

COLUMNS

How hotels can integrate mobile

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Mobile has truly gone global on several fronts and, within the United States, the rapid ascendancy of today's mobile audience has hit critical mass and, in particular, with the ever-consuming high-touch, high-gloss usage smartphones elegantly deliver to nearly 60 million owners.

Consequently, for hoteliers, the power of harnessing mobile's convenience and relevance has been nothing short of transformative in aiming to meet a new range of heightened expectations from today's affluent guests demand and, by extension, streamline a new layer of operational efficiencies that span on- and off-property services for staff and guests.

How more specifically, this relates to the concern of hoteliers, is leveraging the growing consumption patterns of smartphone usage as an always-on device increasingly relied on by frequent travelers before, during and after their trips.

Also, there is the marketer's never-ending quest to efficiently source more timely and tactical ways that enrich and monetize the overall guest experience while meeting multiple goals in ecommerce, eCRM and brand management.

Beyond the critical mass gained to validate the impressive reach in overall smartphone ownership, specific to the coveted business traveler segment, 77 percent of frequent

business travelers use mobile for a range of trip planning, per PhocusWright 2010.

This supports another point of credibility within the arsenal of using mobile's extensive handheld capabilities to seriously evaluate from an investment and strategy standpoint for integrating within hotel's overall sales, marketing and revenue management.

Thus, whether considering a specific facet unique to mobile – SMS campaigns, mobile Web site – or crafting a comprehensive strategy that integrates a native application, Web site, mobile messaging and social media, the transformative role of one-touch mobile technology truly resides within the DNA of today's frequent traveler and, by extension, affluent lifestyle segment.

In fact, for the first time with fourth-quarter 2010, the U.S. volume of mobile phone sales surpassed PC sales, according to Gartner Group.

As for timing, with giving serious thought to what defines core deliverables that comprise a customized multichannel mobile-powered program, this article broadly outlines key fundamentals in understanding integration of mobile's empowering role within various hospitality disciplines, though not the specific goals of each hotel, which would warrant deeper evaluation.

However, considering that by end of 2011, smartphones will escalate to 73 million U.S. owners, whether topically exploring or having in-depth evaluation on the advantages of mobile-powered hospitality, the multi-dimensional usage of handheld communications clearly defines the sweet spot of helping today's desirable business and leisure traveler segment stay organized, in particular, with the highly sought expenditures the predominantly smartphone-reliant 25-52 age traveler group clearly deliver, per comScore 2010

Strategy with purpose

Upon selecting a mobile platform partner, the following provides a brief scope of core fundamentals, before setting clear objectives and benchmarks:

Mobile Web site: optimized to span any Internet-enabled device

Native apps: For a richer, more customized experience on iPhone or Android devices, does not always require Internet access, as with a mobile Web site

Multichannel messaging: Integrate SMS, MMS, email, social media Facebook and Twitter to drive range of promotions and develop new layer of mobile guest opt-in

Mobile eCRM: Build an interactive database of highly qualified mobile opt-ins; include segmenting hotels' lists in accordance to guest preferences, loyalty clubs, sweeps, alerts, F&B specials and spa deals

Mobile advertising: Serve and track range of ads, from click to call, video or form-launched, whether placed in-app, in site or with SMS-launched landing pages for special deals, VIPs and happenings

Mobile audience analytics and dashboard: Analyze and eventually monetize, gain a new layer of highly credible guest metrics that span range of mobile-related behavior and booking patterns.

Implementing the mobile process

Within the realm of outlining a formal approach in mobile development, implementation and optimization phases through your platform partner, a key initial point is to pay close attention to what ultimately conveys the end result.

This refers to the user experience that lands within the comfy confines of a smartphone, which your guests will expect to easily navigate, for frequent usage.

Another key point is supporting the hotel's signature brand attributes to what already exists online with your Web site or other media channels since mobile is not just about repurposed densely designed content in a small screen. It is truly a magnified version of your brand's market position.

As for the following, it provides a very broad parameter of what to address when beginning to formalize process of evaluating tactical ways that fit mobile's unique capabilities into your overall goals:

- 1) Are you dealing with mobile as a basic communications device – SMS – for online communications or looking for a strong build-out of mobile solutions that span the hotel's key disciplines?
- 2) What is the mobile value-proposition for aligning your guest's expectations with the brand's key attributes?
- 3) Extending new distribution channel of mobile-only "special" deals or bookings or save guests time with more personalized services, such as pre-arrival requests with ordering room service via mobile, right off the plane.
- 4) Looking to strategically build a new channel of eCRM? Leverage guest data – email database – to a new influential channel that is geo-targeted and custom-labeled in mobile-powered communications.
- 5) Social media is also accelerating growth of mobile in hospitality. If actively managing your social media, extend with multichannel integration of Facebook, Twitter and YouTube, with easily navigated presence on the hotel's mobile site or applications.
- 6) Aiming to influence buying behavior? Such as upsell/cross-sell when guests are on-property, with range of amenity-rich specials, specific to guests' profiles and seasonality.

CONSIDERING THAT consumer consumption patterns are rapidly shifting and one-touch functionality clearly reigns in the confluence of defining today's mobile-powered fusion via myriad of streamlined guest and booking services, the time is now to begin process of investing in what truly defines a transformative shift in on-demand customer expectations.

The result will be efficiently-derived yields for integrating a range of multichannel mobile-powered solutions centralized within one automated platform.

Toward that end, mobile and, in particular, the smartphone's integral role within today's affluent lifestyle segment has clearly gained rapid ascendancy.

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