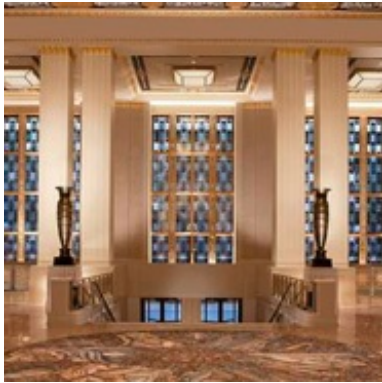


MOBILE

Waldorf Astoria exec: Luxury marketers must understand intersection of service and technology

April 23, 2013



By TRICIA CARR

DANA POINT, CA – A Waldorf Astoria executive who spoke at the American Express Publishing Luxury Summit 2013 said that luxury marketers should focus all technology-driven efforts on leveraging service above all else.

[Sign up now](#)

[Luxury Daily](#)

During the “What Do Travelers Want Now? How to Deliver High-Touch in a High-Tech World” panel, Nancy Novogrod, editor in chief of American Express Publishing’s Travel + Leisure, asked Indagare Travel founder Melissa Biggs Bradley and Hilton Worldwide’s John Vanderslice how innovations such as mobile touch points, in-store technologies and on-the-go social media have affected their business model. The panelists agreed that a marketer that understands where service and technology meet will succeed in the luxury space.

“When you have that interaction with service, it has to be authentic and has to be delivered in the right way,” said John Vanderslice, global head of luxury and lifestyle brands at [Hilton Worldwide](#).

Savoring service

Hilton's Waldorf Astoria brand looks to establish a culture of delivering service with a mix of technology and traditional aspects.

With each reservation, the guest receives an email from a personal concierge. The concierge is able to interact with customers in real time since many guests use mobile devices.

Also, Waldorf Astoria uses technology to democratize the VIP experience. Since each guest should be a VIP to a luxury hotel brand, technology can leverage the experience by gathering CRM data on each customer.

The new luxury traveler is 35-45 years old and often from one of the BRIC markets – Brazil, Russia, India and China.

These consumers are constantly plugged in. When they want service, they want it delivered perfectly, which creates a challenge for travel brands.

Luxury hotels need to use technology to provide service on an opt-in basis.

For example, Hilton's Conrad brand launched the Conrad Concierge mobile application that delivers on-the-go service, but as soon as guests walk into the hotel, they are given traditional service from the staff.

Mobile can also help luxury hotels provide seamless service to foreigners. If a guest at a New York hotel does not speak English, he or she can access a branded mobile app to request services.

Also, most luxury travelers seem to be open to text confirmations.

"Does this new luxury customer want four people for one guest? No," Mr. Vanderslice said. "Meet them where they are and provide them with that service."



Moderator Ms. Novogrod with Mr. Vanderslice and Ms. Biggs Bradley.

Custom order

Technology can also assist luxury marketers in providing customers with customization and personalization, per Ms. Biggs Bradley, founder of [Indagare Travel](#), a content brand with an in-house travel agency.

When Ms. Novogrod asked if today's luxury travelers are more demanding, the panelists agreed that technology has opened the doors to a collaborative experience between a customer and a brand.

While some consumers want a brand to do the research and personalization for them, others want to work with the brand to create a custom experience.

High-net-worth consumers are often aware of their own abilities to do research and brands can deliver a positive experience by assisting them on the planning and execution with technology.

Marketers, especially in the travel category, should give consumers the information that makes them feel in control through technology.

"Reliance on the machine has made people crave face-to-face interaction," Ms. Biggs Bradley said. "Find [employees] who can build relationships through the technology."

Final Take

Tricia Carr, associate reporter on Luxury Daily, New York

© Napean LLC. All rights reserved.

Luxury Daily is published each business day. Thank you for reading us. Your **feedback** is welcome.