

Experiential via Digital: Use Media to Engage Guests, Tell Your Story and Drive Bookings

By Tracey Anderson

In today's technology-focused society, how can boutique and luxury hotels best communicate their brand promise and gain an edge in a crowded marketplace? Hoteliers understand that travelers choosing boutique and luxury properties are looking for exclusive experiences in an intimate, atmospheric accommodation along with highly-personalized service. Boutique hotels need to show the distinctive positioning of their brand if they want to occupy an elite position among their competitors.

Because travelers are tired of the monotony of large, bland hotel chains, they're increasingly attracted to "lifestyle" hotels that promise unconventional hotel experiences. A lifestyle brand is about personality, letting travelers define themselves with the way they want to live. What makes these properties attractive is their uniqueness, and what distinguishes them is that they have a story to tell. When it comes to storytelling, the best stories begin with an image.

Start with Your Property's Website

The first rule: show, don't tell. Our brains process visual content 60,000 times faster than text and 90% of the information transmitted to the brain is visual.¹ In fact, a team of neuroscientists from MIT found that we can process images that we see in as little as 13 milliseconds.² According to TripAdvisor, having just one photo on your property page increases engagement 138% and the probability of a booking inquiry 225%.³ Imagine what well-placed photographs, virtual tours and video can add to a traveler's impression of a property.

People choose a boutique hotel instead of a chain for a variety of reasons. Its design and décor might stimulate their imagination, or the onsite restaurant might boast a critically-acclaimed chef. Travelers might be drawn to special events, such as wine tastings or cooking classes. These days, people are obsessed with sharing images documenting their experiences, particularly when they travel. While user-generated images can be helpful, particularly through social media, luxury and boutique hotels must rely on conveying a certain lifestyle, and luxurious imagery requires a professional touch to add value. High-quality photographs of a signature dish from the onsite restaurant, or stylized videos of guests enjoying themselves at a special event help travelers understand the character of a hotel.

The Value of Video

Unless your building is a historic landmark or has dramatic architectural elements, your guests would favor a 360-degree view of the interior of your guest rooms, restaurants

and amenities over a static exterior building image. Properties offering virtual tours and video are increasing online traffic, engagement and bookings. When a travel shopper is looking for a hotel, he or she is 89% more likely to book if they can view a video of the property.⁴ For boutique hoteliers, video is a dramatic way to provide a visceral, detailed example of the uniqueness of their accommodations.

In addition, video transcriptions can have a major impact on search rankings. By adding transcriptions to the HTML of the page where the video is located, viewers can “read” a video if they are unable to listen to it.

The Impact of Social Media

While you likely recognize the value of a presence on Facebook, LinkedIn and YouTube, properties like Gurney’s Montauk, Revere Hotel and Hotel de Coronado are taking the road less traveled by building awareness through Snapchat.⁵ Gurney’s featured a geofilter showcasing the hotel’s trademark font that resulted in 140,306 impressions over a 10-day period, and the Revere Hotel in Boston generated almost 5,000 impressions during a two-day social influencer event promoting its rooftop area. The Hotel DeCoronado utilized a filter to promote their “Grand America Beach Vacation” campaign and had well-known personalities promote it on social media.

Social media can be the cornerstone of your marketing strategy, and it can also be used for guest touch points. In fact, social channels are critical in communicating a brand and helping to guide and influence consumers during their initial hotel search. Seeing friends or experts whose opinions they value share your beautiful photographs and exclusive video helps travelers feel confident in their decision to book. Regardless of a consumer’s point of contact with your hotel, connecting via social media can help properties maintain a meaningful position in the traveler’s mind.

Consistency

Your promise is based on a personalized hospitality experience, and consistently communicating your brand promise is essential. From the moment a traveler begins searching for “the perfect hotel,” that promise should be conveyed on your website, in the digital confirmation you send and the way you welcome them on arrival. A post-stay email or newsletter can help maintain the connection, and including a linked video in your email can be even more valuable. According to a report published by Forrester, an email with video increases the click-through rate 200-300%.⁶ This positive reinforcement reminds travelers of the unique attributes of your hotel that made them want to visit and might just suggest a return stay.

TAKING STOCK OF SOCIAL MEDIA PLATFORM USAGE

Here are the latest social media statistics of consumer adoption for several of the major platforms used around the world.



5 THINGS TO KNOW

84% of Facebook's daily active users are outside the U.S. and Canada.

79% of Twitter accounts are outside the U.S.

75% of Instagram's user base is outside the U.S.

433 million LinkedIn users in more than 200 countries and territories

TEN billion videos per day watched by Snapchat users

Sources

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