

## Hotel Marketing Starts Locally: Never Forget Your Neighbors

*By David M. Brudney, ISHC, March 2006*

I love it when clients put me up at a hotel I never would have found nor selected on my own. I love it because I always come away from the experience with either a reminder or a new lesson to share.

One lesson I've learned over the years is to always engage other guests in conversation, when and wherever the opportunity presents itself.

This past week I found myself in a suburban, independent limited service hotel near a project where I anticipate doing some future consulting work.

So here I was, having a really nice complimentary breakfast - - make your own waffle fresh, what a great idea! - - when a fellow business traveler sat down at the table next to mine. A CNN news item triggered some conversation during which I learned the following:

- ❑ The guest was a “brand new” road warrior
- ❑ He drove his own car 400 miles from home
- ❑ He made no reservation because he didn't think it was necessary (Metro suburban area, winter time, midweek arrival), but he had done some Internet homework and knew of two options
- ❑ Upon arriving in the town he tried to check in at a branded inn and suites property in the heart of the small downtown
- ❑ He couldn't find the entrance and due to all the surrounding construction (condo development), he made the assumption the hotel was not open
- ❑ He had an address of the other option (“our” hotel) but he could not find it in the dark
- ❑ He saw a familiar branded supermarket across the street and since his wife worked for the same chain, he went in and asked a cashier where he might find a room for the night (3 nights!)

- ❑ The supermarket cashier not only told him about “our” hotel, she told him it was a nice, clean place and then gave him specific directions on how to find it

My fellow business traveler’s stay represented \$262.11 in room revenue and taxes. None of that would have been collected by the innkeeper had it not been for a neighborhood merchant’s awareness and testimonial.

And that testimonial did not come from the supermarket’s general manager nor manager on duty, it came directly from a cashier, possibly part-time hourly.

As I reflected on the experience, I wondered if the hotel’s general manager and/or sales associate had made neighborly calls on the market, providing information while delivering “goodwill” packages (breakfast or snack samples) and thanking the team for keeping the hotel in mind whenever shoppers inquire?

I wondered if the hotel had ever called on all the other neighboring merchants: fast food, restaurants, lounges, service stations, auto repair, car rental and retail shops?

Paraphrasing the late Tip O’Neill, all marketing is local and it begins with careful cultivating of merchants in your immediate and surrounding neighborhoods. A testimonial and/or referral from a local merchant can make the difference in a point or two in weekly occupancy or making room revenue monthly budget.

Better yet, should the innkeeper deliver the product and service, that one referred guest might return a dozen times in the future and who knows how many other potential guests he or she might influence?

A successful restaurateur told me once that a table of four - - producing a positive dining experience - - represented \$1 million worth of future business.

Here are a few other reminder tips:

- ❑ Seek out website linkages with merchants, attractions and venues of interest to your guests
- ❑ Seek out database sharing and possible co-op marketing efforts and cross-selling

opportunities with selected local merchants with interest in your guest profiles

- If your complimentary breakfast is your hotel's signature item, invite selected merchants to experience first hand
- Offer neighborhood merchant owners complimentary rooms and breakfast (subject to space availability, of course) as part of their employee bonus and incentive planning
- Donating gift certificates for local school fundraisers, auctions and telethons
- An annual neighborhood merchant reception with heavy "working the room" by the G.M. and/or Sales associate, is very good for business

*Note: for more ideas and tips on neighborhood marketing, you can find "Uncertain Times Call For Backyard Basics," April 2003 under "Special Reports and Articles" ([www.DavidBrudney.com](http://www.DavidBrudney.com)).*

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