HOSPITALITY BRANDS

What Do Consumers Want?

UNIVERSITY of
SOUTH FLORIDA

Muma College of Business

M3 Center for Hospitality
Technology and Innovation

Introduction

Hospitality means more than being hospitable. It deals with emotions, trust, and interactions. It means being friendly and helpful, welcoming, and considerate, understanding needs and expectations, responding in quick and respectful ways. As an industry, hospitality is based on a human-centered philosophy, influenced by religions and cultural traditions.

Over the last few decades, the global hospitality industry has grown by leaps with more than 1000 hotel brands. This means travelers have several options to choose from. **Hoteliers need to reach out to them in different ways.** Hospitality industry offers tangible and intangibles to develop experiences. **Therefore, building a consistent identity and well-known recognition is very important.** Marketing strategies must include maintaining good relationships with existing and potential customers and responding to their needs and expectations immediately.

Especially during these unprecedented times of global pandemic, **hospitality brands must rethink their marketing strategies.** Customers are staying at home and use the internet and social media platforms more than usual. As such, there is an opportunity for hospitality brands to use these platforms wisely and timely. **But these activities should be in line with the expectations of customers.**

The Study

A study by University of South Florida's M3 Center for Hospitality Technology and Innovation, led by Dr. Faizan Ali, has some interesting findings to understand what do customers want from hospitality brands? The study surveyed 1371 customers from 50 States in the United States.

GENDER (%)

44
Male

52
Female

32% of the respondents are female. 31% of them are older than 30 years. 46% of the respondents have a household income of less than US\$ 70,000.

When asked on a scale of 1 to 3, where 1 represents "Strongly Disagree" and 3 represents "Strongly Agree", respondents tend to agree that hospitality brands should use

their resources to help customers, bring them together, and raise awareness about COVID-19 (mean 2.5 out of 3). Hospitality brands should unite people from different backgrounds and act as leaders (mean 2.4 out of 3). Respondents trust their favorite hospitality brands (mean 2.6 out of 3) and think that their favorite hospitality brands understand them and their needs and wants (mean 2.5 out of 3).

86% of the respondents think the most important action of the hospitality brands must be being positive contributors to the society and connecting with their customers.

Findings show that the respondents believe that the hospitality brands are able to connect people from different backgrounds because of several reasons. These reasons are shown in the chart below. These scores are on a scale of 3 points with 1 being 'strongly disagree' and 3 being 'strongly agree'.

To make consumers feel connected, brands should include the following in their messages.

PRODUCTS AND SERVICES

IMPORTANT SOCIAL ISSUES

EMPLOYEE FEATURES

CONSUMERS REACTIONS TO SOCIAL INITIATIVES

BUSINESS PERFORMANCE

Respondents also reported what will make them feel connected to hospitality brands during a pandemic as shown in the chart below.

Hospitality brands leverage social media to connect people to one another by using following strategies.

Favorite Brands

The study also asked respondents about their **favorite hotel brands**. They were asked to identify three favorite hotel brands. According to the results, **Hilton Hotels** was ranked on 1st place among the 107 hotel brands. Hilton's brand name was mentioned 501 times. Founded by Conrad Hilton in 1919, Hilton Hotels is the flagship hotel brand of the US. In 2020, Fortune magazine ranked Hilton Hotels at number one on their Fortune List of the Top 100 Companies to Work For in 2020 based on an employee survey of satisfaction.

Marriott Hotels took the second place. Their brand name was mentioned 425 times. Marriott mobile application is the most downloaded hospitality applications in the US. Marriott Hotels places interaction with the customers as their number one priority.

Hyatt Hotels occupied the 3rd place. In the study, their brand name was mentioned 213 times. Hyatt Hotels is well-known for its social media usage and co-operation with its customers to generate content.

Recommendations

1. Harness the power of data and use it to make informed branding and communication decisions
2. Anthropomorphize the brand by taking some stance on relevant social issues
3. Create interactive communications with the customers and facilitate customer-customer-brand interactions.
4. Customized and personalized communications on different channels.
5. Encourage the customers to share their experiences on social media and online communities.

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