Getting Guests to Stay [Loyal]

Best Practices Hospitality Brands Need to Know

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Introduction

Gone are the days when a guest's experience began when they set foot on your property. It starts way before … before they have even decided to stay with you.

Simply put, your guest experience does not start and end during their stay. Their physical presence on your property is crucial, but it's only one part of their experience with you. In today's travel and hospitality industry, brands are competing like never before for a guest — one who shops around; prizes personal convenience; requires personalization; and wants to feel seen, heard, and valued.

When you provide "wow" experiences that delight guests and make them feel special, customer loyalty is born. The best way to achieve this is by viewing the guest experience as a journey. Now more than ever, it's imperative that you think through the entire guest journey, how feedback is captured and used, and how your teams can influence and maximize guest experience in real time.

In this guide, we will showcase a holistic view of a guest journey. We'll break it down into five critical parts: Research, Book, Prepare, Stay, and Post-Stay. Each is an important leg of the journey in its own right, but together they must consistently and cohesively create brand interactions that are seamless, differentiated, and exceptional.

With that said, let's go on a trip together. We need to find a place to stay!

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Smart brands position themselves not only as an accommodation but as an experience partner. They forge a deep relationship early on, and influence the entire experience starting with discovery, booking, and pre-trip planning.

Geoffrey Ryskamp
Vice President, Sector Head – Retail & Hospitality, Medallia

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Where Should We Stay?

The "Research" Leg of the Journey

Think of this stage in your guest journey as online dating. They haven't met you in person; they're getting acquainted with you online. If they don't like what they see, you get crossed off the list. That's why it's so important to have an engaging digital experience, one that flawlessly delivers the information, functionality, and ease of use that today's traveler demands. In fact, your websites and apps should be the preferred way to book a stay.

449% ROI by improving the digital experience

What if it's not? Are potential guests browsing your website, but not getting the information they want? It's imperative to uncover what your specific digital friction points are. Otherwise, the consequences are swift and severe: you're no longer a consideration, and the potential guest vanishes. And let's not forget another part of the digital equation: favorable online reviews, which are influential and powerful in this early stage.

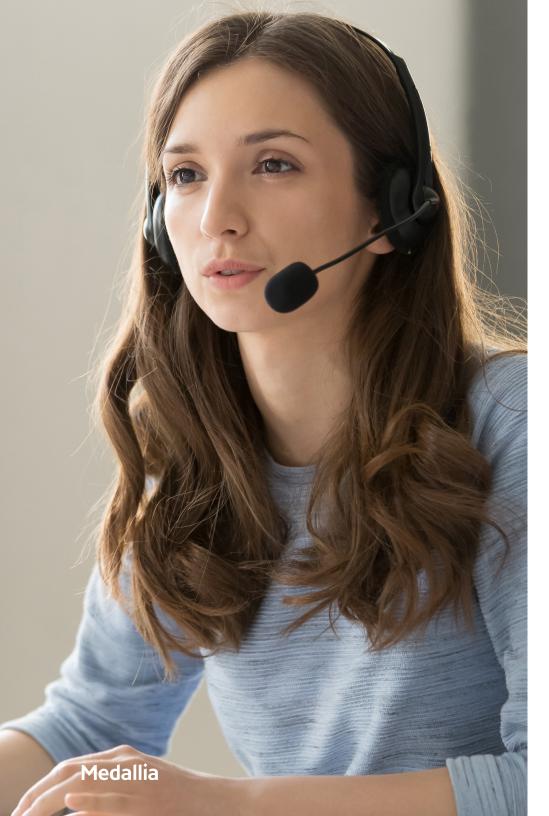**Medallia**

Medallia Can Help You:

Understand the precise paths visitors take through your digital channels, fix points of high drop off, and optimize the path to conversion. Tools like heatmaps and session replay can easily identify hidden opportunities to increase user engagement and accelerate conversions.

To gain a competitive advantage, you must identify and prioritize the most important issues, which can be achieved by:

- Tracking guests' digital behavior on your website and app
- Soliciting their feedback via a pop-up survey on your website or app
- Engaging in a web live chat
- Utilizing social review tracking and streamline response engagement

> Your digital presence is a decisive, dividing line: The guest decides to move forward with you ... or not.

Listening to the voice of their guests was especially helpful to Holiday Inn Club Vacation. After initially closing resorts due to the COVID pandemic, they used voice of the customer (VoC) data to make reopening decisions. In terms of re-engaging with potential guests — many of whom were reticent to travel — Holiday Inn prominently showcased their "Safe Travel" program on all digital properties. VoC also revealed a strong desire to preview/see room floor plans. Based on this, floor plans were added to the website to aid travelers in their planning. This comprehensive approach helped Holiday Inn achieve a 16-point increase in Net Promoter Score (NPS) and a 41% increase in customer satisfaction.

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Should We Make the Reservation?

The "Booking" Leg of the Journey

The "*to book or not to book*" decision is a major one, as it's the first glimpse of future guest loyalty. Once again, it must be an engaging and frictionless experience, as the opportunity to "opt out" and stay elsewhere is still a very real possibility.

100% of brands view proactive customer engagement as a differentiator

Personalization reigns supreme, in that your prospective guests have different preferences when making reservations. Some like the ease of booking online with no assistance needed, others like the online process with the added convenience of live chat, and still others prefer the comfort of human interaction. Regardless of booking preference, you must provide an integrated omnichannel experience that exceeds expectations at every touch point.

Whether online or in person, Medallia best practices reveal that it's imperative to:

- Empower your Contact Center employees to engage with potential guests when it matters most. Insights can be gleaned from voice-to-text analytics and end-of-call surveys.

- Repair poor booking experiences in real time with immediate and personalized engagement. Solutions include tracking web browser behavior, pop-up surveys on the booking web page, and web live chat.

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This approach also applies with the "almost but not quite" customer — one who begins booking online, but abandons the process. Feedback can be captured by triggering a survey upon abandonment, which is then shared with a Customer Care agent, who proactively contacts the potential guest to help complete the booking.

Take Choice Hotels for example. Their customer care team leveraged the Medallia platform to drive continuous improvement in customer experience. Their focus: to improve call center productivity and agent performance. More than one million pieces of feedback were collected, star ratings increased to 4.7 out of 5, and improved experiences drove a 7-figure revenue gain.

Medallia Can Help You:

Interact with customers using strategic digital engagements like abandonment surveys, live chatbots, and personalized promotional offers so your customers have everything they need to complete the desired action.

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Today's travelers expect a connected and consistent experience, and in order to deliver experiences seamlessly, brands must provide an integrated omnichannel experience that exceeds traveler expectations at every touchpoint.

Lorena Kurtjian Hernandez
Senior Director, Global Solutions Principal for Travel & Hospitality

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Ready or Not?

The "Prepare" Leg of the Journey

Congratulations, your guest has committed. In theory, that is. Your goal here is to continue providing a welcoming, engaging, and seamless experience, while ensuring the stay actually does happen. They still have the opportunity to opt out and stay in your competitor's "house."

24% **More on-property spend from guests who used messaging**

It's also an ideal time to create a deeper connection with your guest by building positive energy around their upcoming stay. Everyone wants to feel appreciated, welcomed, and special. Simplifying and personalizing two-way guest communication is key. Position yourself as a caring brand by sending guests a pre-arrival welcome text message or email with helpful check-in information or updates on specific services and amenities. When you demonstrate personalization, you can create "wow" moments which build loyalty and can generate upsell opportunities.

> 33% of guests who don't report issues say it is because there's "not an easy or quick way to do so."

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Medallia Can Help You:

Capture comprehensive and continuous signals across all physical and digital touchpoints to create accurate guest journey insights from pre-stay to post-stay.

For example, if a guest includes children in their stay, you can reach out to inquire if a crib is needed. Whether the answer is yes or no, follow up with kid meal promotion for on-property dining. It's a win-win: your helpful and personalized offer can also drive revenue through targeted promotions.

At Medallia, our transformative web-based messaging platform — Zingle — helps fuel experiences that raise NPS scores and RevPAR. It does so by combining artificial intelligence and machine learning with workflow automation and real-time mobile messaging. Providing a two-way interface early on is imperative, as only 1 in 4 guests will report any issue that impacts their guest experience. And it's also a highly responsive solution, as nearly 1 in 3 respondents who say they don't report issues, don't do so because there's "not an easy or quick way to do so."

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We're Here!

The "Stay" Leg of the Journey

It's the moment you've been waiting for ... your guest has arrived! While you're meeting in person for the first time, your guests already have opinions and perception of your brand. You've been cultivating this for a while during your guest's research, plan, and book experiences. They may arrive delighted with the experience you've created thus far, or perhaps be a little pensive or underwhelmed. You don't want their stay with you to start with them thinking: "I should have booked at the hotel down the street — they had nicer rooms online."

42% of guests would return if a poor experience is repaired immediately

Your guests crave an exceptional and attentive experience from check-in to check-out. Gone are the days of a singular, post-stay survey — by then it's too late. The need for real-time engagement is at an all-time high, as it can help you immediately recover poor experiences and capitalize on good ones as they occur.

Think of a text inviting a guest to a happy hour in your hotel lounge or to book an activity. This achieves two things for your property: an elevated guest experience, and opportunities to create ancillary revenue.

As a hospitality brand, your ability to continuously interact with your guests and collect feedback 24/7 in a seamless, effortless way is key and helps you achieve the following:

- Understand what guests want/need at all times

- Ensure timely guest insight reaches the right employees to take action

- Resolve any issues in the moment with proactive service recovery

- Strengthen guest satisfaction scores and differentiate your brand

Interestingly, service response and recovery is an often-overlooked factor in driving brand loyalty and return business. A Medallia/Zingle survey found that 42% of respondents would return to a hotel that turned a poor experience into a positive one. For example, by increasing mid-stay engagement, Sahara Las Vegas improved guest satisfaction and experienced a 10-point ranking boost to their TripAdvisor score after optimizing guest engagement with Zingle two-way messaging.

Consumers are twice as likely to prefer texting over any other communication method. 95% of text messages are opened within 3 minutes.

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I've found that when a guest has an issue that you are able to fix and then exceed their expectations, you have turned them into a loyal customer.

Michelle Huntzinger
VP of Hotel Operations, Sahara Las Vegas

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We're Back Home!

The "Post-Stay" Leg of the Journey

Your guests are back home now. Their trip has ended, but their experience with you has not. They likely are reflecting on all aspects of the experience you created and delivered to them. It's also a critical juncture, as you need to continue cultivating customer loyalty that results in repeat bookings, while creating promoters who influence your online reputation.

51% of guests say online reviews "greatly" impact booking decisions

A great way to create a seamless link from stay to post-stay is through day-of-checkout engagement. Your guest receives a text asking if they want to check out via their phone. After doing so, a survey prompts them to provide experiential feedback on their stay with you. A social review request is also sent. This is followed up shortly with an email or text about your loyalty/ rewards programs. This information capture will provide a deeper understanding of their unique behaviors, needs, and preferences, and allow you to personalize future interactions.

> One Hilton brand found that promoters return more than 3x more frequently and spend over 58% more than detractors.

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Consider that one guest's experience can travel far into the social media universe. When it comes to decision-making time (i.e., whether to book a stay or not), many travelers heavily rely upon TripAdvisor, Expedia, Google reviews, and other social review sites due to their authenticity, unbiased honesty, and real-world speak. Think of your guests as brand ambassadors who can help you:

- Increase online review volume and recency to improve your search rankings

- Influence your online reputation and create one that attracts new guests

- Empower your employees to respond with confidence using social feedback powered by auto-generated social alerts and dashboards

In addition to influencing decision-making, these social review sites are a treasure trove of free insights and opinions. When aggregated and analyzed, they reveal experiences that have a lasting impact on guests. It allows you to better understand what's driving good and bad experiences for them. This allows you to capitalize on positive experiences that influence promoters and build brand loyalty. In addition, robust text analytics can reveal reoccurring key words or themes that identify areas of improvement, like "dirty rooms" or "unfriendly staff".

Medallia Can Help You:

See how you stack up against the competition — at a property, regional and brand level —through rival location intelligence and hotel benchmarking data comparisons and assessments using STR integration.

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Your Staff The "People" Part of the Journey

In the hospitality industry, people + technology combine to create a powerful force in building guest loyalty. Responsive websites, virtual chats, real-time engagement technologies, these are all must-haves in your guest experience arsenal. However, your people can be just as influential.

147%   Amount by which companies with highly engaged employees outperform their competitors

From the Customer Care agent to the front desk staff to hotel management, your team has the ability to impact and influence every guest interaction. They are the voice and face of your brand and come into direct contact with your guests on a daily basis. Most understand the value of good customer service and seek to demonstrate it. However, what if you could take it a massive step further and empower them not to just serve, but to influence and transform?

> Going above and beyond in some small way to surpass a guest's experience will earn you those 5-star reviews.
>
> *Medallia/Zingle 2019 Guest Service Report*

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Real-time alerts can help frontline staff promptly respond to customer needs, whether it's more pillows, ample water in the fitness center, or securing a taxi or Uber. These micro-moments, which further enable personalization, add up to delight guests and cultivate loyalty. Consider Hilton, who empowered their 54,000 employees and C-suite leaders with real-time guest feedback and actionable insights. The result? A nearly 60% increase in spending by promoters.

And don't forget to capture feedback from your own employees — since they directly interact with customers, they often see trends, hear about pain points, and have innovative, new ideas. You can leverage this information to make your hotel operations more efficient and effective, while recognizing staff for their valuable contributions.

When armed with a comprehensive, innovative customer experience solution platform like Medallia's, general managers have actionable insights, which enable them to make timely and impactful changes and improvements. And hospitality brand executives are able to tie revenue back to guest experience, resulting in a healthy return on investment.

Medallia Can Help You:

Distribute customer insights from the digital channel across your organization, so your frontline staff in contact centers and hotels have the right data at their fingertips to make every guest feel truly known.

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Conclusion

Building customer loyalty within the hospitality industry is a journey, not a destination. Like any relationship, it must be cultivated and nurtured through a strategic combination of high-tech and high-touch. Your guests are viewing travel differently. They are not necessarily less loyal; they are more open to trying out new brands. This is both an opportunity and a threat. And another shift is occurring: guests expect you to meet them on **their** terms, not **yours**.

Medallia's robust and customizable platform delivers the tools and insights needed to optimize your guests' omni-channel journey — from research to post-stay — so you can drive meaningful change and create exceptional experiences that build brand loyalty. Our suite of solutions — which covers digital, contact center, in-stay insights and customer engagement via text/SMS, employee experience, and social — enables your hospitality brand to:

- Exceed expectations with an exceptional brand experience at every touchpoint and stage of the guest experience
- Optimize productivity and empower employees with role-based, actionable insights that delight your guests
- Capitalize on positive guests experiences that influence promoters and build brand loyalty

When exceptional guest experiences are created, you will benefit from: increased online booking conversion, higher booking revenues, and reduced abandonment. As brand loyalty builds, your online reputation will improve, while your NPS and revenue increase, too. All of this occurs when hospitality brands take a holistic view of the guest journey and use a solutions-based platform to connect with guests in real time, maximize their experiences, and ignite and sustain loyalty.

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To learn more about how Medallia empowers hospitality organizations with actionable insights that enable every employee to create exceptional guest experiences, increase bookings, and build brand loyalty, visit https://www.medallia.com/solutions/travel-hospitality.

Meet with a Medallia Expert →

About Medallia

Medallia is the pioneer and market leader in Experience Management. Medallia's award-winning SaaS platform, the Medallia Experience Cloud, leads the market in the understanding and management of experience for customers, employees and citizens. Medallia captures experience signals created on daily journeys in person, digital and IoT interactions and applies proprietary AI technology to reveal personalized and predictive insights that can drive action with tremendous business results. Using Medallia Experience Cloud, customers can reduce churn, turn detractors into promoters and buyers and create in-the-moment cross-sell and up-sell opportunities, providing clear and potent returns on investment. www.medallia.com

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