

Marketing to Millennials: Are Hotels Ready for an Influx of Millennial Travelers?



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Looking at recent lists of industries disrupted or supposedly "killed" by millennials and their divergent tastes, it's easy to see how marketing to millennials could be quite a challenge for organizations lacking in-depth knowledge of this demographic. An influx of millennial customers could leave stakeholders unnerved despite the potential for added revenue.



For hotels marketing to millennials, meeting guests through the communications channels they prefer is key.

The newest industry to work through these challenges? Hospitality. According to the travel research group Skift, the 18-34 age bracket's oft-reported love of travel hasn't ceased to increase in recent years, and a lack of traditional homeownership opportunities combined with a tendency to marry or have children later in life effectively funnels more discretionary dollars into millennials' pockets. The situation — and the resulting millennial trends in travel — is unlikely to change any time soon.

Considering this, measures that prioritize hospitality marketing to millennials, combined with the sorts of services and features that make a message worth spreading, will be a necessity within five years if they're not already. By marketing offerings that cut to the core of what millennials want, hospitality organizations are figuring out how to market to millennials and are setting themselves up to build a stronger, more lucrative relationship with the demographic.



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Marketing to Millennials 101: Know Your Audience

As a group, millennials rarely fit the "industry-killer" role certain media and industry sources like to place them in. Instead, they simply tend to value convenience and have very little patience for inefficiency. While all consumers show these traits to some degree, millennials also rely on a large — and growing — collection of technologies that make older business models pale in comparison (trips to the video store becoming obsolete with the arrival of streaming services, for example).

What's more, the constant or near-constant presence of the internet in their lives contributes to millennials' sense of perspicacity. This shrewdness drives the average 18-to-34-year-old's immense distrust of advertising and being "sold to" in general.

But like most other generations, millennials tend to stay faithful to the brands that show them loyalty. Hospitality organizations looking to overhaul their experience with a millennial-friendly flair would be wise to ensure every effort they put forth aligns with three tentpoles: It needs to be honest, it needs to make a process faster and more convenient and it must eliminate "salesiness" from its final product. This is where the right communications technologies come into play.

Instead of fearing the influx of millennial guests, hospitality leaders should rise to meet the challenges this generation of consumers offers.

The Right Tech in the Right Place

The smartphone-based experiential enhancements many hotel marketing initiatives have implemented are a good starting point to improve the onsite experience for users. By creating smartphone-unlocking doors and app-based room service ordering, businesses that put thought into how millennial guests can use their own devices for efficient service position themselves close to positive social media comments and other word-of-mouth benefits.

For example, if smartphone keys have become generally expected (thanks in part to the influx of millennial guests), there's still plenty of room for great smart device communication experiences. Complimentary, hotel-provided smartphones that are returned at the end of a guest's stay have become a growing trend, supplanting many manual processes organizations once relied on. Instead of sifting through the huge binder next to the telephone, Tech Crunch reports, guests can use the device to access standard hospitality information on services and local attractions in a digital format.

Hotels not wishing to invest in per-room smartphone costs, meanwhile, could ply their audience with an investment in software products. An organization with many international guests, for instance, could make strong inroads with an app that discounts sending international SMS messages through the duration of the stay, using a communications API provider to reduce the number of costly "hops" that cut into revenue.

Bringing It All Together

Marketing to millennials obviously doesn't need to start when a room key changes hands, however. Hotels wishing to build a little brand goodwill can do so simply by meeting millennial guests where they are: that is, expanding contact center capabilities to turn every contact, from phone calls to social media messages, into a single, ongoing conversation. With a cloud-based contact center, the hotel can funnel every channel of communication through one central location, providing streamlined service for guests and helping the hotel collect calling and messaging data effectively. On the hotel's side, implementing contact center capabilities with AI-powered chatbots further removes inefficiency from the process for guests by routing their queries quickly and effectively.

Room keys and restaurant recommendations aren't the only areas of opportunity. A hotel may simplify their check-in experience using smartphone apps, automate and personalize their hospitality marketing tools or use automated, SMS-based communications to inform guests of events they may enjoy.

Instead of fearing the influx of millennial guests, hospitality leaders should rise to meet the challenges this generation of consumers offers. It takes relatively few changes to build the kind of hospitality branding, marketing and practical improvements they enjoy — making the budding relationship authentic and efficient for guests and more profitable for the hotels they frequent.