

Short-Term Hotel Strategies to Achieve Long-Term Gain in a Post-COVID Environment

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The impact of the COVID pandemic and its decimating effects to the hospitality industry are very real and caught many off guard. As we approach 12 months of these sustained challenges, it is critical that we not lose faith and manage for the changes ahead!



This article will focus on the short-term strategies that hotels should be implementing now, to ensure the achievement of long-term gains and the attainment of normal, business operations, as the threat of the COVID pandemic recedes. The assumption that your past clients are standing by and anxious to bring their business back to your hotel, but is that true? Has your sales team been in continual contact with key clients over the past 11 months and kept them informed of what steps your hotel has taken to assure them a safe environment for the stay or upcoming meeting? Or more realistically, was the sales department reduced to

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minimal levels and this individual or limited team is only coping with day-to-day issues? Are they maintaining relationships with these key clients, let alone any type of proactive selling for new future business?

If this situation sounds familiar, please take a moment to consider the following short-term strategies to ensure your immediate post-COVID recovery.

1. What shifts in the market mix might be possible?
 - This would be the time, if you have not already done so, to throw out your old marketing plan and start from scratch by re-evaluating how each segment of your business has changed and which have the best growth potential.
 - Consider how the changes in the mix of business will affect the hotel's future average rate projections.
 - Determine what changes in sales deployment will be needed.
 - Evaluate what added services might need to be offered by the hotel to aggressively solicit business from these new potential segments.

2. If your hotel's source of business came from third-party organizations, think again!
 - Evaluate if changes in your sales deployment will be needed to target more business directly.
 - Making a change like this requires strategic planning and a collective agreement from all stakeholders.
 - For example, if a hotel proceeds down this path, they need to commit the sales resources to go after smaller short-term group bookings, and to do so, may have to refuse participating in larger citywide group blocks. Such decisions require everyone to be on the same page.

3. Maintain ongoing communication with your clients, providing you have staff to perform this task.
 - Communicate what your hotel has done to create a safe place to meet and stay.

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- Create a sense of urgency with your clients to book now for the future.
 - In the event, your sales team staffing was substantially reduced during the COVID pandemic, the use of a third-party vendor to fill this void may be needed.
4. Don't assume that all of your sales team furloughed or laid off will return.
- One way to keep abreast of this potential risk is to keep in contact with this team with periodic calls to see how they are doing, and if they moved have secured alternate work.
 - Consider how to quickly train a new and potentially inexperienced sales team to drive future sales, and if third-party vendor support is required to fill the void as new sales managers ramp up their skills.
5. If your hotel's current sales staff is not adequate to address some of the actions noted above, this would be a good time to consider the use of Third-Party vendor to maintain client relations, lead generation, sales training, and targeted sales efforts. Such services may prove to be more cost-effective than bringing back sales managers earlier than planned.
6. Consider the Mental Health of Your Team Now and Post-COVID
- There have been many articles on how the extended period of the COVID pandemic has impacted the mental health of workers who have been laid off.
 - Obsessive-compulsive disorder could be one of the main candidates
 - General anxiety is also a very important mental health issue to watch out for
 - Chronic loneliness brought on by social isolation or "a lack of meaning" in life during the pandemic is another major concern
 - Ongoing unemployment or loss of income (caused by the knock-on economic effects of the pandemic) may affect long-term wellbeing, too
 - For further examples visit <https://www.bbc.com/worklife/article/20201021-coronavirus-the-possible-long-term-mental-health-impacts>

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- For those team members, who have continued to “hold down the fort”, so to speak, through long periods of low occupancies, the absence of group functions, increased cleanliness, and guest interaction compliance guidelines, you should acknowledge their efforts and assess how they’re feeling about the hotel right now.
- If your past management style did not include regular, team member events bringing the housekeeping and front desk staff donuts in the morning is a simple way to show appreciation. Consider having department appreciation weeks recognizing your rock star team members. Now would be a good time to get these activities underway.

Develop a Plan for Organizational Change

I had the pleasure to read a great book many years earlier while working for a large international organization undergoing organizational changes related to new ownership. The book was entitled "Our Iceberg is Melting. Changing and Succeeding Under Any Conditions" by John Kotter and Holger Rathgeber. The authors use a fable about a penguin colony in Antarctica that has lived on the same iceberg for many years. When one curious bird discovers problem signs in the iceberg, few penguins want to listen to him. They are fine the way things are and don't want to change. The story is analogous to the situation many Hospitality professionals are facing now.

Once a small group of penguins came to understand that their iceberg actually was melting, they 1) created a sense of urgency in the colony to deal with the difficult problem, 2) put a carefully selected group in charge of guiding the change, 3) found the sensible vision of a better future, 4) communicated that vision so others would understand and accept it, 5) removed as many obstacles to action as was practical, 6) created some sort of success quickly, 7) never let up until the new way of life was firmly established, and, 8) finally, ensured that the changes would not be overcome by stubborn, hard-to-die traditions.

Consider that your hotel, whether you wanted it or not, has gone through external changes, and as the COVID pandemic concerns begin to recede, we are all going to face a new definition of normalcy. How you and your hotel adjust and manage through this process will determine

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your future success. If you consider the eight actions of a small group of penguins who came to understand that their iceberg was melting and equate this to the changes your hotel has experienced, I think you will agree that many of these actions would be applicable to your hotel's current situation.

In summary, we took a quick look at some of the short-term strategies that hotels should be implementing now, to assure the achievement of long-term gains. We discussed that the playbook has changed and to be successful you and your hotel need to manage the required changes logically and effectively. If you would like to discuss how Hospitality Performance Systems, Inc. can assist your team and hotel further, we would welcome such discussion.

About Hospitality Performance Systems, Inc. (HPS)

Hospitality Performance Systems (HPS) was created to provide operational and sales support to the hospitality industry globally. Founded in 2009 this enterprise takes advantage of its founder and President, Stanton D Jacobs, CHA, with over 30 years of proven success in the hospitality industry and strategic relationships globally, HPS is affiliated with a wide array of professionals specializing in their respective disciplines, enabling HPS to provide a wide range of services. <https://www.hps-strategic.com> <https://www.linkedin.com/in/stantonjacobs/>

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