

INTERNATIONAL Cruise & Ferry REVIEW



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Dialing for Dollars with your Marketing Message

by Jim McKenna; Vice President of Customer Support and Product Management for Wireless Maritime Services/ AT&T Mobility



In today's challenging environment, cruise line and ferry operators are focused on growing onboard revenues as much as they strive to maximize ticket revenues. There is good reason to do so: onboard revenues – from bar sales, shore excursions, casinos, spas and gift shops, just to name a few – can make up nearly 25% of a large cruise ship's combined ticket and onboard revenue stream. Compelling marketing is a key to driving this, especially when it comes to cell phone revenues.

Getting a consistent, on-point message out to guests about your onboard mobile communication services helps the bottom line by reinforcing customer awareness of what can be a robust source of revenue. In fact, we have found that our customers who actively market this service to their guests before and during a cruise typically generate at least 10%

more in onboard cell phone revenues than those who take a more passive marketing approach on similar ships.

Some of this success comes from the inherent stability of cell phone revenues. Unlike other areas prone to risk (think inclement weather in Alaska suddenly cancelling a day's worth of highly profitable helicopter glacier shore excursion tours, or a VIP in a casino winning big), revenues from mobile phone services are one of the more stable and steadily burning stars in an otherwise darkening onboard revenue sky. Travellers continue to use their mobile devices while sailing, and passengers on ships are making use of new data-rich services they have at their fingertips more than they have ever done before. In fact, since 2007 guest spend on voice calls with some of our cruise line partners increased 20% to 30% and, in some cases, even double that amount for data and SMS (texting) services.

It is pretty funny to think how all this has evolved. Years ago in the pre-cell phone era, a guest checking in to a hotel saw the in-room phone like a piece of uranium: expensive calling rates made the phone radioactive, and to be avoided at all costs. Now with the ubiquitous cell phone and affordable maritime international roaming rates, sea-going travellers have a new pacifier that they cannot leave home without.

Proper marketing ensures that guests remember to take their phone with them (and hopefully use it) during a cruise. But how exactly do you ensure that the person who is trying to get away from it all knows that they can keep in touch while sailing on the high seas? What can ship owners do to best promote their mobile communication services in order to maximize revenues?

Raising passenger awareness of the onboard cellular phone service via strategic marketing is paramount to achieving both of these goals. As part of our ongoing focus on raising customer satisfaction and revenues, Wireless Maritime Services (WMS) regularly and systematically reviews a number of important marketing touch



points to ensure our partners consistently, yet subtly, inform their guests that their phones work while at sea.

We start by looking at all opportunities for communication with a guest before sailing. We want to make sure guests know well in advance of their cruise that they can take their phone with them. This starts with ensuring that travel agents and in-house reservation specialists are knowledgeable about onboard mobile phone services. Websites should also indicate cell phone service is available onboard, usually in a "Staying in Touch" section. We encourage our partners to also include a link to the WMS website (www.cellularatsea.com) for further information. Pre-cruise documentation, including reminders to book shore excursion tours and countdowns-to-your cruise, can make effective mention of our services. We have also found good opportunities for promotion in loyalty programme newsletters, as well as a mention incorporated into reservation departments' on-hold announcements.

Onboard, the marketing message needs to be carefully woven into a brand's overall fabric of guest communication. Every onboard revenue area wants to be front and centre in the eyes of a guest, and some cruise lines choose a more muted method of marketing their revenue-related offerings to their passengers. At a minimum, daily programmes or newsletters should make mention of cell phone service while at sea. This is particularly important on the first day of a cruise. Inside the stateroom, information on the service should be included in each cabin's services directory. Brochures should also be available at reception desks and elsewhere throughout the ship, including internet cafés and at concierge desks. Screen savers on idle computers in internet cafés are another easy way to spread the word. We also encourage use of in-cabin television commercials, for which we have prepared 30-second and two-minute videos that explain the service.

One of the most effective and easiest ways to promote cellular phone service onboard is during

a Welcome Aboard show. A subtle 15-second reminder to guests to set their cell phones to vibrate during a show or in dining rooms lets them know their phones work at sea. Where a cruise director wants to have some fun with this, we have seen great results and increased usage when they have their cell phone ring onstage at the start of their act. The cruise director answers the phone in a hushed tone saying: "I can't talk now mother, I'm doing my show!" and then jokes with

the audience that, as they can clearly see, mobile phones do work onboard. The great part about this approach is that it is short, sweet and does not require any updating or reprinting as do other pieces of marketing collateral.

By regularly reviewing each of our partners' pre-cruise and onboard marketing touch points, WMS remains focused on growing the cell phone slice of the onboard revenue pie for our customers. On a pure service level, we are also delighted to be able to provide a pretty amazing piece of technology to guests thousands of miles away from shore.

We sometimes joke about how different the world may have turned out if Christopher Columbus had been able to phone for directions. We'll never know the answer to that one, but we do know that with WMS's service onboard, guests will always be able to make or answer a call no matter where they are. ●



Jim McKenna is Vice President of Customer Support and Product Management of Wireless Maritime Services, LLC based in Miramar, Florida. A 12-year veteran of the cruise line and hospitality industries, Mr. McKenna is a recognized authority on cruise line onboard revenue operations and brand development, including application of the Six Sigma process improvement methodology to maximize sales, customer support and client satisfaction.



Wireless Maritime Services

Wireless Maritime Services provides voice and data connectivity for guests on more than 130 ships around the world to use their mobile devices while at sea. Through our joint venture arrangement between AT&T and SeaMobile, we have roaming agreements in place with more than 300 service providers worldwide.

Guests sailing on one of our ships in the middle of the South Pacific can phone home, surf the internet or send a text message to a friend just as easily as they can when on shore. Now with our CrewzFone product, crew can also enjoy the same service to keep in touch with their family and friends.

Contact us at www.cellularatsea.com