

EBOOK

HOW TO EMPOWER YOUR HOTEL GUESTS THROUGH DIGITAL CONNECTIVITY



APPLAUSE^o



A Shift in Expectations

The key to a successful hotel experience has long been held by the people who interact with you from every transactional touchpoint. From booking a room to planning activities to checking out on the final day, humans have been the go-to for ensuring a memorable stay. However, the modern traveler is prioritizing a more digitally connected travel experience, opting for flexibility and convenience over human interaction.

Today, more than 148 million people use the Internet to book reservations for their accommodations, tours, and activities, according to StatisticsBrain. Mobile devices, in particular, have emerged as an indispensable travel companion with 48% of U.S. travelers researching, booking, and planning their entire trips using only a mobile device, per [Google and PhocusWright](#). Moreover, more than 70% of respondents always use their smartphones when traveling, up from 41% in 2015.

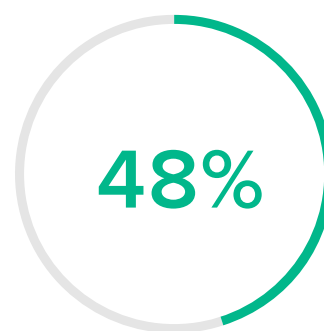
As more travelers lean into mobile, the expectation is that they receive a seamless omnichannel experience — one that keeps them connected at all times and simplifies the common and time-consuming actions. Hotels that can't deliver these high-quality digital experiences will quickly fall out of favor with travelers.

For instance, the Google/PhocusWright research revealed that over one-third of smartphone users have a negative view of a brand if the mobile experience is slow.



One third of smartphone users have a negative view of a brand if the mobile experience is slow.

Source: Google/PhocusWright



48% of U.S. travelers rely only on their mobile phone to research, book, or plan their travels.

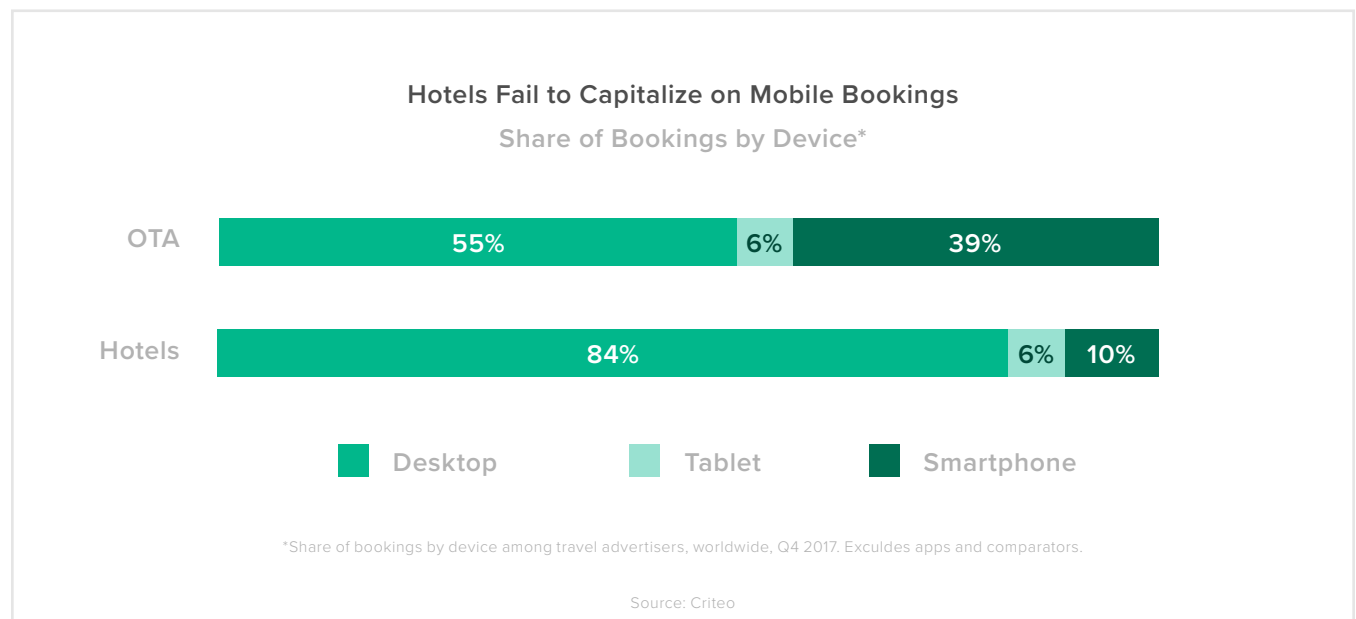
Source: Google/PhocusWright

In reality though, most travel organizations are not fully prepared to execute on this digital transformation. In fact, less than half of organizations (44%) are prepared for a mobile world, [per Skift](#). That means there is a long road ahead to ensure that the wide range of high-touch, highly personalized digital experiences meet the quality customers expect — especially at a mass scale.

Where You're Falling Short

While digital transformation has taken many industries by storm, lodging companies have been slower to adapt. Segments of the travel experience have been digitized by hotels, but they largely have not come together as one unified experience.

As a result, online travel agencies (OTAs) like Expedia and Kayak have steadily been gaining the patronage of mobile-first travelers. With [mobile bookings surging](#) from 14% of total bookings in 2014 to 25% of the total in 2017, there is a renewed urgency for hotels to improve their mobile capabilities.



Once at the property, guests who use a hotel's mobile app are said to have much higher satisfaction with their stays than those without the app, [per J.D. Power](#). The problem is, only 19% of total guests have downloaded a hotel's mobile app, indicating a serious issue of adoption. With that said, 70% of rewards members have downloaded the app — an indicator of how a positive mobile experience can engender loyalty to the brand.

“

Imagine a world where the room knows you, and you know your room.”

Christopher Nassetta, CEO, Hilton

Among guests that have downloaded a hotel mobile app, 38% never use it during their stay and only a tiny fraction tap the convenience for check-ins (4%) and check-outs (1%); when a mobile app is used, there is typically higher guest satisfaction.

The fact remains that hotels have a long way to go towards perfecting the mobile app experience, and as a result, a seamless end-to-end experience. With that in mind, it's critical that hotel companies improve the quality of their mobile apps and educate users on their value in order to bolster guest satisfaction and foster greater loyalty.



Your Digital Future Has Arrived

Many leaders just beginning to scratch the surface of potential mobile offerings, digital conveniences, and omnichannel experiences. Still, a growing number of hotel brands have launched new technologies and mobile features that are deepening their connection with travelers. This will soon be the expectation rather than the exception.



Keyless entry, offered by many leading global hotel chains, affords guests the luxury of using their mobile phone to open the door to their assigned room. This eliminates the need to wait at an oft-crowded front desk upon arrival. Not only this, but some apps allow for guests to select their rooms in advance, giving them an opportunity to personalize their stay.



Connected rooms are the future of the hotel experience and have already made their mark on a small sample size of properties. This high-tech concept allows guests to personalize and control every aspect of their stay from their mobile device. Hilton was the first to roll this out to a select few properties, allowing users of the Hilton Honors app to adjust temperature and lighting and personalize their TV settings with their streaming preferences. The goal is to eventually tap into other connected devices to upload guests' own artwork and photos for further personalization.



Voice connectivity is quickly becoming a fixture in the connected hotel experience with more and more brands showing interest. Marriott is among the chains leading the charge, having secured a partnership with Amazon to deliver Alexa for Hospitality. With an Echo device available to guests at select properties, they can use the app to control room basics like temperature and lighting, order room service, or request housekeeping without picking up the phone.



Mobile concierge services are quickly becoming more common via hotel apps, enabling visitors to easily request common services such as laundry, valet, and even fresh towel delivery. Most of the concierge mobile apps also serve up curated recommendations, from must-see local attractions to the best-reviewed spas and restaurants.

Personalization Reigns King

Digital transformation can yield many benefits for hotels from process optimization to reduction of operational costs. However, the greatest upside is the benefit of creating a highly personalized customer experience.

Whether traveling for business or leisure, visitors don't want a cookie-cutter hotel experience. Simplicity and efficiency are important, but they want something that caters to their unique interests and makes the hotel stay feel comfortable, yet special. [Research from IHG](#) found that nearly three in five travelers (59%) found their hotel stays to be significantly more comfortable when services were personalized, and more than 54% admitted that such personalization makes them feel more valued as a customer.

So what exactly does a personalized hotel experience entail? It can start at booking with recommendations of room categories or packages based on previous stays. That can be followed by restaurant or activity suggestions based on interests from your profile. Other areas of personalization can be as simple as a welcome note on the TV screen when entering the room.

There are countless ways to personalize the hotel experience through mobile and delivering that experience to travelers is the top priority for more than [three-quarters of hotel companies](#). However, many struggle to follow through on this as only 36% of travel organizations currently rate themselves four stars or higher when it comes to customer personalization.

In the end, the hotel experience is only as good as the quality and functionality of the mobile app. Other areas of personalization can be as simple as a welcome note on the TV screen when entering the room, or leaving a guest's favorite snack or newspaper in the room to arrive to.

Top 3 Reasons for Not Delivering Personalized Experiences

An in-the-wild testing solution is key to overcoming your personalization shortcomings.



1. Budget Constraints



2. IT Infrastructure Challenges



3. A Lack of Skilled Data Marketing Talent

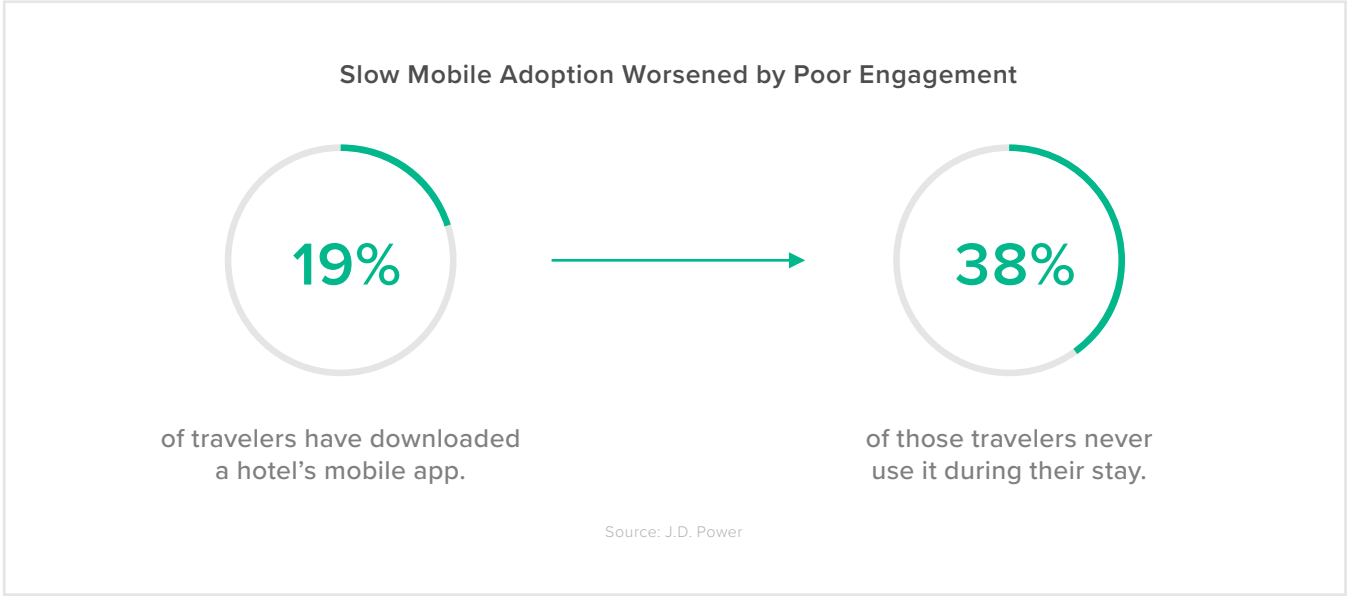
Source: Skift's 2018 Digital Transformation Survey



The Digital Excellence Challenge

Delivering a seamless digital experience is a complex endeavor for any company, but particularly so for hospitality giants with a global user base. Between countless languages, locales, and devices — which vary from market to market — the breadth and complexity of the test matrix make software consistency a monumental task.

Consistency of the hotel app not only extends to the traveler, but to the hotel staff as well. Remember that apps are, in most cases, eliminating the middleman of certain tasks. However, these tasks are still executed on the back end by hotel associates — all of whom need to be prepped and trained on how to facilitate these new types of digital interactions.



Ensuring quality of the app is troublesome enough at that scale. Seamlessly aligning with staff to ensure property readiness is another beast altogether. The Marriott portfolio is comprised of 30 distinct hotel brands, 6,500 total properties, with a presence in 127 countries and territories. Ensuring quality of the app is troublesome enough at that scale, but seamlessly aligning with staff to ensure property readiness is another beast altogether.

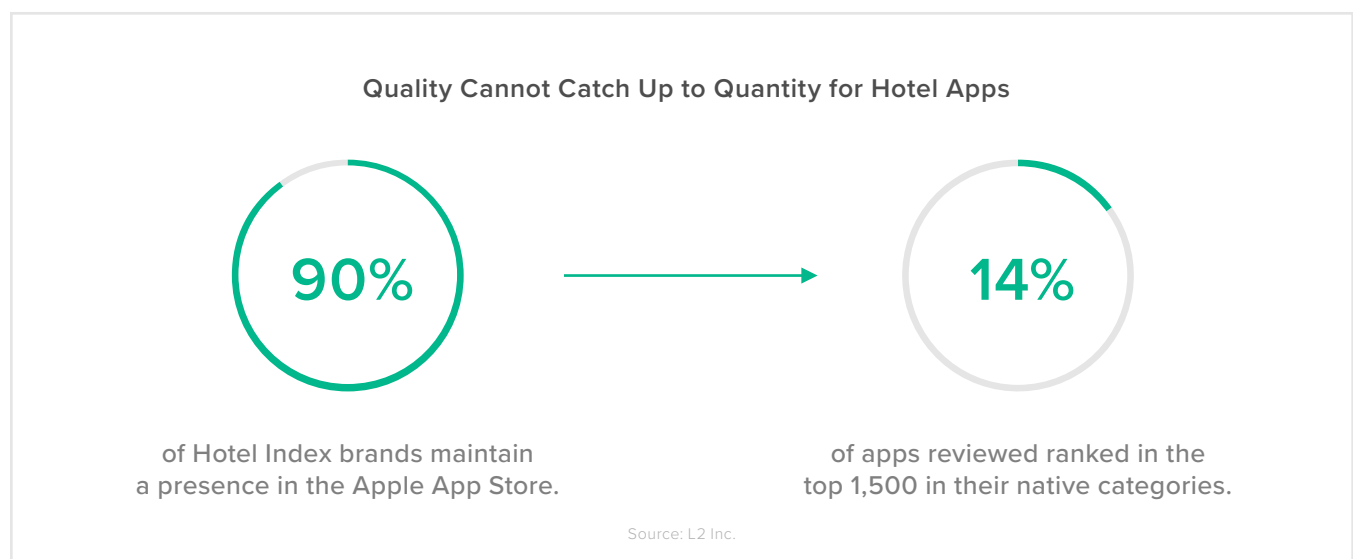
Perhaps the most difficult challenge to overcome is that of adoption and engagement with hotel apps. Both of these shortcomings stem from lack of insight into consumer expectations. If hotels are not clear on what features will add value and convenience for guests, no amount of marketing will entice them to download the app.

By the same token, poor engagement is largely due to a lack of insight on the usability and intuitiveness of an app. Customers are the ones using the apps, but feedback is typically limited to in-house testers, revealing a glaring lack of perspective on whether the app is actually easy to use. Only by looking outward and collecting feedback through the lens of the customer can a company know if they are delivering a meaningful experience.

A Comprehensive Solution to a Complex Problem

Only 21% of hotel companies feel they are ahead of the curve when it comes to their digital strategy — down from 24% the previous year [per Skift](#). This is understandable given the challenges they face, but it's time to start trending in the right direction. Applause is the solution that can get these organizations to the next level.

While some core functionalities of mobile apps and online experiences can be accomplished through automated testing, the majority of work demands an in-the-wild approach. Only this approach can account for the variability of real-world use cases and do so at the scale needed for an organization's global footprint.



When testing for a feature like keyless entry, Applause can quickly assign vetted testers from any global market to thorough test it on-site and deliver results within hours. With real people testing the app from their own devices in real-world environment, organizations are able to detect bugs or misalignment with back-end staff before the feature hits the market.

For a worldwide rollout, organizations can launch test sprints simultaneously in as many markets and properties as they desire, significantly increasing their test capacity without the added stress or overhead required of hiring and training new staff. **Applause clients have been able to scale their testing capacity by more than 200% with a crowdsourced testing approach.**

Best of all, this approach not only tests the functionality of each app feature, but gathers unique feedback on the intuitiveness and ease of use on the overall mobile experience — all through the lens of your target demographic. How can you really deliver what customers want if you fail to listen to them? Considering the difficulty hotels have with adoption and engagement, this feedback is invaluable towards delivering the ideal customer experience.

Hotels have an opportunity to alter the landscape of hospitality through digital experiences. Though a digital transformation is a massive undertaking, the tools are now there to help you take it on. It's your move. Are you ready to take the next step?



Driving ROI: Getting Closer to Your Customer Through a Crowdsourced Testing Solution

Read Hobson & Company's complete report to understand the full ROI of Applause.

[DOWNLOAD](#)

About Applause

Applause is the worldwide leader in crowd testing and digital quality. Software is at the heart of how all brands engage users, and digital experiences must work flawlessly everywhere. With highly vetted testers available on-demand around the globe, Applause provides brands with a full suite of testing and feedback capabilities. This approach drastically improves testing coverage, eliminates the limitations of offshoring and traditional QA labs, and speeds time-to-market for websites, mobile apps, IoT, and in-store experiences.

Thousands of leading companies — including Ford, Fox, Google, and Dow Jones — rely on Applause as a best practice to deliver high-quality digital experiences that customers love.

Learn more at www.applause.com

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