



October 2016

Hospitality Hotline

Connecting the industry through
Advocacy, Education and Partnerships

News from...

THE BOARD OF DIRECTORS

Overtime Wage Seminar

In 2014, President Obama directed the Secretary of Labor to update the overtime regulations to reflect the original intent of the Fair Labor Standards Act. *According to the Obama administration*, the intent is to simplify and modernize the rules so they're easier for workers and businesses to understand and apply. However, these changes will have a major impact on your business. The changes are due to begin December 1st. These changes include: Raising the salary threshold indicating eligibility from \$455/week to \$913 (\$47,476 per year); Automatically updating the salary threshold every three years, based on wage growth over time; Strengthening overtime protections for salaried workers already entitled to overtime. We have partnered with the Chamber of Commerce to bring you an informational seminar to address the changes and provide solutions to deal with the changes. The seminar will be held on the morning of October 18th at the Clarion. Save the date as details are forthcoming!

MD Tourism Summit

Tourism representatives from around the State will gather in Baltimore for the annual Summit on Nov 2-4. This event provides a great way to network with colleagues from around the state. If you would like to donate a door prize, please contact us ASAP.

For complete information, click here.



Restaurant Week ushers in Fall!

Returning October 9 – 23, Restaurant Week will offer a great opportunity to dine out and will help spur some business! Unlike other destinations, we do not charge our members to participate as this is a member benefit! The Fall RW allows you to get as creative as you'd like as the focus is "Great Deals on Great Food." Additionally, October is Shore Craft Beer month, so be sure to incorporate a craft beer pairing or infuse a menu item with craft beer. By doing so, you'll receive additional promotion on www.ShoreCraftBeer.com. If you'd like to participate and be featured on www.oceancityrestaurantweek.com, make sure you sign up today! Call us at 410- 289-6733 or email inquire@ocvisitor.com to sign up.

Upcoming Economic Development Meeting

The next E.D.C. meeting will be held on **Wednesday, October 5, 2016 at 8:30 am at the Carousel Hotel on 118th Street**. This month's sponsor will be The Carousel Group.

The guest speaker will be Liz Fitzsimmons, Managing Director of the Division of Tourism, Film and the Arts for the State of Maryland. Liz has previously served as Executive Director of the Office of Tourism Development where she led a team of advertising, communications, tourism development, sales, and interactive services professionals to grow Maryland as a competitive, desirable and successful travel destination. We will also have Katherine Momme, Executive Director of the Lower Eastern Shore United Way who will update the group on the current United Way campaign.

Please R.S.V.P. to Lindy.Kosydar@Carouselhotel.com



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REST EASY: Lodging industry trends

By: Alex Shashou

5 WAYS FOR HOTELS TO COUNTER GROWING PRESSURE FROM REVIEW SITES, THE SHARING ECONOMY AND THE EXPANDING TECHNOLOGY STACK

With TripAdvisor's growing impact on bookings, hotels are under a microscope like never before. Guests are evaluating and sharing service observations publicly, divulging insights that previously lived anonymously in the hotel's review systems and on paper rating cards. Because some 80% of guests consult 6-12 TripAdvisor reviews before booking, these ratings now have a direct bearing on ADR.

Previously, a hotel's marketing department might focus on distribution and content that supported a brand's image, without concerning themselves with the day-to-day operations of each individual property. As reviews were an internal toolset, the marketing department controlled the messaging and online opinion of the brand. In today's environment, however, guest-generated content on blogs and review sites is driving bookings without the supervision of the marketing department.

If you think about the last time you gave or read a review on TripAdvisor, you'll recall one of the main evaluation parameters is service, which means the content of the review is heavily focused on the in-stay experience. This means that looking at the booking experience as the end of the customer journey is not enough. Hotels are under more pressure than ever before to align the brand's image with its actual experience and service delivery at the property level. Yet the foundation to achieving operational excellence is too often an afterthought.

Additionally, competitive pressures on hotels are rising. The sharing economy has birthed giants like Airbnb, which continues to take an ever growing chunk of the global lodging business. Each year the piece of the market taken by Airbnb becomes more meaningful, forcing many of the economics in running a hotel to be questioned.

And, while Airbnb has been able to run a "hotel business" without the inherent costs of running an actual hotel, hotels are getting even more expensive to run. CBRE data points out that U.S. hotel operating expenses rose 4.7% in 2015, a year in which inflation was just 0.1%.

But pressures are also mounting for hotels in subtler ways. The rise of dedicated hotel technologies aimed at alleviating some of these more obvious pressures can in fact create logistical challenges and uncertainties for hotel decision makers, due to limited IT budgets, questions about measurement of ROI, and worries about how systems actually impact the guest experience. So too, changes in consumer behavior and ever-rising guest expectations in technology are making the task of identifying the best hotel technology stack challenging.

The answer then is to find ways to leverage technology to improve the guest experience without needing to bet the farm. Here are five ways to do just that:

1. Connect your technology stack to improve service - Disparate systems, each of which are independently meant to improve operational efficiency and enhance guest service, end up creating unexpected operational burdens and can actually lead to awkward guest experiences. Guest to Staff and Staff to Staff communication should be seamless and real-time, regardless of the department.

2. Analog technology may get the job done, but you miss out on data - Surprisingly, two-way radios, clipboards and pen and paper are still very popular tools for hotel worker communications. There are some downsides though. Radios make it hard to log and keep track of tasks. Pen and paper records can get lost and can be easily ignored. Worst of all, none of these tools leaves a trail of data that hoteliers can later use to find guests' pain points and address them before they show up in online reviews.

3. Satisfy the new consumer expectations through a mobile infrastructure, not a mobile app - Guests, particularly younger ones, are now expecting a mobile interface for everyone they do business with. Though it's not a deal-breaker yet, the hotels that provide such interfaces have an edge over those that don't. Guests should be able to communicate their needs and concerns during their stays via a service on demand infrastructure that staff operations are working on. As noted, this gives guests transparency into the work being done for them, allowing them to make more informed decisions.

4. Use data to identify and address problems - Prior to widespread data collection, issues at a hotel might have gone undiagnosed for long periods of time. Since there were no records kept and communication among a 24/7 staff can be lacking, this was forgivable. Now, though, there's no excuse. Search functions can allow a layman to easily pinpoint a problem. Setting up messaging and alarms can help the staff stay on top of their work day to day while analyzing your data can lead to improving operations over the longer term.

5. Don't be beholden to older constructs, think outside the box with your workforce - Software automation gives hotels the opportunity to redefine themselves. This means experimenting with a front desk-less lobby but also empowering workers to take on multiple tasks. With mobile technology in hand, workers shouldn't have to pass the buck anymore, but should rather be able to handle any situation themselves.



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THE DISH: Restaurant industry trends

HOW YOUR WAIT STAFF CAN ENCOURAGE MORE ONLINE REVIEWS

Everyone's a critic, Right?

Actually, it's true. There is now the potential for every single customer that crosses your path to qualify themselves as an admirer or detractor of your restaurant, without a moment's hesitation. Blame it on mobile devices taking over the world if you like, but the fact remains that we are now chained to our smartphones and portable gadgets like never before and with that, the reality that consumers are social beings with a need to share most experiences on a whim. Online reviews are now an important part of the consumer's life, which includes restaurant and dining choices. That can be good or bad news for restaurant owners. Reviews are now, whether we like it or not, taking centre stage, and are frankly, loving the spotlight. Your staff are sometimes the first contact your customers have when wishing to offer up opinion or comment on their dining experience.

So how can your staff be directly involved with the online review phenomenon?

Ask and You Shall Receive

Ask yourself what is it you are trying to achieve here? The main goal would be repeat patronage through positive reviews and the impetus to existing or new clientele, to feel welcome to submit comment based on their experiences. Restaurants are looking for ways to encourage online reviews, and customer facing personal might just be the answer.

It is not always known that online review can really assist a restaurant's patronage, and ultimate bottom line. It is sometimes forgotten that more reviews can also lead to a better search engine ranking, so why not utilize the people who have the most contact with your customers. Your staff. Customers need to know that this is indeed encouraged and be gently persuaded, but how do we do this?

Staff can be instructed as a part of their finalization of a meal to attach a card to the final bill or receipt. This may encourage or remind your wait staff to ask the questions. It could simply be, as an example, the restaurant's business card, or a with compliments slip, with links to your website and other online partners such as Google+ or your Facebook page. Or maybe front end staff can be given a cue card to remind them to say "How was your meal? Please consider leaving us a review on TripAdvisor. It helps us improve your experience!" Some staff may be happy to wing it and come up with their own way of asking and directing diners.

Brand Ambassadors

It will soon become routine to staff to encourage patrons to review your restaurant and its service. The good, the bad and the ugly. Some staff have an inbuilt skillset that can be immediately identifiable. An instant rapport with customers is why some employees are drawn to front facing food service roles, and staff that have this can be an asset for any restaurant. They are genuinely good at it, and they know it.

Other staff may need a little encouragement. That's ok, everyone is different with differing personalities and value that they, as individuals, bring to the table. As a way of inspiring them to have

personal interaction with customers, some may need more of an understanding of why this is important. Empowering your employees to have a direct involvement in the success of your establishment can create a very effective awareness of the bigger picture. Involve your employees and having them understand why you ask them to participate in certain marketing projects. You never know, they might really enjoy it.

Creating a united mindset starts with you the restaurant owner. How else are they to feel connected to your customers if they don't feel it within their own workplace? As a follow up, if you are having a regular staff meeting, or staff dinners, make social media an agenda item for discussion. Be open to new ideas. We all have them. Your staff are living, breathing representatives of your restaurant and might just be considered your best work. Loyal employees love what they do and vice versa.

Socializing the Workplace

Staff can bring social media reviews to your establishment by using their own accounts. Employees these days are well versed in the ways and means of social media and their workplace's social interaction shouldn't be any different.

Your staff are the perfect choice to enable mass contact with others in their social network, and can be the best vehicle for getting your brand out there to the hungry public. What the food service industry has found is that potential customers trust, above all else, recommendations from friends and family. Whether via Instagram, through amazing photos or your food being enjoyed by crowds of people, or through comments and statements via Twitter, staff can be a great warm up act, especially if this is your first contact with the social media world. Making it a competition is one way to encourage staff to interact, but usually incentives need to go far and beyond how many times your staff are asking customers if they've had a nice day.

So, does excellent service and customer satisfaction begin and end with your floor staff? No, but combined with everything else you have on offer to entice second and third visits, they can make a lot of difference.

Reputation Management

Quite an ominous descriptor, isn't it? There are plenty of companies wanting to manage your online presence and the ramifications of all involved, good and bad. If this is the way you wish to go, that's fine, but don't forget some of the most valued partnerships a business will have are that between yourself and your employees.

Staff content in their environment that feel connected and a part of the bigger picture will always give off that happiness to customers more than someone who is simply watching the clock until their shift is over. They really do create a positive environment around them. Call it a vibe if you're a believer in such things, or simply call it a happy and motivated employee.

Amid all this apparent change, one thing is constant. We need all kinds of staff, but among them will be key players with invaluable traits that make them an advocate happy to carry the torch for your



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BOARD-MEMBER SPOTLIGHT: KATHLEEN HARMAN

As first President of the OCHMRA, Kathleen Harman was hugely instrumental in shaping Ocean City's hospitality industry. Her late husband, Bill, is responsible for her introduction to the lodging world. Bill spent summers working at his family's first Ocean City motel, the Alamo. After World War II, Kathleen and Bill permanently moved to Ocean City and she operated the Miami Court, while raising her sons, as Bill spent his days as a plumber. In 1958, Kathleen and Bill bought a half block on the ocean and built the Ocean Mecca Motel on 23rd Street. In addition to her dedication to the OCHMRA, Kathleen was the first female President of the Greater OC Chamber of Commerce. She has three sons, the late Steve, who started the Poor Girls Open, Stacey who operates the Ocean Mecca and Shawn who operates Fish Tales and is Past President and current Secretary Treasurer of OCHMRA. Kathleen was honored with our inaugural "Steel Magnolia" award named for Ladies who have charted the course of hospitality. She has always loved fishing and currently likes to visit the Casino at Ocean Downs.

2016 Economic Development Summit



Worcester County Economic Development proudly presents the 2016 Economic Development Summit, in conjunction with the Ocean City Economic Development Committee. Save the date for this premier event at the Ocean City Performing Arts Center, December 14. Registration with light refreshments begins at 8:30am, program 9am-Noon. This Summit will feature economist Anirban Basu with an economic update for Worcester County and the Lower Eastern Shore, plus an update on the status of Natural Gas Extension in Worcester County. To register for free for this event, contact John Azzolini at JAzzolini@co.worcester.md.us.

Congrats to **Mary Susan Jones**, who with her team at **Howard Johnson's Plaza**, won the "Hotel of the Year" award by Howard Johnson International! Welcome to **Melora Olexo**, who joined the team at **Dunes Manor Hotel Suites** as Assistant General Manager. Congrats to **The Boardwalk Hotel Group & Pat Ambler-Perry**, who has won American Bus Association's 2016 "Best of the Best" Award.



Social Security announces new online service for replacement Social Security Cards in Maryland

The Social Security Administration introduced the expansion of online services for residents of Maryland available through its my Social Security. online portal. Carolyn W. Colvin, Acting Commissioner of Social Security, announced that residents of Maryland can use the portal for many replacement Social Security numbers (SSN) card requests. This will allow people to replace their SSN card from the comfort of their home or office, without the need to travel to a Social Security office.

"I'm thrilled about this newest online feature to the agency's my Social Security Portal and the added convenience we are providing residents of Maryland," Acting Commissioner Colvin said. "We continue to provide world-class service to the public by making it safe, fast and easy for people to do business with us online and have a positive government experience. I look forward to expanding this service option across the country."

U.S. citizens age 18 or older and who are residents of Maryland can request a replacement SSN card online by creating a my Social Security account. In addition, they must have a U.S. domestic mailing address, not require a change to their record (such as a name change), and have a valid driver's license, or state identification card in some participating states. For more information about this new online service, visit www.socialsecurity.gov/ssnumber.



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A Positive Spin on the Bed Bug Blues

The National Organization of Bed Bug Education for Lodging (NOBBEL, Inc.) is partnering with local hotels to put a positive spin on the growing bed bug epidemic. Our mission is two-fold:

- To educate the public and the lodging industry about the bed bug epidemic
- To offer bed bug training and certifications to the lodging industry to build consumer confidence.

From our new travel website, KnowBedBugs.com, we can train and certify hotel employees on the biology, detection and treatment for bed bugs, and give guidelines for professional guest interaction concerning bed bugs. Certified hotels are provided with signage and certificates, letting the public know that when it comes to bed bugs: "We Have A Plan!" Potential guests can book rooms with member partners directly from our website. Partners are given top-down priority in our listings.

"We aren't trying to turn hotel employees into exterminators" says Michele Berdelle, President of NOBBEL, Inc. "But through years of bed bug remediation experience, we saw a need to bridge the gap between concerned consumers and the lodging industry. Our training provides the tools necessary for positive interaction about a problem that is not going away." She continues: "And from a guest's standpoint, wouldn't it be nice to know which hotels have a bed bug plan prior to reserving a room? This is an industry game-changer, and an excellent consumer-confidence and marketing tool"

NOBBEL, Inc and KnowBedBugs.com is locally based (Millsboro, DE) and though our focus is on the national level, we are concentrating our efforts locally to start. Training and certification takes about an hour. For more information, please visit our website at KnowBedBugs.com.

OCHMRA at the RAM MidAtlantic Expo



Susan & Liz with Raven's Poe.



Susan & Liz with Tom Knorr of Evolution Brewing.

*Mark your Calendars
Our first dinner meeting is
coming up! November 17 at
the Carousel Oceanfront Hotel!*