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### Introduction

Guests that are fully engaged with your property will spend an average of <u>46% more</u> than disengaged guests.

Let that sink in.

That's the difference between a guest spending €300 and spending €438 at your property. The key to improving your guest engagement? You guessed it: perfecting your guest communications.

This guide covers the three key channels through which you can engage with your guests: **website**, **emails**, **and social media**. For each channel we'll look at what you can do to improve engagement, including real-world examples and specialist integration suggestions.

If you're lucky enough to have a marketing team you can move more quickly, but even if you don't, with a little effort and consideration you'll be able to action many of these ideas without much fuss.

The end result? Increased guest loyalty, boosted revenue, and ultimately a higher lifetime value of your guests.



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Your brand is more than just a logo and the pretty pictures on your website. It's also your values, your people, and how you talk to your customers. Guest messaging is an integral part of a cohesive brand experience and can have far-reaching impacts for loyalty, satisfaction, and profits.

Full disclosure: this guide has been produced by a marketing team, so you may think we're a little biased when it comes to evangelizing the value of great communication. But the data tells the same story. Average revenue increases by 23% when a brand is always presented consistently.

It can also help in a recovery, which feels particularly pertinent right now. Following the 2008 financial crisis, strong brands recovered <u>nine times faster</u>. In short, if you can spend a little time strengthening and aligning your brand's messaging and tone of voice throughout every channel, it can have a big impact in terms of numbers.

Why does a strong brand have this effect? Besides the fact that defined guidelines make it easier and faster for you to create content, most importantly it helps you build a rapport with your customers. If a guest feels like they understand what you stand for and if they engage with the way you talk to them, they're more likely to invest emotionally (and ultimately financially) in your brand.

Once they become invested, their loyalty grows too. The most tangible way this can boost your bottom line is not only through repeat bookings, but through direct bookings too. Your brand is a valuable commodity. Treat it as such.

### Watch yourtone

Think about your favorite brands. Perhaps you like the simple confidence of Apple's language. Or maybe you prefer Innocent's informal, playful messaging. Whatever our personal taste, we're drawn to brands that connect with us on some emotional level, and tone of voice is at the heart of this.

So what is a tone of voice? In short, it's not what you say, but how you say it. It's derived from your brand values and reflects how you want to be seen by the world. That may sound a little grand, but in reality it's not rocket science.

For instance, take a look at the about us page on your website and read the headline.

Yes, right now. We'll wait...



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Does it reflect the way you think of your brand? If your property is on the corporate or business-oriented side of things, it might be straightforward like: 'About our hotel'. If you're a boutique or lifestyle hotel, maybe your language is more playful – something like: 'How the magic happened...'

There is no right or wrong tone of voice – you need to find the voice that's unique to your brand and that will best connect with the customers you want to reach. The most important thing is that you're consistent throughout all your guest comms.



Whatever our personal taste, we're drawn to brands that connect with us on some emotional level, and tone of voice is at the heart of this.

## Perfecting guest communication

We set the scene by talking about brand and tone of voice, so now it's time to get into the specifics. The next few pages cover the three most important channels for guest communication:

01 Website

02 Emails

03 Social media

Of course, the reality isn't so neat that everything falls into these three categories; advertising, brochures, and even the way your team answers the phone are all part of the picture.

Nail these essentials, however, and everything else is more likely to fall into place.





### Give guests relevant messaging

Effective engagement is when you know who you're talking to. You may think that by keeping your messaging broad, you'll reach a larger customer base. In fact, the more generic your messaging, the less likely you are to make a connection with your guests.

Assuming you've done the research and know who your target segments are, tailor your messaging appropriately. You can even go more granular with customized copy based on guest data like geolocation. Let's say you have a banner near your 'Book now' button that says: 'Pure relaxation awaits'. Nothing wrong with that. But imagine you know where the user is – now you can say: 'Pure relaxation is only two hours away'. Suddenly the prospect of sitting by a pool is tantalizingly close.

Another way that you can use geo-targeting to sharpen your messaging and improve conversions is

through offers and imagery. If you know that guests from America particularly value gym facilities, you can make it so website visitors from the US see a picture of your gym when they land on your homepage. Or if you want to encourage more guests from Japan because they have a high average spend, you can create special discount messaging that only those users will see.

One more thing: language localization. There are over 7,000 languages around the world, so it's not exactly realistic to have your website translated into every one. Run a report that shows you where most of your guests and most of your website traffic come from. Use this as your order of priority. If you find that you have a lot of German visitors to your website, but relatively few German guests, it could be that they're put off from booking because they can't fully understand your website. Time to get it translated.





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### Distinguish between new and returning users

When a returning guest arrives at your hotel, it's good hospitality to greet them with a 'welcome back' message. The same is true for visitors on your website. Personalization on a website can be the difference between someone converting in that session, as opposed to bouncing from your site and booking through an OTA.

You should be able to recognize when a guest is returning to the website, perhaps looking to book again. This is especially the case if they're logged in. You should be tailoring offers, images and the guest journey on your website to ensure that the guest feels like you know them and is encouraged to rebook.

For example, give them an offer on the same room type they booked the last time. If it's a family booking, there's an opportunity to upsell them post-booking with trips out or relevant messaging that will be pertinent to their stay. Offer guests recommendations based on their previous behavior, either online or during their previous stay.



OTAs have become the standard-bearers of how to quickly convert customers through an onsite journey, with countdown timers, number of reviews, social proof, and product recommendations – take a leaf out of their book but make it better. Instead of messaging like '100 people are looking at this RIGHT NOW', segment your onsite visitors and soften that messaging a little: for instance, '10 other couples have booked this in the last 24 hours'.

Hospitality is one of the most data-rich industries out there, and understanding how to use this data, derive insights, and then surface personalization before, during and after a stay can have an enormous impact on the number of direct bookings you can drive.

You should be able to recognize when a guest is returning to the website, perhaps looking to book again.

### Make your site easy to navigate

The style and layout of your website is part of how you communicate your business. And it really does matter: <u>75% of consumers</u> make judgements on a company's credibility based on their website design.

From the moment someone lands on one of your pages, they should know exactly what kind of property you are. It only takes <u>50 milliseconds</u> to form an opinion about your website, so your headline and leading imagery are of most importance. Think of it as the purest distillation of your property. If you were to communicate only one thing to potential guests, what would it be? Is it an image of your best room, or your stunning location? What tagline sums up your guest experience and will create a sense of excitement?



High quality imagery and video is king. Make it easy to visualize staying at your property. Check out the homepages of <u>Cabiner</u> and <u>Finn Lough</u>, for example. They show off their locations in full screen while also conveying what their guest experience is all about. As a user gets deeper into the discovery of your website, can you tailor the images to them? If it's a business guest, swap generic images for images of in-room desks or communal meeting space. If it's a family booking, change the images to show other families and child-friendly facilities.

A good website leads its visitor on a journey. Beyond the imagery, make sure your language is simple, active, and inspiring. Ensure that it's easy to navigate and that a button for booking is always visible. Whichever content management system you're using, there should be data analysis and testing features built in. Use them.

75% of consumers make judgements on a company's credibility based on their website design.





# Test your CTAs

A call to action (CTA) is usually a button, though it can be a hyperlink within text. Buttons are more eye catching, however, and typically drive higher clicks. So if you have an action that you want guests to perform – most likely booking a room – make sure the button stands out from the rest of your website. If you have a blue background, don't make your button blue as well. Contrasting colors (ideally still within your brand guidelines) will help improve conversion.

As for the text on the button itself, create a sense of urgency and make it obvious what your guest has to do. 'Book' and 'Book now' are by far and away the most common hotel website CTAs, and nine times out of ten will be the best way to go.

However, that doesn't mean you shouldn't test. Run A/B tests with different options that fit with your tone of voice – you can always choose to test with a small sample size if you're worried about harming conversions. For example, you could test 'Book now' against a more evocative 'Visit paradise'.

There are mountains of research that's been done about CTAs and customer behavior, and if you want to dive into more detail, this article is a good place to start. And by the way, all of this same logic and practice also applies for CTAs in emails.



### Provide social proof

Sometimes the most persuasive communication doesn't come directly from you: it comes via other guests. 96% of travelers consider reviews to be important in the research phase, while <u>81%</u> frequently or always read reviews before booking a hotel.

If you don't have easily accessible reviews on your website, people will search for them elsewhere, meaning they're likely to book through a different channel. When you're choosing which reviews make it onto your site, pick the ones that tell a story. 'We had an amazing stay, would 100% come back again' is nice, but it doesn't really say anything about the guest experience. 'The hotel staff were so considerate and went out of their way to recommend amazing restaurants and local events' conveys a lot more about the hospitality you provide.

As with other elements of your website, you can also tailor these reviews to your visitor. If they're based in the UK, show them reviews from other Brits. This will give them more confidence that they'll be well looked after.







is the industry average open rate for emails

### 60.5% OPEN RATE

is the industry average for pre-arrival emails

72% OPEN RATE

is the industry average for confirmation emails



is the average return for every dollar spent on email marketing

There are lots of different types of emails – the newsletter, the upsell, the promo offer – so where should your focus begin? Prioritize by open rates. Take your booking confirmation email, for example. While the industry average open rate is 17.7%, confirmation emails have a huge 72% open rate. Pre–arrival emails are almost as high, with a 60.5% open rate and an impressive 30.6% click-through rate. These emails will have the biggest impact as they're the most likely to be seen.

One thing worth noting is that OTAs can often throw a spanner in the works by generating temporary email addresses. With no real guest emails, this means no email marketing. However, it is possible to use tools like online check-in to capture real guest emails even if they've booked through a third party – and yes, you can do so through Mews.

## Get your timing right

The most important thing in your email is the content itself. But you can make gains by sending emails at the right time. However, there's no ultimate source of truth. Some reports that say <u>Tuesday is best</u>, while others claim that Tuesday actually has the lowest click rates and that <u>Fridays are best</u>. What they all seem to agree on is that weekends see a much lower open rate, so avoid sending emails then – the exception being the confirmation email, which should be immediate, and a welcome email if the guest is due to arrive on the Saturday or Sunday.

There's a bit more consensus on what time of day it's best to send emails. The peak open time comes at around 3pm on weekdays, so scheduling your send for after lunch could bring you most success.

Analyze your reservation data to inform how close to arrival you send your hotel pre-arrival emails. Segment your sends, depending on how far in advance someone booked. For example, if a guest booked six months in advance of their stay, they're probably the type of person who doesn't do things last minute – so send their pre-arrival email with plenty of time before their booking.





### Automate email sends

Speed is good. For emails that are directly linked to the guest journey (booking confirmation, arrival, poststay), set up automation whereby the email send is triggered by a specific action.

If you're still doing manual input for these emails, even if it's just clicking a button, you're doing unnecessary work. Automated emails mean fewer mistakes (they pull data that guests have already entered themselves) and it cuts the wait time for customers.

At the moment of booking, for example, excitement levels for the guest are high. A confirmation email appearing immediately in their inbox is more likely to be opened and they're more likely to click because they're still riding that buzz. Whenever you can, be in the moment with your guests.

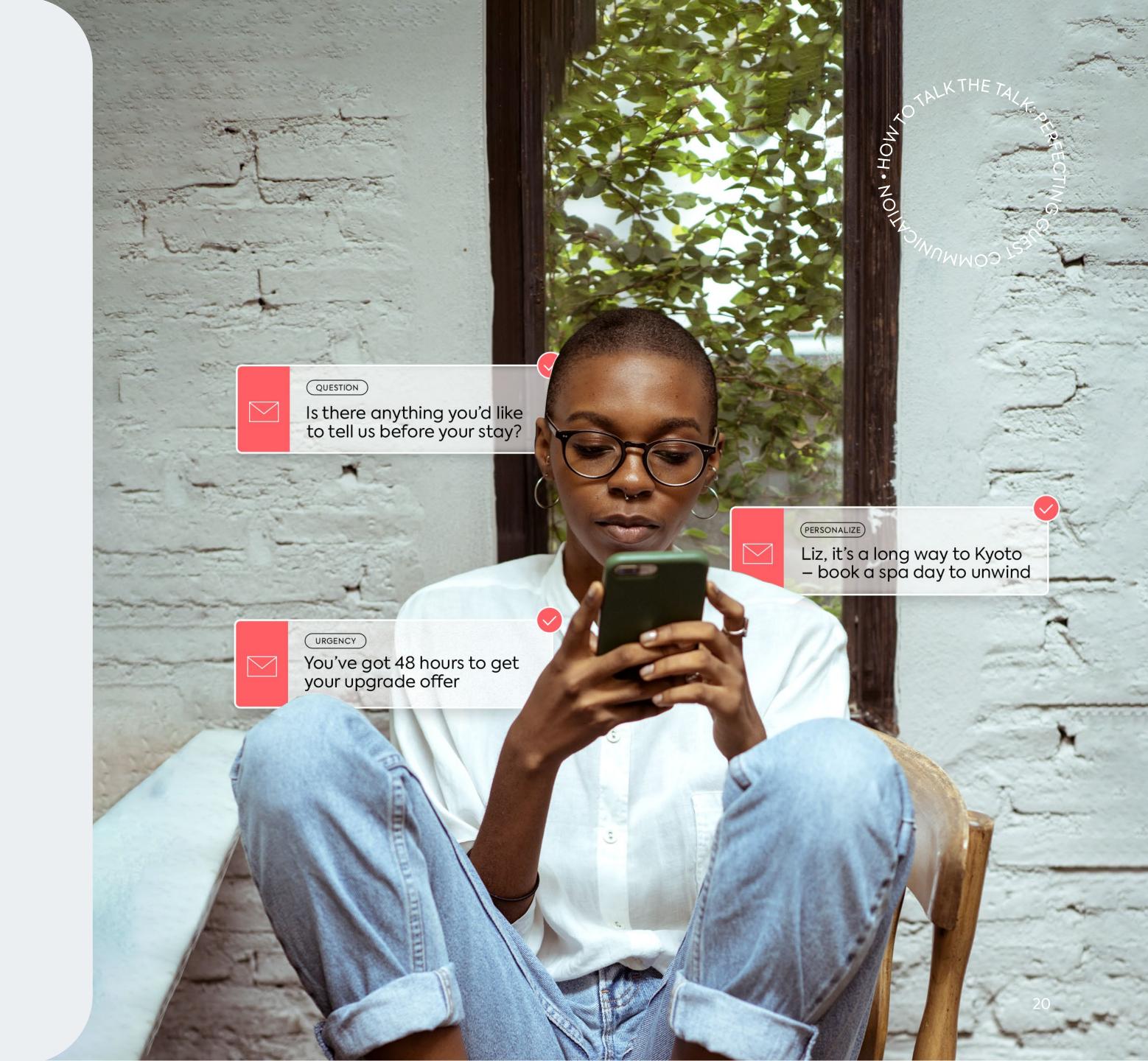


## Craft your subject lines

As any copywriter will tell you, the shorter the copy, the harder it is to get right. Subject lines are a perfect case in point. You have something in the region of just 50 characters before your copy cuts out (depending on the email client and device), and in this tiny space you need to make a compelling argument for your customer to click and read on. It's a bit of an art form, but some tips that have proven to increase open rates include:

- + Creating a sense of urgency: "You've got 48 hours to get your upgrade offer"
- Personalizing the content: "Liz, it's a long way to Kyoto book a spa day to unwind"
- Using numbers: "80% of our guests dine with us on their first night
   here's why"
- + Asking questions: "Is there anything you'd like to tell us before your stay?"

There are plenty of really helpful articles about creating excellent subject lines, so we won't go on and on here. This one's a great place to start.





read emails on their phone in travel and hospitality



of hotel website traffic is now on mobile or tablet



### Optimize for mobile



An important part of good communication is readability. Not only in terms of your writing, but also layout and how it appears on the screen.

This may or may not shock you, depending on your own habits, but the majority of people use their phones to read emails. In travel and hospitality, <u>55.6% read emails on mobile</u>, compared to 28% on webmail and just 16.4% on desktop clients. Your email may look smart on your work laptop, but have you checked how it will open on your phone?

Hospitality emails have a 12% higher open rate on mobiles than desktops, and better click-to-open rates too. You shouldn't need any more convincing that it's time to work on optimizing your emails for mobile. And in case you were wondering, it's also the same story for your website: an average of 61% of hotel website traffic is now on mobile or tablet.



### Customize your content

Don't just stick to the default email setup of your hospitality cloud or CRM (customer relationship management). The number of scheduled emails might not be right for your property, and the content and language can definitely be improved upon.

Let's start with quantity. There's a balance between keeping your guests well informed and overloading them with information and offers. You know how annoying it is to sign up to a mailing list and then suddenly be bombarded with emails almost every day. Particularly with promotional emails sent outside the guest journey, be mindful. A monthly newsletter is fine, but does your database really need weekly updates?

A common question is how many pre-arrival emails to send – the emails between the booking confirmation and the welcome email. The sweet spot for pre-arrival emails is usually two. Any more than that and open rates will start to drop as guests feel pestered. Any less, and you're missing opportunities to not only improve the hotel guest experience but to bring in more revenue too.



These emails are where you can really upsell your property's services. According to a Revinate report, a massive 98% of upsell revenue is made through pre-arrival emails. So what should you promote? In <u>GuestJoy's hospitality upselling report</u>, wellness had the biggest revenue share, with 26.7% of total upsell revenue. Room upgrades came in second, generating 23.8%, and restaurants were third with 17.5%. No real surprises here: these are three areas that most hotels can take advantage of, where there's a high intent for guest engagement. Make sure you have these three bases covered before you attempt a less popular upsell.

Analyze your data to see what you should be leading with. Usually, you can make more money from room upgrades and restaurant offers during the summer months, but your hotel might have its own distinctive patterns. If a guest has booked to stay in the cold winter months, it might be that they're less likely to want to leave the hotel and venture into the cold streets. In which case, be sure to highlight your in-house spa and swimming pool, or any other amenities that play into the comfort-factor. To really perfect your email comms, you need to consider this kind of customization.

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98% of upsell revenue is made through pre-arrival emails... wellness had the biggest revenue share, with 26.7% of total upsell revenue. Room upgrades came in second, generating 23.8%, and restaurants were third with 17.5%.





### Adapt to the channel

Remember how we spoke earlier about the importance of consistency in your tone of voice? That's still true, but social media is where you have a little bit of wiggle room.

By their nature, social channels tend to be informal spaces; exactly how informal depends on the specific platform. The language you use on Instagram, for instance, can be more relaxed and playful because of the channel's demographic. Even if your brand and your tone of voice tends to be more strait-laced, it's natural to relax this a little in this instance – otherwise anyone scrolling through their feed will find your posts jarring.

Facebook, on the other hand, has fallen out of favor with Millennials – but remains a huge market with around 2.9 billion active users – while LinkedIn is mostly a useful channel if you're looking to attract business and MICE guests. Prioritize video content, and to remember that shorter is generally better. Attention spans are short and if someone has to read big chunky paragraphs of text, they're more likely to scroll on.

Whether you're creating posts or running ads, be wary of the specific rules for each platform. Image size, character limits and more will also affect your messaging. Embrace <u>channel-specific social media strategies</u> if you really want to convert likes into bookings.



# Be human in your direct messaging

Let's talk about live chat for a moment. Picture the scene: you've made a hotel reservation but you need to change the dates. You click the 'Talk to us' button on the hotel website and the following happens: 

—

There's nothing wrong with the content here – it's the way it's delivered. It's incredibly frustrating when you know that someone is typing from a script, and it makes the experience feel impersonal.



Hello, this is Sam. How may I help with your enquiry?

An emergency came up last minute so I'd like to change my booking dates.



Thank you for your message. You can view our cancellation policy here. If you would like to change your booking dates, I need your booking reference and then I will be able to help you.

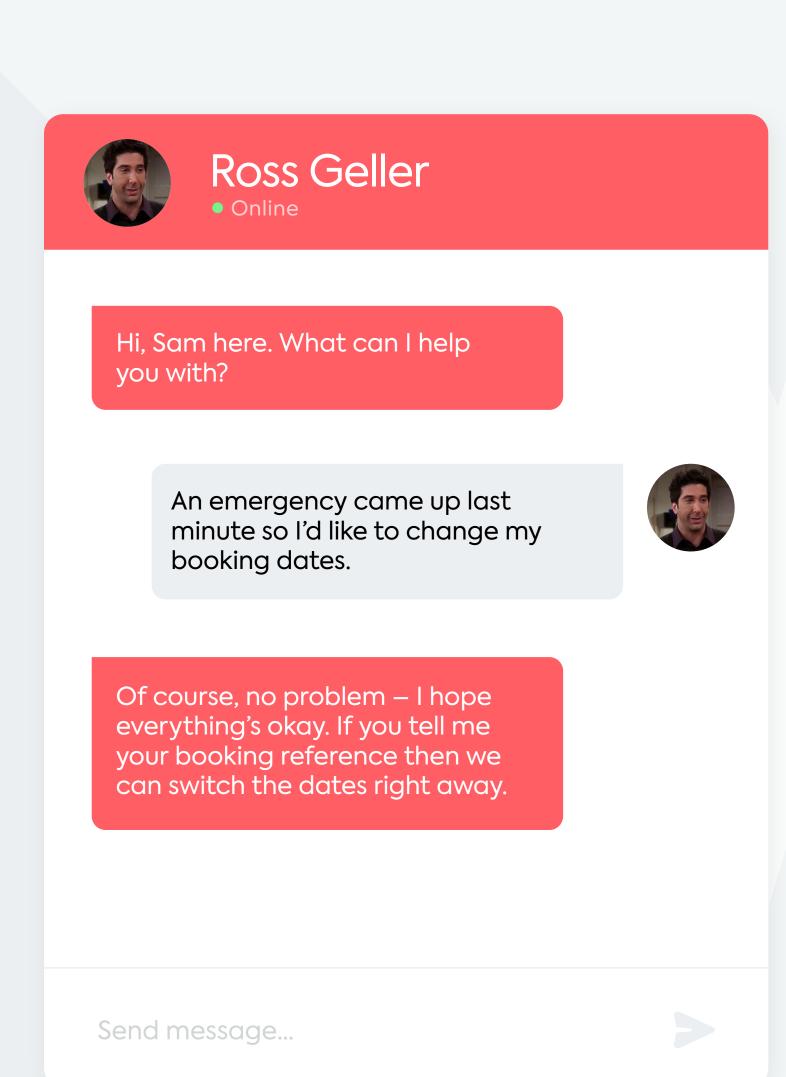
Send message...



Carry through your tone of voice into your direct messaging and be empathetic when appropriate. For example:  $\rightarrow$ 

The same applies for replying to messages via Facebook, Instagram and other social channels. Yes, make sure your grammar is good, but don't be robotic.

It's incredibly frustrating when you know that someone is typing from a script, and it makes the experience feel impersonal.



TALKTHE TALK. PERFECTIVE OF NOW ON ISTANDAND I

Perfecting Guest Communication





### Engage with your audience

One of the tenets of social media is that it's supposed to be a dialogue. It's social. The more engaged with your posts someone is, the more likely they are to book, re-book, or even become a brand ambassador.

85% of people said that a thoughtful response to a guest's review will improve their impression of the hotel – and you need to have the same approach when replying to comments. But how do you get people to interact in the first place?

Videos tend to have better engagement (they're usually prioritized in the mysterious algorithms) and give you plenty of scope to be creative. For instance, check out these TikTok videos that Magdas Hotel made during the pandemic. They're fun, easy to make, and got millions of cumulative views.

Not everything has to be video content.

Just make sure that whenever you post something, you're showing guests something interesting and are engaging them in some way. It can be as simple as one of your rooms or a tantalizing shot of breakfast, but try to provoke a response.

Don't just write: 'Here's our hotel breakfast'; say something like, 'What's the one thing you couldn't go without from our breakfast selection?'

Bonus tip: don't be afraid to leverage guest content. 97% of Millennials share posts of their holiday on social media. Reposting or commenting on this content is easy and gives your property further social proof.

### Commit to your accounts

Everything we just mentioned about social media comes with the following caveat: only create accounts for your property if you're confident you have the time and resources to run them properly.

If your brand has a marketing team, staying on top of social media shouldn't be a problem. But managing and creating content is probably a bigger commitment than you think. We've seen plenty of Instagram accounts begin with a flourish of beautiful photos and thoughtful insights, only to run out of steam after a couple of months.

This may seem harmless, but it can have damaging effects. If no one is monitoring your Facebook account, you'll miss direct messages from guests and potential guests. If someone writes a critical comment on your post, it will sit there forever without a response. And if you haven't posted for months, guests might assume you're closed and look elsewhere.

All of this adds up to a poor guest experience and losing out on potential customers. If you're worried about maintaining social channels, just pick one to begin with. You'll be able to judge the workload and see if it's worth expanding into other platforms.





# Website optimization



### D-Edge

In addition to a booking engine, channel manager and more, <u>D-Edge</u> can also help you build an intuitive, responsive and conversion-driven website. Content creation and media production experts will help to showcase what makes your property special while also targeting SEO.



### SiteMinder

SiteMinder might primarily be known for their channel manager, but they have also developed into an open hotel commerce platform over the years. When it comes to their hotel website builder offering, you can expect as much as 20% better conversions thanks to their mobile responsive layout, proven design templates, and industry expertise.

# Email customization



### **Experience Hotel**

Experience Hotel is an all-in-one CRM that gives you easy control over your guest communication while ultimately boosting your hotel revenue. Through segmentation and customization, they can boost your ROI by as much as 31x on email campaigns, and will also help capture every guest email address, however they booked.



### LoungeUp

LoungeUp is a guest relationship and internal operations management platform – including a guest database – that lets you handle direct messaging, mobile keys, personalized upsells, touristic recommendations, and – of course – guest communications through email, SMS, WhatsApp and Facebook Messenger. Using a guest messaging hub, hotels can send highly personalized communications that are tailored to each guest's preferences, streamline that experience, and build loyalty.





### Mailchimp

Mailchimp is one of the household names in email marketing. It's exceptionally easy to use and with tools like audience management and an Al creative assistant, you'll be designing, sending and automating your emails in no time.

### REVINATE

### Revinate

Revinate is actually a full-bodied CRM platform that covers every element of guest marketing, feedback and data-driven insights. Hyper-personalized guest communications is one of its real highlights, helping to generate 73% more revenue per recipient through the use of segmented campaigns.

### Guest messaging



### Hi Jiffy

HiJiffy is an all-in-one communication platform for hotels, featuring a smart website chatbot that automatically answers more than 60% of guest queries, helping them throughout the booking process. The platform also centralizes customer care activities, making hotel teams more efficient.

### **Bookboost**

### Bookboost

Bookboost is a guest communication platform helping you streamline your operations and build stronger relationships with your guests. It provides a 360-platform suitable for multi-property hotels, hostels and serviced apartments, including multi-channel communication and marketing (email, WhatsApp, SMS, Facebook Messenger) and a unified inbox (including channels such as Booking.com, Expedia and Airbnb), increasing your (Total)RevPAR, efficiency, and guest experience along the way.

### Q QUICKTEXT

### Quicktext

Quicktext provides instant communication for hoteliers. You can view multiple comms channels in one place (live chat, SMS, Facebook Messenger, Twitter and more) and easily respond from the same central dashboard. There's also Zoe, an Al chatbot, that typically responds to up to 80% of guest messages, giving your team more time to focus on providing better communication.

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### Guest feedback

### TRUSTYOU\*\*\*

### TrustYou

<u>TrustYou</u> is a leading guest engagement tool with reputation management at its core. You'll get valuable data about your user journey at every stage as well as a central platform for managing guest surveys and reviews which can then be leveraged as social proof on your website.

### ReviewPro •

### ReviewPro

ReviewPro offers a guest experience platform that helps you identify operational and service improvements by managing guest feedback from one central dashboard. Improve your online reputation on over 175+ review sources, gain detailed insights with guest satisfaction surveys, streamline operational processes and automate your guest communication.

### ••••ualitelis®

### Qualitelis

Qualitelis helps you communicate with guests before, during and after their stay through customizable surveys and questionnaires. Manage your reputation from a single platform that also offers an inbuilt CRM to help with your marketing and campaign operations.

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# Upselling communication



### Oaky

Oaky helps hotels boost revenue through enriched guest experiences and branding. It's a personalized approach to subtly encourage their guests to spend more and enjoy more, promoting the right service to the right guest to maximize total revenue.



### UpsellGuru

<u>UpsellGuru</u> is an innovative upselling tool that sells upgrades to guests via a dynamic, automated bidding system. It's an engaging way to boost guest engagement and lifetime value, alongside other features like online check-in and direct communication throughout the stay.

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### Summing up

Getting your guest communication right isn't rocket science. Your success is largely dependent on having a strong, defined brand, a consistent tone of voice, and the tools to personalize and customize your messaging.

Across every industry, the use of personal data to drive better customer engagement is becoming increasingly common. The reason is that it works. You're in the fortunate position of having lots of valuable guest information that can be used to segment and personalize your communications, and it's this that will drive better conversion, improved engagement, and more return guests.

Ultimately, we're all in hospitality to provide remarkable experiences for guests. How you talk to them and interact with them digitally is a big part of that. Take the advice from this guide on board and you'll be well on your way to perfecting your guest communication.



### About Mews

Want to work on your guest communications? You'll need an innovative hospitality cloud that connects to the best solutions and gives you the power to work efficiently and with a focus on your guests.

Mews has been transforming hospitality since 2012. What began in a single hotel in Prague now powers thousands of properties around the world, as we pursue our mission to develop transformational solutions for brands and create remarkable experiences for guests.

From global hospitality brands to independent properties, hospitality professionals join Mews because they recognize the power of innovation. They understand that properties like yours can benefit from hospitality tech that drives efficiency, maximizes revenue, and improves guest happiness.

If you'd like to know more, head to <a href="mailto:mews.com/en/demo">mews.com/en/demo</a> and fill in the short form. One of our sales specialists will get back to you and arrange a time to show you around Mews Hospitality Cloud in more detail.



