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Bringing Back the Culture of Innovation to Hotels

I recall a time when I was a kid and my parents decided to take me to a hotel. What an excitement! I remember the large bed, a powerful shower, the television I could watch from the bed... All the things I did not have at home, and that made my experience so unique and special that I still remember it today!

Last week I took my own kids to a hotel. After just a few minutes in the room, they started asking me: "Dad, when are we going back home?" They were bored... I wondered why?

In less than 30 years, hotels have gone from unique and special to predictable and boring, losing their attractiveness towards the younger generations in the process. I never really understood what the marketing people meant by "Gen X, Y and Z" as I felt I was a part of them all. But clearly one could say Gen X are the ones that were excited by hotel rooms, Gen Y think of hotels as nothing special, Gen Z are already checking-in on airbnb and other services more in tune with their audience. Is this inevitable - can't hoteliers do something about it? Tourism is still one of the largest industries worldwide. Doesn't it deserve a better destiny?

Hotel brands must change to remain attractive to the new generations of guests. Bring back the culture of innovation and creativity that made them so special to begin with!

Here are a few ideas that I think would make hotels more attractive, in tune with expectations and "cool" to my kids:

Giving back control to the guest



First, hotels need to accept the idea that what guests want is often fundamentally different from what they deliver. Hoteliers often expect all guests to appreciate "personal service". Personal service is very nice, but unfortunately often delivered under the pretext of "manual check-in", also known as "waiting in line while the receptionists try to spell your name and assigning the room they think you want". Guests are experts at their own name and know exactly what kind of room they prefer!

Times are changing! We often feel much more comfortable doing our own online reservations, checking in by ourselves, selecting the preferred location for our room and perhaps even setting the temperature and ambience before arrival. It's all about being in control and having the ability to customize according to our own specific needs and preferences.

Adapting the guest experience



Hotels often choose the simple path, and force all of their guests through the same process, thinking one size fits all. This is regardless of if you are young or old, male or female, geek or tech adverse...

Wouldn't it be cool to walk into a room fully customized to your personal preferences that were submitted during your personalized online check-in: Ambient lights configured to fit our mood, the ideal temperature, screens displaying artwork to your taste or perhaps even pictures from your own Instagram account!

Imagine a guest room where Wi-Fi is automatic, and as soon as you turn on the TV - all of your media content is available for you to pick-up where you left your favorite TV show at home!

This level of service is not science fiction or restricted to 5 star hotels. It can be turned into reality, with full automation in a technology driven process utilizing a mix of CRM, guest profiling and integrations between the available systems.

Re-inventing the service offer



Hotels have been offering the same kind of services for decades.

Yet guests have changed, society has changed, and we have changed. Our expectations are very different today, but basic hotel services remain the same...

We all accept the idea that hotels cannot offer everything for free. So yes, we understand that they need to make a choice; if they can't offer services A or B, we at least expect them to offer what we really care for.

So please get rid of what we do not want and give us what we need! It doesn't make sense to pay for Wi-Fi or a bottle of water, while there is still an expensive and unused telephone in the room or a minibar with dated chocolate!

More modern and efficient ways to check-in and service guests are now available that provide the chance to revamp a hotel's offerings. If the majority of guests checked-in online and avoided the pleasure of "personal service" (standing in line waiting), many front desk positions could be used in better and much more creative ways. What about using the hotel staff to bring our luggage to our room, or even better - offer us a massage for every stay? Yoga, singing lessons or a chess tournament?

The field of possibilities is endless...

Hotel groups need to rethink their approach to the overall guest experience. At a time where home rentals are exploding (people try to find a feel of the local experience) and indirect booking channels are growing, hotel groups need to go back to their roots: offering a good night of sleep and giving a truly unique experience, thus once again ensuring each stay at a hotel is special and memorable.