The Hotelier's Complete Guide to Recovery Readiness

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Contents

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"In the midst of every crisis, lies great opportunity."

- Albert Einstein

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Over the coming months as travel bans and social distancing measures are lifted, the hospitality industry will begin forging its path to recovery.

However, our long-awaited return to business as usual, will not be a "return to normal." As history has shown, global events like the coronavirus pandemic are an integral catalyst to innovation and long-term change.

Things will look different after COVID-19 and hoteliers will be expected to embrace new and improved standards, adopt new business policies and technology, and digitize touchpoints with contactless technology to ensure guest and staff safety. Areas that have perhaps previously been seen as 'nice-to-haves' by the industry are now a necessity.

Despite the uncertainty, all economic disruption scenarios expect the situation to improve by the end of 2020 or the beginning of 2021 at the latest. Hoteliers must be ready. Those that take proactive actions today are more likely to emerge as winners on the other side, well-poised for growth in the expansion to come.

With that future upon us, StayNTouch has created a comprehensive guide to recovery readiness that outlines what hoteliers can do today and how they can prepare for the inevitable upswing in a post-pandemic world.

The Impact of **COVID-19** on the Hospitality Industry

The implications of COVID-19 have been felt far and wide, but perhaps no industry has faced a more pronounced impact than hospitality. Worldwide, the effects mirror the experience of past global crises, such as 9/11, SARS, and the 2008 financial crisis; however, in the case of the coronavirus pandemic, the downturn was notably sudden and more severe.

Beyond the mounting fears of citizens around the world in relation to health and personal safety, physical distancing guidelines and travel restrictions have brought the travel and tourism industry to a grinding halt. Once full lobbies and occupied guest rooms are left vacant, hoteliers are left to wonder when they will once again welcome guests onto their property. OAG Aviation Worldwide notes that the travel restrictions on international flights have caused the global airline industry losses mounting up to $880 billion. The AHLA, on the other hand, reports that nearly 7 out of 10 hotel rooms were empty across the country per STR, as of May 6th. Since the pandemic began escalating in mid-February in the U.S., hotels have reportedly already lost more than $21 billion in room revenue.

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While these are undeniably grave circumstances, it's important to draw parallels to past global events and, subsequently, acknowledge the recovery periods which followed them. Over the past few decades, our industry has faced no shortage of challenges and collective uncertainty, and each time we have continued to forge ahead. Moreover, global events such as 9/11 and SARS have notably improved many of our practices, including enhanced international travel security, heightened cleaning standards, and innovative revenue management strategies. With widespread changes implemented by both airlines and hotels, the travel and hospitality industry has always been able to boost the morale of travelers and, once again, drive occupancy.

In the coming months, our industry will be expected to embrace meaningful innovation, as we learn how to thrive in the 'new normal', while ensuring the on-going safety of guests and staff. We will overcome this crisis one step at a time, from strict sanitation measures to enhanced transparency with guests, the implementation of digital and contactless touchpoints, and a focus on new guest segments.

Recovery Readiness:
What Does This Look Like for Hotels?

In any business, adaptability is integral to success, but this lesson is especially prevalent within the hospitality industry. Right now, a hotel's ability to adapt will, in many ways, determine its' ability to survive the course of this downturn. The question then, on the minds of hoteliers, is:

What does it mean to be adaptable during a worldwide pandemic?

What does the path to recovery look like?

Recovery readiness is no small task, but hoteliers can take steps to mitigate the impact and lay the foundation for a strong comeback.

① Keep Your Guests Connected (Virtually)

Although traditional marketing efforts will take a back seat during this time, it's essential for hotel properties to remain vigilant and engaged in their communication efforts. Communication with guests via social, email, and editorial content should be a top priority, as hoteliers work to build back the trust of travelers and position themselves as a trusted destination when citizens begin traveling again. These

communication efforts should convey value, transparency, empathy and leadership, as hoteliers let guests know that customer safety and wellbeing has always, and will always be, of the utmost importance. Hotels should also extend flexible cancellation/rebooking policies to guests, as well as adjusted loyalty program requirements.

Ultimately, how hotel brands respond to this crisis will have long-term implications for how their brand is perceived both by guests and their staff.

② Leverage Downtime Appropriately

As hotels around the world wait for the pandemic to pass, it's important to leverage downtime appropriately. Although budgets are understandably limited with respect to recent revenue losses, hoteliers should tackle those maintenance projects which are within their financial means.

During this time, hotel staff can perform comprehensive 'deep cleans' of now-vacant rooms and areas, while addressing any physical issues on the hotel property to ensure it is ready for re-opening. Hotels should also take this time to manage their virtual properties, and make any necessary updates to ensure their website and social channels are relevant, user-friendly, and inviting to guests.

③ Prepare Your Staff for Policy Changes

Hotel staff will be undeniably paramount to their property's recovery, and, with this in mind, hoteliers are encouraged to communicate any impending policy changes with their team proactively. Long-lasting hygiene and distancing measures may impact property layouts and staff training. From heightened cleaning standards to physical distancing recommendations and amended staff-guest protocols, hoteliers should ensure their staff is ready for the return of guests. This will require proper staff training, documentation, and persistent communication of new standards and protocols.

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④ Ramp Up Your Marketing

With online channels and virtual connectivity taking center stage during the pandemic, it may be time for hotels to revisit their digital strategy to optimize online touchpoints and omni-channel capabilities.

This is an opportunity for hotel properties to take their personalized marketing to the next level and treat your best guests like VIPs by staying engaged with email communications. Remind them what your brand has to offer with newsletters that share unique cocktail recipes, spa treatments they can try at home, and recipes for some of your specialty dishes. Keep them posted on what you are doing to prepare for their return to build trust and confidence.

SOME TIPS:

- Be engaging and sensitive in your messages, avoid being overtly promotional

- Build your marketing and media plans around the new normal

- Push your social media activities and engage your testimonials and influencer community

- Check your competitive landscape to see what others are doing

- Explore technologies like virtual tours, virtual guest services, AI-powered upsell platforms, interactive room plans for groups, and anything else you can do to further enhance the online experience.

Identifying New Industry Standards

While hotels begin preparing for the initial rebound in travel demand, it is important to recognize that, to maintain the safety of guests and hotel staff, existing cleaning standards will be subject to rigorous reform. In accordance with public health recommendations and government advisory, hotels will be expected to adopt and readily communicate heightened cleaning standards across their properties.

Lobbies, guest rooms, amenities, and any other interactive component of a hotel property will come under scrutiny. Hotels will be expected to adopt some (if not all) the following changes:

- The creation of a 'Cleanliness Manager' or a 'Cleanliness Council' dedicated to the frequent sanitization and management of public areas

- Enhanced cleaning technologies including electrostatic sprayers and the highest classification of disinfectants, as well as increased frequency of disinfection and upkeep

- Ongoing staff training relating to enhanced cleaning measures and protocols

- Frequent temperature screenings of both guests and employees for COVID-19 symptoms

- The implantation of physical distance guidelines/barriers between guests and employees, along with the provision of masks and/or protective equipment where necessary

- The revision of some amenities and service offerings, in accordance to public healthy guidelines

- Enhanced food and restaurant safety and sanitary processes

- Implementation of and action plan for event response procedures when alerted of a COVID-19 case

Here are some additional, actionable tactics that hoteliers can implement:

- Make alcohol-based hand sanitizer readily available at key locations such as entrances, service desks, lobby area, fitness centers, bathrooms, etc.

- Increase frequent cleaning and disinfecting of regularly used objects and hard surfaces in public areas.

- Encourage social distancing guidelines with signage, limits, and ground markings.

- Promote contactless transactions and ensure staff wear disposable gloves when they are handling objects and money.

- Monitor and encourage guest adherence.

- Have daily check-ins with employees on their well-being, guest adherence, and ensure employees and contractors are properly trained and have access to personal protective equipment (PPE).

Over the last month, major hospitality brands and authorities have come together to announce enhanced hotel cleaning practices and resources, to meet new health and safety standards in light of COVID-19.

These initiatives include, but are not limited to:

1. **ITC Hotels Launch 'WeAssure':** Guests of ITC Hotels will be reassured by an accreditation by National Accreditation Board for Hospitals & Healthcare Providers (NABH) - the leading standards organization for sanitation, hygiene, safety and infection control practices.

2. Red Roof RediClean™: Red Roof RediClean includes rigorous enhanced cleaning protocols that address the new normal and give consumers the confidence they need to hit the road again.

3. The Domio Difference Program: Offers industry leading guest experience enhancements to provide guests with peace of mind while they relax in the comfort of home and confidence of a hotel during their Domio stay.

4. The Marriott Global Cleanliness Council: Consisting of in-house and outside experts in food and water safety, hygiene and infection prevention, and hotel operations, the council will work to develop a new generation of global hospitality cleanliness standards, norms and behaviors for our more than 7,300 properties around the globe.

5. Choice Hotels Commitment To Clean Initiative: Enhanced best practice guidance for cleaning, disinfecting, hygiene and social distancing to help protect the health and safety of guests, franchisees and their employees amid COVID-19 pandemic.

6. AHLA 'Stay Safe' Initiative: An industry-wide, enhanced standard of health and safety protocols designed to prepare America's hotels to safely welcome back guests and employees as the economy reopens.

7. Best Western's We Care Clean Program: Ensures elevated level of cleaning standards and operational best practices at Best Western-branded hotels.

8. Hilton CleanStay with Lysol Protection: A new program to deliver an industry-defining standard of cleanliness and disinfection in Hilton properties around the world. In a first for the hospitality business, Hilton will collaborate with RB, maker of Lysol and Dettol, and consult with Mayo Clinic to develop elevated processes and Team Member training to help Hilton guests enjoy an even cleaner and safer stay from check-in to check-out.

For additional resources and news regarding post-COVID-19 cleaning standards and regulations, click here.
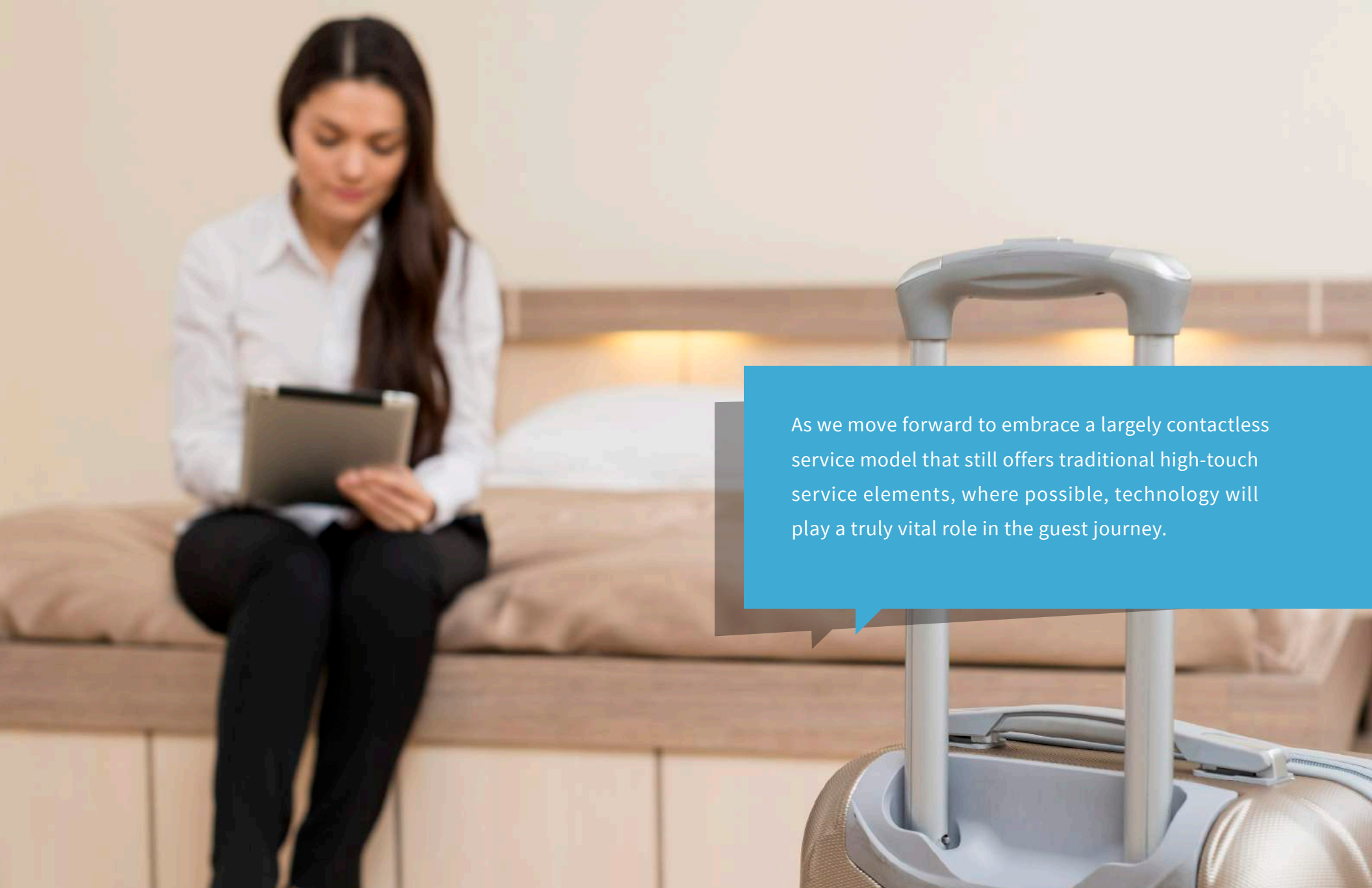
As we move forward to embrace a largely contactless service model that still offers traditional high-touch service elements, where possible, technology will play a truly vital role in the guest journey.

The Role of Technology in the New Guest Journey

In a post-pandemic world, utilizing self-service digital technology will be understandably integral to the success of any business to provide contactless service. China has already demonstrated some innovative shifts to self-service offerings, including face mask vending machines, hot meal vending containers, unmanned grocery stores, and more.

For hospitality, the mobile guest journey was already at the forefront of the modern hospitality experience. Before the pandemic, experts were already predicting that by 2020 more than 85% of all customer interactions would be handled without the need for a human agent by 2020. However, COVID-19 has accelerated the wide-spread adoption of mobile-first technology. As we move forward to embrace a largely contactless service model that still offers traditional high-touch service elements, where possible, technology will play a truly vital role in the guest journey.

① **The Digital Guest Journey Powered by Contactless Technology**

Digital platforms leveraged by hotels post-COVID-19 will include, but aren't limited to:

- Mobile apps for check-in/check-out
- Self-service kiosks accompanied by hand wipes or hand sanitizer dispensers
- Mobile payment platforms
- AI-powered assistants
- Digital menus
- Robot butlers

Mobile technology allows hotels the option to enable push notifications and, depending on the solution, can offer robust communication pathways to engage with guests (virtually) at every touchpoint of their journey.

Pre-stay messaging, check-in, room entry, concierge services, special offers, and personalized messages can all be achieved via a mobile device or self-service kiosk.

A mobile-first Property Management System can represent a wealth of user data via learned behavior and preferences and can, as a result, cater to a more personalized guest experience. This is especially important because, although physical interactions must now be limited, hotels will still be expected to offer their guests attentive, responsive, and personalized service via digital channels. With a mobile PMS, staff can access guest information and personally engage with guests using a tablet anywhere on property while still maintaining social distancing.

Fortunately for guests, the shift to mobile, self-service, and digital technology also provides them with increased control over their desired experience. Those guests who prefer a more high-touch, traditional service model will likely engage with the app or kiosks more. Those guests who prefer a low-touch, convenience-driven model, however, can benefit from quick and effective, contactless service at a safe distance from a front desk agent.

② The Continued Rise of Cloud Technology

With credit to cloud-based PMS platforms, hoteliers can effectively manage most — if not all — of their operational processes via highly intuitive remote, digital infrastructure. In light of the pandemic, the ability to remotely manage a full suite of property management tools is more important now than ever before.

In the case of cloud-based PMS systems, hotel managers should seek out those platforms which allow them to perform the following tasks whether on or off property:

- Make changes to rates and availability

- Generate revenue and automated upsells, and monetize early or late check-in/out through the platform, mobile device, or kiosk station...without the need for guest/staff interaction

- Improve staff onboarding and reduce training time

- Manage reservations and access hotel availability, guest data, and booking details in real-time

- Streamline cross-department staff communications with ease

- Connect seamlessly to other best-of-breed applications

Understandably, the ability to seamlessly connect every aspect of a hotel's operational structure, including housekeeping, IT, maintenance, and occupancy management, is incredibly important to hoteliers, especially now. As housekeeping departments prepare for strict regulations, cloud-based PMS platforms that enable automated alerts of room status, guest requests, and other critical updates to staff, will become invaluable. Finally, this technology also empowers certain departments of a hotel's team, including sales representatives or revenue managers, to work remotely via a mobile interface.

From a revenue perspective, self-service platforms are especially appealing. When guests use your self-serve kiosks or your browser based mobile app, they'll be able to browse upgrades and extra services at their leisure, which they can instantly add to their bill if desired.

Rover™ Mobile Hotel PMS

▶ WATCH DEMO

③ Maintaining Virtual Guest Connection

The shift to a high-tech and contactless experience should not come at the expense of great service. Although the service model of many hotels is based on traditional, high-touch service that requires in-person interactions, today's digital platforms still provide hotels the opportunity to forge meaningful relationships with guests. In the coming months, hoteliers will be expected to leverage new technology to remain connected with guests through the following practices:

- Utilize customer service chat and Guest Messaging
- Leverage push notifications
- Stay active across social media platforms and engage with guests online
- Utilize smart technology (mobile apps, smart thermostats, in-room assistants etc.) to enhance guest personalization
- Explore virtual reality offerings
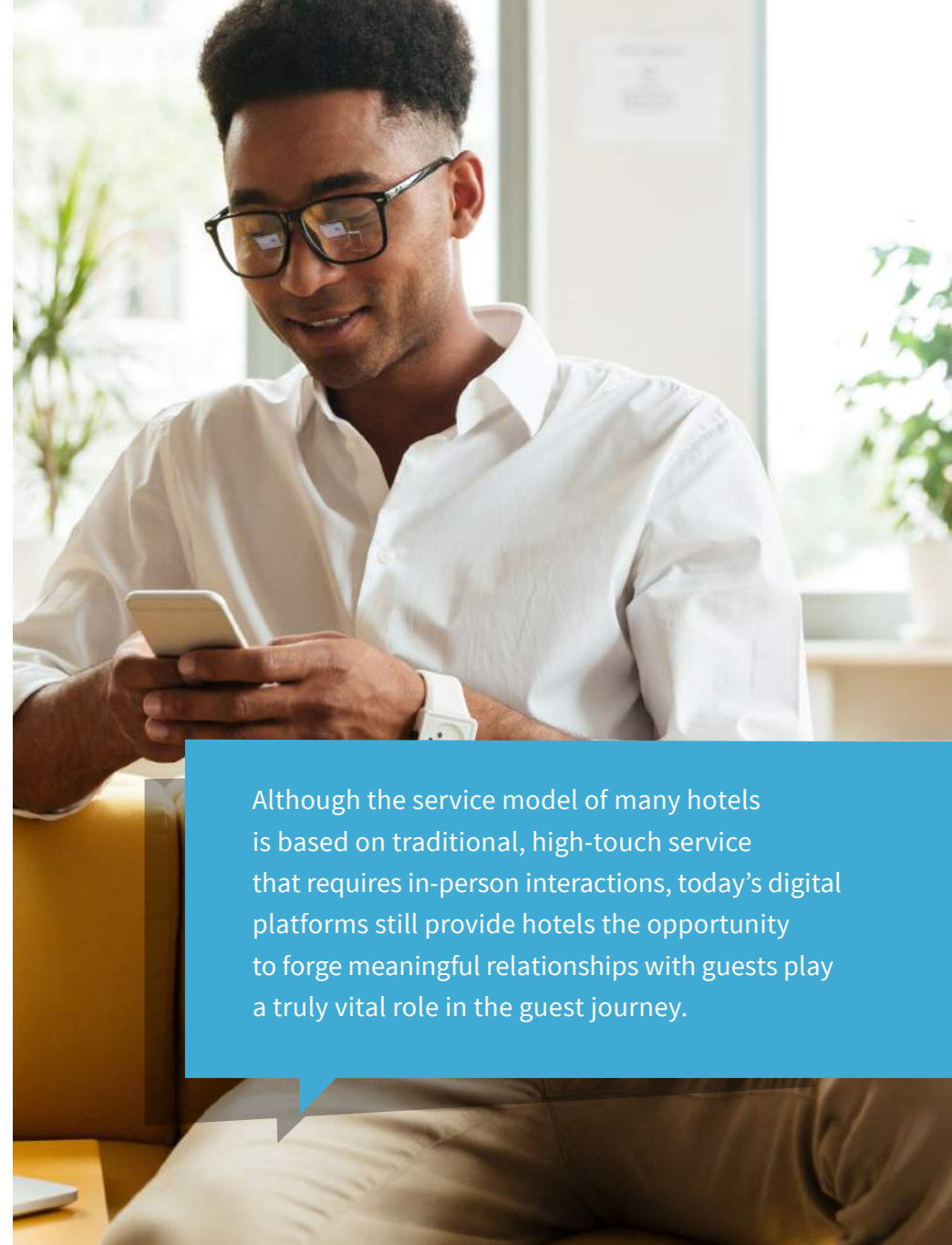
> Although the service model of many hotels is based on traditional, high-touch service that requires in-person interactions, today's digital platforms still provide hotels the opportunity to forge meaningful relationships with guests play a truly vital role in the guest journey.

Embracing a Contactless Experience

In an effort to minimize risk, hotels will be expected to divert from traditional interaction formats to digital, contactless equivalents. This will become especially prevalent within F&B service, as well as in-room service and amenities. With expectations for heightened sanitation protocols across the guest journey, many hotel properties will shift to the following digital options:

- Digitized menus
- Mobile ordering
- Contact-ess payment solutions (including mobile payment)
- Service robots
- Smart-room features powered by mobile apps, including light switches, TV remotes, thermostat customization

Hotels will also be expected to remove any features within guest rooms or public areas that pose a contamination risk, and, in the case of in-room provisions, hotels may resort to single-use items or will only provide goods upon a guests' specific request. Guests will also be provided bags for their used towels, robes, bedding, and trash, which can be placed outside their room when ready for contactless removal.

Zest Web™ Mobile Guest Check-in & Check-out

▶ WATCH DEMO

How Hotels Can Thrive in a Post-Pandemic World

Though many consumers have canceled their trips, it's important to recognize that they have not lost their desire to travel. As hotels prepare their properties for the return of guests, there are a number of new business policies that will pave the way for their marketing strategies in a post-pandemic world.

These changes include but are not limited to:

1. Implement a Flexible Cancellation Policy: Moving forward, flexible cancellation policies will become the norm across both airlines and hotel properties. Allowing guests this flexibility will help to give them a risk-free incentive to book, while helping to drive direct bookings.

2. Instant Rewards and Revised Loyalty Programs: Consider the implantation of an attractive rewards feature that provides prospective guests with exclusive rates when they provide their email. Existing loyalty programs will also be subject to change, as hotels should consider novel ways to incentivize guests post-pandemic, and reward their loyal members with personalized offers and packages.

3. Reservation Recovery: Work to recover lost bookings by sending an email to prospective guests who recently canceled or rescheduled a trip, prompting them to rebook (perhaps with an added incentive).

4. Brand Messaging: Guests will expect enhanced transparency from the hotels they frequent. As such, properties should actively communicate their new and improved cleanliness standards as a key part of their brand messaging. Be sure to make all updates to your website, social media, email marketing campaigns, and all other marketing channels.

5. Align Revenue Management with Rate Strategy: Align revenue management strategy with rate strategy, taking into consideration presumed recovery timelines. While discounted rates will be a crucial part of a hotels' initial recovery plan, revenue managers must consider both their short-term and long-term revenue management and channel strategies. Continuing deep rate cuts for too long will prolong the recovery back to pre-COVID RevPar.

6. Revenue Optimization: Consider ancillary revenue streams which can boost bottom line even in the absence of bookings. Monetize early check-in and late check-out, incorporate automated upsells and upgrades into your check-in/out guest touchpoints to drive revenue.

7. Attracting Millennial Travelers: For many hotels, attracting millennial travelers will be essential to their recovery plan. Even before the pandemic, millennials had largely inspired the "Experience Economy", often prioritizing experiences over material goods. Known as tech-savvy digital nomads, millennial travelers deem travel as an integral part of their life and, as such, the desire to once again travel will surely only continue to grow and potentially out-pace the desires of their generational counterparts.

Zest Station™ Guest Self-Service Solution

▶ WATCH DEMO

Conclusion

Despite the massive challenges the hotel industry is currently facing in response to COVID-19, it's important to prepare for recovery. Adapting is truly the only option for properties of all types and sizes today.

Yes, times are uncertain - and while we don't have all the answers, we're doing everything we can to offer resources and support to our customers around the world. We believe, with the strategies in place, hotels can anticipate slow but prolonged and reassuring growth as this pandemic comes to pass, and come out stronger with greater adoptions of new technology, enhanced infrastructure, and heightened services that appeal to the post-pandemic traveler.

Together, we will overcome this crisis, and we hope this guide will help to put your property on the path to success.
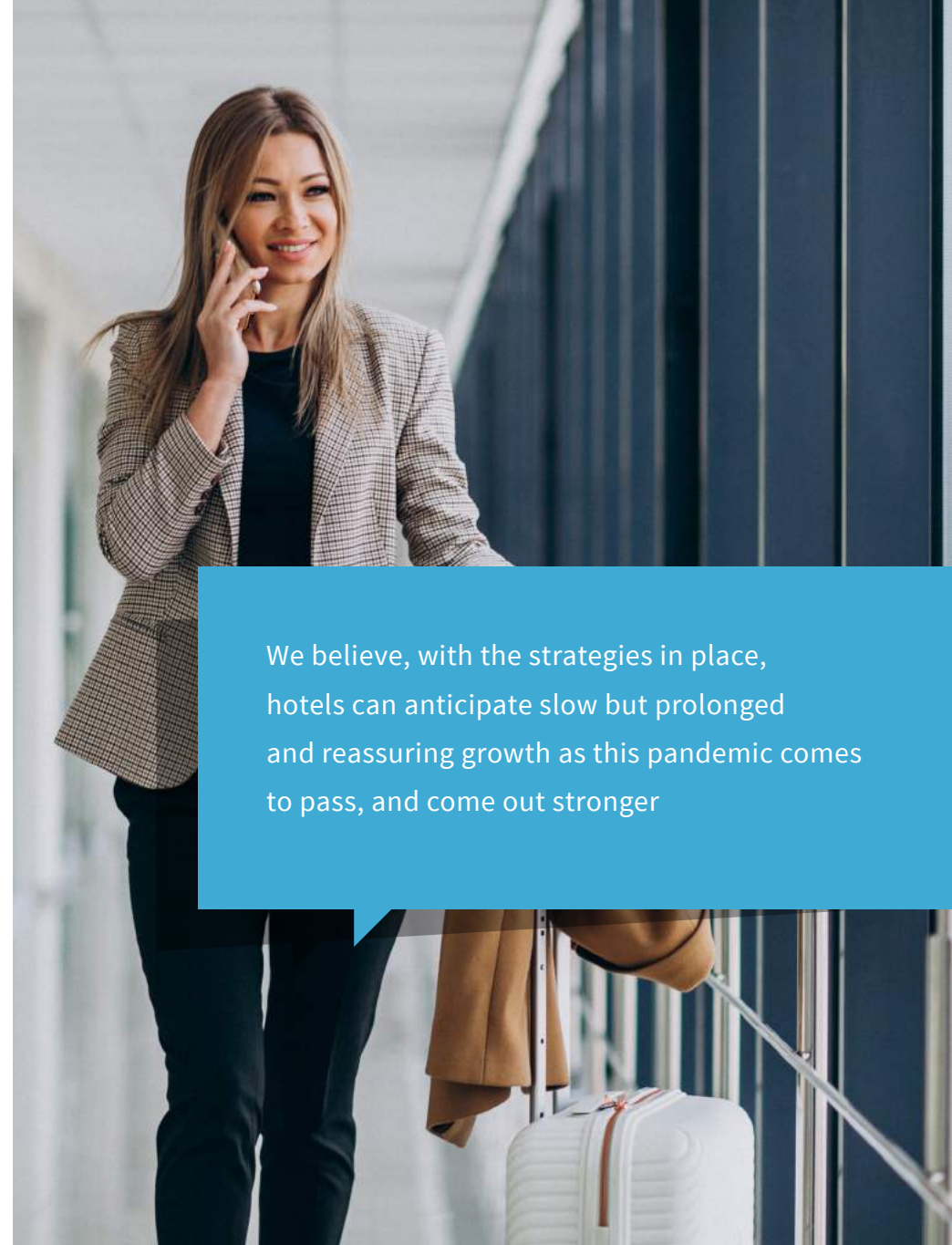
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About StayNTouch

StayNTouch provides a next generation and fully cloud mobile hotel property management system (PMS) that enables hotels to raise service levels, drive revenues, reduce costs, and ultimately captivate their guests. Developed in 2012 as a fully mobile solution, StayNTouch currently powers over 97,000 hotel rooms globally. Backed by a team of professionals with deep roots in the hospitality industry, StayNTouch is a trusted partner to many of the most forward-thinking hotels, resorts, and casinos in the industry: including Yotel, TWA, First Hotels, Conscious Hotels, Valencia Hotels, Modus hotels and MGM Resorts.

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Give Your Guest a Safe and Seamless Contactless Experience.

Request a demo of StayNTouch's Mobile PMS