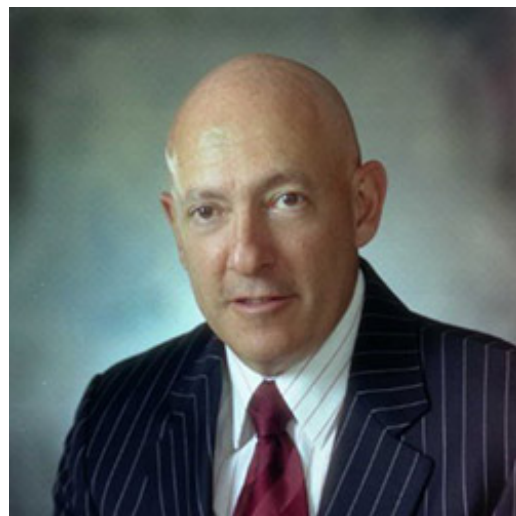


Pirates and poaching: What is it worth to protect your room block?

Guarding your room block could be worth thousands of dollars when you consider the cost of potential hotel contract attrition penalties. Because housing block "pirates" now routinely "poach" event attendees and exhibitors they can often be the leading cause of room block leakage.

The pirating companies, commonly located in Las Vegas or Henderson, a suburb of the city, gather your group's contact information from published or online directories. They will call your attendees leaving the impression that they are "official" housing. They will also frequently cite an imminent sell-out of the block while urging your attendee to secure their housing immediately. Another tactic is to offer a room rate that is significantly less than your official rate. How do they do this? Pirates often purchase heavily discounted blocks of rooms from tour and travel wholesalers who may have surplus rooms they need to offload. What is especially insidious is when pirates hold rooms in the official event hotel(s). In some instances pirates have taken room deposits and have failed to make room reservations --- this kind of activity is not only unethical it is illegal. In many other cases rooms are blocked in substandard facilities with little or no recourse given the disappointed guest.



Protecting the integrity of your room block is possible but it takes some work on your part. Here is a simple formula that can work well:

1. Educate your audience about the presence of pirates and poaching. Most are totally unaware of the practice but once informed they appreciate your outreach. Many will contact you at the first sign of pirates at work. One mention of poaching, by the way, is never sufficient. You must issue warnings about the practice regularly during the entire event registration process.
2. Consider revising attendee and exhibitor contact information that you publish. Publish just name, company affiliation and city and the pirates are forced to graze elsewhere. If you must provide complete contact information do so in direct communications to recipients, don't publish it for all to see.
3. When you discover a pirate poaching your event act decisively and promptly. Get your attorney involved and threaten legal action for the "tortious interference with your hotel contract". It's a tactic I used repeatedly and with success because it's a fundamental legal principle and is "court-worthy".
4. Create a distinctive event "Official Housing Logo" and make sure it includes your organization's name and logo (most are trademarked) as a prominent feature. Provide only official housing vendors with the logo to use in all of their outreach. If a pirate lifts your event logo you probably have another legal cause of action for trademark infringement and/or intellectual property theft.
5. Always audit the rooms occupied during your event to ensure that you are credited for all rooms your

attendees/exhibitors occupy irrespective of the source of the reservation. This should be a contract clause that you include in your contract during negotiations.

Sample letters and warning notices are included in the links that follow. While "pirates" and "poaching" are troublesome and potentially costly, you can combat the practice effectively once you have crafted your own pirate-fighting strategy.

For more information visit <http://www.iaee.com>

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