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# How Chatbots Improve Guest Experience

**September 2020**



They say all roads lead to Rome, and in hospitality, all roads should also lead to one destination - creating great guest experiences. While this aim has not changed - neither over time nor during the recent pandemic - the tools we use to connect with guests and collect their feedback has. The collective shift towards private messaging means hotels must adapt and fast. But, to be truly effective and operationally efficient, messaging needs support from other structures like a chatbot, automation, AI, and data analytics, to provide the service level expected and collect the information to improve hotel operations going forward.

The best brands know that great guest experiences are the foundation of hotel success - their teams are customer obsessed from reception to maintenance and head office. They have been employing guest intelligence solutions for years to monitor, collect, and act upon guest feedback to implement operational and service improvements. They discuss guest feedback, they act upon guest feedback, their processes, operations, and Capex decisions are based upon guest feedback.

## INFORMATION DRIVES THE GUEST JOURNEY

Something that hotels have learned over time, is that information drives every single part of the guest journey. Guests have many (many) questions and expect correct, quick answers whether researching for their next stay, in the phase leading up to the stay once they have booked or while on site. Guests that can't get the information they need will not book a hotel, guests that can't get the assistance they need when they need it will be dissatisfied. We live in an age where we don't write things down in our notebook anymore, we just get out our smartphone and grab information from the cloud then and there.

Requests for information have traditionally been via email inquiry, messaging via the OTA they book from, or calling the hotel. These incoming queries have often created a large amount of repetitive work for the staff. One of our clients told us that 63% of incoming queries were from the same eight questions, another that 91% were from the same 18 questions. Clearly, the need for a constant stream of (repetitive) information from guests causes quite a bit of strain on staff.

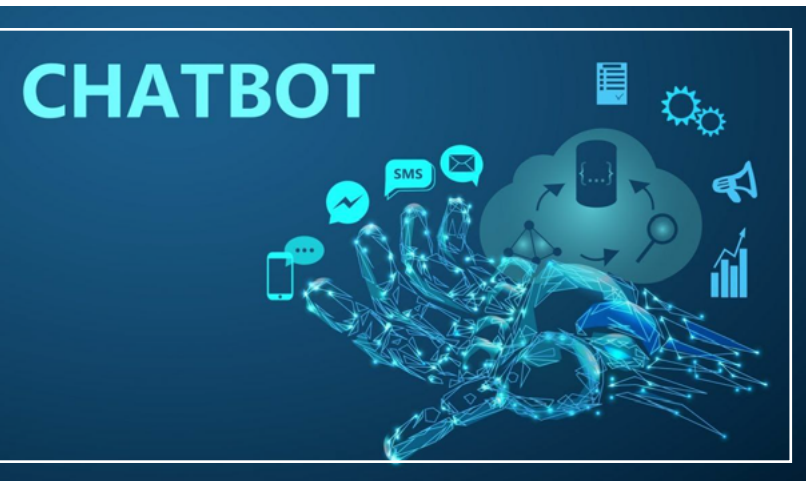


## THE RISE OF MESSAGING

Private messaging has seen a huge rise in recent years, and even more so recently. During the pandemic messaging app usage increased by 45% worldwide according to Statista, making this medium of communication much more than a 'nice to have'. Unsurprisingly, according to a recent study by ReviewPro, StayNTouch, and Fuel, half of the hoteliers are considering implementing guest messaging.



But hotels are now faced with dealing with yet another form of an incoming communication. For many hotels, implementing messaging seems daunting - do I have the staff to cover an influx of messages? How can I deal with yet another channel when my staff is already engaged in review response, email response, telephone management, and reception inquiries? How do I ensure a timely response to a medium that expects instant answers?



## MESSAGING DOES NOT WORK IN ISOLATION

The concerns of hoteliers are completely valid. Messaging, when implemented in isolation, can cause more harm than good. If a guest messages a property and does not hear back, they will be unlikely to message again and the brand will be damaged. If they lodge a complaint or a request and it is not dealt with, the guest experience will suffer. One study by ReviewPro showed that guests who reported a problem and didn't have it fixed were less satisfied than those who had a problem but hadn't actually reported it.

Luckily, technology is keeping up with demand, and there is an array of supporting solutions to ensure the success of messaging. One huge area of advancement is the chatbot. This technology can both answer repetitive queries, and also provide insights and data analytics as to where hotels can improve operations.

## ADVANTAGES OF CHATBOT

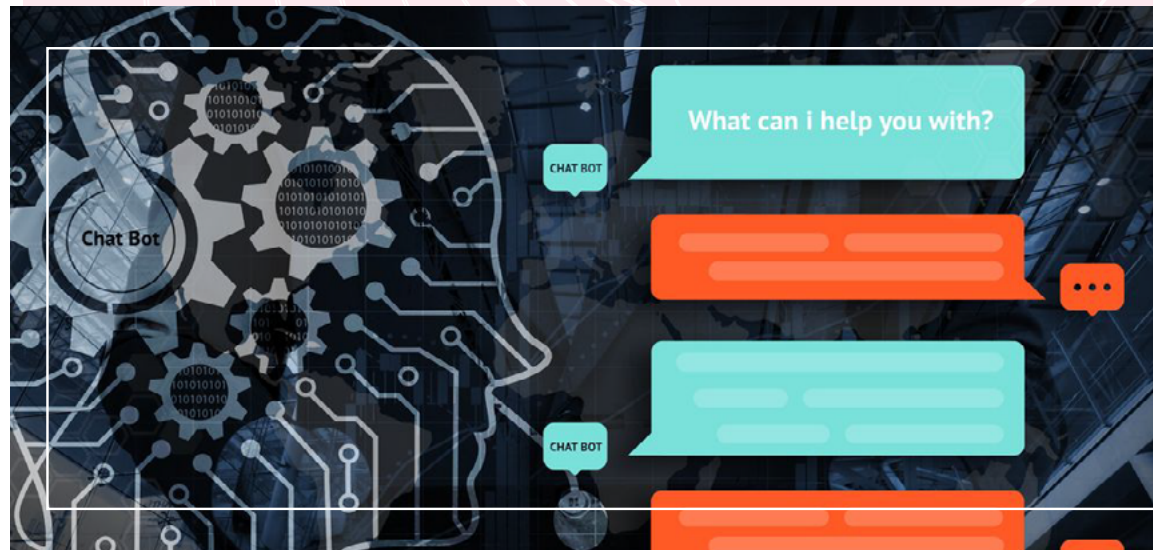
All chatbots are not created equal. A simple chatbot matches user questions with predefined answers, whereas an advanced chatbot uses Artificial Intelligence (AI) to expand its knowledge and capabilities over time by learning through its interactions with users. The best chatbots use a combination of intent detection and machine learning, with escalation to live agents if they do not understand or do not yet have the knowledge to handle a query. After all, while the majority of people prefer to be answered quickly by a machine than being left in endless telephone queues, there is nothing more frustrating than being sent around in loops when what you need is to talk to a member of staff.

**Chatbots can be employed at several crucial points in the guest journey:**

- **When guests have booked via an OTA**, and have questions. One of our clients told us that 50% of messages coming from OTAs were going unanswered by the hotel because of a lack of resources. In times when bookings are scarcer than ever, being able to answer these incoming leads is vital.
- **When potential guests are browsing on your website** for information, webchat with a chatbot can be used to answer queries instantly. Hospitality specific chatbots can also at this point detect an intention to reserve a room and guide the guest to your booking engine to support a direct booking strategy. It can also detect intention for many other needs like making a reservation at your spa or restaurant, and support upselling or cross-selling.



- If a guest has **already booked your hotel**, and even if your emails and other communications are clear, they may still need pre-stay help getting to your hotel, asking about any last-minute needs, or double-checking their reservation.



- At this point in the guest journey, it's also useful to have a chatbot solution that can **automatically and proactively reach out to guests**. Especially in times where protocol and safety measures vary from country to country, and even sometimes by week, guests need to know what they will find at the hotel so they are prepared. Often we have heard of guests being informed of surprising protocols upon arrival, that perhaps they did not have to face at their place of origin. This sets things off on the wrong foot, whether as an informed guest will generally understand. At a more basic level, pre-stay communication can be used to ask them if there is anything they need that could improve their up and coming stay, or inform them of the readiness of their room upon arrival.
- When a **guest is on-site** chatbots can answer the repetitive queries that come in: what time is breakfast? Can I have a late checkout? What time does the pool open? By providing an instant and reliable medium where the guest can fire off these questions and receive the information they need in the moment, it alleviates strain on call centres as well as the in-house staff who are now able to concentrate on providing great hospitality at other touchpoints.
- Saying this, it is not only queries that will come through this medium, guests also have complaints and requests. Chatbots should be integrated within an automated ticketing system so that maintenance is receiving those leaky shower complaints, housekeeping responds to extra pillow requests, and the reception staff are aware that room 203 would like a bottle of champagne for their anniversary. Responding and resolving at the moment, while the guest is still on-site to benefit, boosts satisfaction, and creates great experiences.
- Of course, a guest can also **contact you post-stay**. Did they leave something behind? Did they want to double-check something with their bill? Or did they want to book again because they had such a great time? Once a guest has connected to messaging, it has now become a direct line to your hotel, again mostly answered automatically via chatbot so there is no extra strain on staff.

## CHATBOT ALSO NEEDS SUPPORT TO SING

So messaging is vital, and a chatbot can make it a whole lot smoother. But ensuring chatbot has supporting structures like automated case creation, automatic translation, and data analytics are key. A chatbot should not





be an isolated extra added to your website, but fit snugly into the rest of your operations. Just like your online review and guest survey feedback, guest feedback in the form of messaging needs to both reach the right people or workgroups and undergo automated analysis to pinpoint larger issues that could support and improve the operations at your hotel.



Which brings us back to the guest experience. The most valuable voice you can listen to at your hotel is of course that of your guests. Messaging allows you to provide an elevated level of service and alleviates your staff to focus even more on the guest. Leveraging the guest feedback data and trends from messaging to the other forms of guest feedback you collect enriches what you can learn about how your guests are experiencing your hotel and help you to improve. This ensures that, once we are all able to travel again freely, whether we travel to Rome, Paris, London, or New York, great guest experience is always the destination.

#### ABOUT THE AUTHOR



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*Michael Kessler is the CEO of ReviewPro, the market leader in guest experience management. He is committed to continually driving the development of the latest in hospitality technology and bringing it to ReviewPro's 60,000 global clients. Having been a business leader in the SaaS industry for the last 20 years, he has a wealth of experience in growth and innovation in competitive and fast-paced environments and has consistently driven ReviewPro's expansion and revenue. Michael is a sought-after public speaker in online reputation, guest experience in the hotel industry, customer acquisition, and SaaS companies. He frequently participates at key hospitality industry events and digital travel conferences worldwide including ITB, WTM, AHC, and UNWTO Seminars, as well as other tech events such as CeBIT and Systems.*