

Room for Hire: A Bed and Breakfast Business

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So often in the past, I have spoken to people who had a home in foreclosure. They often made the statement "if I had only taken in a border."

This is definitely an option for people who can't afford their mortgage notes and have extra rooms or a basement at their homes.

The biggest dilemma about taking in a border is that no one wants to take in anyone who has children, since children are often destructive to properties. But for many, it's been a very big mistake!

Now due to this continuous failing economy and administration, it's time to be strategic and your number one goal should be to keep a roof over your head. If you have food on the table, and you are in fairly good health and have a roof over your head, then you need to count your blessings everyday.

Do you have an extra room or two or a basement that you could rent out? If you do, then you can be in the Bed and Breakfast (B&B) business.

In these times, in order to keep their heads above water, many families are building extra rooms on their homes to offer to paying family members or tenants.

You can turn your home into a Bed and Breakfast business or restore a building that has the potential of being rental units. You might have to reside at the property, managing and maintaining the business and satisfying license requirements.

For people with rentals (condos, houses, etc.) that they can't sell, you can turn them into a Bed and Breakfast business for short term or long term lodging.

Remember this is your B&B and you might just want to look into long term lodging options such as boarding for 30, 60, 90 days or even 6 months or longer.

For short term lodging options, you will need to decide if you are going to accept one night stays on Friday and Saturday night or should you wait to try to get a 2 night booking for your rooms every weekend.

Remember the weekdays might be emptier than the weekends but you need to consider your market before adopting this sort of strategy. For example, if you're next to a wedding venue, you may need to be more flexible about one night stays as these guests tend to only want to come for one night.

When you first set up your B&B, you may want to test the waters and see what sort of guests you get before you make a decision about whether to exclude, for example, children. Running the B&B should not adversely affect your business if you except children under 12.

Can you or should you risk turning anyone away? Remember you can always put new terms and conditions in place. After all you are the boss!

If you're right next to the best children's theme park in the country, you will probably benefit from having a children friendly B&B.

It may actually improve your bookings if you have a 'no children policy' for many parents staying for a romantic break that have left their own kids at home. If people have gone to the effort of finding a babysitter for a childfree weekend, they will probably not want to be faced by someone else's 5 year old over breakfast.

Creating a home away from home which is often more beautiful than where they are traveling from will ensure many return customers.

This is a great business you can start without too much hassle. If you live near a college town, a tourist attraction, the beach, a lake, a mountain for skiing, etc., it makes your B&B much easier to market. Peak and off-season will have a significant impact on your monthly earnings.

Similar to tourists who choose to stay in traditional hotels, customers who patronize B&Bs seek out relaxation, fun and stress management while on vacation.

The B&B industry offers a unique lodging environment, which caters to an ever-increasing group of travelers. They create a climate of home, where guests become temporary members of a larger family.

In a B&B, a guest is a guest in one's home, not a customer. It becomes a place to return to at the end of a day, or during the next vacation (like going home). This type of customer also prefers comfortable accommodations in a cozy, family environment. These patrons are more social, they love meeting new people while at the same time require enough privacy to enjoy their vacation.

Guests will have the right mix of membership and privacy. The goal is to be dutiful without being intrusive which can be a delicate balance and one that owners have mastered in their various walks of life.

A B&B opens itself to guests, allowing them to participate and share in the richness of a community, while still allowing whatever degree of privacy is preferred.

A variety of settings available in the B&B are situated to enable individuals or small groups to locate the perfect setting for whatever mood or activity one is pursuing (reading, watching television, playing board games, etc.).

You could eventually expand your services to the residents by offering adjoining rooms which open creating a large area, ideal for formal or informal gatherings (i.e. wedding receptions, office parties, Christmas parties, etc.).

You don't have to serve a huge breakfast. In fact, a bowl of cereal with coffee and some juice is acceptable. Meals can be shared with the innkeepers and other travelers allowing new relationships to be created and old ones enriched. Or, meals can be taken in the privacy of the guest's room.

You don't necessarily have to provide a private bath, but it is a nice touch.

B&B tenants every need should be met to ensure his/her comfort. For special occasions, catered meals, chilled wine, etc., can be provided for an additional stipend. During the weekends, guests can return to the B&B in the evening and find cheese, fruit, and wine for snacking before turning in.

Some other items you could offer your guests are a complimentary music CD for each room that the guest may keep (copy included in packet): 1) An extensive video and audio library for guest use, 2) CD stereo systems and VCRs in each room, 3) Starbucks coffee, 4) A variety of herbal teas, 5) Daily fresh-baked muffins and fresh fruit, and 6) Links to other businesses, attractions and services in the area.

If you are considering this idea, you should call your insurance company and ask them to review your policy. Should you beef up your liability coverage? Do tenants need to sign contracts for long term lodging? Should you hire a private investigator to run a background on your guests? Should you check credit references?

Remember you are going to be the one setting up the rules so first of all you have to make sure you are not breaking the law and, secondly, how the rules you set will affect your business.

You need to check into legislation to ensure you and your tourism business stay on the right side of the law. For example, you need to ensure that the rules you set do not break any discrimination laws by not allowing people on grounds of race, sex, sexual orientation or disability to stay at your B&B. And you also need to be careful that you aren't discriminating against people.

You also need to consider how the rules you set will affect your business. Some of the things you need to think about is will you be flexible allowing children, assistance dogs, one night stays, cooking evening meals, etc.

In order to be successful in a B&B, you can offer packages and special rates. You need to build a strong market position among the local patrons. With the right exposure, it is probably an untapped market of vacationers that can be enticed to your B&B.

B&B can sell its rooms directly to repeat customers, as well as via traditional travel agents and through the internet. Repeat customers will have the privilege of priority reservations during the high season. Subscriptions to various web services will provide international exposure to potential customers for annual fees.

You can find out more about how to set up, run and market a B&B by reading books at the libraries and bookstores, conducting research at <http://www.google.com> or <http://www.yahoo.com> and networking and talking to business owners who actually run a B&B.

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