

Hotel Security: Navigating Concerns and Identifying Solutions

Business and recreational travelers demand safe and secure hotel accommodations and responsive and friendly customer service. How can hoteliers ensure that their property provides as secure an environment as possible, while maintaining friendly customer service?

As Warren Buffet said, “it takes 20 years to build a reputation and five minutes to ruin it. If you think about that, you’ll do things differently.” A single act of crime on your property could diminish your brand. Hotels need to partner with an experienced physical security provider, and ensure that the entire staff understands the need to keep security top of mind - always. Savvy hoteliers should consider the following solutions when looking to improve their property’s security:

Maintain Security Minded Customer Service

Front desk staff and valets are trained to embody a customer first, customer service model. While maintaining friendly, responsive interactions with customers is crucial, it is also important to vigilantly follow all security protocols. What happens when a nicely dressed man asks the valet for his car or stored bags? As a matter of course, does the valet validate the request against identification, room card or ticket, or do they take the man at his word that that the Gucci luggage and Mercedes Benz are indeed his own? Does the front desk require identification when providing replacement access cards to those who have misplaced or lost their cards?

Key Card Access Review

With a few pieces of hardware and minor programming, it is possible for a criminal to gain undetectable entree to millions of key card protected hotel rooms. At a security conference, a hacker presented the vulnerabilities he discovered in hotel room locks by a major manufacturer whose devices are installed in about seven million hotel rooms internationally. The manufacturer answered this security breach and is working with customers to repair these faulty mechanisms with hardware retooling. Hotels need to ensure that their key card access systems are not vulnerable to hacking or unlawful access.

Hoteliers should remind all guests of the security safeguards they offer and remind guests to use their lock bars and chains and dead bolts when retiring for the evening. Room safes or securing valuables at the front desk should also be recommended if available.

Establish Evergreen Background Screening Protocol

While the hotel industry is ahead of the curve on ensuring that applicants complete comprehensive background screening, not all hoteliers are as vigilant when reviewing the processes of their contract partners such as landscaping and security. In addition, background screening should be an evergreen process. This is an important element of an ongoing commitment to safety and security. Re-screening employees annually can help hoteliers maintain the high level of quality staff they desire.

Control After Hours Access

For maximum safety, posting security personnel at front entrance and other access points is vital. Security personnel are able to report suspicious activity, conduct property tours and protect guests and guest information from outsiders. This effort shouldn’t end when the sun goes down and foot traffic in the lobby slows. An around-the-clock security presence is a strong deterrent to unwanted activity and a clear signal to guests that your property is secure. Also ensure that your up-to-date closed circuit system is tracking all of the hotel’s public areas, including the parking lot, gym, restaurants, loading dock, etc.

Assess Location and Local Crime Statistics

All hotels are not created equal in terms of area crime statistics. A hotel in a rural community will have a very different crime profile than one in an urban market. CAP Index is recognized as the authoritative leader in quantifying the overall likelihood of crime or loss affecting a location's safety, operational goals, or profitability. This knowledge is power and can lay the groundwork for your hotel's safety and security plan.

Security Officers that Welcome *and* Protect

Hotels must foster an inviting atmosphere for guests while ensuring safety and security. Presenting security personnel in a customer service role with officers dressed in upscale business clothing rather than traditional police or military style uniform, makes for a more accessible presence. This careful balance of customer service and security requires experience, specialized training and supervision. When your guests feel that they are both welcome and watched-over, they will feel more comfortable.

Ensuring that the right type of person occupies this customer-centric security role is also important. It is important to identify candidates through selective recruiting resources like hospitality and concierge associations and conduct extensive interviewing to ensure they possess a high aptitude for customer interaction.

Bolster Public/Private Initiatives

Establishing public-private programs that further police and security cooperation in the protection of people and property helps to enhance safety and security. Police officers dedicate a significant amount of time to public nuisance and lifestyle assistance issues such as responding to noise complaints, administering first aid and addressing public drunkenness. When private security works in partnership with law enforcement to respond to these issues, police officers have more time to focus on solving crimes and enforcing the law. You also want police to be familiar with your location and understand your commitment to maintaining a safe and secure environment, both on property and in the surrounding community. Your security team can help bridge that gap.

The keys to success are the hiring of high quality security professionals who have developed quality relationships between all public and private groups - whether or not formal "partnerships" exist. Private security officers can make a significant impact on safety and security as they can be dedicated to specific posts or areas. This constant presence serves as a deterrent to crime, but also as a resource to local law enforcement and the community.

Maintain Emergency Response Plan and Team

The collaboration between law enforcement and private security needs to extend beyond on-the-spot information sharing. Proactive security efforts and emergency planning initiatives should also involve everyone with a vested interest in safety and security. As hotels proactively implement prevention and response plans for everything from workplace violence to natural disasters, security professionals are quick to recommend the involvement of local law enforcement agencies and first responders. Existing plans should be reviewed annually, and evacuation and response drills, as well as other training sessions should include those external groups as well. Involving everyone in planning and training will allow plans to be as situational as possible, and also help ensure a more efficient implementation if the worst case scenario does occur.

Part of emergency response and event management plans require the ability to ramp up staff at a moment's notice. Ensuring that your security team is ready and available when you need them can pay enormous dividends in minimizing the real world impact of a crisis to your brand, staff and guests.

Commitment to Ongoing Training

Security professionals require continual quality training if they are to be as responsive and knowledgeable as possible. Given that security personnel are placed in the front line of an hotelier's security force, it is vital that they have all the latest tools needed to handle emergency and crisis situations. Security professionals should be able to access training in a way that benefits their lifestyle whether it is online or classroom training.

Hotels are held to extraordinarily high standards with regard to safety and security. It is critically important that all hotel staff be trained on appropriate security procedures for all high traffic areas including the lobby, front desk, baggage storage area, guest entry points, valet, and parking lot and receiving dock areas. The open environment fostered by hotels is welcoming to guests and visitors but, unfortunately, also creates vulnerabilities that must be addressed. Ensuring that all public spaces are continually monitored by staff and security personnel is crucial in maintaining a hospitable environment.