

The Grand America Hotels and Resorts

EMBRACE A CULTURE CHANGE AND INCREASE CONVERSIONS



IN BRIEF

BACKGROUND

The Grand America Hotels and Resorts include two properties in Salt Lake City, Utah: The Grand America and Little America hotels. After serving as host to the XIX Winter Olympic Games, the two hotels turned to Signature Worldwide to provide the training and sales skills reservation agents would need to make a smooth transition into a new results-oriented culture and keep conversion rates up.

CHALLENGES

Overcoming the Olympics boom made selling the value of hotel amenities and services a top priority. And, with high retention rates, Signature associates kept training programs fresh so long-term employees remained connected and enthusiastic.

SOLUTION

Signature Worldwide's Transient Edge® training program helped Grand America and Little America hotel reservation agents convert inquiry calls into actual reservations. Monthly monitoring and coaching, and quarterly training sessions kept the program on track. Tailoring incentives to individual reservation agents maximized the effectiveness of training, and a customized spreadsheet made it easy for management to measure results.

RESULTS

Mystery shopping calls placed to the hotels following training were recorded and scored according to the criteria in a simple Magic Formula. The scores, available to clients via Signature's Web-based reporting tool, showed a 17 percent increase in conversions for transient calls. The Grand America Hotels and Resorts have now trained all of their other hotels on the Transient Edge program and rolled out Signature's Sales Edge™ training program across all properties.

Background

The Grand America Hotels and Resorts, a collection of eight properties located in Utah, Idaho, California, Arizona and Wyoming, are known for their grand style and exquisite details.

Two of those properties, The Grand America and Little America hotels, in Salt Lake City, are no exception. More than 1,600 rooms and suites and 74,000 square feet of meeting space feature a combination of Old World craftsmanship, charm and hospitality with every modern convenience. This approach has earned the hotels AAA's prestigious five diamond and four diamond awards, respectively.

The Grand America was opened in 2001, in conjunction with Salt Lake City's role as host to the Olympics. Beyond supplying the additional rooms and suites that would be needed, it truly welcomed the world in grand style. Anticipating that room demand would slow after the Olympics, the management of The Little America, and The Grand America knew selling value over rate to callers would become increasingly important. To prepare the hotel staff to sell the features and benefits of the hotels to support a higher room rate than most area competitors, seasoned hotelier, Anthony Bartholomew, sought the services of Signature Worldwide to train employees.

Challenges

CONVERTING CALLS TO RESERVATIONS: The XIX Winter Olympic Games were over and converting calls to reservations was not as easy as when room supply was low. Both hotels stand well on their merit; however, with a series of rate increases over the past year, and with rates nearly \$100 dollars higher than competing hotels in the area, selling the value of the hotel amenities and services became increasingly important.

INSTILLING A CULTURAL SHIFT: Past practice for reservation agents was to simply answer the phone, quote rates and wait for the client to make a decision. A new director of rooms and an eager director of reservations sought collaboration with a professional training company to help reservation agents learn to qualify callers, get to know clients, match the features of the hotel to potential guests' needs and always ask for the reservation.

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TAILORING TO A DEDICATED STAFF: Employee retention rates at the Grand America and Little America hotels were high, and keeping training programs fresh and interesting for tenured employees was challenging, especially with an emphasis on changing the employees' sales behavior and working toward a results-oriented sales culture.

Solutions

TRANSIENT EDGE® TRAINING: In December 2004, the Grand America and Little America hotels partnered with Signature Worldwide to introduce reservation agents to Transient Edge, a training program specifically designed to help hotel employees convert inquiry calls into actual reservations, resulting in tangible Return on Investment (ROI).

A full-day, on-site training event kicked off the program for 15 reservation agents, including their veteran manager. A simple Magic Formula for handling inquiries, improving caller experiences and selling more rooms was adopted.

The Magic Formula was reinforced monthly through mystery shopping calls, unlimited coaching and online Web-based reporting. Quarterly, a Signature training account manager returned to the hotels to review and introduce advance sales skills and provide feedback based on identified strengths and weaknesses.

A PERSONAL TOUCH: Signature Worldwide made it a priority to identify how the customer planned to measure the success of the training program. Throughout the relationship, the Signature training account manager, Grand America director of rooms and Grand America director of reservations worked together to produce a spreadsheet that was customized to the hotel's goals and reflective of ongoing progress. This spreadsheet was reviewed and improved during each visit to the hotels.

In order to make training programs more effective and more meaningful for individuals, Signature Worldwide encouraged the personalization of performance incentives. For example, one employee enjoyed running in his free-time. So, incentives for this employee evolved around running. This system worked well for the group of long-term employees at the Grand and Little America properties. Additionally, the hotels increased the monthly team performance rewards, and offered personalized recognitions such as ice cream sundaes and cookies for individual perfect scores.

"Independent hotels simply do not have the same resources and training options that many branded properties do," said Anthony Bartholomew, director of rooms for The Grand America Hotel. "While it can be tempting for us to attempt the training ourselves, the transient segment of our sales effort is far too important a component to risk with trial and error. Signature had a proven track record of producing the desired results in reservation capture and conversion. I have been a fan for 15 years."

Results

SIGNATURE SCORES CORRELATE WITH CONVERSIONS: Over a year, Signature worked with the Grand America and Little America hotels to measure the success of the Transient Edge training program. Each mystery shop call placed to the hotels was scored based on the criteria in the Magic Formula. The scores were available via Signature's Web-based reporting tool. Since the Magic Formula was put in place, conversions for transient calls rose 17 percent.

"Calculate that number into the number of reservations taken on a daily basis, and the revenue results were dramatic," Bartholomew said. "We were so fortunate that our reservations manager, a 23-year employee, became a champion of this training program and that the staff embraced her example and responded exceptionally well to the Signature concepts."

PROOF POSITIVE: As a result of the success at these two hotels, the Grand America Hotels and Resorts trained all [of their other hotels on the Signature Transient Edge program, in addition to rolling out Signature's Sales Edge™ training program, designed to help directors of sales more effectively close on group business, across all eight properties.

"I have worked with Signature when I was with other hotels in the past and they have always produced results. And, we think there is more that Signature can do for us. We would like to expand this new sales culture throughout our remaining hotels, so everyone from the front desk to in-room dining staff can participate," Bartholomew concluded.