

Marketing Matters: Reset and Recalibrate

By [Brenda Fields](#), Founder, Fields & Company | June 21, 2020



Marketing, in its broadest, and I believe, more accurate definition, is at the core of good business. Especially for hotels, it is essential that marketing incorporates every aspect of the business from the quality of service; cleanliness and maintenance; to the actual marketing initiatives. That total approach creates a brand which in turn, garners customer loyalty and attracts new customers.

Every detail matters ergo, "The whole is greater than the sum of its parts". A great social media campaign that is not aligned with the brand will not succeed, nor will a ubiquitous marketing program that overstates a brand that is sub-par.

Studies have shown that especially during a crisis, brands matter. Customers rely on their trusted and favored brands to guide them. According to a 2020 Edelman Trust Barometer report, approximately 90% of global consumers believe that brands

should protect their employees as well as suppliers. And almost 70% of US participants interviewed stated that a brand would lose their trust forever if that brand favored profits over people during the pandemic crisis. Sixty-one percent stated that a brand's response during a crisis, will have a major effect on where or not they will purchase it from in the future.

Bear in mind that your guest or the target audience of yesterday, is not the same as today. Start with a clean slate. Redefine the new customer and the new hotel environment in this transformed reality. Without that in place, any marketing efforts will be misspent.

Communicate

Frequent communication is important to remain "top of mind" even when customers are not buying or if your hotel is temporarily closed. Adapt messaging to align with customer sensitivities. Now is not the time for a hard sell. Rather, focus on what people need at a time of this crisis i.e. safety and security.

Authentic language inspires trust. Avoid buzzwords. How many times have we recently heard the phrase, "unprecedented times", referring to the pandemic? The over-use tends to fall on deaf ears. That is the same when communicating with your guests. Take the time to customize all communication for greater impact. Use rich and meaningful language and concepts.

Be aware that your existing customer and account base may have changed with company furloughs and closings. Ensure that your direct messages are sensitive to that. Do the hard work and continually update email lists.

Re-evaluate your customer and target audience as market dynamics have changed and revise accordingly. Did your previous strategic plans target the international traveler? Was your business made up of the business traveler or domestic leisure traveler? All of that has changed. Therefore, it is important to re-strategize and determine the target guest based on new conditions.

Also make certain that visuals used in all communications including your website, reflect the new reality. For example, avoid images of crowds, handshakes, and health club and food and beverage outlets. Details matter.

Innovate

Necessity is the mother of invention. There will be numerous and creative product developments over time as we adapt to the new world order. But until then, there is ample opportunity for marketing innovation.

Take the time to assess the new reality and tailor promotions and messaging accordingly. Early on in the pandemic as hotels and restaurants were closing and adjusting their businesses, a small independently owned pizza joint in a rural area in New York offered a free roll of toilet paper with each order of pizza delivered, when toilet paper was in short supply! This is a great example of how a business quickly adapted and applied original thinking. They fulfilled their customers' need, gained some favorable press, and put a smile on everyone's face.

When New York City imposed "smoking bans" in bars in 2003, most owners feared that business would vanish if customers were not

allowed to smoke! Drinking and smoking seemed to go hand in hand. Although the law prohibited smoking in closed in areas, it did allow smoking in open-air settings.

And voila, with some ingenuity, the rooftop bar was born. It took one creative person to come up with the idea to use a vacant rooftop area and create a stylish open-air bar with spectacular views! Problem solved! And the rest is history! The rooftop bar was an overnight sensation and has served as an additional marketing tool for driving profitable liquor sales.

What will be the next innovation? There will be numerous possibilities to rethink every aspect of the hotel stay and the marketer will be key to this.

Evaluate

Going forward in a depressed economic environment, every marketing initiative needs to be evaluated to ensure the best ROI. Part of that analysis is to incorporate short-term initiatives with long-term payouts. Most properties will need to invest in future business building.

Remember that your website is the most cost-effective tool that you have. Keep it updated with current and practical information relevant to your COVID-19 initiatives. Reconsider your SEO strategy. Conditions and markets have dramatically changed. What was effective pre-COVID-19 is more likely than not, ineffective now. A property's location, once the gold standard in driving business, has taken second place to cleanliness and safety standards.

And social media platforms have shifted in popularity and usage. Study to understand those patterns and set new strategies accordingly.

Evaluate distribution channels as well. Many hotel customers who had booked through OTAs learned the hard way that cancellations were nearly impossible to make during the pandemic. They went in circles trying to determine how to cancel i.e. OTA or hotel? There is now an opportunity for the hotel which had been dependent on OTA business to shore up their own booking system.

Good Citizenship

Good citizenship means doing charitable and unselfish acts. Why does this matter? Authenticity and placing others needs above your own, inspires trust, which inspires loyalty. Those companies and brands that are exploiting the crisis may have a temporary gain, but will lose in the long term. There is no greater marketing messaging in letting guests and customers know that you care, than actually caring. That rings true and creates power in the messages.

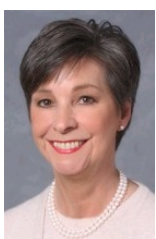
In the immediate aftermath of September 11, 2001, New Yorkers were trying to wrap their heads around the catastrophic event and to help in any way. The Ritz Carlton, located near the demolished twin towers, had been scheduled to open in the next month. Without fanfare, they opened their doors to provide rescue workers a place to rest. There was also a makeshift food station in Ritz Carlton ballroom which fed the workers 24/7.

And every top-rated restaurant in the city donated meals for the rescue workers. A large network of volunteers helped set up the stations, delivered food, cleared dishes, and escorted rescue workers. There was no PR for this. The Ritz Carlton and the restaurants did not received publicity for their tremendous gestures. But one can assume that everyone involved just wanted to help and to do the right thing.

Throughout history, there are countless stories of great acts of humanity in natural disasters as well as compassion and courage during acts of aggression, all with the guiding principle of how it serves the greater good.

We do not need a crisis to generate acts of caring. As we move into social distancing; faceless hotel check-ins; and hermitically sealed guest rooms, we now, more than ever, need the hospitality industry to lead the way and show the world a kinder and gentler way to be.

Going forward, there will no doubt, be more changes impacting the hospitality business as well as every aspect of our lives. But understanding that it is not "business as usual" should drive the hotel marketer to approach every aspect with fresh eyes to reset and recalibrate for success.



Ms. Fields

Brenda Fields is an industry leader, named by HSMIA (Hospitality Sales & Marketing Association International) as a "Top 25 Extraordinary Mind in Sales & Marketing" and is a member of the exclusive International Society of Hospitality Consultants (ISHC), a by-invitation only, 200-member professional society. Ms. Fields served in senior marketing positions before establishing her successful consulting practice. Her clients comprise a wide range of hotels, resorts, and hotel companies around the world, including five-star, luxury boutique properties, 2,000 room hotels and conference centers, as well as some of the largest real estate development companies in the U.S. At the onset of her career, Ms. Fields joined the then, hospitality industry visionary, Dunfey Hotels at the renowned Ambassador East in Chicago, IL and moved up the ladder quickly. The systems Dunfey Hotels had pioneered provided a basis on which any problem can be resolved regardless of market conditions or product type. Ms. Fields can be contacted at +1 518-789-0117 or brenda@fieldsandcompany.net

Extended Biography

The Hotel Business Review is a weekly journal of best practices in hotel management and operations and is available at www.hotelexecutive.com. HotelExecutive.com retains the copyright to the articles published in the Hotel Business Review.

Articles cannot be republished without prior written consent by HotelExecutive.com.

© 2020 Cummins Communications