Travel Media GROUP

THE LASTING IMPACT OF
F1RST IMPRESSIONS
FOR HOTELS

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When guests are searching for the perfect hotel to take their vacation, they're presented with thousands of options. In order to narrow their choices down, they investigate details about each property and form opinions. However, studies show that it takes as little as 33 milliseconds to form a first impression based on visuals alone. Guests will narrow their choices this way, but when they click into different properties to compare, a deeper first impression is made. Auto-san published an infographic citing that first impressions about hotels are made within 15 minutes. What elements influence a guest's first impression within those 15 minutes? What is the resulting impact for the hotel? Depending on what the guest finds, the result could be the beginning of a trusting relationship between guest and hotel, or drive the travel to book with another property entirely. Knowing the best strategies to implement in reputation management will help improve the first impression guests have about a hotel both in person and online.

ELEMENTS OF A
F1RST IMPRESSION

A study published in the International Journal of Contemporary Hospitality Management researched the effect of atmosphere on the psyche of guests staying in a hotel, claiming that the appearance of a hotel – in this case, specifically the lobby – influences the guests' emotional response, igniting either an "approach" or "avoid" reaction regarding the physical location. While this study focused primarily on the effects of environmental psychology, the same could be applied to a digital space. There are aspects of a hotel that act as your online "lobby" – a hotel's website, its nightly rates, and most importantly, the reviews. A TrustYou study found that 95% of travelers reported using online reviews to make booking decisions. With such an overwhelming portion of guests using reviews to determine their stay, it's clear to see how reviews carry such weight when it comes to a guest's first impression of a hotel.

Travel Media Group believes that the importance of reviews on the first impression for a hotel breaks down into three major categories: recent experiences, hotel responses, and review flow. Review recency matters because those will be the reviews travelers see first upon looking at a hotel's page.

Guests place trust in others' recent experiences, since they feel it will mirror their own. Responses to these reviews go hand-in-hand with recency when it comes to importance, as guests are comforted to know that the hotel staff is listening to their concerns. Making an active effort to communicate also leaves a stronger impression that the property is actually taking action. Travel Media Group uses "review flow" to describe both recency and frequency of reviews posted to a hotel. Similar to how recent reviews are significant, seeing a consistent stream of reviews for a property can also help a guest feel they're making the right decision in booking. Above all, reviews provide data for guests to utilize when drawing conclusions about the experience they might have.

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ELEMENTS OF A
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In a digital space, the first impression also depends on a hotel's website. The infographic posted by Auto-san has a number of suggestions for factors that influence a traveler's first impression from a website. Loading time, a user-friendly layout, and a simple, straightforward booking process all contribute to how a future guest feels about a hotel. The creators of the infographic suggest building a website to be optimized for mobile viewing first, as most visitors will be coming from their phones. Slower processing times and unintuitive layouts serve to frustrate users, so prioritizing these elements will result in a better user experience.

A hotel's social media presence is imperative to a guest's first impression, as well. Each post serves as a small billboard to advertise a property, and is a hotelier's best opportunity to showcase beautiful, eye-catching images that help to encourage the "approach" behavior described earlier. Social media is also a useful tool for hoteliers to promote updates to policies and advertise promotions and special deals going on at the property.

Over 4 billion users are on the internet worldwide, making it both a vast and important market for hoteliers to capitalize on.

Hoteliers are used to utilizing various strategies to enhance their property to be more appealing to guests, but what about improving the varied elements of the first impression?

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When discussing the best strategy to improve the first impression a hotel evokes, it's best to divide the conversation into reputation management and digital presence. While there is significant overlap between these two, the strategies behind improving each area differ enough that it's valuable for hoteliers to separate them.

In terms of reputation management, the first focus for raising a hotel's reputation is in securing new, positive reviews. This is simpler said than done, but at its core earning new positive feedback comes from guests enjoying a positive experience at a hotel. In providing clean, organized spaces and friendly, attentive service, hotels can ensure guest satisfaction at their hotel. Then, hoteliers can request guest feedback at check-out or through a post-stay email that asks guests to fill out a survey indicating their feelings about their stay. If they're satisfied, the email would encourage guests to post reviews online, which in turn contributes to review flow and recent review score.

Recent, positive reviews are important, but hoteliers should additionally focus on responding to reviews. Ensuring responses are made quickly and professionally is one significant way to boost your first impression. A hotel's voice is a useful tool to ease concerns and promote better communication to potential guests. Policy changes and updates to available amenities will also be front and center to guests looking through a hotel's review sites. In times where review frequency may be slower, each review left for a property holds a greater weight, making the response imperative to leave a positive first impression on potential guests in the future.

> "Raising brand awareness ignites a curiosity in travelers to check out what a hotel has to offer.

Trivago's business [blog](#) shared detailed advice for hoteliers seeking to make the most of their digital first impression. They detail the significance of an attractive website with mobile-first design and intuitive, easy-to-use booking systems on a guest's desire to stay at a hotel. Ensuring a hotel's website also has top SEO keywords included throughout descriptions on the page will also help ensure it appears at the top of traveler's searches, earning more visits online and the potential for increased booking. Taking advantage of social media will improve website visit counts as well, as raising brand awareness ignites a curiosity in travelers to check out what a hotel has to offer.

The article continues, suggesting hotels attempt to offer more digital services once the guest arrives. Remote check-ins are only the beginning of varied suggestions Trivago makes to hoteliers. Utilizing the digital screens across the property to advertise amenities or attractions is helpful for guests to have information available and displayed at all times. Another recommendation is for hotels to redirect their WiFi connection to bring guests to their hotel's landing page. Some hotels offer SMS-based services to guests, allowing them to message the front desk when they need refills on certain amenities. While some of these strategies remove the high-touch factor, this can be considered a positive for hotel staff. It opens up their schedules to have more time to personalize guests' experiences in other ways.

Improving various elements of a hotel can encourage guests to leave positive feedback online, contributing to other guests' first impressions and tumbling into an overall lift in a lifetime score.

ARE LIFETIME SCORES
SIGNIFICANT?

Many hotel marketing companies utilize a lifetime score as the cornerstone for discussing a hotel's reputation. While a lifetime score is one good measure of the success of a hotel, it is not what guests care the most about. When researching options for a place to stay, most guests will be more concerned about the first page of reviews as opposed to the 4th or 5th. A TrustYou study found that when given the choice of two hotels with equal pricing, travelers were almost 4 times more likely to select the hotel with more highly-rated reviews. All of the reviews and feedback you receive contribute to your lifetime result, and when recency is not part of the equation, it places equal weight on each individual review. This means that consistency is a key component of a hotel's lifelong reputation – simply, the more positive reviews a hotel receives over time, the better the lifetime score becomes.

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However, lifetime score is fairly static, and can be difficult to influence quickly when it comes to changes or improvements made at a hotel. For example, think about a hotel that receives a few negative reviews because guests felt the cleanliness of their accommodation was not what they expected. The hotel could make the proper response, adjust policies or communication, and future reviews could reflect that improvement with higher scores and positive comments. The hotel, however, will not see this uplift reflected in their lifetime score right away; instead, it could take months or even a full year before hoteliers can report a noticeable change in their lifetime score.
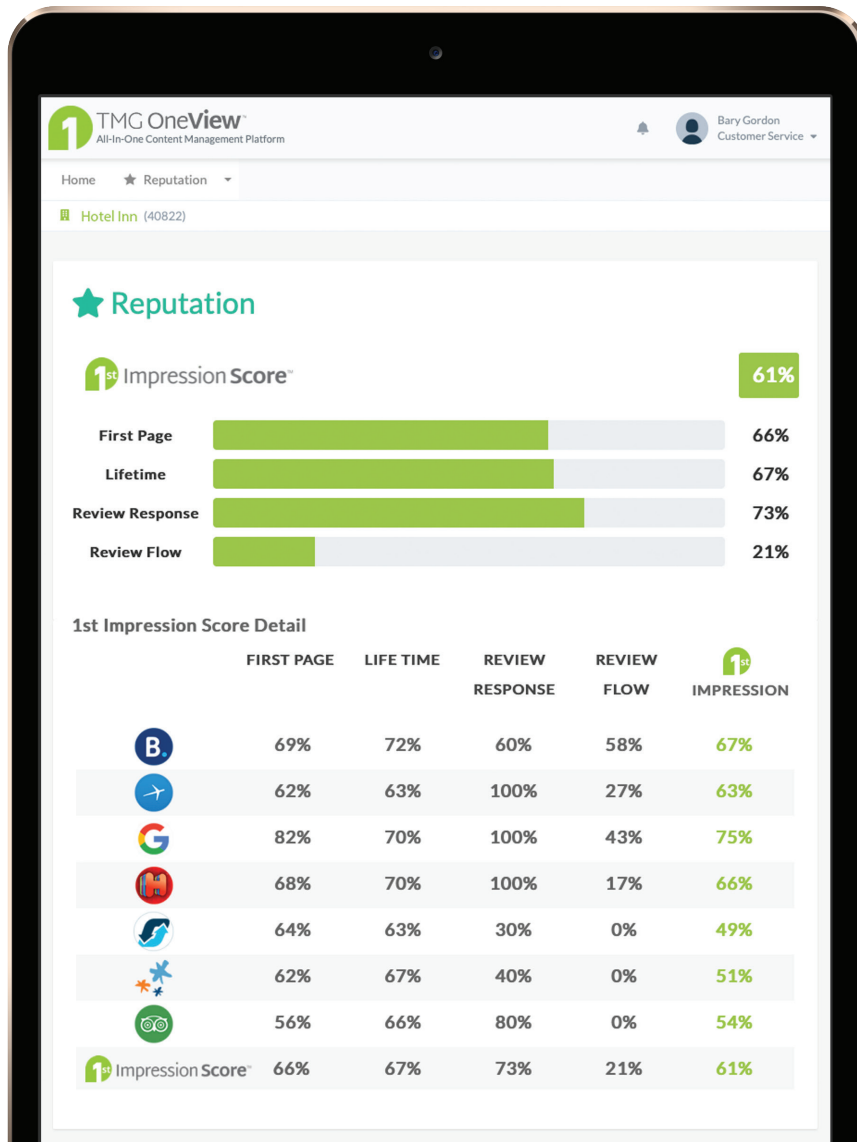
Using a lifetime score as the only metric to judge a guest's first impression of a hotel can be severely limiting. It doesn't take into account the efforts hoteliers and their staff do to improve their property on a day-to-day basis, and leaves out other important elements of reputation management for hotels. In many cases, a lifetime score on its own may not be entirely accurate as a depiction for how guests feel about a particular hotel.

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TRAVEL MEDIA GROUP'S
Impression Score™
PROVIDES A BETTER BENCHMARK

TMG OneView™
All-In-One Content Management Platform

Bary Gordon
Customer Service

Home ★ Reputation ▼

🏨 Hotel Inn (40822)

★ Reputation

1st Impression Score™ — 61%

First Page	66%
Lifetime	67%
Review Response	73%
Review Flow	21%

1st Impression Score Detail

	FIRST PAGE	LIFE TIME	REVIEW RESPONSE	REVIEW FLOW	1st IMPRESSION
B.	69%	72%	60%	58%	67%
✈	62%	63%	100%	27%	63%
G	82%	70%	100%	43%	75%
H	68%	70%	100%	17%	66%
	64%	63%	30%	0%	49%
✳	62%	67%	40%	0%	51%
🦉	56%	66%	80%	0%	54%
1st Impression Score™	66%	67%	73%	21%	61%

Our marketing experts at Travel Media Group believe that there's more to a hotel than the lifetime score, so we've developed a solution as part of our reputation management program that includes more relevant components of a hotel's first impression on guests. We combine review recency, responses, and flow together with a lifetime score to generate a number that refreshes continuously.

The 1st Impression Score™ tells hoteliers how their property is ranking in the minds of guests browsing for a place to stay.

Revisiting the example from earlier, if a hotel receives 3 negative reviews about cleanliness, the 1st Impression Score™ for that hotel will go down. However, as soon as the reviews are responded to, the score may lift back up a little. If 10 new positive reviews get posted to the hotel, the score will rise even more. Any action the hotelier took to earn those positive reviews can be credited for the change in score. Positive changes to the score provide an affirmation that the efforts were effective in providing a better, cleaner experience for guests. That opens up more time for the hotelier to consider other beneficial ways to enhance the guest experience at their hotel, whether that's at the property level or online through social media and website management.

First impressions drive a guest's motivation to book with a hotel, and what they see could impact their opinion of a property for a long time. Having access to a dynamic, comprehensive score that shows hoteliers more in-depth information about their reputation is critical for success.

Contact one of our sales representatives to get a tailored, thorough look at your hotel's 1st Impression Score™ today.

Learn more at trvl.media/1st
or email info@travelmediagroup.com.

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