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**TITLE : MARRIOTT INTERNATIONAL – MARRIOTT’S RESPONSE TO  
THE COVID CRISIS**

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## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Once COVID began to spread in the areas where it works, The Marriott had to take decisive action. In order to maintain liquidity, several hotel chains are using tactics to reduce expenses like layoffs, lower compensation, furloughs, and shorter hours (Chaturvedi, 2020). Marriott shifted their marketing strategies in to more digitally.

This work emphasis on the critical evaluation of effectiveness of the marketing strategies and theories used by Marriott International, an American multinational company especially during the covid crisis. It includes the concept and importance of marketing and its competitive analysis during that time. Besides it critically evaluates the SWOT analysis of the company as per the case study. The primary strength includes its strong brand recognition and large cash reserve and weaknesses consists its unionized staff and debt level. The technological transformation is a drastic change that witnessed during the epidemic. The impact of this shift is also analyzed through this. Moreover, the managerial inferences on marketing strategies of the Marriott further exhortation on how to improve their marketing tactics in the post pandemic era too dealt round this work.

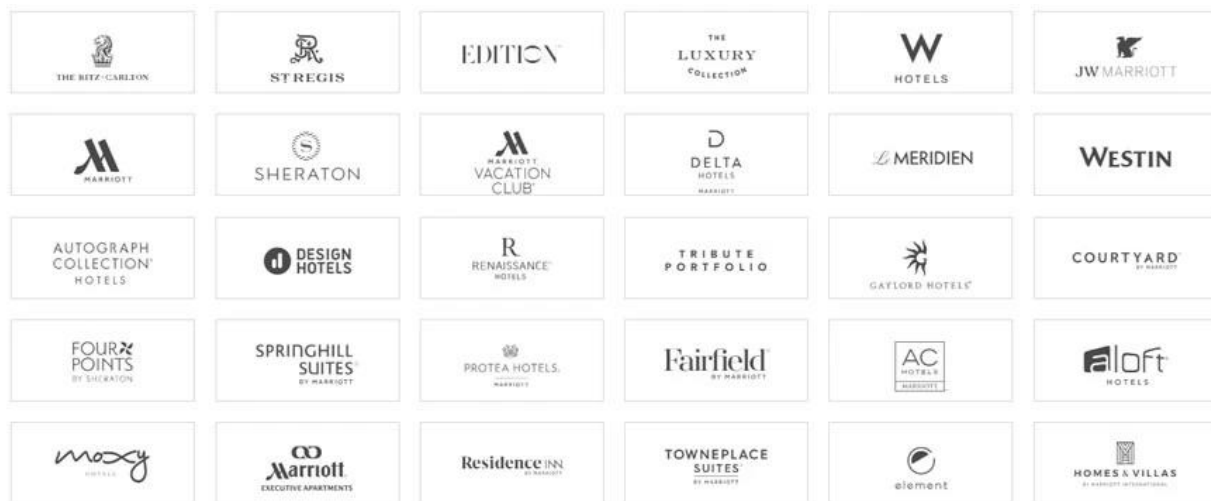
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# INTRODUCTION



A hospitality service company, Marriott International Inc. (Marriott) established in 1927 by Bill Marriott, Jr. runs hotels and eateries. Under a number of luxuries, premium, and exclusive brand names, it manages, franchises, and grants operating licenses for hotels, homes, and timeshare properties. It is headquartered in Bethesda, Maryland, United States. Around 140 thousand employees were employed by Marriott International in 2022. Marriott's main rivals are the hotels owned by Hilton and Hyatt. Travelers may stay at more than 7,000 participating locations worldwide at over 30 hotel brands that are part of the Marriott Bonvoy network.



Brand portfolio of Marriott International

The COVID-19 pandemic's widespread effects had a significant impact on the tourist and hospitality industries (Gossling et al., 2020; Zenker and Kock, 2020). They have to shift their marketing strategies in order to provide safety and security of the guests during that period. The COVID-19 pandemic's impacts have also been investigated in a number of contemporary researches. For instance, (Zheng et al. (2020) examined the impact of false media stories on the mental health of Chinese visitors. Gossling et al. (2020) contrasted COVID-19 to past pandemics in terms of how it has affected society, the economy, and tourism.

# 1. Critical evaluation of the effectiveness of marketing theories and strategies of Marriott International during COVID crisis

By the hit of COVID 19, Marriott implemented different marketing strategies to cop up with the impact of crisis. The assessment of its effectiveness are discussed below.

## 1.1 Concept , importance and resource allocation towards marketing activities

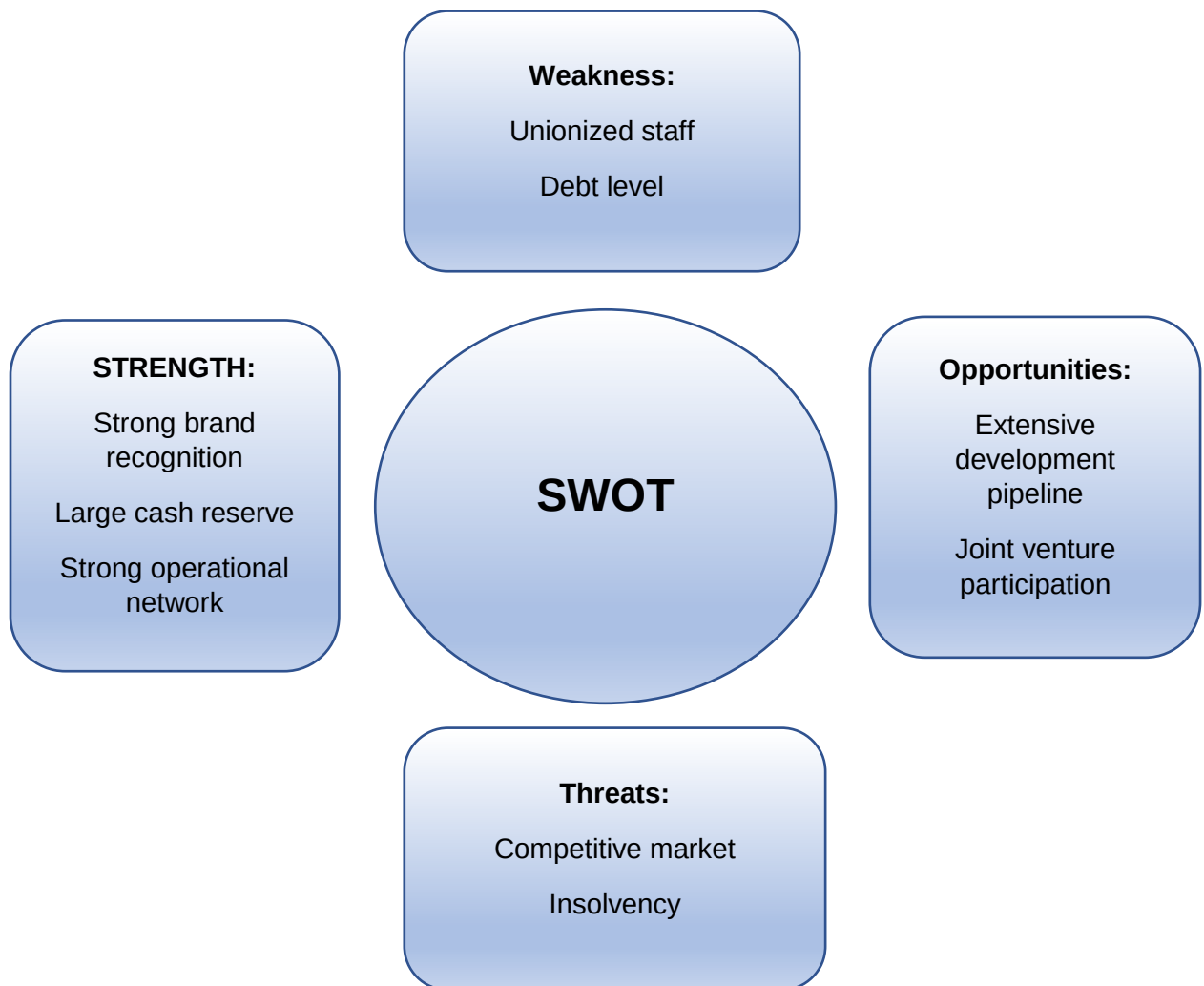
The COVID-19 pandemic's widespread effects had a significant impact on the tourist and hospitality industries (Gossling et al., 2020; Zenker and Kock, 2020). Nonetheless the business understood the value of marketing at this time and changed its tactics to consider the shifting environment. In order to stay in touch with its clients, staff members, and stakeholders, Marriott's marketing activities throughout the epidemic included communication as one of their main goals. The business recognized the need to reassure, respond to questions, and outline the measures taken to guarantee guest safety. This reduced possible reputational concerns and preserved confidence and openness. Conventional marketing initiatives were reassessed, and a bigger focus was put on online avenues to target clients who were at home (increased online reservation options, liberal cancellation policies, and virtual experiences). Marriott changed its attention to regional markets, nearby staycations, and important travelers. It aids in marketing domestic travel by providing discounts, rewards for loyalty programs, and appealing packages to stimulate reservations and enable revenue recovery. By housing frontline staff, aiding food banks, and participating in other community-oriented programs, Marriott International demonstrated its commitment to social responsibility and helped to enhance brand perception during the crisis. Many hotels have, in fact, already implemented a variety of changes in reaction to the epidemic (Shin & Kang, 2020) from measures to assure higher hygienic standards and social seclusion to modifications in booking and cancellation regulations, etc. (Gross, 2020; Hang, Aroean, & Chen, 2020; Hao et al., 2020; Hu et al., 2020). Marriott's marketing efforts emphasized the adoption of novel operating methods, contactless services, and cleaning procedures to assure guest safety.

Budget adjustments and a focus on digital platforms are how Marriott International allocates its resources such as email marketing, internet campaigns, social media participation, and search engine marketing. This will shrink the cost whilst reaching to large spectrum of people. Marriott

also highlighted the usage of its loyalty program, Marriott Bonvoy, to interact with consumers and encourage further reservations.

## 1.2 Critical evaluation of SWOT analysis

To overcome the hurdles presented by the pandemic, the firm will need to be able to innovate, adapt, and capitalize on its strengths while resolving its weaknesses and reducing dangers.



Strong brand recognition as a strength of Marriott aids in preserving client loyalty and bringing in fresh visitors once travel is resumed. The large cash reserves enable Marriott to keep up vital tasks and make the investments required to assure guest protection. Effective property management is made possible by a robust operational network, which also facilitates quick reaction and adaptation to shifting conditions.

Efficient labor-management interactions may help to sustain stability in the workforce and employee happiness, even if having a unionized workforce might bring difficulties in negotiations and perhaps higher labour expenses. In order to determine the true influence of debt level on a company's operations, it is critical to take into account variables including debt maturity, interest rates, and the health of the company's finances.

Once the epidemic has gone, the one-year-delayed investment stream will serve as an edge over competitors. Evaluation of the possible effects of capital saving owing to postponed projects on future development and competitive positioning is critical. The joint venture involvement may encourage novel approaches and tactics to adjust to shifting market circumstances.

To keep one step ahead of both current and potential competitors, constant observation of industry trends and changing customer preferences is necessary. When employees look for work elsewhere after being furloughed, rivals may gain access to the expertise. Once the crisis has passed, there can also be hiring and training expenses for new employees. To lessen the insolvency risk, it is essential to practice effective financial management, cost-cutting initiatives, and adaptive techniques.

### 1.3 Effect of marketing strategies on stakeholders identified by the use of marketing mix

Marriott International used a variety of marketing techniques such as 'always on' marketing approach includes M live studios, Marriott bonvoy, "golden rule" and advertising campaigns etc. during the COVID-19 crisis to address the issues facing the hotel sector and to meet the demands of its stakeholders. Product, pricing, venue and promotion are 4 P's of marketing mix.

Marriott prioritized cleanliness and safety as its primary product offerings. They highlighted the steps made to maintain visitor safety while communicating improved health and hygiene practices. To reduce physical encounters, they implemented digital technologies and contactless services like smartphone check-ins and room entrance.



Because of the focus on safety precautions and contactless services, clients felt more at ease and secure while making reservations with Marriott during the epidemic. Safety standards were prioritized, which increased worker trust in the workplace and allayed worries about virus exposure.

In order to account for shifting demand patterns and travel constraints, Marriott changed its pricing strategy. In times of low demand, they provided lenient cancellation procedures and reduced prices to draw customers. To encourage customer retention, the Marriott Bonvoy loyalty program offers exclusive member discounts and privileges.



Travelers found Marriott more appealing because to its lenient cancellation policies and special prices, which helped them stay loyal to the company and make additional reservations. To

maximize income in the face of shifting demand, price modifications need careful observation and analysis, which presented difficulties for revenue management teams.

Targeting domestic travelers and those looking for staycations, Marriott changed its marketing emphasis to regional and local markets. By using online material and virtual tours to showcase homes and activities, they were able to connect with potential at-home guests.

Marriott's focus on regional markets created chances for local companies and helped areas that depend on tourism to recover economically. Sales and marketing teams have to modify their tactics and design campaigns specifically for local consumers as a result of the shift in marketing focus.

For consumer engagement and brand recognition, Marriott used email advertising, digital marketing, and social media platforms like Instagram and Snapchat that specifically target millennials. They worked together with partners and influencers to spread their message and engage more people.



Digital advertisements educated visitors about Marriott's safety precautions and travel updates, promoting brand loyalty and enticing them to make more reservations. The marketing teams had the difficult task of developing sensitive and pertinent message at a period of ambiguity, necessitated ingenuity and agility.

## 1.4 Competitive analysis of the strategies

To maintain liquidity, some hotel chains are taking measures to reduce expenses including layoffs, lower compensation, furloughs, and shortened workweeks (Chaturvedi, 2020). During the crisis, Marriott's solid brand awareness and reward program, Marriott Bonvoy, gave it a competitive edge. Due to their familiarity with and faith in the brand, repeat consumers were more

inclined to pick Marriott. By focusing more on local and regional markets, Marriott was able to take advantage of possibilities where travel restrictions were laxer. They were able to meet demand from both domestic travelers and vacationers by using a focused strategy and swiftly adjust to shifting consumer tastes throughout the epidemic due to Marriott's emphasis on digital transformation. They distinguished themselves from rivals by offering smooth and secure visitor experiences through improved mobile applications, online booking systems, and contactless services. 66% of the surveyed millennials said they booked their vacation using a smartphone, which makes Airbnb and last-minute booking services frequently less expensive. User-generated content, according to millennials, affects travel choices and is more lasting, impactful, reliable, and a sign of a brand's value. This could influence people to pick Marriott when making last-minute travel arrangements. With Marriott's unique app, reward members may bypass the hotel check-in process and immediately use their phone to open their room. This adopts cutting-edge technology while enhancing consumer perceptions of the brand, giving it a competitive edge. Every room at Marriott's new hotel brand, "Moxy," has the finest Wifi, a TV with YouTube and Netflix, and an option to sign up for the "Guestbook," a big video wall in the lobby.



The competitive edge Marriott has, nevertheless, is due to the use of technology and consumer-based marketing.

## 1.5 Impact of technologies in the strategies

Marriott's strategies with the use of technology strengthened internationalization efforts, allowed personalized communication, and increased digital marketing outreach.

- Mobile app

During the crisis, the Marriott mobile app was even more important since it let customers to access contactless services, check-in, and check-out without having to engage with hotel staff physically, assuring their comfort and security. In order to keep guests informed and reassured during uncertain times, it functioned as a direct communication conduit, enabling Marriott to give them contemporaneous updates on safety precautions, travel recommendations, and property-specific material. its user-friendly layout and accessibility in many languages assisted internationalization efforts, making it simpler for visitors from other locations to interact with Marriott's services.

- Marketing on Digital Platforms (M Live Studios)

By enabling Marriott to actively monitor social media and online conversations, M Live Studios played a crucial role in providing timely replies to client complaints and questions.



Marriott may modify its communications in real-time to address new problems, offer useful information, and share case studies of their community assistance programs throughout the epidemic. The features of M Live Studios improved Marriott's capacity to interact with

international audiences, offering region-specific updates and messaging adapted to various cultural situations.

- **AI & Analytics**

During the crisis, AI-driven analytics enabled data-driven marketing strategies and targeted advertising by helping Marriott recognize shifting customer behaviour and tastes. Many of its hotels embrace AI-enabled chatbots that let visitors communicate with hotel personnel to make reservations, check their balances, and redeem gift cards.

It might be utilized in many foreign markets, offering insightful information about regional customer trends and facilitating more effective internationalization initiatives.

- **Smart rooms**

IoT guest rooms emphasized the advantages of contactless technology and improved sanitary procedures during the COVID-19 crisis, attracting security-conscious travelers.



It allowed Marriott to reassure customers by demonstrating their dedication to their safety and wellbeing using cutting-edge in-room technologies. While not directly related to attempts to internationalize, IoT guest rooms demonstrated Marriott's dedication to innovation and strengthened their position as a globally renowned brand.

## 1.6 Evaluation of the success of strategies and measurement metrics

By concentrating on digital platforms like the smartphone app and M Live Studios, Marriott was able to interact digitally with guests, responding to their needs and sharing pertinent information. Positive guest feedback and high user interaction were strong signs that these techniques were effective. Despite the difficulties, Marriott was able to preserve customer loyalty and brand toughness. Continually explaining safety precautions and offering flexible scheduling alternatives helped foster and sustain consumer loyalty. Marriott demonstrated their capacity to react to market trends throughout the crisis by quickly adapting to shifting customer behaviour, such as the focus on local and regional travel. In order to assess the general customer experience, mood, and impression of their security measures, Marriott probably performed polls of guest satisfaction. They would've monitored the use of mobile apps, including downloads, frequent users, and the rate at which contactless services were being used. Marriott was able to assess the effectiveness of its digital media marketing initiatives by tracking social media activity, sentiment analysis, and online discussions. Insights into consumer loyalty and retention were gained through tracking membership activities, repeat reservations, and the expansion of their reward program, Marriott Bonvoy. Guest satisfaction polls, mobile app participation, social media analytics, and loyalty program metrics were probably used as measurement measures for assessment.

## 1.7 Measures to control and improve the strategies

If it turned out that the deployed marketing techniques were ineffective, the company may have done a number of things to enhance and regulate its marketing operations.

To pinpoint the precise areas where the marketing initiatives fell short, Marriott might have performed a detailed investigation that included a review of customer feedback, performance indicators, and a comparison with industry benchmarks. They might produce more pertinent and alluring marketing communications by reassessing the target audience segmentation and comprehending evolving consumer wants and preferences. The business has to make sure that its messaging is clear, translucent and catered to the needs and preferences of their intended audience. Marriott might make the required changes to its marketing mix components, such as adding new products, changing price

policies, or improving distribution systems. They could swiftly test and refine several techniques if it adopted an agile marketing strategy. A/B testing, pilot initiatives, and rapid feedback loops can help achieve this. Besides they might find market possibilities and gaps by examining the marketing tactics of its rivals. Utilizing this data will help them stand above the competition and better position their goods. It is essential that marketing teams effectively communicate and collaborate with other departments, including sales, operations, and IT. Marriott will be able to trace the effects of their modifications and make data-driven choices for future optimization by routinely evaluating marketing performance and KPIs.

## 2. Managerial implication on marketing strategies

- Guest-Centered Approach : To obtain an in-depth knowledge of client preferences, requirements, and expectations, do frequent market research and customer surveys. This will allow Marriott to tailor its offers and services properly. Discover touchpoints where customers connect with the brand by using customer journey mapping to make sure they have a consistent and smooth experience while they are there.
- Digital Conversion : Continue to invest in digital capabilities and emerging technologies to promote brand loyalty, better the visitor experience, and remain competitive. Utilize AI and sophisticated data to personalize marketing campaigns, forecast consumer behaviour, and maximize marketing budgets.
- Cultural Sensitivity and Localization : Consider local conventions, dialects, and concerns when developing marketing messages and services to fit regional preferences and cultural standards. In order to maintain cultural relevance and prevent any potential misunderstandings in global markets, work with local marketing teams or agencies.
- Integrated Marketing Communications (IMC) : With the goal to reinforce brand identity and values, make sure that the company's message and tone are consistent across all marketing platforms. To establish a seamless integration of online and physical touchpoints and a cohesive, immersive consumer experience, develop an omnichannel marketing strategy.

- Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) and sustainability : For guests who care about the environment and to improve business image, incorporate sustainability and CSR efforts into marketing campaigns. To show Marriott's commitment to social and environmental responsibility, convey CSR actions in a clear and sincere manner.
- Constant Education and Training : Spend in professional development and continuous learning programs for marketing teams to keep them abreast of market changes and best practices as well as to improve marketing capabilities and maximize marketing efforts, offer training on data analytics and digital marketing technologies.
- Management of reputation and brand resilience : Create a crisis communication strategy that specifies how to handle foreseeable problems and communicate successfully in emergencies like the COVID-19 pandemic. Use a reputation management approach to keep an eye on reviews on the internet and reply in a timely manner to any bad comments while guaranteeing good sentiment.
- Communication between departments and cooperation : Encourage cross-functional cooperation across the divisions of marketing, operations, sales and other areas to coordinate efforts and provide a consistent client experience. Hold frequent interdepartmental gatherings to discuss marketing efficacy indicators, consumer feedback, and market insights for overall decision-making.
- Key Performance Indicators (KPI) and Return On Investment (ROI) measurement : Establish precise Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) that are in line with marketing goals including client acquisition, retention, and profit creation. Utilize data analytics to calculate Return on Investment (ROI) and monitor the success of marketing efforts and promotions.

## CONCLUSION

Marriott International was able to successfully navigate the difficulties brought on by the COVID-19 issue by its tactical marketing strategies.

In order to meet shifting client expectations, the organization placed a high priority on visitor happiness, safety, and communication. Through the adoption of digital transformation, Marriott used its mobile app and M Live Studios to interact digitally with customers and keep its brand visible when travel was prohibited. Utilizing AI and analytics improved visitor experiences by allowing marketing campaigns to be tailored to specific tastes. IoT integration in hotel rooms also enhanced contactless services and security procedures, meeting customer requirements for a private and customized stay.

The management repercussions and suggestions provide insightful information for Marriott International's marketing plans as it moves into the post-pandemic period. Marriott will be able to maintain its image, encourage client loyalty, and take advantage of new possibilities in the rapidly changing travel industry by putting an emphasis on agility, sustainability, and inclusion while using technology and data to gain insight. In the aftermath of a pandemic, Marriott can solidify its position as a top hospitality brand by adopting a coordinated and customer-focused strategy.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

These are the suggestions on how the Marriott International can improve their marketing strategies in the post pandemic era considering the skills and resources that company currently has.

- Enable personalized marketing strategies and products by enhancing customer relationship management (CRM) systems to collect thorough data on visitor preferences and behaviors.
- Implement post-stay surveys and feedback loops to continually track customer satisfaction and adjust marketing initiatives based on data.
- Work together with area influencers in important regions to provide genuine content that appeals to residents and highlights Marriott's ties to regional cultures.
- By providing personalized incentives based on customer preferences and travel patterns, they may improve the Marriott Bonvoy loyalty program.
- To encourage greater loyalty program participation, provide exclusive advantages like curated experiences and personalized travel advice.
- Establish community-focused CSR programs that are customized to each region's demands and challenges to demonstrate Marriott's dedication to helping the communities where it operates.
- Address social and environmental issues in the areas where Marriott operates by working with regional charities and organizations.
- Promote cleaning standards and safety precautions via videos, social media campaigns, and obvious signs to demonstrate Marriott's dedication to wellness and security.
- Offer tier-based benefits for various degrees of loyalty to entice customers to advance in the program.
- To gauge the success of various activities, establish precise KPIs for marketing campaigns, such as customer acquisition, conversion rates, and return on marketing expenditure.
- To determine effective marketing tactics and optimize budget allocation, conduct routine performance reviews.
- To entice environmentally aware travelers, draw attention to eco-friendly attributes, green certifications, and neighborhood support programs in promotional materials.
- Stimulate career growth and participation at trade shows to promote an environment of ongoing learning and innovation.

- To encourage responsible travel, give rewards to visitors who take part in sustainability initiatives like reusing towels or conserving electricity.
- For a smooth and secure guest experience, extend the usage of contactless technology beyond mobile applications by including contactless check-in kiosks, digitized room keys, and voice-activated controls in guest rooms.
- Create marketing strategies that place a strong emphasis on health, rest, and renewal, appealing to tourists looking for stress reduction and self-care following the epidemic.

Marriott also has a strong loyalty program (Marriott Bonvoy) that may be used to increase customer happiness and retention.

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