

MOBILE

SLH launches new app to reach mobile travelers

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The Bannister Hotel, Puerto Bahia, Samana, Dominican Republic

By FORREST CARDAMENIS

Independent hotel network Small Luxury Hotels of the World is capitalizing on the sector's mobile boom with a new application.

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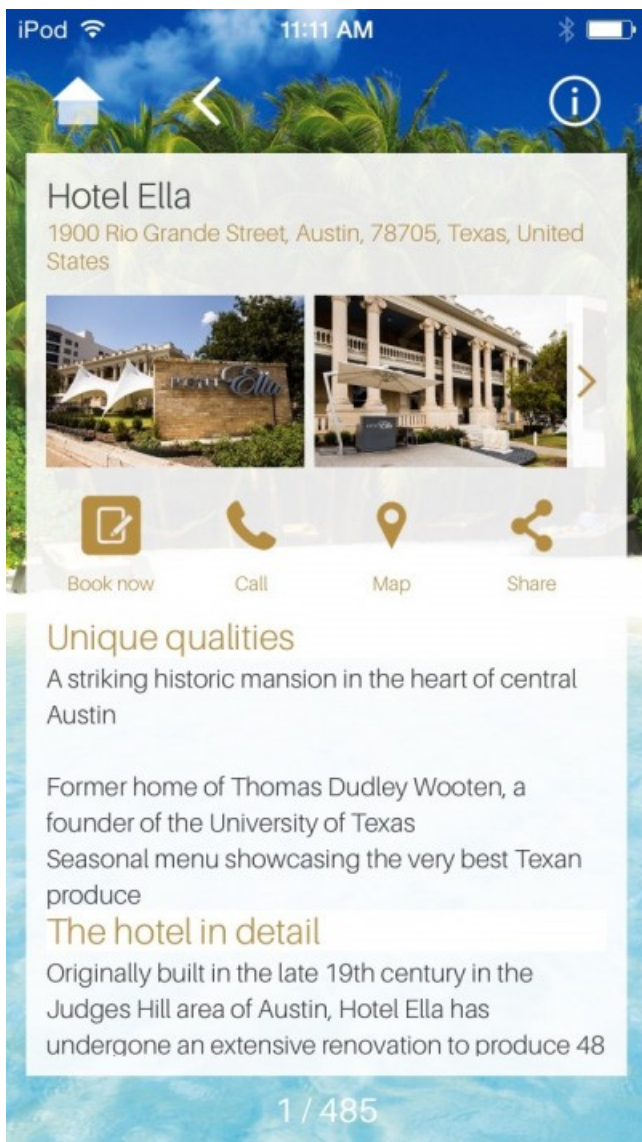
SLH saw a large increase in mobile activity in 2015, so the new app will help the network service its consumers when and where the consumers want. The rapid rise of mobile is having a large impact on all industries, including hospitality, and brands that are not accessible and user-friendly risk losing business to more sophisticated digital users.

"Visitors to our Web site have increased by 3 percent in 2015 when compared to 2014 and we've had over 4.4 million visitors to the site this past year," said Tim Davis, global vice president of marketing and brand, **SLH**. "The real trend which we've been tracking over the past few years is the jump in mobile visits and actual reservations up 35 percent (nearly 1 million) and 54 percent respectively when we compare 2014 to 2015.

"It's also interesting to see mobile overtake tablet viewing but not bookings, as our guests love to browse on their phones but then tend to book on their desktop or tablets," he said.

Join The Club

The new app, available on the App Store Jan. 22 and for Android beginning in March, reflects SLH's brand repositioning. The interface has been redesigned to be more navigable and connect travelers to any of the more than 520 hotels available in the collection.



SLH hotel description

Hotels can be searched by name, organized according to geographic location or even filtered by experiences they offer and will be displayed on Google Maps. A "hotels near me" function is also included.

Upon choosing a property, users can view detailed information about the hotel. Room descriptions, information about restaurants, facilities, services and a pitch on the location are available, as are photo galleries.

Filterable "experiences" extend from "adult only," "ski" and "wildlife and safari" to design and amenities with categories such as "modern design," "historical" and "UNESCO site."



SLH experiences filter

The different search functions allow travelers to plan trips in a way that is attractive to them. Rather than being forced to pick a location and look for hotels with skiing options, the consumer can look for hotels with skiing options and choose a region to visit based on that. Likewise, she can settle on a region and then look through hotels and decide on an experience.

Consumers can book a room directly from the app or, if she prefers, call a nearby agent. A "share" button will allow guests to alert friends to their hotels via email or social media.

Given the enormous impact of word-of-mouth recommendations and the collapse between "real life" and social media recommendations, luxury boutique hotels without the resources to market internationally could potentially see significant gains from the function as recommendations lead other travelers to pick the property for their next trip.

For SLH, the option of a Club sign-up option could create loyalists. The Club of SLH gives member benefits such as room upgrades, better rates, early check-in/late checkout and complimentary breakfast.



SLH search by region

In 2015, SLH saw a 49 percent increase in visits to the mobile site and a 71 percent increase in reservations made on mobile devices. The app will make mobile research and reservations much easier, thereby helping to sustain that growth.

Although all age groups are making a shift to mobile consumption, it is being embraced most quickly among young consumers, who also tend to be less loyal to brands. Consequently, brands that do not optimize mobile commerce may see these consumers opting for a competitor who appeals more directly to their wants and needs.

Mobile hotels of the world

Although the app will attract consumers for its ease of use and versatility, in the past SLH has found creative and fun ways to appeal to consumers.

In June, Small Luxury Hotels of the World celebrated its 25th anniversary with the launch of a new program that gave consumers the chance to participate in hotel inspection as secret agents.

The Mystery Inspector program is recruiting guests to play the role of quality inspectors for the luxury hotel collective. This unique offering is practical for the hotels and has the added benefit of forging a more intimate relationship with the consumers, who will likely enjoy the opportunity to participate in the behind-the-scenes initiative ([see story](#)).

Larger hotels are also attracting consumers with their mobile sophistication.

Noting the value of localization, in December Four Seasons Hotels and Resorts reconstructed its mobile application to make bookings easier for Chinese guests.

Four Seasons launched an app earlier this year, but rather than merely translating it into Chinese, the chain instead

decided to design an entirely different app for the new market. The dedication and precision required in tailoring an app to a specific market is emblematic of Four Seasons' focus on service and the consumer's convenience ([see story](#)).

"Small Luxury Hotels of the World has announced a brand new look and feel designed to demonstrate a contemporary and forward-thinking positioning for the luxury brand as it celebrates its 25th anniversary," Mr. Davis said. "The new direction, coined 'The SLH Way', emphasizes SLH's core philosophy to match independently-minded people with independently-spirited hotels. It celebrates the fact that all SLH hotels are consistently different, united by a shared commitment to providing the highest levels of quality and service to their guests, and reinforces SLH's position as an anti-brand kind of brand.

"Complementing the existing logo a new brand device' will feature more prominently on the website and newly launched apps for iPhone, as well as on SLH collateral, notably the SLH Directory which has been reintroduced for 2016," he said.

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