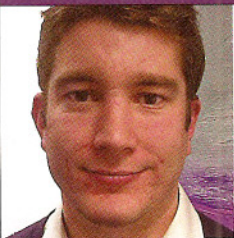


BERTIE STEVENSON
Director, Global Reviews



Hotels websites must offer users a five-star visit or not bother

Even with significant online budgets, larger hotel brands have to work very hard to meet customer expectations

The costs involved in offering a high-quality online service can be prohibitive for many industries. But a poor offering can actually be worse for a company's reputation than failing to offer these services at all. This is especially relevant in the hotel industry, where online tools are becoming ever more popular, especially online booking, but can be difficult and expensive to do well.

In July, Global Reviews assessed six leading hotel websites against its customer experience benchmark. The sites were measured against more than 500 criteria including the hotel selection process, booking, customer support, online content and tools, and general site usability. To meet customer expectations, sites needed to score above 55%. Hilton came top of the league with 61% for the second year running, followed by Hotels.com with 54%, Ibis with 50%, Express by Holiday Inn with 48% and Travelodge with 47%. These are all significant increases on last year.

Interestingly, the study found that, while Hilton offers the best overall customer experience, hotel selection and the booking

process are the two categories that are most important to customers, and in these criteria Hilton didn't receive the highest score. Hotels.com came top of hotel selection with 70%, followed by Express by Holiday Inn (66%) and then Hilton (60%). Hotels.com also scored highest for its booking process category, followed by Express by Holiday Inn.

The study found that even with the availability of significant online budgets, these larger brands have to work very hard to meet customer expectations. It's likely, therefore, that smaller hotels will find the costs prohibitively expensive. But there is a solution.

Global Reviews recommends that instead of trying to offer advanced and expensive booking and search tools, smaller hotel chains ought to focus on getting the basics right, such as making sure the website looks appealing to customers, is easily found online and has clear phone numbers and email addresses to encourage visitors to make a booking. None of this requires large budgets and is a much easier way of ensuring a good quality, more personalised experience.

The bottom line is that if you're going to offer services online, make sure they actually improve the customer experience. And if they don't, consider whether to offer them at all.

Hotel website approval scores



Source: Global Reviews