



The Well Bar and The Collector Luxury Inn & Gardens, St. Augustine, FL

2017 - QUARTER 2

Executive Insight: **How to Capture and Retain Direct Bookings**

by Johnathan Capps, Vice President, Revenue Management
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While online travel agencies (OTAs) can be part of an overall healthy channel mix, direct bookings will never fail to be the most profitable. Not only are these bookings more lucrative from a rooms revenue standpoint, but guests who book direct usually contribute to higher overall spend while they're on property.

To shift your mix from third party to direct, here are some best practices to capture and retain these high-profit bookings:

Communicate the value of direct

Guests need to know why they should book directly through you, and you must give them valuable reasons for doing so.

Make sure guests have incentives for bypassing an OTA and booking directly with you, whether that's via pricing power, arrival perks or stay incentives. Use your market resources to communicate that guests are guaranteed the best rate when they book direct.

Continue this messaging even after guests arrive to your property. If guests booked their stay through an external channel, take the time to communicate why booking direct is in their benefit for future trips. This message can be expressed subtly via in-room methods, digital channels and printed materials, or as an added suggestion from a front-desk associate at check-in.

Also, chances are that if guests booked via third party, you have not yet captured any of their data. Make sure to record the information you need, such as an email address, and invite them to join your database. Then, post-stay, you can further communicate the advantages of booking direct.

Build loyalty to retain direct bookings

Are your guests loyal to you or the OTAs? If they aren't loyal to you, you need to make this shift because loyal guests will become repeat guests.

Again, show guests value. Provide special offers, give them first access (or exclusive access) to sales and promotions, or include a package freebie for loyal guests. Communication is the most important part of the equation. Ensure that you reiterate the value the guest will receive by being loyal and booking direct. Thank them for their direct booking and explain that is the reason they are receiving special privileges, which can encourage their continued loyalty.

Websites must be user-friendly

If your website is unappealing, you'll never see bookings from it. Websites need to be speedy. In fact, Google has prioritized fast websites with load times of fewer than three seconds. If your site is slow to load, potential customers will bounce off shortly after clicking, taking their booking power with them.

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Your website also needs to be easily navigated with seamless transition between the site and booking engine. Be detail oriented: Work with your digital partners to determine where menu bars should be placed or which booking button color will capture maximum attention. To continue peak performance, audit your own site regularly to identify where visitors may fall off. For instance, if data shows most people exit the site two pages in at the rooms page, analyze this portion of the site to determine the reason why.

Don't forget about voice

Your hotel's website isn't the only channel with the opportunity to capture direct bookings. The voice channel isn't dead. In fact, it is becoming less of a shopping channel and more of a

booking channel. However, OTAs also rely on voice reservations, and their agents will work to make a reservation at your property, though with unsavory commission fees attached.

Embrace click-to-call technology and empower voice channel agents so that they are more likely to convert calls. Challenge them to increase the number of voice reservations they take, and determine the training needed to accomplish those goals and garner more ADR.

With a strong communication structure in place, you'll ensure customers will find you first. By using the right tools, guests will feel motivated to remain loyal, lowering your reliance on OTAs with each return visit. ●

Best Practices: Four Ways to Build Guest Loyalty at Independent Hotels

by Johnathan Capps, Vice President, Revenue Management and Sam Trotter, Marketing Strategy Manager

This story originally appeared on *Lodging Magazine's* website

It's no secret that guest loyalty drives revenue at hotels. Dedicated customers bring with them a number of advantages, as they're more likely to book direct and tend to contribute a higher ancillary spend. Most importantly, they become invaluable assets to your property as ambassadors for your hotel, leaving positive reviews and recommending your business to new guests.

However, guest loyalty differs between branded and independent properties. A guest carrying a hotel rewards card is often loyal to a family of brands, while those loyal to an independent hotel are dedicated to an individual property. That kind of loyalty can lead to exciting opportunities for independent owners and operators. What's more, independent hotels frequently have more control over loyalty and guest reward options, translating to greater guest satisfaction and even higher loyalty rates.

Independent hotels should continue to build on this by considering what they can and want to offer loyal guests. There are a number of simple ways to make guests feel special during their visit that aren't groundbreaking or at a high price point. How about a glass of wine at check-in? What about free bottles of water waiting in guestrooms? Because they're not confined by larger brand standards, policies, or costs of point redemptions, independent hotels have some flexibility to fit loyalty costs within the confines of their budget.

Building guest loyalty can seem like a big undertaking, but there are some simple ways to begin implementing a strategy.

1. Give back to guests – There are two tactics hotels can use to drive loyalty—hard and soft. Hard items are those that you can touch and feel, such as a bottle of water waiting in a room, or a treat at check-in—a glass of wine or a cookie.

Soft items are those that are not tangible, but are equally valuable. One of the best “soft” strategies to drive loyal guests is through acknowledgement. A letter of welcome and thanks

can go a long way to turn customers into repeat guests.

Acknowledging and then rewarding loyalty can beget more loyalty, too. For instance, offering a discount or perk to returning guests can show that a hotel values their business. Additionally, it helps to incentivize past guests by giving them access to the best available rates, offers, and packages. Before blasting out an offer to everyone at large, give your past guests first access as a reward for their loyalty.

2. Invest in a good CRM system – Great technology on the back end can help on the front lines. Look for a system that allows you to create guest profiles and integrates seamlessly into your other tech programs. You can add profiles to track guest preferences and stay frequency. With the tap of a button, you can determine the best way to tailor rewards to guests, whether placing them in their favorite room type, offering late check-out, or simply having a small token ready at check-in.

3. Communicate with and train the team – Know who is staying at your hotel before they walk through the door. Consider holding a daily stand-up meeting to discuss who will be visiting for the day. Look at the profiles in the CRM to determine exactly what each guest wants from their stay and talk about how to greet them. There is no better way to build loyalty than through excellent customer service from a well-trained, tuned-in team. Everyone from your general manager to housekeepers should be trained to develop a relationship with loyal guests. Greeting your loyal guests by name and mentioning something personal to them connects guests to the team and therefore the hotel.

4. Listen to guests – Hotel rating and reviews affect loyalty. Spend time reading what your customers say about your hotel. If there are complaints, seriously consider them and determine what you need to do to fix the issues—and then actually fix them. Respond to all online reviews in a timely manner with a personal tone to show that you care about each guest who walks through the door. If a guest complains in a review and you have fixed the issue, invite that guest back. Remember that loyalty can be built after a negative experience if the service recovery is genuine and authentic. ●

Now Open

The Abernathy - Clemson, SC

A home for high ideals and warm handshakes, The Abernathy pays homage to the late Larry Abernathy, Clemson's longtime mayor and a much-loved professor whose commitment to the city and school was all-inclusive. As the city's newest boutique hotel, we honor our namesake with guest experiences that reflect the best of Clemson's past, present, and future. To stay here is to experience Abernathy's Clemson: gracious, welcoming, effortlessly hospitable. 🍷



The Abernathy is now open in Clemson, SC, and recently welcomed special guest Head Football Coach Dabo Swinney

Five New Properties Under Charlestowne Hotels' Management

The Fairlane - Nashville, TN

Located in the hub of downtown Nashville, TN, the Fairlane Hotel will open as an 81-room, boutique property repurposed from a midcentury bank building. Boasting original modernist architecture and design details that recall the 1960s and 70s, the Fairlane will include an all-American restaurant and terrace bar, lobby café, Brooklyn's Mile End Delicatessen and Bar, and two rooftop penthouses with outdoor terrace space for unmatched views of Music City.

Hotel Clermont - Atlanta, GA

Set in one of Atlanta's most dynamic and colorful midtown sections known as Poncey Highlands, Hotel Clermont will open as a 94-room boutique hotel with a rich and fascinating history. Originally built in the 1920s, the famous Clermont Lounge will continue to be a tenant, while new hotel updates will include the introduction of a restaurant featuring French-American fare, an intimate lobby bar and rooftop garden bar overlooking the Atlanta skyline.



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Pre-Renovation Hotel Clermont, Atlanta, GA

The Inn at Carnall Hall - Fayetteville, AR

Located at the University of Arkansas on the lawn of the Old Main, the Inn at Carnall Hall is a short walk away from everything U of A, including Razorback stadium. Originally built in 1905, the 49 room inn features plush bedding and large historic windows overlooking the campus. Just past the well-appointed lobby resides Ella's Restaurant and the relaxed Lambeth Lounge. Showcasing original pine floors, red exterior brick and pristinely restored twin columns made of horse hair and wood, the rich historic building truly reflects the original opulence of the 1900s.



The Stowehof, Stowe, VT

The Stowehof - Stowe, VT

Surrounded by 26 acres and featuring sweeping mountain vistas and an unforgettable ambiance, The Stowehof offers an experience unlike any other in Vermont. The iconic architecture and expansive grounds provide the perfect setting for everything from outdoor adventure to familial interaction to quiet reflection.

Twin Creeks Resort - Winchester, TN

A short drive from Nashville and Chattanooga, Tims Ford Lake in Winchester, Tennessee is home to Charlestowne's latest development project. This new resort will offer guests stunning views of the lake and surrounding hills, as well as a full service marina, restaurant, and hotel. 📍



The Fairlane (Rendering), Nashville, TN

Recent Corporate Press

- *Hotel News Now* - How to walk guests when a hotel is overbooked
- *Hotel Online* - 3rd Annual ILES Conference, BITAC Independent Draws Record Crowd, Iconic Speakers
- *Hotel Interactive* - The Upside of Independents; Leading Management Executives Detail Evolution of Non-Branded Hotel Assets
- *Hotel News Now* - Boutiques benefit from college, university business
- *Hospitality Net* - Charlestowne Hotels Opening Five Historic Adaptive Reuse Properties in the Next Year
- *Lodging Magazine* - Driving Customers to Direct Bookings
- *Hotel Management* - Are hotels missing a marketing opportunity in TED Talks?
- *New York Times* - Hotels and Resorts for Romance of All Kinds
- *Lodging Magazine* - Four ways to build loyalty in independent hotels (reprinted in this newsletter)
- *Lodging Magazine* - Set the Table for Success
- *Leaders Magazine* - Interview with COO Michael Tall
- *Lodging Magazine* - Tips on Hiring in Hospitality
- *Hotel News Now* - What Google wants from your website