

HAVE IT YOUR WAY - DESIGN OF THE PERSONAL GUEST EXPERIENCE



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I want it my way, and this is what that looks like. Will this be the next step in the Hospitality evolution? The restaurant sector has played around with this a little - from Wendy's and to Fuddrucker's building your own burger. Buffet tables have always been a favorite - no portion control and heaps of your pleasures. Even the New York Times Frank Bruni covered a TriBeCa Bar, Ward III, which "...creates drinks out of customers' whims". One such challenge centered around a Hostess Twinkie. But, as Bruni noted, what really excites the owners/Bartenders "...is using their experience behind the bar to bring balance, nuance and good sense to a drink hatched on the spot". Is this not what we all wish to accomplish - using our skills and sensibilities to satisfy our Guest's expectations, create some differentiation and distinction, market that reputation and prosper?

So, are we moving in that direction? You bet we are, and our Customer's changing requirements will be even more curious and demanding. **Standard practice and offerings will become diminished, and innovation and adventure shall rule the marketplace.** How do we tap into this movement and start creating that Hospitality picture for the consumer?

A number of Travel internet sites are already on this front - they allow the potential Guest to let their fingers do the walking (across the keyboard) and select type of lodging, location, amenities, etc., using pictures and write-ups. Then, they "Book" them at their choice location. From the food and beverage examples above, Management still has some control over the "menu" of choices - they manage the garnishes, toppings, ingredients. **In the hotel sector, we have begun to collect information and data about the Guest - we know some of their preferences, we track the history of their stay(s), we maintain a loyal and beneficial relationship.**

We have read numerous articles about the Guest Room of the future. Now, think "outside the Box". Can the Guest Room be made to order, translatable to the Guest wishes?

We have a structure, the Guest Room - living space, bedroom and bath, the "box", if you will. We are not going to knock down walls, re-plumb or do extensive electrical/HVAC work all the time for any Guest request. However, within confines of that structure, ask what can we offer to that whimsical/adventuresome Guest, which makes us special and them thrilled. Just like offering an array of food toppings, we can do the same thing, and create the "Have it your way - **design your own Experience**".

To start your thought process off: choices in mattresses (hard, medium, soft), pillows (regular, feather), blankets (wool, electric) and even linen (cotton, satin). Properly stocked bar with favorite beverages/snacks. Bath amenities, which I, your Guest, have identified (Brand, type, selection), specific technical requirements (for my various personal communication needs), other room amenities I desire (exercise pad, treadmill, fish tank, etc.). Be clever and build your own list or

menu. And, this is just the Guest Room. What about how I wish to spend my time outside of the Guest Room? Talk about a wild ride here across the landscape of escape and thrills. Brainstorm this, drawing upon partners and affiliates in your Destination area!

Jumping into these uncharted waters requires a few prerequisites. Firstly, what do you know about your Guest and the audience you serve? Without “feedback” you are that proverbial fish out of water. Plus, **with sophisticated “Feedback” you know instantly what is working for you and what is not** - your further innovation becomes actionable and targeted. Secondly, what do you have in place to ensure a definitive message and committed performance by your staff. QA or Mystery Shops bring you that confidence level. Lastly, how will you communicate this extraordinary Experience? **Your Marketing mix should address all the communication avenues** - traditional, e-mail, mobile, social media and the like. Your audience is connected and wired, yet very selective on medium.

Will your Customers create a circus for you? This is doubtful, for as Mr. Bruni pointed out, “It’s trusting that the majority of patrons will show some maturity, wisdom and restraint. It’s betting on a degree of sophistication, wagering that most bespoke wishes will be few, tenable and reasonable.”

You know what is the most fun and rewarding part of this proposition - you can charge a fee. Gosh, you have created a new, fulfilling experience, a creative venture into Hospitality. You are selling something which is distinct; you are “cutting-edge”. You lead with innovation; you constantly adapt with what you have learned from your Guests. You make money! That’s a wrap.

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