The HotSOS Story

If your guests take the time to report a failure of your service or facility, you should thank them, correct the issue and log it. With this information in hand, tell your line personnel that walk the hotel every day what bothers guests most and give them an efficient method to seek out these failures and report them before a guest sees them. Lastly, look for systemic issues that you will just need to look for periodically and call that preventive maintenance. Returning to the guest, store this incident history and preferences for this guest and make sure that they don't occur again, in any of your hotels if you have more than one. If you have several, manage the whole process from the corporate office. Welcome to HotSOS.

Complaints from guests are gifts. You should treat them as such. Essentially, the guest is telling you that they want to give you more business, if you only take care of this first. Why else would they take the time? It is also probable that many guests have experienced the same thing but haven't told you, so it is great to hear a complaint. Of course, this only holds true if you do something about it. First, make sure that the issue gets resolved before the guest leaves and log as much about the issue as you can. Then, make sure that you work to prevent complaints from re-occurring; this is where logging is important. Next, define which are the biggest complaints and communicate this to the team; if they are service related, correct them with additional training. If they are facility related, you have just figured out where to direct capital dollars. All the while, you query your logs to see if you are reducing the recurrence of the biggest complaints.

HotSOS helps you by starting with an interface to your PMS. On a daily basis, the PMS provides a list of arrivals. HotSOS runs several checks to see if these guests have stayed with you before and if they have had any issues. A report is then pushed to department heads alerting them of arriving guests who have had issues during previous stays. Then, the first opportunity to satisfy the guest is to give them what they asked for in the reservation. If they have special requests, Hot-SOS can send those in the Arrivals reports, or it can create service orders upon events like room assignment or check-in to fulfill the request that are then automatically sent to the appropriate department or individual who should fulfill it. All of this occurs with the feed of data coming from the PMS.

With the guest information in HotSOS, HotSOS also becomes the tool to field guest calls. When a guest calls, you can either type in part of their name or their room number to bring up their information. This information includes: guest name, VIP level, frequent stay ID and level, arrival and departure date, issues from this stay, or stay history including old issues. With this information, the guest service agent can expeditiously follow up on any pending requests or issues or log a new one. If the call is about a new request, logging the request will create a service order that will be automatically routed to the appropriate respondent. The agent can then be automatically prompted to call the guest back to ensure the request was fulfilled. In the case of a complaint, the agent can take care of performing a service recovery with the guest, and compensation for the problem can be given and logged.

Typically, hotels that have a centralized guest response department have employees call into the department to report problems or submit requests. Guest response ends up being a dispatch center, when they should be focusing on guest needs. More importantly, it is a terribly inefficient and ineffective workflow. For example, a room attendant notices that the carpet is stained in a guest room. Her options are to write out a paper order or call down to guest service. In either case, she needs to have command of the English language. In the case of the phone call, you introduce the grape vine effect. Room attendant tells Guest Service, who in turn needs to tell the houseman to go clean the carpet. The likelihood that the message makes it to the right person unchanged, especially considering that Guest Service is also fielding calls from guests, is not great. Still, the respondent needs to communicate back via radio or phone that the issue has been resolved, taking up more of Guest Services' time.

There is a better alternative. When the room attendant sees the carpet stain, she looks at a short cheat sheet translated into her first language. From the list, she gets the code for carpet stain and goes to a phone. She calls an extension that connects her to a computer voice system that prompts her to enter her ID, the room number, the issue code, and whether a guest told her of the problem or not. All of this occurs in her preferred language. Once she submits the request, HotSOS generates a service order and sends it automatically to the appropriate respondent on a wireless device like a cell phone. The respondent replies from the phone to signal the beginning of work and again to complete the order. Now, our stain is gone, but the only people involved were the person who saw the issue and the respondent. The process is far more efficient and far less prone to error.

You are probably wondering how long the cheat sheet (issue card) needs to be. The answer is not too long, but you have to make sure that the items that your guests are noticing most are on the card. Because you are using HotSOS to log all guest incidents, HotSOS will tell you which items need to be on the card.

So far we have talked about Guest Services and Housekeeping using HotSOS. Who else uses HotSOS? Well, Engineering is the largest respondent, taking care of all of the facility related problems, however, the Bell stand handles a good number of requests as well. Banquets can provide a lot of requests, in addition to responding to many, for the meeting areas. HotSOS has a number of ways to dispatch calls to meet the needs of all of these departments and more.

HotSOS gives you options when it comes to wireless devices. You can use just about any cell phone carrier that has two way messaging or SMS. You can also use two-way pagers or site based systems like Spectralink or Vocera. These are optimal for users who do not need too much detail, like housemen or rooms call people. They get the order details including the guest name and they can reply to inform the system of the following – accept/decline, start, stop, or complete. There is also a Java application that runs on Blackberries. This app allows you to view history for a room or guest details, and allows users to create their own requests. This application is typically for power users. A similar application exists for PocketPC for the cases where wireless coverage is ubiquitous.

Each department also has unique needs with regards to work distribution. Bell stands need to rotate jobs through bellmen, in order to properly distribute the opportunity for gratuities, while Housemen typically respond by area of the property. Engineering typically breaks work down by trade, and general maintenance calls typically go to one person or group with overflow going to others. With HotSOS all of the unique workflows can be accommodated and automated.

In the case of Engineering and Housekeeping, there are scheduled jobs that need to be done. Equipment and rooms need preventive maintenance. Housekeeping needs to do deep cleans, mattress turns, etc., while Engineering needs to visit plant equipment to insure these assets are in tip-top shape. HotSOS also has the ability to handle this scheduling. It has software wizards that take care of most of it and can even schedule work based on usage from the PMS. To handle this work, respondents can also use the PocketPC application to know what steps to follow to perform a deep clean or to PM an air handler.

How do you figure what work should be scheduled? Ask HotSOS. Because HotSOS is tracking all of your guest complaints and all of the problems noticed by your team, it is the best place to learn what needs to be checked periodically.

Whether one hotel or one thousand, there are reports that turn your logs into a wealth of knowledge. As has been mentioned, there are reports that can be pushed to your team at the property or corporate level to ensure that guest issues are resolved and that the team is working efficiently to preempt guest complaints. The only value of the data is its ability to help you improve for the future.

In the end, your guests are giving you the gift of a second chance. Make sure you are making the most of that opportunity.