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Seminar "How to deal with Online Reviews: On Holidaycheck & Co"

"Reviews are everywhere" – Not only hotels, accommodation providers and other suppliers in the tourism sector but actually any service or product is rated online today. Consumers are faced to online reviews as soon as they start to research. They are familiar to use this information before they take their final purchasing decision.

Hotel reviews have developed over the years into one of the most important issues for accommodation providers. The influence of reviews on quality but also marketing, sales, price and overall success is huge.

OTAs such as Booking.com know about the value of showing reviews on their portals. For them it's all about conversion. Poor quality does not sell anymore. Plus there is so much good quality in the market worldwide that guests need reliable information and orientation to book the right hotel. Reviews can even influence a guest's choice for the next holiday destination. The content of reviews is rapidly growing and determines whether your destination or business is visible or not.

Recently Booking.com and Google developed to be the most relevant sources of reviews. Together with TripAdvisor and Facebook these top 4 sources stand for 74% of the global review volume. Of course there are several other, much smaller players which are very interesting for dealing with particular markets too. HolidayCheck for example is one of them and the most relevant for German vacationers.

We are offering seminars in online reputation management since 2010 and still find the most challenging part for all of us to respond on reviews. You have to understand the background about how guests write and read reviews, you have to consider the functions of reviews, you have to embrace copywriting online and publicly for your own business or as an employee. You have to react individual and not standardized. And it takes a lot of time. What a task!

Getting the most out of online portals and the importance of HolidayCheck

- Booking.com, Google, TripAdvisor and Facebook are the most relevant sources for reviews globally
- HolidayCheck is the travel portal with the highest reach in Germany and especially relevant for German vacationers. The business model behind the portal is a travel agency by earning commissions from tour operators or shares of commissions from OTAs (like Booking.com)
- HolidayCheck's reviews are distributed to relevant booking channels across Germany such as tour operators and travel portals
- A unique factor for ranking on HolidayCheck apart from the average rating is the recommendation rate
- Your property may be listed on any portal (e.g. Google's business listings, as soon as you cooperate with Booking.com or if a guest sets up a listing for you on a review portal) and if not it can be registered by yourself
- Ensure to concentrate on the most relevant portals and take control of your listings
- The portal's rankings are determined by many factors. Most relevant ones are the quantity of reviews, the quality (e.g. average rating) and the recency of reviews

The psychology behind why guests read reviews and give online feedback

- Reviews give orientation in a market with more supply than demand
- During the early decision process users search for information to limit the range of accommodations (such as real photos, recommendations and ratings)
- During an advanced decision process they have a more selective perception (e.g. reading single reviews)
- Users want to increase trust in their own booking decision, get an impression of how it will look on location and they want to reduce risk
- Most critical factor about whether a guest likes your hotel or not is expectation (which you are able to manage by being more honest and transparent with your marketing tools)
- When expected performance matches perceived performance then a guest will be satisfied
- When you cannot deliver expected performance a guest will be dissatisfied
- Only by exceeding your guest's expectations you can gain positively surprised guests



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How successful hotels use ratings & reviews for quality management

- Guest satisfaction is defined by providing a standard performance plus differentiation
- To differentiate you have to know the expectations of guests in general and the expectations of your target group in particular and you have to find innovative ways to communicate differentiation
- Gather qualitative feedback from your guests by analyzing online-reviews
- Frequently mentioned topics are most important from guest's point of view
- Quality of service is the main factor for returning guests

Top tips and methods to motivating guests

- Main reasons for guests to write reviews are helping the hotel or helping other guests
- By motivation guests to write reviews they are 3.6 times more likely to leave a review
- Most efficient and measurable instrument is a post-stay-email
- Be more pro-active and mention the importance of reviews and recommendations for your business
- Remind your guests to post a review, for example with flyers or feedback cards
- For HolidayCheck: use the brand new Review Tool for German guests

Driving hotel bookings with professional Online Reputation Management

- Organize your Online Reputation Management (ORM) process
- Analyze your reviews by quantity and quality (e.g. sentiments) by using software tools (such as TrustYou, ReviewPro,...)
- Show reviews on your own website to increase conversions by using widgets and meta reviews
- Increase visibility by distributing reviews to relevant online portals (leads to more interest in general, higher booking potential on OTAs and higher click through rates on meta search engines)

Legal problems: How to handle unfair online feedback

- Expression of opinion is allowed. Untrue statements, abusive criticism, personal attacks or insults are not acceptable.
- Publishing photos is regarded as journalistic freedom as long as personal rights are not violated (for example posting photos of people without prior permission)
- Consult the terms and conditions of the portals about what is allowed or not (on HolidayCheck reviews are only allowed by people who spent a minimum one night stay in your venue)
- Do not accept blackmailing and contact the portal if there is a case

The secret to writing the perfect management response

- Response on online reviews is not feedback on a complaint - it is marketing
- Addressees of your respond are new potential guests
- Take the chance to explain your product
- Find your own style that expresses the way you communicate on location (set appropriate expectations)

Responding efficiently: Guidelines, modules and foreign-language reviews

- Create a guideline that prioritizes relevant portals, defines processes and responsibilities, response rates, languages, style and wording, salutation and signing off, etc.
- Do not overdue it! Cornell University claims that "Making too many responses is worse than offering no response at all." (If you respond to all reviews, standardization is a problem)
- React to all negative reviews (most effective) and only to very positive reviews and/or reviews of loyal guests
- Whenever possible: Answer in the same language (mandatory in some portals – e.g. TripAdvisor)
- Use English as backup for relevant markets / If possible use German for HolidayCheck
- Determine, which languages you generally use for communication in online portals (again you set expectations also about your language skills)
- React as fast as possible
- Also react to older reviews if they are still visible