



# 10 Dos & Don'ts for Your Call Center



A GUIDE FOR HOTELIERS & VACATION RENTALS





## First impressions matter, especially in the business of hospitality.

The guest experience doesn't start when the guest first sets foot on the property; it starts with the first interaction with your property. In many cases, that happens with a reservations agent in your call center.

Matt Juarez, VP of Contact Center Operations at NAVIS, says that voice is the most profitable channel since it leads to direct bookings. A thorough dive into reservations data shows that the voice channel drives 75-80% of a property's revenue<sup>1</sup>, especially in the case of independent as well as four and five-star properties.

Juarez says: "Guests are looking for a personal touch and for a conversation where they can ask questions to give them comfort to drop that much of a spend." More importantly: "Personalized engagement with a highly trained property expert on the phone fosters brand loyalty," says Josh Guthrie, Contact Center Director at NAVIS. "There's a relationship that can be built with guests," he adds, "so it tends to stick a little closer."

In this guide, we'll share a few dos and don'ts to start your guests' experience on the right foot and to build brand loyalty with that first phone call.

<sup>1</sup> <https://insights.ehotelier.com/insights/2015/03/06/driving-hotel-call-center-conversions/>

## NUMBER 1

# Do take your recruitment process seriously

After all, this person will be the personification of your brand. In addition to a passion for customer service, do their personal values align with your brand values? In assessing candidates, consider whether they come across the way you want your property to be represented – is it laid-back but still professional? Or more formal and refined?

NAVIS has an acronym for the most important qualities to screen for: ACE: Attitude, Confidence & Enthusiasm. "They have to have a great voice and a positive attitude," says Guthrie. In addition, Juarez says they need the confidence to take a call and convert it into revenue. They need to be confident about what they're selling and be enthusiastic about the property, so the guests get excited about their stay.

Beyond recruiting someone with the right disposition, set clear expectations early in the process so candidates understand their potential role with your company involves sales. Of course, your business is also looking for a highly motivated, reliable, competitive, team-oriented, detailed person who sincerely enjoys interacting with customers over the phone. Still, even extensive customer-service expertise does not necessarily mean a candidate is a fit for a proactive sales position. For example, the job title should include the words "Reservation Sales" and the job description itself should include responsibilities around sales performance, call efficiencies, call quality, and team performance.



## NUMBER 2

# Do consider your Call Center staff as revenue generators

“Having a selling mentality is really important,” says Guthrie, adding, “We want employees that drive revenue and are motivated to work on a commission plan. If you’re here for the hourly wage, it’s the wrong job for you.”

Juarez considers sales a fundamental requirement of the job. “We’re in a revenue-generating business,” he points out.

Inbound call conversion is one of the easiest ways to drive revenue for your business. But many Reservations teams focus so heavily on inbound that they miss opportunities to capitalize on outbound revenue.

Next to inbound call conversion, outbound phone sales is the best way to increase bookings and revenue. Yet few hotels and vacation rentals make proactive sales calls. Instead, they view reservation agents and call center teams as “order takers.”

Building a successful outbound sales system isn’t just about choosing the right technology. You also need to shift your culture. Agents are used to a certain way of working. For many, selling is a brand-new experience, and you need to equip them with the right tools and coaching to master this skill.





NUMBER 3

# Do implement call scoring and coaching for your Reservation Sales Team

Call scoring is intended to help improve the performance of call center agents in terms of their efficiency in handling calls and their effectiveness at resolving customer issues or converting sales.

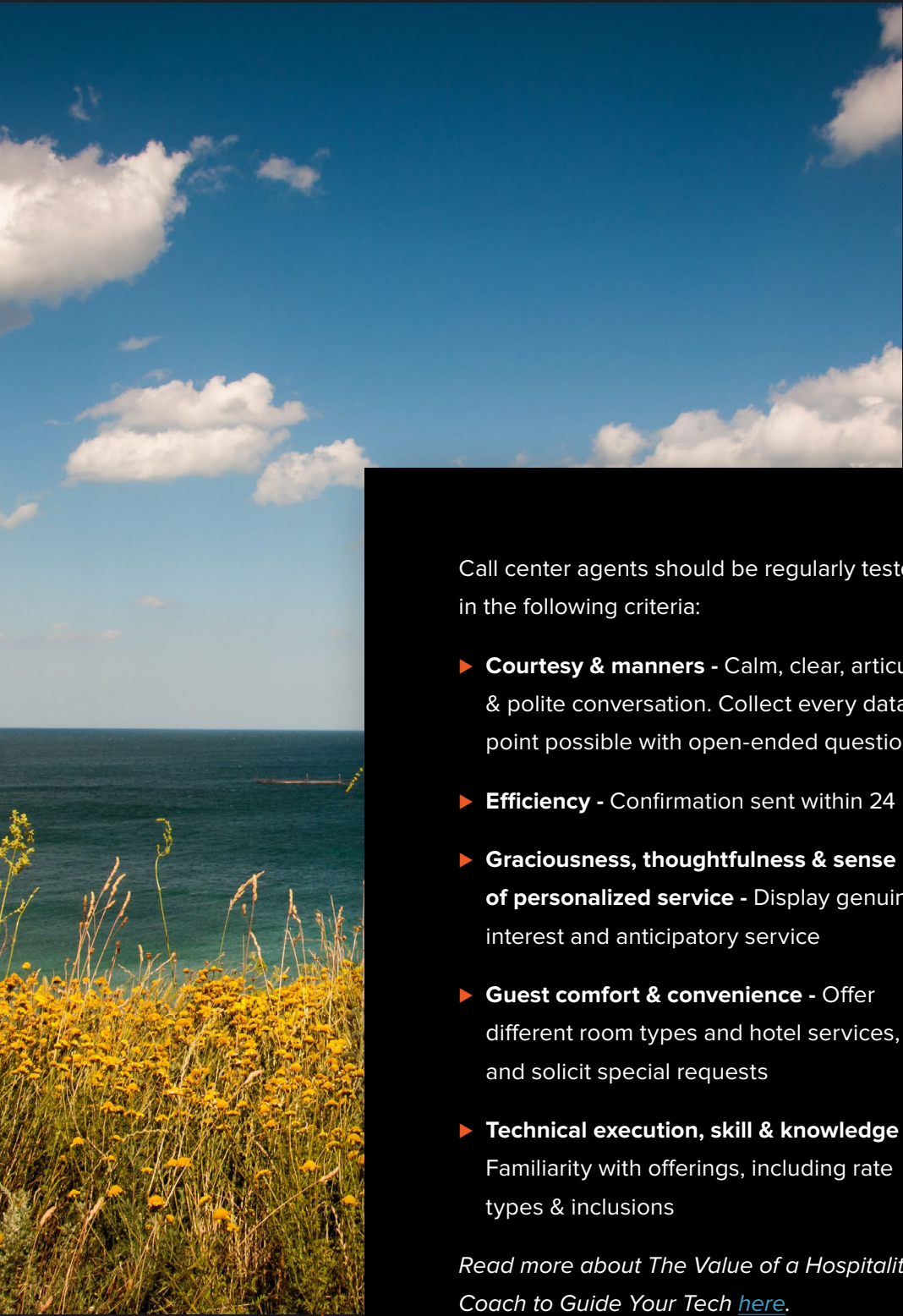
But some calls may be more important than others. Focus your scoring efforts on those calls that represent sales challenges to your staff. Scoring Hot Lead and Not Booked calls will reveal not only the behaviors of your team, but the desires and responses of the potential guest.

Even though you may regularly hear half of the sales conversation, it’s important to hear both sides of the conversation for coaching purposes to determine whether your agent is actively listening and responding to the caller’s questions or stated desires.

Effective coaching enables individuals to realize their greater potential by developing the means to achieve it. Effective coaching will reap a multitude of rewards for your organization. Employees will begin to develop a sense of ownership and belonging as they understand their critical contributions to the company’s goals. When employees feel connected to the greater goal, have a clear understanding of what is expected of them, and believe they are appreciated and fairly rewarded for their work, the result is a healthy sales culture with increased buy-in and less turnover.

NAVIS RezForce LUX assists luxury properties with capturing missed revenue while maintaining quality standards with Forbes Travel Guide’s Hotel Service Standards.

“We’ve been very impressed with the NAVIS RezForce LUX team’s performance over the past several years,” said Forbes Travel Guide CEO Filip Boyen. “From the high-end level of service provided to luxury hotel guests to the revenue generated by the team for our clients, it’s excellent.”



Call center agents should be regularly tested in the following criteria:

- ▶ **Courtesy & manners** - Calm, clear, articulate & polite conversation. Collect every data point possible with open-ended questions
- ▶ **Efficiency** - Confirmation sent within 24 hours
- ▶ **Graciousness, thoughtfulness & sense of personalized service** - Display genuine interest and anticipatory service
- ▶ **Guest comfort & convenience** - Offer different room types and hotel services, and solicit special requests
- ▶ **Technical execution, skill & knowledge** - Familiarity with offerings, including rate types & inclusions

Read more about *The Value of a Hospitality Coach to Guide Your Tech* [here](#).

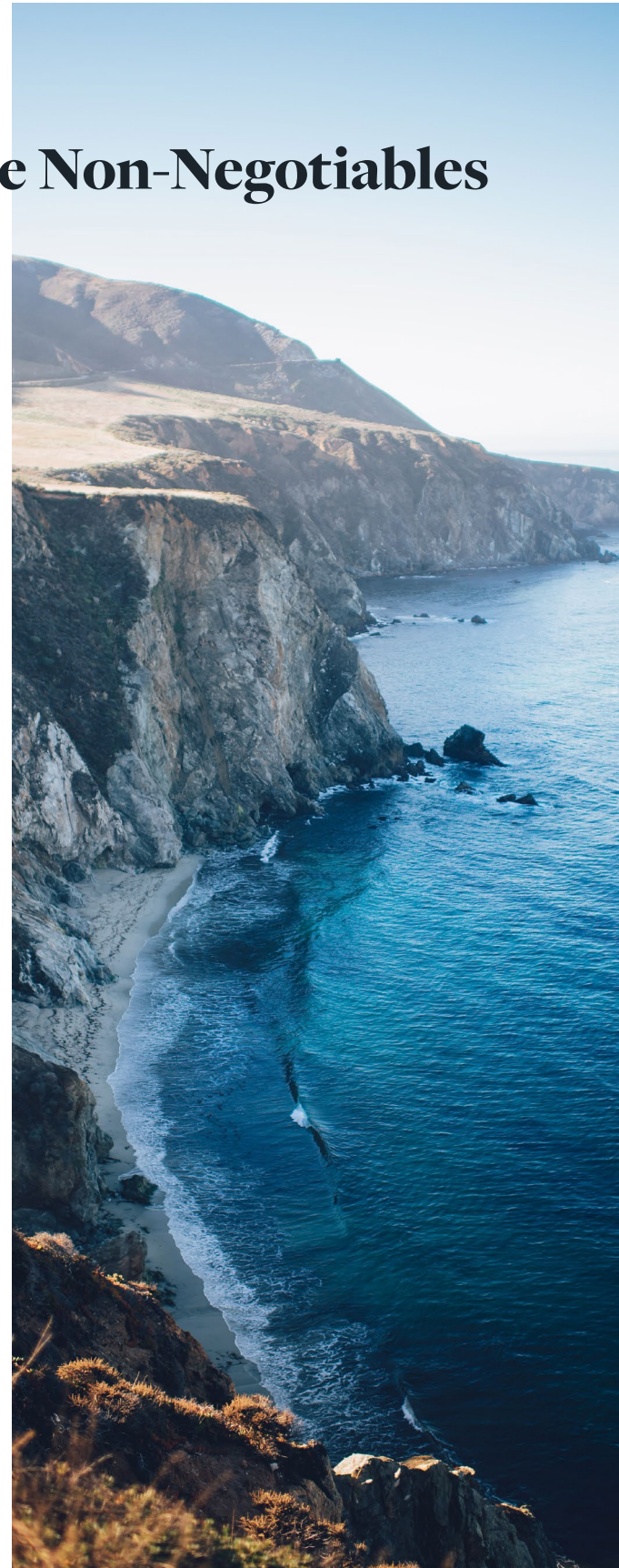


## NUMBER 4

# Do – Implement the Non-Negotiables

Non-Negotiables are key components to a reservations sales call that have been identified as the absolute “must-haves” within a sales call. The Non-Negotiables can be conformed to fit your business needs and are a guideline to help guide your reservations team to success. The values or “points” associated with each Non-Negotiable are configured to add “weight” to the criteria that are the most important.

Each element is designed to build on each other so that once the agent has the caller’s name, it can be used when asking open-ended questions to determine what is most important to the potential guest. Interactive dialogue, conveying confidence, and pride and asking for the reservation are the three most important things your agents can do in a phone call. Of course, asking for the sale is ultimately important, but to be successful, agents should earn the right to ask for that sale by utilizing all of the Non-Negotiables.



## The 7 Non-Negotiables:

- 1. Use the proper greeting.** Use the property’s full name, say your own name, and ask for the guest’s name
- 2. Create a dialogue.** Use open-ended qualifying questions to understand the caller’s requests. Leverage that information to build rapport and sell your property’s experience. Have a conversation. For example, is the caller booking for an anniversary? If so, highlight romantic dining options or packages for couples. If the guest is booking a family vacation, emphasize kid-friendly amenities and activities.
- 3. Personalize the conversation.** Use the caller’s name. Speak to what you’ve discovered—either through integrated CRM information about their previous guest experiences or through your current phone call—about what’s important to the guest. Share a bit of yourself by giving them a local viewpoint. For instance, have you visited the museum featured in the package the guest is booking?
- 4. Convey confidence and pride.** Letting callers know why your property meets their needs shows your investment in the hotel and in their experience. That said, offer the value of the product before stating the price.
- 5. Be professional and courteous.** Speak in slang-free, full sentences. Use a natural, friendly tone. Avoid dead air and excessive hold time.
- 6. Ask for the reservation.** While this seems obvious, NAVIS data shows that reservation agents skip this step 60% of the time. Asking for the sale, after you’ve earned the right to do so, increases conversion significantly.
- 7. Thank the caller.**

Juarez says that the non-negotiables are key in helping the agent drive the conversation and lead the caller into making the sale. “Conversion is king,” says Juarez, since one percentage point up or down can make a big difference to a property’s revenue.

Guthrie understands the importance of conversion rate, but he counters by saying quality is the most important metric in judging the success of a call. “If we’re not representing our clients from a quality standpoint, it doesn’t matter how well we’re selling. One poor quality review from a guest can tarnish the relationship long-term with that guest, as well as with the hotel or vacation rental brand. I coach our team to represent the client’s brand with the utmost quality first and foremost.”



NUMBER 5

Don't take your guest's privacy for granted

Maintaining compliance throughout your call center is a team effort. It takes cooperation and understanding at every level of the business. Establishing guidelines, maintaining current documents, and fostering an open, positive environment are all essential to keeping agents invested in compliance.

With the rise of remote work, compliance issues have become a major concern for companies. NAVIS was well ahead of the curve, having had a remote team since 2007, and going fully virtual with recruitment, hiring and training since 2016. NAVIS had long sorted out tech

and compliance issues, as well as employee engagement hurdles, related to remote work years before remote work became a necessity for many companies.

One of the biggest concerns for call center agents working from home is keeping guests' private information secure. You need to ensure that the employees work systems and networks are inaccessible to housemates. In addition, PCI standards require secure disposal of paperwork that contains credit card numbers or other private data.



NUMBER 6

Don't underestimate the importance of notes

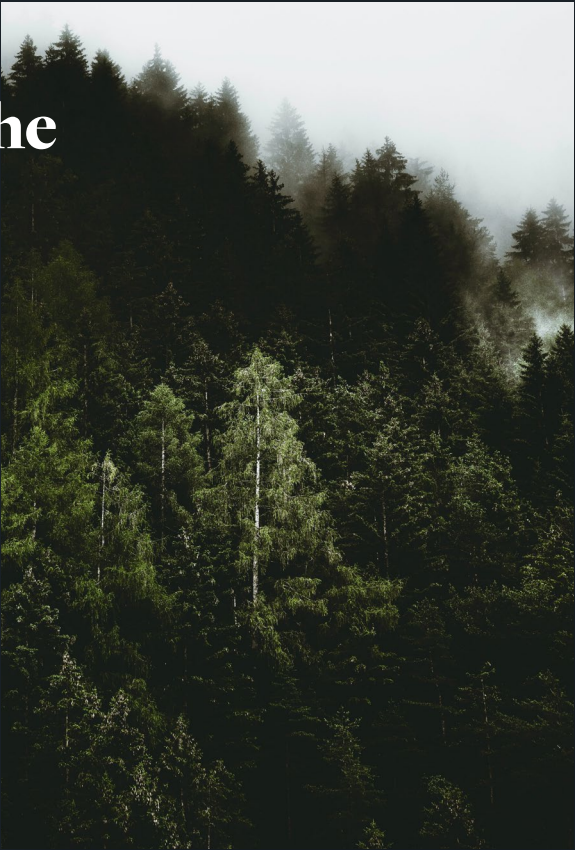
One of the most important tools for effective follow-up is the unique notes of the conversation. Notes such as the price range mentioned by the guest, a spouse's name, rates quoted, specials discussed, and policies reviewed, can all assist with effective lead follow-up. If an agent suspects that a guest will not book, notes should capture that information.

For example, if the guest is looking to spend within a price range that does not fit what you have to offer, this should be noted. That way, if a follow-up is made and the agent is unable to get in touch with the lead, the lead can be saved as Not Booked and the rate resistance non-booking reason can be used. If a person calls back and a different agent takes the phone call, the notes can be very helpful from a customer service standpoint because the caller won't have to repeat themselves.



Also, when an agent is assigned to follow-up with a lead, notes will be helpful when making the sale. When following up, agents can review the original phone call recording when time allows. However, if a lead form has complete information and good notes that will not be necessary.

Additionally, notes provide key data points for future marketing efforts. When agents actively input conversation and lead data into their CRM that data can be leveraged for future marketing efforts. E.g., was it a couple celebrating an anniversary? Now you can set automated campaigns to market to them automatically on their anniversary. Did they turn away because rates were too high? Market to them in the future with deals that fit their budget.





## NUMBER 7

# Don't forget you're in the business of hospitality

When answering calls all days, it can be easy to forget simple rules of phone etiquette:

- ▶ **Don't cut off callers when they are speaking.** Cutting callers off is rude and can cause them to get upset.
- ▶ **Don't be dishonest with the caller.** Saying you will do something or promising something you know will not happen is bad business.
- ▶ **Don't put callers on long holds.** Be mindful when putting callers on hold and ask their permission ahead of time. Limit hold times and check periodically with the caller.

Guests call to understand what to expect on their vacation experience. Besides speaking with a polite professional, they want to speak with someone truly knowledgeable about the property. "It's important for a reservations agent to be familiar with a property," says Guthrie, "as there are unique branding questions a guest may ask, such as how many feet away is the beach? Through tech, we can share that information with agents to provide specific details. Even though they're not onsite, they have the information at their fingertips."

## NUMBER 8

# Don't stop listening

It is often said that if you listen to customer complaints empathetically, they are more receptive to the solution offered. Moreover, active listening helps to avoid any miscommunication.

Active listening also ensures that the expectations of the customers are clearly understood. Listening to the customers also helps hospitality businesses in providing a more robust and innovative customer experience.

Guthrie recalls how an exceptional Reservations Sales agent at NAVIS went above and beyond in listening to guests. He would learn the menus of fine-dining establishments at luxury hotels, even going so far as to recreate the dishes at home. He would then speak to the guests and find out what sort of dining experience they were looking for, or if they were celebrating an occasion, so he could respond with customized recommendations. In this example, listening is key, but the quality of your response is equally important.



## NUMBER 9

# Don't lose patience

It goes without saying that being a call center agent means dealing with all types of people. It can be difficult to keep your calm and your poise when you're on the other end of an abusive rant, but hopefully you'll have been trained with the right tactics to deal with the situation in a professional way.

Whatever you do, avoid upsetting the client and work to de-escalate the situation. Losing your patience with a guest over the phone means not just losing that sale, but future sales – whether from that specific guest or the people he or she shares the experience with.

## NUMBER 10

# Don't forget to reach out

In the same way that a guest's experience doesn't begin when they step foot on property, it also shouldn't end when they check out. After the guest leaves, you've got a great opportunity to build your brand for their next stay.

First, you want to make sure they've had a great stay. For every guest that complains about a problem, on average there are nine more that don't complain to you but may complain to their friends. Proactively reaching out to measure what your guests think will provide invaluable information for your organization. Find out what they think and give them an incentive to stay with you again – some sort of loyalty discount that expires at a certain time would be one option. And don't forget to check the review sites. A few negative comments are hard to avoid but do what you can to mitigate the bad reviews.

## In Conclusion

Establishing great call center protocol standards is one of the most important things you can do for the guest experience and your brand's reputation. Customer service is the backbone of the hospitality industry. It is what that makes or breaks a hospitality business, so invest in building and training your call center team.





# Chart Your Course.

For hospitality professionals, getting and keeping profitable guests is tougher than ever. NAVIS has created the only complete Direct Booking Platform with a proven plan to help Reservations, Revenue Management, and Marketing truly operate as one team, and make more profit.

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