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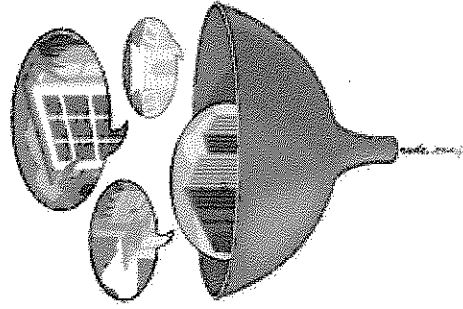
A Big Year

Damage Control

by Chris Warren

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Art by Alison Seiffer

In an age where every guest is a potential online critic, hotels get a little help defending their honor.

As far as friendships go, it wasn't exactly the best start. Late last year, Paul Frechette, who is the manager of the Shorebreak Hotel in Huntington Beach, Calif., got an e-mail giving him a heads-up that his boutique property had just gotten slammed in reviews on Yelp.com and the all-important travel site TripAdvisor.com. Turns out, the same disgruntled guest, a Huntington Beach local, had authored both reviews and was



A Contemporary Twist

angry about what he felt had been a dirty room and rude staff. Right away, before the reviews were 48 hours old, Frechette acted by posting a heartfelt response on TripAdvisor. "Since I was able to match his user name to his e-mail and last name, I was able to personalize my response to him by addressing him as an HB (Huntington Beach) local," he says. "I went on to explain how the people in the city of Huntington Beach are our most important clients and that it would mean the world to me if he contacted me in person."

Not long after Frechette's response went up on TripAdvisor, the unhappy guest showed up and the manager bought him and his girlfriend dinner. Since then, everything has changed. The once-angry guest has not only been back numerous times, but he has also encouraged friends and business associates to stay at the Shorebreak as well. "He has also gotten to know all my desk clerks by first name and visits frequently just to say hi," he says. "He would be someone I would consider a friend rather than a customer now."

This happy outcome — for both the guest, who felt respected and well treated, and Frechette, who not only didn't lose a customer but actually gained an evangelist for his hotel — would likely not have happened were it not for the e-mail that alerted Frechette to the fact that someone had just bad-mouthed his hotel online. And that e-mail was no fluke. It was the product of a small San Francisco-based software company called Revinate, which launched in 2009 and has quickly become an intelligence service, a quasi-CIA for the hospitality industry.

Revinate keeps track of — and, just as important, allows hotel owners and managers to quickly act on — the avalanche of public information generated every single day on social media outlets like Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, Yahoo and TripAdvisor that could potentially impact their reputation. "Their business lives and dies by guest satisfaction and quality service," says Marc Heyneker, who co-founded Revinate with a high school buddy, Jay Ashton, and now serves as vice president of sales and business development. "We realized that traditional guest-satisfaction measurements of comment cards and e-mail surveys after a stay were now being replaced to a certain degree with public domain, public forum tweeting, Facebook and user-generated content on review sites."

Think about it: As a traveler these days, where do you go to get impartial, unvarnished reviews of a hotel, its staff and amenities, like a spa or restaurant? Chances are at least part of your research involves going online and reading what fellow travelers have said, both good and bad, on TripAdvisor, Yelp or any number of other social media platforms. Two things became crystal clear to Heyneker and Ashton as they researched whether to launch their company: Hotel management everywhere, at big and small properties, have been keenly aware of the importance of social media and the impact it has on their reputation and bookings, but

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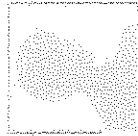
they've also largely felt impotent in tracking it, let alone managing it.

Sensing a big opportunity, Revinate developed their software product — which is delivered over the Internet, a phenomenon known as cloud computing — that allows hoteliers to do just that. "We monitor full fire hoses of Twitter content, all public Facebook content, YouTube, everything on Flickr," declares Ashton, who says that Revinate has about 1,000 clients, including hotels from the most widely recognized brands like Peninsula, Radisson, Kimpton, Best Western, Hyatt and Holiday Inn. "We have data partners who send us blog posts, mainstream news articles, forums and comments on content. It's more than 100 million pieces of content every day that we are sifting through to find mentions of our clients."

The Bellagio hotel and casino in Las Vegas just might want to consider becoming a customer of Revinate. As a way to demonstrate how hotel staff can easily use Revinate, whose offices are in a modest 19th-century brick building on the grounds of the Presidio, a centuries-old former military installation in San Francisco, Heyneker takes out his laptop. With a few clicks, he pulls up the "dashboard," which is the web page that summarizes all of the social media mentions relevant to a particular hotel — including such measures as the total number of reviews, overall review rating, percentage of positive reviews, TripAdvisor market rating as well as the same information on competitors, all broken down into time increments, such as the past week or month. As a way to illustrate, Heyneker pulls up the information on the Bellagio — which, although not a client, it monitors because it is a competitor of other Revinate customers in Vegas — and clicks over to another feature on the dashboard, the so-called keyword analysis, which picks out words mentioned in reviews that hotel management would want to know about, like bad or comfortable or bedbugs or even sucks.

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Admin

Echo 1 Items

Michelle Wohl

Chris - Incredible job explaining the importance of reputation management in the hotel industry and thanks for the coverage! Regarding our tips for hoteliers, we just hosted a Webinar yesterday on the topic and would love to share the link with anyone interested in learning how we recommend that hoteliers respond to tough reviews. <http://revinate.me/38D>

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