DIRECT BOOKING
SUMMIT

12th - 13th September 2023

DIRECT BOOKING SUMMIT: CHICAGO

KEY LEARNINGS

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Building a foolproof direct booking strategy

Charlie Osmond, Co-Founder & Chief Tease, Triptease
Ian Sloan, VP Global Strategic Partnerships, SHR Group
Kim Howard, Director, Digital Marketing & Strategy, Remington Hospitality

- Ian Sloan and Kim Howard were invited to build their foolproof direct booking strategy live on stage.
- Ian and Kim put 'Responsive website' in first or second position respectively. Ian explained that 65% to 70% of website views are now mobile but an alarming number of hotel websites are still not responsive. If you offer a poor mobile experience the worst case scenario is that customers will find another hotel, best case is that they use an Online Travel Agency (OTA) instead.
- Both speakers also placed 'Digital strategy' high on their lists. It's never been more important to have a digital marketing strategy. Unless you are a destination hotel with huge brand recognition you will need a digital strategy to find and acquire direct bookings.
- Personalization ranked higher for Ian than for Kim, and he commented that 'We have been talking about personalisation as an industry for over a decade. But somehow we are still not doing a great job – operationally ('Have you stayed with us before?'), via marketing (email blasts) or on websites.
- Next on the list for Kim was 'Parity management' and then 'Metasearch' which are typically high priority strategies for hoteliers, whereas Ian's focus was on 'In-house content creators' and 'Generative A.I.', saying that hoteliers should 'hire in-house content creators to promote your brand across all social channels including TikTok, Instagram and YouTube Shorts'.
- On the topic of generative A.I Ian explained that 'there's been an explosion of interest in A.I. since ChatGPT burst onto the scene last year. It will have a profound impact on the hotel tech stack from revenue management to reporting and content creation. Let's just choose one example – CRM. 'I need to run a promotion to pick up occupancy in X month, build me a segment.' The system can look at who stays normally in that month, when they generally book and who doesn't usually cancel. Then the system could send out the campaign and use generative A.I. in real time to create the content.'
- Both speakers also included 'CRM', 'First-party data' and 'Reporting and analytics' in their lists, saying that 'It's time to move beyond simple reporting and start getting insights. Who is booking your hotel? When do they book? On what device? Where from?'
- The speakers differed in their final choices with Kim selecting 'CRS and booking engine' and 'Paid Search' while Ian focused on 'Digital/mobile wallet', 'Healthy OTA relationships' and 'The right metrics', explaining that 'We are still focused on legacy metrics like conversion and CPA. They don't tell the real picture. Hotels should be looking at things like GCR and Net CPA.'

Stuck. How common traps prevent us from moving forward

Dan Wacksman, Co-Founder of hotelBschool.com & Founder / CEO of Sassato

Dan outlined the five common traps that hinder progress in the industry, and explained how you can create better habits to address them:

1. **The 'Too Busy' Trap:** People often get overwhelmed with urgent but less important tasks, neglecting the important but not urgent activities.
   Solution: Put first things first: decide on what's most important and take action on that. Using the Eisenhower Matrix, almost all problems can be divided into four areas: Urgent + Important, Urgent + Not Important, Not Urgent + Important, Not Urgent + Not Important. We tend to focus too much on the first two, but by focussing more on the Not Urgent + Important tasks, it often helps to alleviate some of the issues faced in the first two areas.

2. **The 'Too Complicated' Trap:** Complex problems can paralyze decision-making, but a structured approach can help break them down.
   Solution: All problems can be addressed with some basic methodology: Identify the problem, gather information, generate solutions, choose the best solutions, create a step-by-step plan, and finally implement.

3. **The 'Can't See the Forest through the Trees' Trap:** Organizations sometimes focus on fixing symptoms without addressing underlying issues.
   Solution: By using the The Six Thinking Hats methodology, team members can put on a different hat/perspective to get fresh eyes across all areas including the process, facts, creativity, feelings, benefits and cautions.

4. **The 'Too Political' Trap:** Internal politics and siloed thinking can hinder progress, and leadership should encourage open communication.
   Solution: Embrace your negative team members - they can teach you what not to do and inspire you to build a better approach. If you're not part of the solution, you're part of the problem.

5. **The 'FOFU' (Fear of F****** Up) Trap:** Fear of making the wrong decision can lead to analysis paralysis. It's essential to balance due diligence with action.
   Solution: Make the best decision possible based on the information available at the time. There is rarely (never?) a perfect decision/solution.

SEO success in 30 minutes

Alex Velazquez, Vice President, Digital Marketing, Westgate Resorts

- Hotels typically don't place an emphasis on developing travel blog style content, because they don't understand how it can impact their monetizable traffic. Direct monetization can come from tactics that lead from blog traffic. Indirect monetization can come from traffic made possible by blog ranking.
- Global media and hospitality brand, Time Out dominate organic rankings for 'New York Hotels' by using list-type articles that live on their blog. They do it by using the EAT model: Expertise, Authoritativeness and Trustworthiness.
- Creating effective, SEO-optimized content is a time-consuming endeavor. Alex shared his step-by-step process for getting A.I. to do it for you at scale within 30 minutes.
- Start to prioritize by focusing on building search engine authority for a destination.
- Write for your city lifestyle, guest interests, and your hotel's unique selling points.
- Alex went on to share his entire process from selecting an article you want to outrank, providing the exact prompts to use with ChatGPT for extracting keywords and headings, then explaining how it can write your article and even extract a relevant feature image. *Stay tuned over the coming weeks: We'll be releasing the entire recording and slides from this session for you to follow the detailed steps on the Triptease blog.*
- Other useful A.I. tools to leverage in the process:
    - **Grammar**: Grammarly (free) helps flag potential issues in the text and make context-specific suggestions to help with grammar, spelling and usage.
    - **Uniqueness**: Contentatscale.ai (free) allows you to view a likelihood scoring of whether the text is human-generated or AI-generated.
    - **SEO**: Scalenut (paid) assists with the writing and research processes. With their Wordpress plugin, it can inject the meta titles and descriptions, and create the image for you.
    - **Imagery**: Midjourney (free) assists you with image generation.
- Some pro hotel blog tips:
    - DON'T use numbers in your URL to keep posts evergreen.
    - DO use social embeds for images to reduce lift.
    - DO place your business in point #1 if possible.
    - DO link from your first paragraph above the fold to your homepage.
    - DO post these on social media.
- Download more expert tips from Alex, including his 10 pro hotel blog tips and PR/SEO link building.

Maximizing value: Building strong tech partnerships

Gary Glodowski, Commercial Strategy and Global Partnerships, Premier Advisory
Dustin Caromano, Vice President, Marketing & eCommerce, Premier Advisory

- Hotels allocate only 2.5% of their net room revenue to technology, trailing other industries with a 4.2% average spend.
- Technology can address staffing challenges post-pandemic, enhance guest satisfaction, and increase revenue.
- Hoteliers' risk aversion often hinders the adoption of unfamiliar technologies and hotels need to evolve faster and embrace change to compete with OTAs.
- Why are tech partnerships so important?
  - Only 30% of independent hotels have a Customer Relationship Management (CRM) Platform meaning they cannot maintain quality communication with their customers.
  - Email marketing offers an exceptional $36 return for every $1 spent so it's key in allowing you to put your resources in other places.
- The core benefits of having a tech partnership is an enhanced customer experience and a detailed understanding of guest preferences and needs by leveraging customer demographics, segmentation, and personalization data.
- Another benefit is the ability to derive data-driven decisions using analytics for pricing, occupancy, and promotions.
- It also provides a seamless experience and streamlined operations via automation and integrated systems.
- So how can you collaborate with partners to build a strong tech stack? Firstly, focus on sharing data to improve personalization, pricing, and promotions. Additionally, you should share guest demographics, booking history, and seasonal trends safely through secure APIs.
- Investing in revenue management systems yields a 10:1 return in the first 12 months. You'll notice improved RevPAR results during high and low-demand periods and lowered commission costs of around 20%. You'll also build loyalty to direct channels.

Learn from a successful AB test

David Sistilli, Global Product Owner, Four Seasons
Robert Paterson, Former CEO Best Western GB and Founder of The Grind Academy

This fireside chat on A/B testing in the hospitality industry covered key insights and strategies for optimizing website performance and increasing direct bookings.

- David's experience revealed the impact of A/B testing on website optimization and direct bookings.
- The testing journey at Four Seasons began with a bold $18 million investment in website development, highlighting the scale of the strategy.
- They ventured into A/B testing across all fronts - including mobile apps - and employed a strategic approach that involved launching a minimal viable product (MVP).
- Amid their strategies, one test stood out. It generated a remarkable 17.7% YoY increase in the Average Daily Rate (ADR) index, saving the hotel an impressive $189,000 in commissions.
- David stressed the pivotal role of data collection in informed decision-making and improving the customer experience. He saw a 12% boost in conversion rates through image optimization and a 15% uplift from addressing mobile-specific issues.
- Their pursuit of direct bookings led to a focus on enriching the booking process with engaging content, a strategy that resonated with guests and enhanced conversions.
- David highlighted that collaborating with OTAs to leverage data resulted in a valuable partnership, allowing for strategic refinement. Hoteliers can definitely benefit from implementing this kind of strategy.
- David cautioned the audience about running too many tests concurrently, particularly if they homed in on the same metric. To avoid careless, unplanned testing, ensuring statistical significance and a test duration lasting 3-4 weeks was crucial.
- Additionally, a focus shift from minor changes, such as font colors, was advised. Real impact came from larger, strategic experiments.
- Central to their success was nurturing a culture of experimentation and they even went to the extent of building a team to support this function of the business.
- In the next three to five years, David anticipates that personalization will continue to be a key focus, alongside the potential of chatbots in mobile apps and AI-driven staff enhancement.

Key learnings and success in hospitality retailing

Mykola Sheludko, CTO, Sabre

- With the vast amount of data available to hoteliers today, there are ample opportunities to both increase revenue *and* enhance the guest experience through personalization.
    - 71% of guests expect brands to deliver personalized experiences.
    - 76% of guests consider buying from brands that personalize.
    - 78% of guests repeat purchase from brands that personalize.

- So how can hotels take advantage of the opportunities of personalization?
    - **Enable consumer choice:** Guests appreciate the ability to choose from a variety of ancillary offerings such as late checkouts, shuttle services and spa treatments. Hotels can create packages with customizable options and utilize recommendation tools to optimize the order of items.
    - **Hotels need to shift to a retailing mindset:** Rather than thinking 'we sell rooms, and we measure success by ADR and occupancy' think 'we sell what my guests want, and we measure success by total revenue.'
    - **Identify revenue opportunities:** Consider where you can offer more to guests across policies, goods, experiences and services. Create visual and descriptive content to entice guests.
    - **Take advantage of technology:** Machine learning can help a hotel identify which guest segments are going to be most likely to purchase specific products. These products can then be displayed at the right time in the guest journey to influence a purchase.

- Following best practices can lead to outstanding results. Mykola discussed the success of Paradero Todos Santos, a luxury hotel in Mexico:
    - In August 2022 they activated Sabre SynXis Retail Studio.
    - They have now seen a 6.8X increase in ancillary revenue.
    - They have hit $30K increase in ancillaries revenue per month.

What ecommerce leaders are getting right

Aaron Serrato, VP of Sales, Selfbook

- Retail, consumer goods, airlines and OTAs are winning at ecommerce. Hotels need to catch up.
- State of ecommerce:
  - Mobile commerce makes up more than half (60%) of all ecommerce sales worldwide in 2023.
  - Poor online user experience causes 76% of shoppers to switch to a competitor website.
  - By 2025, 50% of all ecommerce payments will be made using a digital wallet.
  - As of May 2023, average ecommerce conversion rates were as low as 2%.
- Retailers are succeeding across industries using the following techniques:
  - **Social proof and FOMO:** 45% of consumers want to find out more about a product when there is limited availability.
  - **Commoditizing the minutiae:** 40% of Hopper's revenue comes from it's fintech products, including it's 'cancel for any reason' policy.
  - **Supersize it:** Upselling and cross-selling via upgrade options and purchase recommendation can increase AOV by 10-30%.
  - **Diverse payment avenues:** 53% of consumers prefer digital wallets to credit cards, while 37% use mobile one-step checkout monthly or more often.
  - **Bargain perception:** Promotional messaging surrounding discounts and limited-time offers can increase conversion by 33%.
  - **Frictionless experience:** 18% of cart abandonment is due to complicated and lengthy checkout processes.
- Putting it all together - The Amazon effect. The most popular mobile shopping app among 80% of consumers, Amazon brings together a majority of ecommerce best practices: Scarcity marketing, strikethrough pricing, integrated upsells, mobile optimization, digital wallet payments and one-click checkout.
- A case study from 11 Howard showed that embedded fintech, a customizable booking flow, flexible cancellation and digital wallet support drove a 38% adoption rate, 70% fewer cancellation and 12% conversion growth, while room upgrades and add-ons drove 9% of guests to upgrade, over 49% premium bookings and an 11% AOV increase.

The big budgeting battle

Derek Brewster, Regional Director of Revenue Management, Lotte New York Palace and Seattle
Sheila Malekzadeh, CDM | Corporate Director Hotel Ecommerce and Marketing, Ensemble
Lori Kiel, Chief Commercial Officer, Kessler Collection
Tay Mauro, VP of Commercial Strategy, Legacy Vacation Resorts
Franklin Da Costa, Sales and Marketing Manager, Marenas Beach Resort Miami

- **Jump to the finish line… if you can:** Find out what the goal needs to be before you even start. Talk to your leader/owner to see if you can get a topline revenue growth number. Can you get a little direction (i.e. 'Double-digit earnings growth would be great') or maybe a loose statement (i.e. 'We're really focused on maintaining margin this year').
- **Start with the tank half full:** Start with last year and adjusting to the current year. The counter to this approach is a zero-based budget. This has you building from the ground up, which takes too much time.
- **Keep that Excel flexible:** Make sure EVERYTHING is linked to an input and nothing is hard coded. Building inputs into everything will be a pain to build out and feel like a waste of time in the beginning but will be a huge timesaver when you get to the review phase and do live changes on the spot.
- **Version, Version, Version:** Every time you share a number, you save a version of your file. Doesn't matter how small of a tweak, a number could get stuck in an executive's head and randomly show up two weeks later.
- **Don't break the bank with details:** The more you go down a rabbit hole of trying to forecast each individual level, the more opportunity for error. So, think about it from a time trade-off, would I arrive at the same number if I did my plan one level higher compared to doing it one step down the detail ladder?
- **Home on the range:** Don't give exact numbers - at least not yet. Give ranges when reporting out your numbers for as long as you can. This provides you room to flex as you continue to refine your inputs and it also reminds the target audience that this is an art, not a science, and that you will never be exact.
- **Check early and check often:** Your forecast should be like you're making a cake - or a lot of different cakes! You must taste test throughout the whole process, and more importantly, your customer (aka owner) should always be getting a taste right along with you. Constantly relaying where you're at with a goal and what key assumptions you're making, will go a long way to keep your time productive.
- **Market research:** Analyze current market trends, customer preferences, comp sets and attend meetings hosted by local CVB's or Hospitality Groups to listen to forecast trends.
- **Target audience:** Attend sales missions to other destinations and conferences/trade shows that will help you obtain desired target audience. You can also host FAM groups to create relationships with travel agencies.
- **Sales and marketing channels:** Investing heavily in sales and marketing to promote the property in a heavily saturated market is crucial.This helps you remain competitive and brings awareness of the property to new customers.
- **First steps:** Determine what your focus will be for the upcoming year and tie that into actionable items where you can track an ROI. For example, the focus for 2024 is to increase top line revenues by X% and also increase occupancy levels by X%. Ask what you can do differently or continue to do next year to achieve these goals.
- **Uncovering the current drive market:** Pull your website and social media analytics then push digital marketing dollars behind boosting geo-targeted areas that you want to grow or maintain growth in via direct ads and social media ads. You can also create pop-up ads for your website with special offers from guests that are searching from a specific zip code and add more marketing dollars into metasearch and google ads to increase your direct bookings in certain territories.
- **Utilize sales/catering teams to sell all areas of the hotel:** Invest in different branding videos the team can share that showcase the business, group, leisure, wedding/social client. Update your giveaway items to the latest and greatest that match the uniqueness of your property. Are these items on brand with what your property represents?

Gen Z. Love us, hate us, we're here to stay

Jessie Linevsky, Strategy & Innovation Manager, The Guestbook

- Understanding and capturing Gen Z's love for travel is essential.

- Some key generational insights to be aware of include:
    - Over 50% have taken three leisure trips this year.
    - Only 11% of adult Gen-Zers come from household incomes greater than $100K.
    - 79% view travel as a priority, and 84% would prefer a dream vacation over luxury items.
    - They value unique experiences, interesting local food and hard-to-reach locations.
    - They prioritize 24/7 connectivity and use platforms like TikTok to experience destinations virtually.

- In order to capture direct bookings from Gen Z, hoteliers need to:
    - Get on TikTok and engage with these potential guests here.
    - Create Instagram-worthy spaces and increase influencer marketing. This can be an especially cost-effective strategy for destination hotels.
    - Gen Z values instant gratification and choices, which can lead to loyalty within this segment. They love OTAs because of the options they offer and price sensitivity. Loyalty programs which offer instant cashback appeal more to this generation as opposed to traditional loyalty points.
    - Gen Z value their well being, with 70% of the segment travelling for 'emotional wellness'. Hotels should focus on delivering genuine value rather than just marketing.

- Gen Z's preferences and behaviors will have a significant impact on the travel industry.

Case study: Reputation management

Adrienne Fors, Senior Manager, Marketing & Distribution, Kasa Living

Why digital reputation matters:
- Over 80% of travelers read guest reviews before booking.
- An increase of 1pt in the review score can lead to an 11.2% ADR gain.
- An increase of 1% in average guest review score can result in a 1.42% RevPAR increase.
- Kasa Living's digital reputation strategy helped drive significantly more reviews, with 15% higher review scores, metasearch growth and four TripAdvisor Awards.

Top three ways to maximize your reputation:
1. Encourage guests to share their experiences on their favorite platforms, including social.
2. Respond to reviews. Give your side of the story and leverage the space for custom content. Expedia for example don't allow Kasa Living to list that one of their unique selling points is online check-in before arrival/guests being able to check themself in, so they use review responses to make this clear to guests.
3. Ask for private feedback and public praise. Constructive feedback helps you improve, while positive reviews help you sell.

Utilizing A.I. to manage reputation at scale:
- Get A.I. to write your responses, which can then be customized for a personal touch. Input the guest review into ChatGPT, and ask it to *'write a response to this guest review'*. You can then refine it using prompts such as *'make the response friendlier/longer'*.
- Use A.I. to identify trends in reviews such as identifying strengths, weaknesses or common guest feedback for you to make improvements. Copy your list of reviews and insert that into ChatGPT then ask it to *'summarize the strengths/weaknesses of my hotel from these guest reviews'*, or *'based on these reviews, how could I improve the check in experience or perceived value'*.

Have the best price everywhere, always

Jonathan Hickford, Product Manager for Guest Applications, Triptease
Andrew Williamson, Product Manager for Parity, Triptease

- Price is the number one factor that influences a customer's booking decision.
- It's a competitive landscape. Major OTAs and smaller players are all in the mix. Hoteliers need to focus on undercuts and the impact they have on click-through rates.
- Triptease has a rich history of helping hoteliers to use pricing data to drive more direct bookings. Starting with Price Check and Parity Monitoring back in 2015, Triptease then pioneered the use of pricing data on metasearch and display retargeting through game-changing features like Parity Blackout and Price Preview.
- In the past year, Triptease doubled down on pricing data, introducing Price Match on Meta, Price Previews in Paid Search, and automated emails with relevant pricing.
- The impact of pricing on metasearch is crystal clear – **it drives 55% more clicks** and guides guests to your website, boosting your top-of-funnel performance.
- **Price Match is the not-so-secret weapon that allows hoteliers to achieve top performance on metasearch.** When an OTA undercuts the hotels direct price, Triptease automatically adjusts the direct rate to ensure that the hotel has the best price. That same price is adjusted on the hotel's booking engine too.
- Concerned about over-discounting? Don't be. The discount is only applied when necessary, by *just enough* for the hotel to win the click, avoiding unnecessary giveaways.
- Hoteliers select the size of discounts they want to provide/the rates they want to match, and the OTAs they want to price match, so full control remains in your hands.
- The results speak for themselves – a 17% increase in meta bookings for price-matched clients, thanks to a skyrocketing click-through rate.
- Does ad spend rise? Yes, but wisely. Price matching boosts your ROAS by a substantial 15%.
- But what about the customers who don't come from metasearch? Triptease is now closing the loop and bringing this game-changing Price Match functionality to your website too. Stop guests from leaving to find better prices elsewhere. Want to be first in line to revolutionise your on-site pricing strategy? Sign up to be part of the alpha launch phase here.

90% of guests don't come from metasearch. **Make sure you show them the best price you can with On-site Price Match.**

Game over for OTAs?

Discover the all-in-one Triptease Data Marketing Platform for hotels.
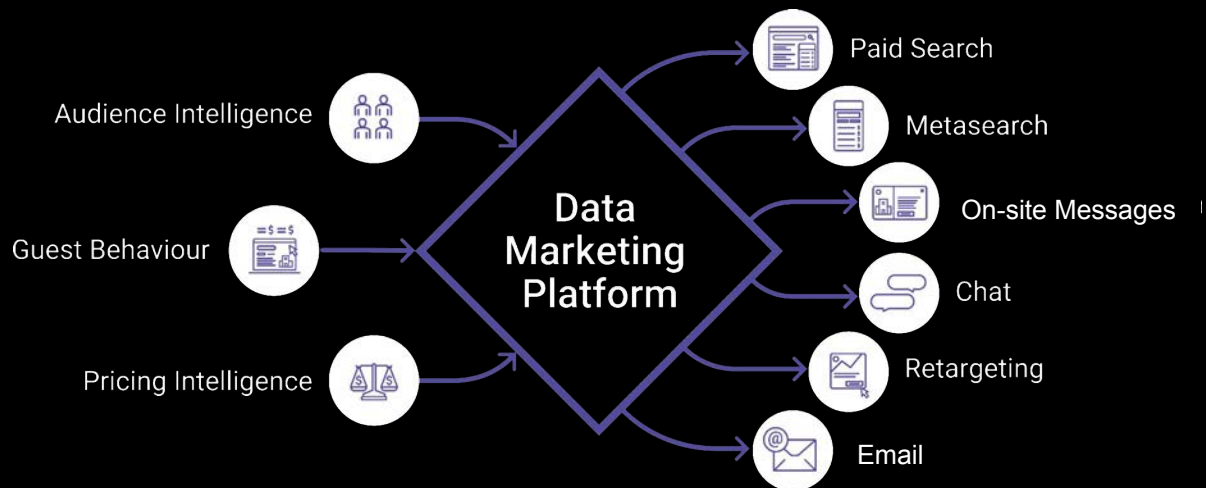
Price Match: On-site and on Metasearch

Never get beaten on price. Solve your metasearch and on-site parity for good with automated precision discounting. Increase bookings by 33%.

AUTO-MATCH

$97 ~~$100~~

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Overview   Prices   Reviews   Location   Photos   A

Check in   Check out
◀ Mon, 19 Dec ▶   ◀ Fri, 23 Dec ▶   2

Hotels.com $100 ›
Free cancellation until 12 Dec
Customer Support   24/7 Customer Service

Beachfront Resort $97 ›
Get 3% off plus free Wi-Fi with free registration   ~~$100~~
Free cancellation until 12 Dec

Expedia.co.uk $98 ›
Free cancellation until 12 Dec

B. Booking.com $105 ›

P Priceline $103 ›

Best price on this site
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Expedia $215.00
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Find out more: triptease.com

Your guide to commercial strategy

Matt Peschke, Corporate Director of Marketing, Marcus Hotels & Resorts
Linda Gulrajani, Vice President of Revenue Strategy and Distribution, Marcus Hotels & Resorts
Linda Price-Topp, Vice President of Sales, Marcus Hotels & Resorts
Andrew Flack, Chief Commercial Officer, Marcus Hotels & Resorts

- The team at Marcus Hotels & Resorts are pioneers of commercial strategy, having formed a cross-functional team across Marketing, Revenue and Sales to focus on working collectively to achieve shared goals.
- If you don't get the relationship between these three disciplines right then none of the rest matters. There can be big egos across Marketing, Revenue and Sales but you need to listen to each other's point of view.
- Think about what you're all trying to collectively achieve. You're aiming for one commercial plan for all your hotels. For Marcus Hotels & Resorts this was 16 award-winning hotels and resorts.
- They needed one set of revenue goals, and began by looking at target segments, channel strategy and seasonality.
- One of the key pillars of building a successful commercial team involves building deeper connections between the teams. You can do this by:
    - Combining bonuses and/or Key Responsibility Areas (KRAs).
    - Sharing responsibilities between functions.
    - Rethinking who is responsible for what.
    - Creating more connection points.
    - Combining meetings and giving everyone a voice.
    - Sharing wins as a team!
- Examples of joint KRAs include:
    - **Revenue and Marketing:** Increase direct booking mix year over year, reducing third-party commissions.
    - **Sales and Marketing:** Create and execute a comprehensive marketing plan that demonstrates Social Catering growth. The plan includes but not limited to: public relations, events, advertising, social media, and email marketing.
- Take a step back to figure out who's responsible for what. For example, between Revenue and Marketing, the Revenue team works on Search, Metasearch and Retargeting. That allows Marketing to focus on visuals and ads, messaging and the website, and gives them more time to execute on that.
- Debate and disagreements can still happen. The point is that it's much easier to have those debates when there's trust between the teams and shared goals.

Converting the clicks - generating demand to drive direct bookings to your website

Tina Markowitz, VP - Global Digital Strategy, Cendyn
Julio Selva, VP - Ecommerce Partnerships, Cendyn

- In this session Tina and Julio shared some actionable strategies hotels can use to generate demand and drive direct bookings.
- **Use a full funnel approach.** In a cluttered, fragmented travel marketplace it's vital hotels get exposure to guests earlier in their booking journey. By restricting itself to just metasearch, for example, a hotel is only becoming visible to guests at the lower end of the funnel. Hotels should consider mid and upper funnel activities such as paid social, programmatic and non-brand search.
- **Know your guest.** In order to effectively reach and influence your guests you need to understand them. You should define your guest and understand their digital behaviors, and create messages and visuals that resonate with them.
- **Fish where the fish are.** Concentrate your marketing spend on the impactful channels where you know your guests will be. Don't spread yourself too thin. It's better to execute effectively on one channel than ineffectively on multiple channels.
- **Don't be flat.** Adjust your budgets based on seasonality, identifying the time periods when it's most important for you to invest in upper funnel activity. During periods where guests are researching, inspire new guests and reap the rewards throughout the year.
- **Test, test, test.** Run tests to continuously optimize your campaigns. Monitor performance and conduct carefully planned A/B tests to refine your approach.
- Tina also outlined why **website optimization** is so important. It's the digital representation of your business, and offers an opportunity to increase brand visibility, recognition and trust among prospective guests:
  - **User experience.** Have a simple, intuitive navigation and optimize for all devices. Through the website and your integrated booking engine you should be able to offer guests a smooth, easy booking experience.
  - **Content strategy.** Produce content outlining your unique selling points and amenities. You should produce local area and destination content, and content for meetings/groups/weddings (where applicable).
  - **Imagery and video.** Professional, clear and inspiring pictures and videos of your property are a must if you're going to entice direct bookings on your website.
  - **Personalize the guest experience.** Personalization can significantly improve conversion rates. Guests should get the same look, feel and imagery throughout their journey - if they click on an ad with an image of an infinity pool, that image should be displayed on the site when they get there.

How to have a 'million dollar month'

Michelle Klein, Director, Ecommerce and Digital Marketing, Schulte Hospitality

- Having a million dollar month, or stringing multiple million dollar months together, requires a combination of careful cross-channel planning with reactiveness and experimentation.
- Michelle has seen it done in many different ways across many different types of hotel. Some have relied heavily on OTAs, paid search and meta and seen success. Others have had evenly split spend and return across multiple paid channels and combined this with good PR and organic social activity.
- The main levers she pulled to help hotels maximize their chances of achieving a million dollar month include:
  - **Collaboration and planning:** The first step towards success is to set out a yearly roadmap of key channels, initiatives and time periods. This roadmap is created in collaboration with revenue, sales, agencies and hotel leaders. Layered in are occupancy, flash sales and major focuses. The plan should be flexible, but the existence of the plan with cross-functional buy-in gives marketing a much greater chance of success.
  - **Paid search:** Don't just 'set and forget'. Find the right partner to take a data first, active approach. Michelle worked with a couple of partners before landing with Triptease's Paid Search product. She saw an improvement of 3.6 ROAS in 2022 to 7.3 ROAS so far in 2023.
  - **Paid social:** Having a well-timed annual sale and constantly refreshing ads saw an improvement of 15:1 ROAS to 20:1 ROAS in one year. Michelle refreshed the ads quarterly, or more regularly if there were special offers.
  - **Email marketing:** With simple rebrand and email design improvements Michelle was able to help a Wyoming hotel start generating significantly higher returns. The next step is segmentation and more granularity with email campaigns, and the introduction of Triptease Cart abandonment emails.
  - **Organic social and PR:** Michelle has been able to use organic social to drive as much as 20% of website traffic and up to 28 bookings from social per month with consistency, creativity and good use of imagery. She also worked with local media partners to be included in roundup articles, with three articles driving $3.5k in revenue.
  - **Website design.** It's important to have a website that encourages conversion. A modernized website with smoother user journeys and enticing imagery improved conversion rates from 1.6% to 2.2%. This makes an enormous difference over a month or quarter.

The pragmatist's guide to using AI in hospitality

Satvika Ananthanarayan, Strategy Insights & Planning Manager, ZS consulting

- AI 1.0 is optimized for single tasks and requires human supervised training, making it well suited for work that requires speed and automation. AI 2.0 can complete multiple tasks to achieve a broader objective, learns without human supervision and can 'invent' with human prompting.
- Expectations of AI have exploded in 2023. It is required to be smarter (uncovering previously unknowable insights), faster (dramatically reducing timelines to create impact), cheaper (significantly decreasing operational costs) and empowering (refocusing humans on higher-value activities)
- The average success rate for technology transformations is around 30%. AI 2.0 success requires a pragmatic approach. If you're considering whether a current project or challenge could be a good use case for employing AI 2.0, the following criteria of a pragmatic approach can help you decide:
    - **Is this a high ROI problem?** You have a well-defined business problem which, if solved, would have high business impact.
    - **Is it large scale?** Solution must operate at a very large scale to be successful.
    - **Do you have unstructured data?** You have very large volumes of unstructured data (i.e., does not live in a clean table).
    - **Is there high novelty to the project or challenge?** Low likelihood of or desire for repetitive, expected outcomes.
    - **Does it require human oversight?** Humans can be easily involved to ensure ongoing accuracy and quality of outputs.
- There are two clear AI 2.0 use cases for hotels: Guest feedback and content creation.
- Post-stay feedback requests are a primary tool for understanding guest satisfaction and identifying brand and property opportunities, but current approaches are limited in depth of insight. AI 2.0 can be used to analyze positive and negative sentiments, then recommended actions.
- Demands for personalized content continue to increase. Producing a sufficient volume of content to sustain unique, ongoing conversations with every guest requires huge investments. AI 2.0 can be used to create content and imagery in a range of styles and formats much faster than a human could.
- There are also hospitality use cases that do not pass the test. Pricing does not provide unstructured data to work from, and there is unlikely to be a desire for novelty in pricing! Similarly customer-facing interactions still require human oversight and also carries a high risk in terms of 'hallucinations' or too much novelty in the AI responses.
- Ready to get started? First you'll need to define a transformation roadmap that clarifies overarching roles and guiding principles for AI in your organization, then identify 'quick win' opportunities.
- Next, begin to acquire and consolidate data relevant to those 'quick win' opportunities, update and communicate your data security policies and create an AI solution acquisition and vetting process in conjunction with IT.
- Finally identify new roles such as AI Transformation Lead, AI Tool Governance Lead, Prompt Engineering and Fact Checker and Establish AI experimentation success criteria and incorporate into stakeholder metrics.

You're looking at parity wrong

Sandor J Winkler, Corp Director Sales & Marketing, The Villa Group Beach & Spa Resorts

- The Villa Group team wanted to increase their market share by focusing on achieving pricing parity with OTAs so they gradually increased loyalty discounts to ensure competitive pricing. Instead of experiencing growth, the direct channel suffered, impacting the overall performance.
- Sandor's hypothesis stated that disparities generated by the 'top players' might have different impacts on results compared to disparities from other sources and by filtering disparities hoteliers can clarify the correlation with conversion.
- The most effective strategy would be to be in parity with top players while actively addressing disparities from other sources was the best strategy for both the hotel and the direct channel.
- A test was conducted between July 14th and 24th, 2023 with the following strategic changes:
    - Reduced public advantage to 7% and loyalty discounts to 10% vs 18% and 23% respectively.
    - Eliminated 'slash through' pricing in order to participate in the most visible OTA promotions.
    - Stopped sending loyalty rates to metasearch to avoid detection by OTA parity tools.
    - Took action against any B2B channels that fed rates to random.com.
- Eliminating extreme price disparities had not negatively impacted the properties and it was noted that parity with major OTAs could be both competitive and collaborative.
- Another strategy that was mentioned was to address disparities from random.com which can be crucial in terms of achieving parity for your hotel.
- To do this, Villa Group's approach included prioritizing collaboration with similar hotels in different destinations to share data, with the focus being on addressing disparities from the smaller 'random.com' OTAs.
- They also considered cutting off partnerships with certain B2B partners to gain control over disparities. The use of blacklists and email communication had been employed to deter unfair practices by OTAs.
- The key takeaways:
    - Big OTAs are a hotelier's competitors in the direct channel…but they can also be allies.
    - Attacking random.com disparities is the best thing to focus on when discussing parity within your organization.
    - Ensuring parity with the Big OTAs and then offering opaque closing incentives via your call center or website will give you a better result.

What hoteliers can learn from ecommerce email strategy

Alasdair Snow, Co-Founder and Chief Product Office, Triptease
**Chimmy Kalu, Senior Product Designer, Triptease**
Don MacCorquodale, Director of Revenue Management, One King West
Karen Wilken, Marketing and Public Relations Manager, Fountain Head

- Despite being considered old-fashioned, email marketing remains a powerful channel with significant ROI potential. For every $1 spent on email marketing, the average ROI is $42.
- With Google Chrome phasing out third-party cookies, email marketing is becoming even more critical for maintaining direct, personal, and privacy-friendly relationships with customers.
- Many hotels primarily use email marketing for post-booking communications, but there's a significant untapped opportunity to leverage email in driving purchase decisions with new guests.
- Looking at the top five booking engines, there's an 80% average cart abandonment rate and 20% no availability rate on hotel booking engines. These booking dead ends can easily be fixed using email.
- Learning from ecommerce:
    - Collecting emails should be a priority, and there should be a clear value exchange for customers.
    - Rewards programs and loyalty schemes can incentivize customers to share their emails.
    - Leveraging scarcity, urgency, and behavior-based personalization can boost engagement.
    - Providing genuinely useful content and building excitement can reduce booking cancellations.
    - Price-driven marketing campaigns, follow-ups on abandoned purchases, and back-in-stock alerts can be effective strategies.
- Triptease now offers an automated Email Activation tool, including Cart abandonment and 'Back-in-stock' emails for hotels, which are already generating high returns for Triptease clients, with some achieving a 21X ROI on their investment.
- As Karen Wilken, Marketing and Public Relations Manager for Fountain Head, explained, an archaic tech stack can significantly hold back email innovation for hotels. Before working with Triptease, all emails had to go via her IT team and could take weeks to implement. But once you have the tools in place, email can be highly effective. "The inbox is intimate - they've asked to be there. Treat it like a good relationship and being personable."
- Don MacCorquodale, Director of Revenue Management at One King West, previously struggled with OTAs picking up and selling their 'back-in-stock' rooms before they could, but Triptease automated emails allow them to block out that stock and send it to their direct guests. As Don said "Automation and bookings are a wonderful thing."
- Find out more about Triptease Email Activation **here**.
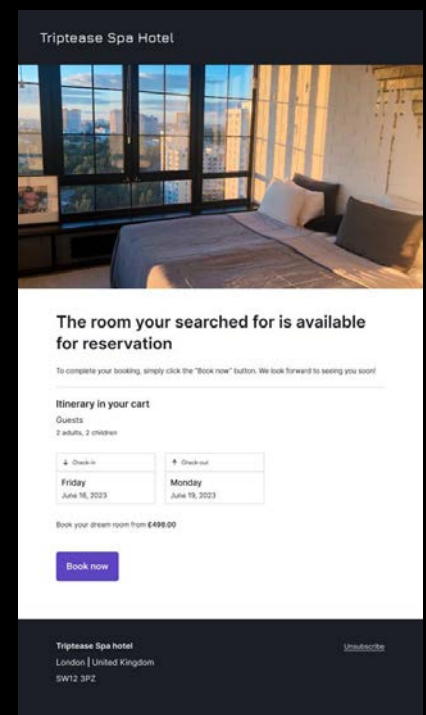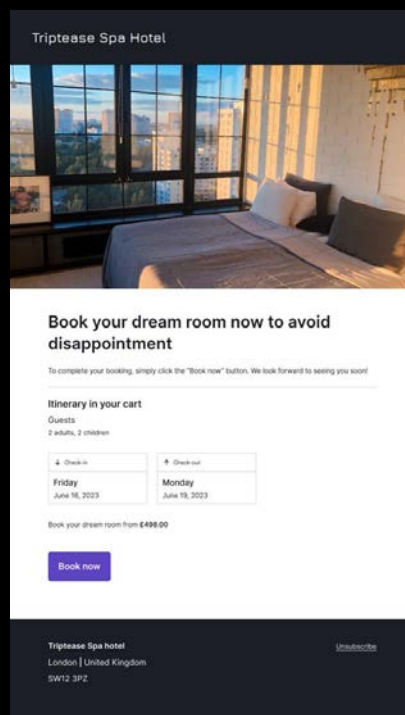
Game over for OTAs?

Discover the all-in-one Triptease Data Marketing Platform for hotels.
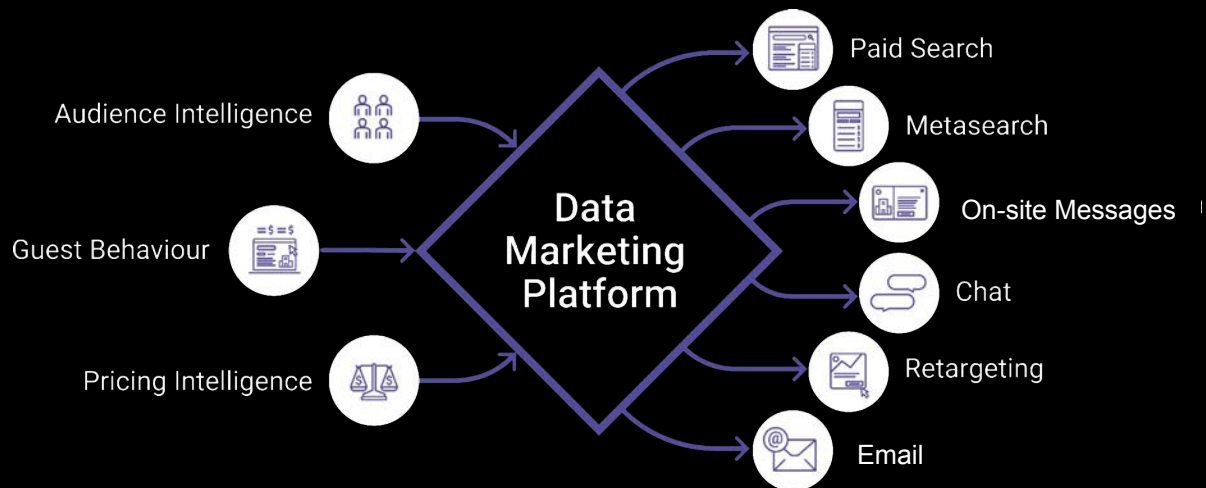
Automated Cart abandonment & 'Back-in-stock' emails

Instantly contact guests who didn't - or couldn't - book with automated Cart abandonment and 'Back-in-stock' emails.

Get the same first-party customer data sent automatically to your CRM.

Find out more: triptease.com

The hidden cost of outsourcing marketing and sales to OTAs

Tim Peter, Founder & President, Tim Peter Associates

- RevPAR has beaten 2019 multiple times this year, even when adjusting for inflation. 88% of global markets are above 2019 RevPAR and air travel marginally above 2019. There may be some clouds on the horizon, but how do hotels make this their best year ever?
- The truth is, OTAs are not evil and while partnerships should be approached carefully, working with them is not inherently negative.
- OTAs employ smart strategies, including personalization, to attract guests. Hotels should take note and implement similar to reduce their costs. But it's important to note that personalization relies on data, and when bookings go through OTAs, hotels miss out on that valuable data. Data is the foundation of personalization and can lead to a significant increase in conversion rates - up to 40%.
- Conversion rates should be benchmarked against your own baseline, not industry averages since guests search for value, not just price.
- Tim winning 'Backyard and Bundle' strategy can help hoteliers win back bookings by taking control of their own sales and marketing output instead of relying on OTAs:
    - Offering packages and exclusive experiences to increase the value of stays.
    - Highlighting value-added benefits such as free Wi-Fi, parking, breakfast, and special offers to drive conversions.
    - Upselling and cross-sell to tap into guests' 'second wallet' for additional revenue.
- The Royal Court Framework: Content is king, but it should provide value and drive conversions. Customer experience is queen - with personalized experiences fostering loyalty. Finally, data is essential as it fuels personalization and broadens the definition of conversion.
- The key takeaways:
    - Data and loyalty are critical drivers of conversions.
    - Relying solely on OTAs comes with hidden costs related to data and loyalty - but also monetary costs of up to $772,057.13 for an average hotel if you outsource too much of your sales and marketing to OTAs.
    - Implementing the Royal Court framework and leveraging your social proof (your 'Secret Sales Force') can help recover these costs.
    - Taking ownership of your sales and marketing strategy to demonstrate value in every guest interaction is key to driving conversions and recovering lost revenue.

Optimizing holistic revenue

Shawn Usami, Vice President, Revenue & Distribution, EOS Hospitality
Matthew Wolf, Cluster Director, Revenue Management, Montage International
Richard Valtr, Founder, Mews
Arthur Lane, Corporate Director of Revenue Management, Charlestown Hotels

- When it comes to balancing short term gains with future revenue potential, Matthew Wolf explained that there is immense pressure on revenue leaders to win every week in their STR reports (some even every day). It's important to pull back and look at optimizing total hotel performance rather than just rooms.

- A compromise his team made over a peak week just recently in Chicago was contracting an entertainment group last minute at an ADR deficit. However, they were able to measure the impact this business would have in terms of ancillary spend and their commitment to returning a sizeable block over three weeks in the dead of winter. The next step is communicating this decision to stakeholders.

- Arthur Lane's approach runs contrary to a lot of branded properties, in that his team separates OTA guests out on the P&L, even if they pay BAR. And those guests then have a completely different guest journey in the CRM, etc. "It's unacceptable to have less than 80% of OTA guest email capture on property. They then follow up with an email a week later so they go direct next time."

- In terms of total revenue management, Shawn Usami says that for every dollar you lose on the room side you should balance it out with 3-4 dollars on F&B. A lot of companies will do a 'pick your perk' for groups. Free happy hours for example. His hotels have employed a similar strategy on the transient side. They protect the BAR performance by allowing customers who select that rate to choose from one or two perks - complimentary breakfast, room upgrade, late checkout, etc. When they put that decision in the consumer's hands that helps them capture a little more information about what guests really value. So those highest value guests that book BAR direct - they get a better experience, conversions are higher and his team gets that customer intel.

- When giving targets to front of house teams in terms of ancillary revenue, Arthur said that "having come up in reservations - if I knew the impact of things I would have cared more. If we just treat them like replaceable people who are paid an hourly rate then we won't get that flow through. Front of house needs to know why we do things - why an email capture from an OTA guest matters - because we know the lifetime value of an OTA guest."

- For Shawn, being short sighted on front desk incentives is an issue. "You give them 10% for upsell. But we give OTAs more than that. So give your front desk team 50%. 10% is going to take them all day to make $100. Whereas 50% means they start accumulating commission really quickly and it matters."

Commercial strategy titles or tactics

Lori Kiel, Chief Commercial Officer, Kessler Collection

- As the Chief Commercial Officer of Kessler Collection, Lori recently faced a specific challenge. Her hotel was 1.4m off budget in room revenue, and she needed to find a way to hit her targets.
- Lori and her team identified the two critical months of August and December and focused on how they could fix issues and increase revenue in these periods.
- The current demographic the hotels were attracting were couples, but the hotel is primed for families. They also needed to increase their focus on local zip codes in order to promote staycations.
- The two months are very different in terms of what's happening during that time, so the team created two different strategies to tackle them:
  - **August status:** End of summer, start of school.
  - **August strategy:** All discounts are open and Summer promotion is performing well.
  - **December status:** Holiday season, slow corporate travel.
  - **December strategy:** Utilize Christmas Markets for room packages and promote to locals.
- The key differentiator between August and December is the booking window
- August required a short term strategy because the booking window is short - less than 45 days:
  - **Revenue:** Yield rates and discounts based on short-term demand.
  - **Sales:** Check for short-term group booking opportunities.
  - **Marketing:** Analyze competitors' marketing channels with short lead time.
- December required a longer term strategy because the booking window is much longer:
  - **Revenue:** Revenue to create packages based on marketing advisement.
  - **Marketing:**
    - Research other Christmas Markets advertising strategies.
    - Identify other markets and destinations to promote event and packages.
    - Analyze past Christmas market visitors.
  - **Sales:** Sell to groups as an experience.
- The results for August improved by $50k, while December had picked up $200k but still has significant risk.
- Things that Lori will do differently next August include: Focusing on building pace further out to avoid last minute tactics, building summer specials earlier, evaluating retail rates for different guest segments, being flexible with pricing strategies, recognizing and understanding the risk of turning business down, developing a more defensive short-term booking strategy and researching and understanding the options thoroughly.
- Things that Lori will do differently next December include: Building off of the recurring annual Christmas Markets event, creating an email campaign to invite guests back next year, better understand the competition and creating packages that include the Christmas Markets and upsells

7 UX tricks you can steal from OTAs today

Chimmy Kalu, Staff Product Designer, Triptease

- 80% of travellers use OTAs in the 45 days leading up to their hotel purchase, and these businesses have entire teams dedicated to optimizing the guest booking experience. So why bother to reinvent the wheel when you can simply copy the best in the business? Here's the top 7 UX tricks you can steal from OTAs today.
- **1. Prioritize new visitors:**
  - Emphasize offers page or show a highlighted deal on the homepage to attract price-sensitive new visitors.
  - Use bold or sticky call to actions (CTAs) to guide new visitors along the booking journey - like checking availability or selecting a room.
- **2. Make finding information simple:**
  - Ensure clear signposting of essential information such as rooms, hotel location, and amenities. Avoid hiding critical information behind additional clicks to minimize bounce rates.
  - Use lists, icons, or bullet points to present complex information for easy consumption.
- **3. Make it easy to compare:**
  - Lay out room information clearly and consistently to help visitors compare different room types.
  - Provide on-site price comparison against OTAs to showcase your competitive pricing.
- **4. Facilitate the next best action:**
  - Recognize that guests often do not book on their first visit to a website, so cater to various steps in their booking journey.
  - Define page hierarchy and layout to guide visitors through different stages of the booking process.
  - Ensure prominent and easy-to-find primary CTAs to move visitors along their journey.
- **5. Reassure worried guests:**
  - Use free cancellation callouts to reassure guests they can book even if they're uncertain.
  - Offer to price match instantly to assure guests they've found the best price.
  - Reassure guests about the steps and time required for booking.
  - Provide multiple payment options to accommodate different guest preferences.
- **6. Personalize the guest experience:**
  - Customize website content, imagery, and messages based on guest preferences and behavior - make them feel seen!
- **7. Give value in return for data:**
  - Encourage guests to provide their data by offering value in return, such as member rates, discounts, and access to exclusive information.
  - Use guest data to personalize website and email marketing experiences.

Content in context: Everyone has a content strategy, but today's buyers require a context strategy

Jason Craparo, CEO, Hovr

- You've probably heard, Content is King. While that might be true, it's really only half the story. Gary Vaynerchuk said that 'Content is king, but context is God'. That means you need to meet consumers in their day in authentic ways. Content is almost always out of context.
- Types of content include customer reviews, user-generated content, social media posts, influencer marketing, promo videos, tutorials, branded user guides and mission-driven content.
- The purpose of content is to entertain, educate, inspire and convert/convince. You need to make sure there's a return on the effort that you put in to creating content.
- Imagine a customer called Olivia. She's pretty excited because she's planning a ski trip for her and some friends. She's got a shortlist of things they'd like to do, but is also open for new experiences a town might offer. She does what any of us would do. She Googles the location but she's got some questions… and the scavenger hunt begins. She goes to YouTube, checks out hotel Instagram pages and gets some inspiration from other people, goes to Reddit to see what people are saying. She goes to OTAs and sees if she can get her stay at a lower price.
- There's so much content, but after all of that time, money, and effort, the content is still disconnected from where people should be buying. Your website is one of the few channels you actually own. Olivia left. She may not come back. She should be here, but the content is over there.
- You might have video content on YouTube, great social posts, etc. You should host this relevant, timely and high performing content directly on your website.
- Create a Google Drive or Dropbox folder then compile all the brand content you have - any user generated content, any influencer content, etc. Categorize them by room type, experience, restaurant, package or highlight.
- Walk through your site as a website visitor would, paying attention to your booking detail pages, where customers may have questions about your the experience. You can also take information from historical chats, high traffic FAQs, or DMs/comments on social media. You will begin to see where people get stuck, and why.
- Decide what content from your folder would make sense to display at each sticking points you've identified. This helps users to save time, boosts their confidence in your product, shows them that you know them and keeps them on your site.

Does your online presence match your on-property experience?

Jason Pirock, Corporate Director, Marketing, Springboard Hospitality

- Guests are doing their homework and they have more resources than ever before - over 90% of travelers will do their research online, and 82% will end up making their booking online as well. Nobody wants to be *that* hotel whose photographs don't match up to what's delivered on-property.
- This is even more pressing since Google changed their algorithm making relevant website storytelling even more important to search rankings.
- Ultimately loyalty is the name of the game. We want to focus on the experience at hand while the guest is in house, but also think about securing future bookings - via positive reviews, customer retention and word-of-mouth marketing.
- Consistency is key - you need to make sure you're sharing the same message across all channels.
- It matters because we're all about selling the experience. So hoteliers must avoid over-promising and under-delivering. Set yourself up for success from the get go. One issue can be overlooked, but multiple leaves a bad taste.
- There's a certain expectation that comes with your ADR. That could be in service, amenities, product, etc. Make sure your experience aligns with the price you're charging.
- By not delivering, you're opening up yourself to scrutiny. This will come through in your surveys and reviews, which then impact future bookings.
- Four steps to make sure you're on track:
    - **Dig into reviews and surveys:** Identify trends and themes in guest feedback and align with the General Manager/Operations for the source of truth in service/experience. Uncover any issues that need to be addressed.
    - **Audit your most visible channels:** Using the insights from step one, apply them to your audit. Is it time for a photo/video shoot? Are images labeled? Is your messaging consistent? Are you highlighting differentiators or the typical hotel room?
    - **Share your findings:** With asset managers, digital/web agencies, PR, etc but most importantly with your property team. They have more interaction with guests than you do.
    - **Keep it all top of mind:** Track your findings, implement a quarterly or bi-annual audit, address in marketing meetings and incorporate into property visits.

Case study: The right way to do chatbot selling

Corrina Terenstra, Sales & Marketing Director, The Reef Resorts & Spa

- Corrina shared her insights on how The Reef Resort & Spa leveraged chatbots to increase their direct revenue, and then adapted their strategy to include human interaction combined with chatbots to drive nearly 3x the booking revenue than just using chatbots alone.
- Chatbots can make your website more responsive and engaging, providing visitors with quick and helpful responses to their inquiries.
- They also help you to gather valuable first-party data, such as phone numbers and emails, from website visitors.
- They can contribute to increasing sales, with The Reef Resorts & Spa generating $5K a month from a chat bot spend of only $250 a month.
- Chatbots should enhance, not *replace* human interaction. They can handle routine inquiries, leaving complex or personalized interactions to human staff.
- **Key strategies for successful chatbot implementation:**
  - Ensure that the program or company you choose is user-friendly.
  - Train your staff to understand the chatbot dashboard and manage it effectively.
  - Establish a daily routine for human intelligence to review and optimize chatbot interactions.
  - Human intervention should follow up on lost communication by the chatbot within 12 to 24 hours after a guest interaction.
  - Frequently update and optimize the chatbot question and answer sets to improve its ability to close sales efficiently.
- **Benefits of using chatbots in balance with human interaction:**
  - Provides a 24/7 service to website visitors.
  - Can efficiently handle multiple inquiries simultaneously, reducing the chance of losing potential bookings to competitors.
  - Collects guest information that would not be accessible otherwise.
  - Guests can swiftly access details about room availability, pricing, amenities, and more without navigating multiple website pages.
  - Quick and helpful responses from chatbots create a positive impression, leading to higher guest satisfaction, loyalty, and sales.
  - Human intervention can capitalize on upselling opportunities by offering upgrades, special offers, and personalized information to encourage direct bookings.

The ultimate hotelier tech stack 2024

Leslie Lew, VP Revenue + Technology at Practice Hospitality
Dan Wacksman, Co-Founder of hotelBschool.com & Founder / CEO of Sassato

- When it comes to building a hotel tech stack that works, many hoteliers are not naturally knowledgeable about the right technology but rather - like Dan Wacksman - accidental experts who learned what they needed to know as they went along. Dan and Leslie discussed what they've learned and what hoteliers should consider when making tech decisions.
- **Building the right tech stack:**
  - Building a technology stack involves making trade-offs and decisions about which technologies to source in 2024 and beyond.
  - It's crucial to avoid the common mistake of purchasing technology without proper planning, leading to unused or underutilized tools. Some vendors may be great at selling products but may not offer adequate support or guidance on product usage. Checking references and finding references from similar properties can provide valuable insights.
- **Future-proofing the tech stack:**
  - Consider the scalability of technology solutions, especially when sourcing for properties with varying sizes.
  - Avoid analysis paralysis by starting with short-term contracts. Migrate to more suitable solutions as needed.
  - Cloud computing is essential for scalability, and it's advisable to involve the IT team in the selection process.
  - CRM, connectivity/APIs, chatbots, AI, automation, and mobile payment gateways are key components of a future-proof tech stack.
- **How to avoid mistakes:**
  - Understand the connectivity/APIs of the technology you're purchasing. Ask for documentation and references.
  - Design the user experience with user expectations in mind, and phase changes effectively.
  - Leverage experts' opinions to ensure successful implementation.
  - Ensure that new technology and innovation aligns with your overall business goals.
- **Design with users in mind:**
  - Consider the language barrier between different departments, such as revenue management and IT, when selecting technology.
  - It's essential to equip yourself and your team with the necessary knowledge to make informed decisions about technology investments.
- **The tech stack of 2024 must have:**
  - Cloud computing, CRM, connectivity/APIs, chatbot, AI, automation, mobile payment gateways and administration.

Community engagement that guarantees a direct click

Dan Smart, Director of Sales & Marketing at Dream Inn Santa Cruz

- In 2022 and year-to-date 2023, Dan's hotel's booking statistics revealed that 41% of their reservations came from call-ins or walk-ins.
- A significant achievement has been the reduction in OTA bookings, which decreased from 26% in 2017 to 20% in 2022. This reduction led to a 6% decrease in commissions, resulting in savings of $18k. This proved the effectiveness of their initiatives to drive direct bookings.
- Looking forward, Dan intends to explore how their community can further support the hotel. Instead of asking what the community can do *for* us, they need to consider what we can do *with* their community to boost direct bookings.
- This involves collaborating with local non-profit organizations that align with their guests' values, contributing to both the community and the hotel's reputation.
- Identifying local businesses and attractions that cater to their guests' preferences provides partnership opportunities, enhancing the guest experience and adding value to their stay. Understanding the events that their customers want to attend allows Dan's team to tailor marketing effectively. They can showcase their offerings and build relationships with potential customers.
- Effective email marketing is essential. Building a robust email database through lead generation ensures that their email campaigns reach a qualified audience. Membership in the local Chamber of Commerce opens doors to networking and collaborations with other businesses, and active participation in events maximizes the benefits.
- Celebrating milestones with partners strengthens relationships and acquires valuable email contacts for future marketing efforts. Assigning a monetary value to email contacts, such as $5 per email, allows Dan to assess their significance and showcase the value of marketing efforts. A high email open rate, such as the impressive 39% his team has achieved, signifies strong engagement and the relevance of their content.
- Building strategic partnerships, even with a modest number of bookings, demonstrates innovative thinking in marketing.