Mobile App Review of IHG (InterContinental Hotels Group), February 1st – 3rd

<u>User Experience, Usability and Functionality</u>

First off, I was very impressed with the user interface (UI) of this app, on both Android devices and Apple devices (especially Android). For specification purposes, the Android devices used were the HTC Evo 3D, and the Supersonic tablet. The Apple Devices used were the iPad and iPod touch 5th generation. The UI is very welcoming, easy to use, accessibility is high, and it succeeds in directionality, that meaning I could understand where the app was going and what it was doing without confusion. The content is not cluttered and frustrating to sort through. The screens flow very well into each other, and the transitions are very smooth. The technical architecture is splendid. The design is very consistent, very precise, and very attractive. It provides a great aesthetic appeal and professional quality. Design is more than a surface value. It is not merely how an app looks, it is how an app is built.

However, while the app was running smoothly from the beginning, when I eventually received an update on my Android device and it was installed, the app stopped working. It would not even open, so that update should be looked into. Furthermore the app also comes with a lot of reading. Having explored it and its options, it feels quite tedious. Most users will probably skim over this content, unless it appeals to them in a more interactive, way. That's just one minor issue. It is great to see that the app has an integration component with social though. In regards to security though, do customers have the comfort of knowing their reservations are secure and their money really went to said hotel? Does this technology protect the information and privacy of its users? These are some of the things your users are looking for in your app.

"Apps have become a major part of the smartphone culture, and a good experience is incredibly important."

Strategies and Suggestions

One thing to remember is that the most important part of an app is its users. Always consider your users. There are many types and each responds differently. Raise individual focus. Given the type of app this is, it is unlikely that your users will be using your app on a daily basis, unless they are avid travellers or vacationists. On the Apple stores, unlike Android, submitting comes with a cost. So you might be tempted to monetize the app by giving it a price here. I do not recommend this if your main goal is to increase downloads, because that simple price puts a sort of wall or barrier between you and your customers. Most customers do not pay for apps unless they desperately need it, thus they may just resort to your website only. Demand for this app is highly elastic, therefore a change in price (plainly from free to not free) will cause a drastic change in downloads. But simple market research can tell if your customers would be willing to pay a small fee, maybe 99c, for the app so by all means look into that. There is a distinct difference between a moneymaking app and a highly downloaded app.

With proper strategies though, you can make your app into both. There are other ways to monetize without pricing. Regarding ways to increase the amount of downloads for this app, I suggest making small partnerships with other highly rated and prestigious hotels outside of your 9 brands that have a wide market base already, and getting them to include the app in their promotions. Given that this app's main purpose is for reservations and bookings, just because someone downloads this app and "uses" it, doesn't automatically mean they are your customer. They may not be planning to book a hotel any time soon. Do not be fooled by the statistics of downloads. While the app already seems pretty popular, it can never be too popular. Put it out there as much as possible. Additionally, if applicable, a monetizing possibility lies there as well. You may propose agreements with hotels that seek to be more recognized, that for every reservation made at their hotels using your app, you receive a portion of that revenue.

Another recommendation for increasing your customer base, include new features sparingly. By this I mean, you do not want to put all your features in at one time upon release of the app, and then when users

download it, they use the app for a while then eventually stop because there's nothing new. Keep the customers interested. Start off simple, and then add newer features when updating. For example, and this can be taken as a suggestion, in the near future you could include a feature that included panoramic views of particular hotel environments and the rooms that would give the user a feel of what being there is like, and what the hotel really has to offer them.

One obvious way of monetizing your app is advertisements, but again, you have to always consider your users. It is highly counterproductive to incorporate ads in your app that will generate revenue, but dissuade users from using it, turning your customer base away from the app. There are many types of in-app ads though, and some do not interrupt the user experience. For example OfferWall ads, which is a subsection of your app dedicated to ads that the users themselves can select to view. There are Rich Media Ads that are embedded in your app's coding and may pop up after a certain button is pressed, but the user may simply close it and continue what they were doing. You may consider these ways to make these ads nonintrusive in your app. But if you would prefer to not bombard your app with ads, that is also a good choice, this app is already great on its own. I noticed the first thing that popped up when I started the application was a query asking if I would like to receive push notifications, and it is commendable that you give your users the option, as opposed to forcing it on them, and they're left to put up with them. That's a major point in user experience.

Also, try to include more Caribbean hotels. I see that there are a few, maybe a handful, of hotels suggested in your app from the Caribbean, but there is a large market of travellers interested in vacationing on Caribbean islands. As a Caribbean resident myself, the Caribbean is definitely a hotspot, and it would serve as a huge diversity to your app. Another suggested feature to consider in the future is allowing users to have a watch-list in the app. A watch-list of particular hotels that they have their eye on and be able to receive updates (when they wish to check the list, of course) on booking capacities, new developments, special occasions, events hosted by the hotel, the like. Hotels lose a lot of money daily on unoccupied rooms. One

update from your app, sort of like a news feed, informing your users of vacancies available, and your app becomes a saviour of lost money. Also consider including motels, bed & breakfasts, inns, as a small add-on or feature.

In App Purchases are another route to take, but keep in mind Apple takes about 30% of In App Purchases. You could have the previously suggested watch-list feature as an In App Purchase, for example.

Apps are basically mobile websites, so find ways to incorporate as much of your website's features into the app, this way people can use it equivalently with how they use your website. It defeats the purpose if they can complete the basic job of making a reservation from the app, but cannot view your extras on the app and thus have to end up back on their laptop on your webpage. Overall, this app's performance was impressive minus the crash issue that occurred later on. It is attractive and sleek, I enjoyed using it. I wish I was planning to take a trip soon so I could have even made a reservation using it. You must remember though, there will always be new apps. Other apps are out there that serve a similar purpose. What makes yours stand out is how different it is, what makes it better. Research is always continuous when it comes to technology. Functionality and usability are pristine, maintain these standards, but there is always room for improvement. Never get too comfortable with where your product is, know who you're selling to.