Discover, plan, book - a definitive guide to hotel marketing

By Stewart Smith

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The pandemic has fundamentally changed the way people travel, including how they book accommodation. Travellers are seeking increased flexibility, cancellation and refund policies, Covid-19 security measures, plus loyalty programmes and special rates, all to ensure travelling is as stress free an experience as possible. The good news is all of this means they're now more likely to book directly with a hotel than through an online travel agency (OTA).

Source: jcomp via Freepik

This offers a glimmer of hope after an extremely tough two years for the travel and tourism industry. In 2021, Stats SA reported that the tourist accommodation industry's unadjusted income decreased by close to 50% year-on-year, with hotels feeling the effect loss the most. In 2022, positively, occupancy rates seem to be on the rise, with Google's Consumer Insights reporting a 200% surge in searches for phrases like 'weekend getaways', 'flights to and flights from'.

Now's the time for hotels to focus on customer loyalty and retention. To do this, they need to activate the traveller path to purchase. The travellers' path to purchase is a complete funnel approach that uses the right data and technology at the right time to capture the traveller's attention from discovery to planning and after their stay. By using the right data to ensure a consistent and personalised experience, hotels can earn current and future guest reservations.

What is the roadmap?

At Sojern, for example, the discovery, planning and booking approach of our travel marketing platform combines your first-party data with Sojern's data to create a multichannel strategy. Multichannel strategies are an extremely effective way for hotels to attract direct bookings.

A data-driven approach comprising reactivation of CRM to retargeting, through SEM or metasearch, allows hotel marketers to better interact with travellers, enticing them not only to book, but also to increase brand loyalty and encourage them to stay again. Here's how.

Discover

To understand the wishes and needs of travellers, marketers must have sight of their past and current behaviour. Using behavioural data that combines searches and other data, marketers can discover unique traits and create travelling identities. Are they looking for a luxury vacation or are they business travellers? Do they want to book a family trip or a solo adventure?

By tapping into this data to see the complete path-to-purchase, marketers can find out why some customers complete a reservation and others do not. From there, they can develop personalised campaigns to encourage travellers to book. Even if they don't book the first time, retargeting can give them the extra boost they need to cement their travel plans.

In addition, by combining historical reservation data with customer records, marketers can unify online data, including non-direct reservations through an OTA, with offline reservations, such as those made by phone and in person, marketers can see where and how their travellers book in order to create personalised plans.

Plan

Once travellers move from the discovery phase to the planning phase of a trip, marketers can draw up an attractive - or even competitive - offer to capture a new or repeat reservation. For example, vendors can reach in-market travellers who are planning a trip to the same destination, or one with a similar offering, such as beach, gastronomy, spa, etc. Once they know what the traveller is seeking from their trip, they will be able to give him or her an offer.

Understanding the intention of a potential traveller is essential to convey the right message to effectively reach high-value travellers. Machine learning tools help marketers segment and rate existing customers based on the probability of booking. A customer who has stayed several times in recent months is more valuable than one who stayed once a few years ago, which helps marketers know where to invest and make their budget work harder.

Book

Getting travellers to convert is the ultimate goal of every marketer, but the way to attract travellers is about to change. Third-party cookies will eventually disappear, with Google phasing out Chrome's use of third-party cookies in 2024, which means that marketers must rethink existing data strategies. The source data, that is first-party data, of a hotel's website, combined with hashed emails and historical reservation data, help marketers get a complete picture of traveller data.

First-party cookies help to collect data, remember language settings and perform other functions that provide a good experience for website visitors. This data can then be shared with partners to create a hashed email, which is a first-party private identification that unifies the search and reservation data with the first-party data of the website. The historical reservation data further enrich that identification, which in turn makes retargeting more effective.

Another way to increase bookings and build brand loyalty is to communicate with previous guests. Many travellers opt for

destinations, hotels or attractions they have already visited because new places can pose a greater risk by not knowing what to expect. Take this opportunity to address those who have already visited the brand's website or previously stayed at the hotel.

The travel industry has changed drastically in the last two years, but with the right tools and data, marketers can overcome the challenges of today's market and prepare for a future cookieless world. By adopting a full-funnel approach, brands can convey the right message at the right time to capture more direct bookings and build customer loyalty.

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