COVID STRATEGY EBOOK FOR HOTELS
The hospitality industry is in disarray, thanks to lockdown and ensuing restrictions brought in to defray the effects of COVID-19. It would be easy to paint a picture of gloom and doom, but I do believe that the industry will survive the turmoil and uncertainty to come out stronger.

There are many things we cannot control: the government’s guidelines, the regulations we must now adhere to and the restrictions on everyday life. However, we can influence how we treat our teams, our customers and our colleagues in order to operate our businesses in a professional, caring and safe manner.

I welcome this eBook from Oaky, an Institute of Hospitality Business Partner. It is full of practical and creative ideas that will act as an inspirational guide to recovery.

This e-book features advice from:

Nathalie Mulder of Kimpton De Witt Hotel
Angelo Vassallo of Fairmont Rey Juan Carlos I Hotel
Katie Hokin, Founder and Director of AccomBoost
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FOOD & BEVERAGE
Chapter 1. Reviewing your Food and Beverage approach in light of Covid-19

CHAPTER ONE
REVIEWING YOUR FOOD AND BEVERAGE APPROACH IN LIGHT OF COVID-19

IMPLEMENT LOCAL GUIDELINES AND SET NEW STANDARD OPERATING PROCEDURES WHILE MAXIMISING SERVICE QUALITY

Featuring advice from:
Nathalie Mulder of Kimpton De Witt Hotel
Angelo Vassallo of Fairmont Rey Juan Carlos I Hotel

Regardless your restaurants and bars were closed for an extended period or not, the following tips will help you determine to what degree your outlets are providing a safe and comfortable environment for your guests.

1.1 RESEARCH AND IMPLEMENT LOCAL GUIDELINES

First things first – if you haven’t already, find out which new rules and regulations you must comply with to run your F&B venues. Check your local authority’s website to get a list of things you need to do to make your operations compliant. This can include:
• new cleaning procedures
• capacity limits
• rules about using PPE and hand sanitiser.

1.2 SET NEW STANDARD OPERATING PROCEDURES (SOPs) AND CONDUCT STAFF TRAINING

Most of what you do at your restaurant involves close contact with guests e.g. welcoming and seating them, taking orders and serving food and drinks. New government requirements and the need for reduced contact will make it necessary to update your SOPs and find alternative ways of providing the same level of service while keeping guests and staff safe.

Here are some ideas for new SOPs:
• Instead of providing a self-service buffet, let staff serve food at each station
• Outline standards around the proper use of PPE at work
• Implement new/updated cleaning and sanitising schedules for surfaces, equipment, etc.
• Set up a process for staff to follow if they feel sick or test positive for Covid-19

Whatever new SOPs you implement, train staff to ensure these procedures are being applied both in the front and back of house.
Interactions with guests are going to be different for the foreseeable future. This means restaurants and bars will have to find new ways to delight guests.

In some cases, you may offer the same services but be less proactive about it to give people space and minimise direct or indirect contact (e.g. with cloakroom service or valet parking). Whatever you plan to provide, keep comfort and wellbeing in mind. They will appreciate that you are taking their concerns seriously while welcoming them in a warm and friendly way.

When you plan to reopen your F&B venues, answer the following questions to make a financially sound decision.

- **What is the overall mood in your city, town, or region?** Look at how restaurants around you are doing and how many guests they attract. If they are busy, it’s probably time to draw up a reopening plan.

- **What costs are associated with reopening one, some, or all of your F&B outlets?** Opening a restaurant or bar can bring significant costs, including manning, food and beverage stock and possibly fees for renovations needed to make your outlet compliant to new regulations. Consider these costs when you run the numbers while planning your reopening.

- **Which new costs will you incur when reopening your venues?** Stricter hygiene regulations leading to longer cleaning times and greater product use, as well as the need for PPE for staff and guests are just a few new cost factors you need to budget for.
• **Who is your main target market?** With travel being so heavily restricted, you may have a different target market now from before the pandemic. This is important to know since local guests can be more price sensitive. You may face lower spend per guest in the coming weeks and months from regular channels, so it’s important to make it clear that less run-of-the-mill desires are also something that your team would be happy to accommodate.

• **How many guests do you need to serve to break even?** Given the point above, it’s best to make conservative calculations about how many covers you need per day to break even. F&B cost control relies on accurately estimating occupancy and adjusting your provisions accordingly. Consider if this figure is realistic and how long it may take you to build up to this number of guests. Any additional revenue you generate incrementally via upselling for instance, can then act as a buffer for the inevitable unexpected occurrence.

• **How can you maximise service quality while minimising costs?** Having a good overview of your costs and being able to eliminate all the unnecessary ones has never been so important. Removing high-cost and low-profit items from the menu is a good place to start. Make your operations as efficient as possible to save money on manning. Use tech tools to better schedule your staff, streamline workflows and avoid wasting valuable resources.
LEVERAGE YOUR ORIGINAL F&B SELLING POINTS IN COMBINATION WITH HEALTH AND SAFETY MEASURES TO ATTRACT PATRONS AND MAKE YOUR MARK IN THE FOOD AND BEVERAGE INDUSTRY

Featuring advice from:
Nathalie Mulder of Kimpton De Witt Hotel
Angelo Vassallo of Fairmont Rey Juan Carlos I Hotel

As you gear up to reopen, getting the word out about it is key to attracting those first visitors. As you might expect, competition will be fiercer than ever as venues around you fight to make up for revenue lost during the lockdown.

Follow the steps below to let your loyal patrons and new customers know you’re open for business.

2.1 LOCALISE SEO AND SOCIAL MEDIA

In the first weeks and months after lockdowns ease, you’ll be primarily attracting guests from your area and drive-to markets. Help them find you by localising your SEO and social media presence.

- **Set up or optimise your Google My Business page** Include revised opening hours, feature your menu and highlight new options such as pick-up or contactless delivery. Google allows you to give detailed information about your venue, so take advantage of this to answer all your potential guests’ questions. Don’t forget to add some beautiful and convincing imagery!

- **Leverage online business listings** Get your venues featured on sites like Yelp, TripAdvisor or Foursquare (or your local equivalent) to get eyes on your business, drive traffic to your website and engage with people who leave reviews. If this is covered for your hotel, think about your F&B departments specifically to attract people searching for brunch or dinner options, for example. Highlight your restaurant and bar USPs across all listings!
2.2 Encourage Staff to Leverage Their Social Media Networks

- **Update your menu** Keep your menu updated on your website, social media, Google listing and other third-party sites. This shows guests what they can expect, and your target audience will know they’ve come to the right place. It’s also helpful for guests with dietary restrictions or preferences because they can check your options ahead of their visit.

- **Target local guests via social media** If you’re not doing this already, use your local language on social media to better connect with people around you. Create promotions around upcoming holidays or events and make your content relevant to your area. Also consider working with local bloggers, influencers and media to expand your reach and promote your venue.

While you staff should be motivated and encouraged to be brand ambassadors in regular times, this period would especially benefit from public support from staff.

- **Invite your team to share your story on their social channels** Encourage staff to show behind the scenes shots of how you’re getting ready to reopen or how you’re operating now. Tag your team members in photos and invite them to comment, like and reshare your posts. Before you start, let your employees know they are not obliged to do this but tactfully emphasise the difference it would make.
• **Host social media training for staff** When sharing business-related content, there are legal aspects to be aware of (e.g., privacy protection). Communicate this to your staff so everyone is on the safe side. Highlight branding guidelines as well to ensure your team’s posts reflect your venue’s style.

2.3 **DRIVE REVIEWS AND CUSTOMER-GENERATED CONTENT**

When people research a new bar or restaurant to go to, review sites can have a huge impact on their decision. Plenty of good and recent reviews will make potential customers much more likely to stop by. Use this to your advantage!

- **Encourage guests to leave reviews** Do this as guests pay or when you say goodbye. Tell them how much it would help your business if they shared their experience. Many will be happy to support you in this way.

- **Reward guests who ‘check in’** Facebook allows users to check in and publicly share their experience at a restaurant, store, hotel or city. Their connections can observe their experience at your outlet, which is a great form of organic publicity. Since not everybody checks in automatically, you can consider offering an incentive like a free starter or a drink if they do.

- **Promote user-generated content** If your food or drinks are beautiful or your design is quirky, chances are guests will take some pictures for their social media. Like the check-in feature on Facebook, you can encourage them to post photos of your venue and tag you. This not only gives you extra exposure on social media, it also lets you engage with your guests by resharing their posts or stories on your channels.
You’ve probably seen many hotels share their new hygiene and safety measures on their website and social media. If you haven’t already, you should do the same. After all, you’ve gone to great lengths to implement all the new regulations, so why not tell people about it?

This doesn’t mean you can’t break the mould by communicating your measures in a more fun and engaging way. Try recording social media stories or short videos of staff following the new procedures. You can show that you’re taking the situation seriously but are still focusing on providing a lively experience for your guests.

Remember though, if you promise something, you’ll need to deliver. Once a guest arrives, they need to see these measures in action. Encourage patrons to ask questions and ensure your staff are ready to explain the how and why behind your new procedures.

2.5 CREATIVE IDEAS TO INCREASE YOUR F&B SALES

Of course, getting guests to come to you is only half the job. Now it’s time to drive sales in your venue. Try these tips to avoid your offering becoming stale while your attention is devoted to health and safety.

- **Regularly update your menu** Your customer base will be smaller with fewer out-of-town guests. You’ll probably have more repeat business from locals and this is a good thing, especially in these trying times. Keep things interesting for your customers who come back by having a small menu that you change regularly with regional or seasonal specials.

- **Revise opening times and seating options** Capacity restrictions mean you can welcome fewer guests in your regular opening hours. Consider whether it would make sense to extend your opening hours or expand
outdoor seating options during summer to serve more guests.

- **Consider pick-up and delivery**  Many restaurants have had great success with this approach during lockdown. Would this fit your restaurant and appeal to your guests? If normal delivery isn’t an option, are there other creative ways you can implement this? Think: a box with ingredients for a lavish meal and a video tutorial by your chef or ingredients and a guide to making cocktails.

- **Offer new dining settings** If your outlet is in a hotel, can you offer packages where you serve a meal in an unusual location? This could include the Presidential Suite, the terrace, spa, beach or garden.

- **Train staff to upsell** Every penny counts, so encourage your team to upsell to guests whenever possible. Host training to teach them the right techniques and ensure guests don’t feel harassed by it. You can start with something simple like proposing an aperitif to every table or pushing your high-profit low-cost dishes. Create incentives for your team to make this more fun. For example, the one who sells the most aperitifs wins a bottle of Champagne.

- **Collaborate with other departments in the spirit of total revenue management** Ask front office or the spa if you can create joint packages for hotel guests. This could include a spa day with a healthy meal or an upgrade to a suite which comes with a set menu at your restaurant. You can get creative here – the sky is the limit.

Hopefully these ideas and pointers will get your creativity flowing and help you create and implement a strategy to bring back your F&B venue with a bang.

As you navigate these challenging months, bear in mind that even with new rules and a more difficult situation overall, you can still find a way to delight your guests and keep giving them the fantastic experiences you’re known for.
HOTEL MARKETING
CHAPTER THREE

HOTEL MARKETING QUICK WINS

PIVOT YOUR HOTEL MARKETING STRATEGY TO WORK AROUND THE CORONAVIRUS CRISIS

Featuring advice from:
Katie Hokin, Founder and Director of AccomBoost
Luis Enrique Goldamez Echeverria, CEO of FashionPotluck.com
Perryn Khoo, Digital Account Manager at WME Australia.

If you’re like many in the industry, you’ve been working on a long-term hotel marketing strategy to gradually attract hotel guests back to your property. Read on for a host of clever ideas that you can apply immediately to kickstart post-crisis recovery, boost your online presence and in-stay offering.

Luis’s experience has taught him that generosity with your time and resources is key when there are multiple messages to communicate relevant to different stages of recovery.

- **Keep in mind that creating content is only half the work** Getting it in front of the right people and encouraging them to engage with it is just as important.

- **Identify which media or social channels your audience uses to consume content** Do they prefer Instagram over Facebook? Do they read local newspapers and magazines (both online and print)? Answering these questions will help you decide what type of content to create and where to publish it, so you can make the most of every piece.

- **Show your staff returning to work and how you are preparing the hotel to welcome guests once again** Make sure to highlight your new hygiene and safety procedures. Once you have reopened, it’s time to show your property in action. Stage photos with models and staff or opt for more candid shots of real guests (only if they agree, of course).

- **User-generated content remains a good way to promote your hotel in these unusual times** This means encouraging guests to share photos of their stay via their preferred social channels, tagging you in them and using your hashtag.
You can track this content with a hashtag tracker and re-share at your discretion. Members of your target audience will see others enjoying themselves at your property, which will place your name and imagery front of mind when planning their next hotel stay.

- **Keep in mind that each phase will require some degree of spend, for content creation and promotion alike** When allocating budget towards creating and amplifying your content, make sure you consider the need for specific messaging at different phases of the reopening process. Budget accordingly for content creators, designers, paid social, paid search and paid coverage/advertising to get yourself in front of potential guests.

- **Think about who your current target audience is and how you can reach them** Domestic guests are probably your best bet in the short and medium term since international travel is still restricted in many countries (e.g. closed borders or mandatory quarantine on-arrival).

- **Offer special events and promotions to your local community while you wait for travellers from abroad to return** Create events and offerings that they can easily take advantage of. Use this not only to initiate the first trickle in your returning stream of revenue, but also to let a wider audiences know that you’re up and running and already providing value to your customers.

- **Prepare for changes in your country or region by returning to business with this narrowed focus** This foresight is especially important since rules, regulations and restrictions are changing constantly.

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**3.2 ENGAGE WITH YOUR LOCAL COMMUNITY**

Since COVID-19 is an unprecedented situation and every hotel is different, there is no one-size-fits-all answer for promotions. Katie suggests below with a brilliant list of actionable hotel marketing ideas.

- **Think outside the box with your promotions** Create Covid-ready experiences to offer moments of joy for adults and children alike.

- **New offers can include Covid-aware upsell deals or upgrades** You could offer 3-for-2 night staycation offers, a special up-sell deal on breakfast or other services at your hotel or less conventional ideas such as selling day-use rooms for people wanting to work remotely in a quiet, sanitary environment close to home.
Ask your newsletter subscribers or social media followers for their opinion. Understand what would entice them to come stay with you. Make it clear that your team is open to suggestions from customers to increase your chances of creating promotions that truly inspire them.

Test your promotions to see what your guests respond to best. Refine your approach to give the right guests the right experiences at the right time.

Perryn encourages you to think unconventionally when it comes to enhancing your hotel’s online presence with SEO. If now is not the time to future-proof your approach, we don’t know when is!

Consider voice activation software. Capture the increasing number of potential guests using this method to search for their holidays by making sure to structure your content clearly for use in voice search results.

Use a Q&A format or include phrases that resemble a voice search query. If you find this difficult to do on your homepage or in your room description, having a few blog posts optimised for this purpose will help generate traffic from voice search.

These posts can list nearby landmarks, sites or other things people can visit or do while they are staying with you. They can include topics such as ‘best restaurants/bars/cafes/museums/family activities… in your city’. What phrases do you normally use when speaking to Siri or Google?

Create a Covid-related blog post to highlight your city’s and country’s regulations and first-response steps. Update it regularly so guests can inform themselves before the trip and prepare accordingly. A high-demand topic like this is a great way to drive traffic to your site, if formatted with SEO in mind.
TWEAK YOUR HOTEL MARKETING STRATEGY TO KEEP YOUR CUSTOMERS ENGAGED THROUGH PERIODS OF LOW TRAVEL

Featuring advice from:
Katie Hokin, Founder and Director of AccomBoost
Luis Enrique Goldamez Echeverria, CEO of FashionPotluck.com
Perryn Khoo, Digital Account Manager at WME Australia.

Covid-19 doesn’t need to ruin your business – make changes where possible and reduce any additional barriers to booking. Read on for some suggestions on what you should be doing to keep your customers engaged.

4.1 BE FLEXIBLE WITH YOUR ROOM RATES & CANCELLATION POLICIES

Offer generous cancellation policies that allow guests to move bookings or cancel them free. Since the threat of a second wave may still loom large in your customers’ minds, it would make sense to give them peace of mind when booking.

In addition to carrying out reinforced cleaning schedules and hygiene measures, make sure that this extra effort is easily noticed by your guests and website visitors. Create a video if budget permits.

Share details of your new hygiene measures on your social media channels as well. Can you follow your executive housekeeper for a day to show which new tasks are part of the daily cleaning routine? Have you bought any new equipment you could show off in a boomerang or time-lapse story? Use this approach to showcase your efforts, especially if you don’t have the budget for a video.
4.4 ENCOURAGE FORWARD THINKING

Your tone and style of communication may unconsciously waver—do your best to keep it upbeat, confident and full of exciting imagery. Ensure language used in your communication maintains references to the future and continuity. Help people look forward to brighter times!

4.3 EXPOSE THE BACKBONE OF YOUR ESTABLISHMENT

Make an appeal to your customers’ human side by documenting the day-to-day and showing the personal side of your business. Showcase many staff members doing their part to keep your company alive. Do this on social media by highlighting fun and challenging moments or featuring individual staff members and their stories.
HOTEL MARKETING & TEAM ENGAGEMENT

GIVE YOUR HOTEL MARKETING A PERSONAL TOUCH BY NURTURING EMPLOYEES’ ADVOCACY OF YOUR BRAND AND PROPERTY

Featuring advice from: Luis Enrique Galdamez Echeverria, CEO of FashionPotluck.com

This section will focus on how you can work with HR to keep your team happy, giving them an active part in the effort to keep your business afloat. Read on for universally tried-and-tested approaches to nurturing brand advocacy among your team members.

5.1 TAKE ADVANTAGE OF THIS SLOW TIME

Make your values and mission abundantly clear Ensure your values are known to your employees. It may sound silly, but if they don’t know the specific qualities you promote, they won’t be able to advocate them!

Re-evaluate, refine or update your mission and values Think about how you can better integrate them into day-to-day operations. Working on this together with your team will bring everyone onto the same page and ensure you move forward together.
As you can imagine, brand advocacy ties in closely with employee satisfaction. Work with HR to make sure any outstanding issues are addressed before encouraging your staff to speak out.

HR should be working to create regular moments of unity, validation and joy for your team – all cornerstones of brand advocacy. This crisis offers a unique opportunity to generate such moments.

Think about where you and your team could step up and make a positive impact together, be it for guests or your local community. Many hotels around the world have taken great initiatives to host medical teams, organise food drives or donate cleaning supplies. Could you do something similar?

- **Champion your strongest team members** Identify those working with you that display exceptionally good character, work ethic and belief in what you are collectively doing as a company. This is a way to gently guide the representation of your brand without rigidly filtering content, which brings us to the next point.

- **Loosen the reins on your brand guidelines (in this context)** The very reason brand advocacy works is that it is personal in motivation and practice. You might say the same for social media. As accustomed as you are to enforcing your brand guidelines, remember that your employees’ accounts are their own spaces to express themselves. Keep it real, keep them on the same page as you, and allow them to share their day-to-day experiences as they see fit.

Do let your staff know if there are a few guidelines you want them to follow, especially where privacy, safety and proprietary information are concerned.

- **Be open about the need for help** Make it clear that your business could use the extra help from it’s highly regarded employees. Empower them by reminding them of the value they bring to the table and the stake they have in the success of the company, individually and as a team.
• Encourage effective mediums and storytelling Offer pieces of advice without constraining people’s preferred ways of storytelling. For instance, you might mention that Instagram stories typically result in more engagement and are suited to capturing day-to-day events.

An Instagram story takeover by one of your team members is a great way to show some behind the scenes activity, build a connection with your audience and make your staff an active part of your promotional efforts.

Your content (on your website, social media and everywhere else) reflects on your property and shapes your audience’s impression of you. Find ways to emphasise the importance of correct spelling and grammar when you encourage your team to post about your hotel. This simple step will ensure content featuring your hotel always looks professional.
In this chapter, we are getting into the bread and butter of market recovery operations – online performance. As a fundamental part of your hotel marketing strategy, you should review your online performance. You’ll find that clarity of intention is once again key.

Online operations might be the one part of the hotel industry left relatively unscathed by the pandemic. Innovative tech platforms continue to provide clever ways to boost your traffic, revenue and engagement.

In addition to these tools, you might want to review your online presence and performance and optimise it before getting into the swing of things again. Read on for some key ways to strengthen the online performance of your hotel.

### 6.1 Assess Your Representation on All Your Online Platforms

Luis’s experience in online marketing has shown him that when the basic building blocks to establishing an online presence are neglected, performance needlessly suffers.

- **Check that your basic SEO is on point** Make sure your title tags on each page are clearly written and unique. Review your meta descriptions, so they are up to date and accurate for each page. Do a search on your key words to see if you are ranking well on the results page and go over your website copy to improve your position if needed. Just a few simple steps can make a big difference here and lead to a traffic boost that supports your business.

- **Maintain coherent messaging across all your platforms** Keep your messages consistent and clear across your website, social media and partner sites. This slow business period is the best time to review all these platforms, update your information and create a consistent, well-branded online presence.
6.2 Make sure you’re featured on every potential customer source

- **Analyse data on your site’s traffic and social media** This information is fundamental to building future strategies in light of any changes that may have occurred during the crisis. Use tools like Google Analytics to see how your website traffic has altered. Where do your site visitors come from now? Are they from your city, region or the whole country? Can you see new trends you might be able to leverage in promotions?

  Do the same for social media. Check which posts, stories and campaigns gain the most traction and with whom. Use this knowledge when creating new content or promoting your deals and offers.

Katie’s success with Accomboost is partly due to industry-specific marketing tactics. Below are some reminders of what to prioritise in terms of digital marketing for your hotel.

- **List your hotels on all relevant channels** Work through an up-to-date list of sites that are a must to be featured on, like the Siteminder list that Katie suggests in the video below. Make sure your property is present on each, with plenty of up-to-date information and photos. A strong online presence will help you get in front of a wider audience and can lead to more people finding out about your hotel.

- **Examine your user journey** A common journey for those planning a holiday will include a browse on a popular OTA, resulting in a shortlist of hotels. From there, a holiday planner might individually Google these properties to learn more about each one and check rates. Try this for one of your competitors to see which channels they appear on and make sure that you haven’t missed any, including meta sites such as Google Hotel Ads and Trivago. Follow this with a search for your own hotel to see your website’s position on the results page and how your listings look. Update them if necessary to ensure your information is accurate and up to date.

- **Increase your chances of direct bookings** If your hotel site reflects rate parity and offers direct booking incentives, you have a much higher chance of driving bookings via your site. This boosts your bottom line as you won’t have to pay commissions to OTAs.
Do your best to ensure that your photos are up to date, high-quality and look stunning! They are the most powerful tools in seducing would-be customers.

- **Review your online messaging** Try another Google search of your property, this time paying attention to how a first-time visitor to your site might view your hotel. Does it reflect what your brand wants to project? If not, what changes should you make?

- **Define your USP beyond generic terms** Think beyond terms like ‘luxury’ – consider how attractive your unique selling proposition might be to your target market. If it doesn’t quite align, do some research into what might tip the scales in your favour.

- **Online reviews are a gold mine for insight** Customer reviews are a great place to learn what stood out about your property to your guests. Read them and highlight the things people love about your property on your website and OTA listings.

- **Help Google understand your USP** Proliferate SEO-friendly content around your USP, so Google understands that you are associated with whatever that may be (i.e. champagne breakfasts, rooftop swimming). This could mean mentioning your USP in several relevant places on your website, writing a blog post about it or including it in your link texts.
• **Optimise your Google My Business listing** Renew your images regularly and once again, include your specific USP. The more active you are with updating and engaging with your GMB listing, the more Google will favour it with Google Search and Maps users.

• **Reach out to your customers** Encourage them to leave reviews, mentioning your USP, e.g. ‘We hope you enjoyed our champagne breakfast’. This will make it more likely that they mention your USP in their review, which will only strengthen Google’s understanding that you are associated with what you would like to promote as your signature offering.
Chapter 7. Hotel Marketing and Brand Equity

7.1 Review your messaging & its effect on your (desired) customer base

- **Clearly define your business and USP** Perryn’s chief piece of advice in terms of brand equity is this: distill your reason for existence into as short a statement as possible, then be sure to use this statement consistently and clearly throughout all of your brand’s messaging. Weave this sentiment through your staff training, customer education, social media and PR, so that it is omnipresent in both private and public arenas.

- **Educate yourself on the people that form your client base** Research demographics and interests in your past and current customers to learn how best to speak to them. Consider whether your ideal customer is included within these groups or not. If not, devise new lines of communication, content and amplification that would resonate with them.
• **Make use of your partnerships** Explore guest blogging opportunities with complementary businesses and peers to build backlinks to your site. The options here are limitless. Start by checking if you can write a guest post for local companies such as tour operators, entertainment or lifestyle businesses. See if you can put together a feature about your destination for a newspaper or magazine (online or print) or collaborate with other travel and tourism brands you share an audience with.

• **Build your community on a story you want to tell** Use your company’s mission and history to craft a story that will underpin your efforts in community building. A story-driven approach like this will not only help you create a personal connection with your audience, but will allow you to showcase your property as a destination with a story, rather than ‘just another hotel’.
FRONT OFFICE
Chapter 8. Setting up modified front office procedures for success

Despite notable changes to the industry, the raison d’être of hospitality remains intact. Upholding the standards your hotel is known for will require care and foresight.

Featuring advice from:
Arian Roehrle, General Manager at Seehotel Schliersee Hof &
International President at AICR International
Nathalie Mulder, Rooms Division Manager at Kimpton De Witt Hotel

Your front office team is now more important than ever because they can offer a safe and warm welcome to your guests at a time when the perceived risk of travelling is higher than usual.

8.1 ACKNOWLEDGE CHANGES AND PLAN FOR THEM

Without a doubt, Covid has resulted in many new challenges for the hospitality industry. While some of them may be hard to face, try to see the opportunities around you, too.

- **The purpose of hospitality hasn't changed** Before Covid, you welcomed guests and created meaningful memories and experiences for them. Even with new rules and regulations in place, the goal remains the same. At first, it may feel a bit more difficult to achieve, but with the right preparation, strategy and communication, you will still be able to create a memorable stay for your guests.
Local authorities will provide rules and theoretical guidelines but it’s up to you to implement them to ensure your guests are safe and have a good time.

- **Space out your seating** Many countries have new rules about how many people can be in a closed area at a time. Space out seating in the lobby and other public areas to limit the number of people who spend time there. Avoid boring empty spaces by setting up plants, artwork or decorative separators that suit your property’s style.

- **Share information** in many countries, hygiene regulations vary from region to region or city to city. Help your guests stick to local and in-house guidelines by publicly displaying safety information. This can include details on when to wear a mask, where to find hand sanitising stations in the hotel, how many people are allowed in the elevator at a time and anything else that applies to your property.

- **Set up sanitisers stations** For the safety of staff and guests, have sanitiser stations in strategic spots at your hotel. This can include all entrances, the reception desk, the area in front of the elevator and the host’s desk in your dining outlets. Keep your property from looking like a hospital by making the stations blend in with branded stands, dispensers, or sleeves for the sanitiser bottle.

- **Find ways to adapt** When moving forward, acknowledge that your circumstances are different now and you will be most successful if you look for creative ways to adapt sooner rather than later. Whatever stage of closure or reopening your property is at, start brainstorming ways to make your post-Covid front office operations effective, efficient and engaging for your guests.
Implementing and following the new hygiene regulations will generate costs. Get an overview of them now to avoid surprises, cash flow challenges and shortages in the future.

The following points are a few of the main new cost drivers to consider.

- **PPE for staff and guests** Depending on your local rules, you’ll need to supply your staff with masks and/or gloves. You may also want to offer these items to your guests. Perhaps you’re planning to buy reusable branded masks which would look better but also come at a higher initial cost. Either way, calculate what you will need daily and factor this into your operational budget.

- **Disinfectant and hand sanitiser** Determine the cost of refilling your hand sanitiser stations regularly and buying more disinfectant to clean reception counters, credit card machines, pens and everything else staff and guests touch regularly. Keep in mind that these costs will rise as you welcome more guests and bring back more staff.

- **Time spent on new Covid-related tasks** Cleaning and sanitising the reception area and your equipment several times a day as well as dealing with new paperwork and service requirements can take a lot of your staff’s time. Find creative ways to handle this work efficiently and ensure you consider these tasks when planning your rotas and labour cost.
9.1 ADAPT FRONT OFFICE SERVICES

Today, new restrictions make it difficult to provide the same services to guests as before the pandemic. However, there are ways to change things and still provide the same level of service, albeit in a slightly different way.

- **Check-in and check-out** Implement online check-in and check-out to give guests the option to skip reception if they want to. Registration forms are also available digitally now and can be completed by the guest before they arrive. This will save your team time they can invest in other forms of guest interaction, training or keeping up with hygiene measures. When a guest does check in and out at the front desk, wipe down the counter, credit card reader and pens after every use.

- **Porter service** Have porters disinfect their trolleys regularly and offer guests the option to have their bags disinfected too. Keep the number of people entering a guest room to a minimum by offering to leave guests’ luggage in front of the room and ringing the bell to announce its arrival.
9.3 EMBRACE DIGITISATION

- **Valet parking.** Ensure the safety of your valets and guests by disinfecting the car before and after parking it. Of course, guests need to agree before staff use sanitising products in the vehicle.

- **Make more services optional.** In the past it may have been a given to park a guest’s car or take their bags on arrival. With people being more careful about direct and indirect physical contact, it’s important to offer them a choice of which services they want and how they would like them carried out.

Instead of thinking of digitisation as a way to replace staff and do away with human interaction, see it as a tool that can help you add value for your guests. By saving time on repetitive tasks and making operations more efficient, your staff’s life becomes easier, and they have more time and energy to focus on genuinely connecting with guests. And isn’t that what it’s all about?

- **Make your website a direct communication channel:** Add a live chat feature to your website, so guests can get quick answers while they research. Consider using a chatbot to answer repeat questions at all times of the day and night.
• **Implement a messaging platform for guests** The trend towards digital communication with guests started before Covid. As more people want to avoid contact with the front desk these days, this trend will be magnified.

Set up a direct messaging platform to communicate with guests before, during and after their stay to accommodate this demand. Use this tech solution to streamline your guest communication, respond to questions, requests and complaints quickly and effectively, and to generate more reviews through post-departure messages.

• **Generate revenue through pre-arrival upselling** With fewer guests wanting to check in at reception, the front desk loses out on the opportunity to upsell on arrival. Implement a pre-arrival upselling platform like Oaky to promote your property’s unique offers, let guests customise their stay and drive ancillary revenue for your property.

• **Modernise internal communication** Now that you’ve made guest communication quicker and more efficient, do the same for your internal communication. Leverage new tech solutions to cut back on time spent in meetings, ensure messages go to the right departments and complete action items promptly. As well as helping you save time and reduce direct contact between staff, this will boost guest satisfaction because your response time will be shorter.

• **Offer online restaurant reservations** Restaurant capacities are limited in many regions, so guests want to book ahead to secure a place. Allow them to do this online with a tool where they can choose their desired date, time and even the table they want.

• **Provide digital services and amenities** Newspapers at breakfast, a hotel’s A-Z guide in the room… guests want them but they’re yet another thing that should be cleaned after every use. Save yourself this hassle by digitising these amenities.

Offer online access to popular newspapers, magazines and your hotel guide via your app or a dedicated online platform. This not only saves time on cleaning and reduces waste, it also does away with the need to replace a single page in the room service menu in every room simply because you had to update a few dishes.
Experiences are why we travel, so naturally, you want to make it worth your guest’s time. Let’s look at a few ways you can provide memorable and satisfying experiences even during these difficult times.

- **Localise experiences and offers** There has been a growing interest in local experiences and this trend has got stronger since Covid came onto the scene. Show your guests a new side of your city or region with locally inspired menus, activities like guided hikes and runs, or events featuring regional artists. This offers an opportunity to engage and to upsell services for ancillary revenue.

- **Find new ways to interact with guests** For hotel staff, face masks can make it harder to connect with guests since they can’t even exchange a smile. That doesn’t have to stop you though...

  If your local rules allow you to remove your mask in an F&B venue, why not check your guests in at your bar or in your lounge? That way everyone can sit down and handle formalities in a relaxed atmosphere. Guest relations staff can do the same and join guests at the breakfast table for a few minutes to check on them and see if they need something. Always ask guests if they are comfortable with this, of course.

- **Seize the opportunity to change demand** Whether it’s the demand for more local experiences or the desire for more authentic engagement, guests’ changing demands are a great opportunity for you to try something new. Guests are currently very understanding of the fact that hotels are undergoing changes and are also open to a different experience, so feel free to get creative and break with outdated traditions and processes you’ve been wanting to overhaul for a long time.

Now it’s your turn!
Let these ideas inspire you to create an amazing front office experience for your guests and make the most of your returning demand.
REVENUE MANAGEMENT
Chapter 10. Revenue Management and Changing Demand

navigate changing demand landscapes to build an understanding of guests’ new needs and preferences

Featuring advice from:
Thibault Catala of Catala Consulting
Adrienne Hanna of Right Revenue
Melissa Kalan from ARMA
Annemarie Gubanski from Taktikon

International travel restrictions have led towards drastic shifts in booking patterns across most segments. Updating your segments and target markets is an important first step to dealing with changing demand landscapes in the wake of the pandemic.

10.1 Prepare for a Changing Guest Composition

• Leverage website data to see which markets are ready to travel
  Check your website traffic in a tool like Google Analytics to see where your site visitors are from. The result will probably be different from pre-Covid and show you which new markets you can reach with geo-targeted marketing activities.

• Analyse PMS data to understand how your segments are shifting
data to answer the following questions:
  1. Which segments have dropped the most?
  2. Which segments are beginning to recover already?
  3. Which ones will take longer to return?
  4. Are you attracting new guest segments? If so, is there room for growth in this area?

Your answers will help you understand which guest segments you served before, if and when you may get them back and whether you can tap into other segments in the meantime.

• Branch out to reach new segments to optimise your spread if your usual guests won’t come back any time soon (e.g. if you normally target international leisure), Melissa Kalan, founder and CEO of ARMA (Australian Revenue Management Association) suggests you find out who is likely to travel to your area right now. Then think about how you can position yourself to attract these first travellers and get your piece of the pie.
Hospitality professionals everywhere agree that the domestic leisure segment will be the first to recover. This is a great place to focus, even if domestic leisure guests are not usually your primary target market.

- **How to attract leisure guests if you’ve never had a strong leisure base** Look at what leisure guests want and need. Positive reviews people have left for other properties can be a source of inspiration. Then get creative – your offers don’t have to be fancy or cost-intensive but should rather be fun and personal.

- **Help them discover their neighbourhood** Your domestic guests may already know the region well but if you can suggest and plan cool new trips and activities for them, they will feel they are visiting a new destination. This also shows guests that there is plenty to do outside the hotel, so that there is no risk they will get bored.

- **The best place to start** Staycations are the ideal way for people to ease back into travelling and for hotels to ramp up operations after a lockdown or a time of extremely slow business. Begin by promoting these offers in your country or region since most guests won’t want to drive far or stay for too long.

- **Expect short lead times** Staycation guests often book at short notice. Keep an eye on booking trends at your property, so you have enough clean rooms available, can schedule staff accordingly and don’t have to turn away business because you weren’t ready.
• Offer attractive deals or packages to encourage longer stays
  Encourage guests to book an extra night or two with a great package, including fun activities or extra services that guarantee they’ll have a fantastic time. This will also help your offering stand out and generate more bookings.

• Reach potential staycation guests with targeted ads
  This audience can be clearly defined in terms of geographical location, age group and interests. Use this information to create pay-per-click advertisements and get in front of your ideal staycation guest.

• Get on local staycation sites or work with properties in your area to create one
  Staycation sites have been popping up in many regions and feature local hotels and their offers. This is a fantastic way to work with other businesses who are in the same boat and generate bookings together.

While this is a challenging time, it also offers the opportunity to revisit and optimise your distribution strategy, both in terms of reach and cost.

• Understand your current distribution strategy
  Understand where you are selling your rooms and identify the best- and worst-performing channels by:
  1. Checking which channels bring you the most reservations
  2. Analysing the costs/commissions charged by your channels
• **Research new distribution channels** There are countless OTAs which cater to specific markets such as luxury boutique travellers, couples, families, outdoor enthusiasts and many more. Find the ones that reach your target audience to get in front of the right people.

• **Push for more direct bookings** If you haven’t been doing this already, start now. Ensure your rates are in parity across your channels and throw in a direct booking bonus like free parking or an F&B voucher. Advertise these bonuses when you market your property and let guests know how much it means to your hotel if they reserve via your website instead of an OTA.

• **Collaborate with local partners** Work with local tour operators and other businesses to create an unforgettable experience for your guests. Advertise these partnerships to highlight your unique offering and to show that you’re supporting companies around you.
Chapter 11. Forecasting and pricing for optimal revenue management during market recovery

Forecasting and Pricing for Optimal Revenue Management During Market Recovery

How to build a (contingency) plan based on the short term and various what-if scenarios

Featuring advice from:
- Thibault Catala of Catala Consulting
- Adrienne Hanna of Right Revenue
- Annemarie Gubanski from Taktikon

As a revenue manager, you may have asked yourself the following questions recently:
- Is it worth trying to forecast when the future is unpredictable?
- Should I drop rates to drive business or increase prices to make up for lost revenue?
- How can I manage and reduce costs in this low-demand time?

We have summarised insights on these topics from our revenue management experts to help you find some answers to these burning questions.

11.1 The Importance of Forecasting in Uncertain Times

While forecasting may seem futile due to the many unpredictable changes in rules, regulations and demand, it’s more important now than ever.

Here are four ways to use forecasting even in a volatile market:

- **Outline several scenarios** Creating a forecast, might make you feel secure as you have something to go by. Unfortunately, it’s likely that this will mean you are less able to adapt if things don’t go as planned. Instead, create a best- and worst-case scenario and medium-case scenario to get an idea of possible outcomes, how these would impact your property and how you can react to them. This way you’ll be better prepared for whatever does happen and will be able to make decisions quickly and confidently.

- **Leverage revenue management technology and your experience** Revenue management systems (RMS) help you save time and provide deep insights into how demand in your area has been developing. Leverage your experience and knowledge of the industry to interpret this data and refine your forecasts.
Look at the short term  Government regulations around travel can change daily and lead to a quick rise or drop in demand. Monitor the situation in your home country and key source markets to anticipate changes as much as possible. Focus your forecasting on the short term (4-6 weeks) and be flexible with updates to accommodate sudden changes.

Predict and manage your operational costs  Apart from showing you how much revenue you will be generating in the coming weeks, your multi-scenario forecast is also an important planning tool for operations. Departments such as housekeeping, front office, F&B and engineering will use your forecast to schedule staff and purchase supplies. Work closely with them and keep them updated on any changes to help them manage their workloads efficiently and cost-effectively.

When fighting for the little business there is, it can be tempting to slash your rates to attract guests. But is that the only solution?

Don’t blindly drop your rates  This approach may bring limited results in the very short term but recovering from aggressive price drops could take years, harming your profitability in the long run. Avoid joining (or starting) the race to the bottom. Demand is limited now and lowering rates will not increase it.
• **Stay true to your brand and price positioning** Be strategic and keep your branding and price positioning in mind if you decide to lower your rates.
  1. What does your property stand for?
  2. Who are your ideal guests?
  3. How would they perceive steep discounts or radical price reductions?
Answer these questions carefully before going ahead since drastic moves can change how customers perceive you and may even damage your reputation.

• **Focus on value for money and experiences** Find other ways to offer your guests a bargain, instead of just cutting your rates. This can include creating packages that include several ancillary services like room service breakfast, parking and bicycle rental. Apart from providing extra value, this package can promise great experiences like a leisurely breakfast in the comfort of the room and a fun excursion your guests will remember and probably cherish more than a discount in the long run.

• **Use clear messaging** Let guests know exactly what they’re getting for their money. Competition for business will be fierce, so you will need to justify your rates, especially if your competitors are discounting. Describe the benefits guests will get from booking with you and highlight the fun, memorable experiences you will give them. Focus on things many people missed in the past few months including quality time spent with loved ones, outdoor activities, exploring a new place or simply switching off in a relaxing environment.

• **Analyse your market and find your approach** In this unprecedented situation, nobody can accurately provide a roadmap for how to navigate a new business landscape. Use the suggestions above to get ideas for different approaches and find what works best for you in your specific market.
SHIFTING FOCUS TO TOTAL REVENUE MANAGEMENT

SPREAD YOUR EFFORTS ACROSS ALL REVENUE STREAMS TO MAXIMISE INCREMENTAL REVENUE

Featuring advice from:
Thibault Catala of Catala Consulting
Adrienne Hanna of Right Revenue
Annemarie Gubanski from Taktikon
Thomas Greenall of Bespoke Hotels

Before the crisis, revenue management was largely focused on maximum room revenue. Today, hoteliers are looking for ways to generate extra revenue even during low-occupancy times. In line with this, we’ll see an important shift towards total revenue management. Check out the points below to find out how using total revenue management could benefit your property.

12.1 GET A BIRD’S-EYE VIEW OF YOUR HOTEL’S REVENUE AND OPERATIONS

Understanding your hotel as a whole will help you identify new ways of wowing guests and increasing your total revenue. Here are some steps to follow to get started.

- **Examine your customer journey and their buying habits** Take the time to learn where your customers come from, which sales and marketing approaches work best, and which services or products are most popular. Then look for ways to maximise profitable channels through enhanced collaboration or targeted marketing. End by deciding which of the less profitable approaches you want to eliminate.

- **Use technology where you can** Modern hotel tech and AI-powered solutions can help you save time, get better data insights and make well-informed decisions faster than ever before. Leverage these tools so you can spend less energy on repetitive tasks and focus on refining your strategy instead. Think of it as transforming revenue management from an art into a science.

- **Evaluate data from other departments** When you let a tech solution do the data collection and collation work for you, you can analyse more information from different departments to get insights on their successes and challenges. Use this knowledge to further refine your approach and unlock new revenue-generating ideas.
Increasing revenue in departments apart from rooms is a big part of total revenue management. And as cashflow is currently a challenge for many hotels, generating more revenue across the board can make a deciding difference.

- **Implement a cross-selling and upselling initiative** Use this low-demand period to train staff in upselling guests to higher category rooms and to promote other departments. For example, offer a discount on spa or F&B services if guests book on the day they arrive.

- **Streamline upselling and cross-selling with a tech solution** Using an automated upselling platform will save you hours, take pressure off your staff and even allow you to promote offers to guests pre-arrival. This drastically increases your conversion rates and ancillary revenue.

- **Create unique offers and deals** Make your upselling and cross-selling initiative more successful by offering your guests fun and exciting deals on top of the usual room upgrades. Let your creativity run wild here and test a number of options to see what your guests enjoy. Doing this lets guests personalise their stay in a way they couldn’t before and ensures they will have an memorable time.

- **Focus on leisure offers** since the leisure segment will be the first to recover and these guests are generally more open to upgrading their stay.
Below are a few ideas on how to generate ancillary revenue at your property. If they don’t all work for you, use this list as inspiration – come up with something new and unique to try at your hotel, the possibilities are endless!

- **Food and beverage:**
  1. Extend restaurant opening hours to balance out restaurant occupancy restrictions.
  2. Reduce menu options and work with seasonal specials to save on food cost and offer variety.
  3. Join local food delivery services.
  4. Offer deluxe dining packages in suites, by the pool or on the beach.
  5. Pre-sell F&B credit at a 10% or 15% discount to encourage in-house spend.

- **Spa:**
  1. Create special spa packages or offers for couples.
  2. Promote your most profitable spa treatments via pre-arrival messaging.
  3. Pre-sell spa credit with a 10% or 15% discount.
  4. Set up combination packages including both F&B and spa services.

- **Recreation:**
  1. Monetise your parking spaces with pre-arrival messaging or by opening them up to locals.
  2. Partner with local tour operators, guides and destinations (e.g. theme parks) to offer guests fun activities they can do outside of the hotel.
  3. Come up with family-friendly offers like movie night packages, pastry or cooking classes that kids and parents can enjoy together.

Place your USP at the front of your brainstorming process to delight your guests and generate additional revenue. Every little bit counts and every additional perk to a stay will bring it closer to becoming an unforgettable experience for your clientele. Stay focused on your guest and you can’t go wrong!