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This article is also available in Microsoft Word format which makes it much easier to customize for your own use as a training aid or part of a procedures manual.

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HOW TO SUR “VEHICULARLY

Follow this step-by-step guide to handle days when duebacks and cars on the ground will not cover reservations. Four unique scenarios are examined.

BY JIM TENNANT

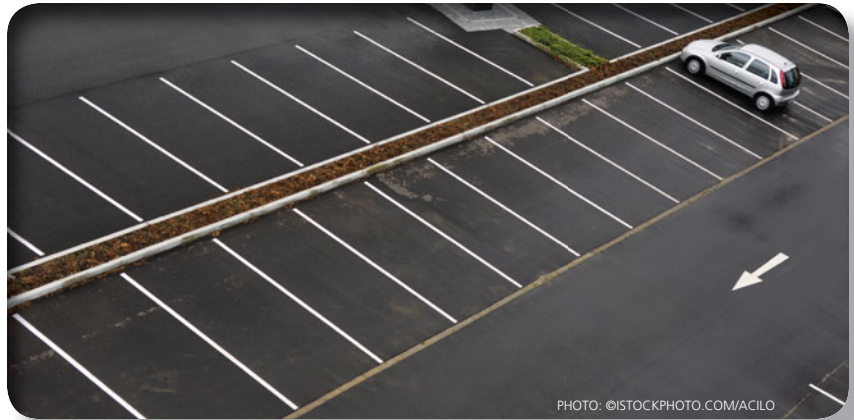


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There will be days when you have a high volume of reservations, yet duebacks are delayed. There will also be days when your “no show” factor will be less than your usual 35 percent. On these days, you will experience a number of things that must be handled efficiently — and in a manner that shows you are prepared to take care of the customer immediately. The following guidelines can be used by your rental and reservation staff, from the graveyard shift to the evening shift the next day, to prevent chaos at the counter. This guideline is applicable to any type of operation.

In addition, four unique scenarios are examined to help you prepare your operation for any circumstance. Keep in mind that no matter what the situation, each customer and situation is unique and should be treated with respect.

▸ Graveyard Procedures: The Night Before

1. The graveyard shift prints the reservation report and dueback report for this location and others, if applicable.
2. Graveyard computes the manager’s report, including reservation count and expected no shows, to determine status of vehicles.
3. Graveyard prints and reconciles the “Cars Not on Rent” report.
4. If you find yourself short of all types or

certain types of vehicles, the graveyard staff should begin calling the competition to determine availability and pricing. Remember to factor in vehicle substitutions.

When calling the competition:

- Speak to a manager if available. If not there, get the manager’s name and time expected in, so the day shift knows whom to ask for.
 - Verify the name of the agent you speak to.
 - List the sizes available.
 - Will they honor your rates?
 - If not honored, what price?
 - How many vehicles can they help you with?
5. Graveyard should then communicate the situation for the day with morning staff.

▸ Day Shift Procedures

1. The first person in every day should go through the reservation manifest and highlight specialty vehicles and long rentals. Make sure you have cars to satisfy the long rentals. Shorter rentals can be referred.
2. This person should also write down any special messages or substitutions that will be made for that reservation. Be sure to communicate with fellow staff members verbally or via a comments screen.
3. Communicate with one another and know who will be in charge when the buses pull up. One person should be there to greet the customer to verify and expedite the process.

✦ **At no time should a customer have to stand in line only to find out there is no vehicle waiting for him/her. Do not start a rental if you know you do not have a car. The person in charge of coordinating should stay in constant communication with the manager.**

4. Day shift will then reverify the vehicles needed and the times they are needed:

- Look at the time of pick up and the number of days each customer needs the vehicle. (Remember, you only want to refer short rentals if possible.)

- Highlight the rentals that are to be sent to the competitor, and indicate on the reservation manifest where they are to be sent.
 - Check to see which ones use substitute vehicles (i.e. vans and 4x4’s).
 - Check to see if you have foreign vehicles to use and call the locations.
 - Check with the shop to see if there are any cars over there that are rentable.
 - Check your overdues and start calling them.
 - Advise your lead service agent of the rental needs so those vehicles are top priority.
 - Make sure all vehicles are “ready rent” and on the clean line. Make sure nothing is being hidden behind the car wash area or fence.
5. Advise the manager of the progress and keep him/her updated.

VIVE CHALLENGED” DAYS

✦ **At no time do you tell the customer that you are overbooked. Tell the customer, “We are experiencing a delay in returns.”**

6. All referrals must have a referral form completed and left on the manager’s desk — even those in which the rate is honored. If the rate is not honored you need to be sure all of the information is completed on the form so the customer can be credited quickly.

7. Throughout the day, the supervisor should update the reservation manifest. Turn reservations that are more than two hours late after the flight has landed into no-shows.

✦ **No agent, on any shift, should leave if there is a customer in line.**

8. Be sure you keep the customer updated as to the status of the vehicle. By being attentive to the customer, he/she may not mind waiting a little while for the car.

◆ Evening Shift Procedures

1. Evening crew will arrive at least 10 minutes prior to the start of the shift. Do not walk up to the counter and interact with customers before you check on the status and conditions of the day. Your first clue is if you pull in and see no cars.

2. PM crew will run the “Cars Not on Rent” and reconcile it.

3. PM crew will call the competition and speak to whoever is in charge to verify that the same agreement is in place. Stay in

touch with those helping you out.

4. PM crew will also have one person who will greet customers and make the transaction as smooth as possible.

5. Reservation agents should also be advised of rental delays so they can communicate with customers who are calling in to confirm reservations. Many times they can call the customer and arrange a later pick up. This is another reason why customers’ phone numbers are crucial when making a reservation.

6. Graveyard will run the “Cars Not on Rent” and reconcile.

7. All staff will use the computer screen status lines to determine availability. It is up to all staff to be sure cars are ready to rent. If a car checks in with problems, be sure to mark it as out-of-service. Also check for cars being saved for specific reservations. If you move a car to the back for this purpose, make the following shift aware of this and why.

Four unique scenarios follow that will give you ideas on how to handle “vehicular challenged” situations.

SCENARIO 1: OUT OF LUXURY CARS

A customer with a reservation for a luxury car arrives at the counter but there is not a luxury on the lot. Before telling the customer that the car is not available, you should:

A. Qualify the customer:

- How many people are in the party?
- How many days will they need the vehicle?
- Where are they going to be while they have the car?

B. Offer alternatives:

- Will a larger or smaller size car work (full-size, minivan)?
- If the car is available downtown, can we take them there?
- Offer two cars for the same price.
- Deliver customer to hotel, restaurant or place of business and pick them up later, or deliver a vehicle to them if in the area.*
- Deliver customer to hotel and change pickup to following day.*

- Offer substitute vehicle with promise to do an exchange within a reasonable area.*
- Substitute a foreign vehicle if available.

**Whenever you make special arrangements with a customer, you must log it in the manager’s log book and/or fax the information downtown so it can be handled first thing. The customer from the day before is top priority!*

C. After you have exhausted all avenues:

- Send to a competitor with the same rate if possible.
 - If it is a long rental, try to make arrangements with the customer to get them back into your office to get a car when one will be available.
 - Offer a free upgrade or discount to get them back.
- You want to do all you can to keep the customer.

SCENARIO 2: LONG RESERVATION FOR 4X4 CANNOT BE SATISFIED

A customer arrives at the counter with a reservation for a 4x4 for 10 days. You do not have a 4x4, and the competitors are sold out. Before telling the customer you do not have the vehicle you should:

A. Qualify the customer (This will give you time to get a 4x4 for them.):

- How many people are in the party?
- Where are they going?
- When are they leaving for that area?

B. If the area they are going to is not in a snow area, perhaps another vehicle will work for them.

C. If they are going skiing and are leaving the area immediately:

- Ask the customer if any vehicle you have on your lot will work for him/her. You can do it for the same price or reduce the price if necessary.
- Offer to supply chains or reimburse the customer if you do not have chains at the location that will fit the vehicle.
- Find out what you can do to accommodate the customer and do your best. If the customer sees you trying, it makes a big difference — even if the competition is sold out, the customer likes to hear you try.

SCENARIO 3: WHEN YOU MUST REFER TO A COMPETITOR

You have 150 reservations for the day and 51 check-ins for the day. There are 12 vans sitting on the lot at 7 a.m. All reports have been run and reconciled, and it has been determined that you are approximately 30 cars short for the day.

You have called the competitors, and a competitor has agreed to take any and all reservations at the same price.

Mid-morning rolls around and the buses begin pulling in with six to 10 reservations at a time. There are approximately 15 reservations waiting to be honored. You currently have one economy, one compact, two midsize, four Mustang convertibles and two minivans. What do you do?

A. The lead agent in charge of coordination will greet customers as they arrive or may choose to ride the bus with them.

- All available rental agents should be at the counter waiting to assist the customers.

B. The lead agent will look at the reservation manifest to determine which reservations you will be able to accommodate with the number of cars available at this moment.

- The lead agent will advise the customer to proceed to the counter and will advise the agent which vehicle is assigned each customer. (It is very important that the counter staff communicate with one another. Before upgrading into a vehicle, you must be sure that the car is not assigned to another customer standing in line.)
- The lead agent will advise those customers that are going to the competitor that “we are experiencing slow returns.” Have two copies of the referral form completed. The greeter will assist the lead agent with transporting those customers being referred.
- The lead agent might offer to have the customers wait a few minutes in hopes that cars may check in while the first customers are being waited on. However, if you know you are going to have to send customers to the competitor, it should always be done as early in the day as possible to eliminate the possibility of a sellout by the competition.

Once again, under no circumstance do you tell the customer that you are overbooked.

SCENARIO 4: HANDLING THE BUSLOAD

After arriving 10 minutes early for your shift and speaking to the manager about the goings on for the day, you discover that you still have 65 reservations and 47 returns. With your no-show factor, you will still have several vehicles to “free sell” later in the day or night. However, at the moment you have three 15-passenger vans, one convertible, two midsize and a luxury car. And then lo and behold, a busload of people arrives at your counter.

What should you do? Keep in mind that cars check in on a regular basis.

A. The lead agent should qualify the customer.

- Find out how many people are in the party.
- How long will they need the vehicle?
- Where are they going? How long will they be in the area?

B. The lead agent will then assign the available vehicles according to the customer’s reservation and needs. Keep in mind to use the larger vans for minivan reservations first.

C. Once you have depleted the ready line you will need to explain to the remaining customers that there has been a delay.



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