

GuestCentric helps hoteliers navigate social media

Large hotels and hotel chains leverage technology extensively to distribute their inventory, but it's not so easy for smaller properties. For the manager of a 25- to 150-room hotel, technology can be expensive. It's often difficult to use. It might require special knowledge.

Pedro Colaco, president and chief executive officer of GuestCentric, acknowledges that the "word of mouth revolution" can be a scary thing for hotel managers.

In Focus

They are told that user-generated content is a minefield that must be monitored. They are told they must play on Facebook.

And what the heck is this Twitter thing, anyway?

But there is an up side. Colaco notes that half of the top hotels on TripAdvisor are independent properties.

"If you do your job right online, with a good offering and the right positioning, and if you create a community, you can compete," he said. "You might not be No. 1 on Google, but you can compete."

GuestCentric spent two years developing a platform with a booking engine that is integrated with social media, along with tools to enable hoteliers to engage new customers easily.

"It's an entire system, including a mini-CRM system," Colaco said.

It allows small and independ-

ent properties to use tools like Twitter to turn social media from a threat to an advantage.

While the tools are helpful to the hotelier, "we built it from the get-go thinking about the guest," Colaco said.

"It enables the hotel to treat guests better and in a more personal way."

The platform's "Twitter Center" allows the hotelier to "listen in on what people are saying and engage them in a meaningful way," he said.

For example, a hotel manager in Bangor, Maine, searches Twitter for people planning a trip to Bangor, and finds someone planning such a trip on a weekend in May.

He can then send a tweet to that user with a link to a special "Twitter-only" promotion for those dates.

The promotion opens up with a booking link — no codes or vouchers are necessary.

The hotelier does not need to know anything about Twitter and its peculiar language of hash marks and "at" signs — the platform will take care of that.



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If the customer books the promotion, he and the hotelier are now following each other on Twitter.

So when the traveler is on his way to the hotel and tweets that he just had a horrible flight, the hotelier can let him know that a cold beer is waiting for him when he arrives at the hotel.



Pedro Colaco

The guest is pleased and impressed, so he tweets to all his followers that he found a terrific hotel in Bangor.

The GuestCentric platform takes on some of the heavy lifting to make this happen.

"If you want to be active on Twitter, you need a minimum number of tweets," Colaco said. The platform enables the hotelier to schedule them — dinner specials tweeted at noon, for example — so that there is a steady flow of news. "There's a very small learning curve," Colaco said.

While social media can seem overwhelming, "the power of the community can't be ignored," Colaco said. People are talking about your property anyway, he said. "You need to take a more proactive approach, do more meaningful things."