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The MAAC Group Offers Specialized Services  
For Boutique Destinations and Hotels

## Creating a Strategic Sales Plan Five Easy Steps

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In nearly every work environment I have been in, selling has been an integral part of the business. After all, one of my bosses once had a poster in his office that said, "If no one sells, nothing happens." What I always found amusing was how often the approach was not thought through or strategically considered. Too often I came into a canned automatic approach, with sales representatives covering different territories, reporting to a Director based in either NY or Miami, with weekly/monthly stats to review, etc.

For smaller destinations and properties, this approach may not work because (a) they don't have the resources to apply and (b) they may not have the technology to review data properly. Here are five easy steps to apply to your sales approach that do not take a lot of resources.

### **1. Geography - Consider the Market.**

Take a look at the flights that come and go to your destination. See if you can get a report of where the business is generally coming from, whether that is by looking through your database using data such as zip code or area code or by looking elsewhere for reports. Many smaller properties and destinations equally balance their approach for Northeast, Southeast, Mid-Atlantic, Mid West and West Coast. But if you know that 80% of the flights come from the Northeast, then 80% of your budget should be spent there. If the potential customer has to take three flights to get to you, your conversion in that territory will be far less than somewhere else. Before making any changes to your plan, make sure the differences in results are because of airlift or some other factor out of your control.

### **2. Data – Consider the Performance.**

No matter if you are a hotelier or a destination, there is no doubt you have access to some data that is telling you where your guests are coming from. Have you seen any trends? Are more people arriving from the Southeast? If so, is this because of a flight from Miami that has been added or a one-time large group that has been booked? Make sure whatever plan you put in place considers not only what is performing, but what the trends are telling you. One company I worked for was communicating with all their travel agents equally, requiring their reps to call on a certain number of agents per week and month. Once I reviewed the data, we learned that 20% of those agents were actually giving us meaningful business and 20% had not booked at all. The remaining 60% would do one booking here or there sporadically. Thus, we changed the

program so the top 20% got more attention from our sales reps (maybe we can sell more to existing loyal customers?), the mid-tier customer was converted to a “virtual relationship” which included monthly phone calls to advise of specials and inquire if they needed help on inquiries and bookings. The lowest tier became an “email only” relationship. Since email was the most effective marketing tool at the time, we figured if they had any potential to become a customer, then ... (1) their curiosity would be piqued by the email, (2) they would book, and (3) then move up to the mid-tier, earning a relationship with someone in the office.

**3. Consider the Partners:** For hotels and destinations this list includes entities such as the tourism board, the hotel and tourism association, local ground operators, wholesalers, tour operators, travel agents, associations and consortia, and (of course) each other. Make sure you have explored all options with your travel partners. Something as simple as providing brochures to all the representatives that do sales calls for your destination across the country could help significantly. Even better, if you can spend some time training and/or hosting them, they will eventually become your natural advocate. One way to do this is to offer free stays to support promotions or offer a free night directly to your travel partner. You can also train them in person on site, at their location or even virtually. Your goal is to keep your product (or service) top of mind with as many of your partners/resources, as possible. But make sure you select the right partners if you expect results. When I was hired as a VP for a European car rental company, I noticed one of their partners was a company that exclusively sold the Caribbean. While people traveling from the northeast is a good “lead”, I’m not sure if they booked a trip to Mexico that they will pay attention to an offer about a car rental in Europe when they get their documents in the mail. It was a deal put in place by my predecessor. I immediately canceled it, most because (not surprisingly) after more than a year and several thousand dollars later, the program had not sold one rental. Conversely, we have also seen millions of dollars in bookings simply by training the right people to do the selling for us.

**4. Consider the Niches:** You can’t be all things to all people, especially if you are a small property with less than 100 units. So many properties try to appeal to families, honeymooners, and group travel such as corporate retreats. Generally my advice here is to “pick one” and if I get a lot of push back on that, I allow the sales plan to target two niches, if necessary. Selecting which ones is a challenge, but most entities have the information to do it. First you want to figure out who is the most profitable customer. Is it the yachter who stays only a night or two but consumes a lot of F&B? For a full service property this works, but for a condo (that doesn’t have a restaurant) this doesn’t. How about the behavior of the families who stay with you? Do they trash the place and expect a discount, then leave your property for all their activities and meals? Or do they come in small groups with extended family, increasing the size of the booking and making it more likely they will also consume other services you offer?

**5. Plan, plan, plan:** Now it’s time to write up a plan. Where are you focusing your efforts and when? For example, we don’t do much promoting to the southeast in winter, but we do so in summer because people in the northeast are not likely to spend thousands on a vacation in the Caribbean during the 8 weeks of nice weather. Which niches are you targeting and why? Once you have a first draft of the plan, ensure you have shown it to all relevant people. Even the young woman who only answers your phones will appreciate asking her thoughts. And even though she may not be an owner or manager, you would be surprised with what kind of ideas she may have. Make sure your plan is strategic, has goals and targets, and is reviewed every quarter against expectations.

What are you waiting for? It’s the New Year, let’s get going and put a new sales plan in place.

*About the Author: Melanie Alexander is the founder and owner of The MAAC Group, a travel and hospitality marketing and sales consulting firm. In addition to over twenty years in the travel industry, Melanie has over ten years experience teaching travel and marketing related subjects, spending most of that time at New York University. She has appeared on the cover of Travel Agent Magazine, been named one of the "Most Powerful Women in Travel," and has been a judge for the Hospitality Sales and Marketing Association International (HSMAI) Adrian Awards Competition. Her specialty is helping boutique hotels and destinations acquire growth – regardless of how the market may be performing – on small budgets. Her most recent accomplishment is helping a 30-unit property in Grand Cayman grow room nights by 50%, following two previous years of solid growth.*