

HOTEL ENTRANCE, LOBBY AND FRONT OFFICE

Front Office Layout and Equipment

Most front office functions are performed at the front desk. Since guests directly interact with front desk personnel, the front desk represents the hotel to the guest. When a guest enters the hotel, it is the entrance and thereafter the lobby, which is subjected to scrutiny. The main entrance must be identifiable and directly lead to reception area ie. Lobby of the hotel. Care should be taken that the main entrance area is able to accommodate the guests of the hotel who may come by a car or a taxi or many a times walk up the hotel, and also may reach by coach. As a general rule, the driveway in front of the lobby entrance should be at least 18 ft wide so as to allow at least two cars to pass easily. Sufficient height clearance to allow coaches loaded with luggage on top should also be given consideration. A minimum of 16 ft clearance from road should be allowed. To avoid the problem of carrying of luggage through steps, it is advisable to have separate luggage entrance in the form of a ramp starting from driveway to the main entrance. The ramp should not be very steep. The recommended inclination with road of the ramp for luggage trolleys and wheel chair is 1:10.

Lobby

- Lobby should be spacious but not wasteful.
- The natural flow of guests should be towards reception/information counter on his arrival in the hotel. Sufficient space should be provided in the lobby for short time keeping of luggage in the lobby before sending it to the room or to the car.
- Lobby of the hotel includes general circulation and waiting area which lead to check in, information and cashiers counter and also to desks such as concierge, bell desk, travel counters, elevators etc.

- The shopping arcade may be either in one part of the lobby or near the lobby. The various restaurants and other food and beverage outlets may also be reached through lobby.
- The reception desk is in the lobby and should be so located that it is in clear view of the guest entering the lobby of the hotel. Also the front office staff should be able to oversee the activities in the lobby, entrance, exits, elevators, shops etc.
- Lobby of a large hotel is also required to accommodate travel desk, G.R.office, the lobby managers desk, bank counter and public as well as house telephone booths.

Size of lobby depends upon the size and type of the hotel. Cocktail lounge can also be made in the lobby. Avoid pillars as far as possible as they obstruct the view and may create problem in the movement. Lobby in some hotel is used as a feature around which whole activity of the hotel takes place. It may form a part of an atrium extending the full height of the building and containing garden, landscapes, displays etc.

Access for physically challenged guest : Accessibility for physically challenged guests is an important consideration in the design of a hotel in general, but applies especially to the front office area. Generally a ramp is provided for wheel chairs. Door should be wide enough to let a wheel chair pass. The height of the reception counter is sometimes lowered to facilitate guest on wheel chairs. A toilet with special facilities is provided near the lobby for physically challenged guests.

Reception Counter

Various activities connected with guests such as arrival, information, departure, mail handling, luggage handling etc. are done from the reception counter which is situated in the lobby. The counter must be fully functional and operational and well planned. The following points are important:-

- **Size** : Basically size depends upon the size and systems used by the hotel. For a large hotel using automatic system, the size may be small while for a small hotel on Whitney rack system or manual system, the size may be comparatively big.
- **Shape** : Another important factor is that the counter should be designed matching with the shape of the lobby. For example. 'L' shape, straight shape, curve shape (semi circular) or circular shape etc.
- In a semi circular arrangement, there is normally a straight wall at the back of the desk with a door leading to front office support services. Circular and semicircular guests allow greater service to more guests at the same time, they also tend to appear more modern and innovative than the traditional straight desk. A potential problem is that although front office work stations and equipment may dictate where functions must be performed, guests can approach these desks from all angles. Therefore extra care may be necessary to ensure the success of these and other innovative desk designs.
- **Dimension** : Usually the counter dimensions are: height between 38" to 42"; width is 30" approximately and the length depending on various factors such as size of the lobby, type of hotel, business profile of the hotel and systems used etc.

Some hotels have experimented with a lobby arrangement which includes no front desk at all. In a deskless environment, registration and room assignment may be handled at a small table or personal desk at a low traffic area of the lobby. A concierge,

receptionist or special service employee may serve as guest host. Although a guest host may perform many of the same functions as a front desk agent, the service is intended to be more personal and informal. Guests often enjoy a casual seated registration instead of a long wait standing at a front desk counter.

Material used for making the counter varies from wood and cement to concrete with finishing of laminated surfaces, stone, marble, granite etc. depending on various factors such as cost and design.

The other counters in the Front Office are bell desk and Concierge desk, Lobby desk, travel counter.

Front Office Equipment

In non-automated and semi automated properties, the layout of the front desk is centered on a collection of racks and specialty equipment designed to produce, store or display front office forms. In a semi automated system these racks are augmented by posting machines, cash register devices and other pieces of equipment designed to facilitate front office tasks.

In a fully automated hotel, most of the machinery and other equipment is replaced by a front office computer system.

Room Rack (semi automatic and non automatic)

The room rack has traditionally been considered the most important piece of front office equipment. A room rack is an array of metal file pockets designed to hold room rack slips displaying guest and room status information. The room rack is normally recessed into the front desk counter, tilted against the desk or mounted below or behind the desk. When key slots are added to the room rack, it can serve as a combination key and room rack.

The room rack contains a summary of information about the current status of all rooms in the hotel. A room rack slip or in some hotels, the guest registration card itself can be inserted into the room rack to display summary guest data, room

number and room rate. One glance at the room rack should immediately inform the front desk agent of the occupancy and housekeeping status of all rooms. The room rack may also contain information about room types, features and rates. Front desk agents use this information to match available rooms with guest needs during registration process.

In a fully automated property, the need for a room rack may be eliminated. Equivalent information can be stored in a computer system and displayed on a front desk terminal whenever needed.

Mail, message and key rack (semi automatic and non automatic)

A key rack is an array of numbered compartments used to maintain guest room keys. To minimize the number of racks in the front desk area, most hotels combine the room rack with either the key rack or the mail and message rack. A combination mail, message and key rack can be either a free standing wall unit or under counter row of compartments. Some front offices use this as a room divider by placing it between the front desk and the switchboard area of the front office. When the mail and message racks are open from both sides, telephone operators and front desk agents have equal access to rack contents.

If guest room telephones in the hotel are equipped with message lights, they can be used to notify guests of messages awaiting their retrieval. In room message lights may be activated with a control switch beside each room's slot in the mail, message and key rack.

In a fully automated property, a mail and message rack may be all that is necessary. The function of a key rack may be performed by the master console of an electronic locking system.

Reservation Racks (non automated and semi automated)

Front office often use both advance reservation rack and current reservation rack. In an advance reservation rack, reservation rack slips are arranged by the guests' scheduled dates of arrival and within each days grouping alphabetically by the

guests' or groups' name. A current reservation rack is a portable subset of the advance reservation rack. Early each morning, the advance reservation rack slips for that day's expected arrivals are loaded into the current reservation rack and taken to the front desk. The current reservation rack is used by front desk agents during registration.

In a fully automated property, both advance and current reservation racks may be eliminated. The equivalent information is internally managed by the computer system.

Information Rack (semi automatic and non automatic)

An information rack is an index of in house guests by both last name and room numbers. It is commonly used to assist front office employees with proper routing of telephone calls, mail, message and visitor enquiries. The information rack normally consists of aluminium slots designed to hold guest information slips.

Front office computer system eliminate the need for an information rack since guest name and room number data are easily retrievable through a system computer terminal.

Folio Trays (semi automatic and non automatic)

In non automated and semi automated properties, guest folios are stored in a front office folio tray or folio bucket and arranged by guest room number. Guest folios remain in the tray throughout the occupancy stage of the guest cycle except when they are used in posting transactions.

A second folio tray is normally located in the hotels' accounting office. This secondary storage location contains the folios of departed guests whom the hotel is direct billing or who settled their account by credit card. Once these accounts are settled, the folios are moved to a permanent storage location.

In a computerized front office, there is little need for a folio tray since folios are stored electronically, not in printed form.

Account Posting Machine (semi automatic)

Semi automated hotels that allow guest to make charge purchases to room accounts use an account posting machine to post, monitor and balance these charges. A posting machine normally provides:

A standardized means of recording transactions

- A legible statement of guest account
- A basis for cash and deferred payment management
- An analysis of departmental sales activity
- An audit trail of charge purchase transactions

In a semi automated operation, the account posting machine should be located near the front office folio tray and voucher rack.

Voucher Rack (all systems)

After a voucher has been used to support the posting of a transaction, it is stored for verification during the audit. Vouchers are normally filed for future reference in a voucher rack located near the account posting machine.

Cash Register (semi automatic)

A front desk cash register is used to record cash transactions and maintain cash balances. An electronic front desk cash register may also be interconnected with a front office computer system to provide more complete control over financial transactions and folio handling.

Cash registers are designed primarily to record sales transactions and to hold cash. Most cash registers also include printing devices for producing transaction tapes, sales receipts, inventory and price controls. Keys on a cash register may perform a variety of operations including:

- Recording the amount of transaction

- Recording the affected departments
- Recording the type of transaction
- Recording the identity of the cashier

Correcting, totaling and computing change for a transaction

An indicator panel allows the guest and the operator to follow the progress of the transaction.

Call Accounting Equipment (semi automatic)

The need to accurately account for guest telephone calls has encouraged the development of telephone call accounting systems. A device linked to the telephone system identifies each phone number dialed from guest room phones. Calls accounting system provides a record of each room's local, in-state and long distance phone calls so that appropriate charges may be posted to the guest folio. If the hotel supports a front office computer system, call information may be directly transferred and posted to electronic guest folios.

New Technology

Often telephone system with sophisticated features are installed in hotels. Examples include automatic call dispensing system, telephone/room status systems and facsimile machine.

In many cases, automatic call dispensing is limited to wake up services. The operator enters the room number and time for each wake up call into the computer and at the scheduled

time, a telephone call is automatically placed to the guest room. Once the guest answers the call, the computer may activate a synthesized voice that reports the current time, temp. and weather conditions.

Telephone/room status system can assist with rooms management and prohibit the unauthorized use of telephones in vacant rooms. Housekeeping or room service employees can use guest room telephones to enter data concerning room service charges, maintenance information and current room status information.

Support devices

- Credit card imprinter – An imprinter is used to press a credit card voucher against a guests' credit card. The impact causes the raised card number, expiration date and name of the card to be recorded on the voucher for use in credit card billing and collection procedures.
- Magnetic Strip reader – A magnetic strip reader reads data magnetically encoded and stored on the magnetic tape strip on the back of a credit card and wires this data to a credit card verification service. On the basis of credit card data and transaction data, the credit card verification service either approves or disapproves the transaction.
- Telewriter – The operator of a telewriter writes with a pen like stylus on a specially designed surface. The handwritten message written on this surface is displayed on a similar device located elsewhere.
- Time stamp – Folios, mail and other front office paperwork are inserted into a timestamp device to record the current time and date.
- Security monitor – Closed circuit television monitors allow front office employees or security personnel to monitor security and safety throughout the hotel from a central location.
- Wake-up devices- A non-automated wake up device is a specially designed clock which allows multiple alarm settings to remind telephone operators to

place wake up calls.

- Telex – International travelers are likely to make reservations by means of telex network connection. The caller directs a message from a telex machine to the hotel's telex machine.
- Self registration/check out terminals – Fully automated hotels may provide self registration and check out terminals for guests.



IHM NOTES

FRONT OFFICE TERMINOLOGY

1. Occupied: A room status term indicating that a guest is currently registered to the room.
2. On change: A room status term indicating that a guest has departed but the room has not yet been clean and ready for sale.
3. Vacant and Ready room: A room status term indicating that the room ;has been cleaned and inspected and is ready for arriving guest.
4. Check out: A room status term indicating that the guest has been settled the accounts, returned the key and left the hotel.
5. DND : Do not disturb
6. Complementary room: A room status term indicating that the room is occupied but the guest is assessed no charge for his use.
7. Out of Order: A room status term indicating that the room cannot be assigned to the guest. A room may be out of order for maintenance, refurbishing and extensive cleaning.
8. Overstay: A room status term indicating that the guest stays after his/her departure date.
9. Stay Over: A room status term indicating that the guest is not checking out today and will remain at least one more night.
10. Skipper: A room status term indicating that the guest has left the hotel without making any arrangements to settle his/her accounts.
11. Scanty baggage: A room status term indicating that a guest has very little baggage.
12. Lock out: A room status term indicating that the room has been locked so that the guest cannot re enter until he/she is cleared by a hotel official.

13. Walk in : A person who arrives in a properly without reservation and who requests for a room.
14. No show: A person who made a room reservation but he did not register or cancel his reservation.
15. Adjacent Room : Rooms close to each other such as across a hall
16. Adjoining Room : Rooms with a common wall but no connecting door
17. Average Daily Rate : An occupancy ratio derived by dividing net rooms revenue by the number of rooms sold
18. Back of the House: The functional areas of a hotel where the personnel have little or no direct guest contact
19. Book: To sell or reserve rooms ahead of time
20. Booking Lead Time: A measurement of how far in advance bookings are made
21. Closed: The status of a date for which a reservation system will not accept additional reservations.
22. Day use: A room status term indicating that the room will be used for less than an overnight stay
23. DNCO (Did Not Check Out): A room status term indicating that the guest made arrangements to settle his account but has left without informing the front office
24. Due-Out: A room status term indicating that the room is expected to become
25. vacant after the following day's check-out time
26. Free Independent Traveller (FIT): A guest coming to the hotel as an individual and not as part of a group
27. Front of the House: The functional areas of a hotel in which personnel

have extensive guest contact.

28. Full House: A condition in which every room in the hotel has been booked
29. House Limit: A credit limit established by the hotel
30. Overbooking: Accepting more reservations than there are available rooms
31. Quad: A room assigned to four people.
32. Rack Rate: The standard rate established by the property for a particular category of rooms
33. Room Rate: The price a hotel charges for overnight accommodation
34. Rooming a guest: The procedures involved in greeting a guest, assigning a room and escorting the guest to the room
35. Understay: A guest who checks out before his stated departure date
36. Walking a guest: Turning away a guest who has a reservation because of lack of rooms and subsequently accommodating him in another hotel.
37. Black listed guest: A list of unwanted guests
38. GIT: Group Inclusive Tours
39. Position: Status of number of rooms available for sale
40. Room Status: The code or description indicating the occupancy and house keeping status of a room.
41. Free Sale: Term used when rooms are available for sale
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