

Using Guest Reviews to Pave the Path to Greater Engagement

Prepared by **Atmosphere Research Group**

Guest Reviews And Review Websites Are Fundamentally Important



Hotel Engagement Is The First Step To Success

Growing supply. Brand fragmentation. New guest source markets. Evolving guest expectations.

The global hotel industry is full of challenges. Against this landscape, smart hotel executives know their marketing must be more relevant and compelling to appeal to distracted consumers. A primary way to achieve this is for hotels to encourage guests to interact – or engage – with the property, and for the hotel to engage with guests as well.

To better understand the relationship between hotel engagement and performance, Atmosphere Research Group, an independent travel industry research firm, analyzed TripAdvisor data from nearly 12,000 properties in the review website's top 25 hotel markets with the most traffic around the world. The goal of the project was to quantify how a hotel's TripAdvisor engagement can help improve its business performance. Atmosphere also interviewed executives from four global hotel chains that leverage TripAdvisor services to successfully engage with their guests.

The Four Shared Characteristics of Highly Engaged Hotels

While hotels may perform various tasks to engage guests, Atmosphere’s analysis shows “highly engaged” hotels on TripAdvisor share the following four traits:

ONE
Registering and verifying as the owner of a property

By registering in the TripAdvisor Management Center and verifying its relationships with the property, a hotel’s management team takes ownership of the property’s TripAdvisor page. By maintaining and updating their TripAdvisor listing, they can confirm the details on the page are accurate, which helps increase travelers’ trust and interest in the property.

TWO
Publishing 10 or more hotel-supplied management photos

This is a clear case where “more is better.” Hotels have a business responsibility to present themselves and their guest experience as accurately as possible. Management photos do this extremely well and are an opportunity for owners to showcase their properties as they would want guests to see them.

THREE
Responding to at least 25% of its TripAdvisor guest reviews

Not every review requires a response, but it’s important that some reviews do get the acknowledgement they deserve from hotel management. There’s a good reason for this. Management Responses can help shift guest attitudes about the hotel – and in quite a considerable manner. Why? Because these responses are a person-to-person connection. Atmosphere Research shows, worldwide, that travelers who write positive or negative reviews appreciate receiving Management Responses to their comments (see Figure 1). Plus, travelers who wrote reviews said Management Responses would encourage them to return to the property (see Figure 2).

FOUR
Make sure their direct contact information is available

Hotels that subscribe to TripAdvisor Business Listings are able to “complete” their TripAdvisor listings by showing three direct contact points, such as a phone number, website URL and email address. This enables hotel owners to make contact information conveniently available to travelers as they’re searching for hotels on TripAdvisor. The Business Listings “Special Offer” feature allows hotels to improve their visibility on TripAdvisor by presenting travelers with promotions, including packages and offers that may be available exclusively via the hotel’s website. By using Business Listings to publish their contact information and promotions, hotels position themselves to increase both their exposure on TripAdvisor and capture more bookings through their own distribution channels.

By using Business Listings, hotels position themselves to increase both their exposure on TripAdvisor and capture more bookings through their own distribution channels.

FIGURE 1
Percent of Hotel Guests Who Appreciated Receiving A Management Response ¹

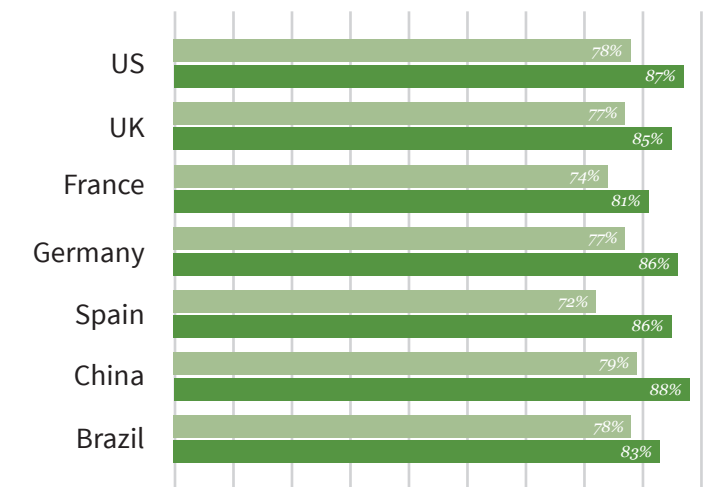
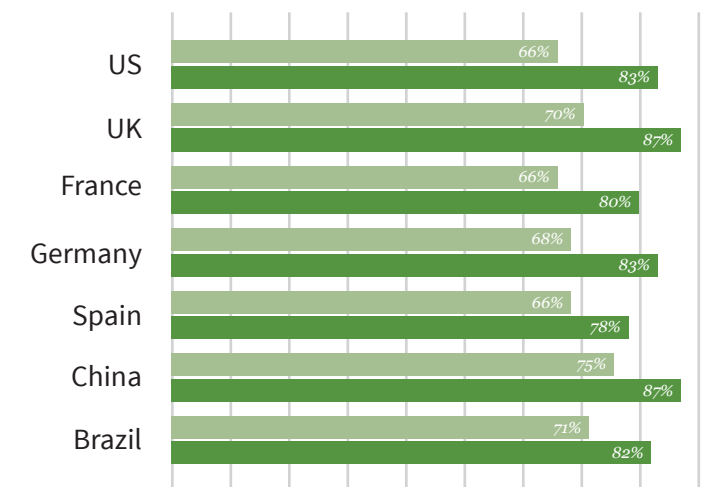


FIGURE 2
Percent of Hotel Guests Who Would Consider Returning to a Hotel If They Received an ‘Appropriate’ Management Response ¹



■ Wrote Positive Review ■ Wrote Negative Review

Highly Engaged Hotels Enjoy Better Performance On TripAdvisor

Atmosphere's independent analysis of hotels on TripAdvisor decisively shows how a greater level of hotel engagement translates into elevated levels of engagement by travelers. One stunning fact tangibly illustrates the value of hotels managing their TripAdvisor engagement to the fullest: highly engaged hotels generate nearly four times more page views than other hotels on TripAdvisor (see *Figure 4*). Our analysis also revealed that highly engaged hotels:

Have higher market visibility

A vital metric that hotels use to measure their success on TripAdvisor is where they rank within their local market, known as the Popularity (or "POP") ranking. The POP ranking is based primarily on the quality, quantity, and recency of TripAdvisor reviews for each hotel in a city. The average non-engaged hotel ranks in the 41st percentile in its market, meaning it may not be very visible to most potential travelers. The POP rankings for highly-engaged hotels, in contrast, were 63% higher, placing them in the 67th percentile – meaning they could be seen by at least two of every three travelers searching that market (see *Figure 5*).

Double their page-views by publishing 10 or more pictures

Good quality photography connects with increasingly visually-focused consumers. Hotels that publish 10 or more management-provided photos generate 2.2 times more page views on their TripAdvisor listings compared to hotels with nine or fewer photos (see *Figure 6*). Clearly, there is a compelling relationship and payback between the number of hotel-supplied photos uploaded to TripAdvisor and traveler engagement.

Are able to drive more revenue

A basic element to measuring the value of a business partner is its products' abilities to help generate revenue for its clients. Business Listings works harder for highly engaged TripAdvisor hotel subscribers by producing 30% to 40% more engagement with revenue-driving products (see *Figure 7*). For example, hotels that use Business Listings to list their website URLs and are highly engaged are able to drive more traffic from TripAdvisor directly to their own websites, where the traveler can continue to learn about the hotel, subscribe to its email and, if so inclined, make a reservation.

FIGURE 4
Highly Engaged Hotels Generate Nearly 4x More Page Views Than Non-Engaged Hotels²

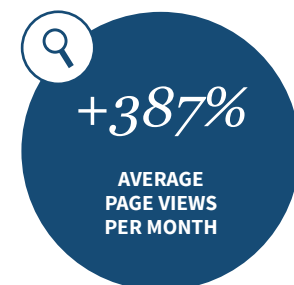


FIGURE 5
Highly Engaged Hotels Have Higher "POP" Rankings Than Non-Engaged Hotels²

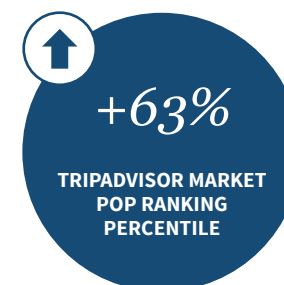


FIGURE 6
Hotels That Upload 10+ Photos On TripAdvisor See Traveler Engagement More Than Double²

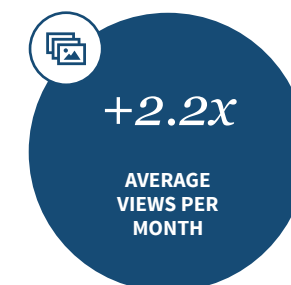


FIGURE 7
Highly Engaged Hotels Produce More Engagement With Revenue-Driving Products²



Successful Hotels Know Review Collection Plays A Decisive Role In Guest Engagement

Hotels Must Continuously Ask, Review, Measure And Improve

Every guest is unique. So is every stay. Regardless of the type or location of the hotel, the best hotel managers are passionate about providing the best possible experience to each guest. A focused, ongoing commitment to serving the guest – against a background of intense competition, an increasingly global customer base, and growing guest empowerment – drives visionary hotel managers to seek guest input at every opportunity and to use that input to continuously improve their businesses.

The most dedicated hotel managers seek feedback on their hotels across each stage of a guest's stay. After collecting the information, successful managers and their colleagues review the feedback, measure the results against relevant metrics, act to strengthen their advantages, and correct any problems. The continuous pace of these interactions results in a "virtuous circle" of two-way engagement between guests and hotels (see *Figure 8*). When well-planned and executed, the result of this "virtuous circle" is a hotel highly attuned to its guests' insights and nimble in its ability to respond and act on feedback as required.

Visionary hotel managers seek guest input at every opportunity and use that input to continuously improve their businesses.



FIGURE 8
*The "Virtuous Circle"
of Guest Engagement*

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Hotels Must Systematically Encourage More Fresh Reviews

In a world where people use social media to continuously share their opinions, it may seem odd to say that hotels need to take steps to encourage guests to share feedback about their stays. And yet that is exactly what is required.

Guest reviews are well-established – TripAdvisor is now 15 years old, and is home to more than 250 million traveler reviews and opinions. Every minute, every day, an average of 160 contributions are posted to the site. A crucial, and effective, part of guests’ interactions with hotels comes from the reviews they share that are a part of “the voice of the customer.” Reviews also matter to future guests, and influence their booking choices (see *Figure 9*).

But did you know that the “freshness” of a review also matters? Atmosphere’s global traveler research shows guests consider reviews published within 90 days to be more credible than older reviews (see *Figure 10*). By publishing the five most recent reviews for each property on its website, Shangri-La’s VP-Digital Marketing, Michael Leong stated “we’re able to keep our website content fresh, keep more of our website users in the channel, and improve our website booking conversion rates.”

FIGURE 9
Reviews Influence Guest Booking Behaviour Worldwide ¹

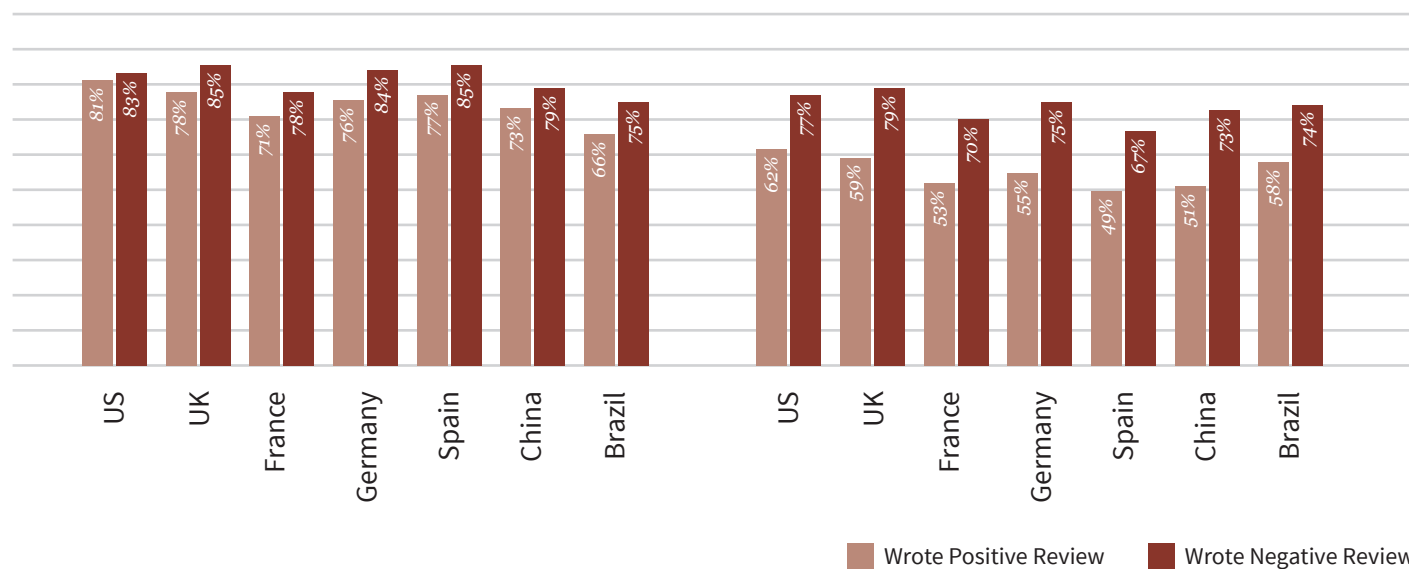


FIGURE 10
Guests Consider More Recent Reviews To Be More Credible ¹

More, Fresh Guest Reviews Can Help Elevate Hotel Visibility On TripAdvisor

Hotels face the challenge of trying to obtain reviews from as many guests as possible. Guest satisfaction surveys, which are very helpful in providing insight about performance in specific functional areas, traditionally have not supported reviews. Hotels thus miss out on the opportunity to benefit from the additional feedback, both good and bad, a guest may have that can only be provided by collecting, reading, analyzing, and acting on guest reviews.

Hotels want the benefit from reviews without sacrificing efficiency or losing valuable guest satisfaction survey insights. Hotels also know they must make the review-writing process easy and effortless to increase guest participation. Javier Carazo, Senior Vice President, Operations and Quality, NH Hotel Group, said it best: “If you put a focus on getting reviews, you will see the positive results. You need to make it easy for guests to post their reviews.”

Understanding this, TripAdvisor has created a number of ways to help hotel managers encourage their guests to share their feedback, and is continually looking for ways to enhance its review collection offering. One product, primarily used by hotel chains, is the Review Collection Platform (RCP). RCP enhances hotels’ abilities to systematically collect guest reviews by integrating its ability to proactively solicit guest reviews into existing customer communications such as guest satisfaction surveys or post-checkout emails. The reviews are collected via a hosted form and the content is seamlessly pushed to TripAdvisor, where the review goes through TripAdvisor’s standard moderation process before being published.

Other tools include Review Express, a self-service email marketing tool for independent properties to encourage guests to write a review, and a suite of review collection “widgets” that hotel owners can add to their own websites.

“If you put a focus on getting reviews, you will see the positive results. You need to make it easy for guests to post their reviews.”



JAVIER CARAZO
Senior Vice President,
Operations and Quality,
NH Hotel Group

“TripAdvisor’s Review Collection Platform enhances hotels’ abilities to systematically collect guest reviews.”

Systematic Review Collection has a Clear Positive Impact

We also examined hotel properties that had implemented RCP as a way to encourage guest reviews. We learned that activating a systematic review collection system has a clear, positive, and directly correlated impact on the number of reviews a hotel generates each month. Atmosphere’s analysis concluded that highly engaged hotels that use RCP:

Generate substantially more guest reviews

Looking across all users of RCP in major markets, review volume jumped more than 83% at properties that received fewer than 10 reviews per month before activating RCP – extremely helpful to these hotels, since more, and fresher, reviews matter to guests and can help increase their market rankings (see *Figure 11, right*). Even properties generating higher-levels of pre-RCP reviews showed an increase in reviews of more than 30% per month, showing that the value of RCP extends beyond just the least-reviewed hotels.

FIGURE 12
RCP Helps Generate Noticeably More Page Views ²



Receive 40% more page views

Page views for highly engaged hotels that use RCP soared 40% from highly engaged hotels that didn’t use RCP (see *Figure 12*). The good news doesn’t stop here. The combination of receiving more reviews and higher page views may help a hotel improve its market POP rankings as well. As previously discussed, highly engaged hotels’ average market POP ranking was in the 67th percentile. With RCP, this climbed to the 74th percentile. This means a hotel may be visible to three in four travelers exploring its market.

FIGURE 13
RCP Boosts Clicks From TripAdvisor to Their Websites ²



Drive more traffic to all the hotel’s channels

Highly engaged hotels that use RCP and subscribe to Business Listings stand to benefit from noticeably better revenue-driving performance. For example, the highly engaged properties using RCP saw their Business Listings clicks to their hotel websites increase 25% compared to the hotels that did not use RCP (see *Figure 13*). The resulting metasearch click-through volumes also showed significant improvement compared to the highly engaged hotels that did not use RCP (see *Figure 14*).

FIGURE 14
RCP Helps Highly Engaged Hotels Generate More CPC Clicks ²

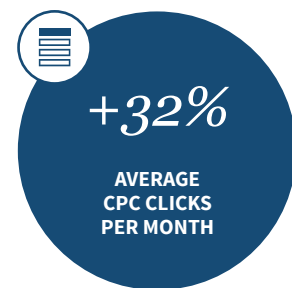
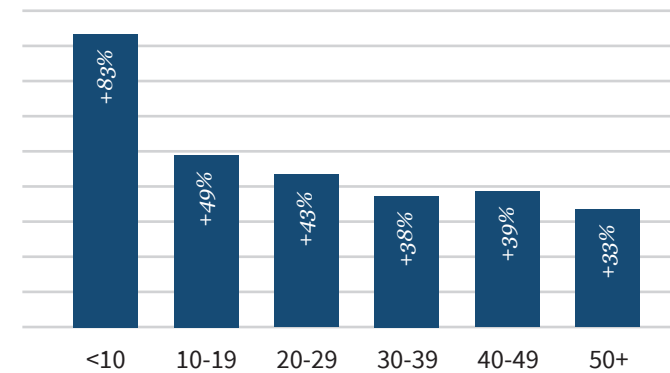


FIGURE 11
Changes in Reviews Collected Per Month Post-RCP Activation ²



“We’re able to keep our website content fresh, keep more of our website users in the channel, and improve our website booking conversion rates.”



MICHAEL LEONG
VP-Digital Marketing,
Shangri La Hotels & Resorts



Guest Reviews Are A Strategic Tool

Though hotels may have stories they want to hear from their guests, reviews tell hotels the stories they need to hear. Reviews are an invaluable source of real-time market research from the most credible possible source: the hotel's guests. Wyndham's Dan Olsen says its guests "see value in reviews," which is why the hotel group publishes "the good, the bad, and the ugly [reviews]" on its websites.

As Atmosphere interviewed hotel executives about guest engagement for this report, it was clear how guest reviews strategically serve hotels in several ways. Reviews allow hotels to become more transparent and accessible, identify and prioritize areas for improvement, and help hotels enhance their guest service.

"People are out there talking about your hotels. So join the conversation, whether to say thank you for a compliment or acknowledge a problem."



JACKIE ASTLEFORD
Senior Director,
E-Commerce, Carlson
Rezidor Hotel Group

"We used to charge for Wi-Fi, but by reading guest reviews we learned it was a basic demand to not pay for it. As a result, we changed to offering free Wi-Fi."



JAVIER CARAZO
Senior Vice President,
Operations and Quality,
NH Hotel Group

"Customers are brutally honest. We have made some operational changes, such as changing both our breakfast offerings and breakfast operations as a result of the reviews we've received using TripAdvisor."



DAN OLSEN
Senior Director,
Customer Experience,
Wyndham Hotel Group

In-Line Guest Reviews Provide Added Transparency About The Hotel Experience And Boost Bookings

Travelers demand convenient, efficient, and comprehensive online travel shopping experiences, especially during the key "moments of truth" within the booking process. In-line reviews allow hotels to fulfill these expectations in several ways that contribute to both more satisfied guests – and happier CFOs.

As well as being published on TripAdvisor, hotels that use RCP may choose to publish reviews on relevant pages on their own websites, such as property descriptive pages and within the booking path. These in-line reviews further elevate hotels' integrity with travelers since, according to Shangri-La's Michael Leong, "Transparency leads to credibility."

In-line reviews on hotel website pages also improve hotels' digital channels' competitive effectiveness against third-party intermediaries, such as online travel agencies, by providing helpful information in the booking path that a traveler can use to determine whether a hotel is right for a particular trip. As Dan Olsen, Senior Director, Customer Experience, Wyndham Hotel Group, observes, "Online travel agencies have been publishing reviews on their websites for years. We knew we had to offer customer ratings and reviews to win back [channel] share."

In-line reviews also let hotels provide helpful information to guests at the time and point when they are getting ready to book – which may produce higher conversion rates.

Displaying hotel reviews inline lets hotels provide helpful information to guests at the time and point they are ready to book.

Conclusions

By committing themselves to the “virtuous circle” of ongoing guest engagement, highly engaged hotels see tangibly better marketing and guest satisfaction results. At every level, these hotels commit themselves to continuous improvement that results from the following efforts.

Active engagement with their TripAdvisor listings

It’s clear that the most successful hotels on TripAdvisor are highly engaged with their listings. As part of the foundation of their TripAdvisor engagement, hoteliers at highly engaged properties start by registering and verifying their TripAdvisor listings, and make sure they keep their listings accurate and up-to-date. Hoteliers at highly engaged properties upload 10 or more photos – and monitor them to keep the hotel’s visual content fresh and appealing. They respond to a minimum of 25% of their guest reviews. And they make it easy for travelers to get in touch by publishing their direct contact information via a Business Listings subscription. The end result: a hotel that sees tangibly better guest engagement and performance on TripAdvisor – increased market POP rankings, more page views, and more traffic to their websites from Business Listings click-through activity.

Systematically driving more reviews

Reviews supply a critical part of the content that makes up “the voice of the customer.” But even the finest hotels know they can’t rely on their busy guests to write and post reviews on their own. That’s why the most highly engaged hotels on TripAdvisor use review collection tools like RCP to proactively invite guests to submit reviews. RCP’s easy-to-use format makes it simple and straightforward for a traveler to write a review. Once submitted and moderated, RCP seamlessly publishes the review to the hotel’s TripAdvisor listing and, if the hotel wants, to its digital channels as well. By generating more reviews, RCP can help highly engaged hotels further elevate their market POP rankings and generate even more guest engagement with their TripAdvisor pages, compared to hotels that don’t use RCP.

Incorporating feedback into operations to improve guest satisfaction

Every hotel professional wants their guests to be satisfied with their stays. The best hotel managers couple their – hopefully continuous – guest review content with review monitoring efforts, and use their guest reviews as strategic sources of feedback. They will share the information with team members, and use it to identify and prioritize areas for guest experience improvement. The results: Happier, more satisfied, more loyal guests and a better bottom line. And what do happier, more satisfied guests also do? Write better reviews – which, in turn, may capture other travelers’ attention on TripAdvisor and encourage them to book with the hotel.





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¹ Base: Online leisure hotel guests. Sources: Atmosphere Research Group's US Travel Online Survey, Q1 2015; UK, France, Germany, and Spain Online Travel Surveys, Q4 2014; China and Brazil Travel Online Studies, Q3 2014. © Atmosphere Research Group, LLC. ² Source: Atmosphere Research Group analysis of TripAdvisor data © TripAdvisor, LLC