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Discussions on Emerging Growth Markets



Ms. Fields

*Sales & Marketing*

## Direct Sales: Some Challenges for Leadership

By [Brenda Fields](#), Founder, Fields & Company

Could it be that following the Age of Industrialization, we have entered into the Age of Impersonalization? How many times have you been a victim of "statistics" and not viewed on your individual merits? For example, did you pay premium rates for car insurance or health insurance just because you were a certain age or gender? Or was a loan denied despite an excellent credit history because "statistics" indicated you were a poor risk? And have you ever felt the frustration of trying to reach a "live" person to resolve a dispute or just to ask a question? And you went round and round in circles by pressing various numbers on your phone, without having an option for your particular issue, just to end up where you started?

Our customers and guests in hotels are no different. They want to know that their business is valued, that they are heard and that they have access to someone who will listen and respond to their particular situations.

The new generation of hotel sales staff was raised on text messaging, instant messaging, and video games. They do their buying online and are adept at condensing conversations to 140 characters in a Tweet, not to mention throwing grammar and sentence construction out the window.

Recently a video went viral showing a young child trying in vain to get the pictures in her book to move around! It caught on because of the absurdity of the situation but also, perhaps, because of the secret fear that our children will only be stimulated by action instead of the written word or appreciating the beauty of pictures.

But does this type of communication and interaction translate to increased business? Clients still want to know that there is a real person at the end of the phone, text, or email who is responsive to their needs; will seek out a better understanding of their needs; and will respond to them quickly and communicate in whole sentences. Many times, a piece of business is booked just because the sales person responded quickly.



The challenge of sales leadership is to work with and inspire this new generation to see each customer as unique and to work with a sense of urgency and personalization.

This article will address some insights and practical tips in working with sales staff to ensure greater productivity.

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example, the Accounting Department is responsible for the smooth and efficient running of a property by ensuring adequate cash flow. But what would happen if bills were sent out only when the accounting clerk had time or if delinquent accounts were pursued only when the clerk got around to it? And in Rooms Division, what would happen if the housekeeping staff cleaned the amount of rooms per day that they felt they could? Some days it would be five rooms cleaned and another day, twelve.

It's safe to assume that that these practices would create chaos in the organization and the property would eventually not survive. But understanding the workflow, processes, and responsibilities in the sales and marketing department is just as critical.

Technology provides the opportunity for instant communication and allows sending and receiving messages any time and to anywhere in the world. But ironically, despite the ability for instant communication, there is a growing trend in hotel sales that it may take days to return client calls and emails. The harm of that is two-fold:

- Clients want to receive timely or instant communication to their inquiries or requests and will move on if that does not happen in a property.
- Developing trust with the sales person is first founded on that level of quick and honest responsiveness. It is when trust is ultimately created that will foster client loyalty and therefore, generate good business regardless of product deficiencies, service lapses, or market conditions.

Therefore, as in any other department in the property, it is important to establish standards for this most basic, but important practice. Rather than leaving this to chance and in order to ensure that every opportunity to book business is met, the following areas to address are:

- Establish a reasonable and timely time frame to return all customer requests/inquiries i.e. two hours after receipt, end of business day, etc.
- Establish a reasonable and timely time frame to send out proposals.
- Establish the number of sales solicitation calls to be made on a weekly basis.
- Establish the number of client site inspections on a weekly/monthly basis.
- Ensure that booking goals and consumption goals tie into budgets and reflect seasonal patterns.
- And generate weekly/monthly reports that show results vs. goals. That level of accountability will quickly indicate the top producers and those who need training/guidance.

In addition to having established standards, it is just as important to establishing a culture where everyone communicates directly with both clients and each other and does what he/she says they will do. Things happen despite all good intentions. And it is important to communicate if a promised proposal will be sent at another date.

#### Formal Sales Training

Many times, especially in small, independent properties, there is not a commitment to sales training because of the expense. It happens over and over that the General Manager is emphatic about hiring the sales person with an existing client base. It may seem like a good idea, but a client base has a short life span and the client is, often times, more loyal to the property than to the sales manager.

Therefore, the sales leader is challenged with getting top performance out of staff when they do not have the skills necessary to do the job. Even in high demand markets, such as New York City, one should wonder what additional revenues could be achieved if the sales manager had expert selling skills instead of just "order taking".

Responsiveness to our customers can some times be related to the sales person's ability and expertise in handling certain situations. Having a sales staff that is aptly trained will help insure booking new business, inspiring client loyalty, and staying abreast with changes in the market place. Sales training gives a sales manager the tools to deal with every situation, provides a common language among the sales staff and therefore results in the achievement of great business. Without formal training, there can be an avoidance of customers where there is a difficult situation to address and a tendency to "order take".

#### Prospecting for New Business

Another challenge for sales leaders is finding new prospects. The tight security of companies has made it virtually impossible to prospect through cold calling. Company directories rarely exist for external use and unsolicited emails many times, end up in the spam file. But there is business to be uncovered and the smart leaders will take the right steps to ensure that their sales people can uncover group leads. A few tips are:

- As we know that people do business with people they know, it's therefore important to be visible. Join industry associations where the membership is comprised of travel professionals, meeting planners and influencers. Some examples are: Meeting Planners International; Hospitality Sales & Marketing Association International; International Special Events Society, and Biz Bash. In addition to joining, it is also equally important



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By Robert King, General Manager, Travel & Hospitality, ClickSquared

to be an active participant. Active involvement contributes to the sales person's credibility, professionalism and overall image with the potential client. These associations have membership directories and the chances of a sales person reaching a decision maker are greatly enhanced.

- Use sales meeting to discuss what is happening in the local business environment. Real estate deals can result in new business for a hotel. And usually by the time a new business has relocated to your area, the hotel deals are already done. The key is to be there first.
- Make community involvement a priority. Being a good citizen and good community member will once again allow you to interact directly with the movers and shakers who are responsible for sending business your way. But, be consistent. Sometimes, hotel management is no better than "ambulance chasers" who try to benefit from a crisis. Even good deeds during a crisis will backfire if they were strictly self-serving. An authentic and ongoing approach to doing good deeds is key to being an important and respected part of the community.

Sales leaders should take notice of the successful companies, such as Amazon, that use technology exclusively for their business, but simultaneously, offer personalized and exceptional customer service i.e. service that is personalized, responsive, and is given by a person! Working with technology combined with excellent sales habits will place any property in a position of strength in achieving excellent financial results.

Brenda Fields is a strategist and sales and marketing expert honed from a successful track record in the hospitality industry. Brenda is a member of the prestigious ISHC, recently served on the Americas Board of Directors for HSMIA, and is Immediate Past President of the Hospitality Sales & Marketing Association International. Brenda was honored as one of "The Top 25 Most Extraordinary Minds in Sales and Marketing" by HSMIA as well as the "Leadership Development" award. She is an industry leader and spokesperson; a member of the Editorial Board of HotelExecutive.com; contributes regularly to international publications Hotel News Now; Hotels Online, Hotel Resource Weekly Network News, eHoteliers, and many others. For more information visit [www.fieldsandcompany.net](http://www.fieldsandcompany.net) Ms. Fields can be contacted at 518-789-0117 or [brenda@fieldsandcompany.net](mailto:brenda@fieldsandcompany.net) [Extended Bio...](#)

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### Coming Up In The January Online Hotel Business Review



#### FEATURE FOCUS

#### Mobile Technology: The Biggest Challenges

The Age of Mobile is upon us. Nine in 10 Americans and 70 percent of people worldwide use mobile phones to text, email, exchange pictures or video, and interact via social networks more often than they talk with each other. 50 billion apps will be downloaded in 2013 and major hotel corporations are creating their own apps which employees utilize to track sales, monitor systems, or check-out customers without being tied to their stations. Equally significant is the rapidly emerging trend that permits consumers to make purchases or transfer funds through their mobile device. In addition, hotel guests are now routinely using their devices to select rooms, unlock hotel doors, make restaurant and golf course reservations, book a massage, order from room service, and track the location of family and friends using GPS technology. Furthermore, hotels are still facing the perennial issue regarding wi-fi ? to charge or not to charge for high-speed internet access. It is no longer a question whether the hospitality industry will fully embrace this revolution but rather when, how and to what extent. The January Hotel Business Review will investigate what some hotels are doing to maximize their opportunities in this mobile space, and will report on the solutions that are proving to be most beneficial for both companies and their guests.

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