

Supplier Response Plan

>> Future of Meeting Safety: Recommendations from Planners <<

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Editor's Note

This paper shares guest and staff safety protocol and emerging best practices for hotel and convention center meetings and events in response to the COVID-19 pandemic.

Each of the suggestions are ascertained directly from highly regarded meeting and event planners and offered for your consideration until state or federal governments or the World Health Organization (WHO) provide standards.

The new world of meetings will require two components for the foreseeable future:

1. More flexibility than ever before regarding meeting and reservation booking terms
2. Reassurance for customers that you are doing everything possible to create a safe experience.

- Steve Steinhart

New Booking Terms

First and foremost, hotels and centers will need to demonstrate flexibility when considering terms for a new group RFP. Following are steps that will need to be considered:

- Update your cancellation policies to include provisions for COVID-19. What will your policy be if an event needs to postpone or cancel?
- Update your Performance Clause. Clearly the co-efficient for attendance and guarantees will drop for the foreseeable future.
- What is your refund policy for the organization? What is your refund policy for the attendee?
- You will need to include fair and equitable contract language perhaps assuming more risk than in the past. Failure to update this component will render the measures listed below meaningless.

Guest Experience

Strict safety measures will need to be in place to protect both guests and employees. Consider the following:

- All employees must wear masks and gloves when their responsibilities include direct contact with public areas or F&B.
- All employees will need to be screened to assess symptoms prior to entering the property and/or serving guests.
- Six-foot distancing should be observed at all times between employees and guests.
- When six-foot distancing is challenging, plexiglass barriers should be considered.
- Review your HVAC systems for possible improvement to air circulation and filters.
- Reduce capacity of airport shuttles to allow proper distancing and clean after every use.
- Place hand sanitizing stations at every guest key contact area.

- Offer mobile phone options to allow guests to remotely confirm arrival time, verify I.D., check-in and receive their room assignment remotely. Their phone will also be their room key and payment method.
- Guests who prefer a key card can utilize self-serve key encoders.
- Guest who check-in via a front desk should have a no contact experience. Phone sanitizers should be available.
- Remove all in-room amenities. Each guest upon arrival should receive their own, personalized amenity kit to include, soap, shampoo, conditioner, lotion, etc. Each of these items will be removed and discarded after each guest's departure.
- All mini-bars and coffee makers should be removed from guest rooms. Coffee stations will need to be provided in the lobby area with masked and gloved employees distributing the coffee and condiments.
- Deliver an email or dedicate an area or person that can explain your new policies to any arriving guests.
- Offer phone apps for any transactions.
- Ask guests to adhere to social distancing.
- Prepare them for potential waiting in line.

- Advise them there may be limited F&B choices and offer information about Uber Eats, Grub Hub, local delivery etc.
- Mention that there may be no off-property options.
- Warn them if there will be limited exercise or no workout options.
- Explain what your modified housekeeping services will be (Rooms should be attended only upon departure unless the guest has made a specific request).
- Do not reoccupy a guest room for 48 hours after a departure.
- Remove pens, pads, room service menus, hair dryers, magazines and books and any item that may be a point of contact for guests.
- Elevator assistance should be available with capacity restrictions and gloved staff selecting floor buttons.
- Physical layouts and furnishings must be arranged to provide appropriate distancing in restaurants, lobby and lounges. including reduction of capacity to allow for six-foot distancing.
- Menus should be touch-free or verbally offered.

Meetings and Banquets

The resumption of gathering brings critical questions for you and your staff. What guidelines will you suggest to meeting attendees? Will you provide masks upon arrival and insist they be worn when in public areas? Will guests need to be tested for temperature upon arrival? What is the procedure if they test positive? Following are more policies to consider in this area:

- In meeting and banquet areas, floor plans must be altered to allow for 36 square-feet per attendee.
- Masked and gloved door monitors should be in place to control the entrance and exits of every meeting room to insure proper distancing.
- Hand sanitizers should be placed at every doorway.
- Provide physical barriers or plexiglass shields in between guests and staff in registration areas.
- Designate high-traffic areas or corridors as one-way when possible.
- Eliminate water stations and instead offer attendees bottled options upon entrance.

- Station attendants in public restrooms to monitor capacity. Ensure each sink and stall is cleaned after every use.
- Add HEPA filters in all high-traffic areas.
- Suspend buffets and traditional coffee stations. Coffee stations must be increased in number to reduce the number of guests at each. Gloved and masked employees will distribute items and condiments.
- Offer pre-packaged meals served by gloved and masked employees.

Marketing to Groups

Even how a venue is promoted may have to be adjusted based on new realities and sensitivities. Following are some adjustments to consider in marketing efforts:

- Consider adjusting your current marketing efforts and photos. Too many current visuals show your facilities set for capacity seating which is a notion of the past.
- Show evidence that safety protocols are in place in all marketing materials. New photos are necessary. Videos are even better.

Conclusion

While these are only suggested guidelines, they will most likely provide more safety features than your state or WHO will establish.

As important as these suggested measures are, a safe transition will require your sales team to convey them to customers—those on the books and still debating whether to hold the function and new customers.

We are entering a new world and we need to develop a new strategy to demonstrate the specific steps you have taken to ensure the safety and well-being of every meeting attendee and guest.

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