

amadeus

salesforce



Amadeus Insights

## Hotel Sales Stars:

### The Ultimate Strategy Playbook

Discover the sales and event trends shaping business and group travel, along with innovative strategies to achieve your next level goals.





In the wake of unprecedented disruptions, the travel industry has experienced a remarkable resurgence, bouncing back with renewed vigor. Recent [data](#) underscores this, revealing a steady uptick in the demand for groups, events, and business travel, coupled with optimistic [forecasts](#) projecting sustained growth in 2024 and beyond. This boom in group and business travel presents fresh opportunities for hospitality professionals who have pivoted to understand the new travel landscape where customers have higher expectations, tighter timelines, and challenging budget constraints. Teams who employ solutions that facilitate seamless communication and collaboration among sales and events can streamline the bid to contract process, ensure flawless event execution, and help build lasting customer relationships.

To help you navigate today's challenges and capitalize on emerging opportunities, [Amadeus Hospitality](#), [Salesforce](#), and [Meeting Professionals International \(MPI\)](#) have come together to compile key data, in-depth market research, and interviews with global leading industry experts. In this eBook, we share the key trends and challenges hospitality sales teams face and offer insights, strategies, and best practices to stay ahead of the curve. We hope these insights, coupled with continued positive momentum, signal a promising trajectory for the industry, setting the stage for a future filled with fresh opportunities for innovation and collaboration.

# 6 Key Industry Defining Trends



As customers' preferences, priorities, and budgets evolve, hospitality teams must remain agile and responsive to their changing needs. Our experts have identified six critical trends that present exciting opportunities for hospitality professionals who can adapt their sales and event strategies accordingly.

## 1. Business travel is resurging but the landscape is evolving

As global business travel emerges from the shadow of the pandemic, a resurgence is evident and continues to grow. A recent [Business Travel Outlook Poll](#) reveals most global business travel industry professionals report increased bookings and spending, with robust performance in business travel and expectations of continued growth.

However, amid this optimism, industry professionals anticipate potential challenges ahead. Rising travel costs, economic uncertainties, budget constraints, and travel disruptions are among the top concerns for industry stakeholders. Additionally, the adoption of remote and hybrid workplace models has prompted companies to revisit their employee travel policies and programs, addressing factors such as type of travel allowed, transportation options, and accommodations for employees.

The evolving landscape of business travel underscores the importance of adaptability and agility in responding to changing industry dynamics. While the resurgence of business travel presents opportunities for growth, businesses must remain vigilant and proactive in addressing emerging challenges to ensure the continued success of their travel programs.

“Corporate travel is our main bread and butter,” says Lawrence Ng, SVP Sales and Marketing at Langham Hospitality Group, a global hotel company with more than 30 properties in major cities across four continents. “Our hotel group has locations in all the key cities, so we definitely see corporate business travel as a major sector.”

## 2. Smaller meetings are growing more popular

As more employees work remotely, there is growing interest in small meetings to bring teams together in person. In the fourth quarter of 2023, the average meeting in the United States hosted **112 attendees**; **40%** had 75 people or fewer. Globally, **37%** of hospitality professionals expect to see more small meetings in 2024. However, small meetings can be a challenge for meeting planners, requiring just as much effort to plan as bigger ones—and just as much agility to win.

“Within our portfolio, about 50% of smaller programs are booked within 90 days, so there’s no time for delays or missteps,” says Jennifer Walsh, Senior Manager of Business Development for American Express Global Business Travel. “You must implement strategies, solutions, and workflows that allow you to quickly respond to these inquiries.” Walsh suggests assigning a seasoned sales team to the small to mid-size market; they have the expertise to make quick decisions.

## 3. Expectations for the attendee experience is elevated

From event design and technology to wellness and food and beverage options, sales and catering teams must fulfill rising expectations from both event planners and attendees. “Quality over quantity” is the buzz phrase with customers planning for fewer events per year. The trend toward more thoughtfully curated events means that demand for boutique experiences, unique venues, and exclusive spaces within hotels and resorts is growing. Smaller cities that can offer attendees a fresh experience have also become more popular locations.

The desire for meaningful and authentic experiences is also paramount. “More and more, I think people are looking for a really authentic, genuine, unique, and meaningful experience,” says Alex Drinkwater, Global Director of Groups & Events at The Hoxton, a boutique hotel chain with locations throughout Europe and North America. Successful sales and catering teams are crafting experiences that seamlessly meld physical spaces with technology to encourage connection and interaction via users’ personal devices.

“The size of the event and the way that people are traveling has changed.”

Lawrence Ng  
Senior Vice President,  
Sales and Marketing  
Langham Hospitality Group



“Make sure you are offering something unique and something different, but that it’s something that is true to your brand values.”

Alex Drinkwater  
Global Director of  
Groups & Events  
The Hoxton

#### 4. There is a higher level of focus on sustainability

A higher level of attention on sustainability is a factor for a growing number of customers. Local sourcing, carbon and resource usage, renewable materials, and community engagement are key areas of focus. “Sustainability is usually focused on environmental friendliness and conservation, but it’s also about how we as an operator can contribute to the local community and connect to the local culture,” says Ng.

Forward-thinking hotels are implementing tools and rewards that demonstrate their commitment to sustainability and give customers tangible data about an event’s carbon footprint. For example, [Hilton’s Light Stay platform](#) measures the environmental and social impact of a planned event, enabling event planners to make changes that will reduce or offset the event’s carbon emissions. Hoxton’s The Good Rate program encourages customers to choose lower-carbon transport by offering reduced room rates for guests arriving by rail instead of air.



## 5. Value is paramount

Financial concerns, such as tight budgets and inflation, continue to be a factor for venues, customers, and travelers alike. Organizations seeking to reduce costs in their business travel and meeting programs are making cutbacks in the number of nights, off-site activities, or food and beverage choices. Among those with growing budgets, 25% plan to focus extra funds on improving the on-site experience, while 20% will focus on technology enhancements, according to Walsh.

Whatever your customer's budget, winning business in an uncertain economic environment requires focusing on value, not just price. "People want to be sure what they're getting is exactly what they need and is the very best value for their money," says Drinkwater. Demonstrating flexibility in customizing events and offering a unique experience will increase value and help your venue stand out.

## 6. Staffing is an ongoing challenge

Staffing is always a challenge in the hospitality industry, which is still recovering from pandemic-era staff cuts. The loss of institutional knowledge, combined with continuing high attrition and staff turnover rates, challenges operators to maintain consistency and provide the high levels of service that customers expect. As demand for travel grows, teams are grappling with managing multiple tasks and responsibilities, while also being expected to achieve their sales targets.

Forward-thinking hospitality organizations will seek talent in other service professions, such as teaching or healthcare, and reach out to former employees. Viewing this as an opportunity to train new staff in new approaches and cultivate the next generation of travel professionals, can ultimately build a stronger organization.

**"We're being much more intentional on what we're asking from our clients and what we need to deliver to get people to give up the most precious commodity everyone has, which is their time."**

**Rachel Benedick**  
Chief Revenue Officer  
Meeting Professionals  
International

**"The power of technology elevates our communication, really to benefit our customer strategies. It allows everyone to achieve more with less effort, which is imperative with the reality of our staffing challenges."**

**Jennifer Walsh**  
Senior Manager of Business  
Development American Ex-  
press Global Business Travel

# Winning Strategies to Elevate Your Sales Cycle

The right sales strategies supported by technology can help sales and catering teams rise to today's challenges. Here are the best practices that help our global industry experts successfully navigate the five stages of the sales journey.

## Stage 1 Prospecting Strategies

As demand from group and business travel continues to grow, hotel sales teams must adopt proactive strategies to effectively identify and engage with potential clients. In this section we explore key strategies to enhance prospecting efforts.

**Stay informed with regional and global insights:** Utilize regional performance indices like the [Hospitality Group and Business Performance Index](#) to assess segment health and identify emerging trends in the United States. Supplement these insights with data from global forecasts such as [MPI Meetings Outlook](#) and [American Express Global Meetings and Events Forecast](#) to gain a comprehensive understanding of market dynamics and upcoming trends on a global scale.

**Realize the best segments may have changed.** Incentive travel, all-inclusive travel, association groups, and “bleisure” (blending business and leisure travel) are among the growth areas, our experts note. Reviewing internal data, such as past group and event bookings, and analyzing search trends to uncover target keywords related to group and corporate travel can uncover promising segments. Ng says this approach helps his team identify emerging source markets, refocus sales and marketing priorities, and understand where best to invest.



**“We must constantly understand where a customer is today, what their needs are, and how we can support them and be a resource for the business.”**

**Gerilyn Horan**  
VP, Group Sales & Strategic Accounts  
Hilton Hotels & Resorts

- **Look in your backyard.** Local businesses planning small events can be a profitable niche, especially for smaller properties. Use technology such as [Agency360+](#)™ to identify prospects in your area and learn what corporate business is booking within your market.
- **Do your homework.** AI can help you efficiently research a prospect’s organization, industry, and concerns. “Finding a coach or someone who knows the client or the industry can also be helpful in building relationships and getting through the noise of spam emails,” says Benedick. Getting advice about what matters to a prospect can help you hone your approach and turn cold calls warm.
- **Don’t take existing customers for granted.** “You may think, ‘I know this account,’ but things can change on a dime,” cautions Gerilyn Horan, VP Group Sales & Strategic Accounts at Hilton Hotels & Resorts. “We must constantly understand where a customer is today, what their needs are, and how we can support them and be a resource for the business.” Don’t forget to tap existing customers as a source of referrals, too.
- **Consider generational differences.** Segmenting prospects by generational preferences and behavior can help personalize your outreach. For example, Ng says Baby Boomers and Generation X are drawn to The Langham’s history and tradition, while Generation Z guests focus more on experiences they can share on social media. “The way we speak and connect with them is very different,” he explains. Langham’s new [Brilliant by Langham loyalty program](#) augments traditional rewards with experiences such as private cooking lessons with celebrity chefs, crafting workshops with artisans, and themed tea parties in picturesque locations.



**Embrace technology for rapid response.** “Ensuring that the salesperson is proactively selling, responding to leads and making connections comes down to time management,” says Barbara Willen, Vice President of Sales & Marketing at Commonwealth Hotels, which provides hotel management services for 48 properties nationwide. Boost your sales team’s efficiency by consolidating incoming lead channels into a central hub. Giving all team members visibility into all your rooms and properties allows salespeople to view updated availability in real time and respond immediately to inquiries. Automatically schedule tasks for follow-up with RFP responses and drive more business to your direct channel with [online group booking tools](#).

**Try, try again.** If you bid on business in the past and weren’t awarded the contract, contact the prospect to explore the issues that cost you the business. Think creatively and highlight relevant updates that can solve the problem the next time.

**“Use your tools and technology to look forward, as opposed to being Monday morning quarterbacks. Using technology allows us to spend the majority of our time and strategies looking ahead.”**

**Barbara Willen**  
Vice President of  
Sales & Marketing  
Commonwealth Hotels



## Stage 2 Proposal Strategies

The proposal stage is the first step in winning the bid. By listening and offering flexibility, customization, and a compelling value story—packaged in a rapid response—your sales and catering team can deliver a winning proposal.

- **Be the first responder.** 72% of businesses choose the first responder to RFPs. Streamline the proposal process with solutions that allow you to create customized workflows and respond promptly to incoming RFPs anytime, anywhere. “Automation frees up our sales teams to focus on the more complex opportunities that need that person-to-person, face-to-face contact,” says Horan.
- **Take a consultative role.** Think of yourself as a consultant, not a salesperson. Even if the opportunity isn't the right fit this time, you can act as a resource and start an ongoing relationship with a prospect.
- **Understand the customer.** This will help you craft a detailed and personalized proposal. “It's really about flexibility and personalization of that booking journey—taking the time to understand a client's priorities, showing what we can and can't match, and viewing it more as a matchmaking process than a hard sell,” says Drinkwater.
- **Become destination experts.** Tap into local culture to offer something unique and different that's true to your brand values. Consider curating exclusive access rights or discounts with local restaurants, beverage purveyors, or interesting venues to enhance the event experience. Be sure to personalize the experiences available in your destination to specific prospects' behaviors and preferences.



**Embrace agility and innovation.** The ability to pivot quickly and innovate has become increasingly vital for hotels, not only in response to the challenges of the pandemic, but also in terms of meeting the evolving demands of business travel. For instance, during the height of uncertainty in 2020, the Hoxton's Holborn location launched the "Stuff It, Let's Get Married" wedding package, an all-inclusive celebration for up to 30 people. "We pride ourselves on not just trying to keep up with the industry but being industry-first, doing things that nobody has done before, taking risks, and being able to pivot," says Drinkwater.

In a similar vein, hotels can apply this agile mindset to catering to the needs of business travelers. Whether it's offering flexible booking options, creating co working spaces within hotel premises, or providing tailored amenities for remote workers, embracing innovation allows hotels to stay ahead of the curve.

**Focus on value, not just price.** "Leading with a clear value proposition is essential," says Benedick. Enlist partners and vendors who can help you tell your value story in a compelling way. Ng recommends quoting your best price point and best value-added experience immediately, rather than expecting a lengthy price negotiation. This approach can help you manage increasing demand and shorter booking windows, even with a smaller sales team.



## Stage 3 Contracting Strategies

Shorter booking timelines mean there's no room for delays or missteps during the contracting process. Paying attention to detail during the proposal stage and automating workflows wherever possible gives sales professionals more time to personalize their response.

**Be thorough in discovery.** Make sure everyone is at the table and all decision makers have been consulted. Address questions and disclose all fees and costs upfront so there are no surprises at the contracting stage. Transparency builds trust and minimizes potential misunderstandings.

**Ensure flexibility:** In today's dynamic business environment, flexibility is key. Offer customizable contract terms that accommodate varying client needs and preferences, whether it's adjusting event dates, modifying room allocations, or revising cancellation policies.

**Embrace verbal communication.** A five-minute conversation to clarify an issue can ultimately save time. Ensure the details of the conversation are logged appropriately into your **CRM** or central solution that's accessible to all relevant team members.

**Assign seasoned sales teams to the small to mid-size market.** “Consider assigning sales team members to this market, as empowered team members who can easily negotiate terms and pricing are key,” says Walsh. “Those who have time in that role can make quick decisions and the right decisions for your property.”

**Allow ample turnaround time.** Implement a back-end process and technology to deliver a contract to the customer as quickly as you expect them to turn it around. Give clients more than 24 hours to sign, being mindful of potential delays due to additional steps or multi-signature verifications and approvals.

**Automate contracting whenever possible.** This frees up the sales team to focus on more complex opportunities. Given today's shorter booking windows, “there's simply no room for delays,” adds Walsh. “Leveraging the synergy of technology with a human touch streamlines communications between suppliers and partners, achieving more with less effort while preserving the essence of personalized hospitality.”





## Stage 4 Execution Strategies

Your contract serves as a comprehensive blueprint of the customer's requirements, but its true measure lies in the seamless execution that follows. How will your team translate this knowledge into a flawless delivery, navigating on-site challenges and adapting to changes with finesse? Ensure successful execution and exceed expectations with these tactics.

### Business Travel Execution for an Optimal Experience

- Tailor services to individual needs.** Personalize services and amenities to meet the unique preferences and requirements of business travelers. Offer flexibility in booking, check-in/out times, and workspace options to enhance their experience.
- Provide seamless communication.** Implement tools and processes that enable seamless communication between business travelers and hotel staff. Offer multiple channels for communication and ensure prompt responses to inquiries and requests.
- Offer business-centric amenities.** Equip rooms and common areas with amenities tailored to business travelers, such as high-speed internet, ergonomic workspaces, and access to business centers or meeting rooms.
- Facilitate productivity on the go.** Provide resources and services that support productivity while traveling, such as mobile check-in/out, concierge services, and access to transportation and local business facilities.

## Group and Event Execution

**Document client conversations.** This not only ensures the client feels heard, but also smooths execution. Leverage software to ensure all the important information from your conversations is accurately captured and secure. Transferring pertinent details directly from the platform to clients, and/or meeting planners and hotel departments creates a seamless hand-off.

**Be intentional and creative in event experiences.** Look through the lens of what's going to get somebody out of the house. What's going to get somebody to give up time with their family. "It's a combination of education, something fun, and great business context," says Benedick. "That's where the magic is happening." With in-person events trending to be less frequent, make sure to align on expectations early on to be able to create experiences that can anticipate needs and exceed expectations.

**Enable effective, real-time communication.** "Effective communication is crucial," says Karen Walker, Enterprise Director of Hospitality, Salesforce. "We need real-time communication because when sales conveys customer meeting requests to operations, there's often a communication gap between the two departments." Streamline communication by ensuring all relevant teams have access to the same data in your CRM or other solution.

**Empower event planners.** Look for ways you can use [technology](#) to make their jobs easier. For example, allow planners to self-book a meeting or event instantly online as easily as booking a hotel stay. Even better, have the booking details flow directly into your [sales and catering solution](#) to easily manage and optimize the booking.

**Keep the sales team in the loop.** Alert the sales team of changes on site by using technology to track any modifications to the contract and share them with all parties. Choosing a sales and catering solution that supports rapid communication among the event planner, staff, and sales departments helps ensure the client's choices are executed correctly.

**Plan for uncertainties.** Create mitigation plans for potential problems such as no-shows or technical difficulties. "Smaller events often require a higher level of attention to detail because each attendee's experience is critical, and there's less room for forgiveness if things go wrong," says Benedick. Staying nimble and ready to pivot can help you handle any eventuality.



**“People today are just putting a bit more thought into curating their group and event travel programs.”**

Alex Drinkwater  
Global Director of  
Groups & Events  
The Hoxton



## Stage 5 Relationship Building Strategies

Cultivating lasting relationships is key to keeping clients returning to your property, building your reputation, and gaining referrals. Follow these tips to generate return business.

**Centralize customer data.** Maintaining accounts and contacts in a solution that's easily accessible across multiple teams and properties ensures continuity so any team member can respond to prospects and customers. "A good CRM is how we can share information, make sure that we are focused on the right things at the right time, and grow the business," says Horan.

**Conduct term reviews.** Document what worked and what didn't in your database, share it with relevant parties, and use it to improve for future business. For corporate contracts, consider conducting term reviews to understand evolving needs or issues that arose during the agreement period. Taking a holistic approach ensures continuous improvement and customer satisfaction, fostering long-term relationships and loyalty. "That's how you create evangelists," says Benedick. "You care about them through the whole entire process and the execution becomes just as important as the work that you put into the initial sale."

**Reward planners for loyalty, too.** Recognizing clients for their ongoing business fosters strong relationships and encourages return business. Implement loyalty programs, offer planner points, and encourage business or bleisure stays at specified properties. In addition to providing an effective engagement platform, loyalty programs capture invaluable data about likes and dislikes, which can help you design more tailored experiences.

**Leverage technology to streamline data collection and analysis.**

Use AI to quickly summarize results from a survey or extract key takeaways. Look for solutions that offer configurable reports and dashboards to help you glean insights from your data.

**Aim for authentic, relational partnerships.**

Use personalized communications to keep in touch with clients and serve as a resource for them. “Your ability to be successful is 100% contingent on your ability to build good relationships, not transactional relationships,” says Benedick. “Those who choose to focus on that will see success.”

**Ask questions and listen to the answers.**

An existing account’s needs can change quickly. Continual curiosity enables you to stay abreast of your clients’ needs and how you can support them.



**“A data- or insight-driven strategy is critical to the success of a hospitality group.”**

Lawrence Ng  
Senior Vice President,  
Sales and Marketing  
Langham Hospitality Group

**“When you look at sales, your real measure of success is getting customers to come back to your hotel, come back to your city, come back to your event. If you really use that as your guiding light, then all of a sudden, all these other parts of the process become super important.”**

Rachel Benedick  
Chief Revenue Officer  
Meeting Professionals International



# The Role of Technology



Burgeoning group business presents new opportunities for hospitality sales and event professionals. To maximize success, teams must embrace technology to support evolving industry dynamics and create efficient workflows for sustained growth.

Leveraging the combined power of a robust CRM with hospitality-specific sales and catering solution allows teams to:

- Respond quickly with a tailored approach
- Streamline contracting
- Ensure a seamless hand-off between sales and operations
- Optimize efficiency during event management
- Build enduring customer relationships

The right [sales and catering solution](#) enhances both your customer's experience and your team's productivity. From individual meetings to the grandest group gatherings, [Amadeus Delphi](#), for instance, helps you seamlessly contract new business, manage strong relationships, track ongoing performance metrics, and manage all details for flawless event delivery.

**“Everybody’s buzzword right now is personalization. Maybe part of that is better understanding our CRM. Understanding the customer’s needs and trends from any data we have on them from the past.”**

**Karen Walker**  
Enterprise Director of Hospitality  
Salesforce

# The Future is Ripe for Authentic Experiences and Connections that Foster **Growth**



Following industry research, market analysis, and interviews with global sales, event, and hospitality experts, one thing is increasingly clear; the industry is constantly evolving and will continue to evolve.

A resurgence of business travel and the growing popularity of smaller meetings means that while terms and conditions have changed, the potential for business and revenue remains promising. The elevated expectations for distinctive experiences, alongside a heightened focus on sustainability, highlight the importance of delivering value and crafting authentic experiences in today's market. To maximize success, teams must embrace the right technology to efficiently sell, organize and manage business across the sales cycle to ensure sustained growth.

While sentiments underscore the importance of staying ahead of the curve and responding swiftly to shifting dynamics, a commitment to value creation is paramount in winning and retaining business in a competitive landscape. Sales and event teams that can be nimble and customer-centric, while embracing technology, will be well-positioned to navigate the evolving nature of our industry with confidence.

**“Our word of the year is authentic. It’s all about creating authentic experiences and authentic relationships.”**

**Rachel Benedick**  
Chief Revenue Officer  
Meeting Professionals International

# Hotel Sales Stars:

## The Ultimate Strategy Playbook

It's how travel works.

Presented by

**AMADEUS**

salesforce



For additional guidance on strategies to grow your group business, visit our [Mastering Hotel Sales & Events hub](#), where you will find useful resources, insights, tips, and discover, for a limited time, how you can [get more for less](#) with Delphi.

For further information, visit [amadeus-hospitality.com](https://amadeus-hospitality.com) or speak to your Amadeus Account Manager today.

© Amadeus IT Group and its affiliates and subsidiaries

Find us on

