

# Hotel Clinic

Each issue, we ask our panel of experts to answer our readers' biggest business problems



**Q** I've heard providing local deals are a good way to attract last-minute customers – how can I get involved, and what are the benefits?

**Mr Freling says:** While offering deals to fill room nights during key need periods is not exactly a new phenomenon, many hotels continue to have problems filling their restaurants and spas even when they have full occupancy. With the advent of Local Deals, hotels can promote specific offers that target consumers in their local area, as long as they use a partner website that has the capability to send geographically targeted emails. By doing so, they are able to market to an area that would not normally be interested in staying in the hotel, and attract local people who are in a position to readily return to the spa, restaurant or golf course on a regular basis. And because there is no upfront cost to running Local Deals, the marketing is effectively no-risk. We're also seeing brands such as Kempinski, W and Hilton do this effectively in the UK, while the likes of the Four Seasons and Ritz-Carlton have also done so in the US. As long as hotels use the right partner sites to create and promote their deals, the benefits can be substantial.



**Q** I am thinking of renovating my hotel. What elements will help me attract more guests – and is a designer really necessary?

**Mr Joehnk says:** When creating a winning formula for a hospitality design project, the most important consideration is very simple: when the guests are happy the owner is earning money – and therefore happy too – and therefore happy too.

Technology prerequisites include, of course, a flat-screen LED TV along with some individual entertainment (films, maybe games) as well as complimentary internet access. Some prefer a wired connection rather than WiFi, which causes potentially unhealthy radiation. Other luxurious touches that help attract guests include the ability to change atmosphere through projections and mood or coloured lighting, curtains that can be opened just by pressing a button, a bathroom TV, a whirlpool, an easy chair with massage features, a waterbed and even a magnetic mattress.

Of course there are also elements to be avoided. A recurring mistake is the creation of spaces that focus on pleasing housekeepers since they are functionally easy to maintain – but that forget about bringing enjoyment to guests. Dark carpets with overly busy designs, vandal-proof furniture with poor aesthetics, and fabric with murky

patterns intended to disguise coffee stains may make cleaning less stressful, but they also result in a distasteful environment for guests that lessens the likelihood of repeat business.

Although "design" hotels are now mainstream and often achieve higher occupancy and rates than their conventional counterparts, sometimes hoteliers ask if these places really require a designer. Throughout the ages it has been the practice that specific jobs require specialists. Hostlers who are good at their job will be interesting hosts, communicative and will organise their staff and work profitably. They might also be creative and know a lot about different design styles and techniques and costs for interior construction. They might even have the capacity to think three-dimensionally for creating spaces, have a heightened intuition for combining colours and have the ability to look beyond personal tastes to see a hotel's atmosphere through their guests' eyes. In this case, they would be good interior designers. However I know I would definitely be a bad hotel manager!

**Q** I'm a small hotelier looking to start marketing my hotel as a wedding venue. What are the key considerations I should make, and do you have any advice?

**Miss Robinson says:** In a smaller hotel it will be the personal touches that a bride-to-be is looking for, so play to your strengths; develop wedding packages aimed at more intimate gatherings and maybe offer exclusive use of the premises.

Create a choice of packages to meet different budgets. Don't be too greedy as there can always be add-ons such as evening buffets. Think seasonally and adjust your prices for winter or mid-week weddings, whenever you have quieter periods.



Invest in local advertising – visit the local registry office which will often produce a guide for potential brides and grooms in which you may be able to place an advert. Make sure you are listed on the wealth of internet sites, such as [www.hitched.com](http://www.hitched.com) and keep your listing up to date.

Open your doors on a couple of quiet Sundays with your banqueting or dining room laid out to impress. Advertise the event and invite other local wedding-related businesses to attend.

Always keep contact details and maybe send the couple an early first anniversary card with an invite to stay again at the hotel. Finally, make sure you put all your testimonials on your website; a good review from a bride is more powerful than any amount of advertising.

**Q** I work for a small hotel group looking to outsource its IT – what are the main things to consider?

**Mr Auld says:** It's difficult enough dealing with guests without having to manage a complicated IT system as well. Many smaller hotel groups often gripe about their internal IT because problems always seem to happen when they're IT manager is off shift.

The essence of judging when to outsource is when you feel you're spending too much time and money on IT issues that could be better dealt with by experts who are available 24 hours a day, 365 days a year, not just nine to five.

A centralised property management system for a small group is great because you can see real time availability across all your properties with ease. Reservations,

cross selling, forecasting and accounting functions can all be accessed from anywhere with a good internet connection.

The big players pay a fortune to run their IT services through vast data centres abroad. That's not possible for smaller groups so it's all about scaling the model right down to achieve your own cost-effective virtual private network.

If your outsourced IT team works with the right hosting

partner, like we do with iomart Hosting through their UK data centre network, any technical issues should be dealt with in minutes rather than hours, whatever the time of day, without you even being bothered about it.

In effect you are buying a new IT department. The main thing is to find a consultancy you feel comfortable working with and who will fix problems quickly using reliable outsourcing partners who provide guaranteed service levels.



## Meet the Experts



**Gemma Robinson**  
Gemma Robinson is the wedding and events manager at the four-star *Hampton Hotel* in Hatfield and is currently arranging her own wedding at the hotel.



**Peter Joehnk**  
Mr Joehnk is the co-managing director of JOI-Design, a leading European interior design practice which specialises in award-winning branded and independent hotels.



**Rene Freling**  
Rene Freling is the general manager of Travelzoo Local Deals, UK, which provides online local savings, and spent a number of years working in the hotel industry.



**Graham Auld**  
Graham Auld is technical officer of Control@Delete and specialises in providing outsourced information and communications resources to the hotel and leisure industry.

**Q** I don't know what sales channels to choose. Should I stick with traditionally popular OTAs or opt for new sales trends?

**A** With popular websites now moving into travel sales, market places like eBay, with over 230 million buyers, and Facebook, with 5 billion+ users present access to a whole new audience of internet buyers. These channels can give you direct access to consumers and help improve your exposure, occupancy and revenue. However popular OTAs should be part of your distribution mix to optimise visibility.

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