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BOOST YOUR BUSINESS

The first Innovative Marketing in Hospitality conference, organised in London last week by *Caterer and Hotelkeeper*, was packed full of tips on how to boost your business, both on and offline. *Janet Harmer* reports

BE AWARE OF YOUR COMPETITIVE MARKET

The number of hoteliers which have a lack of awareness of competitor businesses is astonishing, hotel industry consultant Melvin Gold told the conference.

“A competitive environment should be the key to a hotel’s marketing plan,” he advised. “It is vital that you have a basis of comparison as to how the market is doing, and how you are doing against the market.”

Melvin Gold’s tips for keeping abreast of the competition

- Visit and experience the services provided by competitors.
- Consider the online reviews of competitors – what do customers like and dislike about them?
- How does your business compare?
- Research feedback on what others think of your business.
- Benchmark your business against other similar operators in the market – read data from STR, TRI Hospitality and tourist boards.

- Segment the market by the product area (rooms, food and beverage, conference and banqueting, weddings) target clientele (corporate, leisure, conference, weddings), time of the day/week (midweek, weekend, bank holidays, breakfast, lunch, dinner) and by source of booking (internet, telephone, contract, agent, promotions) and focus your marketing accordingly.

DEAL OR NO DEAL?

The explosion in the past two or three years of the “deal of the day” websites came under discussion during the conference.

Martin Evans, managing director of the Tourism Business, said that the growth of companies such as Groupon, LivingSocial, My VoucherCodes, Travelzoo and Voyages Privee meant that daily deals were now here to stay and the hospitality industry needed to assess the benefits and pitfalls of their offers.

“The benefits of discounting via the daily deal sites include enticing new guests and diners when you need them – but look at the cost of acquisition and return on investment,” he

said. “You can beat the competition, be seen as innovative, have a direct channel to customers, achieve good advertising coverage and an immediacy which entices customers.

“However, there are pitfalls. There is the danger of eroding rates, you could discount to existing guests, the business might not recover, the brand could be cheapened and you may end up attracting the wrong type of clientele.”

Nick Stafford, general manager for Europe of LivingSocial Escapes, advised that any deals set up between hospitality operators and companies like LivingSocial should “generate new demand, tell your story and strengthen your brand, provide measurable results and protect total revenue”.

Stafford highlighted the success of a LivingSocial Escapes deal with London’s five-star hotel, One Aldwych. “The hotel has very strong rooms business, but wanted to boost its food and beverage offer. As a result we put together an offer of a Champagne afternoon tea for two for £35, which represented a 50% saving for the customer. A total of 1,292 deals were done,” said Stafford.