

Hotel Online Special Report

What Women (Really) Want

Identifying the Unique Needs of the Woman Business Traveler

by Brenda Fields, August 14, 2006

As an industry, we have come a long way from catering to the woman customer by placing a red rose on the bed or handing her a restaurant menu without the prices. We realize that the woman customer is typically the decision maker in choosing the hotel or restaurant and is more often than not, the one who pays the bills.

In 2005, women accounted for approximately 43% of the business travelers, according to the Travel Industry of America. In addition, a recent New York University study identified the woman business traveler as a "baby boomer with a college degree who earns over \$75,000 per year". That profile typically points to a sophisticated and discriminating traveler. And research confirms that women tend to have higher expectations than men when it comes to comfort, service, and security.

But, we fall short in identifying the unique needs of the woman business traveler when we make it exclusively about security. In actuality, no reasonable man or woman would stay at a property if he or she did not feel secure. Personal security is the minimum expectation of any guest. The industry has made improvements and is responding. Now, many chains routinely train staff to discretely tell a guest his or her room number when checking in or will write the room number down for the guest to avoid anyone overhearing. And telephone operators are trained to avoid giving out room numbers.

With security in place, creating a product that helps the woman traveler feel her best and perform well on her business trip, will inspire loyalty and drive market share and will help your property outperform its competitors. Sometimes, it's the little things that make the difference. Instead of looking for that great marketing idea to drive business, just addressing the basic needs could be the answer to impact and maintain revenues.

Currently, standard in-room amenities in almost all types of hotels are: irons and ironing boards, hair dryers, shower caps, toiletries, alarm clocks, and coffee makers. But many times, they are not as women-friendly as they could be or fully address her needs. The following provides some insight into the needs of the woman business traveler so that hoteliers can decide if they need

to make adjustments as well as determine the ROI if a large investment is warranted.

Security:

Having a staff that is welcoming, discrete, visible, and available goes a long way to reassure a guest that he or she is in good hands. And as previously stated, the industry has responded to safety and security concerns to insure that guest room numbers are protected. But an area particularly sensitive to women is the issue of connecting and adjoining rooms. The idea that only a double door is separating her from the person next door typically creates a vulnerable and insecure feeling in women. So, after hitting all the right notes upon check in, ensure that that good feeling is maintained by placing the woman guest in a room that does not connect to another one.

Sleep:

A good night's rest is tantamount to functioning well and a decent mattress, pillow, and bed linens are important for that. The large chains are now leading the way in upgrading the standards for mattresses, pillows, and linens. Therefore, to remain competitive, independent hotels, from budget to luxury, need to reevaluate their beds and linens and determine if they meet the standards and meet guest expectations. A guiding principal to see if your mattress, linens, and pillows are up to standards is to ask if they are of residential quality. Even then, sometimes harsh laundering can turn acceptable linens into very uncomfortable ones for women.

In addition, having the alarm clock go off in the middle of the night can really cut into a good night's sleep. Whether the guest is male or female, a quick check of the alarm clock after a guest checks out can go a long way to keep the next guest happy and returning to your property.

Hair:

Now that the hair dryer is a standard amenity in most hotels, women are spared the inconvenience of packing one in their carry-on bags. But, many times, the hair dryer is not near a mirror or it is attached to a wall where there is no place to put brushes, combs, or hair products. Beside hairdryers, women can have electric rollers, electric contact lens kits, cell phone chargers, and back up batteries for the lap top computer, which creates the need for an ample supply of electrical outlets. So, to get high marks from women, make sure that the hair dryer is strategically placed, that it has good power, and that there are plenty of outlets which are logically placed for convenient use for all of her personal and business items.

Make-up:

One of the most important needs for women is good lighting for make up application and ample counter space for all of the cosmetics and toiletries that women carry. Harsh bathroom lighting combined with a tiny glass shelf, can create havoc when preparing for an important business meeting or presentation. It may require a little tweaking at minimal expense to get it right, but the investment will pay off with repeat business. Hoteliers can earn even higher marks by providing a full length mirror! Women are long past the days of worrying about their slips showing, but they still like to have one final

check before walking out the door.

Clothes Hangers:

A major annoyance to women is to have clothes hangers which are not detachable from the rod. Many times, a quick steam of the business suite or silk blouse while taking a shower is a very time efficient means to get ready for the day or evening. Most women are not looking to take the hanger home with them. They don't need the hotel hanger and it wouldn't fit into the carry-on bag for the airplane even if she wanted it. So why do hotels, out of fear of losing a hanger and having to replace it, jeopardize losing the room revenue of a woman guest who will next try the competition to avoid the inconvenience?

Lack of skirt hangers is another annoyance for women is. Skirt hangers are still very useful to women, even if they are not wearing skirts. They can be used to hang pants so there isn't a crease and can be used for certain types of dresses. It may seem like a minor issue, but not having one when needed is a major inconvenience.

Good Service:

The icing on the cake is a caring and attentive staff that makes each guest feel welcomed and cared for. An unanswered phone call in the middle of the night to the front desk or a noise complaint that is not dealt with reassuringly will undermine all the other great experiences in place. A warm and attentive staff can make up for slight inconveniences and is one of the most important ingredients in building guest loyalty.

So, if the goal is to capture your fair share of the women business traveler market, it is important to provide the product, unique to women's needs. They include the right women-friendly amenities, which are strategically placed in the room to provide maximum comfort and efficiency; and a clean, safe, and secure environment. Sometimes, the costs involved in proactively addressing these issues are much less than letting them go and reacting after the downturn in business. A thoughtful and in-depth analysis will allow each owner or manager to decide which approach is best for his/her properties to drive business in the short term as well as for the long term.

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involvement and expertise on a retained basis.



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