

UXD 60103: Research Report

Hilton Hotel User Experience Research Study

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Executive Summary

Research Goals

The Hilton Hotel Group tasked our User Experience Research team with researching business goals related to the needs of business and leisure travelers when booking hotel rooms and the adjoining loyalty program. The overarching questions that our study answered were:

- What do business travelers look for, want, and need when evaluating properties and choosing a room to book, and why?
- What do leisure travelers look for, want, and need when evaluating properties and choosing a room to book, and why?
- Why (and why don't) people sign up for the loyalty program?

Scope

We performed interviews where six users sat with moderators to answer a series of questions aligned to stakeholder goals. These sessions lasted between 10-15 minutes and were recorded and analyzed to find ways to improve the hotel experience for both business and leisure travelers.

Executive Summary - Cont'd

Through the interviews conducted, our team has gained insight and developed several key findings and recommendations to meet the stakeholder goals.

Key Findings

- Cost of hotel room is *the* major factor in booking for both business and leisure guests.
- Both business and leisure guests find the location of the hotel to be of great importance- proximity to airport, work event or attraction determine this.
- In-room food storage (including fridges and microwaves) are important to business and leisure travelers.
- Both business and leisure guests need a nice bathroom with a shower and a tub.
- Business travelers need access to stable WiFi.
- Business travelers find complimentary breakfasts very important to choosing a hotel to stay at.

Key Recommendations

- Ensure that the cost of a room is competitive within the hotel industry landscape.
- Advertise the location of the hotel in relation to specific regional attractions or business related conference centers and proximity to the local airport.
- Upgrade rooms to include a desk, lamp, deluxe shower/bath, and functioning in-room fridge and microwave.
- Offer free WiFi and complimentary breakfasts to guests.
- Ensure that loyalty programs are free to guests.
- Offer benefits in the loyalty program that will benefit guests no matter how frequently they travel.

Business Goals

After working with our business stakeholders, three goals were developed that were the basis of our research study. These business goals are as follows:

1. Determining why (and why don't) people sign up for the loyalty program.
2. Determining what business travelers look for, want, and need when evaluating properties and choosing a room to book, and why.
3. Determining what leisure travelers look for, want, and need when evaluating properties and choosing a room to book, and why.

Research Objectives

The objective of our research was to gain insights into hotel customers by answering the business goals set forth by our stakeholders and provide actionable recommendations to improve the hotel experience as a whole.

To do this, our team developed research themes from which our interview questions were based. The research themes are as follows:

Research Theme 1	Research Theme 2	Research Theme 3
What do business travelers look for, want, and need when evaluating properties and choosing a room to book, and why?	What do leisure travelers look for, want, and need when evaluating properties and choosing a room to book, and why?	Why (and why don't) people sign up for the loyalty program?

Research Method

Our team developed a research project plan and moderators guide based on the business goals as determined by the stakeholders. From this, our team performed a combination of 6 in-person and remote one-on-one interviews. All participants have had experience staying in a hotel. Our team separated business travelers and leisure travelers, only asking questions that pertain to their respective category rather than mixing the two. Three of the interviews dealt strictly with business travelers, while the other three interviews were with leisure travelers.

During each session, a participant sat with a skilled moderator who asked a series of questions to gain insights around what they look for in a hotel and how they interact with hotel loyalty programs. All participant answers were recorded.

Research Questions

Participants were asked the following questions during their interview sessions:

Warm Up Questions

- Can you please give me your first name?
- Would you mind giving me your age?
- What is your current profession?
- Do you, or have you ever, traveled for business?
- How frequently do you travel?
- What, if any, brands of hotels do you prefer to stay with when you travel?
- Do you ever use lodging other than hotels when traveling, and if so, why?

Research Questions- Cont'd

Business Travelers

- When you travel for business, do you book your own rooms or does your company provide that service?
- How do you select a hotel to stay at during business trips?
- Are there specific room features you look for when you travel for business?
 - What are they?
 - Are there any room features you absolutely must have when you travel for business?
- Are there any room features you may not need, but prefer to have when you travel for business?
- Are there specific hotel or property features you look for when you travel for business?
 - What are they?
 - Are there any hotel features you absolutely must have when you travel for business?
- Are there any property features you may not need, but prefer to have when you travel for business?
- Are there any room or hotel features that are *not* important to you for business travel?
- Has the pandemic changed how you select a hotel, or amenities you look for, and if so, how?
 - Do you think you're likely to continue with those changes once the pandemic is over, or just go back to what you looked for before?
- The last time you traveled for business, walk me through what you did to book the trip.

Research Questions- Cont'd

Leisure Travelers

- How do you select a hotel to stay at?
- Are there specific room features you look for when you travel?
 - What are they?
 - Are there any room features you absolutely must have when you travel for leisure?
- Are there any room features you may not need, but prefer to have when you travel for leisure?
- Are there specific hotel or property features or amenities you look for when you travel?
 - What are they?
- Are there any hotel features you absolutely must have when you travel for leisure?
- Are there any hotel features you may not need, but prefer to have when you travel for leisure?
- Are there any room or hotel features that are *not* important to you?
- Has the pandemic changed how you select a hotel, or amenities you look for, and if so, how?
 - Do you think you're likely to continue with those changes once the pandemic is over, or just go back to what you looked for before.
- The last time you traveled, walk me through what you did to book the trip.

Research Questions- Cont'd

Loyalty Programs

- Are you currently a member of any hotel loyalty program?
 - Which hotel(s)?
 - How did you hear about the loyalty program?
 - What made you decide to join the loyalty program?
- What benefits does your membership provide?
- Do you believe your membership has been worthwhile?
 - Why or why not?
- How often do you use the benefits associated with your membership?
- What sort of benefits are you aware of that hotel loyalty programs offer (including those from hotels you may not be a member of)?
- What makes loyalty programs worth it to sign up for to you?
- What would make you not want to register for a loyalty program?
- How would you describe the perfect hotel loyalty program? What would the experience be, and what would you expect in return as a member?

Participant Backgrounds

The following represents the demographic information of our participants:

	Participant 1	Participant 2	Participant 3	Participant 4	Participant 5	Participant 6
Gender	Male	Male	Female	Female	Female	Male
Age	27	57	42	34	62	71
Profession	Field Engineer in the manufacturing industry	VP of a turnaround company in Houston, Texas	Student Financial Aid Counselor	College Transfer Specialist	Administrator of an elementary school	Retired
Type of Traveler	Business	Business	Leisure	Business	Leisure	Leisure
Frequency of Travel	Prior to COVID-19, 250 days a year with a typical stay length of 3 weeks	Prior to COVID-19, three times a month with a typical stay length of 2 days	Rarely - maybe once per year.	On average - once per month.	Rarely	Rarely

Data Collection

The data from our interviews were compiled into a notes document arranged by questions asked of each participant. From the compiled notes, our team created an affinity diagram of the data.

An **affinity diagram** is a tool that gathers large amounts of qualitative data and arranges it into groupings based on the data's natural relationship to one another.

Findings

OVERALL HOTEL FINDINGS (specific to both business and leisure travelers):

- Cost of hotel room is *the* major factor in booking for both business and leisure guests.
- Both business and leisure guests find the location of the hotel to be of great importance- proximity to airport, work event or attraction determine this.
- It is paramount that a hotel be non-smoking.
- In-room food storage (including fridges and microwaves) are important to business and leisure travelers.
- Both business and leisure guests need a nice bathroom with a shower and a tub.
- Both business and leisure guests prefer, but do not need, a workout facility or a pool.
- Due to the pandemic, guests look more at cleaning protocols for their hotel stay and will continue to do so even after the pandemic is gone.

Findings - Cont'd

FINDINGS SPECIFIC TO BUSINESS TRAVELERS:

- Business travelers must be able to work from their rooms; a stable WiFi connection, a working desk and desk lamp are imperative to achieve this.
- Complimentary breakfasts are important to business travelers.

FINDINGS SPECIFIC TO LEISURE TRAVELERS:

- Availability of hotel rooms with the preferred bed size are important to leisure travelers.

Findings - Cont'd

LOYALTY PROGRAM FINDINGS:

- Cost of a loyalty program is a major factor for travelers; any cost associated with a loyalty program will prevent guests from signing up.
- Guests expect that the accumulation of points will get them free rooms, room upgrades, complimentary food (such as breakfast), complimentary transportation.
- Guests expect a more personalized service experience for being a member of a loyalty program.
- Guests who travel infrequently may not see the benefit of signing up for a loyalty program.

Results

Overall Results (specific to both groups of travelers)

There were several key characteristics that both business travelers and leisure travelers look for, want, and need when evaluating properties and choosing a room to book. Both groups expressed that cost was a major factor in deciding where to book. Keeping prices competitive in the market is a very important aspect of the decision making process for travelers.

The location of the hotel was another important factor to both business and leisure travelers. The proximity to an airport or a work related event (such as a conference center) was very important to business travelers. Leisure travelers were concerned with proximity to an attraction or easy access by driving.

Additionally, in-room food storage was important for both types of guests. Business travelers expressed the desire to be able to keep leftovers and cook for themselves while staying at a hotel.

Both types of guests also expressed the preference of a workout facility or a pool/jacuzzi as part of their stay. This is a want, but does not preclude them from booking at a hotel without such amenities.

Results

Business Travelers

Business travelers expressed the need to be able to work from their hotel room. To do this, they need good, stable WiFi and a working desk and lamp. Not having these amenities would prevent a business traveler from booking at a hotel.

Business travelers also expressed the need for a complimentary breakfast. Since they often do not have a means of transportation to get food outside of the hotel, a hot breakfast is a very important need.

Leisure Travelers

Leisure travelers book depending on the availability of the hotel and their preferred bed size. These two factors will determine where a leisure traveler stays.

Results

Loyalty Program

Guests are very familiar with the points system of most hotel loyalty programs. They associate earning points with getting free rooms, room upgrades, complimentary food (such as breakfast) and complimentary transportation. Being a member of a loyalty program, guests expect elevated, more personalized service at the hotel.

There are two factors to whether a guest will sign up for a loyalty program. If there is a cost associated with the program, guests will not sign up. Additionally, guests who travel infrequently often feel that there is no benefit to signing up as they will not earn enough points for the associated perks.

Recommendations

Based on the results and findings of our research sessions, our team recommends the following:

- Ensure that the cost of a room is competitive within the hotel industry landscape.
- Advertise the location of the hotel in relation to specific regional attractions or business related conference centers and proximity to the local airport.
- Upgrade rooms to include a desk, lamp, deluxe shower/bath, and functioning in-room fridge and microwave.
- Offer free WiFi and complimentary breakfasts to guests.
- Ensure that loyalty programs are free to guests.
- Offer benefits in the loyalty program that will benefit guests no matter how frequently they travel.