

Welcome to the ever exciting Outdoor Hospitality

by: Rachel Godbout, Chief Operating Officer, Advanced Outdoor Solutions

Welcome to the exciting world of Outdoor Hospitality. Being a new park owner or d



When I entered the industry 20 years ago, it looked very different than it looks today. There were a few corporate developers, and there were a few REITs (Real Estate Investment Trusts) in the space. No one was using the word, "Glamping," though many of us were doing it. Technology was antiquated, and paper rate sheets were the norm. In today's space, much of this has changed. Advanced Outdoor Solutions has been in existence for ten years, and since day one, we were committed to our tagline, "Thinking Outside the Tent." Our desire is to assist owners and operators in getting their parks to operate like hotels and like a business.

Here are a few of the tips we have learned along the way.

LAND PLANNING AND DESIGN

Without exaggeration, we have reworked and redrawn at least twenty land plans this past year. Why? Mostly because developers of parks have used landscape architects or civil engineers unfamiliar with the industry. The sins are many and varied. Angles wrong, sites set up as blind back ins, and lengths too short or too long. Often widths are not correct, resulting in guests being too close for comfort, or density sacrificed to the detriment of revenue. We have found patio pads in

the wrong spots and utilities placed in locations that are too far from the RV ports, or too close for slides to fully extend.

Avoid this costly error by hiring a land planner familiar with Outdoor Hospitality and save yourself costly errors that will indeed hinder the guest experience.

THINKING THROUGH OPERATIONS

Recently, we met with a Glamping client with 500 acres. They decided they did not want vehicles in the resort, so their plan was to shuttle everyone to their site via UTV. Good plan?

I reminded them they are 2.5 hours from a major city, and guests who get off work at 6 will not be arriving until 9-10 at night. My question, "You plan to be owner/operators and you have no payroll year one. Who is going to shuttle them to their sites at 10 PM?" Their reply, "Well not us, we have young children."

See the problem? Operationally, you must think through the ifs, ands, and buts of the guest experience. Just last night at 10 PM my MOD (Manager on Duty) for AOS texted me because guests who booked a CATV site at one of our Colorado parks were without CATV. These calls, texts, or emails cannot be ignored. Who will reply at your park?

TECHNOLOGY

One of the most important decisions you will make at your park is the purchase of your PMS (Property Management System), aka your reservation system. Do not skimp on this purchase, or it will cost you real dollars in the end.

Changing, Industry!

Developing is both exciting, and daunting.



When I started 20 years ago, there were about three systems in the space. Two were one step above pen and paper, and 20 years later, they still exist and are still as antiquated. Other players have entered in the past 10 years, and they are bringing features we only dreamed about 20 years ago.

AT AOS, OUR PMS SYSTEMS MUST HAVE THESE THREE COMPONENTS:

- The online booking system must be easy for guests to use, and easy for the park to edit reservations.
- The system must make it easy for us to manage rate and revenue (dynamic pricing) and add things like MLOS (minimum or maximum length of stay,) stop sells, or CTA (Close To Arrivals).
- The system must connect to all popular US OTA (Online Travel Agencies) such as Air BB, Expedia, Booking.com, Book Outdoors, and the like.

When you are vetting a PMS system, make sure you look for these three items. Other important features are high end reporting, guest apps, automated check-in processes, and POS (Point of Sale) integrations for retail, food, and beverage.

There are many more items for new owners, operators, and developers to consider. Things like sewer treatment and the options available, how to manage rate and revenue, ancillary revenue streams, staffing in these tough times, and the on-site guest experience. These are all key components to opening a park that meets the guests' expectations and your goal of a solid ROI. ★



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