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Hotels 'get personal'

As with many things, we've come full circle! For years, travellers were content to be unknown to hotel hosts…'another booking, another room number'. Today, however, the trend towards personalisation is once again prevalent in the hospitality sector.

In my last column I mentioned that by 2022 the experiential market is estimated to account for nearly two thirds of the global luxury hotel market. According to a recent report by Infosys, around 86% of international consumers also say personalisation plays an important role in their purchasing decisions.

People are actively seeking hospitality experiences that are relevant to them and make them feel like they matter as an individual, rather than merely being clumped together with every other consumer and offered the same treatment. The drive is therefor for hoteliers to reconstruct and develop their product offering to be more engaged, personalised, immersive, adventurous and more adjusted to local culture.

The 'game changer' in delivering 21st century non-standardised hotel accommodation is the technology of sharing.

In the past, it generally wasn't practical to get insights, references and reviews before you committed to your stay. Today, it's hard to imagine any form of accommodation that hasn't been photographed, shared, blogged, rated and reviewed online.

For those hotels seeking to collect and interpret data about their guests in order to deliver a personalised user experience, gathering guest profile data has never been easier. Guests are generally happy to provide some personal information if it means that they're getting personalised service and relevant information, post-stay, about deals that would suit their specific requirements.

If a particular guest stays at a hotel repeatedly for business trips, their information can be noted and used the next time they book a room at the hotel, perhaps to point them to a wi-fi-enabled work area, free conference room, or other areas suited to their business-related needs. Better yet, hoteliers are increasingly using technology apps to enable the guests to control their own experience. Via an app some guests are able to adjust the temperature in their room, order content for the mini-bar, or stream content on hotel TVs.

Another favourite way to court guest favour is to integrate their social interests into their travel opportunities. An important factor in adding value and deepening customer insight is also to understand the reason that the guest is there – be it business, leisure or conference participation.

Having a sense of a trip's purpose (not just WHO the guest is but WHY they travel) allows hotels to cater to preferences that apply not just to the particular guest but also to their travel persona. A leisure traveller persona effectively translates to particular accommodation preferences, service levels, and assistance requests and, of course, additional revenue opportunities. A business traveller persona may be more inclined to concern themselves with loyalty point earning opportunities, but less inclined toward inclusive meals or services, since their bill is a reimbursable business expense.

Business travellers would be more likely to take advantage of express check-in and check-out services, and less likely to seek extensive assistance or guidance from front desks. Applying travel personas can therefore be an important differentiator to customise and enhance the guest experience.

When you think about the word 'personalisation', what should first come to mind is technologies that provide the tools to better know, understand and recognise guests, their needs and their desires. In the chain hotel's world of highly standardised options, it is customer relationship management software that often provides the best competitive advantage in a marketplace that has begun to value the unique above all else.

Ultimately, the deeper the level of knowledge hotels have about their guest, the more likely that guest will stay loyal, because they trust you know what they want from a hotel experience.

Brands that create personalised experiences by integrating data and advanced technologies are currently achieving revenue increases of between 6% and 10%.

The best approach is for a personalisation programme that brings hotel guests into sharper focus and improves the customer relationship. More rewarding guest experiences that offer a 'you first' proposition are therefor an increasing requirement and brands that don't take the necessary steps towards personalisation will run the risk of becoming irrelevant in the near future. ■