



Damaging Social Media Reviews and Lost Revenue Inspire Hotels to Solve ‘Sleepless’ Night Syndrome

Innovative acoustic soundproof solutions reduce street noise, improve customer satisfaction and help restore online reputations

Online trip advisory reviews have ushered in a harsh new business environment for hotels, motels and inns that live or die by referrals. If a guest had a lousy night's sleep due to exterior noise from traffic, railroads or activity at the swimming pool, do not be surprised if the manager is the last to know. Viral grousing has gone ballistic and its impact can be immediate and long-lasting for hospitality chains that lack a nimble damage control strategy.

The absence of a posted review does not necessarily indicate satisfaction either. A guest that is unhappy with a room due to excessive exterior noise may say nothing to management, but likely will not return. They may also complain to friends and business associates, where

negative word-of-mouth travels fast. This also can take a bite out of revenue. Now who is having a sleepless night?

Despite harsh online rebukes, well managed hotels acknowledge that they are prisoners of a paradox: They must build near major thoroughfares, highways and rail services so that they are accessible and convenient; yet location is often the source of the noise problem.

As noise awareness grows, some proprietors mistakenly believe the only solution is replacing every window – an expensive upgrade with no guarantee of success.

But Howard Hospitality, a hotel developer and hospitality management company, discovered a simpler solution that was cost-effective, did not require re-

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moving the existing windows, and quickly restored its online reputation – even though the site that needed remediation is located near roaring roadways.

Acoustic Test Windows

The guests of Residence Inn Sandestin at Grand Boulevard in Miramar Beach, FL often complained about road noise. The hotel fronts a busy street and highway. Despite excellent staff service, guest feedback included remarks such as, “I couldn’t get a good night’s sleep,” according to Tania Koehler, Director of Hotel Operations for Howard Hospitality that manages the Marriott property.

She calculated that about 74 percent of the negative comments the hotel received through online review sites, like TripAdvisor, also mentioned the noise as “extremely high.”

For more than a year, management researched solutions. Multiple studies revealed that 90 percent of noise seeps through windows, not walls. And dual-pane windows may effectively deter heat and cold, but a much different type of acoustic engineering is needed to block loud, exterior sounds.

Much to their relief, they also learned that they did not need to replace every window in their inn. In fact, the best solution for many sites is to add a second, inner soundproofing window. This method controls temperature as well as eliminates intrusive noise. And these special panels, which open and close (or not) just like the windows already present, need only be applied to areas where noise is most disruptive.

In 2015 Howard Hospitality contracted with Soundproof Windows, Inc., to install 176 special inner windows along the front of the Residence Inn Sandestin at Grand Boulevard. The company won the bid not merely because their product was less expensive than competitors. Koehler says the quality of the windows, the testing process and specificity of the plan to resolve the noise nuisance were superior.

“Other companies were vague about solutions. But the Soundproof Windows people stayed with us for two nights and tested the noise themselves. They explained the type of materials they used and how they sealed the windows, and even explained where the screws would be inserted. They were very clear about how and why their plan would work,” she says.

The window company, founded in 1998, did not just measure decibels and offer solutions. Howard Hospitality was convinced to sign on after engineers installed one test window in a two-room suite. The noise-levels dropped 95 percent.

“It was pretty amazing. The change was night and day,” she says.

In 2014, Residence Inn Sandestin at Grand Boulevard was ranked 74th among 687 Residence Inn hotels nationwide. In 2015, after the installation the ranking jumped to 14th, and the online noise complaints all but disappeared.

Koehler says her company will soon add the sound-



Guestroom with a second, inner soundproofing window

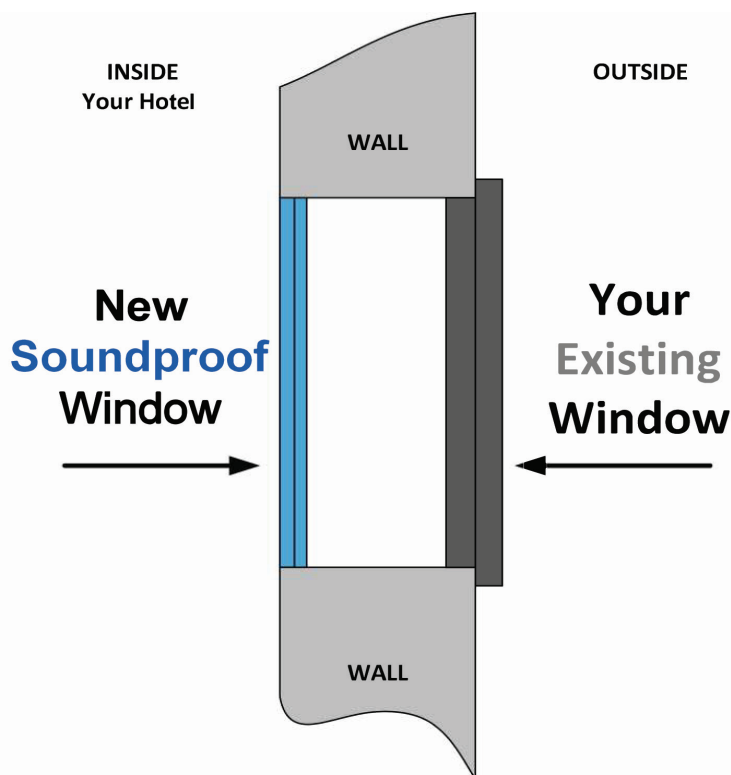
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proof windows to 16 more rooms on a corner of the inn near a major highway.

Acoustic expertise is the key to successful remediation, industry reports say. It is not enough to add thicker or more layers of glass. The product chosen by Howard Hospitality was engineered by professionals that have developed strategies for sound recording studios, one of the most noise sensitive environments on the planet.

Also, when comparing the efficiency of window products, look for a rating called Sound Transmission Class (STC.) The higher the number, the more noise is stopped. A typical rating for standard windows is 26 to 28. By adding the soundproof windows installed in Florida, the STC rating is now 52 to 55.

Industry insiders also advise buyers to be wary. Some manufacturers provide an STC rating only for the glass they use, not including the window frames. This can be deceptive because successful noise reduction is based on factors such as the seals, the air gap between the windows, and the acoustic design of the window frames.



CA is not a designated historic site, but it was built in the 1960s next to a railroad crossing. Passenger and freight trains, north and south bound, regularly blow through with horns blaring and safety guard rails ringing their alarms.

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Historic Remedy

Historic districts that preserve beautiful, but aging, buildings also create problems for ownership. Since the exterior design cannot be tampered with, swapping out old windows for new is rarely approved—even if guests complain regularly about noise. By installing an inner window, hospitality teams improve occupant experience and respect architectural history.

Mark Everton, area managing director for Commune Hotels and Resorts, faced a different challenge. The Waterfront Hotel at Jack London Square in Oakland,

“The majority of our online reviews at TripAdvisor and other sites were people being inconvenienced by the noise. And our internal guest satisfaction survey was equally negative in that area,” he says.

Another problem arose when in 2010 a new ownership group decided the site needed noise remediation. But replacing windows would do considerable damage to the stucco façade. It fell to Everton to find an economical remedy.

When his research turned up Soundproof Windows,



Inc., Everton was intrigued but not convinced. He chose three guest rooms, stacked on multiple floors in the front of the hotel. One room was not altered. Test windows were installed in the other two rooms, one with a 5/8" thick inner window and the other with 1/4" window.

Then Everton hired an independent acoustic firm to analyze the test results.

When compared to the room without an inner window, the room with the 5/8-inch glass inner window eliminated noise by 75 percent, exceeding the other test product. The experiment won Everton over and also proved that noise was entering through the windows, not the walls.

Still, the order for 75 windows was challenging because the face of the building has a variety of window sizes and shapes: rectangular that open and port-hole style. Sliding doors opening into patios are also used in some rooms.

Fortunately, Soundproof Windows can be configured to match any existing style of window, as well as sliding doors. The installation took a week.

"Our online scores and ranking have gone up. In our internal survey, before the change, noise was our number one complaint. Now it has receded to an occasional mention," says Everton, adding, TripAdvisor now ranks the Waterfront at No. 2 out of 48 Oakland hotels, up from No.9.

This year the Waterfront Hotel's owners approved installation of Soundproof Windows in the rest of the hotel.

"The better product you have, the better reputation you have," adds Everton.

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