

## How to get to No. 1 on TripAdvisor

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Panelists at the Hotel Data Conference shared proven techniques to climb the rankings on TripAdvisor.



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NASHVILLE, Tennessee—When the management team at Library Hotel Collection first began monitoring content on various distribution sites more than a decade ago, the goal was simply to make sure information was accurate and up-to-date.

And then they started noticing guest-generated content on a review site called TripAdvisor.

One of the group's hotels was ranked No. 3 in the market. Another was much further down the list at No. 56.

"We had one hotel on the top," explained Adele Gutman, VP of sales, marketing and revenue. "Why not have all of them at the top?"

That's when the management team began a concerted effort to improve the on-property experience at its four New York City hotels with the goal of running up the online review ranks. Two years later, [Library Hotel Collection](#) properties ranked Nos. 1 through 4 on TripAdvisor in New York City.

"We accomplished that by having obsessive compulsive disorder and just looking at all those reviews on TripAdvisor," Gutman said.

That placement drives exceptional demand to the properties, she said.

"It is staggering the difference between the No. 1 spot or the No. 3 spot or the No. 3 spot versus the No. 5 spot," Gutman added. "It is the difference you will definitely feel in your pocket."

Gutman, along with three other panelists, discussed several ways to reach that No. 1 ranking during a panel titled "In my humble opinion" during the 6th annual Hotel Data Conference, hosted by [STR](#) and Hotel News Now.

### Don't be shy

While Library Hotel Collection's stronghold on the top four TripAdvisor rankings in New York has loosened in recent years—at press time the group occupied Nos. 1, 4, 5 and 7—there's a reason they've always hovered in the top 10.

First, staff on property provide excellent service, Gutman said.

"Shower your guests with so much care and attention and surprise and delight that they will want to reciprocate and do something nice for you, which is share their story about their experience with the world," she said.

Second, management is not shy about asking its guests to write reviews, either in person or in a post-stay email.

Other hoteliers should do the same, especially with repeat guests.

"Those are your greatest advocates ... Once a quarter ask for a review," Gutman said. "We feel brave enough at the Casablanca Hotel (ranked No. 1 at press time) that we just send (the post-stay emails) out. We send (guests) straight to TripAdvisor."

### **Keep the reviews coming**

The importance of good reviews on TripAdvisor goes without saying. The importance of a lot of recent reviews is less well understood.

TripAdvisor considers both in its ranking algorithm, explained Brian Payea, the review site's head of industry relations.

"The number of reviews determines your popularity ranking, but the number of recent reviews is the really important part," he said.

"You are only as good as your last review. ... You have to earn your wings every day," Gutman added.

### **Address the good, bad and ugly**

The panelists agreed that staff, preferably the GM, should respond to negative reviews on TripAdvisor. But words without action are meaningless.

"For a lot of people when they talk about a review response, they mean the words that you're putting online. ... What we say there is very important, but it's not nearly as important as what we do," Gutman said.

Hoteliers should follow up, address the issue and do their best to make sure it doesn't happen again, panelists said.

### **Grease the squeaky wheel**

Guest complaints don't spring forth in a vacuum. Often operational issues are the culprit.

Savvy hoteliers monitor online reviews to track recurring operational pain points, explained Sam Trotter, director of new business development and e-commerce for Boutique Hospitality Management. ([Trotter](#) is also a columnist for Hotel News Now.)

When his company took over the 130th ranked hotel out of 137 in one particular market, Trotter immediately turned to TripAdvisor to diagnose some of the property's biggest problems. Complaints about exterior noise were common, he said.

"We had to spend close to half a million dollars on new windows. It's not sexy, it's not glamorous, but it was such an issue that that's where we put our money. ... TripAdvisor helped us eliminate our No. 1 guest complaint right away," Trotter said.

### **Get staff to buy-in**

When Library Hotel Collection decided to drive up its TripAdvisor rankings years ago, it turned to staff to help drive those efforts, Gutman said.

"The first thing we did was we called all the important players of the hotels ... and said, 'We can do this.' They all wanted to do that. They were all committed to having a great outstanding customer experience for every guest. This is not a social media ploy. It is just being a good hotelier," she said.

She asked managers to write the types of reviews they would want to see written about their own hotels. She then challenged them to put plans in place to provide that level of service.

Gutman also turned to staff to compile lists of comments, greetings, interactions or favors that delighted guests. The findings were shared throughout the portfolio.

Today management at each hotel regularly monitors TripAdvisor to track operational issues, address negative complaints regarding particular associates or departments and highlight positive comments to boost morale.



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