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Property promotions: blizzard and snow edition

22 February 2010 8:26 AM
By Christine Blank
HotelNewsNow.com contributor

Getting stuck at home or in the airport during a blizzard is one of the worst feelings ... unless you can have some fun during the storm.

Several East Coast U.S. hoteliers decided to make things a little more fun for guests—and book empty rooms—during the latest round of blizzards.



The Dupont Hotel in Washington, D.C., set up an impromptu “snow bar” outside during the Official Dupont Circle Snowball Fight on 6 February in Dupont Circle. With a huge snowstorm hitting right before the event, the hotel’s executive chef thought up the idea of piling up the snow in front of the hotel in the form of a bar. Employees served specialty cocktails such as mulled wine from behind the snow bar during the weekend event.

“A lot of the restaurants and bars were closed around us, so a lot of people came to see us. The federal government was closed, a lot of people

were out, and we are right on the Circle so people could see the bar,” said Aaron Gillespie, director of sales and marketing for The Dupont,

Then, from the outside bar, many guests gravitated inside to eat and drink at the hotel’s bar.

Not only did the event increase bar revenue, but it also heightened awareness of the hotel in the area. “There was a positive reaction in the community. It allowed people who had not been in before to come in and enjoy themselves,” Gillespie said.

Word about the snow bar was spread by word of mouth and press release, and the hotel may set up the bar during future blizzards.

Meanwhile, New York-based **Morgans Hotel Group** tweeted discounts on its room rates to followers of its hotels in New York and Boston during February blizzards.

One tweet stated, “Flight Cancellations leave you stranded in NY? We love the snow, but feel your pain! Take 25% off rooms in NY 2night/tom!” The hotel company promoted the discounts on Twitter and Foursquare.com for a limited time from 2 February through 7 February and from 9 February through 14 February.

“We don’t have any results yet, but historically, when we have done Twitter promotions, they have been very successful,” said Jim Zito, VP of interactive marketing for Morgans. “You are hitting your followers at the right time, and the cost is virtually zero,” he added.



The Charles Hotel in Cambridge, Massachusetts, is taking the blizzard marketing idea a bit further. Since the beginning of January, the hotel has

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offered up to 25 percent off its room rate every time it snows in the city.

The Charles Hotel

"We thought it would be a neat, fun promotion. We are saying, 'Come get snowed in with us, enjoy the ice rink outside and have some hot chocolate,'" said Elizabeth Stefan, e-marketing manager for [The Charles Hotel](#).

The special snow rates vary based on the going rate that week, but they are ranging from US\$159 to US\$199 per night. Although guests have shown a lot of interest in the promotion, the snow rates have not produced a "huge amount of bookings," according to Stefan.

The Palace Hotel

San Francisco, California

Promotion: Golden Key/100 Year Anniversary

The Palace Hotel's 100-year anniversary promotions demonstrate the top ways to get media attention and revenue during a milestone anniversary.



Palace Hotel GM Clem Esmail and staff prepare to launch the hotel's "Golden Key" promotion.

To celebrate the re-opening of the historic property in 1909, when the hotel was rebuilt from the city's 1906 fire and earthquake, the property conducted a "Golden Key" campaign.

On 16 December 2009, local media gathered as The Palace GM Clem Esmail and staff released 13 balloons into the air. One of the balloons carried a gold key that opened Room 888, the hotel's presidential suite where U.S. President Warren G. Harding died in 1923. Whoever finds the balloon with the key receives a three-day stay in the room. So far, no one has turned in the key, according to Esmail.

"We got pretty good TV coverage. The balloons and the gala that night with 600 to 700 guests was the end of events that we had been doing throughout 2009," Esmail said. The gala featured food stations, music and a live radio broadcast of the event.

Throughout the year, [The Palace](#) bolstered its guestroom and food and beverage revenue from special 100-year anniversary campaigns. The property offered several one- and two-night packages with rates of between US\$129 and US\$189 per night, along with free parking.

Every week, the Palace served a different food that was on its menu in 1909, at the prices of the day. The hotel's 1909 Lunch, a weekly three-course menu featuring food from the day for US\$19.99, produced significant revenue for the property. "We have had over 5,000 people for the 1909 lunch, generating around US\$95,000 in revenue," Esmail said.

To capitalize on its 100-year history, The Palace also increased tours of the hotel through Cityguides walking tours of San Francisco. "We did that by having their guides tell people events that have occurred here. Their tours beefed up from one or two participants per tour to 40 or 50," Esmail said.

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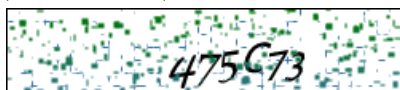
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