

Instant Gratification Hotels Up Their Level Of Service With Help Of Social Media, Latest Technology

By Steve Pike of www.hotelinteractive.com



In a world accustomed to instant access to everything from news to messaging, it's become imperative that hotels and resorts keep up with the pace. Many are doing so through social media and instant access systems whereby guests can do everything from request more towels to provide on-property feedback. The main goal basically is to provide customer satisfaction and keep negative comments off web sites such as Trip Advisor.

"Many of our guests share their experiences on social media during their stays," said Ramona Herald, public relations manager for Innisbrook—A Salamander Golf & Spa Resort Resort—in Palm Harbor, FL. "They also sometimes ask a question about our facilities or personal needs they may have, which gives us the wonderful opportunity to help them out.

"For example, they may express a need for cold medicine which our staff will gladly deliver to their suite along with some hot tea or cup of soup, or they may upon arrival wish they had a different room location and we will respond to those comments immediately and let them know their options and send our bell staff to facilitate the room move. Social media allows us to take the guest experience to a more personalized level and improve upon their stay in a variety of ways."

Charlestowne Hotels has added an option to guest Internet access at all of its managed hotels that provides guests with an opportunity to share immediate feedback. The feature, called "InstantComments.com," is at each Charlestowne Hotels managed property to more effectively intercept negative guest experiences, convert them to positive outcomes, and reduce negative online reviews.

InstantComments.com enables the property-level teams and corporate managers to receive guest feedback earlier in the guest stay. These comments from guests are instantaneously disseminated to all of the hotel's management team, guest services staff on duty, and the corporate management.

In addition, Charlestowne Hotels, whose properties include The Spectator Hotel in Charleston, SC, and The Lodge at Jackson Hole, WY, employs what it calls "GuestFolio," a CRM tool that enables a hotel to communicate with guests' pre and post stay, sharing information about ongoing promotions and events to maintain guest engagement long after the stay and to stimulate interest in returning. A customizable concierge app can be created with this particular CRM tool that can be used to promote the amenities and F&B outlets of the hotel as well as activities and attractions at the destination.

Spire Hospitality—which has a portfolio of managed properties including the Waterstone Resort in Boca Raton, FL and High Peaks Resort in Lake Placid, NY—is in the early days of beta testing new software to create a communication point between guests and the Spire-managed hotels during their stays. The ultimate goal is to improve and personalize the guest experience.

The Hotel Irvine in Southern California offers guests what it calls "Reach Me," a program whereby guests can text requests for services and information to hotel staff and receive almost immediate responses.

"We still have staff that physically meets guests in the lobby and talks to them, but at the same time they can use the "Reach Me" text service as a kind of concierge for all hotel and in-room needs," said Hotel Irvine General Manager Jeroen Quint.

Upon check-in, Quint said, a Hotel Irvine team member introduces the Reach Me system to each guest and explains how it works. "If you need extra towels for your room or would like to order food or drinks, set up transportation or even need directions to a local restaurant, just send a quick text and somebody will pretty much instantly respond," said Quint. "It's like having a personal assistant right there at your fingertips."

Approximately 75 percent of the guests in the 536-room hotel, said Quint, take advantage of the service.

"Repeat guests who previously used the service even text us from the airport to let us know they have arrived, so we can have their room keys ready," said Quint. "It's great, too, for repeat guests because it builds up a relationship with our team members."

The hotel-guest relationship doesn't always have to involve a text. For Coral Hospitality, whose managed properties include Margaritaville Hollywood Beach Resort in Florida, it can be as simple as an old-fashioned phone call.

“With more and more guests using express check-out, it’s difficult to verify satisfaction during their stay,” said Coral Hospitality CEO Lee Weeks. “That said, we are proactively resolving guest issues as they arise and ensuring guests are questioned about their stay during check out.

“A major source of feedback is our ‘call’ program. The night before guests depart, a staff member will reach out and call regarding satisfaction during their stay. If a guest has a less than favorable experience, a manager works to resolve their issues before leaving the property. In a world where social media and online ratings play a critical role in guest purchases, it’s imperative to immediately resolve guest’s issues.”