Is it Time to Rethink Traditional Guest Satisfaction?

A Revinate Whitepaper
The popularity of online reviews and the importance of social media are changing the way that hotels are approaching how and where to gather customer feedback. Historically hotels have relied on extensive post-stay surveys and mystery shoppers to ascertain service levels, customer satisfaction, and areas for improvement. Today, online reviews provide a wealth of data about guest satisfaction to help hotels please customers. In addition, online reviews provide a social currency that drives new bookings and trust in hotels.

For hotels and brands that believe in customer-centric approaches and aren’t afraid to rethink conventional solutions, Revinate invites you to learn more about our 360° approach to guest feedback, which combines online review and social media feedback with modern surveying techniques to replace traditional GSS. When analyzed in a uniform manner and shared publicly, this combined solution will improve operations, increase consumer awareness and drive new bookings.

**GSS VS. SENTIMENT ANALYSIS TECHNOLOGY**

Traditional guest satisfaction surveys have been the main source of customer feedback for many years. While email has made surveys easier and cheaper to administer and track, traditional survey formats have a number of fundamental issues that can limit their effectiveness. Sampling bias can occur when time constraints make leisure and older customers more likely to respond than business customers, skewing your survey results by providing information about only what is important to a couple of customer segments. Closed-ended questions such as “please rate your satisfaction with your room from level 1 to 10” will not yield rich data about what a customer liked or disliked about their room. Surveys aim to collect information in as uniform a manner as possible by asking the same questions in the same way so that the answers are most influenced by the respondents’ experiences and not by the wording of the question. In order to keep response rates high only a limited number of questions can be asked of each customer. Questions are formulated by hotels to focus on areas that they feel need to be measured, rather than what is most important to customers.

Good survey methodology can limit these weaknesses, but customers have limited time and attention for surveys. According to Survey Gizmo, the average response rate for an external appraisal, such as a customer survey, is between 10 and 15 percent, which means that it can take a long time for surveys to yield reliable data. Medallia, a company that focuses on formulating and administrating traditional surveys, lists five steps to get the most out of surveys; capture data, share results, recover from feedback, discover root causes, and improve. However, hospitality companies like Wyndham Hotels & Resorts, the world’s largest hotel company, are finding that bucking the traditional methods of collecting feedback and focusing on an online review style format can streamline the process, which leads to quicker results.

Sentiment analysis technology has given hotel managers new ways to track customer preferences. A great advantage is that you can delve into the data to assess the topics and details that guests share and value, rather than having to stick to a preset structure of questions the hotel selected and asked. For example, a traditional survey question about guest rooms may provide a level of satisfaction on a 1 to 10 scale, which is helpful.
But an analysis of customer sentiment about guest rooms becomes a great way to learn highly specific preference information. For example, Revinate’s sentiment analysis report can show the following:

- 66% of guests had positive sentiment about the rooms, 26% had neutral sentiment and 8% had negative feelings
- Sentiment about rooms is split into thirteen detailed topics with sentiment most positive about room comfort, room cleanliness, and room decor/design and negative sentiment strongest about room odor and room lighting
- A quick glance at the text of reviews that mention odor shows that cigarette smell and mildew were the top complaints
- A quick glance of reviews that mention lighting shows that some guests found the room too dim or found bulbs that were burnt out

Another advantage of sentiment analysis data is that it shows not only how customers feel about rooms, but also what is top-of-mind for satisfied and unsatisfied customers. By monitoring reports that show which topics, from ontology specific to hospitality, are trending positively or negatively, management doesn’t have to know what to ask in advance to find hot-button issues.

In addition to the data provided about detailed aspects of the complete guest experience, this information can also show trends across time. A sentiment analysis tool will identify a problem and monitor improvements quickly. For example, if a property finds an odor problem through analysis of reviews and then invests in a new carpet cleaning service, it will want to measure a return. Depending on the frequency of reviews, the hotel may see improvement in room sentiment scores in as little as a few days to a week. A good sentiment analysis tool also provides search capability, so that managers could focus in on words such as “odor” and “carpets” to read specific reviews that mention these terms. With traditional GSS, it would be necessary to change the survey, add an odor question, test it, wait for sufficient responses, and then report the results. The issue with asking such a detailed question on a survey is that you may introduce question bias as customers think hard about the smell in the room, when they might not have flagged it as an issue to begin with. If they were only slightly dissatisfied with odor they might answer that it was a big issue because the question brought it to their attention. With sentiment analysis, you only see the results of reviews where guests brought the odor issue into the discussion, so their insights are more genuine.

**EMBRACING TRANSPARENCY**

The reality for the hotel industry is that customers are writing and reading online reviews at an increasing rate. TripAdvisor reports that 93% of consumers say their booking decisions are impacted by online reviews.

Transparency gives as much as it takes. Reviews and public feedback have the chance to hurt a hotel when they highlight consistently poor service, low-quality facilities, or other issues. However, using review data to quickly improve operations can lead to far more success. Thriving in a transparent world is about learning what your customers want and meeting their needs as best you can, not trying to control the message of how customers feel about their experiences. Due to the transparency provided by online reviews, hotels have the ability to know more details about what customers like and dislike, which can be tremendously powerful as long as feedback is used to learn and adapt quickly. Clearly, poor review trends can be a valuable warning sign of organizational or physical problems that could harm your hotel’s bottom line. However, if monitored closely,
reviews can also show service and operational improvements and provide a laser focus on customer service issues to ensure enduring success.

By embracing transparency and encouraging public feedback, versus traditional private surveys, hotels can improve their TripAdvisor Popularity Index score, which is determined by four factors:

- Quality of reviews (review ratings)
- Quantity (frequency of reviews)
- Recency (freshness of reviews)
- Other opinions available on the web (guides, social media mentions, blogs, etc)

By publishing surveys and reviews on your brand site and social channels, hotels can increase their popularity ranking by increasing quantity, as well as mentions, affecting this last elusive category - “other opinions on the web.” In addition, by embracing reviews rather than taking a head-in-the-sand approach, management responses to reviews can increase bookings. According to L2’s 2012 Digital Genius Report, hotels that integrated guest reviews on their site sent 39 percent less traffic to the OTAs, which has a positive impact on profitability.

**USING REVIEW DATA TO IMPROVE OPERATIONS**

Once hotels have embraced transparency and learned how to effectively manage their online reputations, the benefits of harnessing feedback start to become clear. Contained in public reviews and free form surveys is a goldmine of information about your hotel, your competitors, and your customers. One of the biggest benefits is a solid understanding of what will delight your customers, and this can translate into more profit. Simply put, sentiment analysis and review data can show management the best places to allocate investment resources to have the largest impact on guest satisfaction. Smarter spending means greater profits.

Using sentiment analysis as an important factor in hotelier compensation plans is another way to improve operations. Sentiment information can yield very specific details about service elements and can improve the influence that performance plans have on management. Unlike traditional satisfaction surveys, data is available quickly and inputs from customers are open-ended and unbiased. Compensation structures can focus on monthly or quarterly results and ensure positive attention to service issues. Tying compensation plans to reviews is not a new trend and reflects the importance of reputation management for hotels today. Sentiment analysis gives more detail-rich data on which to base performance rather than tying performance to just popularity index or star rating. Managers in different departments can be incentivized separately based on their direct operational responsibilities. With surveys, only one or two questions could be devoted to housekeeping for instance, with sentiment analysis from reviews, housekeeping can be measured on multiple different aspects leading to more detailed and targeted compensation plans.

Using this data, rather than traditional GSS data, as a basis for compensation may actually be fairer to managers. When a survey asks about a specific service element such as housekeeping, the respondent may upon reflection be more inclined to focus on negative rather than positive impressions about his experience. With an open-ended review that mentions housekeeping you are more likely to hear the sentiment that is top of mind for that guest and potentially more genuine. Surveys can lead a customer down a path that is less important to their perception of their stay. Customer generated reviews will focus on the elements that made a stay memorable or ruined a guest experience, allowing sentiment analysis to be a better measure of management effectiveness.
RETHINKING SURVEYS WITH REVINATE

Sentiment analysis technology has helped more than 15,000 Revinate clients analyze their online reviews. With that experience and gained knowledge, Revinate is pleased to announce inGuest Surveys, a 360° approach to guest feedback, which combines online reviews and social media mentions with modern surveying techniques. This product is easy to set-up, manage and use. Guests will appreciate the user-friendly, short and interactive survey, which will result in a higher response rate and more valuable feedback. When analyzed in a uniform manner and shared publicly using social sharing tools, this combined solution will improve operations, increase consumer awareness and drive new bookings.

In addition, Revinate provides the tools and reports that you need to fully operationalize guest feedback, allowing you to set goals and track your success. We know your business relies on easily accessed, reliable, data and we deliver.

Hotels can still get a lot of value from surveys, but they must be adapted to the ways in which customers want to communicate. As the popularity of reviewing hotels increases, survey designers need to consider how to re-invent the survey to become compatible with social channels, and in a style that is consistent with reviews. If a survey fosters open discussion with customers and gives them a place to review and share their feedback, they will be more likely to take the time to complete it.

As always, knowing how to please your customers, hiring the best employees, and incentivizing service excellence ensure that reviews will help and not hurt your business. Hotels like Wyndham are embracing public reviews due to their ability to be a force for positive change. Reviews and review-like surveys are increasingly becoming the method of choice for brands and properties to ensure that customers have the best experience possible. Get on board by contacting Revinate at info@revinate.com.

Customers provide feedback for two reasons: to feel empowered and influence other customers and/or because they genuinely want to improve a product or service. A traditional GSS survey will only meet the second need. However, a streamlined digital survey that looks and feels like a review and has social-sharing capability has more to offer. It can meet the needs of hotels to ask specific questions and the needs of customers to influence other people.