

Hospitality trends set to dominate 2018

By  Avukile Mabombo

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It's that time of year when businesses examine what's forecast for the next year. As competitors in a growing tourism and hospitality market, we need to be driving the trends rather than reacting as late adopters. Here are some trends likely to be visible in 2018.



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Data-driven business

A couple of years ago, everyone was chatting about big data, but now we're seeing the influence of data-driven business as tools have been implemented. Data is an odd concept – on its own, it's simply millions of pieces of information, but once data analytics can provide insights, we're looking at a whole new approach to everything, from service to marketing.

Insights gleaned from data can allow you to tailor sales campaigns that are highly personalised and timed to coincide with the period most likely to generate a response. Still more insights can tell you if your service is efficient and, depending on your metrics, reveal if there's a need for a business process enhancement or for team training. Supervisors and managers can only monitor a workforce to a degree, but monitoring tools can ensure that anomalies in service levels can be picked up and addressed.

Data-driven business in hospitality is increasingly the way forward since hotel groups can present far more personalised guest experiences based on information collated about individual customers.

Tech revolution

It's not just in data usage that hospitality is developing, the tech revolution is providing an immense range of means to provide slicker service. Smart access to hotel rooms allows guests to access their rooms simply by swiping their phones across a keyless pad. Visitors are shifting to mobile entertainment using their own devices, preferring hotels that offer access to entertainment via these devices.

Rather than having an IT-heavy staff requirement, many hotels are shifting their IT requirements to the cloud, reducing costs and the need for a highly-qualified IT team.

Customer experiences are central to hospitality business success – and more hotels are recognising this, implementing systems that allow for real-time feedback so that they can act immediately. This is far superior to finding out only weeks later that something went wrong – once your guest has checked out, it's too late to fix what could have been fixed. Seamless customer service delivery takes place across all platforms – website, phone, email, chat, social media and, of course, on site. All of the interactions must be brought into a central space by integrating these channels, allowing the team access to relevant information when they need it.



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Wellness awareness

The global traveller is becoming far more self-aware, realising the benefits of wellness. From busy business travellers to leisure travellers, guests don't want to let themselves go when staying in a hotel. The result is that many aspects of hospitality are impacted. Guests want in-room exercise equipment and capabilities, access to healthy food options and much more. Healthy food means revising entire menus to accommodate many tastes, so much more than having a salad or two tacked on to an existing menu.

African adventures

With increased flights to African countries, this is going to become a "new normal" trend. Africa offers cross-cultural collaborations within the urban culture space that are inspiring and trend-setting. We're seeing hotel developments going up at an enormous rate across many African countries, setting the scene for leisure travel as well as increased opportunities for business travel and commercial activities. Bear in mind that affordability is central to travel planning for many South Africans and you have more affordable travel options within Africa, compared with the costs of travel in Europe, for example.

#SaveWater

Finally, a trend we had not anticipated, at least for those of us in the Western Cape, is that of the need for sustainability in tourism being so visually represented by our drought. We've had to introduce a detailed strategy for water conservation, including messaging to guests, reducing water usage (no hosing down of paving and driveways, replacing linen napkins with paper, reducing the frequency that bedding is laundered and more). It's a trend that has given us acute awareness and reminded us that responsible tourism is an ongoing commitment that is of benefit to businesses and guests alike.

ABOUT AVUKILE MABOMBO

Avukile Mabombo is the group marketing manager of Protea Hotels by Marriott.

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