

HOW TO: CHOOSE A BUSINESS HOTEL

Hotel relationships can mean better rates, add-ons

BY DIANA BARR

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Whether your organization's employees travel only a few times a year or comprise seasoned "road warriors," you'll want a business hotel that meets your needs and offers the best value.

If you travel to a variety of cities, rather than to the same branch offices, look for hotels that offer a nationwide discount, suggested Gerri Lashley, executive assistant and manager of business administration for marketing agency Switch. "We don't have a lot of long-term stays," she said. "We travel internationally to where the project or event is happening."

When considering hotels, first look at pricing, "which is usually determined by loyalty to that brand," Lashley said. Negotiate with the business hotel for amenities that are meaningful to your travelers. "They may roll in late and have to leave early, so having breakfast included might be important."

Consider if there's an advantage to the company by booking a certain hotel, such as loyalty points. "It's always about the bottom line," Lashley said. Also for that reason, take into account the customer service you receive from a hotel. "I wear many hats, and I don't want to spend a lot of time on the phone."

John Bettag, director of corporate meeting sales for the St. Louis Convention & Visitors Commission, said you can save time looking for a hotel for a business meeting by using tools available on the Internet, such as the CVC site www.explorestlouis.com for local meetings.

Location is the No. 1 driver of hotel choice, Bettag said, whether that's close to customers or restaurants and nightlife where you'll entertain them. Consider the distance to the airport or availability of a complementary shuttle.

Look for business hotels with the amenities "that make travel as seamless as

possible, or as comparable to back at your home base," he said, including reasonably priced or free Internet access or dining options. "It's the ease of getting there and getting up and running."

Kelly Christner, vice president of global business development/western U.S., **Atlas Travel International**, said, "If you know you can give a hotel a certain number of room nights a year, you will get a corporate rate." Employees who then book using an online booking tool or travel agency portal will get that discounted corporate rate.

Your company can negotiate for ancillary items, such as parking, free Internet or breakfast, or room upgrades. "It's a relationship based on mutual value," Christner said. "The hotel gets so many hundred room nights (a year), and the company gets a discount as well as value adds." Such amenities might save as much as \$50 a day, she said.

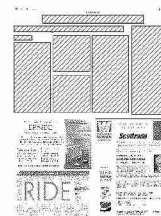
If your travel and entertainment spending is less than \$50,000 a year, Christner said, the Internet might offer the best rates. However, at higher dollar amounts, a travel agency that offers its own discounts might come in handy. "If you charge \$250 or \$300 an hour, you don't want to sit and play travel agent (for yourself) for three hours," she said.

LARGEST ST. LOUIS HOTELS

Ranked by total guest rooms

HOTEL	TOTAL GUEST ROOMS
Renaissance St. Louis Grand Hotel	1,083
Hyatt Regency St. Louis at the Arch	910
Millennium Hotel St. Louis	780
Hilton St. Louis at the Ballpark	675
St. Louis Airport Marriott	601

Source: Business Journal research, April 2010



ASK THE EXPERTS



**GERRI
LASHLEY**

*Executive assistant and
manager of business
administration, Switch*

- **LOOK** for national discounts
- **CONSIDER** customer service



**JOHN
BETTAG**

*Director of corporate meeting
sales, St. Louis Convention &
Visitors Commission*

- **USE** online tools
- **CHECK** location



**KELLY
CHRISTNER**

*Vice president of global business
development/western U.S., Atlas
Travel International*

- **NEGOTIATE** corporate rate
 - **ADD** amenities
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