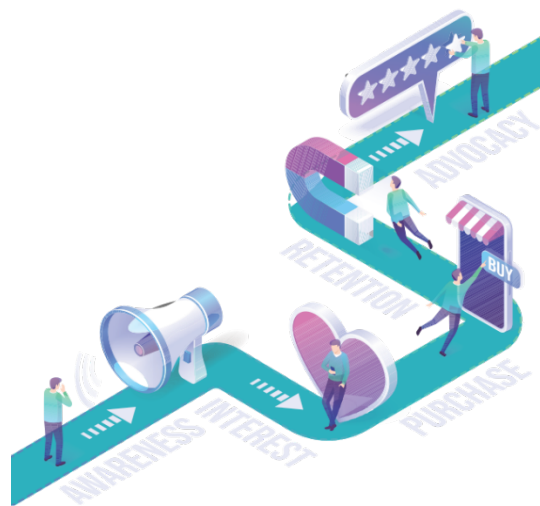# Guest Journey Mapping – From an IT and Commercial Strategy Perspective

You're probably familiar with the concept of a guest journey, guest experience design, guest personas and other related customer profiles from an advertising and marketing agency perspective. Agencies focus on top-of-funnel data to develop a guest profile to best inform their efforts to attract new customers to your hotel.

Over the last several years, commercial strategy, operations and information technology (IT) leaders have begun to place increased attention on thoroughly mapping the guest experience journey from the moment of booking to the departure follow-up.

It isn't something an internal staffer can do – someone to look at your hotel with fresh eyes. In fact, a "secret shopper" scenario often works best. Someone to sit in your lobby and watch guest interactions (this is something we recommend hotel leaders do at least once a year). This can develop a guest persona to look for pain points particular to each type of guest.

Benefits of Guest Journey Mapping

For the past couple of years, Dragonfly Strategists has centered on pandemic recovery strategies. Through this experience, we developed a holistic approach to auditing and reviewing the ways in which systems, processes and people impact the guest experience.

There are many benefits to developing a comprehensive guest journey experience design mapped to the technology that supports it.

Uncovering bottlenecks and opportunities for improvement in both operations and information technology touchpoints:
When we begin a guest journey map, we start with the point of reservation. Then we note the details of every touchpoint – or lack thereof – from that moment forward. These can include:

- **Communications**: Messaging prior to arrival, first impressions, onsite communications, signage, advertising on-site services; follow-up; surveys; review response, guest itineraries
- **Ease of check-in and checkout**: Arrival impressions, parking, welcome back to return guests, ease of departure/checkout, contactless services, mobile check in
- **Onsite experience:** Guest engagement, in-room entertainment; WiFi; F&B experience; housekeeping services, maintenance, ancillary services

These areas are mapped to the technology that supports them and identify improvement opportunities for people, processes, and technologies. Following this detail from start to finish provides an enormous amount of data that can help identify issues and opportunities. This is where IT, marketing, and operations can work together to provide the best guest experience possible. Creating frictionless experiences can convert first-time guests into loyal repeat guests.

Better informing technology decisions, so you integrate the right technology and human interactions at the right time:
Dragonfly Strategists specializes in information technology (IT) systems audits, integrations and migrations. But there are right and wrong ways to use and integrate technology.

You'd be surprised how many hotels aren't correctly integrating some newer technologies. For example, we sometimes find that a hotel is paying for a technology, such as a guest engagement system, but not using best practices in its deployment.

Then there are QR codes, which made a big comeback in food and beverage for contactless ordering during the pandemic. But many hotels aren't using them for room service orders effectively.

Guest journey mapping helps uncover technologies that are being under or incorrectly utilized. We can recommend new technologies to improve the guest experience and new processes to ensure adoption and staff efficiency.

Find technology gaps and better utilize existing technologies:
Technology continues to improve at a lightning pace. Mobile is integrated into everything from check-in and text messaging to room keys and entertainment system remotes. Conducting a guest, employee, or member journey map can help you uncover the technology gaps. It will answer questions like:

- Can a guest use their streaming services on the entertainment system?
- How strong and consistent is the WiFi signal?
- Can the guest make spa and excursion bookings easily?
- Can the guest have a contactless experience?
- Can the member charge easily back to their member account?
- Can the club recognize members upon arrival?
- Do guests need to download an app to access any of the hotel's digital services?
- Does the POS system allow for mobile payments? Mobile ordering?
- And much more!

Provide data to better inform your marketing and advertising decisions:
The guest journey mapping process is unique to each property. City hotel guests have different needs than resort visitors in terms of itineraries and excursions. An expensive suite at a luxury hotel near a noisy nightclub could result in complaints, but it may be more expected at a lifestyle hotel. Programming and activating spaces must be done with the guest in mind. Looking at hotel reviews will help identify some systemic problems, but a thorough and objective guest journey map takes this to the next level.

New technologies can become part of your marketing and advertising strategies when they improve the guest experience. Someone may choose to stay at your hotel if you enable streaming to the TV or have the city's best WiFi or the best guest engagement platform before, during, and post stay. Guest journey mapping enables validation of those key selling attributes attached to a hotel's guest experience.

Create loyal — even evangelical — guests who benefit the hotel in repeat business and rave reviews:

Hotels often make guest experience choices based on finance. But defaulting to the cheapest option may not result in the best guest experience. A guest journey map can help you make guest-centric, data-informed technology decisions. Sound data-informed IT decisions can lead to more revenue in the long run because retention is always lower than the cost of new guest acquisition.

Consistency is critical to the guest experience. Your lowest paying guest should have as excellent an experience as your top VIP. Providing an overall experience will help you create loyal repeat guests and positive customer reviews that will set your hotel up for future success.

"Depending on which study you believe, and what industry you're in, acquiring a new customer is anywhere from five to 25 times more expensive than retaining an existing one" ([Harvard Business Review](#)).

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Caryl Helsel is the founder and CEO of Dragonfly Strategists. The firm prides itself on a unique, holistic approach that integrates revenue management, distribution, guest experience, operations, sales, marketing, reservations, contact center, and information technology on a single pane of glass. This allows us to offer a genuinely unified commercial, operations, and IT strategy that delivers optimum results on time and within budget.