managing hotel reviews

ALEXANDER FRITSCH | HOLGER SIGMUND

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How to receive positive reviews

Actually, it is quite simple: to get positive reviews, the service quality in the hotel operation has to be as good as possible. Many hotel managers and owners still think they must do something about negative reviews. This is a very short-sighted approach. A better approach is simply to address and 'fix' the reason for these negative reviews. Once certain aspects of a hotel are criticized again and again, these problems must be strategically worked on and appropriate improvements and changes must be made in the actual everyday hotel operations of these specific areas.

Hotel managers should always represent their services honestly. This 'Golden Rule' applies to the hotel industry, just as in any human interaction. Exaggerations in marketing inevitably end up with disappointed guests whose expectations are completely overinflated. As a result, these guests might write negative reviews or document their frustration by posting photos of the actual situation.

Exceed the expectations of the guests

A hotel has good chances of positive reviews when it can exceed the expectations of its guests. This becomes more difficult though, because the expectations are constantly rising. In this, however, the hotel industry is not alone. Think of the automobile industry and the expectations of a modern car: today, buyers expect many deluxe features, starting from air conditioning to a central locking system.

Quote

"Nowadays in many cases, a hotel stay means a social decline." (Quality manager of a major hotel chain)

Indead: Many hotel guests already have a larger flat screen TV, higher-quality bedroom furnishings, a faster high speed Wi-Fi connection and a deluxe bathtub at home. Because of this, a hotel owner is under pressure to continually invest in infrastructure upgrades and good service. For example, the budget hotel chain "Motel One" renovates its buildings every five years: "To do this, everything is thrown out and the hotel is newly decorated", the founder announces 36 .

To give a few pointers to hotel owners on how to engender "guest enthusiasm" without performing a major renovation, here are a few tips.

+++ TIPS

Try to surprise guests positively. This doesn't have to be a new bombastic spa area or flat-screen TVs in all the rooms right away. Often unusual details make a difference. For example, providing fresh homemade jam for breakfast or offering particularly high-quality toiletries can make a great impression! Guests like to report about their more special experiences. If you go on a vacation – what do you tell your friends and acquaintances after you return? Usually you don't speak about the room facilities or the number of saunas in the spa; more likely the especially friendly restaurant service or the unexpected "bedtime sweets" are the more interesting additions you mention.



Examples of surprises

It is difficult to surprise guests. Often, we are asked by hotel managers if they should keep trying to excite guests continually with new things. Ultimately, achieving this from year to year gets more difficult as guests quickly become used to innovations and then expect fresh innovations on their subsequent visits. The simple answer though is: Yes, as a host, I am forced to always be creative and to keep offering something new in my hotel.

Why should the hotel industry be an industry that is immune to the ever-growing pressure to innovate? After all, as consumers, we always expect newer and better products. This is something that some hotel owners have not yet really understood. This is evident if we take a look at the self-promotion techniques used in old fashioned hotels. They still display outdated advertisement, such as offering "direct dial telephones" or "satellite TV". There is, on the other hand, a lot of innovation and creativity in tourism, as the following examples that we found on our extensive travels show.

Small surprises

At the Amano Hotel in Berlin, guests will find a pack of 'Ahoi Brause' (sherbet powder) on their pillow – an unexpected and creative memory of their childhood days. If a guest forgets to bring from home his 'rubber ducky' for his bath, a fully equipped self service machine provides all kinds of everyday, as well as unusual items – all in the 'Amano' design, of course. In addition, using an iPhone app, the hotel group offers a mobile travel guide with a personal selection of the best and most interesting restaurants, shops and galleries.

An unexpected dessert in the luxury Restaurant 'Qsine': after the main course waitress Tanesha comes over with a "flower meadow" full of sweet surprises. Included are 'strawberry flowers' and 'crème brûlée eggs'.



Is Easter here already? The Crème Brûlée is served in real chicken eggshells. These are hidden and have to be found by the guests.





Writing authentic and eloquent comments

//// Your response is not directed at the reviewer!

If you have received a negative review, you might have already lost this client. Something went wrong or the guest and your hotel simply didn't match. However, you aren't writing the review for this former guest, but to all those potentially new guests who are interested in your hotel. This is a big difference.

Good to know

Online reputation management differs fundamentally from classic complaint management. The latter aims to satisfy the complaining guest, as he is an "ambassador" of your hotel. As soon as he posts an online comment, this chance to make amends is already over. The negative review is already published and usually will be online for a long time.

Writing online

Only about 20% of the text on a website is actually read⁵¹. So how do users capture content? Besides the rare case of entirely reading the content of a screen, users usually "skim" or "scan" texts. Skimming and scanning are techniques to browse through a page and filter the relevant parts as quickly as possible.

As a consequence, the style of writing on the Internet has to be simpler, shorter and more informal. Focus on the main aspects, thus increasing the possibility of more users absorbing the relevant information you provide.

+++ TIPS

- ★ Use simple, short sentences.
- ★ Avoid subordinate sentences and passive constructions and keep your message to the point.
- ★ Avoid exaggerations and over-used expressions.
- ★ Pay attention to typos.
- ★ Avoid words in CAPITAL LETTERS, as this might be perceived as aggressive.
- ★ Avoid using text templates or standard comments.



The style must be consistent with your hotel

Which of these two original comment examples best fits your hotel? Both writing styles can be accurate and useful – it just depends on your style and the relationship you prefer to have with your guests. If you are casual with your guests and they consider you a holiday hotel, this style should be reflected online (Example 1), unlike a luxurious business hotel which should maintain a more distanced approach (Example 2).

Both the opening as well as the signing off must match the appropriate style: whether you write just "Hi Anne" or "Dear Marcus" – your style must be consistent.

+++ TIP

Even if you know who 'Marcus' actually is: avoid a addressing a peson by name like "Dear Mr. Miller". This could have privacy implications. For anonymous user names ('maxpowers75'), it is best to use a general formulation such as "Dear guest" or directly address the user with "Dear maxpowers75". Sometimes this is also a matter of discretion and may vary with extreme usernames as well. In other words, controversial user names should also be avoided when responding.

Example 1

"Hi Anne,

thank you, thank you, thank you! And once again thank you. We can't wait to have you again with us.

Very dear greetings and hugs!

The entire hotel gang."

Example 2

"Dear Marcus,

first of all we would like to thank you very much for your extensive review of our hotel and we are very pleased that we could meet all of your expectations. In regards to your praise for the excellent service you received, this pleased our staff very much and so we are looking forward to welcoming you again in our hotel.

With kind regards, John Smith, Hotel Director and Host."

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Before booking an accommodation, two-thirds of all guests read online feedback written by other users – which significantly influences their booking decisions.

For this reason, experienced tourism experts Alexander Fritsch and Holger Sigmund have written a book in which they deal in detail with the topics of hotel reviews and the resulting online reputation of businesses providing accommodation. They investigate the following key questions: What are the opportunities and risks of online hotel reviews? What influence do reviews have on bookings and what are the best ways to respond to criticism? And last but not least: How can guest feedback be combined with quality management?

Jam packed with examples and tips, full of clear explanations with numerous figures and tables, this book provides guidance for the professional management of guest reviews. It is an indispensable tool for hoteliers, as well as tourist and travel professionals who would like their business to profit from guest feedback.



