

High-impact, low-cost ways to win guests

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Story Highlights

Inches, small percentages, going the extra mile—these are ingredients of the “secret sauce” that make a hotel, company or leader not just good, but great.

A hotel company that does the minimum, the 97%, will keep its head above water, but it will never be great.

Train, maximize your marketing, and keep your collateral and staff looking fresh and clean.

“You find out that life is just a game of inches. So is football. Because in either game, life or football, the margin for error is so small.” —Al Pacino (Coach Tony D’Amato) in “Any Given Sunday”

Red Sox vs. Yankees. Microsoft vs. Apple. Ford vs. Chevy. Marriott or Hilton? Cowboys vs. well, everyone.

Everyone seems to lean one way or the other on just about everything. We love our opinions. We love arguing. Though some of the best rivalries in life, sports and business have been borne out of the competitors’ similarities, not their differences.

Think about it: How different are the Red Sox and Yankees? Both start nine players, both get three outs, and both pitch from 60 feet 6 inches away from home plate. Their payrolls are both astronomical, and they play until someone wins.

Similar passions are felt today when discussing Droid versus Blackberry phones. Droid guy walks up to a Blackberry guy and the argument starts with one question: Why? There begins the debate. I’ve had the opportunity to own both a Blackberry and a Droid. I believe they are about 97% the same product. The 3% difference is the intangibles ... “usability,” “the feel,” “brand loyalty.”



Inches, small percentages, going the extra mile—these are ingredients of the “secret sauce” that make a hotel, company or leader not just good, but great. A hotel company that does the minimum, the 97%, will keep its head above water, but it will never be great.

In order to demolish the competitive set (figuratively, of course), operators need to do that extra 3%. Here are some **high-impact/low-cost** solutions that will help you win the fight for guests.

Train, train, train

If it’s a branded property, the training is at your fingertips, so take advantage of programs and educate employees on how they can be a part of making your property unique. This is most effective when you assign prep work before you actually meet for the official training session.

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Example: Have 20 employees participate in a S.W.O.T. Analysis. Divide the group into four teams in which one evaluates your hotel’s strengths, the next evaluates weaknesses, the next opportunities, and the last group looks at threats. The exercise is very low-cost, highly effective and yields a huge impact.

Improve your online reputation

This train has left the station. If your hotel has missed its stop, then it’s time to gather your team together and figure out a way to implement a strategy to get on board and manage your online reputation. Josiah Mackenzie of ReviewPro offered the following advice on the basic steps for managing your online reputation:

1. **Start by listening.** Choose a tool that gives you the greatest depth and breadth of data collection. Review websites that might seem small or regionally focused could play a significant role in the business you generate in certain niches and demographics.
2. **Use a benchmark** measure of online guest satisfaction, set goals and

measure progress towards these goals. Holding each manager accountable is crucial for progress.

3. Generate "department specific" reports from social media and review analytics that provide each manager with the insight they need to make decisions and take action. It's especially interesting to see review analytics used for revenue and operations management—and these areas are where some of the most important innovations in social business are happening.

"Operations management is reputation management, and reputation management is revenue management," Mackenzie told me.

Maximize brand marketing programs

Many of these programs are "opt in," meaning the GM or director of sales must decide to join the marketing program offered by the brand. This is a cost/benefit decision, and many miss the expiration date, are shortsighted or simply don't have the data needed to make an informed decision. Beginning today, start tracking the effectiveness of the most recent program you joined, such as "Two for breakfast on weekends," and go from there. Some franchise-related costs and fees represent as much as 12-13% of total guestroom revenue. How are you maximizing these fees?

Update your uniforms

Guests notice this more than you may think—and employees act as they dress. I was visiting a competitor's property a couple weeks ago, and I walked into the "heart of the house," the housekeeping/laundry room. I saw two laundry attendants with jeans and t-shirts folding laundry. Where's the pride or heart in that? I didn't say a word; they are of course, the competition.

Supply your walking marketers with crisp, new uniforms that embody the brand of today. They will walk more confidently and be proud to wear the colors of the hotel. "Uniforms" is one of the most underutilized line items in a property's budget. Even a new apron for your food servers can make an impact. Don't wait until the next Quality Assurance exam to be forced into buying new uniforms. A little bit every month is the answer.

Update your collateral

Don't let your marketing collateral match your 7-year-old carpet. Assign a staff member to list every piece of collateral on the property and assess its condition and relevance. Anything in the guest elevator that is laminated or taped on, trash it. Anything with worn corners or fading material, trash it. That year-old, taped-on, hand written "out of order" sign on the fourth floor ice machine, fix it or trash it. This is more than just improving guest service; it's improving your staff's confidence. This "attack mode" is contagious, and your staff will respond accordingly. You'll soon have 100-plus eyes in your hotel looking for anything that is not up to your high standards.

With all of these possibilities for success and so much more, it reminds me of the last thing Al Pacino (Coach D'Amato) said in that famous speech from "Any Given Sunday": "Now, whattaya gonna do?"

Good question.

Good luck. Have fun.

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