



# Guest Engagement and the Customer's Digital Journey

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**What are the top five ingredients in the race for 'first to adoption' that both hoteliers and tech suppliers share? DataArt's unique domain experience of delivering successful solutions to vendors and operators positions it to offer an inside track on successfully implementing an integrated guest-engagement strategy**

The rules of engagement with hotel guests are changing as their needs, motivations and budgets evolve. We have identified several vital ingredients in ensuring optimal guest engagement and all the positive things that flow from having fully engaged customers: consistency of approach, frictionless interaction, and providing tools to establish guests enjoy their 'experiences' before, during and after their hotel stay.

DataArt's experience designing and building travel and hospitality software solutions uniquely positions it as a master builder in all aspects of the digital journey. This knowledge, which spans from online tour operators (OTAs), to hotel operators and technology suppliers to the hotel industry, allows DataArt to shine a light on the critical areas that operators and suppliers alike need to champion:

## **1. Deliver a consistent, holistic approach that offers good value**

TripAdvisor recently reported ([Ref i](#)) that 34% of travelers want their accommodation to offer mobile check-in. However, this is only part of the story. In cases where a hotel actually offers this capability, how will they communicate it to the guest? There is a continual obligation on the hotel to engage with the customer, not the other way around. Furthermore, do the existing systems and data even allow the hotel to make the guest aware of this service in the first place and support it in each transaction? OTAs and many indirect, and sometimes even direct, booking channels either don't provide the hotel with the guest's contact details, or preclude it from using it for reasons that may be perceived as marketing or promotion, therefore making it impossible to fully interact.

It is essential for both supplier and hotel operator/management company/chain to spell out in detail the end-to-end guest experience and explore all pitfalls and opportunities from a system and data point of view. A third-party facilitator, who can act as a catalyst for the strategy and bring technical expertise within the context of the business needs, will help design a well-thought-out and holistic solution, and may, perhaps, deliver this integration itself.

## **2. Guests want to enjoy their experience. Make sure your touch points are enjoyable, i.e. simple, intuitive and work as promised. Guests expect their 'stay experience' to go beyond the walls of the hotel**

When Airbnb announced its "Trips" platform in November 2016 ([Ref ii](#)), it meant they were embarking on becoming a full-fledged travel company that would allow its customers to become immersed not only in their accommodation, but in their destination.

Guests want to enjoy their experience, and travel technology needs to be frictionless – that is, allow the guests to do whatever they need in an intuitive way. Our experience at DataArt demands that our customers, be they hotel operators or technology vendors, have a clear view of what makes their end users (guests) tick, what motivates them and how a solution can be enjoyed the most.

Integration and highly-efficient, well-designed interfaces between systems are essential. For instance, a guest may book a room and then pre-order a spa service. If they subsequently change details of their room booking, they expect their spa reservation to follow suit. Our experience shows this is often not the case – an example of a non-frictionless experience that must be avoided.

### **3. Have a clear vision of what you want your systems to do, and why it will make the guest experience better**

Clarity of vision and ownership of your systems and what you provide your customers creates a pure identity of what it is you offer (thus helping you communicate your message). It also limits tangential changes that fundamentally alter the scope of your product or service, helps maintain quality and consistency and enhances the engagement with the customer you can achieve by keeping their use of your systems straightforward.

While an operator or vendor should have a clear view of what it is THEY want to provide, early and active involvement of users can also make the difference between success and failure. Our preferred approach, and that which we believe is more likely to succeed, is to utilize a user-driven design. Non-user driven products can fail for the smallest reasons that could have easily been prevented with the right amount of user involvement at the right moments. DataArt encourages championing the users and develops software around a framework of iterative cycles, often involving end users.

### **4. Ensure your guest interaction is fully integrated. Disengaged guests are less likely to return: but only 20% of guests feel fully engaged**

According to Gallup (Refs [iii](#) and [iv](#)), hotel guests that are fully engaged spend 46% more per year than actively disengaged guests. Full engagement means that customers are emotionally attached and rationally loyal – they go out of their way to obtain their preferred product or service. Offering tightly integrated and fully interfaced solutions means guests can engage with a hotel at any point and can rely on consistent interaction, thereby maintaining their emotional involvement. Since engagement rests heavily with the emotional as well as rational connection between customer and provider, consistency is key.

Outstanding systems design, analysis, prototyping, proof of concepts, development, maintainability, documentation and execution are all critically important to the successful implementation of a system, and again an area where expertise delivers results.

### **5. First-to-market is not the objective**

It's commonly believed that first-to-market is a measure of success. While that is important, DataArt believes a greater measure of success is **first-to-adoption**: that is, optimal active take-up by users of any new solution or product.

DataArt has been helping travel and hospitality practitioners, as well as suppliers, gain first-to-market and first-to-adoption advantage for nearly 10 years. Its breadth of experience of developing diverse application software, middleware and integration tools in its chosen sectors are second to none, and have been harnessed by some of the leading global travel and hospitality brands. The consultancy has successfully completed over 1,600 projects over 20 years in operation.

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Ref i - <http://ir.tripadvisor.com/releasedetail.cfm?ReleaseID=919990>

Ref ii - <http://www.businessinsider.com/airbnb-trips-launch-2016-11>

Ref iii - [http://www.gallup.com/businessjournal/192710/brands-aren-winning-millennial-consumers.aspx?g\\_source=HOSPITALITY&g\\_medium=topic&g\\_campaign=tiles](http://www.gallup.com/businessjournal/192710/brands-aren-winning-millennial-consumers.aspx?g_source=HOSPITALITY&g_medium=topic&g_campaign=tiles)

Ref iv - <http://www.gallup.com/businessjournal/172637/why-customer-engagement-matters.aspx>

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#### **About the Author:**

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Tags: [dataart](#), [andrew sanders](#), [central reservations systems](#), [property management systems](#)

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## About DataArt

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**DataArt** is a global technology consultancy that designs, develops and supports unique software solutions, helping clients take their businesses forward. Recognized for their deep domain expertise and superior technical talent, DataArt teams create new products and modernize complex legacy systems that affect technology transformation in [select industries](#).

DataArt has earned the trust of some of the world's leading brands and most discerning [clients](#), including Nasdaq, S&P, United Technologies, oneworld Alliance, Ocado, artnet, Betfair, and skyscanner. Organized as a global network of technology services firms. DataArt brings together expertise of over 2,200 professionals in 20 locations in the US, Europe, and Latin America.

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