



5 Steps to Turn Guests Into **Brand Advocates**



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Get into the **Guest Mindset**

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 he or she narrows 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 dominant industry force, the good news is that hotels can harness that sphere of recommendation for its 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 return again and again.

But turning guests into brand advocates takes more than the occasional complimentary treat. It means putting some thought into what guests really want. Here are 5 steps to build the path from guest to fans:





1. Make Guests' Lives Easy

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

The time to invest in guest experience automation is now.



2. Latest Technology In 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 for those needing to get work done. Forward-thinking hotels are offering technology that brings smart homes to guest rooms. Both [Hilton Hotels](#) and [AccorHotels](#) launched their respective Internet of Things (lofT) guest rooms recently.

Hilton's Connected Room allows guests to control a wide range of room elements—lighting, temperature, window coverings, and media. Future plans include voice technology and saving preferences in guest's Hilton accounts. We have yet to see the impact of these upgrades on guest loyalty, but if lofT trends continue to take over, Hilton has an upper-hand in the race to connect.

AccorHotels' concept room includes lofT 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 choice that feels indulgent to travelers. This unique room mix can give travelers the best reason to choose an AccorHotel stay over other accommodations.

***lofT is a new perk
gaining attention.***



3. Encourage the Social Ripple Effect

There are plenty of ways for hotels to attract the kind of organic influence with a potential high ripple effect across digital and guest networks. Loyalty programs, referrals, and promotions, all supported by a solid social media campaign 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—[according to a study by NextAdvisor](#), consumers are confused by hotel loyalty programs. When Wyndham heard from guests that its loyalty program was too confusing, it simplified it [and it worked](#)—memberships and redemptions increased. Same with referrals and promotions—guests shouldn't need to jump through hoops to make them work.

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



***Social media works.
Use it.***



4. Dedicated Apps That Do More

The world is going mobile, and hotels are launching their own apps in answer to travelers' booking habits. But hotels apps aren't just competing with other hotels and their loyalty programs, they're competing with newer entrants in the hospitality industry like aggregators and last-minute booking platforms.

Many hotel apps just aren't making the grade, according to [travel industry news site Skift](#), and they get low marks from travelers. These apps don't include enough functions, like the ability communicate with hotel staff, and also aren't updated regularly, if at all. That's no longer good enough for travelers, and it's no longer enough to compete in the increasingly competitive sphere of hotel bookings.

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—preferably all those managed by a brand—and offers some type of premium or bonus for using it.

Hilton Hotels, for instance, recently [partnered with location platform Foursquare](#) to offer users of the hotel's app experience recommendations from local experts. That's the type of value-adding proposition that could attract guests to one app—and hotel—over another.

Be Mobile-friendly Outside of Booking.

5. The Chatbot Effect

As calling falls out of favor, consumers are letting their fingers do the talking instead, which is why chatbots are being integrated into hotels. Chatbots provide a good 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 provide a more personalized guest experience.

You can tailor their stay in several ways:

- *Use information on a guest's preferences to make recommendations*
- *Help with reservations, room service orders, and spa bookings*
- *Offer relevant promotions based on past activity*

But chatbots won't be replacing guest-facing employees completely—the best approach is a hybrid tech-human one 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.

Nurturing brand advocates can take work, but fans can be worth their weight in gold—and bookings. No one can rave about a hotel experience better than a devoted enthusiast, and that enthusiasm is contagious.

Building relationships and gaining loyalty is crucial to a hotel's long-term financial health, and nowhere is this more apparent than in a hotel's dynamic with travel agencies. 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 unlock more travel agency bookings begins with trust. Trust that you will give their guests a stellar 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.

Build relationships & gain loyalty



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