

## Need PR and Marketing Help? Ask Away!

By Jennifer Rodrigues, TravelInk'd

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**Q:** I'm looking to do some marketing and advertising for my property but I'm unsure of what my target audience would be. My property is a three-star hotel and I know the types of people that normally stay at my hotel, but my question is this: do I only market to this segment of people or should I branch out and try to bring in other clientele?

**A:** Choosing a target audience is a very important first step for any marketing or advertising campaign. Without one, you decrease your overall results because your messages aren't being received by those who are most likely to buy your product - the room. So in response to your question, my recommendation would be to do the following:

Your target audience is indeed the type(s) of people who stay at your hotel. By targeting these particular segments, you will get the best ROI for your marketing dollar as delivery of targeted and relevant messages will consistently lead to the best possibility of a sale.

But that doesn't mean that you should forget about everyone else. A small percentage of your marketing or advertising budget can go toward marketing to a new segment of consumers. So in your case, as a three-star property, you should go after those people who typically frequent one and two-star hotels as a secondary target market.

Why did I choose the one and two-star market, rather than the four or five-star market? The amenities and service that is provided at a three-star versus a five-star property are much different and so too are the expectations of a guest who chooses to stay at these properties. Most likely, a guest who chooses a four or five-star property would not be interested in staying at your property (because it may not offer the luxury/amenities to which they are accustomed). On the other hand, if you incentivize one and two-star customers properly and communicate the right messages, they will definitely be interested in staying at your property.

The one and two-star market is all about value. If your marketing messaging is communicating value, low price as well as the improved experience/amenities, then your property will become much more attractive to that new market segment and the chance of them choosing your property over a one or two-star property increases. Just keep in mind that to close the sale, you may need to offer this market segment a deal or a discount, as cost-savings really are the driving force behind this market's purchasing decision.

**Q:** I'm looking to hire an agency to help me out with my PR. Any advice on how to pick the right company, how much I should be looking to spend, etc.? **A:** I liken finding the right PR agency to finding the right husband (or wife). It can take a lot of searching through the duds until you find the right one, but when you do, you'll know it. First some selection guidelines to make your search easier...

PR agencies should come into a project with a new organization with an open and curious mind. They have to be willing to do research on your market, your target audience, your competitors and, if they are worth the price, they will have strategies and ideas that will help you to stand out from the rest.

Look for someone who is interested in what you do. When speaking with them, if they don't ask a lot of thoughtful questions about your organization, then keep looking. They must have a curiosity about your organizations, its successes, its goals, etc. so that they can do their job properly.

Look for someone who has experience working with hotels and existing contacts with the member of the media that you want to reach. If they have never heard of ehotelier and they don't know what ADR or GOPPAR is, then they aren't the agency for you. By looking only for agencies with experience in your industry, you will decrease the amount of learning curve necessary for the PR agency to get started on delivering results - i.e. media placements!



Work with someone that you like. It seems obvious but it will make the whole process work that much better if you like and respect the person and agency that you are working with.

Depending on the type of agency that you are looking to work with - small, boutique agency or mammoth, corporate agency - you will find that the prices for services can be at both ends of the spectrum. Here are a few key points to remember when it comes to pricing:

- You really do get what you pay for. If you find someone who is willing to do the same amount of work for half the price as another agency, be very wary as to the quality of their work and experience. Ask for references of previous or current customers in your industry to make sure that they can really deliver what they are promising (at that low price).
- That doesn't mean that bigger (more expensive) agencies are always best. Unless you are a huge chain - i.e. Holiday Inn, The W, Ritz Carlton - you can get amazing and often more personal results from a boutique PR firm. The advantage of a huge corporate chain is the different levels of hierarchy and the size of the team, which is completely unnecessary (both in scope and price) for the average hotel or chain.
- In general, the more services that you would like to have and the more geographical area that you are trying to reach, the higher the price.
- A good PR agency will do their best to work within the parameters of your budget.
- The two most common ways of paying for a PR agency are:
  - Retainer - This is the most common payment arrangement with PR agencies. A retainer fee is a set monthly retainer fee that is paid by the client to the agency for a set number of hours and a set scope of work. This is typically the most cost-effective way for a company to get guaranteed amount of work undertaken on their behalf over a longer period of time (typical contract length is one year).
  - Project Fee - This is better if you need short -term PR help, like for one event or a limited-time campaign (although keep in mind that your best PR results happen over a longer period of time - six months to a year). The fee for the project is determined based on the number of hours that it will take the agency to complete the entire project from start to finish. That number of hours is then multiplied by the company's hourly rate, and voila, your project fee. This is typically a much more costly way to work with a PR agency because with a retainer, most companies will offer a much-discounted hourly rate, whereas the project fee's hourly rate is as high as possible.

Did this information help you? If you have other questions, I'd love to hear from you - please don't be shy! Send an email to [jl@travelinkd.com](mailto:jl@travelinkd.com). And don't forget to check back twice a month for more PR and Marketing Q&As.

#### About Jennifer Rodrigues

Jennifer Rodrigues, Visibility Specialist with ThinkInk and TravelInk'd, is a seasoned public relations professional with a passion for the hospitality industry, which is expressed in her role at ThinkInk's travel division, TravelInk'd. At TravelInk'd, she is responsible for developing cost-effective and creative public relations and marketing strategies for clients in the travel and tourism, airline, lodging, cruise and meeting/event sectors. For more information on TravelInk'd, please visit [www.travelinkd.com](http://www.travelinkd.com) or contact Jennifer at [jl@travelinkd.com](mailto:jl@travelinkd.com).

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