

15 tips for survival in difficult times



People often complain about the impact of the recession on their lives and business. Instead of developing new long-term strategies to help them manage in an ever-changing business environment, many will panic and introduce short-term quick-fix solutions that are not always successful.

It's not as if the hospitality industry hasn't suffered from a downturn in business before. All of us remember what happened after 9/11 in 2001 and the huge impact it had on the hospitality industry worldwide.

Here are some key pointers to help you survive during difficult times.

1. Think very carefully about your advertising and marketing activities and adjust them accordingly
2. Know your guests and understand their requirements; introduce on-line and in-house questionnaires so you can find out what your guests are really looking for instead of offering them what you want to offer. The market is changing all the time and many guests will be 'travel experts' who know what they want and expect to get it.
3. Monitor your competitors on a regular basis.
4. Research and refocus your target market segments and go for volume – for instance, choose 100 small contracted companies instead of five key accounts
5. Make sure the correct rates for business and leisure guests are loaded into the right distribution channels. It is vital to keep control over revenues and prices.
6. Do not forget about your existing regular contracted clients. Provide loyalty programs and, remember, it is easier and less expensive to keep existing clients rather than find new ones.
7. Make your website a business generator – from individuals, corporates and conference/banqueting activities. Ensure your clients can book online or e-mail you to ask for prices. Check its functionality. Is it easy to use and navigate? Has the site been optimized for use with search engines, price-per-click, Adwords, tactics ? Check with e-commerce professionals which solution is the best for your hotel.
8. Familiarise yourself with the latest and most up-to-date technologies and booking systems - and use the same level of technology that is used by your guests.
9. Load promotional videos and advertisements on portals such as www.youtube.com; use social networks (Twitter, Facebook, etc.) and Web2 and deploy word-of-mouth strategies.
10. Don't hesitate to keep co-operation going with third party intermediaries (such as HRS.com, booking.com), online travel agents, business travel agents (such as AMEX) and other tourism related companies. Treat them as additional booking channels instead of 'enemies'. If you have a solid relationship with them in the good times, you can rely on them to help you out in the bad times.

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11. Use customer relationship management systems in the daily running of the business to help build strong relationships with existing and prospective guests. Implement a quick and easy response system for all requests for quotes and control follow-up procedures, which are crucial for winning business.
12. Create special offers for local clients to encourage them to use your hotel at weekends and during holidays. Think about new services and products which could be offered by the hotel to generate additional revenue.
13. Develop new packages and programs to generate demand from new guests. Don't forget about partnerships with destination marketing organizations to promote your location.
14. Drive cost-cutting activities in the hotel. Involve hotel staff in looking at how costs could be reduced in their departments and introduce incentive programmes to encourage come up with ideas. Renegotiate your contracts with suppliers and service providers. Outsource - if it makes sense to do so - functions such as human resources, finance, IT and PR.
15. Always employ talented service-orientated people who are full of enthusiasm and respect for guests. Never forget that every member of your staff is critical to your quality of service and will help you establish strong relationships with colleagues, contractors and guests. Attentive professional staff will help attract business to your hotel.

If you focus on these 15 key points, you will be better prepared for 2010 and the future. Rather than cut back on your sales and marketing activities during difficult times, it is much more effective to adapt your plans to changing circumstances.

Good luck.

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