

Front Office - Introduction

Every multi-departmental physical business needs to have a front office or reception to receive the visitors. Front Office Department is the face and as well as the voice of a business.

Regardless of the star rating of the hotel or the hotel type, the hotel has a front office as its most visible department. For a business such as hospitality, the front office department comes with an aspect of elevating customer experience with the business. Front Office department is a common link between the customers and the business. Let us learn more about it.

What is Front Office Department?

It is the one of the many departments of the hotel business which directly interacts with the customers when they first arrive at the hotel. The staff of this department is very visible to the guests. Front office staff handles the transactions between the hotel and its guests. The staff receives the guests, handles their requests, and strikes the first impression about the hotel into their minds.

Front office department includes:

- Front Desk
- Uniformed services
- Concierges
- Front Office Accounting System
- Private Branch Exchange (PBX), a private telephone network used within an organization

Basic Responsibilities of Front Office Department

Following are the most basic responsibilities a front office can handle.

- Creating guest database
- Handling guest accounts
- Coordinating guest service
- Trying to sell a service
- Ensuring guest satisfaction
- Handling in-house communication through PBX

Front Office Operations

There are two categories of Front Office Operations:

1. Front-House Operations

These operations are visible to the guests of the hotel. The guests can interact and see these operations, hence, the name Front-House operations. Few of these operations include:

- Interacting with the guests to handle request for an accommodation.
- Checking accommodation availability and assigning it to the guest.
- Collecting detail information while guest registration.
- Creating a guest's account with the FO accounting system.
- Issuing accommodation keys to the guest.
- Settling guest payment at the time of check-out.

2. Back-House Operations

Front Office staff conducts these operations in the absence of the guests or when the guest's involvement is not required. These operations involve activities such as:

- Determining the type of guest (fresh/repeat) by checking the database.
- Ensuring preferences of the guest to give a personal touch to the service.
- Front Office Management
- Maintaining guest's account with the accounting system.
- Preparing the guest's bill.
- Collecting the balance amount of guest bills.
- Generating reports.

Guest Cycle in Hotel

Generally, a guest's interaction with the hotel is divided into the following four sequential phases:

Pre-arrival

It is the stage when the customer is planning to avail an accommodation in the hotel. In this first stage, the customer or the prospective guest enquires about the availability of the desired type of accommodation and its amenities via telephonic call or an e-mail. The customer also tries to find out more information about the hotel by visiting its website.

At the hotel end, the front office accounting system captures the guest's information such as name, age, contact numbers, probable duration of stay for room reservation and so on.

Arrival

The front office reception staff receives the guest in the reception. The porters bring in the guest luggage. For the guest with confirmed reservation, the front office clerk hands over a Guest Registration Card (GRC) to the guest and requests the guest to fill in personal information regarding the stay in the hotel. The clerk then registers the guest in the database thereby creating a guest record and a guest account along with it. Later, the clerk hands over a welcome kit and keys of the accommodation. After the procedure of registration, the guest can start occupying the accommodation.

Occupancy

During occupancy, a front office accounting system is responsible for tracking guest charges against his/her purchases from the hotel restaurants, room service, bar, or any outgoing telephone calls made via the hotel's communication systems. The front office staff is responsible to manage and issue the right keys of the accommodations to the right guests. On guests' request, the staff also makes arrangement for transportation, babysitting, or local touring while the guest is staying in the hotel.

Departure

During guest departure, the front office accounting system ensures payment for goods and services provided. If a guest's bill is not completely paid, the balance is transferred from guest to non-guest records. When this occurs, collection becomes the responsibility of the back office accounting division. At the time of guest departure, the front office staff thanks the guest for giving an opportunity to serve and arrange for handling luggage. In addition, if the guest requires airport or other drop service, the front office bell desk fulfils it.