



How to Attract More Direct Guests

Apx. 15 minutes reading

Introduction

Your guests have changed, and the way they make decisions has changed too

You can no longer rely on the same guests returning year after year or new ones finding your advert in a magazine. Holiday planning and booking is more impulsive and has moved online, and you need to be there too. We have seen the same situation in the retail sector which is several years ahead, and those leading companies who have quickly adapted to eCommerce (such as Nike and IKEA) have thrived, while those who have failed to adapt (House of Fraser and Toys R Us) have struggled.

But it's not too late

In this eBook, we explain your new types of guests and their travel habits. We'll look at the way travellers book trips online, what you can do to attract them at the different stages of their buying journey, and how to persuade them to book direct.

Finally, we'll share five steps that all hotels should take in order to survive and thrive in this ever evolving digital world.

Ready to start attracting more direct guests, increasing your profits and spending your marketing budget wisely? Read on...

In this eBook



Your new generation of guests



Their new buying journey



How you can adapt and attract more direct bookings

Your new guests

Millennials vs Baby Boomers... You will have heard plenty about these two generations in the media, but have you heard of Generation X and Generation Z? Why do you need to know about them?

Many of you will have concentrated on the Baby Boomers up to now as these make up your core customers, but the younger generations are your future guests and have enormous spending power. If your hotel is to thrive in the future, you need to appeal to all generations, but you particularly need to start attracting these younger guests.

First of all, do you know the difference between these different generations and their travel habits?

Here's a handy summary...

Generation X

Although less constrained by budget, they still look around for good deals and read reviews before booking.

Tend to travel for relaxation and sightseeing, especially cultural experiences and activities.

1946
to 1964

1965
to 1980

1981
to 1996

1997
onwards

Generation Z

As the most budget conscious generation, they are all about finding the best deals and often book just a week or two before they travel.

Tend to prefer long weekends, are looking for unique experiences and look to social media for ideas and inspiration.

Baby Boomers

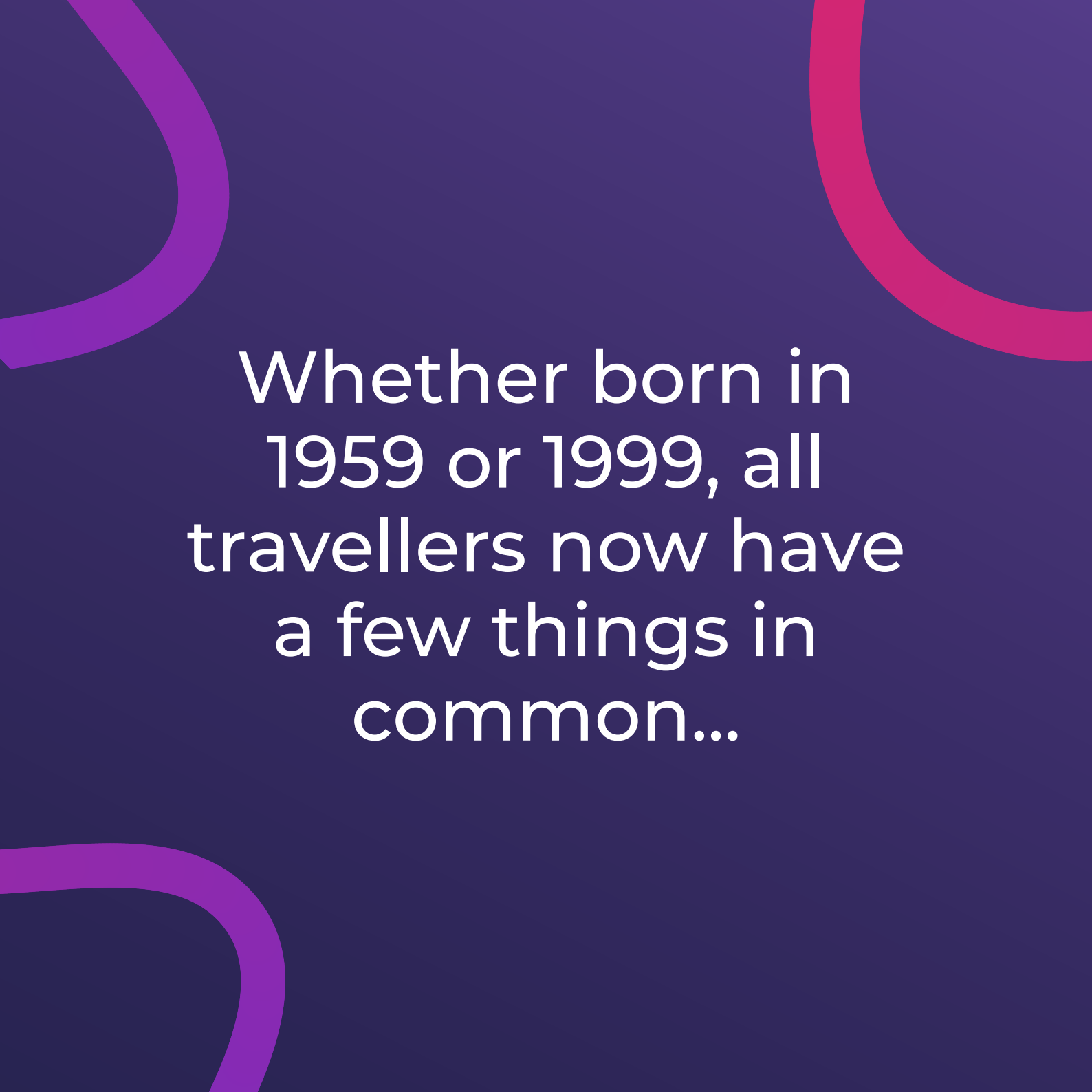
Often book their trips months in advance and spend longer on holiday than any other generation.

Travel for experiences and activities or to visit family. Have the largest budgets, but still like to feel that they've got a good deal.

Millennials

Travel more frequently than any other generation but for shorter trips.

Have smaller budgets and are on the lookout for a good deal, but are also willing to save up to travel. Travel for a variety of reasons including romantic getaways, family trips, relaxation and sightseeing.



Whether born in
1959 or 1999, all
travellers now have
a few things in
common...



Global

With cheaper and more convenient travel, **people are travelling more and further afield** for both business and leisure

In particular, there has been an increase in the number of Chinese tourists and China is now the world's largest outbound travel market when measured by trips and expenditure. As a hotel, you need to be prepared to welcome travellers from all over the world, especially the growing number of Chinese guests.

Well informed

Travellers now have **numerous free sources** to help them choose the right hotel

They can ask friends and family for recommendations, browse review sites like TripAdvisor and OTAs like Booking.com, search on social media, read travel blogs... and once they've chosen a hotel, they can use free comparison sites to find the best deal. As a result, you need to make sure your hotel is visible and the image you are projecting is realistic and consistent.



Choice rich and less loyal

When it comes to choosing a hotel, travellers today **are spoilt for choice**

From hostels to Airbnb, they have a world of options and are often less loyal to individual hotels or brands. This means that making sure your marketing delivers the right message to the right people at the right time has never been more important.

Experience driven

Experiences and activities (food, cultural and 'once in a lifetime' experiences) are among the **top reasons** why people travel

So, emphasising your gourmet restaurant, award-winning spa, or the range of activities available at or near your hotel can help attract new guests.

Patience poor

People today tend to have less time, are less patient and **have higher expectations**, especially online

From choosing your seat the day before you fly to recommendations on the next Netflix programme to watch, people are used to a seamless and personalised experience. If your website or marketing isn't relevant to them or doesn't give them the information they are looking for quickly, they will soon move on to one that does.

Mobile

The **increasing use of smartphones** has spread to the travel industry

More than half of travellers are using their smartphones to research and plan trips (including the Baby Boomers), and there are increasing numbers of bookings on mobile devices - so you need to ensure that your website is fully optimised for mobile.

What happens if you ignore your new guests?

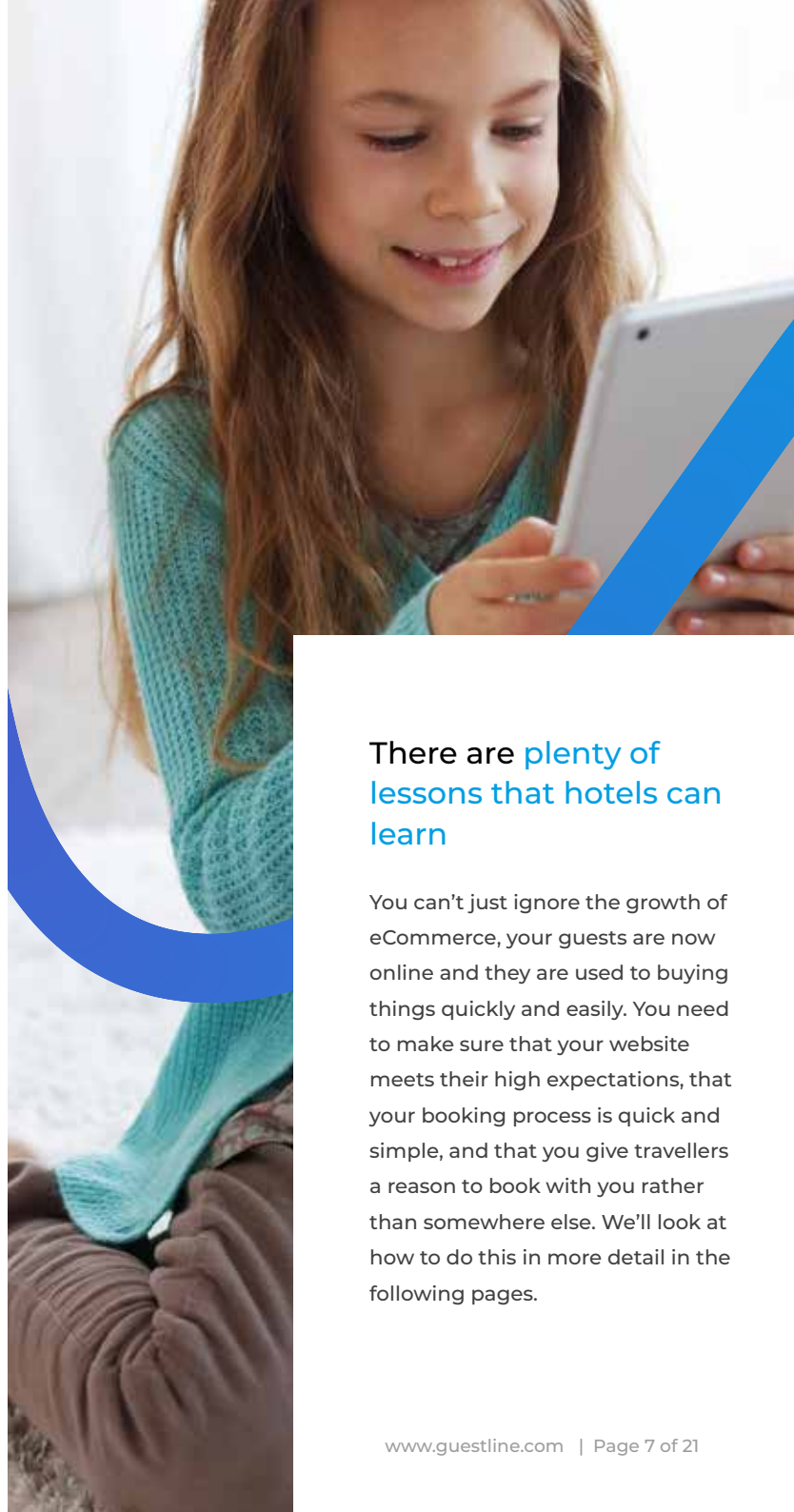
Once the UK's leading toy retailer, the British arm of Toys R Us **went into administration** in February 2018

The company faced a number of problems, not least heavy debts, but their experience should be seen as a lesson in what happens if you don't adapt to your changing customers.

Toys R Us stores were **once the place to go** to find all toys and games under one roof

However they were slow to embrace eCommerce, not simplifying their online checkout process until 2017. Now in the age of eCommerce, all of the items in the Toys R Us stores (plus everything else you want to buy) can be found online through sites like Amazon.

Like most customers, children are seeking experiences rather than possessions. Compared to Lego stores where you can sit and build in the shop, or Hamleys where you can play with toys before you buy, Toys R Us was simply a warehouse with aisles of packaged products that can be easily bought at a supermarket or on the internet.

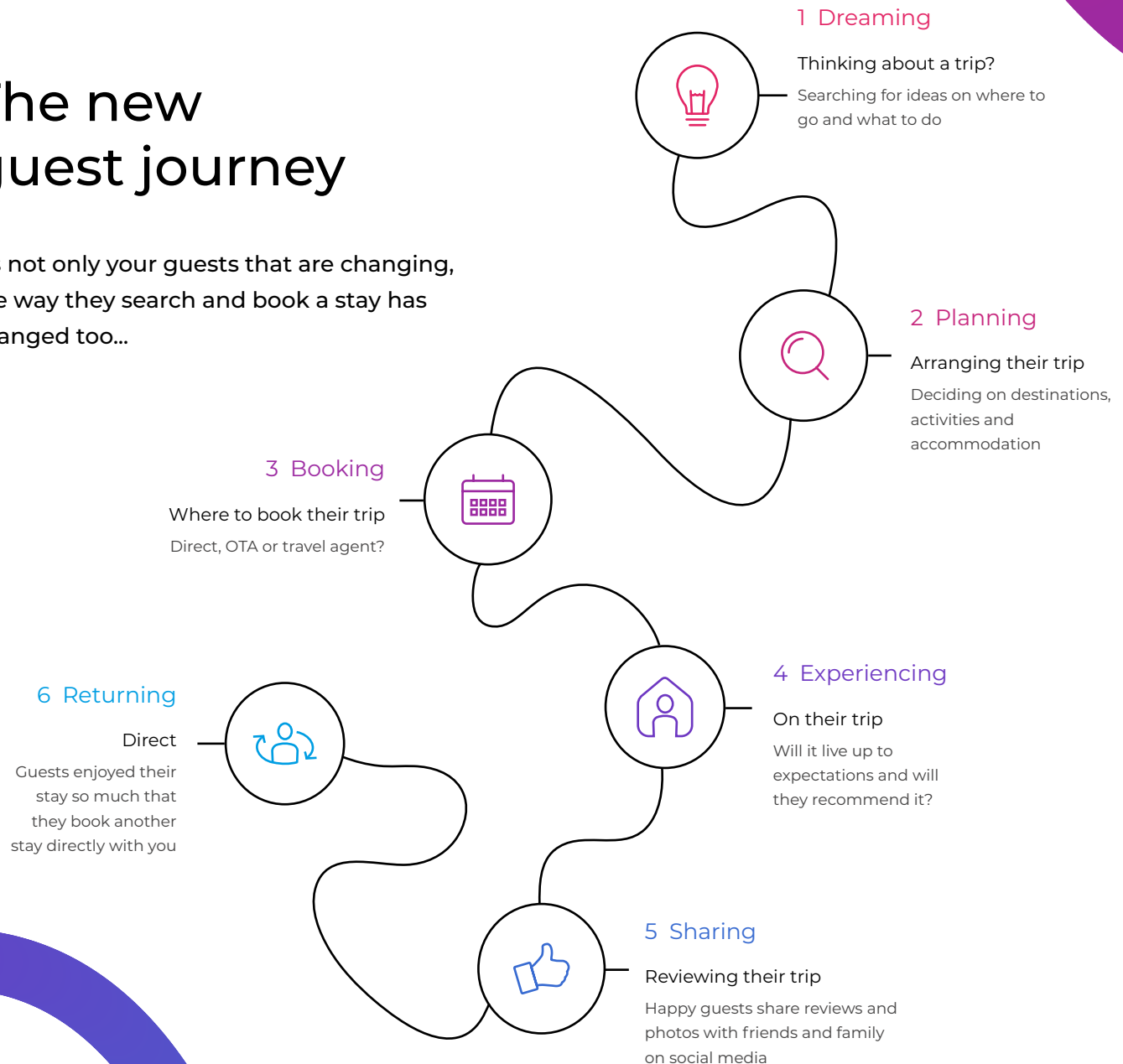


There are **plenty of lessons that hotels can learn**

You can't just ignore the growth of eCommerce, your guests are now online and they are used to buying things quickly and easily. You need to make sure that your website meets their high expectations, that your booking process is quick and simple, and that you give travellers a reason to book with you rather than somewhere else. We'll look at how to do this in more detail in the following pages.

The new guest journey

It's not only your guests that are changing, the way they search and book a stay has changed too...





What does this mean for hoteliers?

The bad news is that guests are less loyal, so you can't rely on regular guests returning year after year.

However, the good news is that every guest purchase is up for grabs, and there are now more opportunities than ever in the guest journey to capture that booking. This means you need to adapt to this new guest journey to take advantage of these opportunities - if your hotel isn't there for the crucial moments of the buying journey then you could miss out on potential guests.

Over the next few pages...

We'll look in detail at the first three stages of this new guest journey, where we'll demonstrate how to attract new guests, nurture & delight existing ones and ultimately drive loyalty.

Stage 1: Dreaming

Previously, it was likely that a guest would have **already decided on their destination** before they started looking for a hotel, whether this was online, booking a package holiday or going into a travel agent.

Today, many are less fixed on a destination when they start thinking about a trip. This means that you are not only competing with hotels in the same area, but with hotels all over the world. But it also means that you have a much larger pool of potential guests to target.

Let's take an example guest:

Meet Sophie. She has some time off in May and has decided she wants to go on holiday, but she **doesn't know where she wants to go**.

She might start by browsing social media for ideas on places to visit, reading a travel blog or website, or searching for 'where to visit in May' or 'best place to visit in May' on a search engine like Google. But as soon as Sophie starts searching online, she is targeted by adverts with appealing images and deals, as well as relevant content that prompts her to click. At this point, Sophie is open to suggestions on where to go, so this is your first opportunity to persuade her that it's your hotel she wants to stay at.

Only **41%** of Baby Boomers, **26%** of Generation X, **24%** of Millennials and **20%** of Generation Z have a chosen destination when they first decide to take a trip (1)

37% of travellers in the US

Think about vacation planning once a month, and 17% think about it at least once a week (2)

36% of Generation Z

Have chosen a destination because they saw it on social media (3)

42% of Millennials

Turn to travel review sites as a source for trip inspiration (4)

60% of searches

For destination information comes from mobile devices (5)

Sources

(1) British Multi-Generational Travel Trends by Expedia Group Media Solutions <https://info.advertising.expedia.com/british-travel-and-tourism-trends-research>

(2) <https://www.thinkwithgoogle.com/consumer-insights/travel-trends-4-mobile-moments-changing-consumer-journey>

(3) Generations on the Move by Expedia and The Center for Generational Kinetics https://genhq.com/wp-content/uploads/2018/12/Expedia_White-Paper2.pdf

(4) American Multi-Generational Travel Trends by Expedia Group Media Solutions <https://info.advertising.expedia.com/travel-and-tourism-trends-for-american-travelers>

(5) <https://www.thinkwithgoogle.com/marketing-resources/micro-moments/travel-booking-trends-book-it-moments>

Dreaming: How can you capture this potential guest?

Build your **brand awareness**

At this early stage, hotels need to build brand awareness and be where your potential guests are looking. So set up social media accounts and use them to share honest pictures of your hotel to illustrate the experience a guest will have. Invest in advertising on social media, search engines, review sites like TripAdvisor and OTAs, so that when your potential guests start searching for their next trip, your advert is the one they see.

Make your website **mobile responsive**

During this dreaming phase, much of the research is done on mobile devices so it is crucial to make sure that your website is mobile responsive. It needs to be fast loading, easy to use and optimised for mobile, tablet and desktop. If your website isn't working properly, users will quickly move on to competitor websites that are optimised for their device.

Case study: No.15 Great Pulteney

The company

No.15 Great Pulteney is a luxury hotel on Bath's grandest street that opened in December 2016. Working with Guestline's strategic partner Journey, they wanted to use digital marketing to drive traffic to their new website and generate more direct revenue through their own website.

The strategy

Using Facebook marketing activity to target key demographics, we helped to increase brand awareness and drive traffic to the website. Secondly, we created an AdWords account to ensure we captured 100% search impression share for branded terms in order to compete with OTAs. We also utilised discovery-based terms such as 'luxury hotel Bath' in their digital activity in order to reach new and existing audiences.

The results

"Through a close working relationship with the team and an investment in their knowledge and expertise, we have seen outstanding results for our first year and expect this to rise again in our second year. Not only has traffic to our website increased, but so has our revenue."

Katie Simmonds, No.15 Great Pulteney

183% increase in **web traffic**
In the first year.

Increased traffic to **booking engine**
From 10% in Q1 to 30% in Q4 2017

131% increase in **revenue**
From Q1 to Q4 in 2017

Stage 2: Planning

At this stage, your potential guest might have settled on a couple of destinations and may even have a few hotels in mind, but **nothing is set in stone**.

They will be researching the areas and hotels they have found and comparing them, before narrowing down their options. This means that you have to make sure that your hotel stands out from the crowd and makes the shortlist.

Example guest:

Sophie, now has a **small selection of destinations** in mind for her trip.

She starts researching online to compare them and ultimately choose her hotel. First, Sophie uses search engines to find out more about her potential holiday destinations, what there is to do and where the best places are to go.

She then visits social media to look at pictures and recommendations of her potential destinations to check that they are as good as she has been told. Once Sophie is convinced about her destinations, she visits OTA websites and review sites like TripAdvisor to see what hotels there are in the area, what the prices are and how good the reviews are.

After narrowing her search down to a couple of hotels, Sophie visits the hotel websites to make sure they are what she is looking for. Even though Sophie has narrowed down her destination, she is still open to suggestions on where to stay, so you have plenty of opportunities to persuade her that your hotel is the one.

52% of travellers

Will visit a hotel's website after showing an interest in it on an OTA (6)

94% of leisure travellers

Switch between devices as they plan or book a trip (7)

87% of travellers

Will not book accommodation without reading a review first (8)

71% of Millennials

Say Facebook alone is influential in their decision making process (9)

54% of Baby Boomers

Use OTAs and 50% use search engines to plan trips (10)

Sources

(6) <http://blog.wihphotels.com/publication/finding-the-balance-between-otas-and-direct-bookings>

(7) <https://www.thinkwithgoogle.com/marketing-resources/micro-moments/travel-booking-trends-book-it-moments>

(8) TripAdvisor Webinar '2018 Insights: Traveler mindsets and how to influence them (10:43) <https://www.tripadvisor.com/TripAdvisorInsights/w4632>

(9) American Multi-Generational Travel Trends by Expedia Group Media Solutions <https://info.advertising.expedia.com/travel-and-tourism-trends-for-american-travelers>

(10) American Multi-Generational Travel Trends by Expedia Group Media Solutions <https://info.advertising.expedia.com/travel-and-tourism-trends-for-american-travelers>

Planning: How can you capture this potential guest?

Invest in digital advertising

Again, it is all about being where your potential guests are looking, so investing in advertising on social media, search engines, OTAs and review sites is important. When travellers are researching hotels, you want yours to stand out, so promote good offers and emphasise the experience guests can expect.

Invest in metasearch

Once your potential guest knows about your hotel and is researching your brand, you want to make sure that they come to your website. Whether this is through an advert, organic listing, the Local Pack or Google Hotel Ads, you want your website to be the first one that is seen, before OTAs and TripAdvisor. So bid on your brand on Google Ads and Google Hotel Ads, update your Google My Business profile so that all of the information is correct and make sure that your rates and offers are in line with your competitors.

Get your website right

At this stage, it is also crucial to get your own website sorted so that when your potential guests make it to your site, they are met with a great first impression. Make sure you have a good conversion-led design that users can navigate around easily. Provide plenty of information about the hotel and local area, along with lots of photos so that your potential guest can imagine themselves staying with you. And, as most travel research is done on mobile, it is crucial to make sure that your website is fast loading and optimised for all devices.

Case study: Dean Court Hotel

The company

Dean Court is a unique hotel in the centre of York. They chose Guestline Websuite to help them upgrade their website with a modern design approach combined with easy-to-use functionality to attract and drive direct bookings.

The strategy

The team created a clean, bold and engaging design that matched the client's brief of wanting a dynamic-led site that would make an impact and retain user interest. Our simple content management system allowed the client to easily change imagery and content plus add further pages to sections on their site. The easy-to-use navigation and stand-out book direct features were all designed to drive engagement and the overall result is a fully responsive multi-device website reflective of Dean Court's offering and hotel personality.

The results

"We love the new website, we like the ease of use from a guest perspective and how easily we can change pages, text and photos. I would have no hesitation in recommending Websuite."

Simon Murphy, General Manager at Dean Court

Stage 3: Booking

Congratulations, after all that research and comparing, your potential guest has settled on **your hotel** as the one.

But you aren't guaranteed a booking yet. There are still plenty of opportunities for them to book through a third party site so you need to persuade them to book directly with you.

Example guest:

After all that research, Sophie has chosen her hotel and is ready to book. But first, she just wants to **check reviews** and make sure she's getting **the best deal** before committing.

So she goes on your website, review sites like TripAdvisor, maybe an OTA, or just Google to do a last bit of research. This is your opportunity to persuade Sophie to book directly with you rather than through an OTA.

75% of UK customers

Believe that OTAs have cheaper prices than a direct website (11)

53% of people leave a site

If a download takes longer than 3 seconds (12)

45% of travellers

Would switch to another site if there are too many steps to book (13)

31% of leisure travellers and **53%** of business travellers

Have booked travel on a smartphone (14)

Sources

(11) <https://www.phocuswire.com/Hotels-versus-intermediaries-consumers-think-online-travel-agencies-are-cheaper>

(12) <https://www.thinkwithgoogle.com/intl/en-gb/consumer-insights/10-digital-marketing-predictions-2019>

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(14) <https://www.thinkwithgoogle.com/intl/en-gb/consumer-insights/travel-booking-trends-book-it-moments>

Booking: How can you capture this potential guest?

Get your **offers** right

Tell your website users that they won't find a better deal anywhere else and offer incentives for guests to book directly with you, for example, arrival gifts, room upgrades or free parking. Half of travellers will visit a hotel's website after finding them on an OTA so this is your opportunity to convince these travellers to book with you.

Get your **website** right

Your website needs to load quickly, be easy to navigate, and work just as well on mobile as well as desktop. It should help to convert users into guests with conversion tools like pop ups and should be seamlessly integrated with your booking engine, so users move to booking without even noticing. If your website doesn't meet their high expectations (maybe your site takes too long to load or they can't find the information they want), they will quickly move on to one of your competitors, or book their room via an OTA.

Simplify your **booking process**

From Amazon to ASOS, online shoppers are used to quick and simple experiences, so if your booking process doesn't match up they will soon go elsewhere. Make sure you have a simple booking process with as few steps as possible and ideally offer several languages and currencies. Clearly display your prices and any additional charges, and offer the same payment methods as your competitors and OTAs. Finally, you can increase your revenue by giving guests the opportunity to add extras like experiences, spa access or restaurant bookings on to their stay.

Case study: The Hotel Folk

The company

The Hotel Folk is a group of award winning, luxury hotels and restaurants located across Suffolk. They needed an online booking platform that would seamlessly work across the whole group promoting all 6 property's availability and rates in real-time.

The strategy

They rebranded and launched new websites and needed a new booking platform to match their new brand identity and effective user experience, and to drive direct bookings.

The results

"We have realised a marked improvement, especially with our online bookings and room revenue. There is no doubt we have achieved a return on our investment"

David Scott, CEO at The Hotel Folk

30% online revenue increase
Since installing DBM across 6 sites

25% reduction
In OTA commissions

5 steps to attract more guests

Now is the time for the hotel industry to learn from the mistakes of the retail industry and embrace new generations of guests and the way they buy

Being agile and creative, independent hotels and small groups of hotels are in the best position to adapt to these changing trends. Those who don't adapt may see themselves heading in the same direction as Toys R Us and House of Fraser.

Here are five crucial steps to take to ensure your hotel successfully attracts more direct bookings.

1. Set **offers & rates** that stand out

Whether they are Baby Boomers looking for a great deal or Millennials looking to maximise their budget, your potential guests are swayed by offers.

You need to make sure you are offering the best room rates, packaged with experiences, and that they are clearly communicated, whether in adverts or on your website. Incentives for booking directly with you, for example, arrival gifts, room upgrades or free parking, will also help to persuade guests to book via your website.

2. Have a **website that converts**

As soon as a potential guest lands on your website, it's your chance to get them to book directly with you.

You need a good conversion-led website design that is easy to navigate around, works just as well on mobile as on desktop, and is fast loading. Also provide plenty of information about your hotel and the local area, with lots of photos to show potential guests what a great time they will have.

3. Attractive digital advertising

More than half of travellers haven't decided on a destination...

...let alone a hotel when they start thinking about and planning their next trip, meaning there are plenty of opportunities for you to capture them. Hotels need to build brand awareness and be where your potential guests are looking. Invest in advertising on social media, search engines, OTAs, and review sites like TripAdvisor, so that your advert is the one they see.

4. Get your hotel seen on search engines

Once your potential guest knows about your hotel and is researching you, you want to make sure they visit your website.

When they type your brand name into Google, you want your website to be the first one they see, whether it's through an advert, the Local Pack or Google Hotel Ads. Bid on your brand through Google Ads and Google Hotel Ads, update your Google My Business profile so that all the information is correct, and make sure your rates and offers are in line with your competitors.

5. Deliver a seamless booking process

People are impatient, especially online, and are used to seamless eCommerce sites, so if your booking process isn't quick and simple then they will soon get fed up and go elsewhere.

Make sure that there are as few booking steps as possible and you don't ask for any unnecessary information. Clearly display your prices, room information, cancellation policy, deposit requirements and any additional charges. Offer the same payment methods as OTAs and your competitors and add in several languages and currencies. Finally, increase the value of a booking by giving guests the opportunity to add extras like experiences, spa access or restaurant bookings on to their stay.

About Guestline

Established in the UK for more than 25 years, Guestline is the leading provider of property management, digital marketing and distribution software solutions to the hospitality industry.

We work with more than 2,500 independent hotels, groups, serviced apartments and pub companies across five continents to equip them with everything they need to streamline operations, drive direct business and increase their bottom line.

What makes us different are the humans behind our technology. We give you both the systems and the advice you need to enhance the guest experience and make your operations more efficient.

Guestline's Marketing solutions

Stay one-step-ahead online



Digital Marketing

Powered by Journey

From search engine marketing to image-based social media, banner and retargeting adverts

With Journey's Digital Marketing programme you can choose the services you want to generate new business and improve conversion.



Websuite

Powered by Journey

Not only will you get a cutting-edge hotel website, designed to convert potential guests into bookings...

You'll also have a strong online presence and tools to market your property, all helping to drive direct business and online revenue for your hotel.

Guestline's Direct Booking Solutions

100% your guest, 0% OTA commission



Direct Booking Manager

DBM is a mobile-first, guest-centric sales platform with a focus on simplicity

It provides users with real-time rates, pricing, room choices and information about the property, helping to drive bookings and increase opportunities for upsell.



Gifted™

Powered by Journey

Built specifically for hoteliers and with 0% commission

The Gifted™ gift voucher platform is designed to increase your bottom line. It's easy-to-use, hassle-free, intuitive, and, of course, fully responsive.



RevSpa™

Powered by Journey

The ultimate online spa booking platform

It enables guests to find out more about your spa, customise and book treatments, and purchase specific packages online. It streamlines the entire booking management process and provides opportunities to upsell.



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