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From High Tech to High Touch:

# 6 Ways to Convert Guests Into Brand Advocates

# Table of Contents

# Connect with connected guests

With the dominance of social media and our connected lives, a hotel's reputation can be made—or unmade—online. The typical guest will do a fair amount of research before narrowing down a hotel selection, and that journey is often guided by recommendations from a wide network of friends, business associates, influencers, and online reviews.

While this is a significant departure from how bookings were done in the past, particularly when travel agents and travel managers were a more prevalent industry force, the good news is that hotels can harness that sphere of influence to their benefit.

The way to do this is by turning guests into brand advocates. A guest who has had a good experience with a hotel is more likely to recommend it to their network, put up a positive post on social, and revisit in the future.

But turning guests into brand advocates takes more than the occasional complimentary treat. It means putting some thought into what guests really want. Let's take a look at six ways today's technology can transform guests into fans.

# Six ways technology can transform guests into fans

## 1. Invest in enhanced guest stays

One of the best ways to get guests to return and to sing your hotel's praises is to make their entire experience simple, from booking to checking in and checking out. According to the American Customer Service Index Travel Report, customer satisfaction hinges on those time-saving experiences. Simplified processes were rated the highest factor in guest satisfaction, surpassing other popular hotel features like in-room entertainment, by a considerable margin. By investing in streamlined guest experiences today, you can end up saving money—and increasing revenue—over time.

**Automation and Artificial Intelligence (AI)** are streamlining stays, too. In Abu Dhabi, the Shangri-La Hotel adjusts room temperatures when room status switches from "vacant" to "occupied" while reducing manual errors and improving response time. And AI can trigger drapes to open and music to play at a guest's desired wake up time.

*The time to automate guest experience is now.*

## 2. Connect guests to smart rooms

Technology in rooms is a no-brainer by now. Decent Wi-Fi is an expectation and, particularly for business travelers, a non-negotiable feature. Forward-thinking hotels are offering technology that brings smart homes to guest rooms. Among the first brands to connect guest rooms to the Internet of Things (IoT) were **Hilton Hotels** and **AccorHotels**, and both continue to expand on the concept.

Hilton's Connected Room allows guests to control a wide range of room elements—lighting, temperature, window coverings, and **entertainment**. Additional functionality such as voice technology and allowing guests to save preferences in their Hilton accounts have boosted Hilton's marketing conversion rate **by 20%**. The impact of these upgrades on guest loyalty are still to be determined, but if IoT trends continue to take over, we may see additional brands follow suit.

AccorHotels' connected rooms include IoT to control room elements, sleep aids, and an aromatherapy sensor system, all controlled by an in-room tablet and by using Google Home voice technology. Not only do these rooms provide functional controls, they're also offering more tailored, luxurious choices that feel indulgent to travelers. This unique room mix can give travelers the best reason to choose an AccorHotels stay over other accommodations.

*Connected rooms are connecting with guests.*

## 3. Make it easier to be loyal

There are plenty of ways for hotels to attract the kind of organic following that results in a high ripple effect across digital and guest influencer networks.

Loyalty programs, referrals, and promotions, all supported by solid social media campaigns and unique hashtags, can have a high return on investment—if done right. But therein lies the challenge.

So many hotels have loyalty programs now that just having one isn't enough. But loyalty programs don't need to be fancy or complex. In fact, simplicity might do more to get guests to use loyalty programs, as a study by NextAdvisor found that consumers are often confused by hotel loyalty programs.

When Wyndham heard from guests that its loyalty program was too confusing, the brand simplified its program, and it worked—memberships and redemptions increased. Wyndham's success reinforces the notion that guests shouldn't have to jump through hoops to reap the benefits of loyalty programs, so those seeking to improve their own programs should review them, along with associated referral programs and promotions, to find areas for improvement.

Finally, a social media campaign with a unique hashtag is a great way to spread the "brand love" triggered by enthusiastic brand fans.

*Loyalty programs should be easy to join, enjoy, and share.*

6

## 4.Unlock more than doors with your mobile app

The world is going mobile, and hotels are launching their own apps in response to travelers' booking habits. **91 percent of hotel executives** say mobile technologies are critical to improving guest experience and cultivating loyalty. **Their guests agree**:

**96%**

of international tourists access the internet via mobile devices while traveling

**70%**

of travelers say their smartphone is the most important tool to research travel accomodations

**80%**

of guests would download and use the hotel app if their favorite hotel had one

Given the rising expectations of today's travelers—particularly around seamless, mobile-first experiences—hotels are under increasing pressure to continually enhance the functionality of their apps. From mobile check-in to digital room keys and real-time service requests, guests now expect intuitive, on-demand features as part of their stay. To remain competitive in a rapidly evolving tech landscape, hotels must treat mobile innovation not as a luxury, but as a necessity. Regularly investing in app functionality is essential for meeting guest demands and staying relevant in an industry where convenience and personalization increasingly drive loyalty.

Apps aren't just for the basics of room booking, but should be used by properties to maintain engagement with guests even before they check in. The key is a well-designed app that's easy to use, provides detailed information about rooms and amenities, can manage loyalty accounts, are for multiple properties, and offers some type of premium or bonus for using it.

*Mobile technology can transform guest experiences.*

## 5. Use bots to streamline service

As phone calls fall out of favor, consumers are letting their fingers do the talking instead, which is why chatbots are being integrated into hotel customer service offerings. Chatbots provide a positive customer service experience at a much lower cost than the human equivalent. But chatbots can go beyond providing answers to basic questions. Using data and AI, they can provide a more personalized guest experience:

>> Use information on a guest's account preferences to make recommendations

>> Help with reservations, room service orders, and spa bookings

>> Offer relevant promotions based on past activity

One bot delivers **personalization with personality**. Rose—the savvy, quick-witted, SMS chatbot of The Cosmopolitan of Las Vegas—was designed to entertain and engage guests with her unique personality while accurately answering their questions through real-time text messages.

Still, bots won't be replacing guest-facing employees any time soon. According to recent HotelTechReport findings, **41% of people** who have used them say they need to be more accurate in understanding what they're looking for. Chatbot responses often lack sufficient detail, forcing users to seek assistance from human staff. Perhaps for now, the best approach is hybrid tech-human because guests still like talking with other humans. The point is to provide the best answers at the best possible time, and as quickly as possible.

*Chatbots can help personalize your guests' stays.*

## 6. Become your travel agencies' favorite brand

Treat agencies well, and they'll return the favor by recommending your properties more often to their customers. This sounds simple, but commission reconciliation and payment processes can sometimes strain agency partnerships.

Due to complex, antiquated rules engines, PMS and CRS systems struggle to calculate not only how much hotels should pay out in commissions to their agency partners, but also the time to pay, and if their payouts have been processed and received. This builds mistrust among agencies, who keep their own (often conflicting) records of what they're owed.

Today, technology like CommPay™ from Onyx CenterSource can help. CommPay increases payment accuracy while improving connectivity and visibility to and from agencies—a win-win for both parties. Plus, CommPay significantly reduces the labor associated with commission processing, saving hotels 30-50% in administrative overhead costs.

*Loyal agents are more likely to foster—and book—loyal guests.*

9

# Conclusion

## The right partner-and technology-for relationship building

Building relationships and gaining loyalty is crucial to a hotel's long-term financial health, and nowhere is this more apparent than in the hotel/travel agency dynamic. Travel agent bookings, from small mom-and-pop agencies to large OTAs, are the perfect opportunity to provide stellar service to new guests who can become your future brand advocates.

The key to unlocking more travel agency bookings begins with trust—trust that you will give guests an outstanding experience, and trust that you will provide timely and complete commission payments to the travel agent bringing you business.

Onyx CenterSource has the tailored products and expertise to facilitate hotel commissions effectively and on time, keeping your agent referrals up and your administrative costs down.

*Happy agency partners nurture brand-loyal guests.*
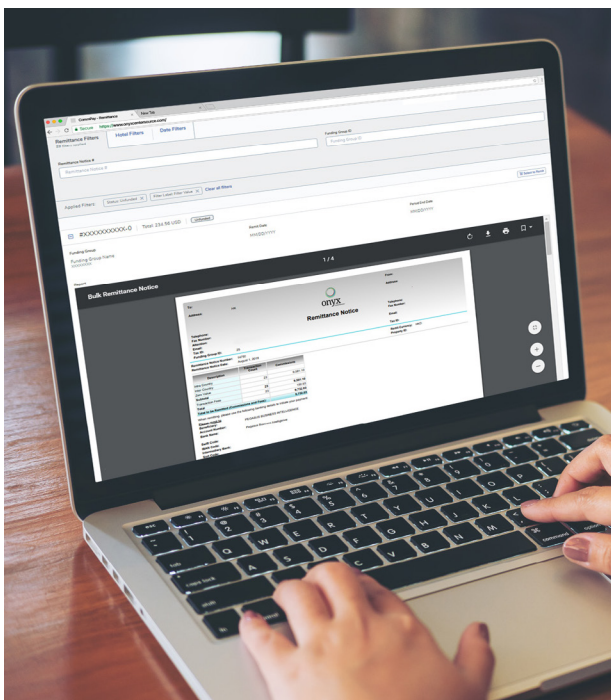
## CommPay™

CommPay streamlines the commission process for thousands of hotels and resorts around the globe. A calculation and processing engine, CommPay parses hotel stay data, calculates the commission payment, sends it in the specified currency and manages any inquiries and follow-ups. It frees hoteliers to focus on generating revenue, not managing commission payments.

*Onyx CenterSource Provides the B2B Payment Tools to Build Agency Trust and Lower Your Administrative Costs.*

**Learn More**

Ready to get streamline your commission process?
**Visit OnyxCenterSource.com today!**