



December 2013

# Hospitality Hotline

## Connecting the industry through Advocacy, Education and Partnerships

### News from... THE BOARD OF DIRECTORS

#### Welcome New Members

##### Active

OC Brewing Company  
56th St & Coastal Hwy

##### Allied

InterExchange  
Salisbury University  
Town of Berlin

##### Housing Bureau

Convention Center Director, Larry Noccolino, attended the meeting to discuss the use of meeting software, Passkey. This system provides meeting planners with the ability to make centralized reservations and track room history. After much discussion, the general consensus was that it was not worth pursuing. While it would be nice to have a presence on this meeting software, existing groups would find the software attractive, which would cause the hotel industry to pay unnecessary commissions.

#### Banner Ads on OCocean.com

The City has been discussing putting banner ads on their tourism website. The HMRA Board voted that this would not be fair to smaller members as they wouldn't be able to afford the advertising that larger members could. This unequal representation would also clutter the site. They are updating their site to allow members to expand listings, at no extra charge, to include more pictures.

### Lodging Roundtable Provides Wealth of Info

Approximately 35 lodging members gathered last week to discuss several hotel related issues. Many thanks to the panel which consisted of Annemarie Dickerson, Francis Scott Key Family Resort; Marie-Noelle Sayan, King Charles Hotel and Rick Day, Real Hospitality Group. Each provided their perspective on rate management, building direct bookings, using online travel agencies and tripadvisor to your advantage.

In today's digital world, the ability to adjust rates daily is an effective way to maximize revenue. Yield management is an important tool; as the demand goes up rates should be adjusted accordingly. Those booking farthest out, should be awarded the lowest rate. Non-refundable advance purchase rates are a way to reward guests who commit to visiting by giving them lowest rate. For direct bookings, think about starting at your own front desk! Train your staff to tell the guest the best way to get the best rate is by booking direct on your website. Use a stamp on their paperwork to remind them; offer 10% off by booking on your site; have your desk clerks ask for their email to send them repeat guest rates.

Creating value add-ons that can only be received by booking on your direct page rather than offering straight discounts is another option. Entice visitors to book direct; i.e. beach chairs or towels, fresh fruit & coffee in lobby, breakfast coupon or partner with a local restaurant to offer a free appetizer or drink with purchase.

With the emergence of visual storytelling, it is critical that your website be attractive. In days past, guest first impressions were when they drove up to your property. Now, "curb appeal" is your website as this is the guest's first impression. Also, the less text the better; visitors want to **see** what they are purchasing. Multiple pictures of the property and rooms are important. Make it easy for guests to book direct by putting a reservation widget on every page.

Facebook ads are an effective marketing tool as you can target your direct audience and add perimeters that work for your time period. TripAdvisor business listings are also a wise choice. They allow visitors to directly click on your hotel site from the TripAdvisor page and allow you to post special offers for that audience. Social sites allow you to listen and engage with your customers; you can build the relationship. Responding to both negative and positive reviews is important. Your ranking on TripAdvisor is based on an algorithm which includes your personal response, and takes into account if the response was "cut and paste." If you are not responding, you are allowing the public to manage your reputation.



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## BOARD MEMBER SPOTLIGHT:

### Mark Elman - Clarion Resort Fontainebleau Hotel

Born and raised in Reisterstown, Maryland, in Baltimore County, Mark Elman began his career in the hospitality industry as a Brookshire Hotel bellman, at only age 17. He quickly moved through the ranks, finishing his stint with the Brookshire as the Rooms Division Manager. Mark's next 12 years were spent at the Harbor Court Hotel, located at the picturesque Baltimore Inner Harbor. His position as Director of Guest Services afforded him the ability to meet and serve the rich and famous. Mark began coming to Ocean City as a child, and continued visiting family and friends in the area as he got older. It didn't take much for the family to agree that Mark needed to find employment in or around Ocean City. Mark has been the General Manager at the Clarion Resort Fontainebleau since 2004, overseeing 250 hotels rooms and 80 condos. Mark is a devoted family man who adores his wife Christy, and their three children: Dustin (15); Madison (13), and Sam (5). He is a die-hard Ravens fan, enjoys the occasional golf game, and cheering his kids on at their many sports activities.



## THE DISH: Restaurant industry trends

### 9 STEPS TO A BETTER BOTTOM LINE *By: Megan Rowe | Restaurant Hospitality*

After struggling along with the limping economy for the last five years, restaurants are seeing signs of better days. According to Sageworks, a financial data and analysis firm, foodservice operators in 2010 eked out an average profit margin of 1.4 percent on sales growth of 0.9 percent. By August of this year, annual sales were up 8.7 percent, and restaurants were averaging 4.1 percent profit. Nice turnaround, sure, but clearly room for improvement remains.

The two obvious routes to more robust profits are (a) running a tighter ship and trimming expenses, or (b) driving revenues by selling more product, or at least more profitable product. We've pulled together ideas to help you do both.

- 1 Show your staff some love:** Why swim so hard against the tide? It's bait for the right candidates. Once hired, they are groomed, steeped in the company culture and expected to help their peers excel.
- 2 Buy smarter.**
- 3 Foster more guest loyalty:** Loyalty programs, punchcards, facebook fan pages, birthday clubs: Whatever you can do to encourage the public to choose your establishment more often or over the competition is going to impact the bottom line in a good way.
- 4 Design menus strategically:** Know what your profit is on each item. Highlight selections that are customer favorites and the most profitable. "You have to make food that people want to come back for."
- 5 Keep it fresh:** "We are seeing an increasing use of fresher color palettes and other changes designed to create more of an ambience of freshness and local flavor" Marek says.
- 6 Train your servers to be sellers, too:** People look at a menu for 90 seconds, so you need to make sure signature and profitable items are in the most prominent places, and make sure the servers are pointing them out."
- 7 Cut down on waste and losses:** The key, the researchers found, was surveillance. Not surprisingly, employees who know they are being monitored behave a little better.
- 8 Mind the facilities:** "You just can't pay enough for cleanliness," Malody says. "You need to wipe the glasses clean, polish the spots from the silver, clean the floors and seats. All these subtle indicators that a guest can see and touch influence their decision whether to come back.
- 9 Leave room for dessert:** Desserts serve many purposes: pushing up check averages in a profitable category, providing a way to mark a special occasion and, if spectacular enough, leaving guests with a "wow" moment to remember.

[CLICK FOR FULL ARTICLE](#)



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## HOW TO TARGET CUSTOMERS IN EACH OF THE 5 STAGES OF TRAVEL

From Blue Magnet Blog



If you were to ask most travelers how many distinct stages are involved in the general act of travelling, I would guess that most people would identify two: the research phase and the booking phase. In fact, **Google has identified 5 stages of travel**, and as online marketers its important for us to target customers at each point in that buying process.

### Research and Booking: A Fraction of the Travel Cycle

For most hotels, the booking is the final goal of their online marketing efforts. It is seen as a linear path that starts off with the consumer planning and researching their travel plans online, and finishing at the checkered flag at the hotel reservation. Unfortunately, once that guest crosses the finish line some hotels will wipe their hands clean of that customer. Well, you could stop there... but then you'd be missing out on a huge opportunity to foster brand loyalty and have guests' experiences at your hotel work in your favor long after their stay in the form of word-of-mouth advertising.

### Google's 5 Stages of Travel Stage 1: DREAM A Little Dream

As a traveler, you've got to start with a dream. Maybe you saw a billboard of a spectacular Hawaiian sunset emblazoned with the simple phrase, "Visit Hawaii." Maybe your friend just posted a video of their hilarious attempt at surfing in Maui on Facebook. And then again, maybe it's 3 degrees in Chicago and you just need one sweet week of pure tropical escape. Regardless of how the idea entered your head, you're now starting to talk it over with your friends and family.

#### Why is this stage important?

In 2011, 49% of leisure travelers reported researching online after viewing an online ad. Start that spark early and get potential guests moving through these 5 stages of travel. The dream is what starts the potential customer through the buying cycle.

#### So how does a hotel reach this dreamer in stage 1?

- Email marketing
- Social media
- Blog about it

### Stage 2: PLANNING The Master Plan

Now you've got them thinking. That random consumer is now a potential traveler because you've managed to spark an interest in a future trip. But you still have a long way to go before you're rolling out the red carpet for Anonymous Hotel Guest #1. Your hotel is just one of many in a nebulous idea-cloud of potential destinations and locations. In fact, over the course of this consumer's travel cycle, he or she will have visited over 20 different travel websites in over 9 separate research sessions on the

internet. The question is: how do you help the consumer cut through the online clutter?

#### Why is this stage important?

The average traveler visits over 20 different travel websites before making a booking 62% of leisure travelers use the internet for researching their trip

#### So how does a hotel reach this planner in stage 2?

- Diversify
- Search engine optimize your website
- Optimize your local listings
- Clean up your OTA listings
- Manage your online reputation

### Stage 3: No Reservations About Making A BOOKING

By now the research stage is just about over and Johnny McHotelguest is ready to lay down some clams for what he hopes will be a vacation that lives up to his dreams from stage 1. How easy is it for this consumer to find your website now that he knows he wants to book? Will he find you though your official brand website? An OTA? Groupon? Ideally, you'd like him to book through your official brand site, but what have you done to ensure that your site is found first.

#### Why is this stage important?

37% of travelers said the internet was the primary source prompting them to book (word-of-mouth was the second most important factor to influence bookings, coming in at 16%)

#### So how does a hotel reach this booker in stage 3?

- Don't make people think
- Optimize for your brand

### Stage 4: It's About The EXPERIENCE

At this point you've got the customer right where you want them...at your hotel! While online marketing can still help to some degree, for the most part, it is up to the hotel staff to create a memorable experience for the guest on site. The greatest impact to a guest's experience happens on property and will influence their decision to return to your hotel in the future and share their experience with friends in Stage 5.

### Stage 5: SHARING The Moments

This is the point at which the traveler who just experienced their dream vacation can help plant the seeds for someone else to start their journey down the 5 stages of travel. Whether it's a well-written user review, a great photo of the hotel's pool deck, or a quick tweet about all the great restaurants right next to the hotel, harnessing this word-of-mouth marketing is the key to a successful social media marketing campaign, and perpetuating the 5 stages of travel for others.

[CHECK OUT THE WHOLE ARTICLE HERE](#)



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## November Dinner



*Rose Brous, Flamingo Motel, Susan, Stefanie Gordy, Salisbury University, & Jackie Berger, Clarion Fontainebleau*



*Susan, Gary Figgs, Seacrets, Margot Amelia, Maryland Tourism, Greg Shockley, Shenanigans, Caryl Cardenas, Park Place Hotel & Bob Torrey, Happy Jack*

*Michael Day, Town of Berlin, Margo Mandes, Susan G. Komen for the Cure, Deb Travers, Comcast Spotlight & Lisa Challenger, Worcester County Tourism*



*Patricia Smith, Castle in the Sand, Anne & Gene Vanderbilt, Vanderbilt Weddings*



*Marie-Noelle Sayan, King Charles Hotel & Viola Candeloro, Ocean Terrace Apartments*



*Sara Sabia, Harrison Group, Joanne Hunsicker, Ocean City Convention Center, & Shirley Doud, Dunes Manor Hotel*



Welcome to **Tommy Bromwell**, who joined the Sales Team at **H & M Wagner** over the summer. Welcome also to **Terry Desautels**, **Matice Interactive's** new Business Development Manager. Another warm welcome to **Martha Strickland**, who is joining the team at **Princess Royale** as the Catering Manager, and **Chloe McKenna**, who will also be in the Catering Office. Big congratulations **Buddy Dykes**, of **Doodle Design** and his new fiance **Marcia Rigsby**, on their engagement.