

2. **Improve guest experience by going the extra mile.** As an owner or executive, you may have less direct contact with guests, but you do set the tone for how middle-level and line-level managers perform. A favorite story from one of my properties is about David, a General Manager who has a habit of stopping and picking up litter if he sees it in the lobby or common areas of the hotel. By making time to take care of the property, and by doing something outside of his job description, it started a ripple effect with the hotel's staff. Now all the employees can be found following his lead. Since David takes pride in a very tidy property, employees respect that and take pride in it as well. With the exception of the housekeeper assigned to the common areas of the hotel, none of the employees were ever asked to do this task, but they modeled their behavior after their manager.

3. **Increase awareness and brand loyalty.** This effort should be led directly by the sales and marketing team and in conjunction with a corporate brand team if you have a franchised brand hotel. Awareness is increased in the local community by sales blitz efforts, as well as online through direct marketing and, of course, social media presence. All successful organizations have formal marketing initiatives but in theory, marketing shouldn't be an organization. Marketing should be driven through the entire organization since everyone impacts the brand and reputation through positive behavior.

Social Media

Communication has evolved from a world where information traveled slowly through letters or telephone chains, to today's society where one comment or picture can travel around the world in a few hours. At the core are social media platforms, which are great tools to connect and engage with your customers as well as turn prospects into customers through platforms like Facebook and Instagram. These tools, though, come with pros and cons. Social media is an inexpensive resource for your hotel to maximize by creating a strong brand image and connecting with potential and returning customers. However, if something goes wrong, the news can spread like wildfire through these outlets, and can be widely spread before you even have a chance to finish reading the complaint.

With that being said, if a guest takes the time to post a positive review online, your business and services have made a good impression. When responding to the positive review, it's important to thank the guest for taking time to post the review. Additionally, it's also important to mention the areas that were positive in the comment.



Hotel managers need to train staff to recognize reputation management opportunities. Recently, I read a story about a hotel in Ireland where a young girl left her favorite stuffed animal at breakfast. Think for a moment about what your staff might do with an abandoned stuffed rabbit. Would they toss it into a lost and found bin somewhere, hoping the owner might contact the right person at the hotel to get it back?

Or would they send it to the spa and afternoon tea, and then post about it on your social media channels? I'm sure you can guess that this hotel did the latter, and pictures of the bunny in the spa spread around the Internet in record time having a significant positive impact to its reputation. After all, we are still talking about it today.

Negative comments and reviews can spread just as quickly around the web, which is why your staff must be trained and empowered with your customer recovery strategy.

Customer Recovery: Turn a Setback into a Comeback

A customer recovery strategy is used to regain former customers who have stopped doing business with your property due to a bad experience. Often, this provides an excellent opportunity to turn a setback into a comeback. Customer Recovery practices are based on the notion that previous demand implies the probability for future demand, and that marketing to repeat guests can yield greater sales increases than marketing to new customers. A guest who has been turned around may not only be loyal in the future, but the "buzz" marketing about your great service may open up referral sources.

Customer Recovery is about maintaining customer loyalty by converting an angry customer into a happy customer. This is a huge challenge that can be daunting if you're not prepared.

There are three main things to remember when trying to pull a customer from hell to heaven: apologize, solve the problem, and then compensate with something of value. A free, one-night stay or a massage at the spa is an example. It's important to create a customer recovery process within the organization, train all employees in the process, and carefully monitor its implementation to ensure success. Empower your people to make these decisions real-time. The best service organizations empower front desk staff eliminating the timing delays of engaging a manager.

Online Market Recovery is a huge component of customer recovery, and is approached with a specific set of steps for success.

Online Market Recovery

Online Marketing is a huge part of day-to-day brand marketing and is very helpful in the customer recovery process, as most online booking channels and travel websites have review areas where guests can share their experiences about a property. Guests accept that mistakes happen; the problem begins when there is no strategy in place to rectify the situation easily. It's a natural inclination to look up a business and see its rating before pursuing it as an option. Any guest that has a memorable visit good or bad is likely to leave a review on one of the social media websites or platforms. When a guest leaves a review, it's very important that a staff member at the property respond back to the review within 48 hours. This gives all future guests the impression that you really care about one's opinion of your business and the service provided.

Unfortunately, there are times when a business will get a negative review. While the business may not be able to recapture the guest who has left the negative review, how the manager/owner responds to the review may help capture new guests. When responding to a negative review, address the response to the general public and not to the individual writing the review. Make sure to apologize for the bad experience and give a brief description on how the problem has been or will be fixed. For example, if a guest leaves a post about a bad experience with an employee, the manager/owner might want to say, "Thank you; at the (brand name), we have ongoing training for all personnel. We, as a company, have added this issue to the agenda for our next training session and will address this issue." The response does not mention the specifics of the issue. It's important to remember that repeating something makes it more memorable, and you do not want to make negative issues more memorable for the reader.

Recently, at one of our hotels, a guest posted a severe complaint on Facebook. Our reputation management staff member brought the comment to my attention, and I was able to call the client within 24 hours of when the comment first appeared. I apologized, listened, and assured the guest that this issue would be addressed in our next training session. Within a few minutes, the customer posted another Facebook comment, apologizing for the complaint and applauding our service efforts. Though this type of turnaround may not always be possible, it's always important to try.

Reputation Management is the practice of monitoring the reputation of a brand, addressing damaging contents, and using customer feedback solutions to get feedback or early warning signals about potential reputation problems. An important piece of reputation management focuses on pushing down negative comments and reviews in search results. Reputation management may attempt to bridge the gap between how a company perceives itself and how others view it.