messaging ahead of time, then you’re top of mind. That might’ve been a year-long funnel before and now it’s maybe a four-week funnel, but that might be a way to think about it.”

Other members agreed that it’s important to target future guests, not just on the leisure side but on the business side as well. “We’re finding that even construction crews are having those discussions as soon as they find out they’re in the running to win a project,” one member said. “So, we’re talking to them early on and then there’s an opportunity to build these compelling campaigns, direct to the B2B customer.”

CHANGING MARKETING EFFORTS

MAB members had a number of creative ideas on how to adapt to the types of traveler that they are seeing now, even if it is different from who they were used to. One member said that because their hotels are seeing more couples and fewer families, they are highlighting offerings that are more interesting to couples. Other members mentioned featuring outdoor activities, which are a huge draw for travelers wanting to get away and still be socially distanced.

“We’re trying to target the people who aren’t afraid to travel right now,” one MAB member said. “We’re focusing on the outdoor pursuits and socially distanced activities that are available nearby.”

Another member said that they are making dogs welcome in all of their hotels in an effort to attract people who may not want to leave their pet behind. Other members are trying to bring in business with packages that allow customers to work from the hotel, whether it’s for the day or just a few hours. “We’ve seen some success with mini room rentals,” one MAB member said. “Kids can swim in the pool while you work, and even if it’s just for a few hours, you can sometimes focus in a hotel room better than you can at home.”

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