



The Hotelier's Guide to Social Proof Marketing

**Leveraging Word-of-Mouth
Marketing in the Digital Age
for More Bookings**





Thanks for downloading!

Whether it's gaining trust online, or getting your guests to do your marketing for you, it all comes down to social proof.

Who is this eBook for?

Hotel Owners
General Managers
Tour Operators
Activity Providers

In this short eBook you will learn:

- ▶ What social proof is
- ▶ What the different types of social proof are and why each is useful
- ▶ How to collect social proof easily
- ▶ What to do with social proof once you have it

Why does your business need social proof?



Builds trust

People trust other travellers' opinions far more than they trust a hotel's own description of itself.

Adds credibility

Social proof from experts such as travel bloggers shows people your hotel is as good as you say it is.

Validates buying decisions

Social proof works especially well when people are unsure – like when they are deciding where to stay in a foreign place.

Easy to do

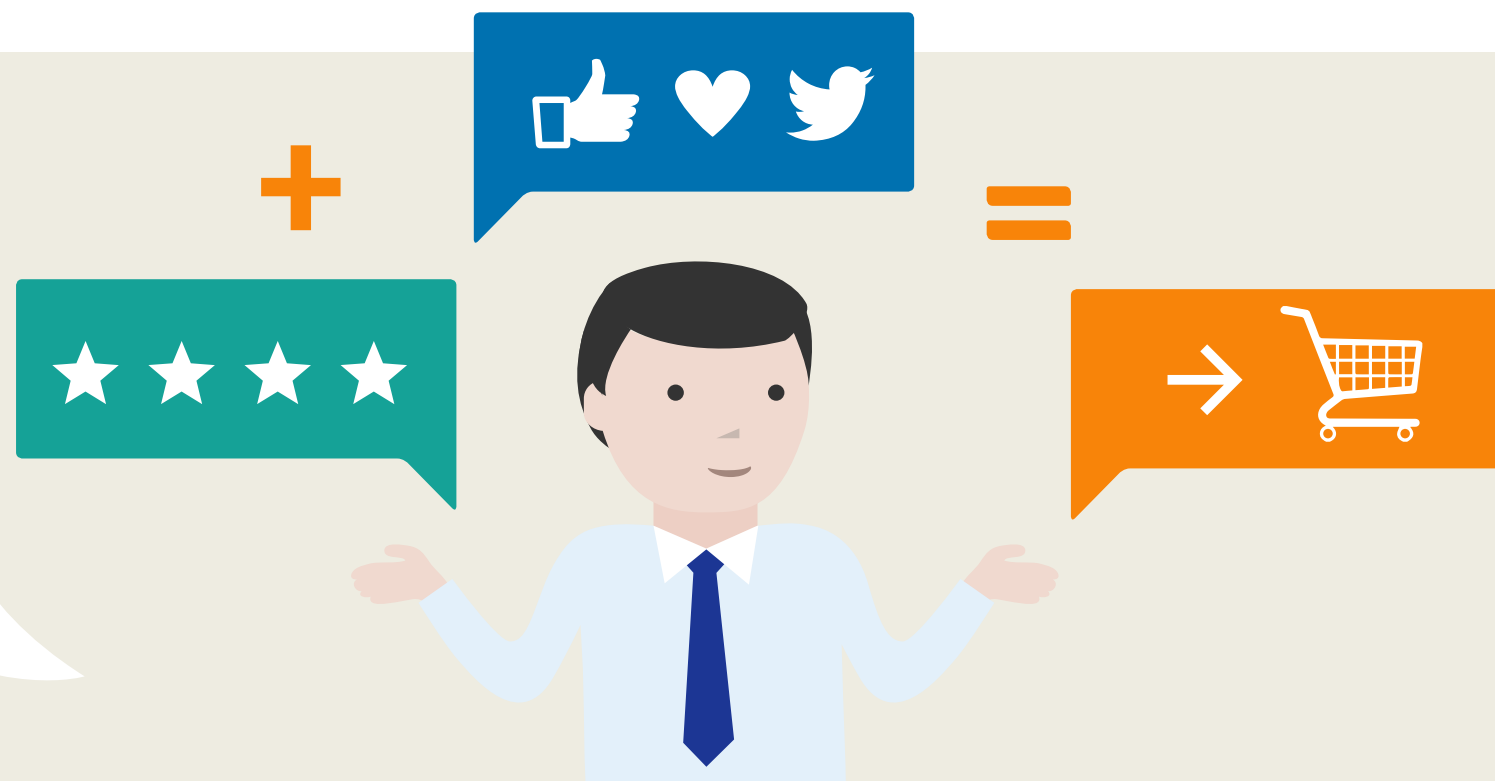
A lot of social proof is created by your loyal guests, all you have to do is curate and share it.

People trust people

– not brands. Which is why personal recommendations are the most trusted form of advertising.

We see this in action every day...

Product reviews are trusted **12x more** than product descriptions



Introduction

The rise of online social media platforms and review sites as sources of inspiration and influence during the booking journey has disrupted the travel industry – from shares on Facebook and photos on Instagram to 140-character tweets and Snapchat stories, booking decisions are being made based on much more than a brand's narrative.

Review sites and OTAs are further driving this change with reviews, ratings and

advanced filter options. The same social media sites and review sites that have disrupted the industry have also provided easy access to one of the most powerful forms of advertising available: social proof – and an easy way to share it.

The key, as a hotelier, is not to resist these disruptive forces, but work with them and embrace them.



Social proof has always been at work in the hospitality sector – people are often inspired to travel when they hear about their friends and family having a great time on holiday, “wish you were here” style letters have existed for centuries, and waiting for photos from your holiday to be developed so that you could show them to everyone you know used to be an essential part of travel.

Nowadays, we are inspired to travel by friends we haven't seen in years when we see their photos on

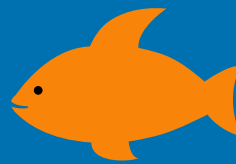
social media, and before travellers decide where to visit and where to stay most of them will read reviews of different hotels, and possibly blog or magazine articles about different destinations.

This is social proof at work, and it is especially effective in the travel industry, where most people are fairly undecided when they begin making travel plans, and they have limited knowledge of the place they will be visiting.

I'll Have What She's Having: The Power of Social Proof

You may not have heard of the term “social proof” but it’s in action every day when someone writes another review of your hotel online.

Many refer to it as “The New Marketing”. So, what exactly is it? And how can you leverage it to get more bookings?



Have you ever noticed that when one person stands behind another at a counter, **others begin to form a queue behind them**, or when someone in an audience starts clapping, **everyone else claps with them**?



88%

of consumers reported that they trusted online reviews as much as personal recommendations



32%

of leisure travellers get their travel inspiration from family, friends or colleagues online



83%

of TripAdvisor users usually read reviews before they book a particular hotel

This psychological phenomenon, where people believe something is the right thing to do or they approve of it simply because others are doing it or approve of it, is known as social proof, and it can be your best friend in marketing your establishment.



Travellers Rely on, and Search For, Social Proof Before Making a Decision

As the studies on the following pages will show, telling people that their peers have done something and approve of it is very effective for getting them to do the same thing.

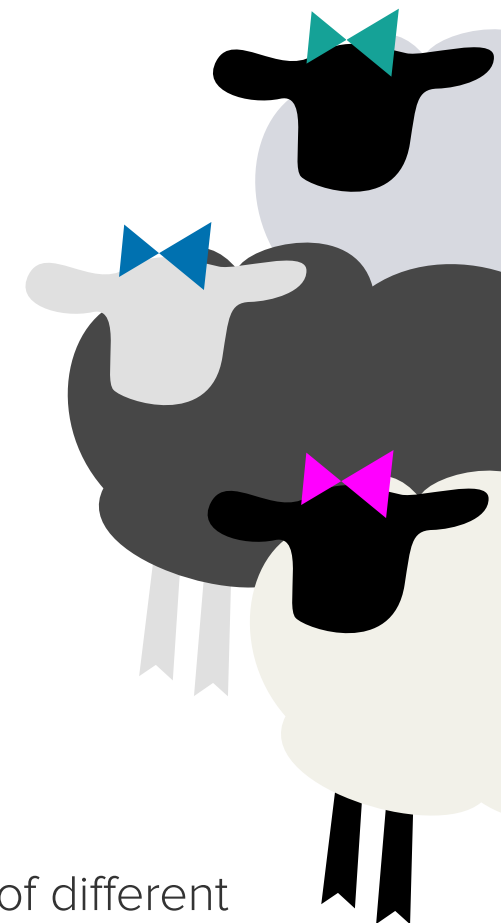
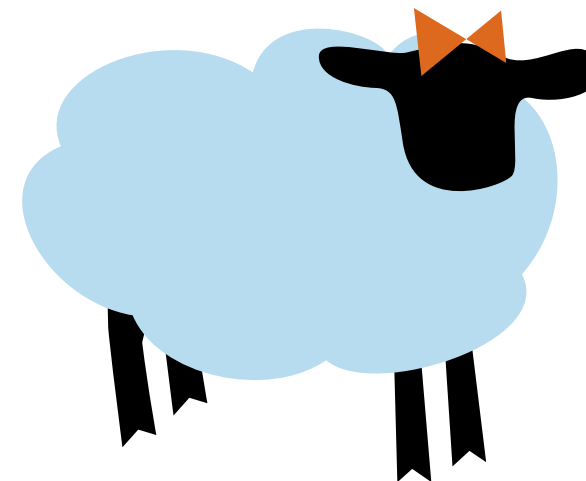
Conveniently for marketers in the hospitality industry, people tend to seek out social proof when making travel decisions.

Travellers read reviews before booking a hotel, are inspired to travel to certain places by content posted by others across the web (especially on social media), and travel enthusiasts will often read travel blogs and magazines.

DID YOU KNOW?



TripAdvisor users view 8 – 10 listings before making a decision



These are just some of the examples of different types of social proof, and all can be used to market your hotel more effectively.

STUDY

1

HELP SAVE THE
ENVIRONMENT BY
REUSING YOUR
TOWELS

2

HANG UP YOUR
TOWELS IF YOU
WOULD LIKE TO REUSE

3

PAST GUESTS REUSED
THEIR TOWELS,
PLEASE REUSE YOURS

APPROVED



Social Proof is More Influential Than Saving the Environment

In 2008, Goldstein, Cialdini, and Griskevicius performed an experiment on towel reuse in hotel rooms.

Using different ways of phrasing the question, the researchers left notes in guests' rooms asking the guests if they would like to reuse their towels.

One of the notes told guests that they would be helping the

environment by reusing their towels (using less water, energy, washing powder etc.), one simply told guests what to do with their towels if they wanted to reuse them, and another told guests that other people had reused

their towels and asked guests if they would like to do the same. Which message variation resulted in the most towel re-use? The one that told guests that other people had reused their towels.



STUDY

1

USING FANS INSTEAD
OF AIRCON WILL SAVE
YOUR MONEY

2

USING FANS INSTEAD
OF AIRCON IS MORE
ENVIRONMENTALLY
FRIENDLY

3

MOST OF YOUR
NEIGHBOURS ARE
CONSERVING ENERGY
BY USING FANS
INSTEAD OF AIRCON

APPROVED

Social Proof is More Influential Than Saving Money

In another 2008 study, social scientists wanted to know if people would be more influenced by the prospect of saving money, helping the environment, or by social proof.

The researchers asked residents in a neighbourhood to stop using air conditioning systems and use fans instead.

Again, they presented the request in different ways, giving

each group a different incentive: Group 1 was told that by using fans instead of air conditioning they would save money, group 2 was told that using fans was more environmentally

friendly, and group 3 was told that most of their neighbours were using fans in order to conserve energy. The winner? Group 3!

The Science Shows That Social Proof Works

72%

72% of British holidaymakers research destinations online

63%

63% of consumers are more likely to buy from a site with product ratings

56%

56% of leisure travellers use the internet for inspiration

Despite what people might claim about being independent thinkers, wanting to save the environment, or how thrifty they think they are, the people who switched to using fans the most were those who were told their neighbours were using fans.

Other studies have found that people are more

likely to laugh when they hear others laughing, showing that social proof works at a subconscious level, and television producers take advantage of the impact of social proof by including laugh tracks in their sitcoms. Another study observed an increase of sales of certain dishes in restaurants when they are labelled “our most popular items”.



“When the internet leveled the playing field

and took away big advertisers' information edge ... we stopped believing what they said and started looking for others to tell us what we should do, buy or think.

– Demian Farnworth, *The Daily Egg*

The Different Types of Social Proof

In the hospitality industry, you are probably most familiar with social proof in the form of reviews, but there are quite a few other types of social proof that you can use in your marketing mix to build trust.

1. User-generated content (UGC)
2. Wisdom of the crowd
3. Wisdom of your friends (personal referrals)
4. Ratings and reviews
5. Testimonials
6. Expert/celebrity endorsement



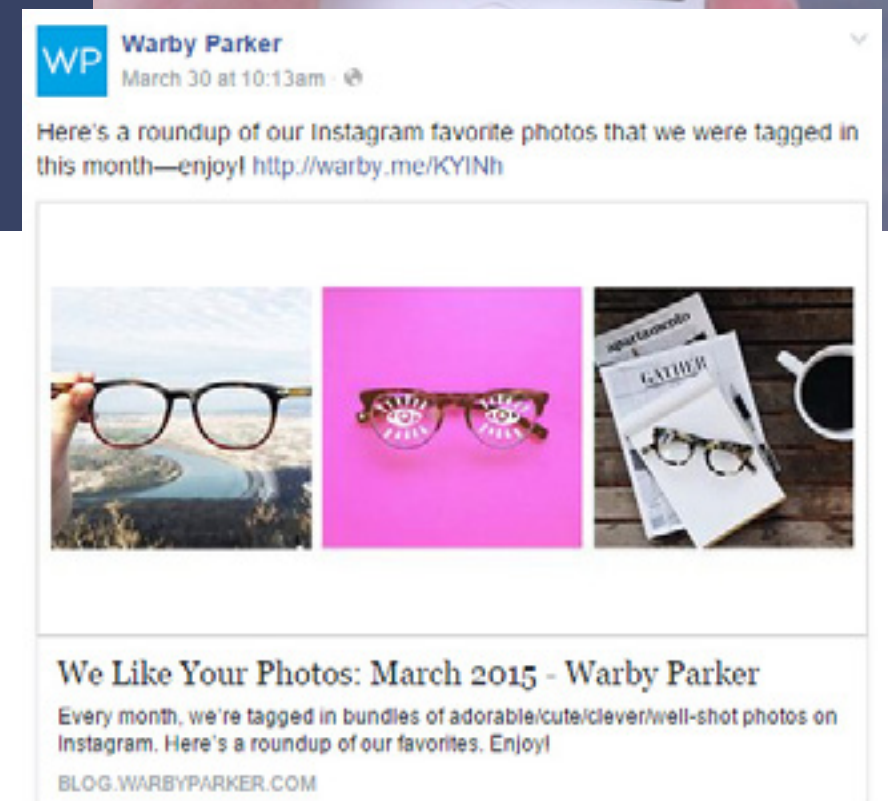
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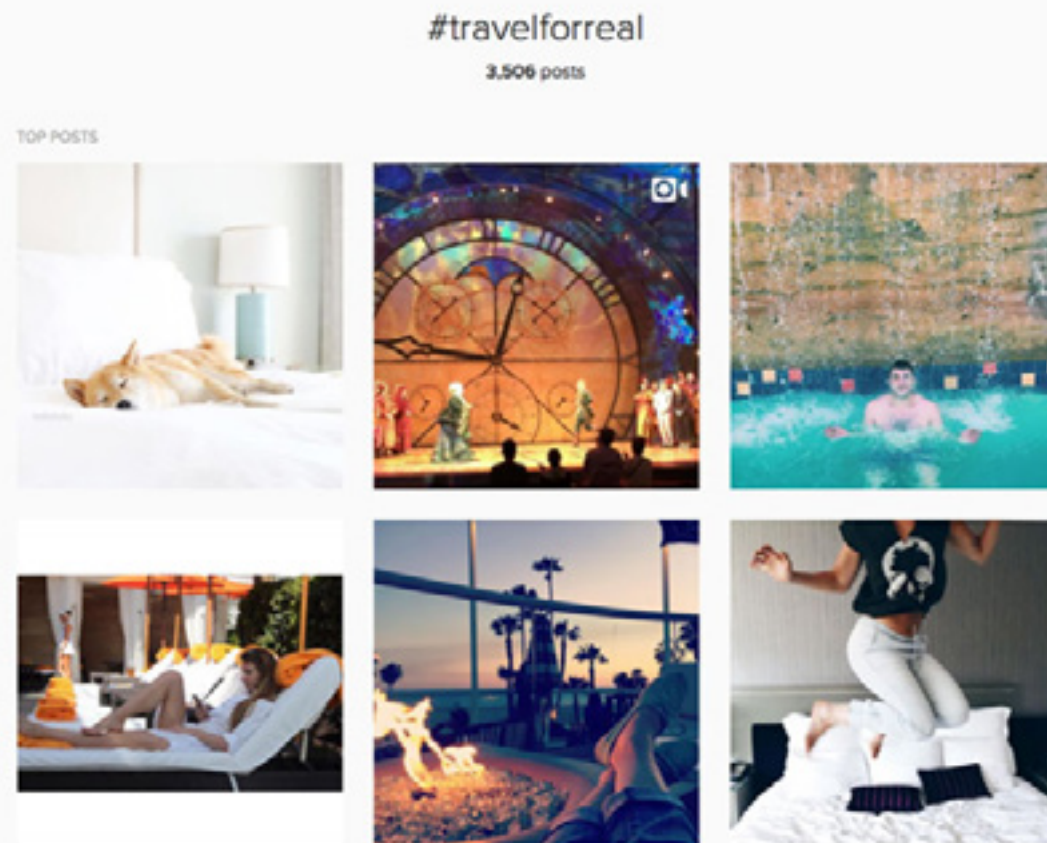
Type 1

Turn your guests into marketers with user-generated content (UGC)

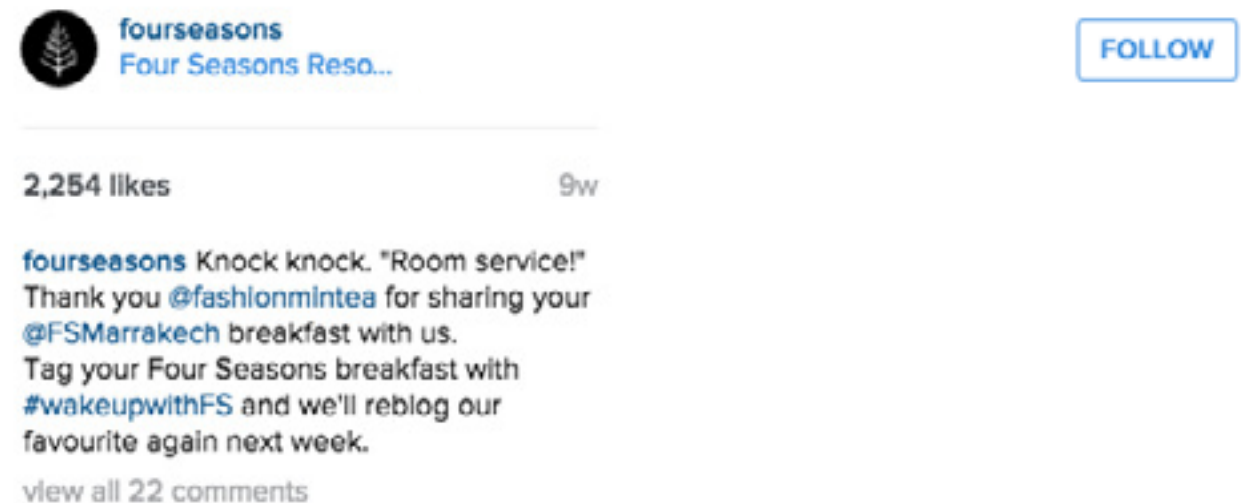
User-generated content is perceived as extremely trustworthy (much more trustworthy than any marketing material you produce as a brand) and among the millennial age group (people born between '77 and '94-ish), about 51% of people said that they are actually influenced more by UGC than by the opinions of their real-life friends and family.

“51% of millennials said that they are actually influenced more by UGC than by the opinions of their real-life friends and family”





Loews Hotels started their **#TravelForReal** campaign to encourage their guests to share their own experiences.



UGC is any sort of content created by ordinary people online. In the hospitality sphere, this can include online reviews, candid traveller photographs and social media posts. User-generated content is the best way for prospective

travellers to see real guests having real experiences. According to a study by L2, luxury hotels that feature user-generated content on Instagram receive six times more interaction on each post than hotels that don't.

Social media is a goldmine for UGC in the form of posts, tweets, photos, videos and even blog articles, it is a great place to share UGC that you come across, and it is also a good platform on which to encourage guests to create their own content.

2

Type 2

If they all loved it - so will you! Use the ‘wisdom of the crowd’

Social proof in the form of the wisdom of the crowd can be seen everywhere – we are all familiar with claims such as “one million copies sold” and calls to action like “join our mailing list of over 20 000 people”. Showing evidence that a large number of people have taken the action you want others to take is an effective way to influence others to follow suit.

People tend to trust the opinions of large groups, and it is common for people to look to the thoughts

In 1955, Ray Kroc's first McDonald's displayed a sign reading “Over 1 Million Served” outside their restaurant. **This smart move proved their existing popularity** and influenced others to also eat at McDonald's.



and actions of a large group of people to guide them.

The opinion of a crowd is often considered more likely to be right than the opinion of a single individual. For example, in the popular TV game show “Who Wants to be a Millionaire” contestants are given the option to ask the audience if they get stuck on a question, with the idea being that the crowd (audience) is more likely to be able to give the correct answer than the individual participant.



3

Recommendations and endorsements from people we know are still the **ultimate social proof**.

Type 3

Leverage personal recommendations and the ‘wisdom of your friends’

One study by Nielsen found that 92% of people “somewhat or completely” trust recommendations from people they know. This trumped the second-most trusted form of advertising (consumer opinions or reviews posted online) by 22%.

Several companies have taken advantage of this tendency for people to imitate the actions of their friends.

Originally, one could only open a Gmail account if invited or referred by a friend (taking advantage

TUGU
The Art, Soul and Romance of Indonesia

Share your stay with Tugu and win a SPA

700 pixels x 700 pixels is an optimal size for facebook photos.

Tag a friend & WIN!

Like · Comment · Share
100 people like this.

Write a comment...

- "I love Tugu (Hotels, Exotic Spas & Restaurants), or Instagram (@Tuguhotels)
- Take a photo of your stay and share either on FB or Instagram tagging 7 friends
- Use the hashtag: #canggubeach #tuguhotels #bali

photo you have taken to one of our Front Office staff to win 60 mins spa of your choice

of both social proof and scarcity/exclusivity) and Facebook not only tells you how many people have “liked” something, but it tells you specifically if any of your friends have “liked” it. This is particularly pronounced in the “follow button” widget that you can add to your website.



4

Type 4Ratings and reviews
all over the web

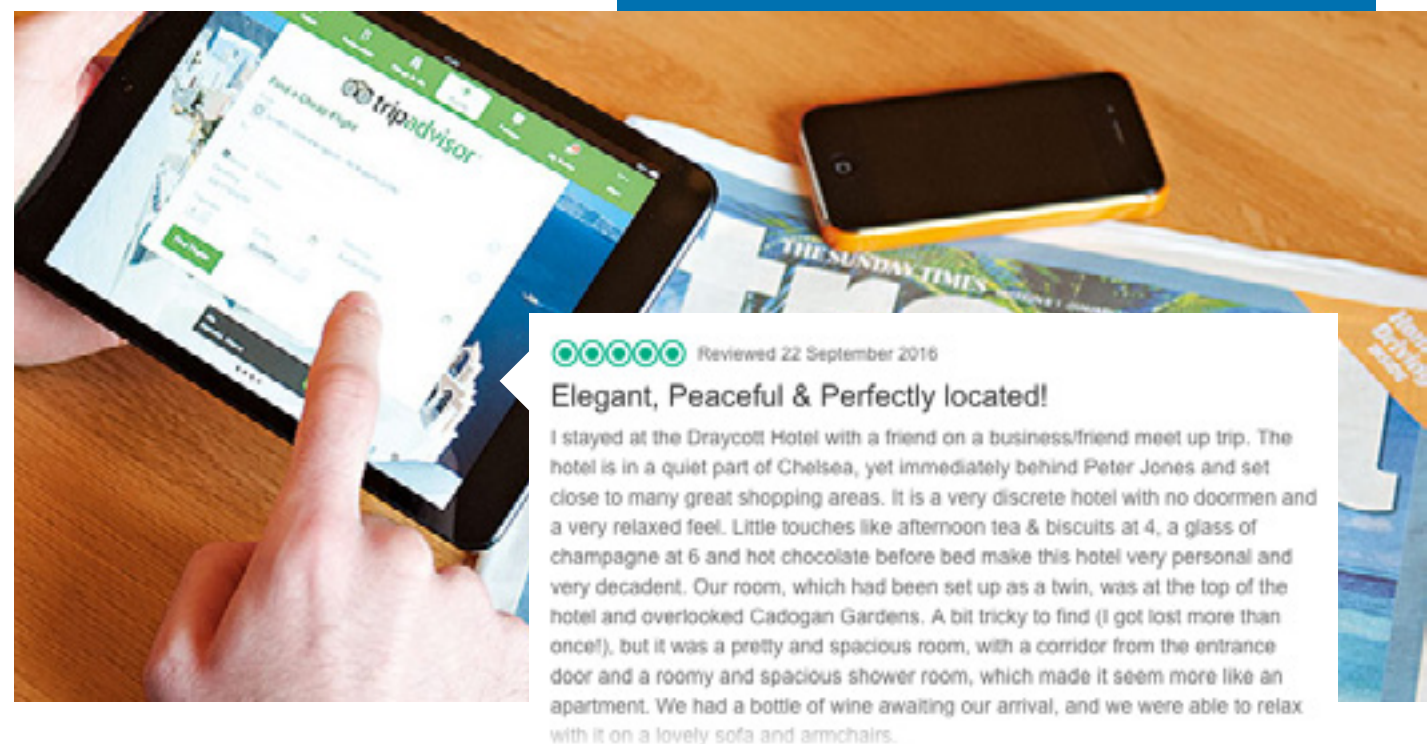
A Nielsen study found 70% of people trust consumer reviews “somewhat or completely”, and a study by TripAdvisor found that 77% of holidaymakers usually or always look at reviews before booking a hotel.

Ratings and reviews can have a direct and measurable effect on bookings and revenue. A study by Cornell University found that if a hotel's

DID YOU KNOW?

77% of TripAdvisor users don't book a hotel without reading its reviews

Reviews are probably the form of social proof with which professionals in the travel industry are most familiar, and they are an exceptionally powerful form of social proof.



<https://www.tripadvisor.co.za>

rating increased by one point on a five-point scale (such as the five bubble rating used on TripAdvisor) the hotel could increase prices by 11.2% and still maintain the same occupancy.



5



Type 5

The supercharged review: testimonials

Testimonials are descriptions of how a person feels about your hotel in his or her own words, but, unlike reviews, they are something you specifically ask a guest to write for you to use, and you include their full name and preferably even a photo. Testimonials are often found on a hotel's own website and, unlike reviews, you can choose which ones to publish.



6

Type 6

Entice someone influential for expert endorsement

In the hospitality industry, there are many different types of credible sources that can provide powerful endorsements – they need not be A-list celebrities. A well-known travel blogger or someone with a large online following can have great impact online.



**“A brand is no longer what
we tell the consumer it is**

— it is what consumers tell each other it is.

— Scott Cook, *Intuit*

How to Get Social Proof Quickly

According to Google, when holidaymakers start planning their trips, only 16% of them have decided which hotel to stay at. If you can collect some social proof to use online, you can build the trust in your brand you need to convert browsing clicks into bookings.



Ask for reviews



If you want reviews, you have nothing to lose by asking for them.

Send your guests a thank-you mail after they have stayed with you and ask them to write a review. You can even use guest feedback technology that integrates with TripAdvisor and bypasses the whole signing-up process to make it easier for your guests to leave a review.

Although you can, and absolutely should, ask for reviews, bear in mind that offering incentives in return for good reviews is against the policy of TripAdvisor and many other sites (and it's a tad immoral).



Invite influencers

Will a free tour and lunch entice local celebrities, like mayors and well-known travel experts, to come and see your hotel?

Ask them for a brief testimonial and if you can use their photo.

Travel bloggers will also usually be happy to write about your hotel in exchange for a complimentary stay or discounted rate.

1 8 5 bookings and counting!

Use numbers

You can turn one form of social proof into another (and double its usefulness) by putting a number on it.

Did you receive a tonne of 4 and 5 star reviews over Easter, for instance? Count them and tell people how many you received.

Do you know how many guests you had over a busy period, like summer holidays, or since you opened? Telling other travellers that you have had so many satisfied guests in the past will make them think, "If they all loved it, surely I will too?"

Interact with guests on social media

Research has shown that one of our most primary needs as human beings is to feel valued, and engaging with your guests online is a good way to make sure that they feel valued even when they aren't physically with you.



Publicise your social media accounts

Make sure your profiles are easy to find, that your website has links to your social media channels, and that your social media handles are on collateral materials like brochures and complimentary notepads in rooms.



Take part in conversations

Monitor social media for any mentions of your hotel or area and take part in these conversations. If someone has praised the beauty of your town on Facebook, share their post. By promoting your area they are also indirectly promoting your hotel.



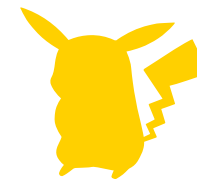
Offer incentives

While you can't reward guests for reviews, rewarding them for sharing content on social media is a great way to get exposure. Offer guests a free drink for sharing a 'happy hour selfie', or a dessert for posting a photo of your view on Instagram.



Get your staff on-board

Train your staff to encourage social media interaction with guests while they are at your hotel. Staff members should offer to take group photos for guests to share on social media, and encourage guests to post pictures, videos and status updates about their stay at your hotel.



Include video and panoramics

Use Facebook's 360 images, video or even consider luring Pokémon to your hotel – be creative and engaging, and remember, enticing children will bring parents in tow.



Make the most of your repeat guests

If you have repeat guests, you already have evangelists for your hotel who are likely to be willing and able to share some social proof.

They liked you enough to come back to your hotel rather than try something new. Repeat guests are considered “fully engaged” customers, and one study by Gallup suggests that fully engaged customers in the hospitality sector spend around 46% more per year than actively disengaged guests spend.

Make it easy for repeat guests to promote your hotel online: offer to take photos of them so

that they can share them on Facebook, and keep reminding them in your post-stay emails of your social media handles and online travel agent listing URLs. The right software can make targeting repeat guests easier by highlighting them in an electronic system.

DID YOU KNOW?



Fully engaged customers in the hospitality sector, like repeat guests, spend around 46% more per year than actively disengaged guests.

Don't settle for satisfaction, aim for delight

You want to delight your guests to the point that they feel compelled to share their positive experience with others.

Aiming for guest satisfaction will prevent bad reviews, but aiming to delight guests will result in positive reviews and increased examples of social proof – don't just meet guests' expectations, exceed them.

Surprise guests with little added touches, (especially if they book direct) and ensure that they feel personally cared for, not like they are just the anonymous guest in room 3.

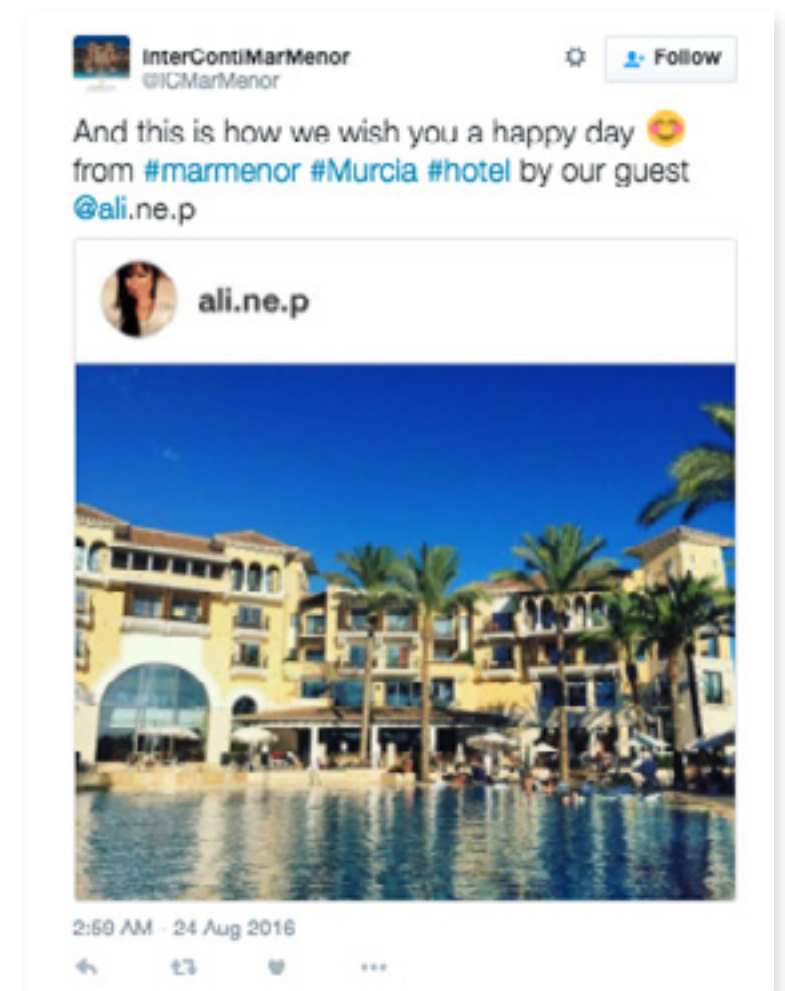
Share your social proof as widely as possible

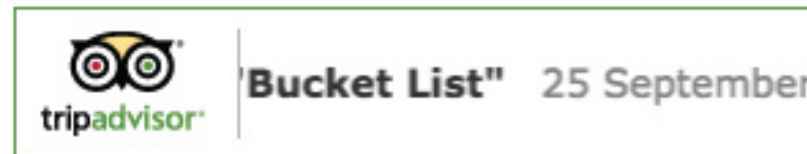
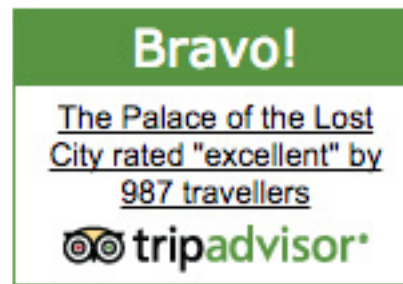
Your social proof doesn't have to stay where you found it – share your social proof as widely as you can.

For example, if a happy guest leaves a complimentary comment in your guestbook, take a photo and share it on your Facebook and Twitter accounts as well. If you can find that person's own social media accounts and @ mention them when you share their comment you will not only make them feel like you really value their feedback, but you will also



increase the chances of them sharing your post (which is actually their comment) with their own social media circles.





You can also share particularly complimentary reviews and testimonials on your website, or try using a widget, such as those provided by TripAdvisor and LateRooms, to pull fresh reviews or updated ratings from the source website directly onto your own webpage.

TripAdvisor also offers special free widgets and badges that you have to qualify for. Check

if you qualify for any by visiting the TripAdvisor widget centre and publicise them. Just having a minimum number of reviews could mean you qualify for a “Bravo!” badge, and earning a “Certificate of Excellence” is mostly just a matter of receiving above average reviews frequently and consistently enough.

If you are mentioned on a travel

website or in a magazine article, this is also a form of social proof (and a pretty good one, being related to the expert opinion of the site or magazine). Share the links to any online articles and photos of press clippings on social media and on your website. This will encourage engagement among your fans as well as locals, who will be proud of your accomplishment on behalf of the area.





“One of the most powerful things social media has done

is to help make important purchasing information more available to the consumers looking for it.

– Khushbu Pandya, *Weave Model: Global Strategy for Weaving Social Media Into Your Business*

How to Use Social Proof

Thanks to the near-ubiquitous reach of the Internet, and especially social networking sites, the power of social proof has never been as easy to harness as it is today. However, there are a couple of ways to make your social proof even more effective.



Use video

Videos are one of the forms of social proof that you can generate yourself – video doesn't lie, and when people see real guests having a good time in your videos, they will trust that they will enjoy themselves too.



“Excellent holiday”

When you share your guest comments and reviews, include a picture of the guest who gave you the positive comment at your establishment, along with a text version of the comment.

Include photos

People are drawn more to images than text. On average, tweets with images get 35% more retweets and Facebook posts that include images get 39% more engagement than their text-only counterparts.

Additionally, research has found that people believe statements more when they are accompanied by an image, even when that image has little to do with the statement.



“Turn guest comments into graphics”

– GuestRevu

If you can't get a picture of the guest, you can try turning your positive guest comments into graphics by superimposing them over a beautiful image of your establishment. Using a free online tool like Canva makes this easy, even for non-designers.





Include links

Once you have used your reviews to prove to a traveller that your hotel is the best option, make it easy for them to act on their newfound confidence. If you are sharing your reviews somewhere other than on your own site (like social media), make sure you include [links back to your site](#), your phone number or [email address](#).

4 RETWEETS 3 LIKES



Make it relatable

Social proof works best when the person receiving it and the person who provided it are similar to each other or are in similar situations – i.e. “I am looking for a family holiday, other family holidaymakers enjoyed this hotel, (rather than just other holiday makers in general) therefore my family and I will probably also enjoy it”.

Make the most of this tendency by including a detail or two about the person whose feedback you are quoting. You may have noticed that TripAdvisor asks people to say what kind of trip they were on; business travel, couples holiday, family holiday etc. and what nationality they are. If you can include a few details like this, your social proof may resonate more strongly with other people also planning a similar trip.



What We Have Learned

Now you know what social proof is, what the different types of social proof are, how to gather social proof online, and what to do with your social proof once you find it.



What is social proof

People are more likely to do something or approve of it if they know that others have done it and approve of it.

Types of social proof

There are different forms of social proof, and all of them can be used to promote your hotel in different ways:

User-generated content (UGC)
– works well on social media

Wisdom of the crowd – use your bookings data and other types of social proof to illustrate how many people believe your hotel is the right place to stay

Personal referrals/Wisdom of your friends – this is good old-fashioned word of mouth, but you can use social media to make the most of it online

Ratings and reviews – this is the most common type of social proof in the hospitality industry, and often travellers seek out

reviews of hotels before they book

Testimonials – testimonials are supercharged reviews, and are accompanied by the person's full name and a photo

Expert/celebrity endorsement
– well known travel-bloggers or people with large online followings can be great sources of endorsement in the hospitality sector



How to get social proof quickly

Ask for reviews – just asking people to give a review will boost your review volume and get you more social proof. Sending out emails to your guests after their stay with you is a great way to do this

Interact on social media – treat guests like your friends on social media, engage in conversations and share other people's content, even if it isn't directly related to your hotel

Go after repeat guests – repeat guests are highly engaged with your hotel, and will probably be more than willing to write a review or promote your hotel on social media

Invite influencers – holding a special lunch or tour, or offering discounted rates to bloggers can help you get expert endorsement

Use numbers – put a number on how many good reviews or happy guests you have, people believe crowds more than individuals

Share your social proof as widely as possible – social proof on one platform doesn't have to just stay there, make the most of it by sharing it across your social media channels, marketing collateral and website

Don't settle for satisfaction, aim for delight – make sure that guests enjoy their time with you so much that they can't help but

talk about it

How to use social proof

Include photos – people believe things more when they are accompanied by images, and images are more likely to get people's attention

Make it relatable – social proof is more influential when it is coming from someone who has been in your prospective guest's shoes

Include links – once you have convinced someone that yours is the right hotel for them, make it easy for them to act by including links, phone numbers or email addresses



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GuestRevu Pty (Ltd)
5 HarbourView, Harbour Road
Port Alfred, 6170
Eastern Cape
South Africa

GuestRevu Limited
9 Britannia Court, The Green
West Drayton
UB7 7PN
United Kingdom



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