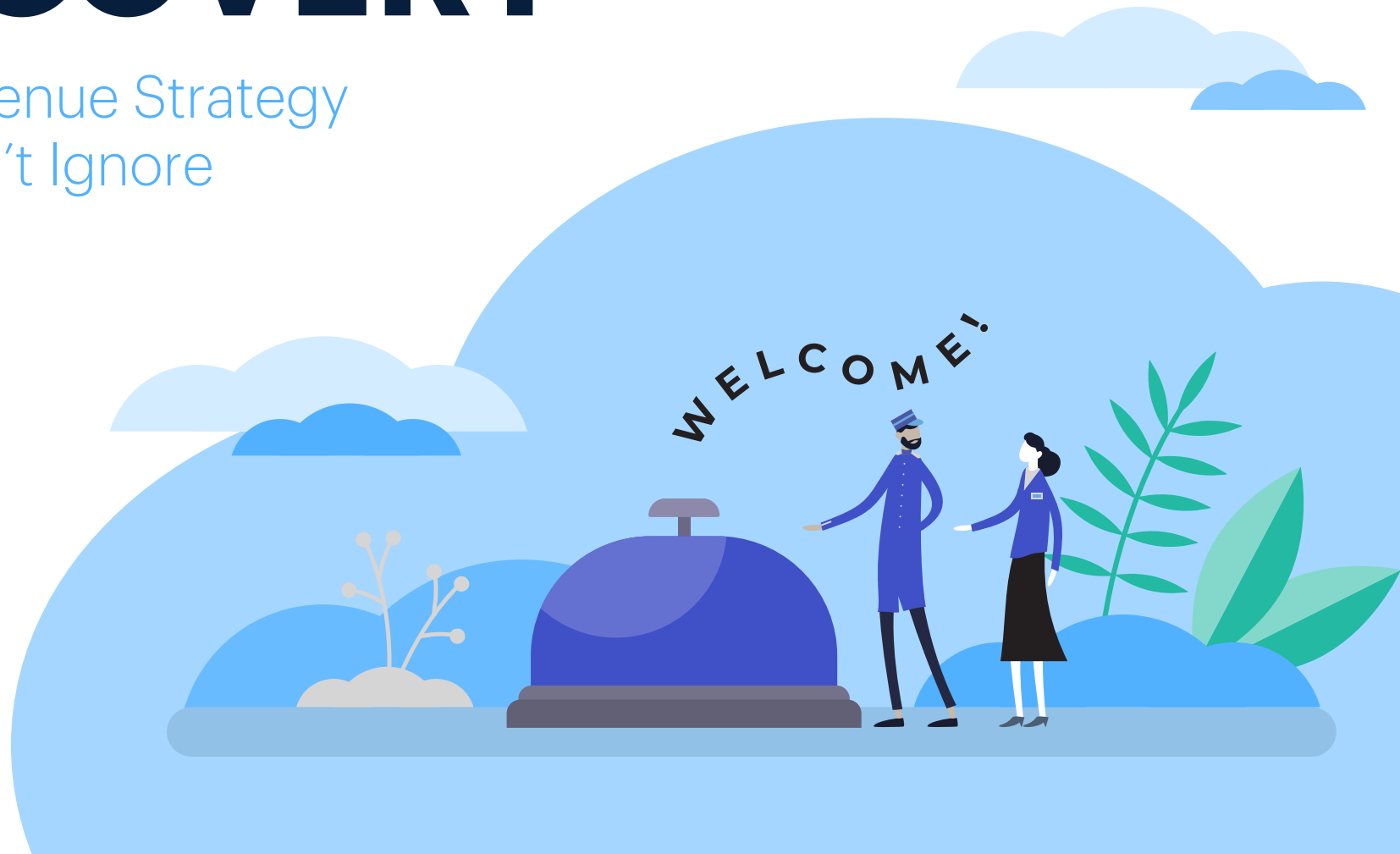


PROACTIVE SERVICE RECOVERY

The Revenue Strategy
You Can't Ignore



Proactive Service Recovery

How to leverage text messaging and blend high tech with high touch to better identify, respond to and recover from issues in real time while guests are still on property.

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Introduction

Why Proactive Service Recovery is a Must

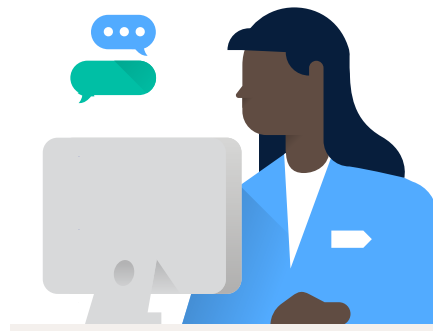
In the age of experience, service is more important than ever. In hospitality, operators work around the clock to maintain and improve the service they provide to keep guests satisfied, and hopefully, loyal.

But a recent consumer research study found that only 25% of guests report all issues that impact their experience, meaning three out of four guests do not. How can hoteliers fix what they don't know is broken? With service more important than ever, the blind spot that spans from the time guests check in to when they check out is an alarming problem for an industry built on providing great experiences.

With hotel industry fundamentals slowing and signs now pointing to the end of the record-breaking growth of the past decade, hoteliers can't afford to sit back and wait for guests to reach out to them and risk service problems turning into bad reviews that hurt business.

Rather, they must become more proactive and develop a service recovery strategy to quickly identify, respond to and resolve those issues while guests are still on property.

By opening the lines of communication and having meaningful conversations with guests throughout their entire stay, you can better anticipate their needs and resolve issues before they lead to negative reviews and bigger problems that affect future guests.



86%

of consumers say they're willing to pay more for superior service over nearby hotels with similar amenities.

51%

of respondents said online reviews "greatly" impact booking decisions.

42%

said they would return to a hotel if it were able to turn a poor experience into a positive one by solving the problem immediately.

Source: Zingle Guest Service Report

Open the Lines of Communication

Communication is the core of exceptional guest service. When you can establish real connections with your guests, you can identify what your business is doing right, and wrong, and set the stage for personal moments that transform an average experience into an unforgettable one.

But how can you reach all of your guests today if they're not coming to the front desk or picking up the phone to call, and you don't have the staff to knock on every door or call every room?

To break through to the quiet majority, hotels must be ready to engage consumers on their terms — when, where and how they want. Today, that means through texting. More than 50% of U.S. homes no longer have a landline (U.S. Health Department), 77% of the population owns a smartphone (Pew Research) and texting is now the most common form of communication for Americans under 50 (Gallup). With digital-native millennials surpassing Baby Boomers as the largest generation in the U.S. in 2019, those percentages continue to grow.

50%

NO LANDLINE

77%

HAVE A
SMARTPHONE

< AGE
50
PREFER
TEXTING

"Hotels must be ready to engage consumers on their terms — when, where and how they want."

"How is it that my landscaping guy who barely uses the computer has a web chat feature that he uses to sell me rocks for my garden but we're a 500-room property commanding \$80 million a year and we can't talk to our customers through the internet," Chris Nelbach, Director of Revenue at La Cantera Resort & Spa in San Antonio said in a recent webinar.

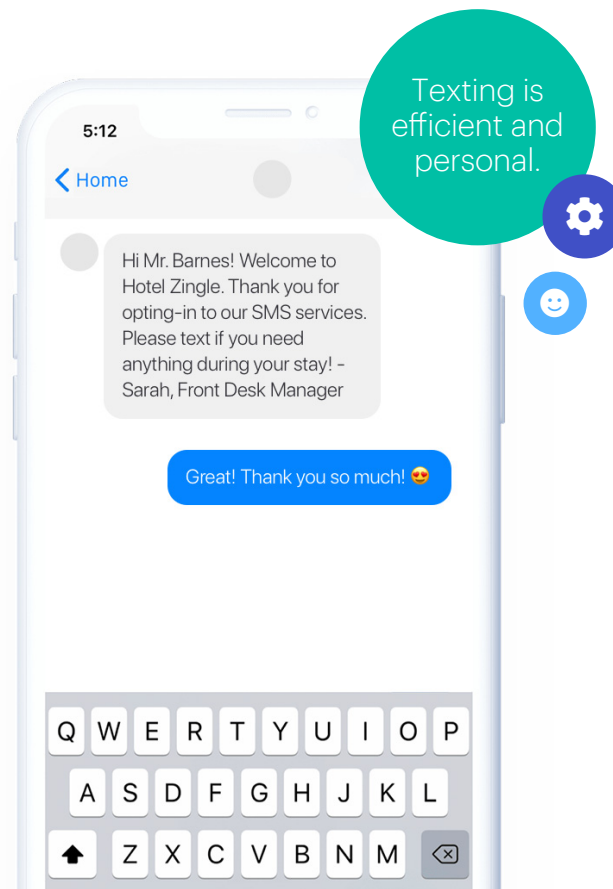
"We knew we had to evolve!"

La Cantera introduced text messaging as a new channel for guests to communicate with the sprawling luxury resort and the results were surprising. Nelbach and staff expected call volumes to decline, but they didn't.

"The guests that were asking us questions and communicating with us through messaging were ones not communicating with us before," said Nelbach, whose resort now exchanges more than 2,000 messages a month with guests. In the first two months after introducing messaging, La Cantera recorded its best ever guest satisfaction scores.

"In the first two months we used Zingle, we had the highest guest scores we ever had."

Texting can't completely replace the more traditional forms of communication, at least in hospitality, where hotels need front-desk staff and guest-experience representatives available at the property and by phone, in addition to a team or tools monitoring social media. But with the right technology, texting can supplement it and provide hotels a far more efficient and personal form of communication the majority of guests crave. It's fast, convenient and happens in real-time, making it the first crucial step to more proactive service.



PRO-TIP:

Send Welcome Messages

Send guests a personalized welcome message and let them know you're available via text for any of their needs during their stay.

[\(See how it can be done HERE\)](#)

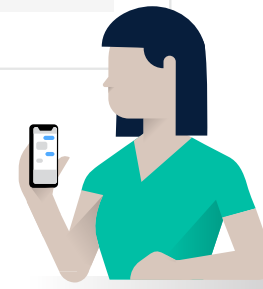
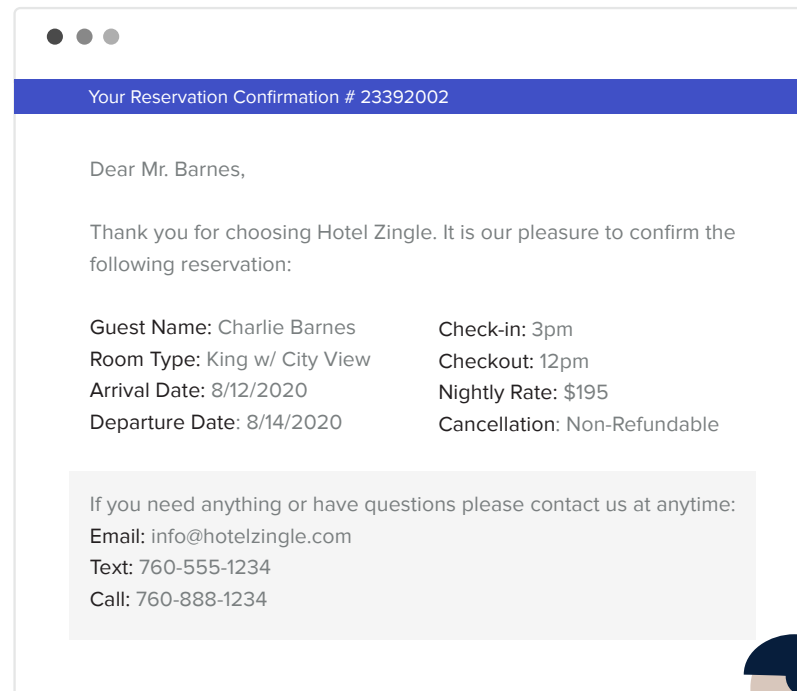
Engage From the Start

By opening new lines of communication, you have the ability to engage guests throughout the entire customer journey, beginning the moment they book.

Booking Confirmation Messages

As an example, you should include details and an introduction to your messaging channel at the time of booking, whether it be on your website, an OTA or even on the phone. Make it clear to guests you're available around the clock to talk and let them know how.

With typical confirmation emails earning high open rates, don't miss the opportunity to again remind guests all the ways you are available to answer their questions or requests.



Pre-Arrival/Welcome Messages

Another way to engage guests before they step foot on your property is by sending a personalized welcome message via text or email. By leveraging the check-in date from the property management system, this can be automated and could include directions, information on check-in times or processes and any relevant services or amenities that may be of interest.

"We send out a pre-arrival message to guests welcoming them to our hotel and let them know right away that they can text this number for anything they need," said Tiaan Homann, Director of Rooms at the Texas A&M Hotel & Conference Center. "It alleviates so many constraints during check-in when guests can request things like a Pack 'n Play or a specific room via text, which allows our staff to fulfill those requests even before the guest arrives at our hotel."

The more information a hotel has about their guests, the more personalized the

communication can be. For example, if you know guests are traveling by air, include information or an offer for shuttle service. If a guest is traveling with small children, send activity recommendations in their welcome message or ask if they need that crib.

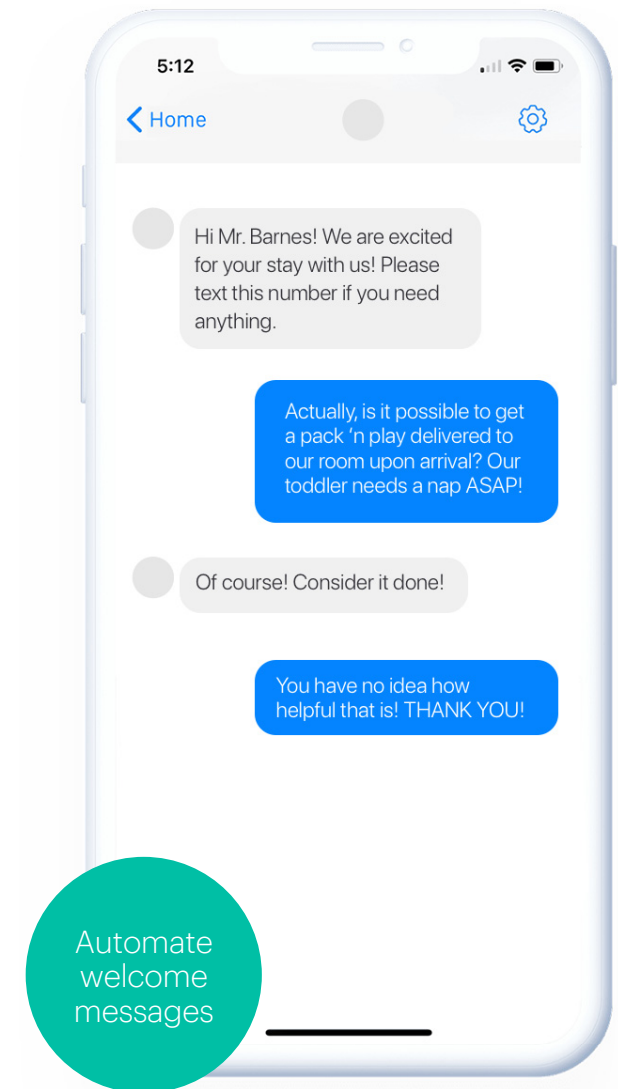
By proactively sending your guests welcome messages and engaging from the start, you can introduce texting as a communication channel and open a conversation that will last through their entire stay.

PRO-TIP:

Welcome Your Guests

Automate a pre-arrival welcome message to your guests based on their check-in date.

[\(See how it can be done HERE\)](#)



Encourage & Welcome Feedback

If superior service drives positive reviews, higher rates, increased bookings and more loyalty, hotels have to know when and where they can improve. Not only is that part of being a good host, but it also can drive significant business results as the consumer research study indicated.

The fact that 75% of guests say they don't report issues affecting their experience makes it extremely difficult for hotels to provide superior service. Consumers today

don't have the time or desire to spend minutes for something that could be answered or resolved in seconds and studies show that today's younger generations have an aversion to face-to-face communication.

In a 2019 guest experience study commissioned by Zingle, 1,100 consumers were asked: **If you don't report issues that impacted your overall guest experience, why is that?**

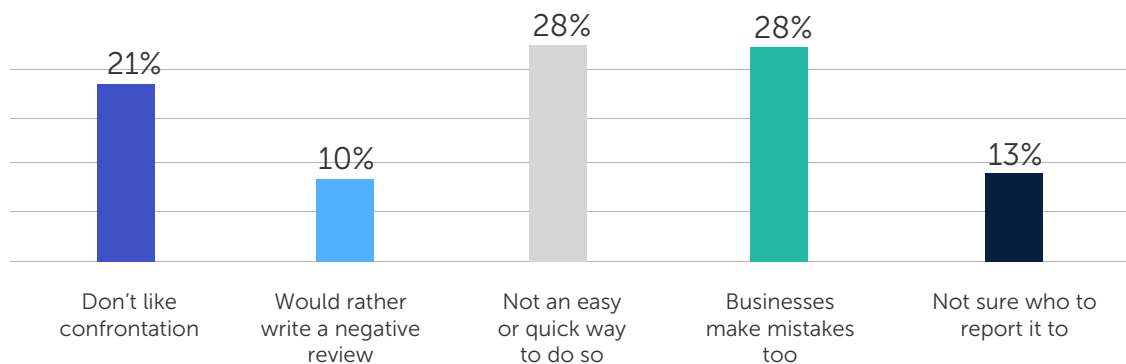


Figure 1

Responses to why guests do not report issues.



of guests say they don't report issues affecting their experience.

Timeliness

In-room survey and comment cards are rarely completed and post-stay email surveys are effective ways to measure and benchmark service and guest satisfaction, but understanding what guests are thinking while on property in real time enables you to improve their experience in the moment.

Convenience

In every face-to-face interaction and phone conversation, ask your guests how they're doing and if they need anything. Make it even simpler for guests to make requests, ask you a question or even lodge a complaint by inviting them to text you. It's easy, fast and non-confrontational — likely why the same consumer survey found that 45% of consumers said they'd prefer reporting issues via SMS text over phone, email and in person, with another 36% saying they'd consider it.

"A lot of people don't like to come up to the front desk, whether they're shy, or we have a long wait," said Sam, a front desk agent at Tenaya Lodge at Yosemite. "It's really easy for them to just text us and let us know what's going on so we can help them directly instead of having them wait."

PRO-TIP:

Checkin with Guests At Least Once During Their Stay

If you don't send a pre-arrival message, or in addition to, send a post-arrival welcome message making sure your guests are happy with their room.

[\(See how it can be done HERE\)](#)



45%

of consumers said they'd prefer to report issues via text than over the phone, email or in-person.

Source: Zingle Guest Service Report

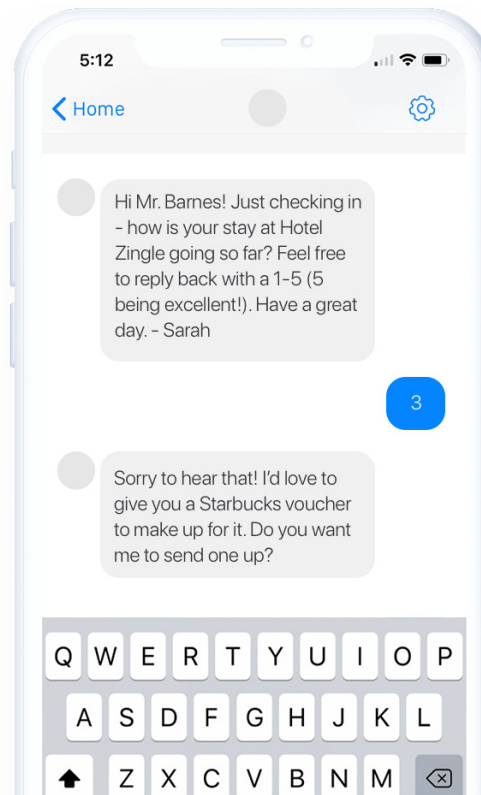
Introduce a Mid-Stay Checkup

Instead of only connecting with guests at check-in and checkout, hotels should introduce a checkup to their standard playbook.

"The instantaneous ability to message a guest a day, two days into their stay and say, 'On a scale of 1-5, how are you enjoying your stay at Tenaya Lodge?' is great. And if they say, 'It's a 2,' and we know they have another two days left, there's your opportunity to take them from being a detractor to a promoter," explained Marcus Story, Guest Path Business Partner, Parks & Resorts Division, Delaware North. "That's the window. Because once they're gone, it's hard to get them back."

He said if you wait until it's too late, you may lose them forever or possibly win them back with a free vacation, but that could be \$1,200 in lost revenue. But when a problem can be corrected before they leave, the resort saves that money and potentially earns another \$1,200 if the guest returns on their own and even more if they tell friends about their great experience or post an online review.

With an intelligent messaging platform synced to a PMS, a mid-stay checkup message can be automatically sent to all guests at the mid-point of their stay, or customized to however many days after check-in, or before checkout as the hotel wishes. With a simple 1 through 5 survey like Tenaya Lodge utilizes, the platform can then alert management when any scores come in at 1, 2 or 3 so the issue can be quickly addressed.



PRO-TIP:

Send a Mid-Stay Survey

Automate a mid-stay checkup survey and ask guests how they're doing.


[\(See how it can be done HERE\)](#)

"Real-Time Feedback is Huge"

Shaun McCaffrey, Program Manager, Resort Operations & Guest Technology at Marriott Vacations Worldwide, says that some of the resort properties he oversees used to try and call all guests mid-stay, but the effort was extremely labor intensive and ineffective because very few guests were in their room or willing to share much information. They now automate mid-stay checkups at the resorts with text messages.

"Real-time feedback is huge," he said. "Not only are the details fresh in the mind of the guest so you can really get an accurate depiction of the issue at hand, but it really allows us to tackle the problem in the moment. Not only does that drive up post survey scores, but it also drives customer loyalty too."

For hotels with shorter length of stays, similar messages could be sent soon after check-in to ask if the room is up to the guest's standards and if they need anything. This is another proactive way to introduce or reinforce the texting option and to show your guests that you care.



New Message

Recipients*

Checked-in Type a name, number, segment, or tag

Message Body*

Hi {{first_name}}! I wanted to be sure you are enjoying your room and have everything you need for an incredible stay. Simply reply to this text if there's anything we can do for you. - Megan, Guest Experience Manager

📎 [] 🖼️ 😊 🕒

Close Reply + Close Reply

Mid-stay checkup message.

Empower Your Staff

Inviting guests to speak freely about their experience and complain about their issues, while arming them with a fast and convenient way like texting, can seem daunting to the hotel's frontline staff, but it shouldn't.

If clear processes and expectations are established from the start and the right technology is deployed, texting will free up time for staff to focus on strategic efforts and more personal interaction with guests. "If a guest has an issue, we need to handle that right away," said Virginia Crowe, VP of Guest Experience at Meruelo Gaming, which owns the Sahara Las Vegas and the Grand Sierra Resort in Reno. "We make sure every team member knows they can use their best discretion to take care of the issue. You have to equip your team with the tools to do it because it can be upsetting to a guest if that front-line team member says, 'I'm sorry, I can't handle this for you, I need to get my manager.'"

If you get the problem, you own it, she says. The old saying that patience is a virtue is no longer valid in today's world, where top brands like Amazon, Uber and Netflix have changed the expectations of consumers. Even in brick-and-mortar businesses, customers don't just expect faster service, they demand it. The longer you make them wait to respond to a question, request or complaint, the greater the chance you won't satisfy them.

"We typically recommend under five minutes as a best practice for response time," said Julie Gamboa, Zingle's Director of Customer Success, who works with hundreds of hotels and resorts and businesses across many different verticals. "Texting is far more immediate than email. Many of our partners automate escalations to management if messages aren't responded to in a set period of time."



PRO-TIP:

Respond Quickly

Respond to texts within **5 minutes** and streamline communications by assigning incoming messages to specific staff members.

(See how it can be done [HERE](#))

Arm Your Team With the Right Tools

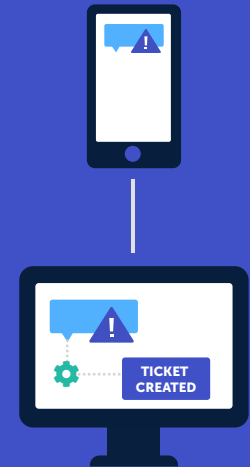
Texting makes it possible to respond quickly, even immediately through artificial intelligence and automations. Sophisticated platforms can automate answers to commonly asked questions without any human support, like “What’s the WiFi password?” or “When does the restaurant open?”

With AI and natural language processing, more complex questions can be understood, answered or escalated, and even other actions triggered automatically. When text messaging can be integrated with other systems, like the PMS or a service optimization solution, automations can be even more powerful and the service response time becomes quicker.

“The integration provided us with guest data and streamlined processes that enable us to provide a quicker and more efficient service,”

said Roland Ivy, a PBX/Instant Service Manager at the InterContinental Hotel Cleveland. “Instead of our front desk having to write down every guest request, and then input it into the ticketing system, all requests are taken care of (through the messaging platform). When our guest sends a text message request, the message gets automatically sent to the right department and the service ticket is created seamlessly.

This improvement in process saved us hours when it comes to fulfilling guest requests and also helped reduce errors and missed requests because everything is done pretty much automatically.”



“When our guest sends a text message request, the message gets automatically sent to the right department and the service ticket is created seamlessly. This improvement in process saved us hours...”

Use High Tech to Provide High Touch

Use Automations to Streamline Processes

Messaging platforms can also help identify opportunities that would benefit from personalized attention, and by automating answers to guest questions and streamlining other tedious processes, staff will have more time to take better care of those guests.

Build Relationships Through Messaging

At the Ridgeline Hotel Estes Park in Colorado, another Delaware North property, a recent example illustrates the door that texting opened to build a deeper relationship with a guest. A family had checked out of the hotel and was on their way to the Denver airport when they realized their son had left his teddy bear in the room. The mom frantically texted and the hotel was able to instantly get in touch with housekeeping, who found the stuffed animal. The hotel texted the mom back, the family was able to turn around, the teddy bear was rescued and the family still made their flight. It all happened in minutes. "To most people, they're like, 'That's not a

big deal.' But to that little kid, that was huge," said Story, from Delaware North. "And I'm assuming to that parent, who was probably going to deal with a kid who was crying all the way back to wherever they were going, it was a big deal."

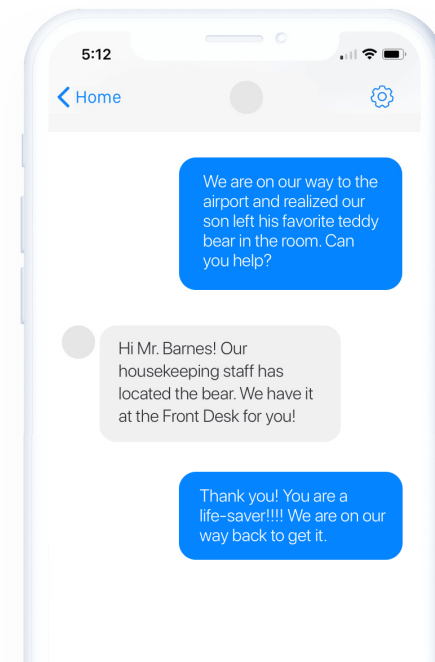
At the KOA Nashville, General Manager Aaron Williamson had a similar experience. On the last day of a multi-night stay at the campground and resort, a woman texted that she wanted to spend an extra night because her husband was not feeling well. Instead of texting back, Williamson called her to say he hoped everything was OK and to make sure her reservation was extended. A little bit later, he texted her to see how things were and to share where the nearest medical facilities were just in case.

She never responded, but a couple days later, Williamson saw a review that called out the exceptional service.

"She said no matter where else she travels in the world, she wants to come back to

Nashville and stay with us because we care," said the General Manager. "I'm glad guests are contacting me when there are issues because it enables me to make it right and improve their experience."

In both examples, the guests weren't likely leaving disappointed in their stays, maybe frustrated by a renegade teddy bear or a sick spouse, but both properties were able to turn what may have been neutral experiences into truly memorable ones.



What is AI, really?

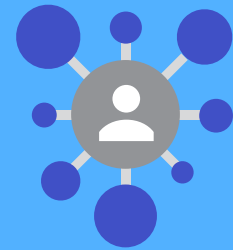
It's hard not to be at least a little numb to the words 'Artificial Intelligence.' Those words, it seems, are used everywhere to describe the latest technology that will change your life. But what is AI, really? It's not automation, but the ability of machines or computers to think, act and learn like a person. By studying how people problem solve and make decisions, computer scientists are able to replicate these processes in the form of "intelligent" software and systems that can be used by machines.

AI and automation are often used interchangeably, but there is a massive difference. Simply put, automation occurs when humans program machines to perform specific tasks without the need for human intervention. While automation is basically machines following orders and rules, AI has much more freedom of "thought." AI is designed to constantly seek patterns and make decisions based on their ability to continuously learn. With AI there is progression, with automation there is predictability.

Programming a chatbot to respond with the WiFi password when a guest asks any question using the term 'WiFi' is basic automation. Understanding the intent and responding correctly or recognizing that is not possible and escalating to a human when a guest asks 'Why is the WiFi so slow and I need more towels' is sophisticated AI.

Natural Language Processing is the subfield of AI that makes that second example possible. NLP is the technology behind a computer or program's ability to understand human speech. The goal is to make sense of human language in a valuable manner. NLP-enabled computers read and hear human speech, then measure it, interpret it and decide what's critical.

Both automation and AI are crucial ways hotels can become more efficient and responsive, but even more powerful when used together.



"AI is not automation, but the ability of machines or computers to think, act and learn like a person."

Analyze & Improve

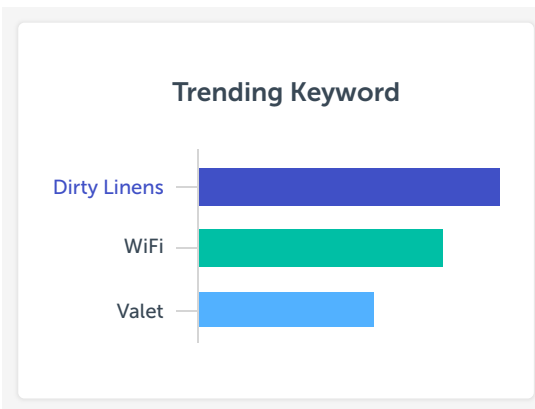
By conversing with guests throughout their entire stay, hotels can not only learn more about each of those guests, but also have the opportunity to identify service trends and recurring issues before they become major problems. Hotel managers should continually review and analyze all guest feedback on a regular basis, looking for ways to improve.

Conversations through texting should be logged and stored by the messaging platform, making analysis even easier. This data can be cross referenced with online ratings and reviews and guest satisfaction survey results and scores to paint a more holistic view of a hotel or brand's overall guest service performance.

Crowe, from Meruelo Gaming, recently noticed a few similar comments threaded across various channels about what guests thought were dirty linens. Crowe and her team were able to trace the comments to a specific area at one of the casinos and the

specific laundry equipment being used. "We found a flat press was dripping rust," she said. "And if you're familiar with laundry equipment, you feed a wet flat sheet into this machine and it goes through and it dries it and presses it and folds it, so when it comes out you can't see the rust stains."

By identifying the issue early, Crowe and Meruelo were able to head off what could have been a far more significant problem and a series of negative online reviews.



Pay Attention to Conversation Insights

More sophisticated messaging platforms provide conversation analytics and real-time insights into how responsive guests are through all messaging channels and how effective staff is in responding to and resolving guest needs. By regularly looking at conversation volumes, median messages per conversation, peak message times, user responsiveness and resolution times by agent, resolution performance by time period, hotels can measure and benchmark service performance and identify areas for improvement.

"Going through all of the closed conversations allows me to see what the guests are saying, what the associates are saying," explained Story from Delaware North. "Are we seeing systemic issues? 'Wait, people were saying this last week, people were saying this last night...' Where do we potentially need to invest capital? If we're seeing the same comment week after week

then that's a conversation that, quite frankly, I need to have with our executive team and say 'Ok, this is a detractor that we have control over. What can we do to correct this?'"



"If we're seeing the same comment week after week then I need to say 'Ok, this is a detractor that we have control over. What can we do to correct this?'"

Conclusion

Mishaps are inevitable in the hospitality industry. No matter how much you plan and prepare, at the end of the day, mistakes can and will happen. But these mistakes don't have to be fatal. In fact, the strategies you put in place to respond to service issues can prove to be your strongest tools for winning over customers and driving revenue.

But when only one out of four guests report those problems, it's imperative hotels do more than just respond. By engaging guests with texting throughout their stay, you can better identify, even anticipate, their needs and those situations that may require attention.

The goal shouldn't be to respond to a guest after they've posted a negative online review, it should be to prevent that negative review from happening in the first place. And with a proactive service recovery strategy, you can turn a neutral or negative experience into a positive one you're happy to see on TripAdvisor.

7 STEPS

to Proactive Service Recovery

- 1 Open The Lines of Communication
- 2 Engage Guests from the Start
- 3 Encourage & Welcome Feedback
- 4 Introduce a Mid-stay Checkup
- 5 Empower Your Staff
- 6 Use High Tech to Provide High Touch
- 7 Analyze & Improve



Explore More Hospitality Resources

- [Zingle Hospitality](#)
- [Guest Service Report: How Service Recovery Affects the Guest Experience](#)
- [How La Cantera Used Messaging to Drive Best Ever Guest Satisfaction Scores](#)
- [How Texas A&M Hotel & Conference Center Improved Efficiency with Messaging](#)
- [All You Had to Do Was Ask: The Power of Proactive Customer Communication](#)
- [How InterContinental Hotel Cleveland Streamlined Guest Service Response](#)
- [How Nashville KOA Combined High Tech with High Touch to Wow Guests](#)
- [What is AI, Really, and Why Does it Matter?](#)

About Medallia Zingle

Medallia Zingle empowers businesses to engage, support and respond to customers in more meaningful and impactful ways. Zingle's guest engagement platform combines artificial intelligence and machine learning with workflow automation and mobile messaging, allowing brands to easily deliver exceptional customer experiences in real time. Leading brands across different verticals, including hospitality, food & beverage, retail, and more, use Zingle to increase efficiency, improve operations and delight their customers. Find out more at zingle.com.

Contact Email: sales@zingleme.com Call: 877.946.4536 Text: 858.877.9200

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