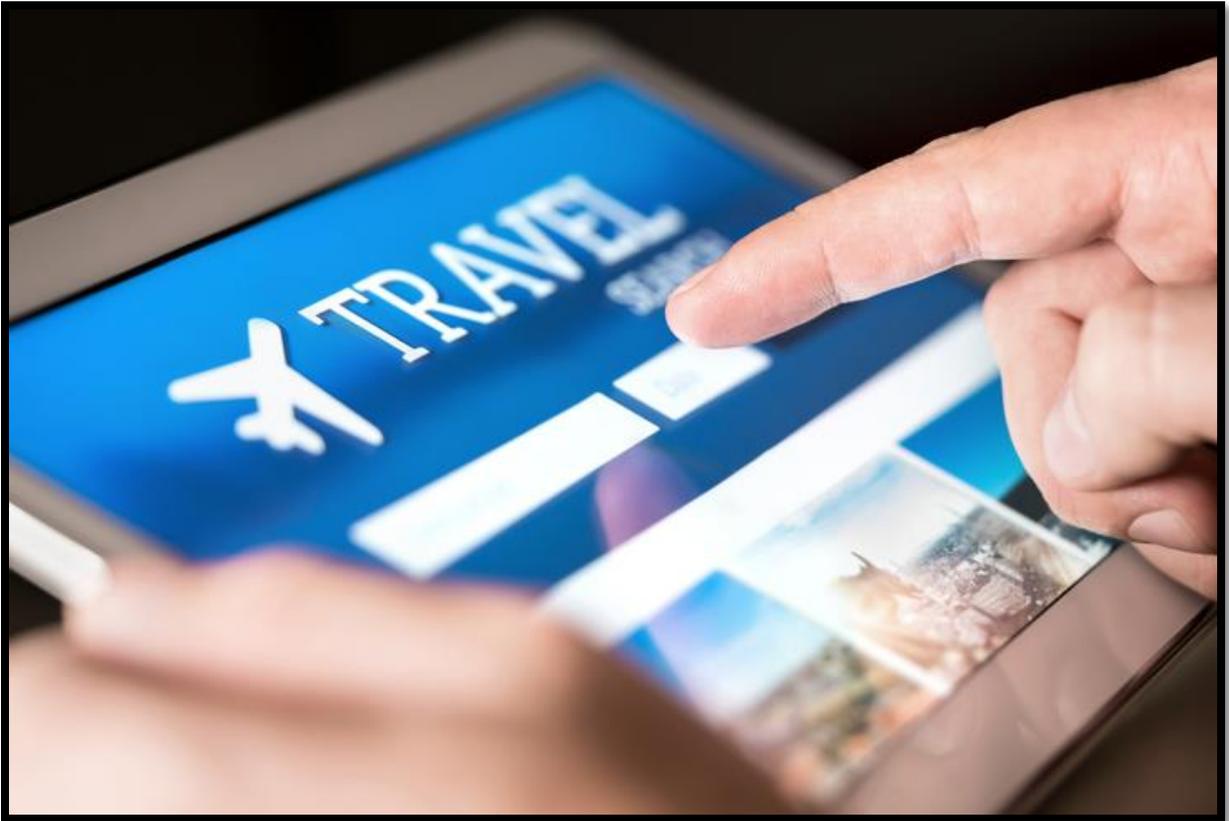


Booking Engine Personalization to Adapt to the Experience Economy



So much talk is made nowadays about the experience economy and how this affects the personalization of hotels, but how can we make these concepts a reality?

We all know they are both important for driving satisfaction scores, loyalty and healthy return over the long run, but there doesn't seem to be a straightforward and one-size-fits-all path towards operationalizing these trends in a way that's meaningful for guests.

To wrap your head around how these two concepts can drive each other in a virtuous and profitable circle, you must first understand what the experience economy is and how it is slowly supplanting our current service economy model. From there, you can analyze nearly any operation in your hotel through this lens – and in particular your prearrival channels – to see how minor tweaks will add to something far greater.

Cultivating Your 'Experience Economy'

What this buzz term entails is the maturation of any transactional relationship into one that resonates and enriches the customer's livelihood. It's all about creating memories and deepening the connection

between individuals. Think in terms of the five senses – sights, smells, sounds, tastes and touch all play a role in how someone interprets and remembers a given situation.

So, for any service you provide, how can you heighten what senses a recipient utilizes during any interactions? This can be far more microscopic than grand projects like adding resource-heavy onsite activities or new amenities to differentiate your property. Yes, those are important, but so is addressing all guests by their name when they show up, or knowing in advance that one particular client likes his or her guestroom set a tad cooler than the average person.

Any aspect of a hotel that can be customized to meet someone's individual tastes or preferences is ultimately an experience unto itself because of how each consumer interprets and benefits from this customization over the long run. But in order to greet guests by their preferred monikers or decide what temperature the room should be (in addition to a myriad of other points of preference), you cannot wing it. You have to start qualifying and introducing optionality from the very first transaction, which these days is most likely an online inquiry or booking.

Starting On The Right Foot

In the past, if you wanted to truly deepen your relationships with guests, you trained your team relentlessly to learn about each individual and you briefed them as often as possible on the peculiarities of these VIPs. For today, though, it's all about getting technology to work for you to develop rich guest profiles that automatically sort through the full range of personal preferences for team members to access them on-demand.

These digital guest profiles are, of course, built upon gathering data about your customers, and for genuine personalization this cannot be relegated to only measuring interactions on property. Your first impressions are everything, and you make a great one by learning about your guests and customizing their hotel experiences as far in advance of their arrivals as possible.

One of the biggest obstacles thus far has been that the required technological processes are exhaustive and incompatible with most hotels' current tech stacks. Not so anymore!

While you may not have the financial equivalent of a gargantuan like Amazon which leverages its gazillions of searches and purchases to generate bespoke recommendations, you can take a page off a slightly smaller giant's playbook – Marriott. This house of brands is adroitly learning about guests' prearrival room preferences through what is labeled as 'attribute-based reservations' whereby the direct booking engine becomes a portal through which customers are made more aware of the varied features and attributes otherwise hidden in the guestrooms.

Personalization Through Guestroom Differentiation

Many hotels think that a property should only have a handful of clearly demarcated room types to be selected based mostly upon bed type – twin doubles, twin queens, kings, junior suites and whatever name is given to the multiroom villas. Attribute-based selling and even the selection of a specific room lets you to get more granular with what features are displayed and possibly influence price.

As an example, an intuitive attribute already universally deployed to heighten revenues is the guestroom view. Oceanview, garden view, sunset view, high floor, low floor or parking lot view – all should be leveraged to tweak the nightly rate of each exact room. A business client on a per diem will not necessarily care about having a downtown skyline view and might therefore go for the slightly reduced room rate on a low floor. But I would bet that a couple celebrating its anniversary would indeed care about augmenting the romance of the occasion with a panoramic vista of the city. And this couple would undoubtedly be willing to spend a few extra bucks for this by selecting a room that guaranteed it.

The incorrect time to introduce this attribute-based selling or the possibility of upgrading a guestroom, however, is during check-in. It's too late to maximize your first impression and to further customize the hotel experience because guests will feel that they are being pressured into a sale.

Instead, any upsell or specific room selection must be done during or shortly after a guest makes his or her booking. An easy extension here that goes beyond viewpoint preferences would be proximity to services and amenities. For instance, resorts are renowned for upselling customers on where suites are relative to the beach, but who is to say that urban hotels can't also individualize the room reservation process by, say, prompting guests to decide if they want a room that's closer or farther from the elevator? Similarly, hotels can segregate floors within a tower and then develop tiered levels of service with additional charges for each.

Selling Every Feature

Using room details and their physical positions to develop new subsegments makes you think of all the other aspects of the guest journey that can be monetized. Starting with the time immediately after a booking prearrival allows you to better prepackage add-ons like club floor access, food and beverage, spa treatments, classes, tours or gifts.

And it's not just about what a customer ultimately purchases, but also what he or she doesn't buy. As an example, imagine you run a semi-remote mountain resort and a couple buys your gourmet getaway package. Once guests have selected their room type, the booking engine promptly invites them to also procure a food platter or alcoholic beverage, to be placed in the room upon arrival. Next, suppose this same gourmet getaway couple doesn't select any of the additional F&B choices but instead opts for

something more experiential, like a wellness hiking tour. This can indicate that perhaps with all the other prepackaged meals in the bundle, the guests want something aside from just food.

Knowing these sorts of characteristics about your guests in advance means you aren't leaving money on the table in the form of room upgrades or merchandise sales. These personalized enhancements, for the booking engine or otherwise, are ultimately what the experience economy is all about, so start using technology to find these new streams of revenue and your property's future will be bright.

Source: <https://www.hotelmogel.com/booking-engine-personalization-to-adapt-to-the-experience-economy/>