
The Resort & Hotel Marketer's Guide to Targeting Travelers with User-Generated Content



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01

How Do You Target Travelers Along the Path to Purchase?

Today, the path to purchase for a hotel or resort guest isn't always so clear-cut. There are simply so many ways for a traveler to book a hotel and so many ways for them to be inspired or persuaded to book.

A potential guest might find you by doing a search on TripAdvisor, or an online travel agency like Expedia or Booking.com. Maybe they have started their journey by using a search engine? Or, perhaps they have found your hotel via social media platforms like Facebook, Instagram or Snapchat?

Wherever a traveler is on that path to purchase, and however they've found you, it's absolutely crucial to target and convince that traveler to book a stay.

Though, this is easier said than done. In fact, 45% of travel marketers¹ have said that targeting travelers during a specific point along their path to purchase is a top marketing challenge.

One way to target travelers that's not only effective but cost-effective too is by using user-generated content (UGC). Already, 74% of travelers² use social media while they're traveling, and they're generating millions of photos and loads of video content to be shared. Furthermore, two-thirds of consumers³ trust others' opinions online, with 83% trusting the opinion of people they know. In fact, 92% of consumers trust word of mouth and UGC more than other forms of advertising.

¹Sojern

²Martech Zone

³Nielsen

02

Are You Using UGC to Its Full Potential?

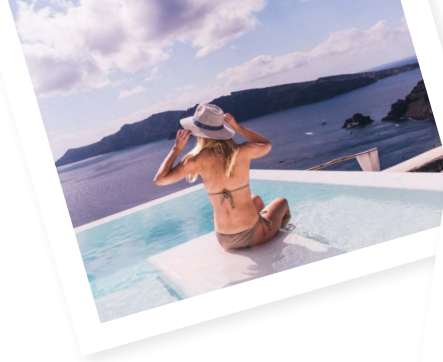
As social media platforms have grown in usage around the world—on average an estimated 2.2 billion people use Facebook, Instagram, WhatsApp, or Messenger every day ⁴—there’s more content than ever for marketers to repurpose as UGC.

Hotels and resorts have, in recent years, realized the potential of UGC, but there’s still a lot more they could be doing with it. More than 40% now use UGC⁵ on Instagram, but only 20% use it on their own websites.

Is UGC a missed opportunity for marketers to reach and target potential guests? If so, it doesn’t have to be.

Even if travelers⁶ aren’t necessarily going to a hotel’s website first when they start researching for their trips, it’s undeniable that those other starting points, like search engines and online travel agencies, are directing an incredible volume of traffic to hotel websites.

In fact, 52% of travelers who visit an OTA with the intention of booking a hotel or doing research for a trip will go to a hotel’s website. This is a prime opportunity for marketers to use their own websites as a way to make their properties more enticing, more authentic, and more relatable to travelers.



⁴Facebook

⁵L2, Gartner

⁶Skift/Adara



Why Should Resorts and Hotels Use UGC?

It increases direct bookings through your website

Once a traveler gets to your site, you need to do whatever you can to get them to convert and UGC can certainly help.

About 85% of consumers say that visual UGC influences their purchase decisions more than photos or videos that are produced by the brand.⁷

One example of a travel brand that used UGC to convert and boost their online revenue is Dollywood. In 2018, the theme park said it saw a \$90,000 increase in ticket sales over a five-month period because of several UGC galleries on their website.⁸ Seeing photos of real guests enjoying themselves at the park had an influence on people's decision to purchase admission.

And, for hotels and resorts, getting a customer to book directly on your own website is so much more preferable than having that same customer book through an online travel agency. This way you likely don't have to pay a hefty commission to that online travel agency, and you're establishing a direct relationship with that customer who will, hopefully, become a repeat guest.

It amplifies your brand and helps you stand out

UGC also amplifies your brand and helps you stand out in an increasingly crowded marketplace for places to stay. It's especially challenging for hotels and resorts to stand out when there's just so much to choose from today in terms of accommodation, from short-term rentals to hotels and resorts.

⁷ Offerpop

⁸ CrowdRiff

Knowing what type of content you should use to convey your hotel or resort's brand message can be informed by what you see in UGC. What travelers are capturing when they stay with you gives you a clearer idea of what kind of an experience it is to stay at your hotel and people perceive it as authentic, credible, and engaging. It's also visual social proof that's comforting to other potential guests and helps set their expectations. And, for millennials, it's especially reassuring: 86% say that UGC is a good indicator of the quality of a brand or service.⁹

It helps you work smarter and improve your ROI

UGC also helps marketers to work smarter. Because it's a fresh, real-time, and limitless stream of content that's easy to scale, you'll likely never run out of incredible images and videos that you can share to promote your property.

It also stretches your production budget and saves your marketing team a great deal of time. Sometimes, all you need to do is contact that guest to request permission to use his/her content, making it a lot less time-consuming or expensive than commissioning your own video or photo shoot.

Organic, direct bookings via your own website also come at a much higher ROI than indirect or other distribution methods. One hotel that successfully used UGC to create more brand awareness is Hotel X Toronto.¹⁰ Shauna Whelan, the hotel's public relations and marketing specialist, said:

“[UGC] helps us attract those who are already considering staying with us for a certain event, but it also helps us raise awareness among potential guests who may not realize how much goes on around us.”

It decreases the chances of visitors returning to OTAs to finalize their booking

After a customer goes to a hotel's website is a prime opportunity for hotels to get that customer to book directly, instead of going back to the online travel agency to book. Having good UGC that acts like a review of the hotel or resort can turn “looking” into an actual booking. Reviews are very important to travelers and they're one reason why travelers turn to sites like TripAdvisor and other OTAs.

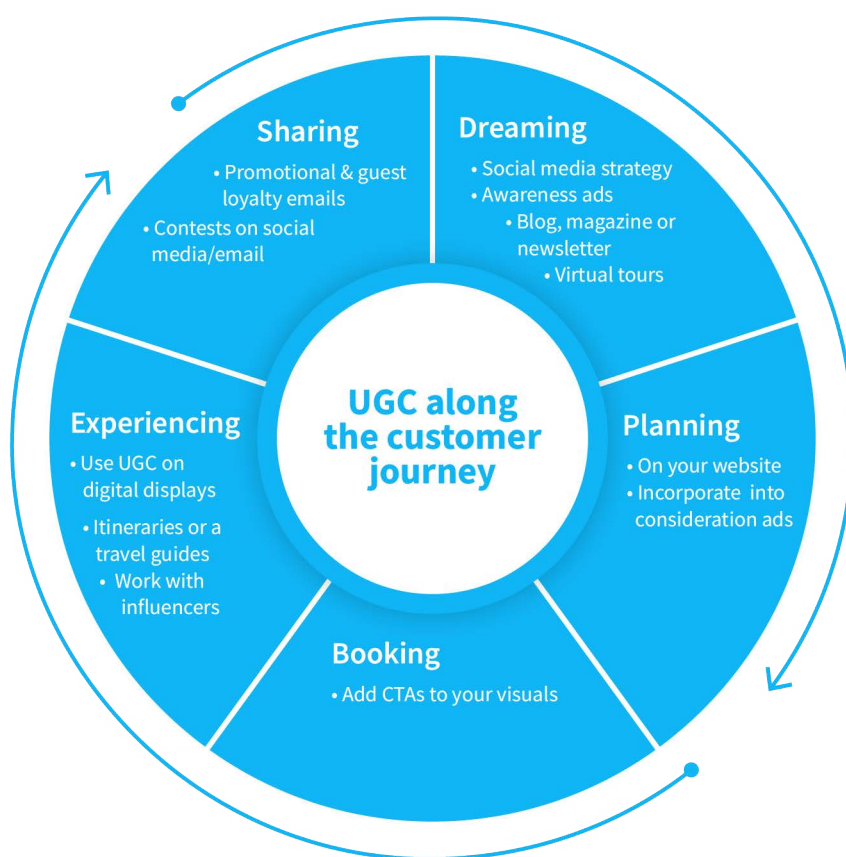


⁹ CrowdRiff
¹⁰ CrowdRiff

Ninety-six percent of TripAdvisor's users consider reading reviews to be important when booking a hotel and 83% usually or always reference a review before making a decision. And, 76% of those users are influenced by pictures uploaded by guests.¹¹

If more hotels were to feature UGC on their own websites, they might be able to decrease the number of customers who go back to the OTA to finalize their booking.

Better yet, if hotel and resort marketers could identify pain points or areas of friction within the customer journey and ease them with UGC, that could also improve bookings and the overall traveler experience. That journey includes five primary phases during the path to purchase: dreaming, planning, booking, experiencing and sharing. Here's a detailed look at how hotels and resorts can use UGC throughout each phase.



¹¹ TripAdvisor



03

Targeting Travelers Along the Path to Purchase with UGC

Dreaming

Long before a traveler boards the plane or walks through the doors of that hotel lobby, he/she has often seen himself/herself doing just that, but haven't yet taken any action toward getting to that point. In the dreaming phase, a traveler is doing just that: seeking inspiration and hoping to figure out where he/she is heading to next. They're looking for inspiration and to be moved by content that will help guide them as they move into the planning phase of the customer journey.

This is a prime opportunity for hotel and resort marketers to entice potential guests by using UGC and sharing the experiences of other guests to convince them to book a stay.

Include UGC in your social media strategy

One of the easiest ways to do this is to use UGC in a hotel's own social media strategy by sharing those images and videos on your Instagram, Pinterest, Facebook, Twitter, Snapchat or maybe even TikTok accounts. While professionally shot images and video are beautiful, travelers often relate better and connect more emotionally with content from actual guests as it helps them see themselves at your hotel or resort in that moment.

Social UGC is so effective that 32% to 39% of millennials won't book a hotel or travel experience that doesn't use UGC marketing.¹² Featuring UGC in your social feeds builds stronger connections with your audience of guests and future guests and makes you stand out.

When you repost photos and videos and stories from your guests or visitors to your own feed, it's a win-win for everyone, especially you. Your guests and target audience feel special and recognized when you repost their content. You benefit from being more relatable and authentic and you're nurturing your relationship with guests and potential guests.

Use UGC in your awareness ads

In addition to just reposting to your own feeds, it's also important to use paid social and display ads featuring UGC to drive traffic to your website. Digital ads that use UGC have a click-through rate that's four times higher than traditional advertisements.¹³

So many social media users are so used to ads that they often tune them out. Though, when they see an ad with UGC, it will stand out that much more because it's more authentic and it captures their attention better. In fact, 75% of resorts and hotels don't use UGC in their Facebook ads, which is a big opportunity for you to stand out among your competition.¹⁴

Showcase UGC in your blog, magazine or newsletter

Another way to feature UGC is in your hotel or resort blog, magazine or newsletter. When you apply UGC to these traditional advertising channels, like print and out-of-home advertising, you're creating ads that are often unexpected, impactful and eye-catching. Out-of-home ads like billboards are incredibly effective. Billboards reach 71% of consumers who drive by, and bus shelters reach 92% of consumers seeing one each week.¹⁵

It's important to note, however, that for out-of-home or print advertising, you must acquire the rights to UGC photos before you use them and you need to specify where you intend to use the visual, whether it's in a print campaign, visitors' guide, or out-of-home ad.

Give UGC-powered virtual tours of your property

Another great way to incorporate UGC is to develop virtual tours of your property that give people a truly 360-degree view of your hotel or resort that's not always possible with photos alone. These are more interactive than a photo gallery and by incorporating some UGC into these tours, it can be an engaging, immersive, and user-friendly way for guests in the dreaming phase to picture themselves at your property.

You can gather inspiration for these tours from anywhere your guests are posting videos, such as Instagram Stories, Facebook Stories, YouTube, etc. And, you could even partner with an influencer to produce a virtual tour as well.

¹² Medium

¹³ Social Toaster

¹⁴ CrowdRiff

¹⁵ Air Outdoor

Planning

In the planning phase of the traveler's path to purchase, he/she is looking for as much content as he/she can possibly find to help him/her make the best possible decisions for their trip. Often, they're consulting multiple sources: their friends, family, social network, online travel agencies, review sites like TripAdvisor, and guidebooks, among many others.

At this point in the customer journey, a traveler is looking for trusted sources to help him/her make crucial decisions for their trip. And, this is another great opportunity for marketers to reach and target potential guests by using UGC.

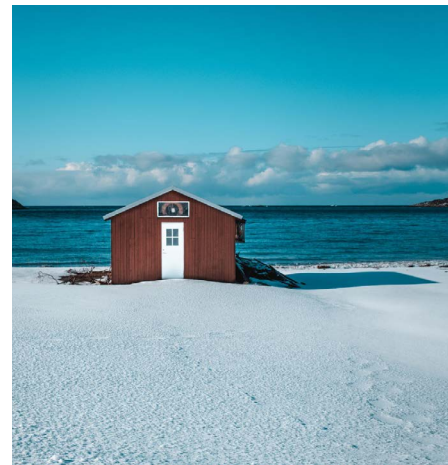
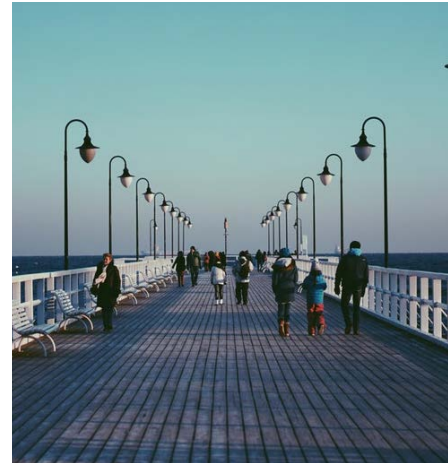
Use UGC on your website

One of the simplest things a marketer can do is simply incorporate UGC directly into the hotel or resort's own website. Using UGC on specific pages of the website that highlight specific interests, like weddings or spa treatments, is especially useful and effective.

Prospective wedding couples or spagoers would benefit from visualizing the experiences of previous guests who've gotten married or gotten spa treatments at your hotel, for example. This can be especially valuable since booking a wedding or spa treatment can be a steep investment for travelers. Again, it helps that prospective guests see themselves at your hotel or resort.

Or, consider grouping UGC into specific content galleries on the website. If your property is known for its cuisine, for instance, why not highlight the UGC of dining experiences your previous guests and diners enjoyed by showcasing them in a specific photo gallery dedicated to culinary experiences?

In other words, marketing UGC to specific demographics is key.





As beautiful as professionally shot or stock visuals are, they're not always the best type of content for convincing or motivating someone to book a stay. Seventy-six percent of hotels and resorts are using this imagery on their home pages.¹⁶ As noted previously, customers trust content and reviews from others.

Incorporate UGC into your consideration ads

Another great way to incorporate UGC in the planning phase is in your consideration ads. Digital ads, both paid social and display ads specifically, can target travelers who have already interacted with your content or have visited your site. Sometimes, seeing the experience through the eyes of other travelers can be the final push someone needs to book with you.

And, print and out-of-home ads can be extremely impactful and make your hotel or resort stand out even more, helping travelers make the decision to book with you.

One thing to pay close attention to with all of these ads, whether digital or print or out-of-home, is to make sure you're using UGC that conveys messages of authenticity and that you have a strong call to action in each of your ads. Call-to-action messages are absolutely essential, but they're something that can often be overlooked.

Booking

After your prospective guest has pored over dozens of online travel agencies and review sites, talked to dozens of people, and looked at countless social feeds, they're now ready to book a stay. This is a crucial point for marketers to convert travelers into bookers.

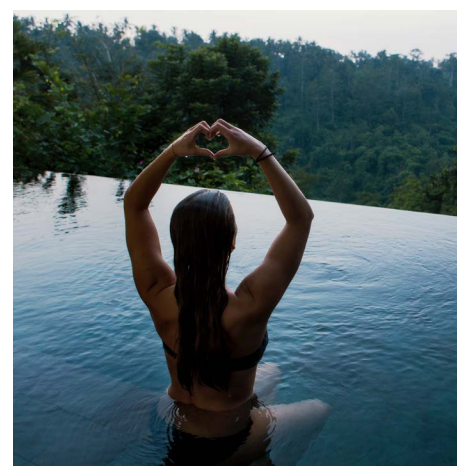
Drive bookings by adding CTAs to your visuals

At this point in the path to purchase, it's the marketers' job to make sure that the booking process itself is as seamless and intuitive as it possibly can be.

One way to drive more bookings is to combine direct calls to action with inspirational and demographic- or subject-specific UGC galleries on your hotel or resort website. You can prompt visitors to book or learn more about your property by adding call to actions directly to your UGC as overlays on specific images.

For example, if a potential guest sees a beautiful photo of someone lounging poolside at your hotel and hovers over that image, a call to action that says "Book Your Stay" should appear so that they can click directly over to your booking page. That next step to booking is placed directly in front of that potential guest and it encourages him/her to take action at the very moment they might be feeling inspired by your UGC visuals.

Whether you decide to use a call to action to link to another page with more information, to link to a partner website, or to link directly to an actual booking portal for your hotel or local excursions, these calls to action can increase your conversions or direct booking revenue. And, if you can track which calls to action drive the most action, or most bookings, you also have the added knowledge of knowing exactly what types of images or visuals are the most effective for conversions.





Experiencing

The real-time nature of social media is what you can use to your advantage during the experiencing phase of a customer's journey. Now that a traveler has booked a stay at your hotel or resort doesn't mean you should stop marketing to them or other potential guests.

There are still so many opportunities for you to use UGC at this point to make that guest feel even more connected to your property or brand, and also to view your hotel as a resource for helping to share her travel experience.

Use UGC on digital displays

Your own property is a great place for you to use digital displays to market the hotel to both guests and potential visitors. Not only that, but when you use UGC in these digital displays throughout your hotel or resort, you're also encouraging guests and visitors to share and tag their own photos and videos for an opportunity to get featured on those displays, too. You're nurturing those relationships and recognizing guests and potential guests by making them feel special and personally connected to your hotel.

Prominently displayed photo walls featuring UGC also give guests a better idea of what their fellow guests and visitors are experiencing, and give them ideas for what they can do during their stay, whether they want to find something relaxing or adventurous to do. Again, it helps them envision themselves doing those same activities or being in similar scenarios.

Digital displays showcasing UGC also serve as a gentle reminder for guests to take photos and videos of their trips and to post them on social media with your hashtag so you have even more UGC to choose from to promote your brand going forward.

Add UGC to itineraries or a travel guide full of local recommendations

Another effective way to reach travelers while they're experiencing your property is to use UGC to craft itineraries or travel guides full of recommendations from locals. More travelers than ever trust the recommendations of locals when they travel; they crave "local" experiences that help them feel like they're experiencing a place through a local's perspective. And, as important as where you stay during a trip is, travelers place just as much importance on the overall experience—the hotel is just one aspect of their journey.

You can use UGC to highlight the destination and nearby experiences enjoyed by those who stay at your hotel or resort, rather than using overused stock photos. By leveraging UGC, your guests get to see what other visitors are actually doing at your destination.

Work with influencers

Another effective way to market your hotel or resort with UGC is to work with influencers. Inviting influencers to stay at your hotel and post UGC about their experience with you can be an important endorsement and driver of increased brand awareness and maybe even a few bookings. Working with an influencer often means you can get quality content created about your hotel or resort and you also get to expand your audience by reaching that influencer's followers.

Influencer marketing grew by almost 40% in 2018 and it's only continuing to rise.¹⁷ One type of influencer not to be overlooked is the micro-influencers, or those who cater to smaller, more niche audiences. This could include travel influencers, food bloggers, photographers, or other social media influencers who have an engaged community of loyal followers. It all depends on who you're trying to target, from families or guests from a certain region or guests with specific passions.

¹⁷ Klear

Sharing

Now that your customers have stayed with you and have experienced it for themselves you can encourage those guests to continue sharing their experiences, not just with you, but with their own social networks. And, you also want to ensure that your connection to this guest remains, and that he/she will be a repeat visitor or guest going forward, as well as someone who uses word of mouth to encourage their friends and family to stay with you, too.

Use best-performing UGC in your promotional & guest loyalty emails

One way to do this is to use the best-performing UGC in your promotional and guest loyalty emails. Resort and hotel marketers often say the primary goal of their visual marketing strategies is to generate revenue, but only 12% are measuring how visuals contribute to this number, and half aren't measuring their visuals at all.¹⁸ Marketers need to take a data-driven approach to their visual marketing strategies because if they don't, they risk overlooking an essential way to increase the value per website visitor or booker, but also the lifetime value of every customer as well.

Run a contest on social media or via email

Another way to continue to engage with guests and potential guests is to run a contest on social media or via email. These contests not only engage your audience, but also help build a community around your specific hotel or resort. You're also generating a large amount of UGC that you can use in your marketing at the same time, and these contests also extend your brand's reach to include participants' followers, too.



¹⁸ CrowdRiff



Contests can be based on photos or videos, but whatever type of social media or email contest you decide to run, you need to ensure you outline and communicate the rules in advance, so your followers know how to enter and participate.

Incorporate UGC in direct mail

Even though many think direct mail is a dead or nearly obsolete form of marketing, it's far from it. Almost 50% of consumers say they take action after receiving a piece of direct mail.¹⁹

You can make your direct mail pieces more impactful by combining UGC with branded messaging, using it to build an authentic relationship with a wider pool of potential customers.

¹⁹ Kennedy Marketing Group

04

How CrowdRiff Helps Attract & Convert Travelers Along Their Path to Purchase



Source and get the rights to UGC

- Keep up with your content demands by tapping into an unlimited source of high-quality user-generated content.
- Securely acquire rights to UGC worry-free.
- Use the industry's most intelligent image search to find on-brand UGC quickly.



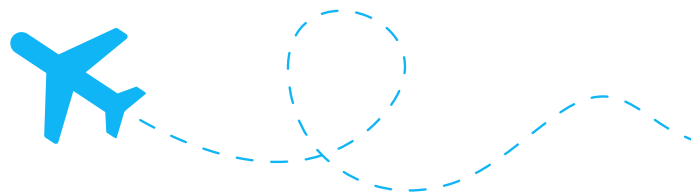
Easily distribute UGC across platforms

- Put UGC to work on your website, social channels, ad campaigns and more.
- Enrich your images with Google Locations so website visitors can easily find the information they need to visit.
- Add calls to action to your UGC imagery that take people to your booking pages, partner websites or deeper into your website.



Pick better visuals for your ads

- Discover which assets are driving the most conversions and revenue.
- Make better ad decisions every day by serving up data on visual content.
- Use these insights to help you choose your ad creative and watch your conversions improve.





About CrowdRiff

CrowdRiff is a visual content marketing software solution for digital and social teams at travel and hospitality brands. Crowdriff can help you source, distribute and optimize the photos and videos that will attract and influence visitors.

We help travel brands at every step of the campaign process:

- **User-generated Content:** Discover authentic, high-quality photos and videos shared by visitors
- **Digital Asset Manager:** Manage all your visuals in a modern, intuitive AI-powered platform
- **Media Hub:** Easily share UGC and branded visuals with journalists, PR agencies and bloggers

Powering the world's most successful travel & hospitality brands



[Watch A Demo](#)

