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The Hotel Yearbook

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Why the Future of Hospitality Excellence Will Be Defined by Digital

Digital Strategy

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Luxury in hospitality is no longer defined by marble floors or high thread count sheets. It is measured by how seamlessly your digital ecosystem meets guest expectations. The modern traveler is not impressed by a fruit basket or a bathroom phone. They are looking for instant connectivity, intuitive digital touchpoints, and a smooth journey from booking to check out. In this new era, your hotel's ability to deliver digitally is not a bonus. It is the baseline.

THE ERA OF THREAD COUNTS IS OVER. DIGITAL SIGNALS ARE THE NEW LUXURY.

I've spent my life at the crossroads of technology and hospitality, and I can confidently say this: the future of excellence in our industry won't be judged by thread count, lobby florals, a bathroom phone, or chandeliers – it will be judged by digital readiness. The modern guest no longer prioritizes a fruit basket on arrival; they expect seamless Wi-Fi, real-time communication, and a frictionless customer journey.

Yet, while guest expectations have evolved rapidly, the benchmarks of our industry have not. Too many star-rating systems, management KPIs, and internal evaluations remain grounded in an analog mindset. That's a mistake. Because the reality is stark: **your digital readiness is what makes or breaks your guest experience.**

REIMAGINING THE BENCHMARK: FROM STARS TO SIGNALS

Hospitality has long had a visual language of prestige, marked by five-star ratings, marble lobbies, high-thread-count linens, and hot and cold room service. But none of these alone meet the needs of today's digital-native guest.

We need a **new benchmark**, one that reflects how guests truly evaluate their experiences now. And that benchmark is **Digital Worthiness**.

To be digitally worthy means more than having a mobile app or a website. It means embedding guest-first digital experiences into every layer of your operation. From intuitive booking flows to intelligent room personalization, it's the cumulative impact of digital decisions that creates a sense of comfort and modern luxury.

That's why I advocate for what I call the **Digital Rating** – a simple, visual scale that captures how well a hotel aligns with digital expectations.

MEASURING WHAT MATTERS: EXPANDING THE KPI LENS

Traditionally, hospitality KPIs have focused on physical assets and operational efficiency. But it's time we expand our dashboards to include Digital KPIs – not as a replacement, but as a necessary complement to existing performance metrics.

In my view, these digital indicators are just as critical as RevPAR or occupancy rates, because they reveal the strength of your digital reputation – and, ultimately, your brand equity – in the eyes of today's digitally fluent travelers.

YOUR COMPETITORS ALREADY KNOW THIS

The digital arms race is already underway. Many of the world's leading hotel brands are actively advancing their digital readiness. The **Digital Rating** provides a structured way to benchmark your readiness against that of your peers. It enables you to assess your digital competitiveness across six dimensions that are, in my view, essential to the guest experience: Web Experience, Mobile Capability, Digital Property, Connectivity, Digital Media, and Customer Relations.

If your competitors offer smart TVs, mobile-first check-in, and dynamic guest messaging – and you don't – then you've already lost mindshare before your guest ever arrives.

I BELIEVE DIGITAL IS NO LONGER A DEPARTMENT. IT IS THE BRAND.

I've watched too many properties treat digital like an isolated initiative – one project, one app, one channel. That approach is obsolete.

Digital is your identity in motion. Guests decide where to stay based on Instagram photos, WhatsApp service response times, WeChat mini-apps, and whether your booking site loads well on their phones. Leading hotel brands are building the new hotel with *"Instagrammable"* – Best Selfie spot moments in mind.

So, if you're still measuring digital success solely by what it saves you, I urge you to rethink. The more meaningful question is: **What does it attract?**

LOOKING FIVE YEARS AHEAD: A DIGITAL-FIRST FUTURE FOR HOTELS

In the next five years, I foresee that:

- **Guest expectations** will grow even more aligned with consumer tech experiences (think: AI assistants, voice commands, live language translation).
- **Digital ratings** will become as common as traditional reviews, impacting reputation and pricing power.
- **Interoperability** will define hotel systems, with seamless data flow across CRM, booking, feedback, and loyalty platforms.
- **Competitive advantage** will shift toward those with strong digital governance, not just aesthetics or heritage.
- **Sustainability** will be increasingly linked to digital infrastructure – smart lighting, occupancy-based energy management, and paperless operations will be table stakes.

The pressure is real. And so is the opportunity. The hotels that embrace this future will gain loyalty not through gimmicks, but through **relevance**.

THE “@” SCALE: A SIMPLE FRAMEWORK FOR A COMPLEX REALITY

The “@” scale is a straightforward way to express the digital maturity of a hospitality business. Here’s how it works:

- @ – **Absent:** Minimal presence; outdated or broken user experience
- @@ – **Basic:** Functional but fragmented digital tools
- @@@ – **Enabled:** App-based services and responsive guest platforms
- @@@@ – **Optimized:** Real-time, integrated experiences
- @@@@@ – **Worthy:** A digital-first guest journey from start to finish

What makes this scale powerful is that it is not an audit of your IT-heavy infrastructure that the customer doesn’t see. Instead, it recognizes the digital enablement you have implemented throughout their journey with you, before, during, and after the stay. At its highest level, it defines the gold standard: a hotel built for the digital traveler of today and tomorrow.

The Digital Rating is not intended to replace your star rating; rather, it will coexist with it – and with the many other differentiation systems you’ll need to distinguish yourself in the complex market, such as ESG, environmental standards, and health certifications.

The “@” scale isn’t just a communication tool – it’s a **strategic framework**. It aligns operations, marketing, IT, and guest experience around a shared vision of digital excellence. It turns technology from a **cost center** into a **competitive differentiator and driver**.

When you operate at the “@@@@@” level, you’re not just offering digital tools – you’re creating digitally enabled experiences. And that’s what turns first-time guests into lifelong advocates.

FINAL THOUGHT: ARE YOU DIGITALLY WORTHY?

Let me leave you with the three questions I always ask hoteliers in this new digital age:

1. Are you operating at a “@@@@@” level – or still pretending Wi-Fi is enough?
2. Are your competitors already outperforming you in Digital Ratings?
3. Are you measuring tech success by what it saves, or by whom it attracts?

The guests of tomorrow won’t be swayed by stars alone. They will be drawn by signals of convenience, of connectivity, of care. And they’ll choose to stay with brands that understand that.

Digital worthiness is not the future. It’s the present. And it’s time we started rating it and **Look Beyond the Stars...**



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