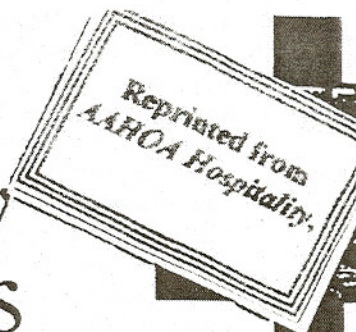


# Business Appreciation Day Improves Occupancy Rates

by Edward L. Xanders, CHA



Front Desk

Every owner and hotel general manager wishes to say thank you to his guests for using the hotel. However, the majority of the time he is too busy with the daily routine. The Business Appreciation Day is one method for professional hoteliers to say thank you. A Business Appreciation Day is a concentrated sales effort, designed not only to demonstrate appreciation to past clientele, but also to generate new sources of business.

To plan, organize, and follow up on such a day, the following 12 points should be followed.

1. Establish a client list from sales history files of individuals and firms that have generated business for the hotel in the past year. The list should also include the names of local elected officials and members of the local newspaper and television media. Take particular care not to duplicate more than two names from any one firm. The maximum number should be 500 names, typed on labels that are easily duplicated by photocopying machines, for future use.
2. Select a day: either Tuesday, Wednesday or Thursday. Also consider the time of the year, avoiding the hotel's peak season and the December holiday season.
3. Print engraved invitations, inviting the mailing list to a

reception. Mail the invitations approximately two to three weeks before the Business Appreciation Day. On the invitation, there should be a "regrets only" telephone number (possibly to the sales or general manager's office).

4. A list of sales calls should be developed by the sales department from the mailed invitations. Care should be taken to group businesses together, with no more than 15 on one particular list, from the same geographic region.

5. The general manager should ask department managers, supervisors and key employees to represent the hotel on Business Appreciation Day. He should try to make two-person teams of male/female. Care should be taken to team an extroverted personality with an introverted personality. No care should be taken as to matching specific departments. It has proven very beneficial to have a representative of the sales department teamed with the executive chef, or a representative from the accounting office teamed with the executive housekeeper. Having department managers and employees represent the hotel as sales ambassadors is a fun and innovative part of Business Appreciation Day. On Business Appreciation Day, a key de-

partment manager should be left at the hotel as the Manager on Duty.

6. The sales department should distribute 20 sales packets per team. The packet should include banquet menus, meeting room diagrams, guest room rates, sales brochures, and any other information on the Food and Beverage Department or general information concerning the hotel. The packets will be distributed by the sales teams and be available to guests at the Business Appreciation Day reception.

7. The day itself has arrived! Kick it off with a breakfast in the hotel for the sales teams. Give each team 15 to 20 calls that they are to make. Also include 20 sales call report forms. Be sure to reimburse those employees driving their own automobiles for their mileage. By 9:00 a.m., the sales teams should be making their calls. They are thanking your clients for their business at your hotel, reinviting them to that evening's reception, and inquiring about immediate or future needs that the hotel could provide.

When making sales calls, two additional points can be stressed:

- a. Try to obtain two business cards (for later use) from the meeting planner of

each firm you are calling on.

- b. Obtain the correct name and title of the individual who books your hotel's guest rooms for out-of-town visitors. These names will eventually be used to develop a list for membership in a club that promotes their sense of belonging and a special relationship to your hotel.

8. At noon, the sales teams must not return to the hotel, or they will become involved in the day-to-day business of the hotel. Have them meet at a special restaurant or your competitor's hotel for lunch. At lunch, each team should give a verbal report of how the morning sales calls progressed. It is quite interesting to see that those teams that were extremely apprehensive at breakfast, now display the confidence of veteran sales people.

After lunch, the teams should continue making the balance of their calls. The team should encourage those who are more sales savvy to make the cold calls, and invite the cold-call people to that evening's reception. After all of the teams have completed their calls, they should return to the hotel by 4:00 p.m. Guest rooms should be set aside for the team members to use for changing clothes and freshening themselves for the evening's reception.

9. At 5:00 p.m., the Business Appreciation Day Reception begins. The Reception can be held in the Ballrooms, Meeting Rooms, Poolside or a tent in the Parking Lot. It should be as elaborate as the hotel can conduct and the budget will allow. If your hotel does not have a Food and Beverage Department, then have the Reception catered by a very professional firm. This is the hotel's day to thank the business community for the support it has given the hotel. The sales team members should attend this function and circulate throughout the

room thanking the people for their business. It is very important that the service department managers understand the need for sales. Many of your clients will say that they have had hotel sales people call upon them for years, but until now, have never had an executive housekeeper or a chef ask them for business.

Have a guest book at the reception, along with name tags for all attending guests, and continue to collect business cards from those clientele missed earlier in the day. Be sure to have meeting rooms set up in such a manner that tours of the hotel can be given by sales team members. How many times has a person booked rooms at the hotel, but has never seen one? Have guest rooms of various styles set aside for tours. This is the time to show off the hotel. Even if it was done at the grand opening party, do it again to reinforce their awareness of the hotel.

10. By the end of the week following Business Appreciation Day, the sales department should have reviewed the sales report forms. The calls should be prioritized as:
  - a. possible interest,
  - b. tentative business,
  - c. definite business.The sales staff should make follow-up calls within two weeks.

11. Two additional benefits of this day are:
  - a. Use the collected business cards as a thank-you gift. Purchase a luggage-tag machine and make the business cards into luggage tags. Mail them out within 7-10 days after Business Appreciation Day, again thanking your clients for their business and giving them a personal token that will remind them of your hotel year-round.
  - b. With your list of names, establish a special club of personnel who make reservations for out-of-town guests. This recognizes and encourages their

continuing recommendations and referrals for your hotel. Such clubs can have many names, but their mission is a necessary function of every hotel's marketing program.

A friend of mine has suggested that club names be selected which enhance the member's image of himself/herself as a respected member of your informal sales team. With that rule of thumb in mind, she rejects the generalization of a "Secretaries Club," the double-entendre of "Executive Sweets," and the chauvinism of "Ramada Girls" or Sheraton's "Selective Service." "If you can't pay commissions," she reasons, "you can at least pay compliments. Why not call them 'Encore Clubs,'" she suggests, "for encouraging repeat reservations?"

12. How much should you invest in thanking your clientele? Your basic costs will include printing and postage for invitations, hourly wages of sales team members, transportation costs for those who drove their personal cars, breakfast and lunch for the sales teams, and the total wholesale cost of the food, liquor, flowers and decorations for the reception. Extra costs would be for the luggage tags or other suitable souvenirs and their mailing.

Approximately two months after the Business Appreciation Day, the sales department should total, on a definite and tentative basis, that business sold which can be directly attributed to this sales effort. When the cost of the Business Appreciation Day is divided against its booked sales, an Acquisition of Sales cost should be 15 to 20 percent.

There are many times we wish to say thank you to our guests and clients for choosing our hotel. Business Appreciation Day is a proven method that works extremely well, either on a one-time basis, or as an annual event. ■

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