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Ms. Dooley

## Checklist to the Top: Leveraging Your QA Program for Guest Satisfaction

By [Shannon Dooley](#), Operations Manager - Quality Assurance Practice, LRA Worldwide

At some point in each of our hotel careers, we've been faced with the same nightmare: the inauspicious smile of a professionally dressed guest, followed by the polite handing over a business card and request to speak with the property General Manager. The guest seems too pleasant to be angry with their past night's stay, and for a fleeting moment you are downright puzzled by the request...and then you look at the business card and it hits you. It's audit time. There is rarely a source of greater anxiety for a property than the annual (or semi-annual) once-over by a

stranger who, while they may know your brand, doesn't know your property like you and your associates do. Call them what you like, from the friendly "assessment" to the harsher "audit," but no matter the name the experience is often one wrought with hand-wringing and flop sweat. The funny thing is that it really doesn't have to be such an agonizing ordeal.

Having been on both sides of the desk when it comes to this equation, my colleagues and I could regale you with plenty of stories of "good inspections gone bad." Associates quitting on the spot, management being walked-out midway through an inspection, a half-full house suddenly being sold out with nary a room to visit, and my personal favorite, the knowing wink and immediate presidential suite upgrade at check-in. You name the hotel inspector trick and chances are we have seen it or, perhaps during our years in operations, pulled it ourselves. In my years in the industry, most of which have been in the quality assurance (QA) world, I've noticed two things that properties that excel in inspections often share. First, they don't necessarily have the most experienced associates, but rather the most sincere. Second, they approach the inspection not with fear and trepidation, but confidence that their property will shine. So how do they do that...and how can your property do it too?

First and foremost: stop trying so hard. Please. I know it goes against common sense when so much can be riding on a good score, but I assure you this is for your own good as well as that of your property. In the interest of full disclosure, during my time behind the desk I was certainly guilty of trying to "catch" the inspector. Rather than focusing on our associates or our guests, my colleagues and I would comb our reservations trying to spot reservation patterns for potential auditors. The theory, in concept, is sound: if you know who the inspector is, then your staff will be able to provide an immaculate room, phenomenal service, and assure yourself of a top score. Unfortunately, this is rarely the outcome. One only needs to be reminded of the scene from Ocean's 13 where the true hotel inspector is pushed aside to make way for the phony inspector. When told that the other man is a VIP, the real inspector quips, "Who am I, a very unimportant person?" I'll save the summary for those who have yet to see the film, but it's a great example of what can happen when a property focuses its attention on just one guest assuming that it must be the inspector. Time and time again, spotting the inspector and focusing in on him or her can adversely impact your scores. In most instances, when associates know that they are interacting with an inspector they freeze up or, alternatively, fall all over themselves to provide "over the top" service that becomes not only disingenuous but appalling to nearby guests who are not receiving similar service. At LRA, our consultants are required to keep their experiences in confidence, and cannot "name names" to the general public. Paying guests do not have that same responsibility. What one inspector sees may last for a moment in time on paper, but what one guest experiences can last for a lifetime on TripAdvisor.

The second tip runs counterpoint to the first: try harder... with your associates and your guests. Not to do my colleagues or our competitors a disservice, but inspectors are at your property anywhere from once a year to once a month, providing just a "snapshot in time." We

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### OCTOBER: Hotel Conference Center Trends for 2013



## How to Capture More Group Business Online

By [Anil Punyapu](#), Vice President, Cvent

Over the past few decades, meeting and event planners' preferred methods of communication with venues have significantly evolved. From primarily placing phone calls in the 1980s to sending faxes in the 1990s and emails in the early 2000s, planners are pros at keeping up with the changing times. As a result, hoteliers have become master adapters when it comes to connecting with planners. However, the past few years in particular have brought, arguably, the most significant shift of them all: the move to online channels. Planners are now using these outlets to conduct preliminary research, compare venues and send electronic Requests for Proposals (eRFPs), fundamentally changing the way the meetings industry conducts business. To keep their venues top-of-mind among planners looking to book a venue, hoteliers must-yet again-adapt. [READ MORE](#)



## The Hotel Readiness Test: Mega Events and the Connected Guest

By [Jon Davis](#), Vice President, Business Development, Indoor Networks, ExteNet Systems Inc.

This year's Super Bowl, Olympics and political conventions—all mega events in their own right, have put the spotlight on whether hotels in the host cities were ready to meet the technology needs of the onslaught of tens of thousands of "connected guests". While these events were a boon for those hotels that reaped the business, they also provided a much

may never come back due to scheduling or contractual requirements. However, your associates are there daily, and in some cases so are your best guests. Focus your team members on providing outstanding service delivery day in and day out to your first time and repeat guests, and higher QA scores should follow. It's easier to do the right thing on a daily basis than stress about "putting on a show" when the inspector arrives.

For starters, ensure the right talent is in the right positions. Maybe your lackluster front desk agent who is a die-hard foodie would be better suited learning the ins and outs of food & beverage. Maybe you have an amazingly personable room attendant who could be an outstanding concierge. It's no great shock that people who have jobs that meet their interests are often happier and happier associates lead to a better guest experience. If the service experience is well-crafted and well-executed on a daily basis, it will come through during your inspection no matter when it takes place. While I know many feel that inspectors take great pleasure in pointing out things that are wrong, for the majority the exact opposite is true: recognizing and rewarding associates who provide "textbook" exceptional service not only makes the inspector's job easier, but more enjoyable.



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Third, get your house in order. Yes, while an inspection may be a "snapshot in time," that picture can be worth a thousand words speaking not only to the service experience, but the leadership (or lack thereof) at a property. While I can only pull from anecdotal experience, I have often found that those properties that are the most organized are the strongest overall performers in both service and product execution. This polished performance comes in part from a well-organized back of house where everything has a place. Clearly labeled shelving, bins, folders, and other organizational tools make it

easy for any employee to quite literally "grab and go" when it comes to assisting a guest or an inspector. As a very simple example, think of the nearly antiquated request to fax something from the front office. What looks better: an associate stumbling around unsure of where the fax cover sheets are, or an associate who knows exactly where these items are and returns both quickly and cheerfully to the guest? Oftentimes evaluations require review of documentation, specific amenities, and other one-off type items. Having these items updated, organized and ready makes your inspection go more smoothly and typically ensures that you receive all credit that you are due. An important sidenote: be proactive and do a monthly check against your property or brand standards to ensure that you not only have everything you need, but also that it is up to date with the latest evaluation checklist. On occasion, what was measured in one evaluation ends up being modified for the future, with minimal (and in some unfortunate situations, no) communication to the property. Stay on top of your brand program and you can stay ahead of the game.

Finally, shift your thought process on the QA experience from "beating" the inspection to "managing" the inspection. Just like no individual is perfect, neither is any property. Most likely, something will go wrong and a point (or two, or three) will be missed during an inspection. Good properties plan to lose points, they just attempt to manage where they lose them. There are certain issues that may be perennial challenges for the location, or simply they know that on any given day "something" will happen in a given department. By prioritizing what is most important for the guest (solid service experiences) and for success (guestroom security, for example, or perhaps a new signature program that is being scored heavily in the next inspection), these properties focus on what can have the greatest impact not only on the guest experience, but also on the property's score. Every point counts in an inspection; what properties fail to realize is that fixing small things can yield small point increases – and those increases can add up quickly to a better score. For example, rather than trying to overhaul your entire front desk after a lackluster inspection, focus on what areas of that score can be easily fixed.

As with anything in life, small changes can lead to big rewards both with your guests and with your QA scores.

Serving as an Operations Manager for LRA's Quality Assurance practice, Ms. Dooley specializes in LRA Worldwide's foodservice, airport, and gaming clients. During her time at LRA, she has spearheaded the development and implementation of customized, experience-driven evaluations for Hard Rock Hotels & Resorts, FLIK International, and the San Diego Zoo. Prior to joining LRA, Ms. Dooley worked with the Walt Disney Company as a Guest Service Manager. She is a graduate of Duke University and is currently pursuing her MBA at Villanova University. Ms. Dooley can be contacted at 215-449-0349 or [Shannon.Dooley@lraworldwide.com](mailto:Shannon.Dooley@lraworldwide.com) [Extended Bio...](#)

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needed readiness test that hotels around the country can benefit from. Now is the time to assess and determine: Is your current wireless infrastructure sufficient to accommodate changing guest needs and perhaps, the next mega event?

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## Collaboration and Customization: The Key to Conferences

By Tom Santora, Chief Marketing Officer / Senior VP Sales, Omni Hotels & Resorts

Omni Hotels & Resorts chief marketing officer and senior vice president of sales Tom Santora shares insights on the ever-expanding relationship between hoteliers and planners. As an hotelier with 25 years of experience, Santora's insights focus on culinary innovation, customization and tailored technology that meet the needs of clients for an overall attendee experience, reaching beyond the meeting room to make the difference for hotel conferences in 2013. [READ MORE](#)



## IACC Accreditation Adds Up to Value and Customer Satisfaction

By Dianne Pepe, Director of Group Sales, Millennium Broadway Hotel, New York

The International Association of Conference Centers has proven to be an important part of the Millennium Broadway Hotel New York's success in one of America's most competitive meetings market. Dianne Pepe, director of group sales, tells us why. With meeting planners, corporations and association executives increasingly savvy about spending tight budgets on meetings, it's the strong value that an IACC-accredited conference center can offer that Dianne tells us is the key and the Millennium Broadway Hotel New York just happens to be the only accredited hotel and conference center in New York City. [READ MORE](#)

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