



HOTEL MANAGEMENT

THE LEADING HOSPITALITY NEWS AUTHORITY SINCE 1878 | Vol. 231 No. 3 | March 2014

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HOTEL MANAGEMENT (ISSN 2158-2122) is published monthly (except two issues in June - 13 issues yearly), by Questex LLC, 757 Third Ave, 5th Floor, New York, NY 10017. Subscription rates: \$68 for 1 year, \$107 for 2 years in the United States & Possessions, \$91 for 1 year, \$130 for 2 years in Canada and Mexico; all other countries \$146 for 1 year, \$207 for 2 years. Single copies (prepaid only): \$5.50 in the United States; \$6.50 in Canada and Mexico; \$12.50 all other countries. Back issues, if available are \$10 in the U.S., \$12 in Mexico and Canada, \$24 for all other countries. International subscriptions will be subjected to \$82.50 per annual order for air-expedited service. Include \$7.15 per order plus \$2.20 per additional copy for U.S. postage and handling. Periodicals postage paid at New York, NY 10199 and additional mailing offices. POSTMASTER: Please send address changes to Hotel Management, P.O. Box 1267, Skokie, IL 60076-8267. Canadian G.S.T. number: 840 033 278 RT001. Publications Mailing Agreement Number 40017597. Printed in the U.S.A. Copyright 2018 Questex LLC. All rights reserved.

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Survey says: You're doing it wrong

BY DAVID EISEN
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I'm the kind of guy who is happy to help out when I can. A frequent traveler, if convenient and available, I fly JetBlue, which I think trumps the air experience of most other carriers. Unless my DirecTV is malfunctioning, I'm a happy camper—especially after my fill of Terra Chips and Skeeter Nut Free cookies. If you were to gauge my happiness at disembarkation, it would be five stars all the way. But by the time I roll my suitcase through the terminal and hop into an Uber, the feeling, exuberance and memory have dried up.

A few days later, a survey from JetBlue will pop into my inbox, asking me to rate my trip. Like I said, I try and assist where I can, so I'll inevitably open the survey and begin to respond to the Likert Scale questions and such. I'll answer down to the bottom of the page, click "Next" and be brought to another page, with more questions. By this time, I'm already fatigued and thinking about what to have for dinner. My focus and attention waste away and before I know it, I close out of the survey well before finishing it—a lost opportunity for the airline and three minutes of my time I am not getting back.

This anecdote proves my point: No survey, especially those focused on customer service and experience, should be 30 questions long. In fact, the delivery of surveys needs a complete overhaul, and one company, I believe, is leading the disruption.

Hotels are as guilty as airlines in their survey approach. They are usually emailed, often laborious and not timely. Hotels pride themselves on guest satisfaction scores—hopefully good ones—so obtaining them should not be such a challenge. Hotels want happy customers and the challenge



is how to know what customers are feeling and how to establish accountability for the customer experience. The solution is real-time sentiment collection, which not only can gauge customers' feelings, it can also improve employees and overall operations.

HappyOrNot is a Finnish company that makes freestanding battery-powered customer-satisfaction terminals. The toy-like terminals have four big push buttons (image below) atop them: a dark green smiley one, a light green and less smiley one, a coral-colored frowny one and a dark red and very frowny button. The genius is in its simplicity: A customer,

after, for example, a retail experience, upon leaving the store can lodge his or her state of satisfaction by hitting one of the buttons, all without breaking stride. The record is instant, in the moment, which makes it all that more accurate of a person's true feelings. All responses are anonymous, but are time-stamped. This can ultimately help a store or property understand why, for instance, there are more frowns than smiley faces at 2 p.m. in the afternoon.

Among other locations, HappyOrNot terminals currently reside at Heathrow Airport and at Levi's Stadium, home of the San Francisco 49ers. These colorful contraptions need to be in hotels, in myriad areas. In the lobby, imagine a guest at check-out sharing his or her attitude at exit; in a restaurant, a diner expressing his or her contentment with the meal; in a gym, a post-workout expression of satisfaction. In the last example, a spurt of frowns at 10:30 a.m. could signify an unclean gym. The applications are many.

Hotels and hotel brands constantly crave feedback. I submit that the old-school method of attaining it is outdated and unreliable. Moreover, installing simple technology, like that from HappyOrNot, will lead to higher net promoter scores. In fact, the newest terminal from HappyOrNot should collect reactions to that very question: "How likely is it that you would recommend our hotel to a friend or colleague?"

The answer to that can make a GM happy, or not. **HM**

CORRECTION

In the February Up Front column ("I need you. I hate you."), in the sixth paragraph, a reference to "hotel developers" should have read "hotel franchisors."



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