

ReviewPro

*How Hotels Can Increase
the Volume of Their Reviews*



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Intro

Your hotels' number of online reviews has a direct impact on key performance measures:

1. Your ranking on review sites
2. Your ranking on third-party distribution websites (OTAs)
3. Your ranking in search engines
4. Your overall online reputation score
5. Your overall sales and conversion rates

With so much at stake, what can be done to legitimately increase the amount of reviews of your hotels?

This guide will show examples of how some of the most successful hotels do this.



Before you ask for reviews

Create a remarkable experience





Before you ask for an online review, make sure you create an experience worth talking about. “Remarkable” literally means “worth remarking about.” Does your guest experience live up to that standard? If not, what creative amenities or features could you offer to get people to tell their friends? (This approach works in all types of hotels: from limited service properties to luxury resorts.)

Adele Gutman, Vice President of Sales, Marketing, and Revenue at HKHotels, shares this advice:

“You need to WOW [guests]. You need to give them something to talk about. You need to shower your guest with so many magical moments that they leave the hotel excited and inspired to take the time to want to share their experience with the world. People like to do nice things for nice people.”

This has worked well for her at HKHotels, bringing their four hotels in New York City into the top four positions on TripAdvisor:

HKHotels tops the charts on TripAdvisor for the most popular Hotels in New York City!

<p>Casablanca Hotel Hotel photos Map this hotel Amenities Contact info</p>  <p>🏆 #1 of 421 hotels in New York City Ranked #11 for business in New York City 🌟🌟🌟🌟🌟 1,188 reviews “A perfect first trip to NYC!” Sep 12, 2010 “You will not get better than the Casablanca!” Sep 12, 2010</p> <p>CHECK RATES! 📍 📞 🍷 🍴 🚗</p>	<p>Library Hotel Hotel photos Map this hotel Amenities Contact info</p>  <p>🏆 #2 of 421 hotels in New York City Ranked #12 for business in New York City 🌟🌟🌟🌟🌟 811 reviews “Good hotel but very noisy!” Sep 13, 2010 “A little oasis in the big city!” Sep 13, 2010</p> <p>CHECK RATES! 📍 📞 🍷 🍴 🚗</p>
<p>Hotel Giraffe Hotel photos Map this hotel Amenities Contact info</p>  <p>🏆 #3 of 421 hotels in New York City Ranked #2 for business in New York City 🌟🌟🌟🌟 645 reviews “A Great Place to Stay in New York!” Sep 13, 2010 “Magnificent accommodations and staff provided superior service with a smile!” Sep 12, 2010</p> <p>CHECK RATES! 📍 📞 🍷 🍴 🚗</p>	<p>Hotel Elysee Hotel photos Map this hotel Amenities Contact info</p>  <p>🏆 #4 of 421 hotels in New York City Ranked #3 for business in New York City 🌟🌟🌟🌟 588 reviews “New Yorks Finest Place to Stay!” Sep 14, 2010 “An “A” for customer service!” Sep 13, 2010</p> <p>CHECK RATES! 📍 📞 🍷 🍴 🚗</p>

Before you ask for reviews (continued)

Exceed expectations

To encourage more positive reviews, avoid setting unreal expectations in advertising. Marketing communications should follow a policy of under-promising and over-delivering. Hotels that build up too much anticipation might risk guests being disappointed when they arrive. The majority of positive guest reviews come when guests are pleasantly surprised by what they receive. Learn from Terry Kane of the Jumeirah Group, who makes a point of avoiding hype and hyperbole in marketing even though properties like the Burj Al-Arab could justify the use of it.

“We try not to use superlatives to hype the properties on social media channels, as this is not necessary. It is important to be there and promote why the stay will be special, but with a sense of individuality for the user. Normally, we find that is actually the guests that leave reviews that use superlatives to describe their incredible experiences.”

Get the right team in place

Hotels that earn the best reviews tend to place a strong emphasis on recruiting the right people and encouraging them to do their best work.

Jonathan Raggett oversees some of the most popular hotels in London as CEO of Red Carnation Hotels. Recently, Rajul Chande [interviewed him](#) at the Egerton House Hotel to learn how they encourage so many positive reviews, and shared his observations:

“They consciously recruit ‘characters’ with personality and flair. So for example you have Antonio at the hotel’s bar who is famous for his martinis.

“Then there is Alex who not only checks you in but may also sing at your table! There’s also friendly Murat – one of the managers who cheerfully showed me around the hotel. All the staff I ran into

had a calm and relaxed attitude. This isn’t always the case in luxury hotels which often have an overbearing formality in the air. The staff here seem to be driven by an expectation of success rather than a fear of failure. This frees them to be themselves and excel.”

In the end, the decision for someone to write an online review often comes down to a single interaction that a guest has with one of your staff members. Focus on consistently delivering impressive service to increase the number of positive reviews you receive.

Provide options

People should leave a review wherever it feels most comfortable or wherever they already have an account set up. Avoid limiting your request to just one website, which could restrict the overall number of reviews you receive online.

When to ask for a review

During the check-out process

At checkout, your staff can ask if the guest had a positive experience at your hotel. If they did, encourage them to share their thoughts on a review site of their choice. During check-out is perhaps the best time to ask, since positive memories from their stay are fresh.

In followup emails

Many hotels send an email after guests check out to thank them for their stay. Consider placing a link to review sites within this message. Or for business travelers, email them the invoice and include a link to review the hotel.

When receiving unsolicited feedback

When someone says something positive about your hotel, this is also a great time to direct them to review sites. You need these stories to be told online and benefit others.

In response to comment cards

If someone leaves very positive feedback in a comment card, don't let the feedback stay on paper internally. Contact the guest by email or telephone and ask them to consider sharing their thoughts with others online.

Example: Asking by email

Before:	After:	
Dear NAME	Hello NAME,	This re-write accomplishes several things:
Thank you for choosing HOTEL for your recent stay in CITY. We have read your comments about the hotel and we greatly appreciate that you took the time to write them, as our guests' satisfaction is our main priority.	Thank you for choosing HOTEL for your recent stay in CITY. I was delighted to hear you had an enjoyable time at our hotel.	»It comes from an <i>individual person</i> instead of the entire hotel. Response rates typically increase when e-mail comes from one person.
We invite you, please, to share your opinion on the TripAdvisor website (website for travelers' opinions) using the following link: [Tripadvisor link]	At your convenience, would you please take a moment to share your experience online with your friends and others on your favorite travel review website?	»It is more focused on the guest, and less about the hotel. A guest may not care what is important to the hotel, so position this request as a way for them to share an experience with friends.
It is very important for us that our guests' experiences are shared. It was a pleasure to have you as our guest. We would like to take this opportunity to thank you for your collaboration and we hope to see you again soon at HOTEL.	It was a pleasure to have you as our guest. We hope to see you again soon.	»It is a bit shorter, so that the message intent is very clear.
Management	- STAFF NAME HOTEL Direct phone: Personal email:	»It is less TripAdvisor-specific, and more of an invitation for people to talk about us in a manner that suits them best online – whether that's on TripAdvisor, Twitter, or another site.
	See what others have said about our hotel on TripAdvisor: [TripAdvisor hotel link]	

Case Studies

The following case studies were published recently in [Hotel Marketing Strategies](#).

/// Michael Rosney, Killeen House Hotel

We became hyper conscious – to the extent of being almost paranoid of reviews. When we first became aware of TripAdvisor a couple of years back, we immediately identified it as a tool that had tremendous potential for us to get the message and the ethos of our property out into a Marketplace that we otherwise had no hope of reaching. We made all of the great people working with us aware of it, and explained to them that this was an opportunity that we felt would have very tangible and positive long term benefits for the Killeen House.

We have always operated our business on the basis of treating our Guests firstly as individuals to be welcomed and looked after in a personal and individual way, and secondly as new friends, who we want to show a great time to while they're visiting with us. And anyone glancing through the reviews we have garnered on TripAdvisor will be clearly struck by the big number of them that specifically mention the PEOPLE rather than the PLACE. Its not within our power to make the bedrooms bigger, or to order up 80 degrees of sunshine, but it is very certainly within our power to ensure that all of our Guests receive a uniquely warm and Irish welcome from all of us here in the Killeen House.....

Given that we are a small operation, we have ample opportunity here in the Killeen House to meet most of our guests on a personal level. If we find out, for example, that they have heard of us via TripAdvisor, than that is a natural opportunity for us to ask them to keep on spreading the word.

Thankfully, we frequently receive notes and e-mails from our Guests after they have departed, telling us how much they have enjoyed their stay with us. Again, a great opportunity to ask them to post a TripAdvisor review of their experience. We have found that after the initial first number of reviews, that it almost becomes a self-perpetuating thing.

Case Studies (continued)

/// David Craig, Hotel Teatro

Hotel Teatro has an inherent culture of exceptional service. We hire our hospitality professionals very carefully and work diligently to train them to 5 Star & 5 Diamond Standards. We have the ability to involve our associates in many of the global decisions that affect the way the hotel operates so there is a strong sense of ownership. Our team is empowered to make active decisions that will create a successful experience for our guests. We have seasoned operational managers on duty 24 hours per day, 7 days per week so there is always intense scrutiny over our daily operations.

We also spend the first portion of every staff meeting reading our newest TripAdvisor reviews aloud to the group. This establishes a forum for recognizing favorable performance and for developing solutions where we have areas of opportunity.

We are blessed with many wonderful guests, a large number of whom have been returning to Hotel Teatro for many years. Every day we receive cards, letters and e-mails of thanks. I make certain to respond to each one personally and whenever I do, I typically finish my correspondence with a phrase like the following:

Thank you for taking the time to relay the details of your experience at Hotel Teatro. I am so glad that you had a wonderful visit. If you'd like to share your experience with others, I encourage you to do so at www.tripadvisor.com.

Case Studies (continued)

/// Michael Vogt at Layana Resort and Spa

Our philosophy is rooted in small size, luxurious accommodation, unobtrusive personalized attention, tranquility and peace, gracious Thai hospitality, and value for money. We work hard to ensure guest satisfaction based on our philosophy, and pay a lot of attention to detail.

Most of the time, this works well and is reflected in favourable guest comments on Internet forums such as TripAdvisor and HolidayCheck. But from time to time we drop the ball and this too is religiously reported, which in turn gives us the opportunity to further refine our product.

[Encouraging online reviews] has been an issue of much management debate. We have taken a conscious decision not to adopt any techniques to encourage our guests to talk about their experiences with us online. We have done this because we perceive the types of guests we attract don't respond positively to being coerced or manipulated into becoming marketing tools for us. And yet they are glad to share their positive experiences as long as it remains their preserve to do so.

The closest we get to encouraging guests to write an online review is by providing direct links from our website to TripAdvisor and, for example, World Luxury Travel Awards to enable guests to vote for us.

Case Studies (continued)

/// Mariquel Waingarten at Tailor Made Hotel

We concentrate on having a good product. Me, Loli, and the staff all love what we do. And second, we always try to never say “no” to our guests... and try to realize what they want before they ask.

It's just little things.

In the beginning, when we were on TripAdvisor I was scared, because you're very exposed to good reviews and bad reviews. Fortunately, we've been able to get very good reviews, and the bad reviews that we received were actually really helpful. They tell us what to correct, and we like to take care of that. Sometimes people don't tell you what's wrong, and then it's a surprise for us when they write it down on TripAdvisor.

Sometimes guests ask us for something prior to leaving: like checking the time of their flights. Or to send a postcard. So then we send a goodbye e-mail telling them we hope they were well taken care of, and if they had a good experience could they share it.

The email includes links to our web presence: including Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, Flickr. And then we also include a TripAdvisor link if people want to write a review about us.

Appendix 1: Frequently Asked Questions

How many reviews should I have?

Take your market into consideration. Look at other hotels in your city, and compare volume of reviews with competitors. Potential guests are likely to look at reviews for hotels most similar to your own.

The way in which guests make reservations at your hotel will also play a role in how many reviews you can generate. If you receive a lot of group bookings, these guests may or may not review your hotel online. If a guest books offline, they may also be less likely to share their experience online. People booking through an OTA are more likely to leave their review there.

What is the best metric to track while trying to encourage more online reviews?

Try tracking your “reservations-to-review” conversion rate. Take your monthly review volume, divide by the number of reservations a property has during this period, and calculate the score.

How can I encourage reviews on a specific OTA?

Many OTAs only allow reviews to be written for purchases made through their website. You may consider:

1. Testing a special offer to raise interest in that channel
2. Purchasing a sponsored listing on the site for additional visibility

3. Creating a private promotion only accessible through Twitter or Facebook for people booking through this OTA

A hotel may have hundreds of reviews on one website, but if the most important revenue channels are elsewhere, it is important to encourage reviews on these booking sites as well. A 2010 report from PhoCusWright indicated the volume of reviews on OTAs is exceeding those on social travel sites, which could make encouraging reviews there increasingly important.

Appendix 2: Five marketing professionals share their advice on encouraging reviews

The following comments were made on a [recent HotelMarketingStrategies.com post](#).

Adele Gutman

At HKHotels, our four NYC hotels each get around 30 comments a month when the average hotel in NYC only gets about 6 a month. And we do that with small hotels from 44 rooms to 100 rooms.

You need to WOW them. You need to give them something to talk about. You need to shower your guest with so many magical moments that they leave the hotel excited and inspired to take the time to want to share their experience with the world. People like to do nice things for nice people. If your staff is always going out their way to make people happy, you will find an endless supply of travelers who will want to return the favor.

Alistair Lattimore

If the property distributes their rates using a channel manager, which most do these days – it would also be a good idea to tailor the email to promote reviews on the OTA they booked through first (if they accept reviews) as the guest is already familiar with that site and will already have an account – where as they quite likely do not have an account for TripAdvisor.

If they didn't come through an OTA, or the OTA doesn't support reviews or they booked direct, then promote TripAdvisor reviews.

While I haven't tested it yet, now that Google are breaking out the source of where the reviews are coming from in the search results, having a good spread of reviews across all of the top travel portals that Google aggregates reviews from will increase trust in the consumers eyes and will inevitably have an impact about how Google perceives the property online.

Sara Borghi

What I experience with my clients is that most of their customers are reluctant to create an account on Tripadvisor and post a review there.

However, since most of them here in Australia book through the major OTA websites (e.g. Total Travel) which also allow reviews, they would feel more keen to go back there to post their review. And certainly this helps in the new Place Search battlefield as well.

Appendix 2: Five marketing professionals share their advice on encouraging reviews (continued)

Margherita Nieri

I agree with the importance of showing clients their benefits [of leaving a review], not the hotel's ones. (The benefit for the client is sharing something cool with their friends or relatives.)

We have suggested to some of our clients to put in the e-mail the links to their hotel pages on different web sites where they'd like to improve their brand reputation, such as TripAdvisor, Trivago and Zoover, so every user can choose the preferred one.

OTAs' reviews are very important. According to some surveys, people trust OTAs' reviews even more than TripAdvisor's, because they are considered more trustworthy.

Brian Simpson

Make [asking for reviews] natural and not pushy. But don't ignore this. I am in the process of creating custom web landing pages for each hotel that will have links to our Facebook, Twitter, Blog accounts and also a direct link to TripAdvisor with its logo.

We are also working on putting the TripAdvisor logo on other collateral. At checkout I do believe it is important to encourage guests, especially the satisfied ones, to leave a review.

What's next?

Keep learning! ReviewPro monitors what is changing in the world of online reputation management and passes along practical ways to use that in hospitality.

Read the blog for more articles and reports like this:

<http://reviewpro.com/blog>

Follow us on Twitter for daily ideas and tips:

<http://twitter.com/ReviewPro>

About ReviewPro

[ReviewPro](#) is the leading customer intelligence tool for hotels. Using it helps managers listen to online reviews, analyze sentiment, respond quickly, and turn guest feedback into improvements at their properties.

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About The Author

Josiah Mackenzie is the publisher of HotelMarketingStrategies.com – a resource of guides and stories showing how to use technology to serve your guests and make more sales.

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