

# Signature Press

## FRONT-END ALIGNMENT ISN'T JUST FOR CARS



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**By John Ely**  
*Hotel & Motel Management*

Last week, we conducted a test for a new client involving their reservations systems and the various mechanisms for logging client purchases. The test seemed simple enough. We were to call their reservations center as well as a selected number of locations and make reservations. For consistency's sake, we were to reserve the exact same products, for the same dates and same locations. Once we had accomplished the calls, we'd record our "experiences" with all of the outlets.

Our expectations, as well as the client's, were to experience different tones, dialects, and possibly different sequences of questions and inquiries by the various reservation agents depending on their locations. We did. However, the differences didn't stop there. We also received a range of offers, pricing and availability on the exact same reservations. In some cases, we were even told we could not purchase that combination of products and were given no alternative but to end the call!

This presented a problem far beyond the "branded" experience we (and the client) were hoping to have. We had been told that some products weren't available, even though we knew they were, since we had access to the corporate inventory screens. Because some agents weren't aware of current promotions, we received a variety of prices. When agents are pricing the products differently, are not aware of certain promotions, and are not reading inventory screens correctly, there's no way to ensure a consistent customer experience. That can quickly and easily lead to customer dissatisfaction!

Some reservations centers are handling

a myriad of products from rooms and activities, to events and transportation. The more complex offerings you have and the more ways to access those reservations for the customer, the higher the probability for mistakes to occur. So, the best way to ensure everyone is rowing your ship in the same direction is to offer these agents some type of periodic calibration training.

Information technology folks have made our lives easier with automated systems for inventory and pricing, but sometimes it still comes down to human interaction with those systems to ensure the customer is going through the reservations process the way you've intended.

Upon further investigation with our client, we found that one key factor was inconsistent reservation system training programs at all locations, which led to many mistakes (on location and at the reservations center).

I propose starting with aligning all systems and agent training. Think your agents are all 100 percent aligned? So did my client!

Next, provide a weekly or daily bulletin from marketing outlining, in detail, all promotions. This gives everyone easy access to the basic information of all running promos.

Finally, hold daily huddles with all team members to ensure they are on board with the system, the promos and your brand. There are many products available to help you with alignment of your call/reservations/customer service centers, as well as those daily huddles.

The first experience a customer may have with your property is likely not at your front door. It's with your reservations systems. Let's be sure that front end is aligned!