For the past 20 years Glasgow-based specialist public relations consultancy

Hotel PR has promoted hotels, restaurants and serviced apartments of all sizes from the Highlands to the Cotswolds.

Here, Managing Director Scott Thornton gives his advice on communicating with guests to prepare for the upturn.

***“Fail to prepare and prepare to fail.”***

This basic truth is particularly appropriate when hotels and restaurants are thinking of re-opening, even on a limited basis, as pandemic restrictions ease.

When the hospitality industry gets going again owners and managers can make sure their property is at the front of the queue to take advantage of a surge in pent-up demand for UK holidays and eating out.

**Communication with customers - past and prospective - has never been more crucial.**

Hotels and restaurants should be making preparations not only for re-opening but sharing the measures they are taking to ensure guests’ health and safety. The same applies to guest houses, B&Bs and serviced apartments.

As a renowned political strategist put it a few years ago when advising a Prime Minister on the timing of an election campaign: *“You do not fatten a pig on market day.”*

Here are 5 things you might like to do to start getting your income stream flowing again:

1. **Communicate** **well during lockdown**

While you’re closed make sure your voicemail message is friendly and reassuring. Show interest in the caller. Tell them you can’t wait to serve them. If Reception is staffed or the number diverts to a mobile make sure the call is answered promptly. That first or renewed contact can be key. Follow up enquiries swiftly.

If you have an e-newsletter use it to give updates. Review your Social Media channels regularly.

**2. Show you’re not just going to open but will be SAFE**

Many people will be naturally fearful of travelling and staying in different surroundings. Confidence in your hygiene and other environmental standards will be vital.

Explain the work you’ve been doing during lockdown to ensure their safety when you open your doors again. You may have been using these unexpectedly quiet months to improve infrastructure and staff training. Talk about it.

**3. Update and if necessary improve your Website and on-line booking systems**

The focus should be on guest safety post-lockdown but stress that you and your staff will be going many extra miles to look after guests in the ‘new normality’ and are determined to give them a pleasant experience they have lacked for too long.

Stay in touch with those who have cancelled. Is your online booking system robust?

**4. Review target markets and update your PR plan**

Your target markets may have changed because of the pandemic. Prioritise the most appropriate ones likely to give you the best return.

Work out the best ways of communicating key messages to relevant sectors, using mainstream press, other publications which specialise in covering them, and Social Media. Most print publications have online versions.

Be honest. Do not make promises you can’t deliver.

Writers are desperate to re-start reviewing hotels and restaurants. Invite them! Your best way of achieving this is probably to use a specialist PR agency which already has the contacts. When these writers visit, look after them well. They are your friends.

Beware of imposters, including bloggers, looking for a free stay. Ask them where their article will appear and if necessary check with their editor.

Newspapers, magazines, Websites and bloggers are already running articles on ‘where to go when this is all over.’ You want to be included.

Create and issuepress releases on newsworthy developments. Sell in features about you, your property and staff. Your in-house PR person or specialist agency (which may be more astute because it can better see the wood for the trees) should know what these are.

Don’t forget the locals. Hotels are often a community hub. Use print, online and social media to communicate with them.

Communicate with transport and travel operators, outside activities’ organisers, and cultural and sports organisations so they can tell their own users about you.

Industry awards have been postponed, not cancelled. Check their new timetables to assess more opportunities for positive publicity.

**5. Give reasons why guests should come to you and not your competitors**

Separate yourself from the herd.

Each hotel, serviced apartment and restaurant has Unique Selling Points. Cash in on them!

For more advice call Scott on 0141 552 4800 or email info@hotelpr.co.uk