

alberta hospitality

The Official Magazine of the Alberta Hotel and Lodging Association

Spring 2011



revenue management for the great outdoors

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this issue

6 REVENUE MANAGEMENT FOR THE GREAT OUTDOORS

Steps include product alignment, competitive benchmarking, strategic pricing, demand forecasting, mix manipulation, and distribution management.

- 
- 10 Playing the Social Media Game
 - 13 The Influence of Social Media on US Travellers

16 The Sheraton Suites
Calgary Eau Claire

- 18 Creating a Micro Marketplace
- 22 The Now of Niche
- 26 Designing a Strategic Marketing Plan
- 28 Build a Sales Team Your Customers Love to Buy From
- 30 Staycations on the Rise

in every issue

- 4 Chairman's Report
- 5 President & CEO's Message
- 15 Travel Alberta
- 21 Names in the News
- 27 Member Value Program Review
- 29 HR Matters

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CHAIRMAN'S REPORT

Alberta's Black Swan

by Mike Shymka



A black swan event is an occurrence that is both unpredictable and carries massive consequences. In Alberta we witnessed a black swan in the political realm with the surprise resignation of Premier Ed Stelmach and Liberal leader David Swan (no pun intended). These resignations were nothing short of unprecedented and unexpected in Alberta politics. At the end of 2010, no one could have predicted these changes. Now we must consider what they will mean for Alberta's future.

What will the changes to Alberta's political landscape mean for hoteliers and the tourism industry? Obviously we don't have the answers. We do know that this change will give us a terrific opportunity to engage with politicians at a grassroots level across the province. It provides us with a platform to meet all the candidates and MLAs and discuss the issues we face as one of the largest industries in Alberta.

We need you to contact the AHLA and/or your local AHLA director and give us your thoughts and opinions - your voice. As an association, we can engage with candidates and potential leaders and let them know what our industry needs in order to be a vital part of Alberta's future. An important part of what we do at the AHLA is government relations, representing your concerns to and with government as partners. We need to know what matters to you if we are going to do this effectively.

The AHLA has identified the following issues as critical to the success of our industry:

- Temporary foreign workers - we need to refocus our efforts from a temporary to a permanent foreign worker program. As the economy improves, hotels, motels, and campgrounds will again be short of employees on the front lines. Solving this problem is of critical importance.
- Open sky policy - we need to open our markets and airport access to attract more tourism to Alberta. Our market is only half open and only half as competitive as it should be.
- Continued dedication of the Tourism Levy to Travel Alberta to ensure that marketing efforts are well funded, especially in times of economic distress.

- Destination marketing fees collected in communities around Alberta that are committed to effective governance and efficient marketing efforts, ensuring a return on our investment.

The AHLA's new Board of Directors will be announced at our 2011 convention. These are the people who will set the future direction of the association. I hope that you will take a few minutes to talk to your directors to ensure they understand the issues that impact your business.

I would like to thank the AHLA and its staff for a great job this past year. Your efforts go far beyond the call of duty. I serve with an outstanding board and wish to thank each and every one of them for their consideration and diligence. I would like to extend a special thank you to Dave Kaiser, who has effortlessly mentored me in my role as Chair over the past year. I look forward very much to working with him in the year to come.

I must also thank Premier Ed Stelmach. The Premier and his Minister of Tourism, Parks and Recreation, Cindy Ady, have represented us very well these last few years - and we appreciate the relationships we have built with them.

I hope to see you at the convention!

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Big Changes are in the Stars

by Dave Kaiser



2011 will be an exciting year for hotel star ratings in Alberta. The AHLA is pleased to introduce Canadian Star Quality Accommodation (Star Quality), a new national rating program developed in partnership with the hotel associations of BC, Saskatchewan, and Manitoba. The new program provides far greater value for both operators and consumers than the old Canada Select program.

Why the change? Based on direction from our Board of Directors and our members, the AHLA has made efforts on numerous fronts to enhance the national brand equity of the Canada Select program. Since 2007, the AHLA's efforts at the Canada Select board table to promote a new business model that would support national marketing of the program have been met with continuous resistance. Hotels, motels and resorts in Alberta and elsewhere have been frustrated with Canada Select's failure to keep pace with design and product change in our rapidly changing industry. The Star Quality program addresses these concerns.

The Star Quality business model includes a strong national marketing program. It provides for an industry advisory committee that will have input and authority over the rating criteria. To enhance the value of the program to travellers, the rating criteria capture and measure the features and amenities that impact the quality of a guest's experience at a property.

Star Quality will be managed nationally by the AHLA. We were selected on the basis of our extensive experience with Canada Select and our Approved Accommodation Program. By centralizing program administration, we will reduce costs and have more funds available for national marketing. Provincial hotel associations participating in the program will retain responsibility for in-province marketing and property rating inspections.

Perhaps the most exciting feature of Star Quality will be a travel website with searchable listings of rated accommodations, including photos, maps, and the ability to book

reservations directly with a property. Research clearly indicates that travellers place high value on the reviews of other travellers when booking their accommodations, and that user-generated content greatly enhances website traffic. As a result, we plan to make TripAdvisor reviews an option that hotels and motels can include with their listing.

The most exciting opportunity for our industry is for Star Quality to be a credible distribution channel that effectively competes with online travel agencies like Expedia and Travelocity. With no commissions or booking fees, Star Quality will greatly enhance the profitability of our industry. All of this is possible as long as participation in the program is strong and the program is marketed effectively.

We will do our part. Please join us so that together we can seize this opportunity .

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COVER
STORY

REVENUE MANAGEMENT FOR THE GREAT OUTDOORS

*by Victoria Edwards
photos courtesy of Travel Alberta*



Kananaskis Country



Lac La Biche

How does revenue management for campsites and motels differ from revenue management for hotels? The fact of the matter is that it does not. Motels and campsites have the same characteristics as hotels, where the practice of revenue management (RM) is so valuable. That is, all three have perishable inventories, fixed capacity, and fluctuating demand. The principles of revenue management remain the same - leverage existing demand to optimize revenue and the bottom line.

Where the three differ markedly is in their respective opportunities to execute RM practices. As the accommodation industry is one of high fixed costs and low variable costs, we all run very tight ships. The campsite and motel business has even leaner resources to draw upon - both financial and human resources. So the question then becomes: Given their limited resources, how can these businesses take a best practices approach to revenue management in a cost and time effective manner?

I would like to offer an easy-to-implement best practice plan from Buckhiester Management's 6-step REVRoadMap®. These steps include: product alignment, competitive benchmarking, strategic pricing, demand

forecasting, mix manipulation, and distribution management. The examples that I have used are based on online research of campgrounds and motels within a 30 km radius of Calgary.

1) Product Alignment - Simply put, product alignment is about defining markets so that customer needs can be assessed and product can be matched to meet those needs. If you have a motel that has decided to capture the aging baby boomer segment, do you understand what modifications need to be made to your guest rooms in order to best serve their needs? With this demographic, ground floor rooms would likely have more value than upper level rooms. In northern Alberta where transient guests include oil field workers, some motels have taken to charging extra for smoking rooms in the winter. In fact, demand for smoking room inventory was so high that one motel was able to increase its average daily rate on these rooms by \$20 per night.

2) Competitive Benchmarking - Deciding on an appropriate competitive set is critical as it plays a role in how you will position your product.





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Consider who your competition is and look at what they have to offer compared to your product. Consideration should be given to amenities, location, size, nearby attractions, price point, etc. Give your competitors a score based on whether they are better on an item (+1 to +3) or weaker than you (-1 to -3)

Your Campground	Variable	Camp 1	Camp 2	Camp 3	Camp 4
0	Size	1	-2	2	0
0	Location	-2	-2	2	1
0	Mini Golf	2	-3	-1	1
0	Pool	-3	1	-1	2
0	Fire Pits	2	1	2	-2
0	BBQ	2	-2	2	-2
0	Retail	-1	1	1	-1
0	Shower Facilities	3	1	1	-1
0	Nearby Attractions	2	-2	2	-1
0	Proximity to Restaurants	1	1	1	2
0	Security	1	-1	2	-1
0	Total Score	8	-7	13	-1
3	Rank	2	5	1	4
\$34	Price Point G,W,S	\$38	\$29	\$39	\$36

Doing this type of exercise helps you in two ways. First, it allows you to identify opportunities that you may be able to improve upon. Second, it indicates if your price positioning is appropriate. In this particular example, price and value appear to be aligned. Your product offering is ranked as 3rd amongst the competitive set and your price is in line with that ranking.

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3) Pricing - Strategic pricing is about matching appropriate rates with demand in order to optimize revenue. The rate structure should reflect overall demand as well as product-specific demand. For example, I noticed on a number of the campground websites, that some campgrounds had sites with fire pits and sites without fire pits. Additionally, some had picturesque settings with woods, streams and mountain views. Both view and amenities, such as fire pits, have value in terms of differentiating price. A riverside site with a fire pit may have much higher demand than a wooded site without a fire pit.

Once high, moderate, and low demand times have been identified, sell your product at a rate that makes sense given the demand.

Pricing should always be differentiated based on demand. In the online research I did not find one campground that differentiated price on anything other than power, water, and sewer hookups. The key is to identify which sites are in the highest demand and price them accordingly. Even a \$5.00 increment per night, per high demand site can add significant incremental revenue to your top line.

4) Demand Forecasting - Having a quantitative idea of fluctuation in demand allows you to react to changes in the marketplace. This means when demand is high you optimize rate, and when demand is low you focus on trying to steal share from your competitive set. Any campground or motel using a reservation service for online bookings should have access to reports that break down reservation conversions as well as reservations turned down. Use this information to assess demand by season, month, and even day of the week. Ensure that you have access to information from your local CVB as to events and conferences that may impact demand for your product.

I am not suggesting a highly sophisticated demand forecast in the case of motels and campgrounds, but rather a simple pace report of reservations pick-up for each upcoming day over at least a 90-day period. Once high, moderate, and low demand times have been identified, sell your product at a rate that makes sense given the demand. You may wish to have 3 different rates available such as Best Available Rate (BAR) 1 = \$42 High demand; BAR 2 = \$38 Moderate demand; and BAR3 = \$32 Low demand.

Forecasting will ensure that you do not leave money on the table during busy times, and that you do not turn away business in low demand periods.

5) Business Mix - The best way to mitigate risk in your business is to ensure that you have a diverse mix of business. Market segments are defined in terms of booking windows, price sensitivity, and user needs. Diversifying your market segments means that when one type of business is down you can shift gears and increase business from another area. One of the fastest growing segments in terms of camping is in the 25-35 year demographic who are into Extreme Camping. Is this a market that you are going after? What would it take for you to pursue this market segment? Have you given any consideration to securing group business from the SMERF market (sports, military, education, religious, fraternal)? Typically, this segment has a moderate booking window and tends to be very price sensitive, but this market, made up of sports teams, church groups, and college gatherings, can be a great way to fill need periods.

6) Distribution - So now that you have defined your product, identified your competitors, set your pricing, forecasted your demand, and diversified your business mix, what's left? You need to get the word out. How you choose to distribute your product will have an impact on the size of market you can reach. For campgrounds I would suggest focusing on niche sites such as Camping.com, Campgrounds.com, and Active.com. Both motels and campgrounds should immediately get involved in social media/networking. Sites such as Facebook and Twitter cost no money and take very little time to set up. The potential on both sites for driving business is remarkable. Consider getting your guests to follow you on Twitter to keep them aware of specials, promotions and upgraded services and amenities at your motel or campground.

The recommendations that have been made represent a handful of industry best practices that are proven to add incremental revenue to hotel top lines. I have suggested only those practices that can be accomplished with reasonably little investment of skill, time, or money. If a motel or campground could undertake just one of these best practices each month, they would be well on their way to establishing a revenue management discipline that will yield significant increases to both their top and bottom lines. ☺

Victoria Edwards is the Vice President, Strategic Development of Buckhiester Management USA Inc., which specializes in developing customized Revenue Management (RM) solutions at the corporate and property level. Visit www.buckhiester.com.

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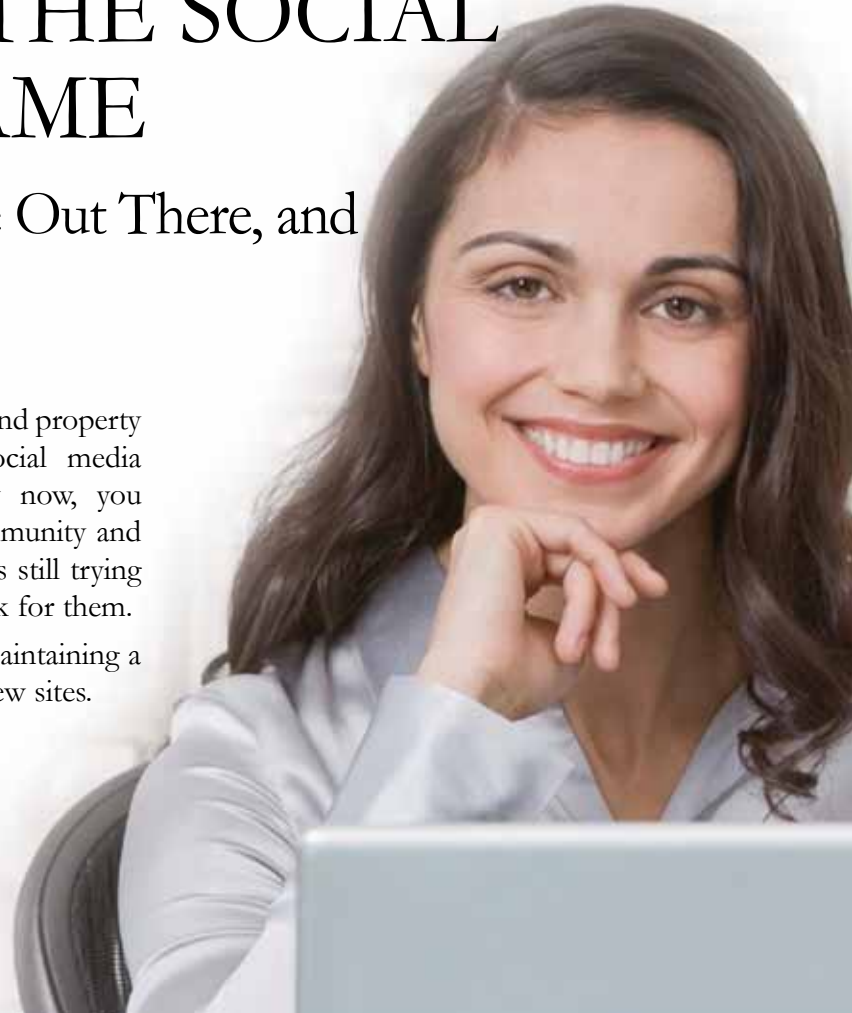
PLAYING THE SOCIAL MEDIA GAME

Getting Your Name Out There, and Keeping It Clean

by Alex Van Tol

In today's ever-changing world, most hoteliers and property operators have plumbed the depths of social media applications like Facebook and Twitter. By now, you know that Facebook is good for building community and encouraging conversation, and that everybody's still trying to figure out how hotels can make Twitter work for them.

Now it's time to examine the importance of maintaining a blog - and maintaining your reputation on review sites.

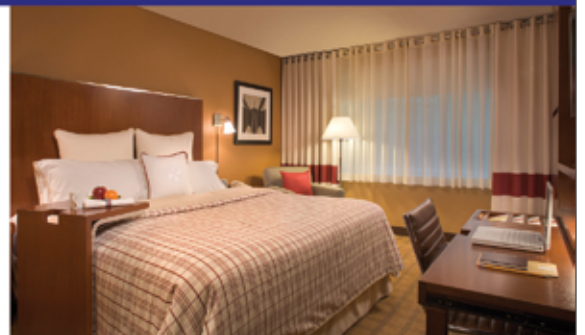


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The Business of Blogging

“There are many reasons to have a blog,” says Chad Gulevich, general manager of Jasper’s Mount Robson Inn. “It helps you rank better on Google because those search engines like to see new content.” A blog also creates a forum to hear suggestions, and it’s more responsive and personalized than traditional PR routes. “A blog provides an opportunity to bring some personality to a hotel website,” explains William Bakker, digital destination marketing expert at Think! Social Media. “The best blogs create a sense of community.” A blog should have an opinion and personality, Bakker continues. Do you have someone on staff who is passionate about writing? That’s the person to put in charge of your blog - not necessarily your marketing director. Maintaining a blog is a lot of work, but if you’ve got lots going on at your property or in your community - and a fresh voice to put it out there - go for it.

However, a blog isn’t a necessity for all properties. It’s an ideal communication vehicle for larger properties located in vibrant centres. For other properties, observes Edward Keenan, general manager of StoneRidge Mountain Resort in Canmore, there’s more value in simply maintaining an up-to-date website. “Most

people aren’t going to wade through a huge blog to find out what’s going on at your property,” notes Keenan. “The average consumer isn’t going to refer to a blog to find out information about a destination. They’ll go to a destination marketing website or check the reviews on TripAdvisor.”

Who’s Using the Reviews? And Who’s Posting?

Travel review sites like TripAdvisor (which is owned by Expedia) form an increasingly important part of the package that guests consider when they’re evaluating where to stay. “If I haven’t been to a property before,” states Keenan, “I’ll look at the website, the rates, the photos, and then I’ll go check it out on TripAdvisor.” Fully three-quarters of travellers check review sites when making their travel plans.

The hitch is that travel review sites are largely subjective, notes Tina Tobin, general manager of Edmonton’s Sands Hotel and Conference Centre, which for now has opted not to list a profile on the review sites. “With Expedia there are certain qualifications a user has to meet before they can put their reviews up. But with TripAdvisor, anybody can post,” including

disgruntled employees. “That’s the tough part,” admits Tobin, musing that hoteliers often talk about this issue among themselves. “You just don’t know who it’s from.”

Your Reviews Form Your Reputation

There will be good reviews, and chances are there will be poor reviews too. “All you can do,” suggests Gulevich, “is try your best to keep your customers happy. At the end of the day they’ll post what they want.” Giving a great guest experience from the get-go is one way to fish for those good reviews. But what do you do when it comes to responding to the negatives? It really depends on the type, observes Bakker. “A negative review related to a specific personal experience is often best dealt with privately,” he notes, whereas a general complaint or suggestion can be addressed on a public forum. “Always be aware of the perception your response creates,” Bakker advises, adding that the best responses are along the lines of “thanks for letting us know; we hear you and this is what we’ve done to make sure it doesn’t happen again.” Gulevich agrees, suggesting hoteliers address negative comments in a positive manner without coming across as defensive or trying to further the argument.



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Keep in mind that you're not only responding to a guest, you're representing your property to thousands of potential visitors who read the reviews of your hotel. "You need to keep two things in mind: the reviewer and everybody else reading the review and your response," cautions Bakker. "Leave your emotions out of it, even if the reviewer is 'one of those' customers." Keenan, whose property at press time ranked not only #1 in Canmore but in all of Alberta, says it's important to avoid taking a bad review as a personal attack. Sharing solutions is an effective damage control strategy, he advises. "If other readers believe you've done what you can to do what's right, they'll understand that." Readers recognize that your team is human, he explains.

In a world where the guest seems to have the final say, is it even possible to cultivate good reviews? "It starts with offering a great all-around experience," advises Bakker. If your property already has this in place, good reviews will follow. Have a look at TripAdvisor and you'll get a good idea of what kinds of experiences generate positive reviews. "It's often as simple as meeting or exceeding expectations," Bakker notes. Provide plenty of checkpoints for guests during their stay. "We

Managing your reputation online should be done by somebody who has the time and skills to do this properly.

have a number of contact points to provide our guests lots of opportunities to talk with us, before, during and after their stay," reports Keenan. "It helps to head off problems and it increases guest loyalty." Ask at check-out whether your guest had a good experience. If not, resolve any concerns before they leave the property. Encourage your happy guests to leave a good review on travel sites.

Do I Need A Manager For All This?

As with everything, some properties are better at managing their social media presence than others. After all, Facebook, Twitter, blogs, and review sites can become big time sinks if you let them. Should you hire a dedicated social media manager? That depends on how big you are and where you draw your business from. For larger properties in busy urban

areas, "It's a critical part of doing business," states Bakker. Too often, he notes, a property's social media presence is managed off the side of somebody's desk, by an intern or a junior staffer who lacks the proper skills. "Managing your reputation online should be done by somebody who has the time and skills to do this properly," Bakker concludes. On the other hand, if your property is small or not constantly fighting for top spot in a hyper-competitive market, it's possible to spread the task around among a few keen staff. Sure, blogging takes a while, but "in this business, people aren't busy all the time," notes Gulevich. "There are downtimes when the phones aren't ringing. That's when they'll have some time to work on a post."

As for those review sites; stay on top of them. If you're not managing your reputation, someone else will do it for you. ☞

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FEATURE

THE INFLUENCE OF SOCIAL MEDIA ON US TRAVELLERS

by Peter Yesavich

Social media are the rage among marketers of travel services, providing an easy, interactive platform to reach and engage large audiences at a modest cost. The theoretical “reach” of social media does, in fact, boggle the mind: Facebook alone now boasts in excess of 500,000,000 members globally. The incidence of adults who report posting on the other popular sites pales by comparison. But to what extent do active travellers visit social media sites, consult the content of these sites when evaluating travel service options and, perhaps most importantly, report that the content of what they find on these sites influences their actual behaviour?

The answers, as revealed in the new Ypartnership/Harrison Group’s 2010 Portrait of American TravelersSM survey, offer surprising insight.

Among all active travellers in the US (those who took at least one trip that required overnight accommodations during the previous 12 months), just under half (an estimated 46%) have a page posted on a social site. Facebook has achieved the highest rate of market penetration, followed by LinkedIn and MySpace:

Social Site	% of Active Travellers with Page Posted
Facebook	91%
LinkedIn	24%
MySpace	23%

But theoretical reach doesn’t necessarily translate into influence, particularly when it comes to commercial communications. In three separate national surveys conducted by Ypartnership, fewer than one in ten active travellers (6%) has reported that the content to which they have been exposed on social sites has had any significant influence on their final choice of a destination or travel service supplier.

The reason behind this discrepancy probably derives from two additional insights. First, when asked about their primary motivations for the use of social media, active travellers cite the expected: a new and novel way to stay in touch with old friends, to find and make new ones, and to share information, photos, and other content about life events. Very few, if any, mention activities of a commercial nature such as sourcing good deals, comparison shopping for products and services, and the like.



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... the true power of social media derives from their ability to reach large numbers of travellers who share some common affinity in an engaging and dynamic way.

Second, the perceived credibility of the content of social media is low relative to the degree of credibility ascribed to other sources of information travellers typically consult when making destination and travel service supplier decisions. This is confirmed by the percentage of active travellers who are “very/extremely” confident in the information they receive from the media sources listed along the “credibility continuum”. According to the 2010 Portrait of American TravelersSM, the vast majority of active travellers are most confident in the information they receive from family and friends (81%). More than half also trust information found in travel guidebooks (57%) as well as that provided by online travel agents (54%) and on online advisory sites (53%). Company or destination websites (46%), travel agents (46%) and media

coverage (43%) fall in the middle of the continuum, while brochures (39%), blogs (33%), and travel advertising land in the lower half. Fewer than one in five travellers now has confidence in the information found on Facebook/Twitter (19%) and YouTube (14%). Thus, the true power of social media derives from their ability to reach large numbers of travellers who share some common affinity in an engaging and dynamic way. Traditional sources of information about destinations and travel service suppliers appear to continue to exert greater influence over consumer choice, however, even though their reach is generally substantially less and the composition of the audiences they deliver tends to be more diffuse.

It is important to append this statement with the following caveat, however: This is true today. It may not be tomorrow. Whether and how the influence of social media on travellers’ actual behaviour grows may be an entirely different question two years from now given the rapidly evolving nature of the manner in which consumers are discovering and engaging with its content. ☞

For more information on the Ypartnership/Harrison Group 2010 Portrait Of American TravelersSM please visit the Publications section of www.ypartnership.com.

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As Travel Alberta works with the hospitality sector to grow tourism revenues, we are increasingly shifting our focus to Alberta's highest spending visitors, those in markets outside the province. These are the folks whose average room nights and spending are considerably higher than other visitors. Our goal is to increase market share of visits to Alberta from international markets, including the United States.

At the same time, we have not lost sight of the fact that Albertans are our largest source of visitation revenue today spending more than \$3 billion - or more than half of Alberta's total tourism expenditures - travelling within their home province. Leveraging the success of our regional "Stay" campaign over the past three years, we will be once again extending it into BC and introducing a version of the campaign into Ottawa this year. Alberta residents represent a valuable and efficient market. Our conversion study of last summer's "Stay" campaign generated incremental spending of more than \$30 for every one dollar Travel Alberta invested in the campaign.

However, there are mixed signals in the Canadian marketplace right now. The strength of the Canadian dollar is a double-edged sword for our industry. Outbound international travel is now more attractive, while the cost to visit Canada has become more expensive compared with competing destinations around the world.

In this highly competitive global marketplace, Travel Alberta has to be more strategic than ever before in making marketing investments to ensure the returns that both you and industry - as well as our shareholders - expect from us. Indeed, we are running our business the same way you run yours. We no longer can afford to make machine gun like investments by "spraying and praying." And we don't believe our tourism marketing partners - especially Destination Marketing Organizations (DMOs) and the increasing number of Destination Marketing Funds throughout the province - can afford to continue to work in isolation. That's why one

of our fundamental key strategic initiatives is engaging stakeholders. This year, considerable time and effort will be spent on aligning industry.

To maximize our collective marketing returns, we must adopt a collaborative approach in working together with our national marketing organization, the Canadian Tourism Commission (CTC), and DMOs in Alberta. We will achieve that goal by agreeing to align investments in order to ensure the greatest return. Conversations and detailed plans are already underway with these key partners.

The CTC's withdrawal from the US market created a framework for Travel Alberta and our DMOs to collaborate in our largest international market. Americans are travelling again and "Team Alberta" needs to ensure we get them to come here. To succeed requires commitment and cooperation from all partners. We need to share a singular focus on the consumer and the visitor experience rather than confusing them with the competing choices of products and destinations available in Alberta. To that end, we are now working with all our partners to clearly define our respective roles in influencing consumers on their path to purchase.

With a new, unifying tourism brand for Alberta that will begin to come to life later this year, there is a strong business case for partnering with us and being part of Team Alberta - One Team, One Brand, One Strategy.

Leading our stakeholder engagement strategy will be Travel Alberta's Executive Director, Industry Consulting Richard Wong, who is based in our new Edmonton office. Your Regional Industry Consultant, on Richard's team, is your best point of contact to learn more about how you can leverage your marketing dollars with Travel Alberta as we partner to grow the business of tourism in Alberta.

Bruce Okabe is Chief Executive Officer of Travel Alberta.

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THE SHERATON SUITES CALGARY EAU CLAIRE

Engagement + Teamwork
= A Formula for Success

by Alex Van Tol



You know a hotel's got it down pat when it's awarded the AHLA Employer of Choice for the third year running. It's the same reason that the Sheraton Suites Calgary Eau Claire's name consistently pops up in the top three across the continent for guest service. "At one point we had eight years in a row as the number one Sheraton Hotel in all of North America," reveals Gord Minor, general manager.

The key to the Sheraton's success? "It's the colleagues," describes Minor. "They're fully engaged. It's not just a job, it's a career. They have a sense of pride in everything they do." At the Sheraton Suites Calgary Eau Claire, employees are invested in making sure that every stay is the best one possible for its guests. "It's not me telling them, 'You have to do this,'" Minor points out. "It's the colleagues saying, 'Hey, we've got to pick it up because we're not hitting where we need to be.' It's been part of the culture since the hotel opened."

How does one get that kind of employee buy-in? "It starts with the hiring process," Minor explains. With over 6,000 applicants for various positions in 2010, you'd think the Sheraton would have no trouble finding skilled people to populate its corridors. "But you go through 80%, and they won't cut it," Minor remarks. Those that *do* make the cut attend a primary interview, then complete an online "perceiver" interview. This process clarifies whether the applicant is recommended for their desired position based on an historical and statistical database. If the applicant turns up as a "recommend" based on the online interview, they're invited to a second interview. "We only want to take the best," admits Minor. "You do a lot more damage by hiring someone who's not going to work well with the team than by going without."

Once the "good eggs" are through the door, each new hire participates in team orientations so they understand the unique partnership of the hotel (the Sheraton Suites

Calgary Eau Claire is independently owned by Invest XV LP and operated by Fairmont Hotels & Resorts under a franchise agreement with Starwood), and they gain an immediate sense of belonging. “I meet with every single new colleague,” reports Minor, “and I congratulate each one on making it as part of this team. I tell them, ‘You’re going to be working with the best team in Calgary. Are you prepared to meet that challenge?’”

An open-door policy among supervisors and hotel leaders means that the lines of communication stay open. Solid HR practices are in place, including annual meetings about issues such as harassment and discrimination prevention, health and safety, and employee assistance programs. “We do it every year, not just once. It needs to be part of the culture.” Regular performance reviews are par for the course, so that colleagues have an opportunity to be recognized for what they’re doing really well, and to identify possible areas for growth. At the Sheraton Suites Calgary Eau Claire, leadership is quick to identify high achievers - those individuals who have a natural talent for dealing with guests. “We keep an eye on those who have potential,” Minor notes. Management looks for ways to support and develop future leaders. “You can teach someone to check in a guest, but you can’t teach talent. We find the people with talent, and then we give them the knowledge.”



Gord Minor, General Manager

With 323 suites and about 10,000 square feet of meeting space, the Sheraton Suites Calgary Eau Claire keeps about 280 staff, which fluctuates with banquet season. Barclay’s Restaurant offers upscale casual fare in its all-day dining outlet, while Fionn MacCool’s Irish Pub and Barclay’s “Wet” are popular places to unwind with friends. Originally the hotel’s F&B outlets were all 100% franchised out, but over time the hotel has now brought the staff under the Sheraton Suites Calgary Eau Claire’s umbrella. “We changed that because we wanted to make sure

everyone who contributes to the success of the hotel is part of the hotel.”

Minor started out 20 years ago with Canadian Pacific in Toronto. While he knew he had the talent to rise quickly in the hospitality industry, he was frustrated by his inability to find a job that matched his abilities - and frustrated at being told that he “didn’t have experience”. So he bit the bullet, took an entry-level job and worked hard. “I was a houseman,” he fondly recalls. “I had the talent to pursue management, just not the experience. My goal was to do whatever I could to get that experience.”

It worked. Minor kept at it, working hard and looking for opportunities to grow. He quickly rose to housekeeping manager and was accepted into CP’s career development program. In 1995, when an opportunity came up at Toronto’s 1,600-room Delta Chelsea Inn, Minor moved there as assistant executive housekeeper and assisted his team (300 in his department alone) to help bring the hotel from three-diamond status to



four-diamond status. From Toronto, Minor moved to Victoria, where he worked as executive housekeeper at The Fairmont Empress. A year later he was managing the front office. After several years he went to The Fairmont Chateau Lake Louise in his first executive role as director of rooms. From there he moved to The Fairmont Royal York in Toronto as its director of rooms. When the opportunity arose in 2008 for an interim general manager at the Sheraton Suites Calgary Eau Claire, Minor jumped. He was made a general manager shortly thereafter. As a Fairmont employee working under the Starwood banner, all employees at the hotel move within the Fairmont company, so Minor knows each company inside and out. Although the Sheraton Suites Calgary Eau Claire is a unique setup, “I take them both and blend them together to get the best possible outcome” he explains.



A self-professed hockey nut, Minor enjoys the NHL and other hockey business the hotel brings in. “It’s a thrill.” While he realizes there will be opportunities for him to move around within the company and share his knowledge, for now Calgary feels like a good fit for Minor and his family. “I love Calgary. My first son was born in Banff, and my second in Calgary. They both love hockey just as much as I do. What better place to be?”

FEATURE

CREATING A MICRO MARKETPLACE

by Louise Hudson

If you Google hotels, motels, and campgrounds in Alberta, the marketing blurbs often say “within a short distance of shops, restaurants, and other amenities”. However, with every dollar counting during this long-winded recession, some resorts are bringing those amenities within their compounds to keep the spending centralized.





Micro marketplaces have traditionally been a feature of grander hotels, like The Fairmont Chateau Lake Louise, The Fairmont Jasper Park Lodge, and The Fairmont Banff Springs, which all have the space - and financial clout - to set up shopping arcades and encourage franchises. However, it doesn't have to be topnotch boutiques and Starbucks to get people spending their holiday money.

Around Alberta there are many humbler properties and campsites that have large enough acreages to add lucrative amenities to their offerings. Unfortunately, many Canadian campsites settle for do-it-yourself (DIY) camping: an empty site with RV hook-ups, maybe a picnic table and fire pit, basic toilet blocks, and a perfunctory office. To many, this is part of the rustic charm of the vacation, but it can become a problem when campers, forced to pack for every eventuality, forget vital items or start to run out of appetizing food, drinks, accessories to mend camping or sports equipment, or even the correct clothing for volatile weather conditions. This is when the strictures of camping often start to take their toll.

The David Thompson Resort in Clearwater County offers the opposite of this DIY camping, anticipating the retail and restaurant needs of

both guests and passersby with its full service resort. Owned by Ron and Wendy Killick, the 60-acre resort encompasses campground, motel, and cabins. It has truly gone the extra mile with its added amenities, which include a convenience store, liquor store, restaurant, picnic area, cowboy breakfast area, pub, antique gift shop, gas bar, laundromat, mini golf, Frisbee golf, two playgrounds, and a chapel as well as a 200-seat Belle Dome for functions and weddings. "The importance of having a micro marketplace in a seasonal operation cannot be stressed enough," explains Kelly Killick-Smit, events and marketing manager. "The resort is an attraction for accommodation, but the store, restaurant, gift shop, and all the other added revenue areas are vital to our survival."

The convenience store caters to every need with groceries, ice cream, toys, toiletries, and camping supplies. With its own ATM, there's also the means to purchase everything from the homemade fudge, to fireworks and fishing supplies. "In addition, the store is also the home for our gas bar," describes Killick-Smit. "It's no small task to stock and replenish the store, and it takes a really great employee to manage all of these tasks at once! Not too bad for about 3,500 sq feet." Killick-Smit has no doubt that these extra amenities bring in serendipitous guests that the resort might



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not otherwise have attracted. “Some folks have used us as a stopping point for their kids to stretch, use the washroom, and get an ice cream on their way to the next destination. Often folks are surprised to discover what we do have for our guests. Our facilities are not new, but we hope our guests will find our hospitality and facilities fresh and inviting.” Some services such as the Frisbee golf are value-added freebies for residents, while others, such as the mini golf course, are money-spinners.

As well as serving guests and passersby, the restaurant caters events including weddings, reunions, and the three music festivals that the resort hosts annually. “The kitchen staff also prepares meals for staff as our employees reside onsite,” Killick-Smit continues. “In addition, the kitchen/restaurant is responsible for supplying the summer kitchen for the Cowboy Breakfast and the pub in the evenings with burgers, hot dogs, and other miscellaneous pub fare.”

Whether staying in a motel, hotel, or a campground, there is one thing holidaymakers have in common - the zest for shopping.

A micro marketplace doesn't always have to be on such a large scale. Having just a store or small restaurant can also make a difference to a resort's potential target market. The remote Num-Ti-Jah Lodge, which hugs the road to the Columbia Icefields and Jasper National Park, benefits from passing traffic and day visitors as well as longer-term lodge residents. Says owner, Tim Whyte, “I'm not sure if we have passing traffic *because* we have the store or we have the store because of the passing traffic. We took it over 16 years ago when we bought the business, and it had been there 10 or even 20 years before that. We do utilize the fact that we have passing traffic and we get business out of that.”

However, with the increased volume come a few extra hurdles. “The real challenge for us is that we have two very different user groups: the lodge guest and the day visitor. The day visitor is the larger group, but the smaller group, staying at the lodge, wants it to be quieter and more serene. It's a difficult balance to achieve,” admits Whyte. Still, the marketing value and exposure afforded by having convenient products as well as public washrooms compensates for this dilemma. “It is an opportunity for people to see the place, and if they are going to be back in the area, we might get some recurring traffic from them,” he adds. Although the full-service restaurant menu has had to be scaled down in recent years due to the economic downturn, visitors can buy coffee, ice cream, and pre-prepared meals along with everything from fur to trinkets in the gift shop.

The French got the message way back in the 80s when they started creating campsite resorts with pools and waterslides, kids clubs, restaurants, bars, supermarkets and bakeries - after all, who can camp without fresh croissants? At the Vieux Port campsite, near Messanges on the southwest coast, the tents are already pitched for campers who just arrive with a suitcase of clothes. As well as separate bedrooms with queen-size beds, the tents boast fully-equipped indoor kitchens plus outdoor barbecues with sun loungers and umbrellas.

Whether staying in a motel, hotel, or a campground, there is one thing holidaymakers have in common - the zest for shopping. It is one of the world's top leisure pursuits. So, in an environment where people are used to purchasing at the click of a computer key, why not plan a micro marketplace for your resort and give your guests some retail therapy? ☞

We extend congratulations to the new general managers at the following properties: **Elizabeth Bahner**, Maligne Lodge, Jasper; **Stephanie Baker**, Platinum Hotels, Fort McMurray; **Chris Barr**, Mount Royal Hotel, Banff; **Reg Bauer**, Days Inn & Conference Centre Edmonton Airport, Leduc; **Elle Bowes**, The Cedars Motel, Edson; **Jonas Cameron**, Yellowhead Motor Inn, Edmonton; **Nicole Carbonneau**, The Commodore Hotel, Edson; **Martin Chuah**, Holiday Inn Express Hotel & Suites Calgary Downtown; **Naomi Ducklow**, Super 8 Grande Prairie; **Michelle Dyck**, Glenn's Restaurant Ltd., Red Deer County; **Melody Eidt**, Comfort Inn & Suites Edson; **Yian Escalante**, Holiday Inn Express Hotel & Suites Airport, Calgary; **Ike Janacek**, The Sutton Place Hotel Edmonton; **Ian Jones**, Ramada Hotel & Conference Centre, Edmonton; **James Kim**, McMurray Inn, Fort McMurray; **Siva Kiruddinan**, Hampton Inn by Hilton Fort Saskatchewan; **Laurie Lynch**, Stanford Hotels & Resort Grande Prairie; **Dan McGowan**, The Fairmont Palliser, Calgary; **Karon Magrath**, Guest House Inn & Suites, Edson; **Amith Menon**, Comfort Inn & Suites Edson; **Jim Ocroft**, St. Albert Kinsmen RV Park; **John Sheret**, Holiday Inn Calgary MacLeod Trail South; **Dwayne Stratton**, Ramada Hotel & Suites Lethbridge; **Shannon Strijak**, Podollan Inn & Spa, Grande Prairie; **Steve White**, Greenwood Inn & Suites Edmonton; **Kelly Anne Yeaman**, Lake Louise Inn; and **Philip Zwiers**, EconoLodge, Lloydminster.

The Causeway Bay Calgary Hotel is now EconoLodge Causeway Bay. The Holiday Inn Express in Rocky Mountain House is now the Rocky Inn Express.

Best wishes to **Gerry Barteluk**, who is retiring after 43 years in the hotel industry. Gerry started his career in Lake Louise and ended it there as well. Enjoy a well deserved retirement, Gerry!

Travel Alberta is pleased to announce the appointment of **Richard A. Wong** as Executive Director, Industry Consulting. Reporting directly to Bruce Okabe, CEO of Travel Alberta, Wong will be a member of Travel Alberta's Executive Leadership Team, responsible for leading Travel Alberta's new Edmonton office and Travel Alberta's team of regional industry consultants. He will be accountable for the effective delivery of Travel Alberta's stakeholder engagement strategy, which includes industry and government relations, industry education, and industry participation programs.

Wong brings to Travel Alberta more than 25 years of national and international management experience in the hospitality sector. Since 2003, he has been general manager of The Sutton Place Hotel in Edmonton. Active in the community, Wong has served as a board member of Edmonton Economic Development Corp., Chair of the Downtown Business Association, Co-Chair of the Edmonton Destination Marketing Fee and

the NAIT Tourism and Hospitality Advisory Council, among many other community and charitable organizations.

"We are very fortunate to attract an industry leader with Richard's impressive credentials and reputation to Travel Alberta," said Okabe. "His intimate knowledge of Edmonton and Alberta's tourism industry will be critical for Travel Alberta and the industry we serve to become stronger at marketing Alberta as a tourism destination. His leadership will contribute significantly to achieving our vision of becoming Canada's pre-eminent tourism marketing agency."

STR has named **Amanda Hite** as its new president. Hite succeeds **Mark Lomanno**, who was promoted to CEO of the company. Former CEO and founder **Randy Smith** has been named chairman.

The Courtyard by Marriott Edmonton has just opened its doors, featuring a guest-friendly lobby with pods (as opposed to a front desk), where associates can more easily welcome guests at the entrance and stay with them at check-in. Media pods are available for business meetings of four or five people. Linenless tables with swirled silver tops are used in the restaurant and banquet rooms, designed to minimize laundry and promote environmental responsibility.

If you have any noteworthy community contributions, please email Debbie Minke at debbie@emcmarketing.com.

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FEATURE

THE NOW OF NICHE

by Chris McBeath



When hotels adopted yield management techniques back in the 80s, the concept of niche marketing reinvented itself. Sexier sounding “catering to niche markets” replaced old terminology of “selling to vertical sectors”, and product marketing started to take a backseat to courting specific customers with an engaging story.



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Niche as a Brand

Today, niche is the “now” marketing approach used everywhere by restaurants, retailers, and hotels - each intent on designing a product that will appeal to different consumers based on research that layers lifestyle values atop quantitative demographics. Entire hotel chains have been built on the socio-economic profiles of their desired buyers, whether it’s for cost-conscious business travellers - think Courtyard by Marriott - or for urban, hip couples as in W and Design Hotels. So how do the rest of us get niche savvy and grow our occupancies?

“Branding and niche marketing go hand in hand,” explains Nora Weber, a tourism consultant. “Going after a niche market starts with an honest analysis of what you offer without any delusions of grandeur,” she advises. “What’s your most accessible market? Where do flights and travelers come from, and how do they reach you? Who are these guests and what experience are they seeking? And, most importantly, what are your property’s particular strengths and values? For example, families will appreciate larger rooms and in-room cooking facilities that can save them the stress and money of restaurant dining. Equally, if you have meeting space, or have an accessible highway location, this can attract regional business clients.”

Find Your SEL

Finding and pursuing your niche guest is all about socio-economic lifestyle (SEL) groups - a catch-all phrase for describing a person’s social and economic standing as well as their values and consumer behaviours. While demographics provide statistical data on, for example, income and age, it’s SEL information that will reveal whether that income earner is a corporate executive or a factory foreman, and thus will lead to more educated assumptions as to their political affiliation and fashion sense as well as their reading, television, and social media preferences. An SEL executive who attends a country club is unlikely to frequent a blue-collar bar and vice versa. And eco adventurers are probably not going to choose to vacation at an all-inclusive resort.

Create a Story

“If you want to capture attention and have staying power, you must capture their hearts,”



Photo courtesy of Mount Robson Inn

advises Weber. “Creating a storyline for your hotel drives the entire design and service process. It is what projects your brand identity, especially if it is woven into the community’s unique cultural qualities.”

For example, the general managers of two very different properties have turned personal passions into niche opportunities that have added to, not detracted from, their properties overall market mix. James Kendal, who manages The Juniper Hotel & Bistro in Banff, is an avid road racer. He has created a destination that

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appeals to the many cyclists who are attracted to the region's fast routes and challenging terrain. "Although my motivation was somewhat selfish, the concept has cultivated quite a following," admits Kendall, who goes on to outline the hotel's cyclist-specific services. "We have a tuning and wash station, a bike storage area, and a comprehensive bike repair tool kit that guests can sign out. We even have three staff members, including myself, who can help fix bikes if need be." Bike rentals - townie cruisers - are also part of the hotel's amenities. "Our partnership with the Rundle Mountain Cycling Club has helped define us as a biker-savvy destination, especially for master bikers and professional mountain bikers. With some 350 members, it is one of the largest clubs in Canada, so this association, coupled with getting hooked into the Twitter culture, has really contributed to our success."

With two-wheel travel a hot commodity in these parts, Kendall knows a few ways to reach a biker's heart. "On check-in, all bikers are given a microfiber cloth. It's the preferred (and coveted) material for polishing metal," he explains, "besides which, it really saves on my towels." The inn also has a secure garage upon request, and most importantly, a selection of tried-and-true touring maps. "When I started biking about 15 years ago, I quickly learned that it's all about the ride, so by developing maps that detail special places to see and take a lunch break, we encourage riders to use the inn as base camp for more than one night. Professional bikers aren't our main market segment, but they are a consistent and growing niche for us."


A recent study revealed that 56% of upper income travellers cite shopping as the key motivator for choosing a destination.

Research the Fit

Mandala Research, a market research company, which specializes in tourism and travel for many Fortune 500 companies, identifies several niche trends that hoteliers can translate into improved occupancies. These include culinary tourism, adventure travel, ethnic groups, gay and lesbian travel, and shoppers, especially from Australia and the emerging markets of Brazil, China, India, and Korea, which are projected to grow some 40% within the next three years. "A recent study revealed that 56% of upper income travellers cite shopping as the key motivator for choosing a destination," notes Laura Mandala, company founder and former Vice President of the US Travel Association. "Study data also shows that this segment has a preference for apparel and specialty foods, and incorporates activities into their vacation that include visiting parks, museums, zoos, and aquariums as well as unique dining experiences, gambling, concerts, the theatre, and spa services. In addition, almost half of Chinese travellers look at real estate during their visit."

Although this research was geared to the US, Canadian urban destinations would do well to heed these figures and rationale, since invariably, US data is mirrored by Canada, albeit to a lesser degree.

Weber, however, cautions all to put trends in context. "China might be an emerging market for many major Canadian cities," she says, "but a closer look reveals that for the immediate future at least, it's only the very wealthy who are travelling, so the SEL group would be an appropriate fit only to four and five star urban properties rather than out-of-town resorts."



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Package a Niche Sector

For independent properties in particular, packages are essential in helping to build brand and pursue niche markets, especially when elements underscore a property's USP (unique selling point) and take advantage of Internet purchasing power, including opportunities such as Groupon. While a certain SEL will always be very price conscious - coupons and discounts appeal to them - packaging is really more about value than price.

"If your hotel doesn't have a spa, align with a local provider to offer in-room services and exclusive bathroom amenities," Weber recommends. "If you're near a dude ranch, partner with them on horseback excursions, include packed-lunches, or ranch-style breakfasts before guests set off." Additional suggestions include resorts offering recuperative services to capitalize on the growing medical tourism industry as recuperative centres, or B&Bs creating back-country driving routes, culinary tours, and experiential adventure weeks that involve stopovers at each participating inn, restaurant, and attraction.

Punch Up Your Web Presence

Niche marketing starts with an impactful web presence where texts are Search Engine Optimized to the desired markets in question. More than half of travellers use social media technology for travel planning, but contrary to anecdotal belief, research data indicates only about 20% use it for actual planning - a figure that's likely to increase over upcoming months as smart phone apps for guides, dining reservations, and ticket purchases become part of the daily vernacular in the same way that texting, tweeting, blogging, and flickering are. "Niche marketing is all about birds of a feather flocking together," says Weber, "and the more you involve yourself in these mediums, the more traffic of like-minded individuals you'll generate to your site." ☞

Ideas at Work

>>> **The Resort at the Mountain**, Oregon, which has earned several awards for its wedding programs, has added a Bridal Boot Camp to its roster of transformational weekend programs of fitness, stress-relieving spa treatments and outdoor adventure, thereby expanding upon an already popular niche market.

>>> Located just three minutes from Amerimed Hospital in Puerto Vallarta, the adults-only **Casa Velas Hotel** markets itself into the expanding medical tourism field, packing the most advanced elective and cosmetic procedures with a luxurious recuperative stay, with ongoing professional medical services, support, and consultation.

>>> In southern China's Shenzhen, the **Vision Fashion Hotel** boasts a range of room options, and 10 types of corridors, all corresponding with fashion images and eras such as rock'n roll, cartoon, and future themes. Each is aimed at challenging the imagination for a memorable stay and a point of differentiation.

>>> In an ongoing effort to underscore brand, story, and niche appeal to design-minded travellers, **Design Hotels** has just published *The Design Hotels™ Made by Originals* book, featuring 33 engaging stories on the original people behind the member hotels, written by international journalists and illustrated by renowned photographers and artists.

>>> Consider this anomaly: When **Ryad Mogador Menara Hotel** in Marrakech decided on a no alcohol policy, the hotel snubbed all predictions of swift bankruptcy, and has enjoyed brisk business year-round. Perhaps a similar concept might appeal to the niche markets of religiously conservative travellers, people in recovery, families with small kids, and even women travelling alone.

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Designing a Strategic Marketing Plan

by Lydia Miller

The three main concepts to explore when you're developing a strategic marketing plan are:

1. Know your competition
2. Identify your customers
3. Define your place in the market

Marketing to any type of traveller, whether it's for business or pleasure, would not be complete if we didn't know what we're trying to sell, and why it appeals to guests over what the competition is offering. Whether you're looking for group or individual business, operating as an independent or branded facility, full or limited service, or an intimate bed & breakfast, you will need to identify and recognize the benefits and drawbacks of competing operations.

Who did your current customers tell you they were looking at before they booked with you? Did you know them all? When was the last time you toured their facilities and chatted up their marketing people? They can provide you with one of your best sources of market intelligence in order to gauge your next steps in designing a strategic marketing plan.

Be direct and ask the right questions, such as:

- How did their guests find them?
- What resources were used to make a reservation?
- Where did their guests travel from and where do they travel to?

- Which market(s) provides the most room nights?
- Which market(s) supply the best revenue?
- What do they include in their room rates and how do they compare with your own?
- What upgrade options do they offer?
- How long does it take for a customer to make a booking decision?
- What held them back, if anything?
- Who else was being considered?
- How did they overcome objections and close the deal?


No, they may not always be forthcoming with the right answers, but it's like winning the lottery, if you don't buy a ticket you can't win. Likewise, if you don't ask the questions, you won't get any answers. You should now be able to draft a preliminary marketing plan that identifies and positions your property in the ever growing marketplace of resorts, hotels, motels, and inns. Based on their answers and your own gained from asking yourselves these same questions, you can research what type of promotional tools and strategies are best suited for you to attract the right guests to the right location and at the right price.


Lydia Miller is a Certified Hospitality Sales Professional with over 25 years of sales and marketing experience. For more information on Lydia Miller and The Miller Touch Training Group Inc., please visit www.millertouch.com, email Lydia@millertouch.com or call 604.984.7445.



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Smith Travel Research

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Market data on the industry is critical to developing programs and services that are relevant to AHLA members. One of the AHLA's strategic objectives for 2011 is to be an expert source of industry information and the leading voice for Alberta's tourism and hospitality industry. The AHLA is pleased to announce a new partnership with Smith Travel Research (STR). This partnership will help members by offering discounted prices on products that track and manage their property's performance through accurate and reliable information about the markets they operate in.

STR is offering AHLA members discounts on products such as:

- STAR Program - Track your property's occupancy, average daily rate (ADR), and revenue per available room (RevPAR) performance against your competition.

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- Canadian Pipeline Reports - Get the complete picture of historic, existing, and projected hotel supply for the market you specify.

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- Canadian Hotel Review - Provides occupancy, ADR, and RevPAR data for global regions, countries, and key markets.

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Since 1985, STR has tracked performance data from more than 38,000 properties, representing more than 5 million guestrooms.

STR's reports will help you:

- Accurately track and manage performance against competitors according to the real conditions in your marketplace.
- Identify precisely where you are gaining or losing marketshare, helping you to drive revenue to your business.
- Use real market intelligence for sales, marketing, and revenue management decisions.
- Spot and understand market trends to quickly assist in developing sales and marketing strategies.
- Monitor the effect of business decisions you make with a clear financial picture.
- Set targets and budgets for your departments and measure progress and bonuses.
- See comparisons between your direct competitors and local market.

STR's statistics are based on the number of rooms available, rooms sold, and net room revenue of properties within a competitive set. This information is submitted by chain headquarters, management companies, and owners of independent hotels, and is never distributed to third party companies. The more AHLA members participate, the more current and accurate STR's market intelligence will be.

Save money while you see how you stack up next to your competition! For more information on the programs STR offers, visit www.strglobal.com. Contact Erin Hannigan at 1-615-824-8664 ext 3313 or by email at erin@str.com.



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Build a Sales Team Your Customers Love to Buy From

by Colleen Francis

When customers enjoy working with you, you improve your chances of making a sale. Here are seven skills GMs and business owners should insist on developing in their sales teams to create a more positive customer experience:

1. Show empathy and compassion. You have to care about your customer (no matter how good an actor you are, faking it won't work). Ask questions, take notes, and lean in to show that you're engaged.
2. Make eye contact. Eye contact lets people know you're interested in their well being. Make eye contact when you walk into a room full of strangers, and especially after you get to know people - it helps cement existing relationships. So few salespeople ever look their prospects directly in the eye. By simply smiling and making eye contact, you can set yourself apart.
3. Give first. Don't expect prospects to give you their business without you giving them something first. This doesn't mean that you should give away free product in the hopes they will buy more. Rather, look to give away things that increase your value. Perhaps they need a referral to a partner; perhaps you can solve their business problem by sharing an idea you heard from someone else.
4. Express your true intent. Tell customers upfront: "I don't know if there's a fit between what you need and what I have right now, but I'm hoping we can explore that in more detail during this meeting. Then we can mutually decide if there is a reason to move forward." This advice runs counter to 90% of the approaches used in the field today, but you'll be pleasantly surprised by the response you get.

5. Don't rush the client. All too often, salespeople jump way ahead of their prospect's buying curve. When the sales person is trying to close while the prospect is still evaluating options or determining risk, trust is broken, the prospect feels pushed and the sale can disappear. Get approval from the customer to move ahead in increasing increments. The first approval might be just to agree to speak openly with each other, as outlined above. The second could be an agreement on a follow-up call or meeting date. The third might be gaining agreement on the decision-making criteria, then a commitment to have the "big boss" present at the site tour, followed by an agreement to a purchase decision date.

6. Be colloquial. When you use simple language, people respond better and trust you more. Never try to impress prospects with your extensive vocabulary - you may end up just sounding fake.

7. Use people's names - in good measure. There are just two rules to follow. First, be aware of whether your client is most comfortable with first name only or title plus last name. Second, never overuse their name - this only sounds corny and false. Although Dale Carnegie said, "nothing is so beautiful to a person as the sound of their own name," you have to use your discretion.

Colleen Francis, Sales Expert, is Founder and President of Engage Selling Solutions (www.EngageSelling.com). Armed with skills developed from years of experience, Colleen helps clients realize immediate results, achieve lasting success and permanently raise their bottom line. Start improving your results today with Engage's online Newsletter Sales Flash and a free 7-day intensive sales eCourse: www.EngageNewsletter.com.

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Performance Management: It's a Conversation with Your Business

by Jill Little

The ability to attract and retain employees in the tourism and hospitality industry is challenging, to say the least. It is expensive and time consuming to get staff working independently so more of management's time can be spent on the business and less "babysitting" the employees. The truth is, employees are the business! Owners, managers, supervisors, and employees need to approach performance management like any other business strategy - identifying the competencies required for the employee's job and the business's strategic direction. The next stage is managing ongoing performance through informal conversations, and once a year having a formal performance appraisal discussion. This provides an opportunity for the employee and supervisor to have a conversation about all of the things that got missed because "it wasn't the appropriate time" in the informal conversation. If at least 30% of your budget goes towards labour costs, then isn't it worth having a conversation with all members of your labour force?

Performance management should be conducted in purposeful conversation. "It is a process of establishing performance expectations with employees, designing ways to improve that performance, and monitoring the success of these interventions. This process signals to employees what is really important in the organization, fixes accountability for behaviour and results, and helps to improve performance."

(Source: Gosselin, Werner, & Hall 1997)

Performance management is important because it:

- Connects an employee to the organization's vision, mission, and strategic objectives;
- Translates business strategies and goals into an employee's personalized action plan and individual performance goals;

- Provides the employee with clear direction and meaningful feedback;
- Identifies, recognizes, and helps improve performance; and
- Creates a forum for discussing the employee's development and career goals.*

Employers of Choice understand the importance of performance management and have a plan for what they want to achieve with their performance management system. Outcomes of successful performance management should include the following:

- A structured approach for discussing employee performance and performance improvement;
- An organization focused on results, performance, continuous improvement, and employee development;
- The achievement of both personal and organizational goals;
- Protection from legal claims; and
- Key input for compensation decisions.*

**Reprinted by permission of the publisher from Ultimate HR Manual - Western Edition, "The Importance of Performance Management", under "Orientation Process" (Toronto, ON: CCH Canadian Limited).*

All good relationships take some effort, even the relationship between employers and employees. Once the communication stops, it doesn't take long for the direction and goals of the parties to get out of sync. Keep the lines of communication open by talking regularly to employees, and at least once a year, have a formal performance review behind closed doors, ensuring you document key points to be the basis for your next conversation.



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Accelerating success.

Staycations Are On the Rise

by Amanda Jackson

One of the consequences of the recession was the emergence of a new form of leisure travel called a staycation, or the propensity of individuals to select a vacation destination closer to home as an alternative to traveling to a more distant destination, presumably as a result of budgetary constraints at the household level. Last year, Ypartnership's research on this trend suggested it was more media myth than reality (fewer than 10% of leisure travellers acknowledged they had taken one), yet the results of the new Ypartnership/Harrison Group *2010 Portrait of American Travelers*SM reveal consumers may now, in fact, be taking more such vacations than reported previously.

Fully one in four US leisure travellers with an annual household income over \$50,000 took at least one overnight leisure trip/vacation within a 50-mile drive radius of their home during the previous twelve months, as an alternative to vacationing in a destination that would have required travelling a greater distance. The incidence of taking this type of trip is higher among younger travellers (Millennials and GenXers) than older travellers, yet equally

evident across all households regardless of their annual household income as revealed below:

Incidence of Staycations:*

All leisure travellers 26%

Generational group:

Millennials (18-30) 37%

GenXers (31-44) 31%

Boomers (45-63) 21%

Matures (64+) 15%

Annual household income:

\$50-124K 26%

\$125K+ 26%

Children at home 32%

No children at home 21%

* At least one overnight leisure trip within 50 miles of home as an alternative to travelling a greater distance.

The staycation phenomenon is also most pronounced among unrelated adults living together (versus those who are married), and adults with children in residence at home:

- 37% of unrelated adults living together took at least one staycation last year, versus 25% of those who are married;
- 32% of adults who have children at home took at least one staycation last year, versus only 21% of those with no children at home.

These data clearly suggest that the recession has, in fact, increased the incidence of staycations. The implication for travel service marketers is clear: local and regional markets retain considerable potential for generating incremental business in the year ahead, and this potential is likely to remain robust well into 2011.

Amanda Jackson is with Ypartnership and can be reached at 407-875-1111 or amanda.jackson@ypartnership.com. Ypartnership's Insights group is widely acknowledged as the preeminent source of market intelligence on emerging business and leisure travel trends. Harrison Group is a leading market research, and strategy consulting firm specializing in sophisticated market strategy, market analytics, survey and forecasting services.

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Alberta Hotel Safety Association	28	Coinomatic Commercial Laundry	23	Marcor Woodwork Ltd.	5	Royal Roads University	IFC
Alberta Laundry Systems	12	Colliers International Realty	29	Northern Feather	24	Sealy Canada Ltd.	27
Allmar	24	Dragontex	10	Planet Energy	14	Serta	29
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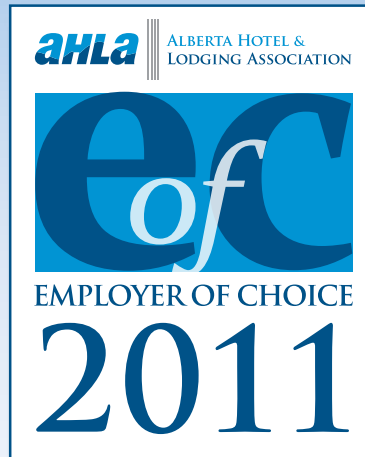
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