



NEWS

Is your staff delivering hyper-local experiences?

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By [Guest Contributor](#) on 7/1/2016

Millennials don't want to visit places, they want to experience them. The under-36 set wants to find the hot new restaurant off-the-beaten path, immerse themselves in events happening around town and do what the locals do. Isn't there an app for that?

Of course there is—and certainly more than one. There are plenty of apps and review sites that will help you map out a plan. But it feels much more authentic and personalized to hear about a hot new spot from a hotel staffer or shuttle driver that tips you off.

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Younger travelers are less excited about that generic piece of paper listing restaurants and bars in the surrounding area. They're looking for guidance tailored to their interests and vetted by locals. It's a generation that more highly values experiences over material things. When they travel—even when it's for business—millennials want to feel like they're a part of the community and what makes it unique.

How can hotels of all price ranges create more of a hyper-local vibe?

Bring the outside in. Don't just give customers a home base; give them a reason to linger. Our Hotel Phillips property in Kansas City, Missouri, which is very connected to the arts community, hosts an Artist in Residence program. Guests can tour the studio inside the hotel or join up with tours of other

art galleries. Music is another great connector. Consider inviting local musicians to play in the lobby or at the bar. Even seemingly smaller gestures, such as featuring local food, can go a long way in enhancing guests' experience. A recent Topdeck Travel survey found that 85% of millennials rated eating local cuisine as an important part of the travel experience. Beverages apply too—highlighting local breweries, wineries, distilleries and coffee roasters can also give guests ideas of new places to explore.

Engage the staff. Recommendations will naturally flow from staff if you make it an ongoing part of daily communication and new hire training. Richard Chanofsky, the general manager of Hotel Phillips, says he makes it a priority to constantly talk with staff about big events and new restaurants coming to town. "All of our staff have tablets, giving them quick access to the latest information that they can tailor to guests' needs," Chanofsky said. "Our onboarding process for new employees educates them about questions they'll inevitably hear from guests. We are so tightly woven into the arts community, it's important for every employee to understand our community ties and how we can connect guests to what's happening."

Of course, programs like W Hotels' Insiders takes this concept to new heights. They hire influential connectors that can open doors for guests and provide them with unique, personalized experiences. While not every hotel has the means to do that, the idea of offering an "inside scoop" on hot places is one that can easily be embraced.

Find your niche. Every hotel has its own personality, and likely so does the area it sits in. How are you using that to your advantage? If your hotel is close to a concert venue, for example, are there special packages you can arrange only available to guests? Can you make it a destination that people frequent before or after the show for food or drinks? How can you collaborate with others in your niche to create more of an experience for guests?

Creating a hyper-localized experience for guests isn't just pandering to millennials; it's good for business across the board. Travelers of all ages want more personalized experiences. An American Express survey found that 72% of travelers will spend more time planning a trip that is tailored to their interests, and millennials are even more willing to have brands track their habits to have a more individualized experience. The survey also emphasized that a human touch is still of the utmost importance as 93% of travelers said personal service can't be replaced despite digital advances.

In other words, no matter how informative the travel app universe becomes, it's still humans that make all of the difference in your travel experience. Well-informed and accessible staff is one of the most important assets for a hotel. Train staff so that they have the right point-of-view, as well as the resources and tools, to make recommendations tailored to guests' needs. In doing so, you'll not only create a memorable experience, but drive more guests to your hotel in the future.

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