

THE OVERVIEW

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No longer booking it

The fall of Thomas Cook

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The right route

The five stages of a connected guest Experience: How multi-channel technology gets results.

By James Slatter, UK Managing Director at Agilysys

For many, guest service and the guest experience are seemingly interchangeable. While guest service may imply a single interaction, the guest experience is the continuum of interactions between the guest and your hospitality organisation. These interactions translate to the stages of the guest journey and they include awareness, advocacy, acquisition, delivery, and nurture.

A guest's first point of contact with your property is usually through online channels, be it an online travel agency or directly through your website. Consider this the first stage of the connected guest experience – or the awareness stage. This is the point when your use of a specified technology can affect the likelihood of appealing to prospective guests. Guest engagement at the awareness stage is essential; it's about allowing visitors to discover your brand and being accessible using multiple technology channels. It shouldn't matter which apps, platforms, or devices guests use – they should be able to find and interact with your property with ease. Brands that offer agnostic technology alternatives are making themselves more visible across all channels and demographics, connecting closely to their guests.

Once a guest becomes aware of your brand, advocacy ensues. As guests begin to discover all the amenities and services your property has to offer, how well is your property poised to encourage continued engagement? How easily can they navigate your site to get

their questions answered? A consistent user experience at this stage, regardless of the devices used, is about helping viewers understand your brand with the aim of encouraging the next stage: acquisition.

Is the reservation process straightforward? Regardless of the visitor's operating system; and no matter their preferred browsing method, acquiring the most guests requires a consistent, multi-channel approach. It's about making your brand visible to everyone and allowing each visitor to interact using the method that is most comfortable and convenient for them. A straightforward reservation process makes all the difference at the acquisition stage.

Delivering unparalleled guest service is perhaps the most critical of the five stages of a connected experience. Digital communication channels have entirely altered the way guests engage with brands, but there are still those who want the human touch. Giving guests what they want, when, where, and how they want it, involves a consistent, end-to-end experience supported by backend technology processes. While an enjoyable stay experience is achieved through individual service touchpoints, it also requires engaging with guests using a technology-agnostic approach; that is, a variety of technology touchpoints designed to increase guest interactions, improve their experiences and streamline your service delivery.

In the nurture stage, properties

must also understand the tastes and preferences of their guests, which is captured through data coming from several channels: booking engines, the property management software, and even social media. As the data is collected, properties that are leveraging technologies to help promote personalised offers have the best chance of delivering an experience that exceeds guests' expectations. The ability to deliver against guest service expectations goes a long way in creating a broader demographic of loyal guests and building a stellar reputation.

In the final stage of a connected experience, nurturing can shift your brand from merely being visible and accessible on multiple platforms, to a technology-centric service-orientated property that becomes highly sought. Nurturing is continuing to build a relationship with each of your guests. The more you engage them, the more likely they are to stick with your property for familiarity and convenience. Not only will they seek you out for future travel, but they will share their experiences on social platforms. As we all know, social word-of-mouth goes a long way to build up your brand's reputation.

Thanks to digitisation, savvy guests are very well-informed, and they insist on a high level of choice in the technologies used to reach and continue to engage with your property. A connected guest experience anticipates and meets your guests' needs by providing what they want, when they want it. To create a truly relevant and connected guest experience, you will need to take your digital strategy up a notch. A good starting point is leveraging existing or employing new network-connected technologies such as business intelligence, point-of-sale, property management systems, mobile check-ins and check-outs, and AI for suggestive upsells and targeted guest marketing.

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