

Rediscovering Your Brand Story After the Crisis

Think About How Guest Needs Have Changed



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COVID-19 has been the story for the past year. The pandemic has gravely affected the hospitality industry. Hotels did their best to weather the storm, quickly putting into place disinfecting procedures, contactless transactions and other measures to keep guests safe. Such precautions have become table stakes for doing business.

As the world slowly emerges and the industry opens its doors to more travelers, it's time for hotel brands to shift the story to why customers should choose their brand for reasons that extend far beyond pandemic-related protections.

Travelers Are Ready. Are You?

People are increasingly eager to travel after a year of restrictions. Findings from the American Express Global Travel Trends Study reveal that 78% of respondents indicate wanting to travel in 2021 to relieve the stresses from 2020. According to the annual Vacation Deprivation study from Expedia, Americans plan to take an extra week of vacation this year.

There clearly is pent-up demand, yet that shouldn't give brands a false sense of security that business will come flooding back. People have choices, so your brand must stand out—and it must stand out in a meaningful way.



Customers will go elsewhere if you disappoint them through underwhelming experiences or if you have not brought back important services that were cut because of COVID-19. Be careful to not view service cuts as a way to bolster the bottom line long term. Only keep those pandemic-inspired changes if they improve the overall guest experience.

For instance, QR code-based menus that make it easy for customers to quickly scan and review a restaurant's menu or touchless check-in options to help guests access their room faster.

Think About How Travelers' Needs Have Changed

As the industry rebounds, now is a critical time to find ways to recommit to your brand story and look for new ways to serve the changing needs of guests.

Here are some thought-starters.

If your brand is primarily focused on business travelers, the days of taking business trips for granted may be over. The nature of work may never be the same as Zoom can close the gaps in distance. Companies have adapted and seen productivity without travel. However, people have a desire to get together—they want and need in-person interaction.

So let's say your brand story centers around keeping people focused so they can get business done. With a fresh eye, look at how well your hotel's spaces support impromptu discussions between clients or colleagues. Consider providing comfortable semi-private seating pods and collaboration spaces along with mobile food ordering and delivery options so conversations can continue without interruption. Make use of outdoor spaces for people to meet or even develop some walking paths so guests can walk and talk. Making deliberate decisions to serve this human need demonstrates you understand how profoundly things have changed and can make your brand a "doing business" destination.

As much as business travel is changing, leisure travel is changing, too. People were largely homebound and there was ample time to reflect on what's really important. Many have emerged with a new mindset and greater appreciation for getting away beyond their four walls. Interestingly, the American Express study mentioned above found a rise in what they called a "digital nomad" lifestyle. More than half of respondents (54%) said that the freedom and flexibility of being able to live and work while traveling the globe is more appealing now than it was prior to the pandemic. It's exciting to consider the idea of traditional travel seasons could be a thing of the past.

Think about how your brand can help people to enjoy their wanderlust while also offering them places and spaces to get work done. For instance, providing guests small, quiet, professional-



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looking environments for a Zoom call outside their guest room, especially if they are traveling with their spouse or children. Or think creatively about reworking unused spaces that could be shared workplaces for guests. These spaces should be thoughtfully designed, not makeshift, to reinforce your particular brand story. For instance, if your brand story is focused on wellness, consider how the right ergonomics, natural light and greenery can enrich these work environments. Stock the areas with healthy treats and brain-boosting juices so people can stay focused, get their work done and get back to enjoying their leisure time.

Open the Door to a New Era for Your Brand

This year rocked the hospitality industry at its core. Now that we're finally emerging from the pandemic, it is time to reignite your brand. Travelers are going to be more discerning because they view travel through a different lens. So think about how you will capture their attention—and once you do, how will you keep them wanting to return.

Here are three steps to get started:

1. Keep your finger on the pulse of how travelers' needs are changing. Conduct an honest assessment of where your brand is today in serving those needs.
2. Get creative about what you offer. Look for ways to uniquely address those changing traveler needs in ways that are meaningful to your customer and strengthen your brand story.
3. Focus team members on the true purpose of why you offer what you offer. Remind them daily of the important role they play in delivering your brand story.

We've all been through a lot this past year. You've made it through the worst of times. Seize the opportunity to rediscover your brand story.

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