

TRAVEL AND HOSPITALITY

ROI of social media is vast but hard to track

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Exterior of The Watergate Hotel. Image credit: The Watergate Hotel

By BRIELLE JAEKEL

NEW YORK At Luxury Interactive 2017, a Watergate Hotel executive described that while social is not always a direct source of bookings for the hotel property, it definitely has an impact that can be hard to trace.

During the Oct. 17 panel "More than Socializing: Advertising Amongst Platforms," the executive explained that Facebook is the most popular form of social media for the brand. Facebook users often flock to the hotel's page, which is usually the first point of contact with the brand for consumers.

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"A lot of times, social is the first touch point consumers have with us, after which they are going back through search to learn more and interact more," said Debbie Johnsen, digital marketing director at [The Watergate Hotel](#). "I know that influence is varied.

"If customers don't book directly immediately and directly through social, that does not mean social didn't have an impact," she said.

Social influence

Social media has a heavy influence on a consumer's perception of brands and awareness of products.

Many guests staying at The Watergate Hotel in Washington D.C. first interact with the brand on Facebook and other forms of social media. However, this does not mean that every guest who was influenced by social will book through that channel.

There will always be a significant number of customers who have been impacted by social media without booking through click-throughs, which makes it hard for marketers to trace.

The Watergate Hotel saw a decline in the late eighties and nineties, which caused the property to close its doors years later in 2007.

Reopening in June of last year, the Watergate underwent extensive renovations to cater to today's affluent audience. The brand has been using social media to take advantage of its infamous place in history and be a part of the joke.

The current political climate and themes on social media have allowed the brand flourish with cheeky content.

In honor of the 45th anniversary of the Nixon administration's political scandal, The Watergate Hotel even gave an infamous guest room a makeover.

During the break-in at the Democratic headquarters in the Watergate complex on June 17, 1972, the leaders behind the burglary used the Washington hotel's room 214 as their command center. Now, this guest room was given a new look that plays into its shady past with help from a costume designer used to outfitting drama ([see more](#)).

The hotel brand has also embraced its past glory by sharing vintage content of iconic celebrities visiting its property. All of this content, including the scandal, builds an authentic dialogue with consumers.

Email individualization

While some retailers are taking full advantage of email marketing, many are lacking basic tenets such as abandoned cart reminders.

This data comes from Dotmailer, an email marketing firm, which released a report surveying email marketing tactics from a large number of retailers to determine what methods they were using and misusing. The data found that while many brands had the most basic email setups, far fewer were making full use of what a simple email can do ([see more](#)).

The Watergate's Ms. Johnsen also noted that with so many different forms of guests, such as business travelers, family vacationers, local patrons who visit the roof top bar and more, it is important to tackle each group differently. Through the brand's email database, each customer needs to be treated with a unique perspective.

For instance, a guest coming to visit who is driving from New York might be interested in a discount on parking, while someone flying from a different coast will be more interested in a breakfast voucher. It is being able to discern the difference and act on it that can make the customer experience special.

The ecommerce vice president from Ghurka backed up this notion by explaining that the brand is intent on building up its email database and reoccurring customers, but it is important not to annoy subscribers. When customers first onboard with the brand, they receive an email with a survey that allows the brand to learn a variety of information about them right away.

"On the one hand we're trying to build up and we don't want to annoy them," said Justin Sellman, vice president of ecommerce and digital strategy at [Ghurka](#). "We want to give them that right kind of balance.

"The next priority is to get people into a funnel where we know all this information about them," he said. "Any new customer that comes in and has never made a purchase we send them an email with a survey and right off the bat we are able to get a lot of information."