

L O D G I S T I C A



hospitality sales consulting and management

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Hospitality industry publications and experts have long focused on the large, corporate hotels even as the prevalence of boutique properties has increased dramatically. However, for anyone who has experience with luxury boutique hotels and resorts, it is clear that sales and marketing for a small, often independent, property requires a different approach. A limited ability to accommodate group business as well as a more specific guest demographic means that budgets and goals have to be carefully crafted to be effective. My years in both large and small hotel marketing and sales has culminated in what I believe to be the Top Ten issues that boutique hotel properties should consider when crafting their 2007 plans.

1. **Promote a Destination Experience.** The modern guest is looking for more than a luxurious room, they want an experience. Situating your property as part of a larger destination experience will inextricably connect your hotel to the destination for the repeat visitor.
2. **Promote a Hotel/Resort Experience.** Today's guests want to understand how they're going to feel and what they are going to do at your hotel, as well. It creates anticipation, so you should create that for them prior to arrival. Send pre-arrival materials that will generate excitement and follow up more than once to arrange activities and confirm. Ultimately, the most important experience you can provide, however cliché it may seem, is service. Without service, your guests will not return.
3. **Consistency in hotel management, marketing, and sales.** Most individual hotels miss the boat on one or all of these by not knowing how to prioritize, how to spend funds wisely, and how to stay on message. Hotel sales and marketing teams are charged with selling your experience; however, if management (or sales and marketing themselves) is inconsistent with what is being sold, the efforts will only result in misspent budgets and dissatisfied guests. Hotels are notorious for changing strategies and staff whenever occupancy is low or strategies don't appear to be working right away. This gives both patrons as well as industry organizations the perception that your property is unstable. Impatience during lower occupancy periods should be met with the resolve to maintain existing **hotel sales and marketing** messages, management styles, and staff (where relationships are built and destroyed every time a staff member comes and goes). A good sales and marketing team will know when a strategy isn't working and will phase it out in a way that isn't perceived as a knee-jerk reaction.
4. **Know your guests.** With a growing number of firms specializing in guest database analysis, **luxury boutique hotels** have the opportunity to understand their demographics on an extraordinarily detailed level. Low season and high season guests are typically very different—low season guests may be younger and have children, while high season may bring a more mature guest with more expendable income. Knowing these details and then specifically targeting these audiences will help you better utilize your sales and marketing budget.
5. **Revamp your website.** There are a few—and only a few—hotels and resorts that have successful websites. Most sites tend to be either unattractive (poorly representing a property), difficult to use, too information heavy, not informative enough, or so over-designed that it can't be marketed appropriately. It is an expensive project that will pay off in capturing the rapidly increasing online bookings of a new generation of traveler. Remember that a website is not all about the design, but also about the usability for a consumer and for the search engines - which consumers are using to find unique **hotels and resort properties**.
6. **Online marketing.** From content syndication to email offers, online marketing is a cost-effective way to reach your audience and most contemporary guests (no matter their age) are internet savvy. Online marketing offers more flexibility, is quicker to produce, and costs less than most print advertising and direct

mail pieces. With the right designer, **e-marketing** initiatives will still reflect the essence of your property. Be weary of overusing tools such as e-blasts and e-newsletters, sometimes this can do more harm than good.

7. **Correspond with your past guests.** Past guests are your most valuable asset and it's critical to reconnect with them periodically. Start with a well-designed "Thank You" email shortly after the guest has returned home and then periodically—maybe once per quarter—send a letter with a special offer specifically targeted to the past guests. This is a good way to let them know about upcoming events or new developments at the hotel.
8. **Create strong relationships with industry organizations.** You must have good relationships with people in the industry to receive referral bookings, and your hotel should establish relationships with travel agent organizations and seek hotel group affiliations. Beyond opening up a multitude of marketing opportunities, you also receive priceless word of mouth marketing.
9. **Set realistic group sales goals.** Each hotel is very different in its ability to attract and accommodate group business and, yet, many set arbitrary group sales goals. From the number of rooms to geographical considerations to food and beverage limitations, you must set realistic goals that will change as the property evolves. Realistic goals will do three very important things: 1). Motivate your sales team to succeed 2). Allow you to meet your budgetary goals without falling short 3). Make the groups you do host happy, because you will have the right space, service, and amenities to accommodate them.
10. **"In-house" sales & marketing matters.** No one is as dedicated to your hotel as your own hotel operations management team. This doesn't mean everyone must work on property or necessarily be full time; however, strategically hiring individuals and/or a small **hotel management company** with a specialty in hotel marketing to handle very specific initiatives means that you not only get expertise, you will generally also get faster results and create a team that understands your property. Don't try to do it all with just one full-time person and don't simply leave it to advertising and public relations firms.

About Lodgistica

With 25 years experience in four- and five-star **hotel management**, **Ling Riley** established Lodgistica in 2005. A boutique luxury hotel marketing and sales firm, Lodgistica differs from other industry firms by offering a hands-on, intimate approach for small hotels and resorts. Unlike other hotel management companies, Lodgistica's team acts as an in-house team offering a range of services: travel agent relationship development, marketing strategies, collateral development, and more. Lodgistica's clients have included The Whiteface Lodge in Lake Placid, New York; The Chanler at Cliff Walk in Newport, Rhode Island; The Inn of the Five Graces in Santa Fe, New Mexico; Oheka Castle on Long Island; Lake Placid Lodge in Lake Placid, New York; Home Hill Inn in Plainsfield, New Hampshire; and The Point in Saranac Lake, New York.

CONTACT

Ling Riley
President
Phone: +1 312.280.1126
Fax: +1 312.280.1127
Email: lriley@lodgistica.com

ORGANIZATION

Lodgistica Hospitality Management
<http://www.lodgistica.com>
40 E. Chicago, #104
USA - Chicago, IL IL 60611