

Overcoming the Top 10 Challenges Facing Sales & Marketing Professionals



By *HSMIAI's Hotel Director of Sales & Marketing Advisory Board*

The “Top Ten Challenges Facing Sales & Marketing Professionals” is a direct byproduct of HSMIAI’s annual membership survey. Hopefully you participated in it last Fall. If not, you’ll have the chance to participate in this year’s survey.

These challenges are facing thousands and thousands of sales and marketing professionals throughout the world. The information and resources provided here are intended to help you overcome those challenges and take full advantage of your membership in HSMIAI.

- 1. Current Economic Situation:** Our points of pain include the state of the global and national economies, cancelled group business due to low attendance, declining or flat demand, and the media’s attacks against business meetings. What can you do in the face of this enormous hurdle?
 - Do some very deep diving into your SIC codes – not everyone is suffering – e.g., petroleum, pharma, government, defense, religious, telecommunications.
 - Prioritize budgets, review expense lines every month, and adjust where needed. Make any tough decisions on sound metrics.
 - Evaluate your sales deployment. Are you aligned properly against the geographical and vertical segments that are booking through the downturn?
 - Articulate often what you need to be successful to your leadership, with data to support your need. If you need more marketing dollars, be prepared with your plan and what reasonable ROI can be expected.
 - Make a candid assessment of your resources and training needs.
 - Check in often with your contracted clients. Be proactive. Partner with them to help drive attendance. Most likely, your CVB has resources that can help promote their events.
 - Partner with your operations and accounting departments now more than ever!

HSMIAI Resources:

- [*eConnect Industry Update*](#) – *Bi-weekly newsletter providing headlines of key trends about your customers and the industry at-large in an easy to read format*
- [*Chapter Events*](#) – *Many are dedicated to the state of the economy in local markets*
- [*HSMIAI Marketing Review*](#) – *A high quality magazine featuring in-depth information and columns on best practices, web marketing, international affairs, and future forecasting*
- [*Recovery Resources in Tough Times*](#) – *A special eConnect section with continuing coverage of market conditions*

- 2. Increased Competition:** As you know, your challenges include maintaining and recapturing market share, competing with major brands, an increasing hotel supply, and more competition in all markets. Hotels are reaching down market across all categories, creating additional pressure on rate. If this issue is impacting you or your sales team, you can:
 - Really use research. Know your competition and their key accounts. Have each member of your team adopt a competitor hotel and develop a features benefit analysis of your business to theirs. Talk to your best customers to ensure you understand what the distinguishing characteristics are of your hotel versus that of your competition.
 - Develop a list of value-adds that can be used to leverage business in lieu of deterioration in rate.

- Master market and customer intelligence. Are you getting everything from your STAR report? How many STAR reports do you review? Do you know about the Smith Travel Databook (see HSMAI Resources below)?
- Evaluate your changing customer needs in light of your product and service offerings. Work with your operational team to make necessary adjustments or enhancements to serve new market segments.
- Connect with your TravelClick rep and be sure you are making the most of your Hotelligence Report.
- Explore www.marketleap.com. Type in your competition's URL and see where they are linked. Analyze your own links against the competitive set and use Internet marketing best practices to improve your exposure.

HSMAI Resources:

- [Webinars & Podcasts](#) – Tap into these timely resources addressing hot trends, best practices, and strategic insights across all areas of hospitality sales and marketing.
- [Marketing Plan Databook](#) – Available through a partnership with Smith Travel Research, secure a significant HSMAI member discount on your customized copy which includes your specific competitive set's historical information, outlook, and key demographics on demand generators in your market.
- [eConnect](#) – From the [HSMAI Foundation](#), utilize its RSS feeds to get the business information you need pushed to you daily.
- [Conferences and Workshops](#) – In 2010 HSMAI will have a number of forums to learn, discuss, and debate these issues, including the [Resort Conference](#) and the [Revenue Management & Internet Marketing Strategy Conference](#). Be there and/or read the recaps of each of these events.

3. Finding & Qualifying Business: We're all working hard developing new contacts and new business, finding qualified leads, increasing customer databases, and booking new business. Some ideas to help you make your numbers include:

- Really leverage the Internet. Search for potential customers using key search terms, rates you desire, groups you desire, etc.
- Look for additional opportunities to be involved in your local market. Relationships at a local level are critical to help leverage business across all segments and geographical sources.
- Talk to your existing customers and look for additional opportunities within their organizations.
- Select your tradeshows wisely, set pre-show objectives, and agree to success metrics. Always know your ROI and be prepared to defend it!
- Take care of your best customers. Grow their total business mix. It is all about service in tough times!
- Create a tight communications team across all sales outlets. Build your internal partnerships from banquet captains, front desk, etc. Flawless execution of meetings and events is critical.
- Utilize technology (like web-based turnkey CRM solutions) to increase length of stay and drive ancillary revenues.

HSMAI Resources:

- [HSMAI's Affordable Meetings®](#) – In case you didn't know it, HSMAI is the largest operator of meetings industry trade shows. In 2010 we'll have 3 Affordable Meetings® events. All are about lead generation for you, our members.
- [Chapter Events](#) – Many chapters have customer events. Some are networking and some even have their own trade shows.
- [eConnect](#) – From the [HSMAI Foundation](#), utilize its Business Journal RSS feeds to get the specific market business information you need in over 35 key markets.
- [HSMAI University Webinars](#) – Attend the prospecting and sales performance programs that are offered quarterly. Host your entire staff for a program...all you need is an LCD, computer and high speed Internet.

- 4. Time Poverty:** It is difficult to find time for research, selling, or lead follow-up in the midst of all the administrative work we're all required to do. It's been said that those with the least amount of "time" do the most work. You just have to manage and prioritize your time.
- Complete a detailed analysis of how you spend your day and determine what time wasters are consuming your valuable time. Then ditch them!
 - Start every day by reviewing what is on your plate. Review your traces, prioritize them and purge any "dead" autotraces. Schedule time on your calendar to take care of projects with looming deadlines.
 - Implement a "buddy" system with a peer in your office, and take one or two hours per day where they can cover your phones and you can focus on new business development.
 - Force yourself to set aside at least an hour a week to recharge your batteries. Let those 4-5 hours per month be what you "invest" in reading, surfing, or benefiting from the myriad of resources HSMAI puts at your fingertips.
 - Don't reinvent the wheel. Use others' best practices and know where to find them.
 - Use your technology! Stop learning as you go on Outlook, your PDA or smartphone! Slow down enough to watch an online video or go to an educational program to learn the real shortcuts. An investment of time today could save you lots of time later.
 - Utilize the "Rules" feature in Outlook to redirect non-urgent emails. For example, put everything you're cc'd on into a "read later" folder and wait until the end of the day to catch up.
 - Close your door and focus. Share your calendar but put "personal work time" slots in every day.
 - Develop a culture of respect to manage efficiency. Ask everyone to minimize interruptions by bundling and holding questions or feedback for set times each day.
 - Know your partners' technologies to understand if you can utilize them to outsource or save time!
 - Outsource a project or a service...maybe even to your local college or university.

HSMAI Resources:

- [*HDOSM Toolbox*](#) – A one-stop virtual warehouse of best practices, templates, and other resources for marketing planning, training, advertising, public relations, brand management, resource allocation, employee management, annual budgeting, and more
- [*HSMAI Adrian Awards Winners' Gallery*](#) – Allows you complete access to the "best of the best" practices in travel marketing advertising, public relations and web marketing
- [*Resort Marketing Best Practices*](#) – Provides up-to-date information on current best practices and future trends that gives insights into marketing techniques used successfully by others
- [*Productivity Workshops at Affordable Meetings®*](#) – Provides free training for attending exhibitors
- [*Sales & Marketing Faculty Special Interest Group*](#) – Your connection to local college students who are available for internships, research, and special projects

- 5. Building Awareness:** The competition for our customers' attention is fierce, so creating visibility, positioning and differentiating our products, and avoiding commoditization are increasingly important. To stand out from the crowd:
- Conduct a comprehensive analysis of your features and benefits.
 - Sell professionalism & creativity – make your business jump off a client's spreadsheet!
 - Be sure to always respect your client's time – they will remember you for it! Don't leave lengthy voice mail messages and keep emails to one or two lines. Always ask your customer, "Is now a good time?" when calling to discuss any new business opportunity.

HSMAI Resources:

- [*HSMAI Adrian Awards Winners' Gallery*](#) – Learn from case studies on how the best in the business use traditional advertising channels, public relations strategies, and web marketing to build awareness. See what proven success stories look like!

- [HSMAI University Webinars](#) – Review the calendar of programs quarterly and plan to attend a session that supports differentiation. Member pricing per portal is only \$99.

6. Recruiting, Motivating, and Retaining Good Staff: Our teams can make us or break us and success so often hinges on getting the right people on the right bus at the right time. So how do you go about recruiting, training and retaining the best possible employees?

- Hire slow – fire fast! If someone isn't working out, don't prolong the inevitable. It will only drag high performers down.
- Implement personality profile tools when hiring.
- Do a simple survey with your team...Why did they join? Why do they stay? Why would they leave? Focus on those answers!
- Understand what motivates each member of your team and create customized incentive plans. Not everyone is motivated by cash.
- Find a good training resource and spend the money!
- Sales and marketing employees who are properly trained and motivated can be loyal and productive employees for a long time. Through your involvement in HSMAI, send your team members to local and regional HSMAI programs and events. It will greatly enhance your position as a supervisor who does the right thing because you care about people.

HSMAI Resources:

- [HSMAI University](#) – Providing education for sales and marketers of hospitality and travel, HSMAI University delivers a wide-ranging schedule of course offerings and learning experiences in public venue, private label and online formats.
- [Chapter Events](#) – A sampling of the education programs offered by HSMAI chapters includes: Reputation Management; Etiquette in Cyberspace; Prospecting for Sales in Today's World; When Revenue Management and Marketing Converge; and, Marketing on a Shoestring.
- [Career Center](#) – HSMAI is not a recruitment agency, but we do want to connect you to the right place. The HSMAI Career Center can lead you to the right solution for job posting, and resume posting and searching.
- [HSMAI's Managing Business Results Advanced Learning Program](#) – This 2 day advanced sales and business acumen simulation training is held in partnership with Johnson & Wales University in Denver, Colorado, and coming in 2010 to J&W in Providence, Rhode Island, and Charlotte, North Carolina. A certificate course from HSMAI University, it offers professionals an opportunity to manage a hotel from the GM's chair and to fully grasp the total hotel picture. It provides skills and outlooks that will dramatically increase your effectiveness in your current position while at the same time preparing you for broader responsibilities.

7. Keeping Up with Technology and Industry Trends: Staying current on all of the issues, technologies, and trends in our industry feels like a full-time job in itself.

- Avoid duplication & specialize. Assign topics to staff to research and report on weekly (for example, key customer review websites, corporate travel trends, the latest social media tool, etc.).
- Use your partners as a resource to bring new ideas and information on trends to your business. Invite them to your staff meetings to share updates.
- Make the time to debrief from team members who have attended an educational program, tradeshow, etc. Extend their learnings to your whole team.
- Listen to your customers, using your Customer Advisory Board effectively and efficiently.

HSMAI Resources:

- [*Travel Internet Marketing Special Interest Group*](#) – Sponsors targeted learning opportunities for professionals interested in Internet marketing and e-commerce in the hospitality and travel industry
- [*White Papers*](#) – Available to help increase your awareness and understanding of emerging issues, opportunities and trends in the online world
- [*HSMAI Marketing Review, eConnect Industry Update, Chapter Events, and more!*](#)

8. Reaching Decision Makers in an Online World: Reaching decision makers seems harder than ever. With email and voicemail dominating, our communication is less personal and less able to truly connect us to our customers. Some tips and techniques to reach the right person include:

- Know that you can't build a relationship via email. You must have the relationship first!
- Get personal and be where your customers are! Host customer events, attend tradeshow, make face-to-face appointments. Go where you know they will be. Then, follow up!
- Understand and use the business development applications of LinkedIn, Facebook, and Twitter.
- Use your CRM technology to store your clients' information that helps you connect with them on a personal level (e.g., birthdays, children, hobbies, interests, friends).

HSMAI Resources:

- [*The Travel Marketer's Guide to Social Media and Social Networks*](#) – A landmark report about the hottest topic in hospitality sales and marketing today
- [*Social Media Webinar Archives*](#) – Learning tools you can watch with your whole team addressing a range of issues from "Marketing to Groups Online" to "Are you LinkedIn or Left Out?" to "Social Media Metrics"
- [*HSMAI's Affordable Meetings®*](#) – Where more than 5000 group customers go each year for educational programs and vendor identification

9. Defending Budgets, Sales Efforts, and Marketing Spend: Proving the Return on Investment for your initiatives, and being able to articulate your ideas and results is often a challenge. Preparation, preparation, preparation is the key to success.

- Hone your presentation skills, and those of your team.
- Understand the views of your top leaders and owners so that you know where they are coming from and can address their chief concerns in a way they can relate to.
- Get the lingo down and know the meaning behind CapEx, NSO, EIBTA, and all of the other terms important to your GM, asset manager, owners, etc.

HSMAI Resources:

- [*Managing Business Results Advanced Learning Program*](#) – Get the skills and outlooks you need to increase your current effectiveness and prepare for broader responsibilities.
- [*Professional Network*](#) – Networking and exchanging ideas with your peers is how some of the best ideas are captured and strategic partnerships are formed. Connect through [*Special Interest Groups, local chapters, and HSMAI's LinkedIn Group.*](#)

10. Building Stronger Internal Partnerships: Increasingly the lines are blurring in companies throughout the hospitality industry between the disciplines of sales, marketing, revenue management, CRM, and distribution. Build partnerships with all of these parties so you all succeed.

- Understand how these disciplines are evolving and how leading companies are managing their convergence. By working closely together, these teams can deliver tactical promotions that provide

consumers with relevant offers in real-time and drive incremental revenue to hotels when they need it most.

- Establish cross-training and cross-job “walk in my shoes” days to better understand each others’ roles and perspectives.

HSMAI Resources:

- *[Defining Revenue Management: Top Line to Bottom Line](#) – This report is a practitioner-friendly publication that addresses the fundamentals of revenue management for a broad audience of hospitality professionals. With comprehensive content that is both readable and actionable, it delivers tools and information for revenue management education, incorporating expert advice, case studies, and practical checklists for implementing successful revenue management strategies at the property level.*
- *[Revenue Management Special Interest Group](#) and [Travel Internet Marketing Special Interest Group](#) – Join for education, best practices exchange, thought leadership resources and networking access.*
- *[HSMAI Chapter Events](#) – Many chapters host quarterly programs focusing on the discipline of Revenue Management. Invite your revenue manager to be your guest at the next program and share ideas to improve your business results.*

About the HSMAI Hotel Director of Sales & Marketing (HDOSM) Advisory Board

The HDOSM Advisory Board is responsible for providing leadership for the HSMAI’s [HDOSM Special Interest Group](#) (SIG). Founded in 2005, the HDOSM SIG provides information, leadership development, and a variety of other resources specifically relevant to hotel directors of sales and marketing, to sales staff who aspire to one day be directors of sales and marketing, and to other industry professionals interested in developments within hotel sales. This is accomplished this through a wide range of information sharing, networking and educational opportunities.

- **Chair:** Heather Allison-Smith, Director of Sales and Marketing, The Ritz-Carlton, St. Louis
- **Vice-Chair:** Ron Loman, Director of Field Sales, Crestline Hotels & Resorts, Inc.
- **Immediate Past Chair:** Mark D. Thompson, Vice President of Marketing, Irving Texas CVB
- Bart Berkey, Director of Talent Acquisition-Sales & Marketing, Ritz-Carlton Hotels
- Susan Cecere, CHME, Regional Director, Sales & Marketing, Carlson Hotels Worldwide
- John Hawley, Director of Client and Industry Relations, Dana Communications
- Linda Hwong, Area Account Executive, Marriott International
- Anne Kane, Director of Sales & Marketing, The Iroquois New York
- Richard Keating, Executive Director of Hotel Sales & Catering, Borgata Hotel Casino & Spa
- Laurie Meacham, CMP, Director of National Sales, The Broadmoor Hotel
- Lynn Mucciano, Corporate Director of Sales & Marketing - Hospitality Division, Turnberry Associates
- Jean Spaulding, Senior Vice President, Market Analysis & Business Development, Noble Investment Group
- Cheryl Street, Director of Sales & Marketing, Hampton Inn & Suites - Surprise, Arizona
- Mark White, Director of Sales, Wintergreen Resort