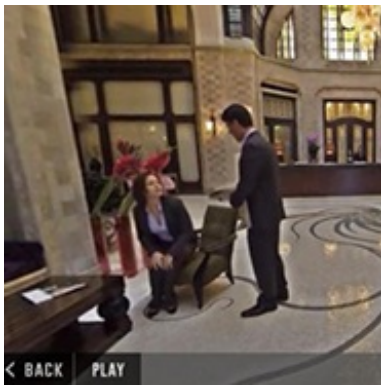


MULTICHANNEL

## Hotel brands increase transparency, digital curation for discerning travelers

June 9, 2014



*Four Seasons Budapest Room360 app*

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By JOE MCCARTHY

Luxury hotel brands are feeding the insatiable consumer desire for travel research with a number of digital tactics.

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**Luxury Daily**

While consumer reviews on travel Web sites and word of mouth still hold sway over many travel decisions, hotels are becoming increasingly transparent to reel in the consumers busily browsing for their next trip. Microsites, mobile applications, social media feeds and content hubs are employing enhanced research tools to convince consumers to book.

"Welcome to the digital age," said [Damon M. Banks](#), freelance journalist and media consultant, New York. "Travelers today have the highest of expectations when it comes to the technology that is available to them during every aspect of travel.

"They research to establish what/where they want to experience during their travels," he said. "Once at their destination, they want to have access to apps to maximize their localized experience. Then when the travel is over, they depend on technology to broadcast to the world via social media and review sites what they liked and didn't like

about their travels.

"Hotels today are very much integrated into the community, and it's still difficult to find an app that can compare to a knowledgeable concierge. The hotels are able to provide their personal localized knowledge to help curate a personalized local experience for their guests – bringing together the best of both worlds with personal insight and the latest technology."

More to know

Recent research affirms that the ubiquity of mobile devices has increased the consumer tendency to research before traveling, if only because it offers more occasions to go online and more tools to research with.

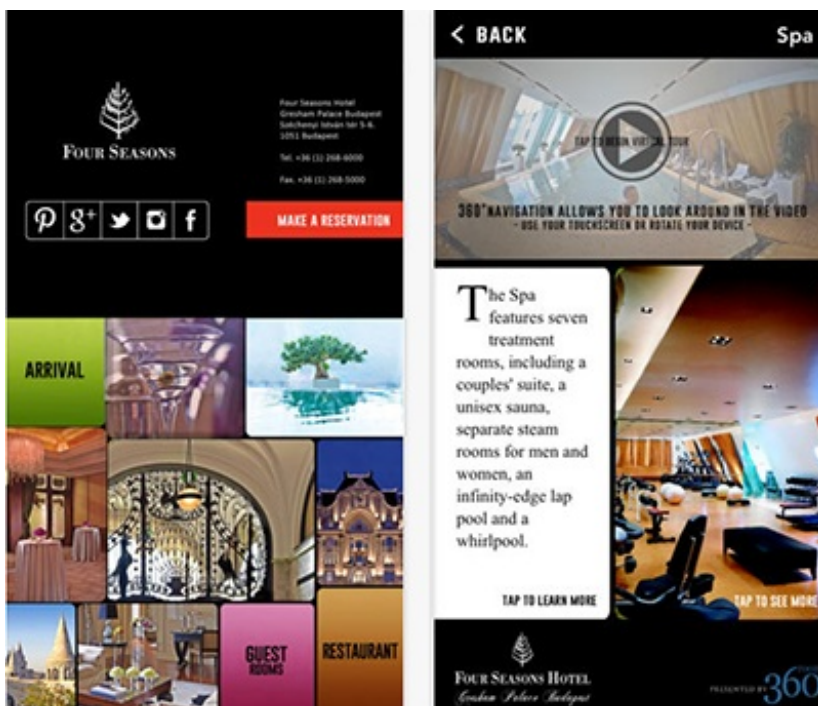
A report by Expedia found that travel-related apps received 127 percent more traffic compared to the year-ago period. Forty-five percent of respondents said that they have used an app to help plan a trip. Seventy percent of respondents said they intend to book on mobile again after having booked once ([see story](#)).

Indeed, consumer connectivity to mobile has birthed a new type of user – the “Mobile Addict” who opens applications more than 60 times per day, according to a report from Flurry.

While the average consumer is launching apps 10 times per day, the Mobile Addict is launching six times more apps per day. The segment of heavy mobile users is growing faster than any other segment, up 123 percent in the past year while the number of Super Users grew 55 percent and Regular Users just 23 percent ([see story](#)).

Some brands are responding to this tendency with all-in-one apps.

For instance, Four Seasons Hotel Gresham Palace Budapest is letting prospective guests explore the property beforehand with a 360-degree immersive application.



### *Four Seasons Budapest app*

The Room360 app strives to be an all-in-one research and companion app. Prior to a visit, guests can tour the property, learn about hotel amenities and local attractions and also make reservations. The app also links to social pages so guests can discover the latest news. Voice narration accompanies some of the filmed tours.

During a stay, guests can use the app to request information, communicate with the front desk and book services. Business guests can conduct video conferences through the app. After a stay, guests can receive special offers for future visits and communicate with the property if they have any suggestions or qualms ([see story](#)).

Other brands are banking even more on the preference for getting information through mobile.

Starwood Hotels and Resorts is anticipating the potential surge in consumer interest for wearables with a new Starwood Preferred Guest application for Google Glass that lets guests take care of a number of travel matters. For instance, guests can search and book rooms at Starwood's nearly 1,200 properties by destination or airport code ([see story](#)).



*SPG for Google Glass promotional image*

### Contrasting experience

Perhaps the main differentiating factor when consumers research is the experience promised. Once consumers get to a location, they want to know what they can do to make their trip memorable.

That is why so many hotel brands have some version of the "Moments" campaign, to make the case that since life is defined by memorable moments, why not accumulate some of these branded moments that are so distinct?

Peninsula Hotels dedicates a section on its Web site devoted to "Moments" ([see story](#)).

Four Seasons has consistently given fans an up-close look at potential experiences as well. The hotel chain is compiling top experiences from properties around the world for its new "Extraordinary Experiences Collection" series.

The hotelier has set up a Web site for prospective guests to browse the collection of experiences. Vignettes, images and videos illuminate the different possibilities.



*Elephants in Thailand experience from Four Seasons*

Arranged in the cumulative, vertical format that has been gaining popularity, consumers can scroll their way through the experiences. Visitors are first invited to watch a video that provides a sense of the breadth of experiences ([see story](#)).

The brand's "Into the Heart of Africa" online immersive tour permits guests to learn about Serengeti National Park via videos and photos. Prior to arriving at the resort it is now possible to have both a personal virtual tour of the safari, the lodge and the wildlife and gain valuable knowledge about the region.

L2 touched on this trend in a video report.

Embedded Video: [//player.vimeo.com/video/97270620](https://player.vimeo.com/video/97270620)

### *L2 Flash of Genius: Four Seasons, Renaissance & Peninsula*

Some consumers prefer to get their brand information via social media rather than navigating a Web site. Consequently, hotel chains regularly devise content to showcase favorite experiences.

"Social media is an important factor in the increase of consumers researching their own travel," said Tiffany Dowd, founder and president of [Luxe Social Media](#), Boston. "Hotels and travel agencies are becoming more and more social media savvy and are continuously feeding curated travel inspiration to their followers.

"Hotels can maintain their status as curators of content by driving the conversation and

providing useful information about their hotel and destination," she said.

"Ultimately consumers are looking for trusted sources when booking travel, and hotels and influencers are seen as expert sources. Hotels should also identify social media influencers to become advocates of their brands."

Final Take

*Joe McCarthy, editorial assistant on Luxury Daily, New York*

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