

UNIT – IV

LAYOUT AND SECTIONS OF FRONT OFFICE

Functions Areas of Front Office. (Front of the House and Back of the House Activities) - Different Sections & Layouts of front office and their importance - Co- ordination of front office with other departments - Equipment used in Front office

FUNCTIONS PERFORMED BY FRONT OFFICE DEPARTMENT: -

The front office is the contact point between the guest, management, and other departments. It handles guests' complaints, dispatches housekeeping and engineering requests, prints and files reports, receives and answers phone calls, and sends and receives faxes. Thus, the front office personnel perform the following functions:

- 1) Receiving & processing reservation {on phone, on checkout etc. Take details report number, mistake to occur}.
- 2) Welcoming the arriving guests. {welcome tikka etc. Make him relax & feel good, create a positive attitude about the hotel}.
- 3) Filling of the arrival & departure register.
 - (I) The legal formality of registration must be fulfilled by the receptionist who sees that all customers supply the details required for a record that may be inspected by the police from time to time.
 - (II) Useful marketing about the guest is elicited from the guest are noted down in arrival & departure register which includes his personal financial information.
- 4) Providing information service {to guest}.
 - (I) About city, surrounding area, hotel has concierge desk {bell desk}.
- 5) Preparing & updating the folios of the guest.
 - (I) During stay & from outlets, telephones etc.
 - (II) Not to cover charge/under charge him.
 - (III) Bill instantly before check out.
- 6) Dealing with complaint & handling them.
 - (I) Listen clear doubts, pay attention, don't argue.
 - (II) Solve with techniques & skills, tell the concerned department.
- 7) Marketing & selling of the hotel.
- 8) Providing security services.
- 9) Communication & co-ordination with other department.
- 10) Maximizing occupancy through revenue management.

DIFFERENT SECTIONS OF FRONT OFFICE AND THEIR IMPORTANCE

WITH REGARD TO HOTEL OPERATION

The major sections of front office are:

- Reservations
- Communication (Telephone)
- Reception
- Information

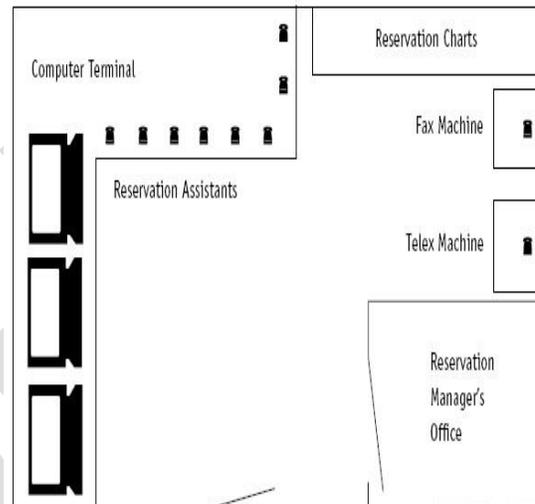
- Cashier
- Guest Relation.
- Uniformed Services

In addition to the above depending on the organization structure and made of operations Business Centre, Concierge, Travel and Transport, Shopping Arcade etc also come under front office department in many hotels.

All the sections in front office have a significant role of their own in the Hotel Operations

Reservations: -

- Handles all reservation calls for all the bookings like free individual traveler (FIT) or groups and also take reservation.
- Handle all reservation requests by all other means like fax, telex, e-mail etc.
- Maintain reservation rack
- Maintain accurate and up to date room inventory.
- Deal with all the sources of reservation like travel agent, airline crew, corporate, etc.
- Set booking levels and close out dates if fully booked.
- Makes effort to up sale the rooms
- Lastly keep a proper record of reservation, room forecasting etc., to make the later process run well.



Telephones: -

The Telephones section or communication section maintains the communication network of the hotel, which is generally quite complex. The hotel may have its own private branch exchange (PBX), along with post and telegraph lines.

Functions of Communication Desk:

The duties of the telephone operator include:

- Answering incoming calls.
- Directing calls to guest rooms through the switchboard/EPABX
- Providing information on guest services
- Processing guest wake-up calls
- Answering inquiries about hotel facilities and events
- Protecting guests' privacy
- Coordinating emergency communication

Reception / Registration: -

- This is one of the most important sections of as they are in direct contact with the guest right from the time of arrival till the time of departure.
- Reception staff performs the functions like welcoming the guest on arrival at the hotel, registering them and assigning rooms to them.
- Complete pre-registration formalities for VIP's SPATT guest, groups, etc.,
- Maintain various records like registration cards, C-forms, amenities voucher, movement slip, discrepancy report, occupancy list and statistics, etc
- Execute government formalities regarding foreigners such as C- form
- Co-ordinate with housekeeping department for room clearance.



Information Desk: -

As the name suggests, the information desk provides information to guests. It is manned by an information assistant. In a small hotel, the same function may be performed by the receptionist. The need of a separate information desk is felt in large hotels where the traffic of guests is higher.

Functions of Information Desk:

Some of the functions of the information desk are as under:

- Maintaining resident guest rack.
- Handling guest room keys.
- Co-ordinating guest mails, telegrams, faxes, courriers, parcels, etc.
- Providing information to guests regarding hotel facilities and services, city information, etc.
- Handling guest's messages.
- Paging



Cashier: -

The cash and bills section records all the monetary transactions of guests. It maintains guest folios and prepares the guest bills to be settled by the guest at the time of departure. This section is headed by a cashier.

Functions of the Cash and Bills Section:

This section performs the following tasks:



- Opening and maintaining of guest folios.
- Posting room charges in guest folios.
- Recording all credit charges in guest folios.
- Maintaining a record of the cash received from guests.
- Preparing bills at the time of check-out.
- Receiving cash/TC/demand draft for account settlement.
- Handling credit/debit/charge cards for the settlement of a guest account.
- Organizing foreign currency exchange for the settlement of a guest account.

Uniformed Services

The uniformed services in the hotel include:

- Bell Desk
- Concierge

Bell Desk

The bell desk is located very close to the main entrance of the hotel. This section is headed by a bell captain, who leads a team of bell boys and page boys.

Functions of bell desk: The bell desk is responsible for the following tasks:

- Handling guest luggage at the time of arrival and departure
- Escorting guests to their rooms on arrival.
- Familiarizing guests about safety features and in-room facilities.
- Making sundry purchases for the guest.
- At request keeps guest luggage in the left luggage room

Concierge

The concept of concierges came from the days of European royalty; the concierge was the castle doorkeeper in those times. His duty was to ensure that all castle occupants were safe in their rooms at night. A concierge is often expected to achieve the impossible

Functions of concierge:

The concierge provides the following services to guests:

- Making reservations for dining in famous restaurants.
- Obtaining tickets for theatres, musicals, sporting events
- Arranging for transportation by limousine, car, coaches, buses, airplanes, or trains.
- Providing information on cultural and social events like photo exhibitions, art shows etc.

Guest Relation: -

- Maintains contact with the guest during their stay in the hotel in order to ensure that the guest is having a comfortable stay.
- Maintain guest history
- Escorting the VIP guest to the room
- Render traditional welcome
- Co-ordinate with travel desk to avoid confusions regarding vehicle arrangement for guest from hotel side
- Take care of special days for the guest and make arrangement for cake / a candle light dinner / complimentary gift / flowers etc

Ancillary Areas of Front Office

Business Center: -

- It is one of the revenue generating centers of the FO.
- It is a place where a guest can get the facilities like Internet, Xerox, Print outs, etc

Travel and Transport: -

The travel desk takes care of travel arrangements of guests, like air-ticketing, railway reservations, sightseeing tours, airport or railway station pick up or drop, etc. The hotel may operate the travel desk or it may be outsourced to an external travel agency.

Functions of Travel Desk:

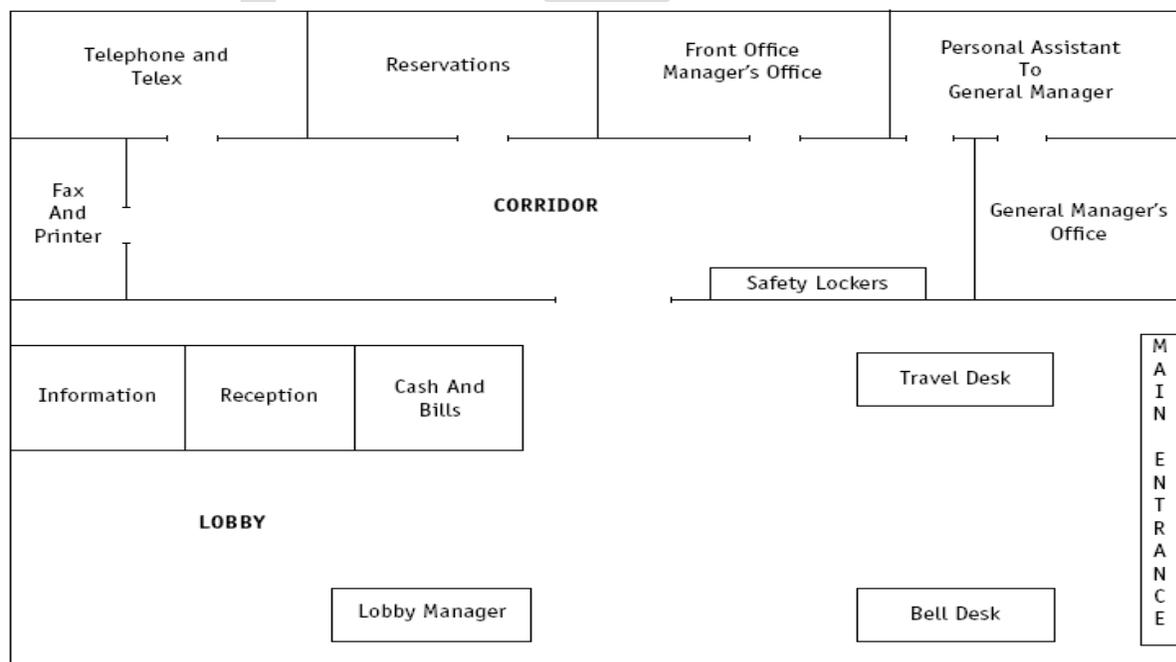
The travel desk performs the following tasks:

- Arranging pick-up and drop services for guests at the time of their arrival and departure.
- Providing vehicles on request to guests at pre-determined rates
- Making travel arrangements like railway reservation/air-tickets
- Organizing half-day or full-day sightseeing
- Arranging for guides who can communicate in the guest's language

Shopping Arcade: -

- A row of shops arranged in the lobby which sell souvenirs, books, gifts, flowers etc.

LAYOUT OF THE THE FRONT OFFICE AND THE LOBBY



Many times in addition to the building and ambience, the main entrance and approach plays an important role in the selection of hotel for a guest, as a guest comes across the entrance and then the lobby when he enters the hotel, hence a lot of care should be taken while planning, building and designing it.

PORTICO: - This is the front area of the hotel, which is a shaded portion, used by the guest to embark and disembark from his vehicle. As there is a lot of movement of the vehicle into and out of the hotel this area should not be congested. The following criteria should be considered while designing the portico.

1. In general, the drive way in front of the lobby (passing through the portico) should be at least 18 ft. wide, such that two cars can pass easily.
2. Sufficient height clearance to allow coaches loaded with luggage on top should also be given consideration. (a minimum of 16 ft. high clearance from the road should be allowed)
3. No. of steps for entrance into the lobby area, as generally a raised entrance approach by steps is used. To avoid the problem of carrying of luggage from steps there should be a separate luggage entrance in the form of a ramp starting from driveway to the main entrance. The ramp should not be too steep. The recommended inclination with a road of the ramp for luggage trolleys and wheel chair is 2 ½ ft. as most convenient.

LOBBY: - Generally lobby is a spacious area where the front desk is housed. After the portico it is the area to which guest comes in contact with the FO. The sight of the lobby either marks or breaks the impression of the hotel. So following points should be considered while planning it.

1. Should be spacious but not waste full. Size of the lobby is dependent on factors like hotel size, activities that take place in the hotel, structural layout of the hotel, system used in the hotel, etc.
2. The natural flow of the guest should be toward reception / information counter on his arrival in the hotel.
3. Sufficient space should be there for luggage center (short time keeping of luggage in the lobby before either sending to the room or to the vehicle)
4. As it is a general circulation and waiting area all the desk such as front desk, travel desk, GRE desk, house telephone, elevators and staircase should not block each other.
5. Front desk is located in the lobby, it should be in clear view of the guest entering in the lobby and the front office staff should be able oversee the activities in the lobby, entrance, exit, elevators, shops, etc. and possibly the dining area i.e. restaurant / coffee shop.
6. Shopping arcade may also be either one part of lobby or nearer to the lobby.
7. All the restaurants may also be reached through lobby.
8. Cloak rooms / washrooms must be in one side of the lobby.
9. In addition to the entry from the porch or drive-in, there must be an entrance to lobby from the car parking area which is usually in basement.
10. As it is the most important public area in the hotel should be well decorated with good quality of display materials, chandeliers, furniture matching with the décor of the theme and décor of the hotel.
11. Flooring of the lobby should be durable, easy to maintain and eye appealing and also cost effective.
12. Walls must be well maintained.
13. Maximum utilization of natural light and air should be done for lobby planning.
14. The design and shape of the lobby should also match the architectural theme of the hotel.

15. Color of paint and distemper used must be in harmony with the color of material such as counter and furniture etc.
16. Lobby should be spaciouly designed without wasting any space. Size of the lobby is dependent on the following factors
 - On the size and type of hotel
 - Structural layout of the hotel
 - Systems used in the hotel, such as manual / mechanical or automatic

RECEPTION COUNTER: - The counter must be fully functional, operational and well planned. The following must be considered while planning this.

Size: - Dependent on size and systems used in the hotel as example for a large hotel using automatic system the size may be small, but while for a small hotel using Whitney rack system or manual system may be comparatively large.

Shape: - Counter design should match the design of lobby, E.g. 'L' shape, straight shape, curve shape (semicircular or circular) etc.

Dimension: - Height between 38" to 42", width is 30" approximately, and the length depending on various factors such as size of lobby, type of hotel, business profile of the hotel and systems used etc.

Materials Used: - Varies from wood and cement to concrete with finishing of laminated surfaces, stones, marble, granite etc. depending on cost and design etc.

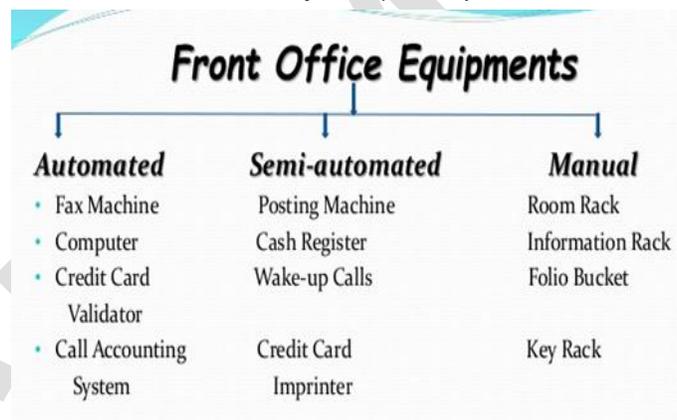


LIST OF EQUIPMENTS USED IN THE FRONT OFFICE

Equipment are very essential to carry out the front office operation smoothly. Equipment vary from hotel to hotel basing on the system of operation of the front office. Here is a common list of equipment used in front office of a hotel (manual / Non-automated, Automated, Semi-Automated).

- ❖ Key and mail rack (Semi automated and non-automated system): - To hold the room key and guest mails.
- ❖ Mail sorting rack (Semi automated and non-automated system): - To hold the mail after sorting the mail.

- ❖ Reservation Rack (Semi automated and non-automated system): - To store future reservation records.
- ❖ Page Board (for all systems): - A board used by the bell boy to page the guest.
- ❖ G.R. Card Holder (For all systems)
- ❖ Bulletin Boards or Reader's Board or Board to Ready or Display Board (for all systems): - Used to display the information of the events going on in the hotel.
- ❖ Photocopying Machine or Xerox Machine (Semi automated and non-automated system)
- ❖ Room Rack (Semi automated and non-automated system): -To hold room rack slips (which displays guest data, room no. and room rate etc.) are arranged room no. wise.
- ❖ Billing Machine and Posting Machine (non-automated system): - Used by the cashier for posting and taking out the bill print out posting, monitoring and bring out balance charges.
- ❖ Date and Time Punch (Semi automated and non-automated system): - To punch date and time on the mail received by the hotel.
- ❖ Credit Card Imprinter (Semi automated and non-automated system): - To swipe credit card at the time of payment by the guest.
- ❖ Telephone (for all hotels): - To communicate
- ❖ Postal Weighing Scale (non-automated system): - Used to measure the weight of the packet need to be posted, so that stamp can be stuck.
- ❖ Franking Machine (Semi automated and non-automated system): - A machine used for printing postage stamps value on the envelope.
- ❖ Perpetual Year Planner / Status Board (Manual Hotels): - Shows Room Status.
- ❖ Fax Machine (Semi automated and non automated system): - To send and get information via electricity.
- ❖ Complete Computer System Hardware (Monitor, Printer, etc): - To carry out various operations like to take reservation, to stores data, to take out bill etc.
- ❖ Magnetic Strip Reader: - Reads data magnetically encoded and stored on the magnetic type of strip on the back of a credit card and writs that data to a credit verification source and the credit card verification service either approves or disapproves the transaction.
- ❖ Voucher Rack (all systems): - This rack is used to keep the guest signed vouchers for future reference and is located near the accounting posting system.
- ❖ Folio Tray: It is a bucket where the guest folio are stored and arranged by guest room number. Ones these accounts are settled, the folio are moved to permanent storage location.



CO-ORDINATION & CO-OPERATION WITH DEPARTMENTS & SECTIONS: -

The front office department plays a pivotal role in delivering quality services to guests. The front office communicates guests' requirements to other departments, which work in close coordination and cooperation to deliver required products and services. In order to maintain the desired level of service, the front office department communicates with the following departments of the hotel:

1. HOUSEKEEPING: -

Rooms being the common factor, front office communication with housekeeping are very essential.

Front Office-Housekeeping

- i. Arrivals.
- ii. Rooming list of groups.
- iii. Change of rooms.
- iv. Departure notification.
- v. Room discrepancy report.

Housekeeping- Front Office

- i. Occupancy report.
- ii. Room cleaned & ready.
- iii. Room under maintenance work.
- iv. Room discrepancy report.



2. FOOD & BEVERAGE: -

ROOM SERVICE: - amenities vouchers, arrivals, departures & change of room.

3. ENGINEERING & MAINTENANCE: -

Repairs & faults pertaining to air conditioner, electrical fittings, plumbing etc.

4. SALES & MARKETING: -

Front office requests the scale & marketing department for improving the room sales, sales & marketing keeps the front office informed about the new agreements with travel agents, airlines & corporate sector.

5. STORES: -

For supply of stationery, forms, formats & registers.

6. ACCOUNTS: -

Notifies arrivals & departures & opening of guest folio after registration.

7. NIGHT AUDITOR: -

He audits & checks all guest transactions & bills made during the day & prepare the room sales for the day.

8. TELEPHONES: -

Front office informs about the arrivals, departures, change of room & guest location.

KEY WORDS

1. **Front Office**- Front office department plays an important role in image building of a hotel. The reception desk includes front office cashier, information, and registration section.
2. **Reception** - Reception staff performs the functions like welcoming the guest on arrival at the hotel, registering them and assigning rooms to them. They are in direct contact with the guest.
3. **Information** – This section provides information to the guest regarding the hotel, city and the country at large.

4. **Concierge** - In some hotels concierge provides information to the guest when longer interactions are required such as planning of an itinerary and related needs.
5. **FO Equipment**- Equipment vary from hotel to hotel basing on the system of operation of the front office. Categorized as manual / Non-automated, Automated, Semi-Automated.

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