

## **David vs. Goliath, Leveling The Playing Field In Attracting, Retaining Hotel Guests**

*David M. Brudney, ISHC, June 2000*

Real world? Big v. small has become a “reality-check” and cost issue. Surveys indicate that all hotels spend as much as six times more to capture new guests as they do for repeat guests. I believe today’s hotel mantra should be “let’s optimize every guest experience so guests can’t wait to return - - and tell a friend!”

Smaller independents and boutique hotels are able to hold their own and, in many cases, outperform chain properties all over the U.S. by focusing on a combination of solid guest identification, needs-and-wants assessment, satisfaction, recognition and reward programs.

### **“getting to know their existing customers better”**

Successful Independent and boutique hotel operators have realized that limited dollars, resources and distribution channels make it near impossible to compete with mega-chain brands and their sophisticated, attractive frequent guest programs. Rather than attempt to go head-to-head in the global, national, regional and local market places, smart independent and boutique operators are protecting and expanding market share by getting to know their existing customers better - - their needs, their preferences and the primary reasons for their patronage and loyalty. This vital information is now being recorded electronically and, when deemed absolutely necessary, manually by hand.

There may be a multitude of reasons for why today’s hotel guests select a small independent or boutique hotel over a chain-affiliated property. The reason could be price. Availability. Location. Possibly, a friend’s recommendation. All things being equal,

however, I believe that more and more guests are making hotel selections based upon comfortability, recognition and service. Status is a whole other issue, one to be addressed in a future article.

**“build a solid data base on all guests, electronically or manually”**

Here are some good tips for independents and boutique hotels for both attracting and retaining today’s (and tomorrow’s) guests:

- insist on a clean, safe, efficient, user-friendly operation
- (owners) don’t assume, inspect what you expect
- if on site food and beverage can not be presented and delivered correctly, on time and affordable, insist that all guests are introduced to neighborhood, value-priced F&B options
- learn as much as possible about guests and guest needs, desires
- build a solid data base on all guests, electronically or manually
- new data base mining companies can help match preferred guest profiles and deliver lists of hundreds of prospective new guests
- customize an appropriate reward program for your preferred guests
- communicate with guests via e-mail or direct mail between visits
- recognize and thank guests at both check in and check out
- develop a satisfied guest “sales force” to spread the word amongst family, friends and co-workers
- insist general managers make local sales calls daily
- seek out new, advantageous, neighborhood marketing partnering relationships

More and more owners, operators and franchisees are turning to established, hands on, professional operations and marketing consultants for help today in implementing successful new concepts and programs.



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