

Two Ways To Check In-Room Minibar

Virtually all properties with in-room minibar will follow the same basic procedure for checking rooms. Typically each room is entered, checked and restocked all at once. This will be repeated until all rooms occupied last night are checked. Some properties however will check every room every day rather than just the rooms occupied last night to ensure an unoccupied room's minibar has not been disturbed while the room was vacant.

While this process is effective, it has a number of down sides:

Firstly by checking rooms one by one throughout the day, the process virtually eliminates any chance to check and charge departing guests before they check out. Postings are not done until late in the day, and guests are long gone by then thus increasing denials.

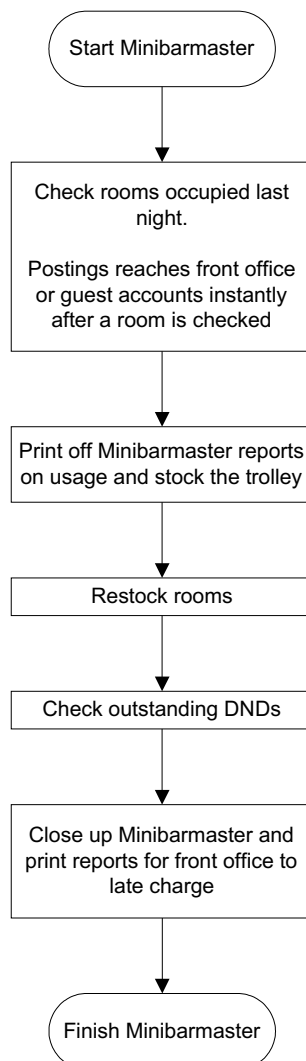
Secondly, quite a few rooms will be checked in the afternoon after a new guest has checked-in. If the new guest consumes from the minibar before the room is checked, staff won't know and will charge the departed guest resulting in an increase in denials.

Thirdly the trolley must be fully loaded at the start of operations as the minibar team member doesn't know how much stock is required to replenish

the rooms. Usually this implies the trolley is heavy and creates OH&S issues. It also slows down the minibar team member and they take longer to complete their rounds.

Check Rooms First And Stock Later

There is an alternative method particularly effective with Minibarmaster. Essentially it breaks minibar operations in two phases. Phase 1 requires minibar staff to check rooms without restocking. This may mean all rooms are checked or just the rooms occupied last night (this is hotel dependant). Rooms will be checked very quickly as there is no restocking to slow this phase down. Using Minibarmaster, charges will hit front office and appear directly on guest accounts immediately after the room is checked. Phase 2 requires minibar team members to enter rooms that were previously found to have consumed minibar and stock them. The flowchart on the left outlines this operation.



What Is Minibarmaster?

Minibarmaster Premium is a specialised minibar solution utilising handheld PDAs for hotel staff to record minibar sales as they check rooms. The charges are recorded on the PDA and automatically posted wirelessly to the guest accounts in the PMS from the floors virtually instantly. In addition, because the system uses the mobile phone network as the wireless medium the hotel does not need to invest in any wireless infrastructure. The system will calculate denials, and includes reports for finding expired products in rooms, calculating staff productivity, DNDs, sales and other reports. It eliminates the need for pen and paper based recording and dramatically improves speed of checking and the speed of posting thus resulting in savings in wages and reduced denials.

Minibarmaster Essential is a low cost version of the Premium System. Instead of posting directly to guest accounts, the charges are visible to front office cashiers on-line and live, seconds after the rooms are checked. The Essential System is identical to the Premium System in all other ways including it's wireless capability.

Both systems were fully developed locally for the Australian and New Zealand market places.

Electronics By Design

Suite 16, 469 Parramatta Rd Leichhardt 2040
 E: contactus@electronicsbydesign.com.au
 W: www.minibarmaster.com.au
 Issue: 2009.4



This method optimises the opportunity to reduce denials since guest rooms can be checked before the guest departs and capture the charges, thus not providing the opportunity for the guest to deny when checking out.

It also means new guests can't consume before their minibar is checked (and hence departed guests will be charged and revenue lost) because all checking will be completed before the 2pm check-in time.

Typically all charges will be posted to guest accounts and visible by front office by mid morning instead of late afternoon.

Checking rooms first and restocking later means the minibar attendant knows how much stock needs to be loaded on the trolley. Usually this means the trolley is lightly loaded, hence easier and faster to push around and takes less time to stock up. Some hotels who use this method, will carry a trolley and a basket to each floor. They look at the Minibarmaster reports to determine what items are required for the floor, load them on the basket and off they go to restock.

In addition, by loading the trolley with just the right amount of stock, staff don't waste time unloading excess stock at the end of the shift.

Checking rooms first and restocking later has some disadvantages (we are told) or does it?

1. The first argument against it is labour is doubled up or is it? In fact it isn't. Only one in 2 to 3 occupied rooms will consume minibar and need to be restocked. Minibar team members are not going to enter each and every room - only the ones requiring restocking.

2. The second argument against it is guests are disturbed twice thus increasing guest intrusion with an increase in complaints. Again we find this is not strictly true. 99% of guests are not in their rooms during the day. This is particularly prevalent in business hotels during the week. They usually leave the room in the morning and don't return until late in the afternoon.

3. The third argument against it is it increases the chance of a DND being encountered because it presents two opportunities for a room to be "DND'd" instead of one. Our feeling is it presents two opportunities to check and replenish the room and avoid the DND. If a DND sign is encountered on the first sweep, hopefully it's gone by the second sweep or vice versa.

4. The fourth argument is "guests are gone when we start checking minibar, so there is no opportunity to reduce denials". Again we find in our business dealing with minibar operations, only about 80% of due out guests have departed when minibar operations commence. If the remaining 20% can be checked quickly, there is a fantastic opportunity to capture charges and reduce denials. Even if only 2 denials each of \$7 (say) can be captured, this equates to a saving of \$5000 per annum.