



OPINION ARTICLE

2 May 2019

# Surprising Ways Hotels Lose Repeat Business

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For nearly a half-decade now, the hotel industry has buzzed about "authentic guest experiences." It was its reaction to



"Belong Anywhere," where travelers who wanted to be insiders could engage with people and culture. But should hotels be trying to replicate an Airbnb experience?



Are hotel guests also really looking for "authentic" experiences, or do they come with a different set of expectations in mind?

Let's get real. When it comes to hotel guests, I would assert that authenticity is overrated. I recently had an authentic hotel experience - it was authentically poor. That's what I will now remember about that hotel. While positive experiences influence hotel purchasing decisions 74% of the time, no brand today can afford to risk a bad experience - one in three consumers say they will walk away from a brand they love after just one bad experience.

What hotel guests really want is a great, frictionless experience, period. They want their check-in process to involve as little wait time and effort as possible. They want their hotel rooms to be clean and their beds to be comfortable. They want in-room and property amenities to minimally meet the standards the hotel has established in their published information. They want the hotel staff to be attentive to their needs. Meeting these expectations could be enough for a guest to come away feeling they had a good to great stay; exceeding these expectations with something surprising or amazing will improve the odds your guests will conclude they had a great stay.

## Surprisingly Simple

Sometimes it's not so hard to surprise and delight hotel guests. Take using an AI-powered smartconcierge, for instance. The smartconcierge automates the responses to common repetitive questions and problems. Accessible 24/7



communicating with just another staff member on the other end of the conversation. In fact, smartconcierges speak so much like a human that guests have been known to mistake them for real people. And yet, the responsiveness and issue resolution happen so quickly - the majority of the time in seconds, not minutes - that guests might conclude they're interacting with technology rather than a super-human. Regardless, the guest cares not if the smartconcierge is a technology or a human being - they're just pleased to have their problem go away, or their question answered promptly and with such little effort. This, of course, makes for a more satisfied guest.

## Surprisingly Effective

Smartconcierges also make hotel employees more effective. With smartconcierges on-deck to answer basic queries and better connect guests to the help they need, hotel staff has more time and bandwidth to build better relationships with guests or focus on more complex issues when the smartconcierge needs to elevate a problem to its human counterpart. This then translates into happier guests with a tendency to spend more at your property. More effective employees are also happier employees - most people take pride in a job well done - and that has the unexpected side benefit of increased employee retention rates: happier employees stay with their employer longer.

## Surprisingly Consistent

Though not everything in hospitality is formulaic, guests count on consistency, particularly when it comes to brand reinforcement. Smartconcierges enable hotels to provide consistent experiences. Responses to the exact same question do not vary by guest (nor from one hotel staffer to



And the smartconcierge doesn't miss an opportunity to upsell or up-service your guests - its programming rules increase the likelihood that your average guest folio will increase over time.

## Surprising Insights

AI solutions create data; data that can be quantified and analyzed. A smartconcierge can create data that hotels haven't been able to easily collect and analyze before, data points such as response time by all staff, response time by the smartconcierge, issue-resolution time, and real-time mid and post-stay guest sentiment. These deep and powerful insights enable the hotel to make improved decisions and actions for the future and can expose strengths and weaknesses that might have otherwise been less obvious.

Phocuswright analyst Robert Cole sums all of this up in his 2018 report, *It's All About the Experience: How Will Technology Improve the Hotel Stay?*: "Modern technologies hold the promise of enhancing every aspect of a guest's hotel stay by improving personalization, service delivery, and experiential relevance. They can similarly help owners reduce capital expenditures, shrink operating overheads, and radically upgrade staff efficiency. As technological advancements impact all aspects of life, hoteliers will need to keep pace, or risk losing share to more technologically advanced residential short-term rental properties or competitors with more sophisticated and productive data-driven guest engagement strategies."

One simple and effective part of this strategy that will take your hospitality operations to the next level should be the deployment of a smartconcierge.