

## Opinions

# Tips for making your hotel renovation guest-friendly

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Renovations are a necessity in keeping hotels in top shape, but some methods are more effective than others.



By Becca Chester

The hotel landscape is far different than it was eight years ago. Properties weathered the turbulent financial climate of 2008-09 by saving dollars retaining their “as-is” conditions and have now moved ahead with long-delayed renovation plans.

But there are any number of reasons to renovate. Here are the top six:

- **Update the overall design and décor:** Although the furniture, fixes and equipment may be in fair condition, the design could be dated.
- **Fix the basic wear and tear:** Worn out items now really show their continued deterioration.
- **Cure functional and economic obsolescence:** An area that worked in the past may now be underused and can be repurposed with a potential for a good return on investment.
- **Comply with brand standards:** Hotel brands showed leniency with owners during those rough years and deferred property improvement plans and brand standard compliance. There is now demand for their immediate implementation.
- **Technology improvements:** Staying ahead of this curve has never been so important, especially in light of the maturation of the millennial market.
- **Reposition to a new concept or brand:** Ownership changes have generated changes to some hotel's flags.

Although goals are varied and often overlap, there is a basic approach for renovations. In terms of the essential project management of remaining on time and on budget, the number of strategies is abundant and could easily fill a book. To maintain an ongoing revenue stream, owners will often keep part of the hotel operational while renovation work proceeds. Whether they are a loyal, long-time or a new guest staying for the first time, there's always a risk of losing them if their experience is an unpleasant one.

Here are a few ideas on creating a better environment for the guest and the hotel's community

during a period of renovation.

### **Plan ahead**

Review the hotel's occupancy trends of the prior five years to determine its off-season—this is the ideal window for the renovation. The FF&E will need to be ordered months further ahead than in the pre-recession years as there is now fierce competition from other projects, both renovations and new construction.

Allow a buffer of several weeks between the end of the construction window and the beginning of furniture installation. Unexpected circumstances should always be factored in. In addition to focusing on the FF&E deliveries, work carefully with your procurement team and make sure the deliveries for contractors' finish materials are on time. And, of course, any glitch can domino and create further delays in the overall timeline, leading to chaos on site.

### **Buffer zones and barriers**

If you're implementing room renovations in a property with multiple floors, keep the floor below unoccupied, and, if low occupancy allows, the floor above, too. This will minimize the disruption to guests occupying the hotel.

The enclosures should not just be a safety barricade or a screen by the areas undergoing construction—they should be attractive visuals with good graphics. Displays of the proposed décor, including photos of the color boards and renderings, are important to inform the guests of the "new look" coming soon.

### **Low VOC**

Utilize FF&E materials with a low volatile organic compound rating. This will be less offensive and safer for the guests, both during construction as well as for the long term. The guests will appreciate it.

### **Quiet hours**

Schedule the noisiest construction work between the check-out and check-in hours—typically between 11 a.m. and 3 p.m. Have your front-desk staff ask each guest if they are planning either a late check-out, or if they are planning to sleep in and strategically place them in the rooms furthest from the noise.

### **Temporary venues**

Temporary reception desks, food-and-beverage venues and other facilities should be attractive and guest-friendly. If an outdoor area is utilized for one of these spaces, make sure it is tented and properly heated for the guests; their comfort is vital.

If the parking lot is being utilized for staging of construction equipment, offer the guests complimentary valet parking, even if this requires additional temporary staffing.

### **Engagement at all levels**

Keep all of your staff informed and updated on the renovation plans, including your housekeeping and engineering staff. Make it a vital part of the weekly staff updates.

Have the design manager and/or designer present the model room and overall plans directly to



the hotel's staff; that way they can share with guests the excitement of new things coming. Their pride of ownership goes a long way and will carry through in their interaction with the guests. Invite the local community and media outlets to cocktail events to inform them of how your property will soon be enhanced, which, in turn, will strengthen the value of the overall area.

### **Postscript**

"No act of kindness, however small, is ever wasted." -Aesop

In the weeks directly following Hurricane Katrina, my team and I worked on repairing damage to the Hilton New Orleans Riverside. Our goal was to have the hotel operational as quickly as possible and we selected carpet tiles as a temporary fix for the public spaces. Once the new broadloom carpet arrived, we realized that there was an obvious and urgent need with many local churches and schools for flooring. The hotel's ownership decided against disposing of the carpet tiles or sending them onto another of their hotels. Instead, the tiles were cleaned and donated to those that needed them the most.

It was an act that the community did not soon forget.

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