

CASE STUDY

Davidson Hotels & Resorts Turns to Knowland to Elevate and Redefine Sales Strategy



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—C. DANIEL ENGLE, VICE PRESIDENT, FIELD SALES, DAVIDSON HOTELS & RESORTS

The Challenge

Group business is key to hotels returning to profitability—but as it returns it will be less RFP driven and will require a hunter sales team to find and capture new business. As 2020 progressed, **Davidson** knew they would need an innovative solution to elevate its group sales teams' performance. The greatest challenge was to get sales out of the reactive mode of yesterday—waiting for RFPs to come in. This meant they would need to reorient their sales teams to become “hunters” and essentially give them a refresher on how to sell again effectively and proactively in the new hospitality environment. They knew there was business to be had, but they also understood the importance of not sitting still but rather going after it. In order for this strategy to be successful, Davidson would have to work hand in hand with each property. That meant monitoring the usage of tools, tracking sales outreach and measuring sales performance for full accountability across the process.

PROPERTY PROFILE

Davidson Hotels & Resorts is a cornerstone of the hospitality industry, founded in 1974. Throughout the last decade, Davidson has developed an unrivaled roster of blue-chip clients and partners, including public companies, private REIT's, opportunity funds, private developers and high net worth entrepreneurs. Today, Davidson stands as one of the premier lodging companies in the industry.

The Strategy

"Not only was it important to provide our sales team with the tools they needed to become proactive sellers with a hunter mentality, it was also critical that management was able to ensure accountability while monitoring their success," explained Tim Gustafson, Regional Director of Sales & Marketing for Davidson. "With Knowland, we achieved our objectives from beginning to end."

They strategized with long-term partner Knowland, whose team worked "outside the box" to develop a multifaceted prospecting program that would help re-invigorate the sales teams for the times and in turn elevate sales for the portfolio. To get started, Davidson selected two properties—one in Boston and one in Chicago—based on a sampling of its U.S. portfolio. To deliver top-notch sales training customized for the new normal, Knowland called in **Master Connection Associates (MCA)** who designed and implemented a sales refresher program that included a "Prospecting with a Purpose Playbook."

Knowland's Customer Success team oversaw project management for 30 days including counseling, training support and a feedback loop. Additionally, a prospecting roadmap was implemented that entailed coaching each property's sales team. These teams were then provided with access to the Knowland platform database and its Premium Contact Data to help them drill into their top 50–100 target accounts. Teams received engagement tools such as email templates, sample LinkedIn messages, and email subject lines to improve efficiency and success of their outreach.

It was clear in these times, Davidson also wanted to redefine success metrics with a focus on personal engagement and relationship building to ensure successful outcomes would lead to future sales.





INDIVIDUAL PROPERTY CASE STUDIES

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The Results

The process brought new insight and opportunity into the sales cycles for each property. Sales teams found the new sales tools and techniques easy to use and efficient. "Working with Knowland, we're building a robust sales pipeline by identifying opportunities our sales teams may have otherwise missed," said Stephanie Antonopoulos Sample, Regional Director of Sales & Marketing for Davidson. Leveraging Knowland's AI-driven SmartSearch technology, sales managers were able to source potential new accounts based on market, distance from the hotel, industry, past booking behavior, brand match, and more. Some properties identified up to \$100k in new potential for 2021, using the Knowland platform for just a couple weeks.

Teams thrived with the refresher of how to sell beyond the RFP. By focusing on building account-based relationships that look past the next meeting, sales managers were able to penetrate accounts and gain insights such as position versus competitors, won/lost feedback, future meeting calendars, and more. Support and involvement from the management company was critical to adopt the sustainable proactive "hunter" behaviors that resulted in pipeline growth.

"In today's market, we know there is business out there. We realized our sales teams needed a refreshed proactive approach and the tools to do the job right," said C. Daniel Engle, Vice President, Field Sales, Davidson Hotels & Resorts. "Longtime partner Knowland helped us show that results are possible, even in these times."