DIRECT BOOKING
SUMMIT

SUMMIT

25th - 26th October 2022

DIRECT BOOKING SUMMIT: NOLA

KEY LEARNINGS

Powered by TRIPTEASE

Contents

Day One

Contents

Day One

Day Two

Contents

Day Two

The state of the industry

Romy Bhojwani, Director of Hospitality Market Analytics, CoStar

- Romy Bhojwani kicked off the Direct Booking Summit, sharing recovery metrics for the North and Latin American markets, as well as what consumer behaviour challenges and opportunities are ahead for the hotel industry.
- The recovery is looking really positive - when looking at RevPAR, most of the world has fully recovered, with Central America leading the recovery and Asia lagging behind.
- In September 2022, demand was ahead of 2019 levels for the first time.
- The ADR growth streak is still continuing - driving the recovery for hotels - and will continue to do so with the help of inflation.
- Weekday occupancy is the weakest, with shoulder nights and weekends fully recovered. Weekday rates also continue to be the weakest.
- Real ADR recovery has been very strong compared to prior downturns. The recovery time for Real ADR has only taken two years post-Covid, compared to six years following the 2001 Recession and eight years following the 2008 Great Recession.
- Group demand recovery has been better than expected, sitting at 96% of 2019 levels. Group RevPAR has fully recovered.
- Of the top twenty-five markets across the US, the lowest performing are business markets.
- RevPAR in 2022 is expected to exceed 2019 RevPAR, and continue to grow in the next two years.
- Domestic travel will remain strong, but cross-border travel will suffer given the strength of the US dollar against the Euro and Great British Pound.
- Environmental, Social and Governance (ESG) policies will affect corporate travel and the recovery to this travel sector won't get back to where it was pre-Covid. Hoteliers need to start thinking about what they can do to replace some of this business.
- Business travel has changed forever, but blesieure provides real revenue opportunities with work-from-anywhere (WFA) policies and hybrid working.
- Luxury travel will continue to be a long term trend, with 30% of global travelers saying their travel budgets are now higher than pre-Covid.
- Sustainability is no longer just a nice to have. Travelers are making buying decisions based on their trust in the sustainability practices of a brand or hotel.

How content can drive direct bookings

Steven Rubin, Vice President of Revenue Management, Schulte Hospitality Group
Keren Sachs, Founder and CEO of The Luupe
Wade Breitzke, CEO and Principle of WeCreate

- In this panel discussion content creation experts, Keren Sachs and Wade Breitzke, discussed the importance of producing photography that potential customers can connect with emotionally.
- This is extremely important because social media content influences 69% of travel decisions. If potential customers can connect with a feeling or emotion when looking at your photography then they're much more likely to buy or book.
- Photography has changed over the past ten years - expensive and highly stylized photography doesn't resonate with customers in the same way that authentic, emotional, 'real' visual content seems to.
- More brands are focusing on representing real people in their photography - for example featuring friends and family rather than models, or choosing to shoot the real staff from a business rather than fake guests. Think about your brand both internally and externally and try to bring that feeling to life in your visual content.
- Authenticity and diversity in your visual content starts from who is behind the camera too. You'll resonate with a wider demographic if you tell more diverse stories in your photography.
- Start with the end user in mind. What does your customer want? What are current data trends telling you about your potential customers? How can you translate those needs into a photo that evokes emotion and hopefully drives revenue? This should all be thought about and confirmed in pre-production.
- Hoteliers should also think about what type of visual content they're producing and what channel it's going to be used on. Is this lifestyle content, architectural photography or content for social media? That will impact what kind of images you need to create.
- Technology is rapidly changing and reducing the cost of high quality photography. You can often capture a great, authentic image on a camera phone, while drone photography can replace a team of four people when looking to get an aerial shot.
- Visual content is not just about your property - it's about your destination. Customers are looking to connect emotionally to a place they're visiting, so hoteliers should ensure that their surroundings are given the same attention as the hotel itself.

Guess what? The 'book direct' message is wrong

Ian Sloan - VP Global Partnerships, Allora.ai

- Digital maturity is about leveraging your guest data and tailoring the content you serve in order to ultimately drive more revenue.

- The hospitality industry sits at the bottom of the list for digitization across all industries. But players like Expedia and Booking.com are always investing heavily.

- Massive problems will continue to arise if we don't adapt, because your guest doesn't actually care about booking direct, they just want to use the most expedient channel.

- Personalize the journey for first time users landing on your site by softening the call the action (CTA). People at this stage of the funnel aren't ready to book yet, so including a 'Book Now' button is pointless. Try A/B testing with other CTAs that make sense for this stage of the journey ('Discover More', 'Explore', etc.)

- Considering that users have forty-two digital touchpoints before making a hotel booking, how can website conversion rates be accurate when the intent for most of these searchers was not to book immediately? We need to think about *guest* conversion rate rather than standard website conversion rate.

- Leverage post-booking content to provide a better experience for your guests and make it harder for them to cancel. Answer any questions they may have, provide directions or transport options, offer upgrades or upsells.

- With one hundred days being the average lead time from booking to staying, a lot can go wrong in that time. Since booking terms have becoming incredibly flexible with $0 upfront payments - there's been a 35% rise in cancellations since 2017. Cancellation data shows that 37% of guests cancel their stay between 0-7 days out, with couples being three times more likely to cancel than families.

- You need to be thinking about your retention strategy. Things like understanding the breakdown of guests who are likely to cancel and scoring them based on who's more at risk can help - so you know where to invest your team's time.

- Your success metric is not a booking, it's a stay.

Case study:
Strategies to revamp direct websites

Jason Pirock, VP of Marketing, Aparium Hotel Group

- Your website is your number one marketing tool and (should be) the largest revenue driving channel for the booking engine, restaurant reservations, lead generation, storytelling and so much more.
- Speed has an impact on SEO: Organic traffic should be your largest traffic driving channel as well as your cheapest. Google now considers three key metrics to measure site performance, including load speed. And because Google handles 88.8% of all traffic, this is something that every marketer should be aware of.
- When redesigning your website: Assess your website, audit your performance and put together your plan so you can accelerate your speed, performance, and revenue.
- Measure website performance using free tools such as web.dev and pagespeed which will provide you with detailed reports and recommendations on your website's performance.
- The Clayton Hotel & Members Club's website was new, but it was the slowest to load due to the website theme. Additionally, the inability to execute updates to the code base - which included basic UI/UX changes - slowed their ability to make content updates.
- Updates they made to the back end involved switching to a Wp-Engine (Wordpress). This offered best-in-class, future-proof technology including Google C2 servers, plus performance enhancing tools such as redundant caching, SLA backed uptime and Global Edge Security.
- In terms of front end updates, they added enhancements on the booking widget and page layouts - changing placements of call-to-actions buttons and adding more robust lead generation forms.
- 90 days post-launch results: Organic share (+3.8%), booking engine visits (+9.41%), booking engine conversion (+10.23%).
- Key takeaways: Assess your website, audit your website on page quality and page speed insights, assemble your plan with stakeholders (buy-in, third parties, cross functional involvement) and accelerate your performance.
- And finally, do not set and forget!

Understanding your distribution landscape & choosing the right partners for your hotel

Katherine Solomon, Corporate Director, Distribution & Sales, Life House
Lorraine Merger, Director of Revenue, William Vale - Brooklyn, NY
Sara Mello, Complex Director of Revenue, Montage International
Dustin Caromano, Global Director, eCommerce & Marketing at Premiere Advisory Group

- Brand alignment with your partners and technology solutions is essential for success. Can they truly help you reach your guests, and will they continue to grow with you in the future?
- Before making a decision, it's essential that you identify and assign who's accountable from each department, get buy-in from them and make sure that each of those stakeholders have the opportunity to ask the right questions and understand the potential impact.
- Driving direct bookings doesn't always come from finding the right partners, you can do this organically by leaning on SEO, the packages you're offering at the hotel, your BAR rate structure and how that's distributed.
- Bring influencer marketing into your larger strategy or campaigns, control the content and make sure they're delivering on their promise.
- Strategies to avoid rate disparities include reviewing how many partners you work with, avoiding static agreements and, if disparities pop up, test book the rate and threaten the provider with a the three strikes and you're out rule. Also think about what you can do to compete in meta - use callouts (e.g. promoting free breakfast) or test member only rates.
- Providing a seamless experience for guests and ensuring the journey is optimized for conversion is essential. Try simplifying the booking page and move your offers or packages to a separate page and see how that impacts conversion. There are some partners in the industry who can also help such as Selfbook who offer advancing payment technology like Apple Pay or Google Pay on checkout, UpLift who offer buy-now-pay-later, and SynXis Retail Studio which allows for attribute based selling.
- Strategies for driving revenue post-booking/pre-check-in include reiterating offers throughout different touch points in the guest journey such as in pre-arrival emails and at check in. Add-ons like early check-in/late check out, breakfast, F&B credits, or offering room upgrades based on what's available usually perform well.

The power of guest data: How EOS Hospitality is using their data to drive more direct bookings

Kris Anderson, Senior Client Sales Consultant, Revinate
Ross McAlpine, CRM Director, EOS Hospitality
Nick Ferris, Senior Sales Director, Revinate

- Using data to drive direct bookings comes from three key places - building a strong foundation of your guest data, unlocking that data with personalization and relevance, and finally reaching your audience on their preferred channels with a consistent message.
- Your data foundation starts with collecting first party data throughout the entire lifecycle (from inspiration all the way down to post-stay). This will likely come from lots of places including your PMS, website, APIs with other technologies and your voice channels.
- All of this data then needs to be pulled into a best-in-class data platform which shows one unified view for you to enrich every guest profile.
- To unlock the potential of this guest data and drive ROI, you need to leverage personalization by building targeted audiences for each marketing offer or communication you have.
- Lastly, ensure you're setup for multi-channel activation so you can meet your guests on their preferred channel and keep the communication consistent.
- Ross McAlpine shared his tips on on how capturing guest data has helped one of their hotels to drive 270+ bookings and $471K in direct revenue. The hospitality leaky bucket syndrome meant that four in five users were abandoning the booking journey after landing on their site. Since they were investing money to get users there in the first place, they needed to find a way to capture them before they booked elsewhere.
- They did this by implementing a Triptease Email Capture Message which allowed them send customer emails straight to their Revinate CRM. Those customers were added to drip campaigns that guided them through the booking journey and generated over 270 bookings and $471K revenue in five months.
- Ross also shared how they leverage segmentation to drive revenue - including running cross-promotions with other properties by need dates, promoting holiday specials to local audiences and upcoming guests, and enhancing the guest experience by promoting restaurant reservations before arrival.

Best practices to navigate through industry changes

Jeff Roark, Director of Sales, Mid-Atlantic, IDeaS
Alex Willard, Territory Account Executive, IDeaS

- The team at IDeaS identified two key industry changes for hoteliers to focus on: Inflation costs and shifting travel demographics.
- Everyone is experiencing inflation, and it's impacting all areas of the economy – including hospitality. Transportation costs are rising 48% for fuel, 24% for flights and 29% for hotels. So it's costing your customers more to get to you and to stay with you.
- Compared to other regions, US travel had a really strong rebound - but due to economic uncertainty travellers are still adjusting travel plans due to costs.
- Travel has a local emphasis again and while 43% of travellers do plan to travel over Thanksgiving and New Year, 79% are changing their travel plans due to inflation. They'll be shortening trips, re-evaluating their destination and accommodation choices, taking fewer trips, travelling shorter distances and choosing to drive rather than fly.
- In terms of shifting travel demographics, bleisure trips are up 25% partially due to the fact that nearly one third of people now work remotely.
- Travellers with intent to work while away plan two time more trips, while working vacationers add three additional days to a work trip so this segment has the potential to be very lucrative for hotels - particularly as 82% of Bleisure travellers stay at their current hotel.
- Another shift in travel demographics has been the emergence of 'Young and Wealthy' travellers. This group of 18-35 year olds average 2.7 trips per year, with 43% of this demographic travelling. Additionally 53% of Americans with annual incomes over $100k plan to travel.
- Hotels should refine their market segments of customers with similar behaviours (e.g. young and wealthy) and re-identify the travel purpose of customers between business, leisure or bleisure.
- As customer behaviours and demand patterns change, that will impact different departments including banquet, F&B outlets and other operations. Total revenue performance becomes more crucial to drive more profit from each department. Think about these new demographics and travel patterns as you create strategies and goals for 2023.

Reframing perspectives in hospitality: Turning uncertainty to opportunity

Rob Paterson, Brand Ambassador for UpsellGuru (Former CEO of BWH Hotel Group GB)

- The past couple of years have been like tsunami. A tsunami can move at the speed of a commercial jet, and that's what Covid-19 did too. Followed by a wave train of staff shortages, the Ukraine war and the Florida hurricane.
- In uncertain times hoteliers need to stay focussed on the things that they can impact. In chaotic times it's easy to get caught in the tsunami wave train, blinded by all the things you can't control. Hoteliers should always ask themselves 'What can I focus on that will make a material difference?'
- **Guest service optimization (GSO):** Otherwise known as upselling but it's not just about generating revenue - it's about optimizing the guest's stay. It's always surprising how few hotels invest time in optimizing the basket after the booking is made.
    - **Find the value and sell the emotion:** Selling an upgrade should make a guest *feel* something. It's important to outline the benefits when describing a product, but don't discount the emotion. List the features but also describe what the product will feel like - a safe haven for recharge and relaxation? A place to collaborate or regenerate?
    - **Leverage the pseudo-endowment effect:** Instead of offering another fixed price offer to customers, try letting them bid on a product (like a lake view room). Remind them they're in an auction against others. You will see better conversion and higher average spend.
    - **Provide pre-arrival value:** Offering your guests some ideas about great things they can do while on-site is a service, and preferable to bombarding them with sales messages.
    - **Deploy a 360-degree GSO tool:** A tool that can advise your team what to sell and at what price will optimize what the receptionist offers on arrival and increases paid upgrades.
    - **Revenue manage your upselling:** The best GSO tools will also have built-in algorithms to maximize the average rate.
    - **Opportunity extends beyond arrival:** One of the simplest, incremental profit drivers is early arrival and late checkout. Having an easy, automated late check out service (like a QR code in room) is a no-brainer. If you're not doing it, you're leaving profit on the table.

Reporting that breaks data silos and unlocks insights

Laura Shaikh, Digital Marketing Consultant, Provenance Hotels

- Laura Shaikh dug into one of the most critical issues hotelier's face today: They don't understand their own reporting. While colourful charts, graphs and numbers always *seem* useful, endless reports means that there is plenty to look at but often little substance.
- For a report to tell a story, you should initially establish a reporting architecture for your activity to make it easier to digest and respond to. Try splitting the reporting into three sections: Website Performance, Push Campaigns and Pull Campaigns.
- As the name suggests, the Website Performance reporting delves into the ins and outs of how your website is performing, how users are finding you, what devices they are using, who visits your website and what they are booking.
- Anecdotally, 5% is a pretty good conversion rate for a hotel website. If you are not quite there, it's a nice goal to strive for. If you are there, great work and keep on going!
- Attribution plays a huge part in reporting. Every hotelier wants to be able to distinguish whether a campaign is a 'top of the funnel' awareness campaign, or a 'bottom of the funnel' direct revenue campaign.
- The reality is, the booking process is not this clear-cut.
- For instance, in Paid Search, if a guest searches for 'new orleans hotels' that's a different part of the funnel than if they were searching for 'sheraton hotel new orleans'.
- Additionally, your prospecting audience sits in a different part of the funnel to your remarketing audience.
- With this in mind, hoteliers can use Push and Pull campaign reporting as a methodology of grouping campaigns together for ease of comparison.
- A Push marketing campaign is when we are pushing our product to people as they do other things on the internet. For instance, perhaps they are checking their email or reading a blog. We are catching them in a moment where they are doing something else and pushing them either into our funnel or to our website.
- Whereas Pull marketing would be campaigns where we are connecting with people who are already actively engaged in looking for what we have to offer and we are meeting those people at the correct moment and pulling them through the booking process.
- As we head into one of the most crucial phases for the travel industry, hoteliers who have their reporting configured will be in a winning position.

Creating an ecosystem within your community

Tauseen Malik, General Manager, Yours Truly Hotel

- Hoteliers underestimate the value and potential of the community around them.
- The team at Yours Truly opened their hotel at the beginning of 2020, just before the nation went into lockdown. They needed to adapt in order to survive.
- They turned survival mode into success with innovative local community outreach and fostering an ecosystem of local ambassadors.
- This strategy saw them turn their luxury guest rooms into dorms for education partnerships, generating half a million dollars in revenue.
- Repurposing their meeting spaces to host local business like Call Your Mother Deli and The Groom Guy breathed new life into the space and resulted in a permanent residency and new service at the hotel.
- Providing a meeting point for local running groups has allowed them to support community fundraising runs while generating over 3000 social media followers.
- With over twelve different partnerships, the team got exposure from more than 750K outlets including Forbes, Architectural Digest, The Washington Post and many more.
- The key is to take each partnership one at a time and learn to nurture the relationship - they're all unique and shouldn't be treated the same.
- It's important to grow and build the local community together. You can be more than just a hotel - curate an experience that is unique and uplifting for community partners and leverage each other's audiences.
- Hoteliers should identify three local businesses in your area and brainstorm potential partnership opportunities that you can bring to the table. Connect with them and have a candid conversation about how you could collaborate - Yours Truly offers inclusion on their app, website, email marketing and social media. But always ensure that you have brand alignment with your partners, as well as a like minded demographic.

The problem with Google Analytics and how you can fix it

Dan Bodart, Chief Technology Officer, Triptease
Anastasia Novak, Senior Customer Success Manager, Triptease

- Tracking website users is important to a direct booking strategy. It allows you to understand who your direct bookers are, where they are coming from, and what they do on your website.
- Having access to this data empowers you to improve your website by making sure your users' needs are met, and therefore improve conversion rates.
- However, accurately tracking users is not as simple as just adding a Google Analytics tracking code to your website. Hotels have a unique challenge - most have a separate marketing site and booking engine, which live on different domains. This means that when a user clicks from one to the other, their tracking details are lost in the middle of the two.
- Fortunately, there are solutions to this problem that are within a hotelier's control - most of them require asking for technical support from your booking engine and web agency.
- The gold standard is switching to a 'Single Domain setup' - this requires speaking to your web administrator about creating a single domain using a 'Content Delivery Network (CDN)' or a 'Reverse Proxy', which will join two websites into one.
- The next best option is switching to a 'Subdomain setup'. For this, you'll need to speak to your booking engine about creating a 'CNAME Record', pointing at the booking engine which will improve tracking by allowing a shared first party cookie.
- If changing your domain setup isn't an option, consider enabling 'Cross-Domain Measurement'. Your web agency or developers should add some code that allows user tracking across domains.
- The accuracy of your tracking can be improved by setting up detailed 'eCommerce Events' within your Google Analytics, creating a custom 'funnel' that just shows your booking engine, using URLs that are readable, adding a 'referrer policy' to improve Path Exploration, and regularly checking that your dataLayer is consistent by running test searches.
- Finally, make sure to upgrade to GA4 now! You still have time to gather data ahead of the switchover on July 1st 2023 and iron out any issues.

Hotel Heroes: Making the industry stronger than ever before

Derek Brewster, Director of Revenue Management, Lotte New York Palace
Maury Lundahl, VP Marketing & eCommerce, Extended Stay
Alex Cass, General manager, Carousel Inn on the Beach

- The Triptease Hotel Heroes are experts in their respective disciplines and joined Triptease co-founder and Chief Tease, Charlie Osmond, on stage for an audience Q&A.
- Maury's top tip was using a tracking tool like Hotjar that records a video of what people are doing on your website. She then asks the people who didn't convert why they didn't. This offers great learnings on how to improve your website and booking flow.
- Derek embraces a coaching style of leadership and fosters alignment between teams. He's a self-proclaimed data geek but understands that not everyone at his hotel is the same.
- Alex is also a lover of data but prefers to collect qualitative information by being a 'lobby lizard' at the forefront of his hotel. He speaks to guests constantly and encourages his staff to personally connect with them too.
- Answering a question about fragmented data and technology, Derek explained that everyone faces this problem and that it's important to ask your peers who they work with as well as going to conferences like the Direct Booking Summit to better understand how to tie your fragmented tech stack together.
- On the subject of attribution, Maury's response was that paid media is only a small portion of your ROAS. When she updated the way that her hotel calculated the attribution of those channels it was a pretty big shift and the number shrank significantly. In fact it was cut in half so it was actually a seismic shift in what their spend was returning to the company. But they could then see how those direct channels are really contributing to the revenue of the hotel
- Alex suggested incorporating the front desk team into all your data-gathering. They're a treasure trove of information because they're meeting guests all day. So sit down with these people because they will have data about your guests that none of these tools can tell you. The person on front desk is gathering real data on about 80 guests a day - what are our guests telling us on a day-to-day basis. That's invaluable. Sometimes the data you need is in the minds of your team.

What can we expect in '23? US Hotel rate parity trends

Charlie Osmond, Chief Tease, Triptease
Andrew Williamson, Parity Product Manager at Triptease

- Understanding parity is hard. There are so many ways that you can slice the data that it's often best to start by asking a high level question - how often am I being undercut?
- Undercutting rates in NORAM have decreased since 2020 and are stable now at around 15%. In LATAM it's more volatile but we're also looking at a smaller dataset.
- Next, move on to a more specific question - who is undercutting me? In NORAM it's Agoda who have the best price most often, followed by Expedia, Booking.com and eBookers. In LATAM it's Expedia in first place, followed by Booking.com, Agoda and Orbitz.
- But what about metasearch parity? Meta is a 'winner takes all' environment, and we know that having the cheapest rate in meta can increase your click through rate by as much 2X or 3X. Which directly leads to the same increase in bookings via meta.
- There are MANY more OTAs to compete with in the meta space. Agoda is no longer the leading OTA - it's Snaptravel and Traveleuro in NORAM and Hurb and Decolar in LATAM. These may not be OTAs that you partner with directly, but they're getting hold of your discounted inventory and undercutting you aggressively.
- The 2022 benchmark undercut rate on metasearch is 51%. That means 51% of all the direct price impressions appearing on metasearch are undercut by at least one other OTA rate.
- But not all undercuts are equal - some are worse than others. Major OTAs and Hurb get more aggressive at longer lead times, While Snaptravel is aggressive across all lead times. Given they get their rates from wholesalers, these short lead time undercuts can be completely negated if you block your wholesalers from selling inventory at short lead time.
- Half of booking and expedia's undercuts are under 5% - if you could automatically match those rates you'd remove a huge amount of metasearch price undercutting for your hotel.
- The Triptease Parity product has been completely redesigned to help you answer all these questions and take action quickly to resolve parity issues.

Removing the silos:
Integrating revenue, marketing and sales

Derek Brewster, Director of Revenue Management, Lotte New York Palace
Andrea Aslo, Director Of Revenue Management at BD Hotels
Matthew Peschke, Corporate Director of Marketing, Marcus Hotels
Corrina Terenstra, Sales & Marketing Director, Reef Resorts Hotels

- The first topic the panel covered was the data they couldn't live without and how they use it.
- For Matthew, it was performance marketing data which he looks at side-by-side with revenue reporting to understand how pace is going as well as understanding digital presence.
- Andrea looks at daily pickup reports, weekly pace reports and every market segmentation report. He focuses on two indicators: Data that includes the country, especially if you have hotels that work with a lot with worldwide companies. The second is the overall customer experience score, because when you increase ADR that comes with an increased expectation from the customer.
- Corina's commercial team uses a PMS report. She agreed that knowing the region guests are coming from helps to accommodate and budget in advance depending on the origin of the guest.
- In terms of sharing reports with their team, Andrea uses weekly meetings to break down silos and involve everyone in data and strategy conversations. Matthew created a dashboard for Marketing, Revenue and Sales in one place. It's an Excel spreadsheet that everyone can input into. Sharing KPIs is essential when you're working as one team.
- Finally the panel discussed how recovery is impacting their decisions. For Andrea the priority is gathering learnings and best practices from other teams and other properties who may be focusing on different customer segments.
- Matthew explained that his properties have traditional sales and revenue weekly meetings. All departments that are part of the commercial team attend it and it helps the whole commercial strategy - this is where you can really discover things e.g. how to drive ancillary revenue. Last year people were coming in more for long stays so the team were marketing to them on-property because they wanted to keep them on property - they didn't want them leaving.
- For Corina the direct brand is their focus. They started years ago with 2% segmentation of direct booking and are now at 25% on average. The dream is to reach 50%. With the movements in the world and everybody being digital, she believes it's a fair goal have.

Turning rate parity to your advantage – how to win on metasearch

Jonathan Hickford, Senior Product Manager for Triptease Metasearch

- Metasearch has seen huge growth as a channel. Covid-19 slowed growth in 2020 but even then meta packed a punch later in the year. In 2021 a slower winter was coupled with huge summer revenge peaks. In 2022 it was full throttle all year round with slightly more normal seasonal trends than we have recently seen.
- More OTAs than ever are competing for guests attention in metasearch which leads to more undercutting and rising cost per click (CPC) prices.
- Hoteliers are already doing many of the critical jobs to combat price undercutting: Test bookings, parity monitoring and turning off wholesalers leaking rates.
- Unfortunately in the metasearch space all that good work comes too late. These are things you do *after* the guest has already seen direct undercut. The damage is done if the guest sees your direct price undercut in metasearch - the chances are you've already lost them.
- But what if we could remove the highest impact undercuts from metasearch before a guest ever sees them? What if we could discount the direct price for each individual meta guest, 'just in time' and by 'just enough' to make the direct price the best for that specific guests?
- We know that bookings from Meta increase by 2.5x when you have the best rate so, let's present the best possible price to those high intent guests since Meta customers are incredibly price sensitive.
- This brings us to the latest development by Triptease: An intelligent price adjustment mechanism, that detects when a high impact OTA is undercutting you in the meta auction, and dynamically adjust your direct price by just enough for that guest so you capture that booking direct.
- Because most major OTAs only undercut the price fractionally, the discount required on the direct channel is very small - but will bring huge improvements to your metasearch performance.
  - You choose which OTAs you want to target - those that impact your hotel the most on metasearch
  - You control the maximum discount you're willing to apply to the direct price (e.g. 5%)
- With this new functionality hoteliers can target high impact undercuts and resolve them automatically before the guest even sees them. Meta Price Matching will help you generate immediate incremental direct bookings by improving rate parity in metasearch.

Own your earned media: Leveraging partnerships/PR to drive digital performance

Mike Givens, Senior Director of Digital Marketing, eCommerce, CRM at EOS Hospitality

- Silos are for farmers. Sharing information and ideas across all teams leads to better outcomes and efficiencies for all. The best ideas can often come from 'non-marketers'.
- Guests consume your marketing holistically, so you should be planning and working holistically. This involves marketing, sales, revenue, PR, and operations sharing knowledge and strategizing together. The marketing message needs to carry through to the on-property experience and beyond.
- Earned media is hard to track and difficult to show hard ROI. That doesn't mean it isn't important. An effective integrated media strategy fully leveraging earned media allows us to:
    - **Drive additional demand:** Access to new audiences with increased awareness and brand recognition. You can enhance owned and paid channels with earned media.
    - **Lower marketing costs:** Use earned placements where it is expensive to advertise.
    - **Charge more money:** Through increased brand affinity and credibility.
- To get buy in for earned media you need to educate upwards - set expectations and fight for budgets then share regular updates at morning stand ups and weekly revenue meetings.
- Trust your gut! If you think it sounds like a cool campaign, your guests probably will too.
- The basis of a solid marketing partnership opportunity is that it is both relevant and mutually beneficial. It can be more obvious - like local services or current vendors - or unexpected - like adjacent industries or audience overlap.
- Making partnerships mutually beneficial has been key to the success at EOS. They prioritize their partners needs over their own.
- EOS had great success with partnerships such as Roberta's Pizza and Molton Brown as well as local partnerships in the vicinity of their hotels.

Optimizing direct bookings with buy now, pay later

Donnie Schumann, Director, Travel Partnerships, Uplift
Scott Stirling, Senior Product Manager - Retargeting and Paid Search, Triptease

- Buy now, pay later (BNLP) is not a nice to have, it's increasingly expected from consumers - from a pair of shoes to a bracelet from Tiffany's.
- BNPL is the fastest growing form of e-commerce payment in North America. Over 55% of U.S. consumers have used a BNLP service, while 87% of consumers aged 22 to 44 are interested in monthly installment plans. Around 70% of all retail merchants offer BNPL as a payment option.
- BNPL is projected to at least quadruple from '21 to '25 % (from ~ $60B to $564B). Hospitality is pegged at $5B
- It's easy to think of BNPL as a just a payment solution, but in reality it is so much more
- You may not think you offer a BNPL payment option for your hotel, but if you're on a major OTA like Expedia or Priceline, you technically do.
- Uplift sits at the center of the BNPL travel universe. It's more than just a payment option - it's a powerful marketing tool
- Most successful partners market BNPL at the top of the funnel - on landing pages, email and social campaigns.
- It drives more users down the the funnel which results in
    - Increased conversion
    - Higher order values
- It's easier for customers to justify that room upgrade or activity add on when monthly 'from' pricing jumps $10 vs the total order value jumping hundreds of dollars.
- This can result in a more than 5% average conversion increase and around a 15% increase in average order value.
- It goes one step further than marketing, because 0% APR offers an effective revenue management tool too. You can drive demand without discounting.

Case study: Shifting revenue share from OTAs to brand.com

Maury Lundahl, VP Marketing & eCommerce, Extended Stay

- In 2020, Extended Stay America's (ESA) OTA revenue contributions outpaced brand.com. This was influenced by the fact that the brand website had not been updated in over ten years. Accountability for media spend was lacking, and there was a misalignment between channel strategies and the Extended Stay business model.
- ESA's strategy was to boost direct revenue and channel profitability. There were five steps: (1) set goals, (2) prioritise brand.com, (3) optimise marketing spend, (4) evaluate OTA strategy, and (5) measure results.
- Improvement requires measurement so when setting goals, ask yourself questions like 'What is your channel mix and why?', 'What should it be?' and 'How will you get there?'.
- Determine whether brand.com requires a complete redesign or minor UX updates. ESA increased the default length of search from one night to seven, resulting in an increase in revenue from this quick win strategy. You could also implement enticing offers, checkout page optimizations, and mobile experience improvements.
- Do not set and forget. Implement a practice of continuous optimization. Perform regular A/B testing, UX feedback and technology reviews. Create a website roadmap to clearly define goals and ensure alignment with overall business strategy.
- When launching a new website, it is recommended to use a phased launch approach. Introduce the new site while legacy remains live, slowly increase traffic to the new site over time and compare performance between the old and the new.
- Audit your OTA strategy: Opaque and promotional contribution levels; compensation opportunities; prioritize profitability.
- To measure results, improvement requires measurement so ensure the hotel remains aligned with primary objectives. Create weekly, monthly and quarterly dashboards and continually monitor for accountability.
- By implementing a strategic share shift playbook ESA improved its direct online revenue contribution by +600bps.

Can AI outperform your revenue manager?

Evan Baker, Director Of Sales, Pricepoint

- There are new challenges to face in revenue management - demand volatility, staff shortages, cost control and increasing numbers of tech savvy competitors. But there are also countless new solutions in the form of cloud-based technology and contactless check-in. Artificial intelligence is next.

- In the past, taking care of revenue meant yield management. This has a narrow scope: what compromise between selling price and sales volume will maximize revenue? This ignores the cost of service and promotion of other revenue streams.

- Right now, revenue management is broader. Focus has shifted to revenue per perishable unit (room night). The goal is to increase average revenue without increasing costs. This requires cohesive strategy and coordination of operational teams.

- In the future, revenue strategy will be focused on automated dynamic pricing, harnessing data, AI, and predictive analytics to support - not replace - well-defined revenue management strategy. This allows you to analyze and process large amounts of current and past data to optimize prices in real-time, driving full pricing automation powered by advanced algorithms. There is no human that can crunch numbers as fast as a computer.

- No matter what solution you choose, long term success is now being driven by different mechanisms and new tools. Your options include:
  - **Upskilling:** Costing $0 to $550, this is slow, difficult to measure and dependent on the individual.
  - **Consultants:** Costing $12,000 this is a mid level solution. Clear ROI but slow to determine.
  - **Professional Revenue Manager:** Costing $7000 - are they beating their monthly salary in additional revenue?
  - **Yield-Management Tools:** Costing from $0 to $1000+ this is a fast and clear option but the value is decreasing.
  - **AI Dynamic Pricing:** Costing $49 to $1000+, this is fastest and clearest (license vs. revenue increase) ROI and AI's effectiveness improves with training).

The loyalty roundtable:
How to keep guests loyal in 2023

Katie Wilson, VP of Customer Success at Triptease
Alan Gonzalez, Group Director, Distribution & e-Commerce at Warwick Hotels and Resorts
Dana Cariss, Vice President, Revenue Strategy + Distribution, CoralTree Hospitality

- According to Alan, customers are looking more for unique stays and experiences than repeat visits to the same location so he offers member only destination packages.
- Dana believes that Gen Z travellers (who are now almost as large a group as Millennials and Baby Boomers) have a desire to connect through travel and experiences, and want to give back through charitable and sustainable trips.
- Hoteliers should respond to OTAs aggressively expanding their loyalty programmes by getting the basics right. Welcome people back, remember their preferences, offer upgrades, personalize email communication and utilize text messaging.
- Loyalty programmes offer rich first party data that enables Warwick Hotels to create more sophisticated marketing campaigns by capturing data points like address, postal code, preferences and birthdays.
- Hoteliers should send emails to guests who booked through OTAs, particularly during pre-stay when you can offer add-ons. Alan mentioned that one of their most successful add-on strategies is to offer early check-in and late check out which comes with low operational costs. You can also set up trigger campaigns post check out to encourage guests to book direct in future. .
- Email marketing is one of the cheapest channels to acquire customers, costing around $10 per customer. Dana found that the value of an email is worth thousands of dollars. This can be attributed to loyalty email campaigns generating the largest ADR and highest spend.
- Alan recommends when launching a loyalty programme to ensure you have a good data strategy. Examples would be data naming conventions (New York, New York City, Postal Codes, Street vs St etc. The better the data going in, the better the results are coming out.
- Dana's three key takeaways are: (1) Be clear on your intention (2) Find a CRM with an easy to use email platform and (3) Be consistent in delivery, both commercial team and ops.

Live website audits with a user experience expert

Chimmy Kalu, Senior Product Designer, Triptease
Bethany Anglin, Marketing Consultant, Woodside Hotels

- It's important to understand that the hotel booking process is a non-linear journey with three stages: dreaming, researching, and booking.
- Throughout these stages, the guest asks questions such as 'Is this dream a possibility?', 'What amenities are available?' and 'What's most important to me?' as well as the crucial question "Is this the best way to book this hotel?'
- Make sure your website provides clear, intuitive navigation. Keep in mind that you are writing for people who are not in the hotel industry, but for your ideal guest.
- It is tempting for eCommerce professionals to write website copy for SEO purposes, but you must consider the type of visitor you want to attract. They don't want to see a lot of fluff keywords, but rather images, videos, reviews, and features/benefits of various types of rooms.
- Make sure your website has a range of resources available to accommodate guests at any stage of the booking process. Articles, videos, and pictures work particularly well for the 'dream' phase, while you'll need to include prices, amenities, and reviews in the 'research' phase. Finally, offer personalization, booking policies, and competitive pricing for the 'booking' phase.
- Consider the approach to messaging on your website too. Pop-up messages can sometimes distract the user while they are completing their booking, so use embedded messages that subtly promote offers to encourage guests to stay longer.
- Ask your guests to complete a booking on your website while you watch. You could offer them a free drink or bottle of wine as an incentive.
- Write for you guests. You're not trying to celebrate your business. You're trying to show them how your hotel is a good fit for their needs. Make important information easy to find. People who are looking for long content and lots of information will work harder to find it than impatient bookers who want to scan.
- Don't have a designer? Learn from the experts. Expedia and Booking lure guests using unparalleled data and user research insights. Learn from travel and e-commerce giants. They are a few years ahead of hospitality.

The lifecycle of a review

Alex Cass, General manager, Carousel Inn on the Beach

- Before Alex Cass became General Manager, the Carousel Inn on the Beach didn't have high ratings as a hotel. His strategy for driving reviews and engagement on review sites skyrocketed his Tripadvisor listing to fourth place out of 48 hotels in Fort Myers Beach.
- To increase reviews, keep your most engaged staff on the evening shift, greet guests in their native language, and let guests know the importance of reviews as well as what platforms you would like them to be submitted on.
- Assign a lobby lizard (a person who stays in the lobby assisting with check-in, check out and customer service during busy periods. This sis a great way to maintain excellent customer experiences if you have the team capacity.
- When guests leave reviews on OTAs, you usually can't respond directly. Instead, encourage customers to leave reviews on websites like Google and Tripadvisor, where you can respond and advise them to book direct the next time. It's important to remember that OTAs are not the enemy - they help generate leads! That said, if you try to reply to a review on an OTA website it is very likely to be removed.
- Increasing the number of reviews your business has doesn't just improve your hotel listing. It also reassures potential guests, improves your SEO ranking and helps drive more valuable direct bookings.
- Never leave it too late to respond to a review - reply as quickly as you can.
- It's likely that most hotels will receive negative reviews at some point and - while it can have an impact of listings and how others perceive your hotel - it is also a great opportunity to turn a negative into a positive.
- Respond to negative reviews with empathy and honesty. State your guidelines and rationale if possible, and invite them to contact the hotel directly if they wanted to discuss it further.
- You can successfully increase your engagement by responding to every review, but never use a generic response when you do this. Always address the customer by name and articulate the values of your hotel in the way you write. Potential guests will be reading these reviews so you need to show them how much your business cares and what kind of hotel you are.

# Maximizing your social media efforts

Calvin Tilokee, CEO, Revpar Media

- Over the past year there have been two key changes in the social media space: Video content and analytics.
- The industry is starting to embrace data and analytics, plus all social media platforms are now focusing on short-form video to capture guests' attention.
- Instagram is the number one social media for travel, so that's where your hotel needs to be present.
- Where everybody got it wrong in the hotel space is that nobody invested in social media. Hotels that were able to invest in agencies have tended to find that agencies are good at creating content like photography, but for your social media presence, professional photography is not always what you need. Pretty pictures gain you followers but very little engagement. Some hotel accounts have 20 thousand followers but 0.01 percent engagement. Hotels should focus more on the engagement piece of social media.
- There are three key metrics you have to focus on before any content strategy.
  a. **Engagement:** This is the metric to track how heavily involved with your content your audience is. It can be calculated very easily. Add these up and divide them by the number of followers you have and multiply it by 100 to get a percentage.
  b. **Reach:** How many individual accounts see a piece of content?
  c. **Impressions:** The number of times the content is seen whether it's clicked or not.
- **Use more videos.** Reels are being boosted by Instagram, they also get 3.8% engagement on average. Smartphones allow you to create videos of your rooms, F&B or the local area. Capture things that set your hotel apart from the competition.
- **User-generated content is also important.** Get your guests involved! If they share something about the property, re-share it, and make them feel like part of a community. This is free content with no additional work required.
- Analyze your audience. Find out what sets your hotel apart and what your targeted customers would be interested in.
- **Use your Instagram Bio wisely.** Your entire Bio is searchable by Google, so use strong keyword, name the account with the hotel's name and use the space underneath the 'name' field. Include words that a person might search for when they're looking for a hotel in your area. Finally, make sure that the call to action includes your direct booking link.

allora.ai

The Science of Direct Guest Acquisition

Proven to increase
committed direct guests by 25%
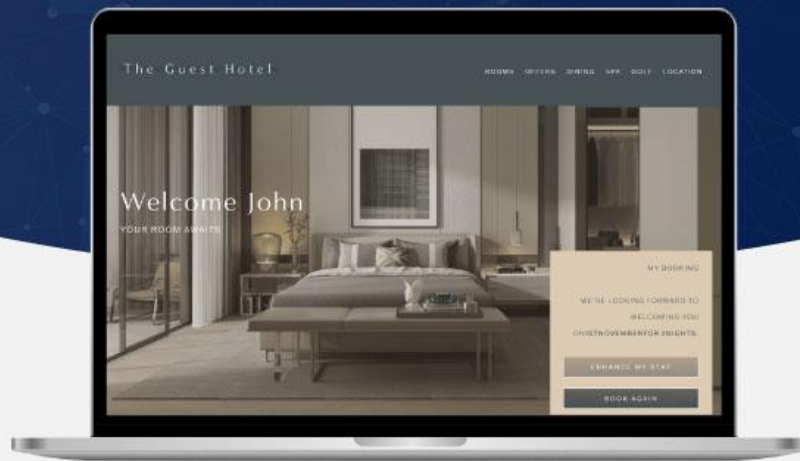
allora.ai is the world's first AI-driven booking optimization platform

Predict every guest journey

Tailor their booking experience

Maximise booking retention

Discover more at www.allora.ai

DIRECT BOOKING
SUMMIT

MISSED THE
NOLA SUMMIT?

JOIN US
NEXT TIME...

Powered by TRIPTEASE