



The Hospitality Industry's Guide to Customer-Generated Content



Purveyors of hospitality services have long known the importance of marketing their offerings to potential clients. For decades, newspapers, magazines, television, and the Internet have been painted with picturesque advertisements of pristine beaches and seaside resorts, towering mountains and their accompanying ski lodges, or perhaps a luscious forest campground complete with every amenity imaginable. These ads are filled with perfect people smiling and laughing, perfectly chosen and staged by a team of marketers and advertisers to paint their product and services in the best light possible.

However, times are changing for marketers and advertisers in the hospitality industry.

[A recent study conducted by McCann](#) found that 42 percent of Americans think that companies and their branding are less truthful today than 20 years ago. However, 84 percent of the same respondents believe that brands have the power to make the world a better

place. These findings tell us a peculiar thing about our customers: people want to be marketed to, but they want to decide HOW they are marketed to.

Enter the age of customer-generated content (CGC). If your business is still pumping out more of the same ads with the same perfect smiles and sunsets, you'll soon be passed up by those businesses that have learned to tap into the consumer mind. How does it impact your hospitality business? And how can you move forward with providing your potential customers with the branding that will garner more business for you in the digital age? Read on to find out.

CHAPTER ONE

Customer-Generated Content and the Hospitality Industry

What Is CGC?

CGC is defined as any content that has been created by consumers that is publicly available to other consumers. This includes any photos, videos, blogs, and discussions that take place on any given digital system or platform such as social media or online review sites. This is content provided by unpaid contributors that promotes a brand without the brand actually promoting itself.

CGC is essentially a form of free advertising for a business. When a user chooses to share a piece of media and attribute it to your brand, that information is in the public realm and can be utilized by anyone. This includes your brand itself!

The hospitality industry is perhaps one of the most readily able to gain from the benefits of CGC, too. Hospitality businesses are often associated with leisure and entertainment, and people are more likely to be sharing their experience with your brand online.

Imagine you own a resort hotel in Cancun. A guest arrives and immediately takes to Facebook to post a location check-in to their followers with the comment “This place is gorgeous!” The guest receives their room key and walks to their room. Once they get settled, they open Snapchat and give their followers a tour of the room using your hotel’s Geofilter. Throughout their stay, the guest is constantly taking photos and posting them to Instagram and using the hotel’s special hashtag the entire time. When the guest’s stay is over, they hop on Yelp to leave a shining review of their time at your hotel and share some photos with other potential customers. In that short amount of time, you have just garnered a whole portfolio of marketing content, and that was just one guest!



Take Four Seasons hotels, for example. Four Seasons has more than [600,000](#) followers on Instagram, which is quite remarkable for a hotel brand. But how did they get there? They started a [monthly photo contest](#). Photo contests have become a hugely successful way to increase engagement and awareness. The company's monthly photo contest gives users the opportunity to win a free travel package when their CGC is shared by Four Seasons. It's not an overhaul or a new campaign, but it's a tool at the disposal of Four Seasons to acquire media collateral and increase awareness.

In the digital age, these pieces of user-generated content are incredibly valuable—according to the [Nielsen Consumer Trust Index](#), 92 percent of consumers trust organic, user-generated content (UGC) more than they trust traditional advertising. And that’s because people trust people much more than they trust a company.



The Transparency of the Customer's Voice

In business, a word-of-mouth referral is perhaps the most powerful value-driven lead you can receive. A potential customer is much more likely to trust the recommendation of a friend or user testimonial for a weekend getaway over the recommendation of an advertisement.

And therein lies the true value of CGC. It allows your customers to get a transparent and honest view into a brand's experience without brand intervention. Or at least with limited brand involvement. In the era of user-generated content, your customers are your best marketers—[let them tell the story](#) of your brand through their eyes!

For example, Loews Hotels began with the hashtag campaign #TravelForReal and location tags to source new CGC collateral. Their hard work paid off: Loews's team saw over [35,000 photos](#) and used the TINT platform to implement and license candid and quirky images submitted by guests. Loews took this content and chose the best of the best authentic content on a campaign microsite. They implemented CGC through many channels, including print ads, native ads, social ad units, lobby signage, and so on. The result was an increase in social engagement by 62 percent and direct bookings by 35 percent.

Now you have all of this free content sitting around in your social channels. It isn't going to do a whole lot of good unless you understand how to harness its powers. So what on Earth do you do with it to paint a meaningful message about your brand?

CHAPTER TWO

Touch Points and the Customer Journey

While CGC does offer a plethora of free or low-cost content (those Snapchat Geofilters do come with a [price](#)), the price tag for development of campaign strategies and analytics can quickly add up. And recently it's proving to be at the forefront of every marketer's mind. According to Deloitte's 2017 CMO Survey, digital advertising spend is increasing dramatically—up 14 percent—and marketers plan to spend 376 percent more on customer experience analytics. The customer journey has become much more delineated and complicated to strategize for, but that also opens up the opportunity for more business, especially for hospitality.

If you are able to use customer-generated information to form insights and predictions for future business actions, you are going to have a much more accurate picture of what is keeping your customers happy. A 2015 McKinsey

and Company article entitled “[The dawn of marketing’s new golden age](#),” for example, recalled a hospitality company that was able to understand the performance of a particular property based on the number of reviews. If there was a lull in customer interaction, the company could bolster business by extending special offerings during that time. The data you are able to retrieve straight from the customer at a low cost gives you the power to provide the best customer experience possible while maximizing your ROI.



Travelocity launched its own hashtag campaign, [#iWannaGo](#). It might seem like just another hashtag campaign, but there's a catch: instead of easy prizes unrelated to travel, they offered their services to a dream destination as an incentive for users.

The CGC that resulted were authentic posts combined with professional ad and video content, featuring locations with the Gnome. Travelocity saw a [95 percent](#) scroll-down rate for further information on the campaign microsite, which far surpassed most competing campaigns in the travel industry. What's the key takeaway here? Travelocity gave an incentive that people actually wanted and then integrated the CGC with its professional content at multiple touchpoints.



The hospitality industry, not unlike any other industry today, is expected to have multiple touch points for customers to interact with. This includes a UX-friendly website, social media channels, customer support, etc. As aforementioned, this opens up main avenues of both fresh and repeat business, but it can be difficult to aggregate data from all of these points. If you aren't able to make sense of the content people are providing for you, it is essentially useless.

Utilizing a CGC Aggregation Tool

Fortunately, it has become a cinch in recent years to understand the impact of your CGC on your business. With a social media aggregation tool like TINT, you are now able to find and curate CGC to use as your own marketing collateral at scale. With all of your social channels located on one platform, it's now easier than ever to understand your customers and develop personable, interesting, and transparent content to use on your own social media, email marketing, or website.



CHAPTER THREE

Final Thought

Gone are the days of corporate messaging in marketing and advertising for hospitality. Where customers once were swayed by precisely-crafted, think-tank campaign efforts for vacations and getaways, they are now motivated and inspired by proven brand experiences from their constituents.

This is in no way a negative for your hospitality company. Your customers are now your marketers—constantly churning out quality content for you to tailor your message to the world in a personalized and honest manner. These days, that is what your customers are valuing most.

With the boundless amount of free content at your disposal today, it is imperative to take advantage of the opportunity to enhance your marketing efforts. It can be a daunting undertaking to go at it alone, so let us at TINT help you find a solution for your CGC aggregation needs. Contact us today to get started on your customer-driven content journey!



