

How to Use Technology to Foster Trust with Guests

By SAP's Travel and Transportation Team

Whether traveling for business or pleasure, most of us have had a bad hotel or restaurant experience. And unfortunately for the hotel or restaurant, these are memorable experiences. And to make it worse, in a digital age these experiences are also highly shareable.

At its core, hospitality is an industry which revolves around people. One of the primary goals for hospitality providers is to create an experience that emotionally connects with the customer, delivers on the brand promise, and is easy and efficient. The most effective way to deliver that experience is by communicating proactively to create trust and build loyalty with customers.

This article from SAP's Travel and Transportation Team will discuss how hospitality organizations must utilize new technology, such as chatbots and IoT devices, to become more aware of customer preferences, prioritize interactions that build meaningful relationships, and foster genuine trust between guests and providers. From search and book to post stay, doing so will enhance the dining or stay experience.

This also enables organizations to bring a purpose-driven approach to their business, which is increasingly important to consumers. For example, linen change options and food bank donations are both common practices in hotels and restaurants. These purpose-driven business practices are a result of brands listening and responding to consumer preferences.

Let's Talk About Trust

In order to earn the respect and repeat business of guests, hospitality providers must build authentic trust with them – and trust is founded on proactive, honest communication. In hotels, guests appreciate proactive updates on like room status, facility hours, weather and billing.

Hotels must shape their experience with the guest in mind, which means offering more flexibility, greater visibility and proactive communication. Fortunately, this is more achievable than ever with digital, user-centric tools.

Some companies are leveraging chatbots as a flexible technology designed to provide superior communication and access for users. For example, during the initial booking process, chatbots can answer questions about hotel availability, amenities, provide links to video galleries and aid in the purchasing process. While on-site, those same chatbots can inform guests about weather conditions and developments within the hotel such as guest events.

The chatbot mobile functionality is also a tremendous benefit. In 2017, the average US adult spent 2 hours, 25 minutes-per-day using mobile apps. Hospitality organizations hoping to reach this audience need a better method for outreach than simply relying on email. It requires an interactive in-browser, or in-app,

approach. By adopting chatbots, hospitality organizations are much more likely to reach users where they are apt to engage.

Personalization, in Real-time

Once a guest checks-in for their stay, hotels are in a unique position – they're responsible for ensuring that the guest has a positive experience, yet the hotel rarely has any further visibility into the guest's daily activities. Outside of operational necessities like housekeeping and amenities, the hotel becomes a bystander in the guest's travel experience.

Implementing connected devices and systems throughout the organization can help management gain real-time insights into a guest's preferences and plans by gathering data about their interactions, interests and plans during their trip. Ultimately, this rich customer data is valuable to the hotel and gives management a better opportunity to positively impact the outcome of their stay. This ensures more consistent integration of systems and processes, allowing for a more personal and seamless stay for guests. Such devices would also be useful to staff who monitor room availability and housekeeping status.

Installing IoT devices like thermostats and tablets in hotel rooms would provide management with user-specific information about preferences like room temperature, music and dining habits. Using this information proves to a guest that the organization values them as individuals and is willing to cater directly to their needs. This proactively builds trust with customers, and makes them feel important, which speaks directly to the core purpose of a service organization.

Similarly, a tablet with pre-installed popular area activities would allow guests to explore things to do – and even book directly from the device. That information would enable the organization to provide similar recommendations in the future. Managing these devices and the data they collect has never been easier, thanks to cloud technology, which can ensure that everything from booking to parking and dining is seamless. Leading hotels have begun to implement real-time dashboards with this information.

Make Purpose a Priority

Trust, transparency and treating customers well are the core tenants of service industry businesses. It's critical that these organizations evolve their business models by using a digital core to manage their customers' preferences, anticipate their needs and offer personalized experiences. Technologies like chatbots and IoT allow hospitality organizations to listen and respond to the needs of all types of guests. This holistic approach to the consumer experience helps to insure a positive impression and create lifelong customers.

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