

## Know your guest



**We talk a lot about listening to customers but it doesn't stop us thinking we know what they want.**

**When the hotel management team considers 'the guest' at each Monday morning meeting, there is a strong tendency to talk in stereotypes, e.g. 'FIT', 'Loyalty Programme Guest', 'Road Warrior'.**

**The trouble is that this type of discussion is diminishing and tends to result in the hotel delivering less than the customer needs.**

As experts in their own lives, our guests will always know more about their needs than any stereotype can capture. So when an entrepreneur recognises that there is a gap between the industry's perception of a stereotype's needs and their actual needs, a new hotel offer is successful put into the market. Maybe that's what Yotel and EasyHotel are.

Seeing the customer as more complex, more interesting, more sophisticated and more willing to buy new and differentiated services is the way in which innovation teams enable hotel brands and hotel operators to create the successful evolution of their company's products and services.

### Extras

It turns out that our customers and guests are willing to pay for things we did not suspect.

Travelodge in the UK is priced below Premier Inn. The guest has a choice of paying for the extra space and amenities that Premier Inn brings. Some do and some don't.

EasyJet has proved that some customers will choose to pay to be at the head of a queue. Ryanair has proved that some customers will choose to pay to be checked in by a human being rather than at a kiosk.

Most airlines have now proved that many travellers will pay to check in baggage. Not everyone. Not all of the time. But enough of the time and a big enough segment of customers to make the accepted offer a significant contributor to profits. EasyHotel is giving the guest the option of paying for use of the flat screen.

If the standard offer is clean sheets and towels every three days, some guests will pay extra for daily laundry. If the standard offer is any room, many guests from western Europe will pay extra in the Middle East for a non-smoking room. Guests are used to paying extra to pay by credit card online but, when they come to check out at reception, most hotels don't yet differentiate between cash, debit or credit cards.

I don't know about you but I would pay quite a lot for an idiot's guide to the controls for the shower in my next hotel bedroom, or to be booked in a quiet room.

The creative souls that lead the 'fine dining' business have in recent years analysed and reassembled dishes, tastes, foods. People like Heston Blumenthal and Ferran Adrià have found new audiences for new taste experiences.

## **New approach**

Listening really hard to what our customers are actually saying should be at the forefront of what we do. Perhaps the time has come for those in hotel sales and hotel operations to take each and every guest experience apart and reassemble them in ways that allows the customer to pay for the desired elements in different ways.

In the world of mandatory three-day packages, shouldn't there be an opportunity for the guest to personalise the experience by buying additional optional elements? In the world of limited disposable spend, shouldn't there be an opportunity for loyal guests to buy just those elements of the branded hotel's services that he or she currently needs?

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