

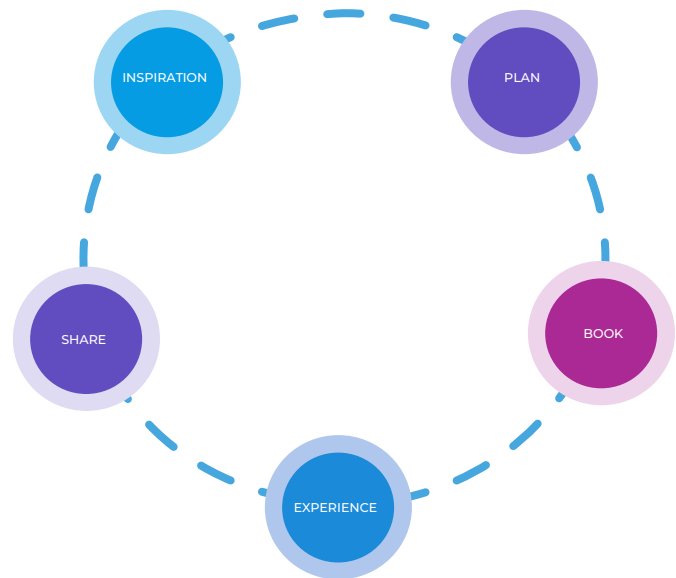
Get more direct bookings

Digital hotel checklist

Introduction

The Digital Guest Journey comprises of five main stages. These are often referred to as the five stages of travel that a guest goes through when they search for their next trip online:

- Inspiration: guest gets inspired to travel
- Plan: guest starts planning their trip and searches for options
- Book: guest chooses a location and makes a booking
- Experience: guest starts engaging with their chosen destination
- Share: guest leaves and shares their experience with others



How this guide helps you

Digital marketing for hotels is complex. In an ideal world every hotel would like 100% of their online bookings to be made directly through the hotel via their website, mobile app or via its social channels. The reality however is that this almost never happens, unless you are the only accommodation provider in town or your brand is so strong that guests only book directly. Most hotels will therefore use third party distributors like OTAs or the GDS network to complement their direct sales efforts, and then work to get a good balance between them.

Your direct channel should be the highest on your priority list not just because of the cost but mainly because it enables you to build this direct connection with your brand.

There are so many factors which can increase your chances for success that sometimes it can be difficult to decide where to focus your efforts.

This checklist has been designed to help hoteliers evaluate their online presence to make sure they maximise their ROI (return on investment), whether that's a new website or a connection to Google free booking links.

Don't make it harder than it needs to be...

The 5 Stages of Travel

And how to connect & engage with your guests

PLAN

Long-term value

Worth the effort

Opens opportunities

Google Business Profile

Google Business Profile- free tool that allows you to take charge of the way your business appears on Google Search and Maps. With your Business Profile, you can connect with customers, post updates, list your products and services, accept online orders, and more.

Best practice

Up to date:

- Map location
- Business name
- Telephone number
- Imagery
- Opening times
- Services/ facilities
- Website/ contact

How to

- Use Google's tools to verify/ claim your business
- Submit amendments: google.com/business

Great ROI

Long-term value

Brings visibility

Website Search Optimisation - SEO

By optimising your website for search engines you increase your chances of being found by travellers researching accommodation opportunities

Best practice

Up to date:

- Specific keywords
- Meta title
- Meta description
- Fresh content (e.g. blog)

How to

- Use available tools (Yoast) to manage your SEO
- Regularly check your Google Analytics to understand if search queries bring in traffic
- If possible, run SEO audit with professional agency

Brings visibility

Worth the effort

Website Content

Website is your most important owned digital asset and it should be always your "master" marketing channel.

Best practice

- Make it clear for your website's visitors, who is your target group: leisure travellers, corporates, weddings, etc
- Use the best pictures and descriptions, so it reflects the experience your guests can expect.
- "Book now" option should have prominent position on all pages.

How to

Inform guests on:

- Address/location
- Availability + pricing
- Safety considerations
- Opening/ check-in times
- Cancellation policies
- Amenities available
- Local attractions
- Room types + packages

Long-term value

Worth the effort

Great engagement

Social media profiles

Social Media platforms can be efficient channels to build brand awareness and engage with your current, past and future guests. In some cases can be also used as a communication tool.

Best practice

Up to date:

- Map location
- Business name
- Telephone number
- Imagery
- Opening times
- Services/ facilities
- Website/ contact

How to

- Regularly check, whether all the information is up to date.
- Share latest news, special promos, events.
- Respond to all queries and comments.
- Thank for following, posting, sharing your content.

PLAN

PLAN

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EXPE-
RIENCE

SHARE

INSPI-
RATION

PLAN

SHARE

INSPIRATION

PLAN

BOOK

PLAN

BOOK

EXPERIENCE

SHARE

Long-term value

Worth the effort

Brings visibility

Review sites

Every hotelier knows how crucial online hotel reviews on popular review sites are to a hotel's online reputation. But if you're not monitoring your hotel reviews and where they come from, you are leaving yourself at a disadvantage in building your online reputation.

Best practice

You should own your hotel profiles, and make sure all the details are up to date:

- Map location
- Business name
- Telephone number
- Imagery
- Opening times
- Services/ facilities
- Website/ contact

How to

- Use online tools to verify/ claim your business profile.
- Submit amendments: via Admin Panels - respond to all reviews, good and bad.

Worth the effort

Brings visibility

Great engagement

Booking engine

Your website booking engine is your online shop, and it's one of the most important components of your direct distribution strategy. Even the best hotel website will not convert visitors to guests without a properly integrated and configured booking engine.

Best practice

Hotel information always up to date:

- Contact details
- Location
- Imagery
- Rooms' and rates' description
- Upselling opportunities
- Special packages

Rates in your booking engine should always match the actual PMS rates, and should be never higher than OTA's rates. Availability should be always synchronised in real-time.

How to

- Complete all the descriptions, making sure they are clear for your potential guests.
- Add high quality pictures presenting your rooms and your add-on packages.
- Check your connectivity with PMS to make sure rates and availability are synchronised in real time.
- Explain the cancellation policy and safety standards.

Easy to set-up

Great engagement

OTA's

Online Travel Agents are in most case the biggest online distribution channel and could be seen as advertising platform for hotels. Taking into consideration high commissions, these channels should be seen as guest acquisition, not repeated bookings, which should be ideally taken to direct on-line channel.

Best practice

Up to date:

- Map location
- Business name
- Imagery
- Opening times
- Services/ facilities: correct room's & rates' structure, correct mapping and update cancellation policies

How to

- Use OTA's tools to update information about your business
- Submit amendments via OTA's Admin Panel
 - make sure all settings are correct, ie allowance to lower the price to stay competitive
 - participation in membership programs

Easy to set-up

Worth the effort

Opens opportunities

Guest communication

There is no better way to prepare the guest for their stay at your property, than pre-arrival communication. It's also an ideal way to process some admin tasks (i.e. guest registration), so your Front Office team can focus on the guest upon arrival.

Best practice

- Make your pre-arrival communication always on brand, ideally fully automated and synchronised.
- Although it's sometimes very tempting do not send too many emails.

How to

- Check all the settings for outgoing notifications.
- In case you are using multiple integrated solutions, ie PMS, CRM and digital check-in, make sure there are no overlapping emails going out to the same guest.

In-stay communication

The guest finally gets to experience your brand when they arrive at the property, and any expectations they had or questions they have will likely materialise during check-in. The process of greeting your guests and conveying them through the arrival process is key to setting the tone for the rest of their stay. First impressions count!

Best practice

- Ensure that any guest notes or queries that you have access to have been addressed/ prepared ahead of arrival.
- Having an understanding of who your guest is and why they may be staying helps with personalisation and drives much better guest experience.
- Ensuring your guests have the right information for their stay is key, like check-out / breakfast / opening times and Wi-Fi passwords - and if you're sending out any digital comms, be sure to let your guests have time to get to their rooms, relax, and settle in.
- Any answers to common questions can be part of your standard pre-arrival or welcome email templates.

How to

- Check any reservation notes held in the system, and ensure that any upsells/ extras requested are available and ready.
- If there are any changes to the guest's accommodation or any important messages, e.g. lifts out of service, room not ready until later in the day, be sure these are to hand at check-in and let the guest know.
- Be sure to update your pre-arrival and welcome communications regularly. Listen and record frequent guest requests or questions, and provide the answers or information up-front.

Post-stay communication

The end of the stay is not a goodbye! It's an opportunity for your guest to share information about their experience. This can be invaluable for your property team to help with improvements, and is also a fantastic way to encourage your guests to engage with online platforms to share their experience so others can be better informed when thinking about staying with you.

Best practice

- Reputation management is hugely important, and ensuring your guests feel comfortable voicing their concerns should be a high priority.
- Where guests are full of praise, ensure this is captured by inviting them to share their experiences via reviews or social media. And remember - if they are happy to help, pictures are sometimes worth a thousand words!

How to

- Use your post-stay communications templates to ensure that your guest's experience has met their expectations.
- Address any problems quickly and ensure the guests are leaving feeling that they have had their issues resolved.
- If your guests use social media or reviews platforms, monitor these and ensure that you respond where necessary.

Digital Health Checklist (1/2)

Ticking less than 50% of the boxes? Time for a review!

Is your Google Business profile up to date?

- Do you own your Google Business Profile?
- Is the location correctly shown on the Map?
- Is your business name correct?
- Are your contact details correct?
- Are all the facilities listed correctly?
- Are you showing the most up-to-date photos?

Have you experienced your guest's online journey with your brand?

- Were you able to find your own brand with a simple search-engine query?
- Did you see OTA's before your own brand?
- Did you see competitor brands as part of the search process?
- Did you have a positive sentiment of your brand after you saw the others?
- Do you feel the need for improvement?

How does your property appear from the Guest's point of view on OTA's, your own website, your own booking engine, social media

- Is the branding and property information consistent on all channels?
- Are facilities consistently described on all channels?
- Is the location presented consistently on all channels?
- Are descriptions consistent on all channels?
- Are pictures consistent across all the channels?



Choose a channel as the 'master' – i.e. the website – create and upload the best information possible and ensure all others align

Are you advertising your key attributes to your potential/ future guests?

- Are your key attributes clearly and consistently stated across your online presence?
- Are you ensuring that your claims are accurate/ up to date?



From the guest's perspective, think "So what?" – challenge your claims and ensure that there is a clear benefit to your guests

Does your online presence appeal to the right audience?

- Are you able to define your business proposition, including target segment?
- Do you know your ideal customer, taking into consideration your offering?
- Is your strategy aligned to match your product with your customers?
- Is your online presence reflecting your strategy?

How do you measure your online success for improvement?

- Do you capture regular, meaningful statistics that you believe are important to your business?
- Have you set clear, achievable goals – short and long term – and regularly track them against performance?
- Have you outlined any initiatives/ actions to achieve your goals?
- Have you implemented your actions and tracked them along with any current measurements?



Don't be afraid to pivot: If your actions/ initiatives are not working, revisit both your goals and how to achieve them regularly – things can, and often will change throughout the year

What are the things that your competitors do differently?

- Have you compiled and maintained a list of your competitors?
- Do you regularly check what the competition are doing online?



Compare your facilities, reviews, website, booking journey, and general 'tone of voice' – Wear the Guest's shoes for a day and compare how you perceive yours and your competitor's online brands

Digital Health Checklist (2/2)

Are you working with local partners effectively?

Have you checked online to see how your local partners are doing and target those that you believe are complimentary to your brand?

Have you approached the partners to see if there is anything you can mutually do to help each other's online brand?

Have you offered anything mutually beneficial to your guests, and to their customers? (discounts are always a favourite to help drive product/brand awareness)



Sharing links is one of the simplest forms of reciprocal partnerships – either via social, or on your own website

Do you have a simple fulfilment path for room booking, table reservations, spa, etc?

Have you ever tried to complete your booking journey as a guest? Set yourself some tasks, e.g. "I want to book a table for 2 on Valentine's night" and see how easy/ difficult that is

If you've spotted areas where improvements could be made, have you made a plan to make the necessary changes?

Did you measure, if those changes have had an impact on conversions/ sales?



You could set up some simple guest questionnaires at the end of your processes, such as "How did you find your experience?" Many free surveys can be found online, so you can automate this using confirmation emails.

How is your online reputation looking?

Do you monitor review sites for guest feedback?

Are you quick in responding to reviews, especially negative ones?

Do you use monitoring tools to keep an eye on your online reputation?

Do you respond to all reviews, good and bad ones?

Do you share your reviews - both positive and negative - with your teams?



A simple search in Google, for instance "[my hotel] reviews" may unearth more than you expected. Do this from time to time on a regular basis.

Are you active on social media?

Do you encourage your visitors and guests to share their experiences via social media?

Have you set a calendar of events and reminders to post regularly?

Do you keep an eye on your social media and remember to view it as a guest would?



Ensure that your choice of social media channels reflects not only your brand, but also your target personas, e.g.

- Instagram is a great visual tool online: If you have anything that really benefits from pictures, i.e. food, weddings, location etc. then Instagram is a great platform
- Facebook has a huge following, and is a great way to push updates – but is less likely to be of benefit if your target personas are, for instance, business travellers
- Twitter is fantastic for conversations, and appeals to a wide audience – it's simple short, sharp messages are hugely appealing to most audiences

Do you have a marketing/ advertising team or budget that can help?



Find a marketing team to suit your budget. Marketing agencies don't have to be an expensive – if you define your goals clearly you should find an agency who are happy to work up a cost-effective plan

The marketing agency you choose should ideally have a track record with your chosen product speciality – look for existing clients/ case studies, and never be afraid to ask them to speak to their existing customers for a reference

Even though you are handing over the responsibility to a third party, ensure you and your teams regularly carry out the items in our checklist to ensure the marketing agency you employ are making the difference you want/ need

Don't make it harder than it needs to be...