

COLUMNS

## Why do hotels always end up with mobile in room 101?

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It is no secret that hotels have had their Web-based business swiped from under their noses by the likes of Priceline, owner of Kayak and Booking.com. Now the preferred destination for hotel visitors online despite not owning any property or producing anything, Priceline has a bigger market value than the top 15 hotel groups combined.

The explosion of social media on mobile means that hotel guests can, and do, share their experiences across the globe, 24/7, 365 days a year.

The realization that the mobile device is a gateway to guest engagement is creeping in. Hotels, with the variety of facilities they offer, need to be thinking mobile more.

### Check-in

In fact, keen to make sure the digital platforms and aggregators do not steal their thunder on mobile like they have online, hotel groups have been pouring hundreds of millions of dollars into mobile applications in an attempt to engage with guests before, during and after their stay.

Many hotel groups are however, failing to engage with guests on mobile and in a big way.

The average engagement levels for hotel group apps languish at around 3 percent. This figure is the total number of downloads across the Apple App Store and Google Play, against the total number of guests per year for the hotel group.

It would be great to see the figures for dwell time and average session length, but none of the hotel groups share this information, I suspect, because they do not tell a good return-on-investment story.

Most of the time, hotels are only providing a repurposed generic, group Webpage shrunk onto a mobile screen, a downloadable brochure and a basic booking engine.

Given that hotels pride themselves on providing guests with a personal touch during their stay, to make such little effort to engage with them on mobile is a wasted opportunity. It does not need to be like this, though.

Today's consumers are savvier than ever before. They already have a concierge in their pocket, but they just do not know where to begin and will ultimately expect their hosts to make them feel like VIPs, regardless of their budget.

## Measuring engagement in mobile

Outside of mobile, hotels can measure digital engagement with guest by looking at unique visitors to their Web site or by tracking how many people downloaded a digital brochure, but it does not really give them a true sense of engagement.

With mobile, you can take the number of downloads of an app, or better yet, the sessions meaning the active users for the app and measure this against the total number of guest that are passing through a hotel or a hotel group on a yearly basis. This will provide a real number that will make sense to a hotel general manager.

Alongside this, you can look at the dwell time in an app, which means looking at how long did each guest or user spends in the app and find out which content is popular, what is not and make necessary adjustments to enhance the experience.

## Mobile engagement so far

There are a number of mistakes made by hotels at a group level on mobile, but the main culprit is a lack of a bespoke approach for each property in the group.

As a consumer, do I care much about the hotel groups? Not really.

Do I have a favorite hotel group? Probably not.

Am I going to spend time looking through a group app to find the hotel I am staying in, to try and look for local relevant information? No, what I will probably do is download the app, open it once and never really look at it again. It is an opportunity lost as far as the hotel is concerned. There is nothing personal there and hotels are all about a personal touch.

Guests are much more likely to have a favorite hotel in a particular location and mobile, by its very nature, is personal.

If a hotel launches a bespoke property app that caters for that specific hotel, with its own assets such as restaurant, spa facilities and photos of the actual team, not only will it be much more useful for guests, but it will make the staff proud and they will do their utmost to market the app, leading to much better engagement rates with guests.

It is not rocket science. It is just making sure that the hospitality sector is keeping up not only with the technology of today, but also the demands of the consumer.

Mobile can unlock all of this for hotel owners and general managers, demonstrating what is popular with guests and when combined with beacon technology, managers can even track physical hot spots and push different messages to guests in different locations.

Hotels have a concierge service to help recommend places to guest, so why not have that as part of a mobile offering?

To wit: A bespoke app helping to accentuate all the best parts of the hotel, from the staff to the facilities, all of which can be immediately available in the native language of a guest, given the settings on their mobile device.

PROVIDING A BESPOKE mobile service for a hotel can have huge benefits and engagement on a personal level with guests.

The hotel industry is one of the greatest in the world to provide an individual service to its guests, but up until now it has been slow at taking this same approach with digital and mobile.

By using every-day technology and data, hotels can continue inspire and delight guests even if they are not in the hotel, ensuring that the conversations with guests can continue long after they have checked out.

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