

ANALYST SPEAK

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Hotels must up their game for online users



The internet has revolutionised much of the travel industry. Airlines have restructured the way they sell their product as well as the product they sell, and independent high street travel agents have disappeared while Expedia and Travelsupermarket advertise on TV. This revolution has encouraged aggressive investment into website design and functionality. Our research shows that one sector where opportunity remains to pursue best practice is hotels.

Global Reviews' survey of 2,900 UK consumers with internet access showed they have a strong preference for researching a hotel online. On a scale of one to ten, over 60% of respondents marked their likelihood to research online at ten, with a further 24% indicating a likelihood of eight or nine. Research and booking require different levels of commitment but there's still a strong preference to book online. On the same scale, 49% indicated a likelihood of booking as ten out of ten, with 28% rating it eight or nine. Only 4.5% indicated a likelihood of booking online as four or less.

Even among business travellers, who have less time and inclination to hunt for a bargain, the internet is popular. 56% of those surveyed expressed a likelihood of nine or ten for researching online and 51% for booking online.

Global Reviews also conducted a benchmark to determine how the quality of the customer expe-

rience delivered by each website compared to best practice. Hilton Hotels led the benchmark results with a score of 59%, with Marriott on 47%, Best Western on 46% and Holiday Inn on 44%.

Unlike other industries benchmarked by Global Reviews, the areas of the benchmark that are most important to consumers are not the categories with the best results. The most important category to consumers is hotel selection, which was led by Holiday Inn on 63%, while the second-most important category is the booking process, led by Hilton Hotels on 60%. However, the industry averages for these categories are below other categories of the benchmark. The industry average for hotel selection is just 42%, and for the booking process it's just 46%. This latter category was most affected by low scores for payment methods, where the average score was just 30%. This shows that best practice is beyond what websites are offering to customers wanting to book online.

Travel companies and customers realise the importance of the search and booking process for websites. However, there's a gap between what hotels are offering and best practice. Capturing direct sales is a priority for hotels so they need to strive to present their own inventory better than anyone else.

Adam Goodvach, director, Global Reviews