

INTERNET

Starwood builds consumer loyalty with guest-curated reviews on-site

October 27, 2011



By RACHEL LAMB

Starwood Hotels & Resorts is attempting to increase site traffic and build customer loyalty with the incorporation of user-curated reviews on all of its properties' Web pages.

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Luxury Daily

Approximately 85 percent of Starwood Preferred Guest members said that they find value in consumer ratings and reviews on travel sites. Therefore, Starwood is making it easier for affluent consumers to find reviews and also keep them on its sites, rather than third-party booking pages.

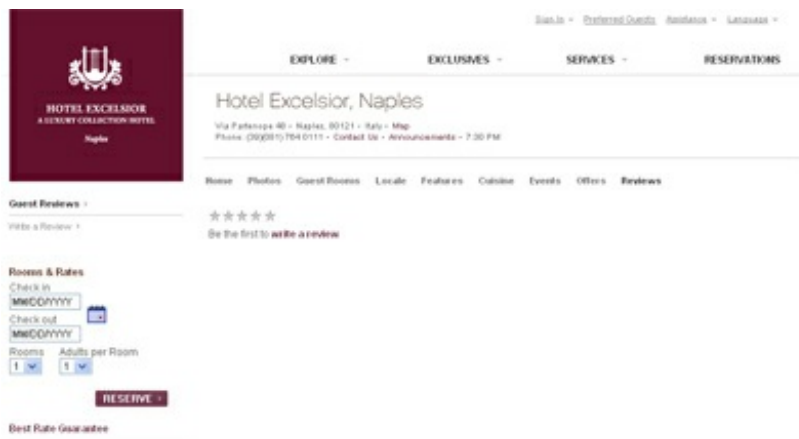
“Affluent consumers are among the most savvy shoppers and research shows that these individuals find ratings and reviews especially valuable,” said Chris Holdren, senior vice president for Starwood Preferred Guest at Starwood, New York.

“Given that Starwood Preferred Guest provides more luxury in more destinations with some of the best brands in the industry, from St. Regis to The Luxury Collection to W, we see ratings and reviews as an invaluable addition to our Web sites,” he said.

Site seeing

Affluent travelers search for travel opportunities differently in the digital age, Mr. Holdren said.

Recognizing this, Starwood is one of the first major hotel companies to allow guests to contribute ratings and reviews directly on its sites, according to the brand.



Consumers are able to write reviews for Luxury Collection hotels

The open forum can serve as a vehicle for consumers to view pros and cons of each hotel so that they can plan their vacations accordingly.

Guests can post ratings and reviews based on overall room rating, room comfort, staff met my needs, room cleanliness and SPG recognition.



A suite at the newly-renovated St. Regis Florence

Potential visitors can filter review content according to their own needs including star rating, purpose of travel, frequency of travel, SPG level, above/met expectations and below expectations.

In addition to the Web sites, consumers can see the reviews on social media channels.

Starwood strives to ensure that all comments are from guests who have actually stayed at the hotels. Reviews are verified by a hotel reservation confirmation.

“Travelers shop for hotels differently in the digital age,” Mr. Holdren said. “Today, consumers want unbiased reviews from fellow shoppers.

“Recognizing this trend, we think there is no better place to provide this information than on our own Starwood Web site,” he said.

Suite nothings

In addition to helping consumers by giving them honest reviews and descriptions of Starwood properties, the hotelier is also helping itself by finding out in which areas consumers are displeased.

Hypothetically, if a customer who stayed at the St. Regis New York complained about untimely room service, that hotel could strive to improve that part of the property.

In contrast, if a former guest lauded the SLS Hotel in Beverly Hills' pool, the property could make sure that its amenities were kept to perfection.

Therefore, offering hotel reviews on its own Web site is boosting Starwood's customer service.

Beside the fact, acknowledging its mistakes could encourage consumers to trust the brand and build customer loyalty.

"The key to building brand loyalty is providing our guests with honest and transparent information," Mr. Holdren said.

"And by giving our guests and SPG Members a new platform to communicate with Starwood, we are able to provide even better guest experiences," he said.

Final Take

Rachel Lamb, associate reporter on Luxury Daily, New York