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A practical guide for independent hotels

The Modern Guest Journey Playbook

How leading hotels are winning more guests, more revenue, and more loyalty.



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INTRODUCTION

No guest ever chose you in a single moment

For years the guest journey was drawn as a funnel. Wide at the top, narrow at the bottom, moving in one direction: awareness, consideration, booking, stay. Guests never quite behaved that way, and today they rarely do.

A modern journey is a loop. A guest wanders in and out of it across several weeks, on three or four devices, while the property has almost no visibility into any of it.

By the time someone clicks book, they have already made a dozen smaller decisions. They decided the photos looked honest. They decided the reviews sounded like real people. They decided the rate on Google was worth a click. They decided the payment page felt safe enough for a card number. Every one of those was a chance to win them or lose them, and nearly all of them happened before anyone at the property knew the guest existed.

141

pages of travel content viewed by the average guest in the 45 days before booking

EXPEDIA GROUP

45

days is the typical window between first search and confirmed booking

EXPEDIA GROUP

70%+

of all hotel reservations are now completed on a mobile device

INDUSTRY AGGREGATE

60%

growth in mobile hotel booking volume over the past two years

INDUSTRY AGGREGATE

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What this playbook **does**

It breaks the loop into seven moments where a guest forms a judgement about your property. For each one it sets out what guests now expect, what typically goes wrong, and how to test your own property against it.

You should be able to read a chapter and go do something with it the same afternoon — without buying anything.

Who this playbook is for



Owners and general managers who want more direct business without adding headcount

Revenue and marketing leaders working to reduce OTA dependency for good

Front office managers who feel the friction on every single shift

Growing groups that need the same guest experience at every property

Read one chapter at a time, then finish with the scorecard on page 30 to see where your journey is strongest — and where it leaks.

The guest journey is no longer **linear**

The journey is not linear, but the moments still depend on each other in order. A guest cannot judge your booking page if they never found you, and a slow check-in is harder to overlook when the booking itself was already difficult.



"One question carries through every chapter that follows: where does a guest have to repeat themselves? Each time they do, it reveals a gap between two of your systems that the guest ends up compensating for."

The question behind every chapter

The seven moments at a glance

Use the right-hand column to decide which chapter to read first.

The moment	What the guest is doing	What usually goes wrong
1. Being found online	Comparing hotels on Google, reviews and OTAs — before you know they exist	Your own rate is missing, so an OTA or a competitor wins the click
2. Taking the direct booking	Trying to book on their phone in a couple of minutes	Slow pages, rates that do not match, fees that appear at the end
3. Answering guest questions	Calling or messaging with real intent, expecting a quick answer	The call rings out; the message waits until tomorrow
4. Recognising your guest	Expecting to be remembered, not to repeat themselves at the desk	Their notes and preferences sit where staff cannot see them
5. Selling upgrades and extras	Happy to pay for an upgrade, dinner or late checkout — if asked	Nobody makes the offer, so nothing gets bought
6. Earning the repeat visit	Deciding whether you were worth a review and a second stay	No thank-you, no review request, no reason to return
7. Systems working as one	Guests never see your systems — but they feel whether everything connects	Seven disconnected tools, held together by your staff

Where guests book today

Most bookings still pass through someone else's storefront — and most direct bookers looked there first.

63%

of all hotel bookings globally still go through online travel agencies

INDUSTRY AGGREGATE

38%

of bookings are made directly on hotel websites, making up the rest

INDUSTRY AGGREGATE

61%

of guests who book direct also viewed an OTA listing during their search

INDUSTRY AGGREGATE

28%

increase in meetings and event bookings recorded in 2024

INDUSTRY AGGREGATE

Not all seven cost the same

Most properties concentrate on moments 1 and 2, because those resemble marketing and marketing has a budget line. Moments 4 through 7 are where guests decide whether they return, and the failures there are usually process problems rather than spending problems.

ONE GUEST · 45 DAYS · 3 DEVICES



DAY 1

Searches Google



DAY 9

Browses an OTA listing



DAY 21

Reads recent reviews



DAY 38

Asks a question



DAY 45

Books direct

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Can guests **find** you?



Being found is not one problem. It is three, stacked, and they fail in order — which matters, because fixing the wrong layer produces no result at all.

01

Visibility

Can they see you at all? Maps, metasearch, OTA listings, organic search. Missing from Google's hotel panel and nothing downstream matters.

02

Credibility

Once seen, do you look real? Review volume and recency, photo honesty, reviews that read like people.

03

Conversion

Can they complete a booking? Consistent rates, a booking link that works, and a page that loads fast on mobile.

The billboard effect

Some travellers discover a hotel on an OTA, then book directly on the hotel's own website.

If 61 out of every 100 direct bookers first found you on an OTA, removing that listing does not convert them into direct bookings. It removes the place where they found you.

The 60-second visibility check

Do this on your phone, on mobile data — not the office wifi where your site is cached.



Search your property name

Does your own site appear above the OTAs?



Open your Google listing

Does the rate match what you are selling?



Check your newest review

Older than 30 days reads as a quiet property.



Time your booking link

Over three seconds loses people.

7.5–26%

more reservations through a hotel's own channels when it was also listed on an OTA

CORNELL CHR

74%

of consumers look for reviews written in the last three months

BRIGHTLOCAL, 2026

53%

of mobile site visits are abandoned when a page takes over three seconds to load

GOOGLE

roommaster in action

Get found, then get booked

roommaster Hotel Website Builder gives your property a conversion-optimised, mobile-responsive website with real-time rates built in — designed to help your own site rank above OTA listings and turn visitors into direct, commission-free bookings.

roommaster Hotel Metasearch places your live rates on Google, Trivago and TripAdvisor so guests click through to your website, not a third party.

Free tool

Not sure where your website stands today?

The free roommaster Hotel Website Audit checks speed, mobile experience, SEO and direct-booking readiness in about two minutes, with no signup to start.

[RUN YOUR FREE AUDIT](#)



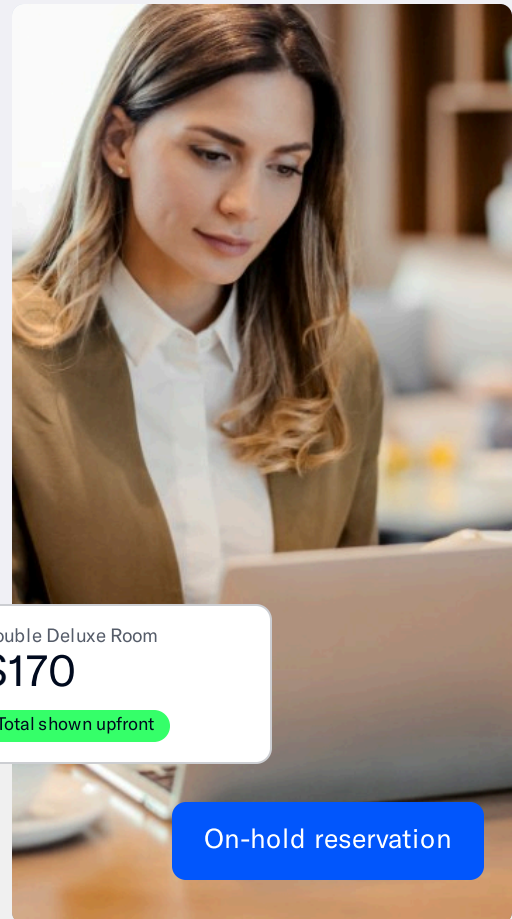
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Can guests **book** you easily?

A guest who reaches your booking page has already decided they want to stay with you. Everything that happens now is you giving them reasons not to. Six things break a direct booking — each has a different owner and a different fix.

01. **Rate mismatch** – The guest saw one number on metasearch and finds another on your site. Trust is gone in a second.
02. **Hidden cost at the end** – Resort fees, taxes and parking at the payment step is the most common abandonment trigger.
03. **Too many steps** – Every extra screen between choosing a room and confirming loses guests. Count yours.
04. **Mobile as an afterthought** – Most reservations are made on a phone. A desktop-first flow fails your main channel.
05. **No way to hold** – Some guests are not ready to pay. Without a hold option they leave to "think about it".
06. **No reason to prefer you** – If direct offers nothing an OTA does not, guests book where cancellation is easiest.



Look-to-book ratio

The share of people who view your booking page and go on to complete a reservation — the most useful single number for judging whether your direct channel is working.

3% → 4%

2,000 booking-page visitors a month and 60 reservations is a 3% ratio. Raising it to 4% adds 20 reservations a month with no extra marketing spend.

At \$220 a night and a two-night average stay, that is roughly \$8,800 in additional monthly revenue.

The real cost of every OTA booking

15–30%

is the typical OTA commission per booking, compared to 3.5–4.5% for a direct booking

OPTIMA / THRIVIN DIGITAL

~9%

more profit is earned on every direct booking than the same booking through an OTA

OPTIMA / THRIVIN DIGITAL

18%

cancellation rate on direct bookings, compared to roughly 50% on OTA reservations

THRIVIN DIGITAL

\$40

is lost per night on a \$200 room when the booking comes through an OTA at 20%

INDUSTRY AGGREGATE

Same guest. Same room. Same stay. A very different profit.

Brought to you by



roommaster in action

Built to keep the booking on your site

roommaster Booking Engine is built mobile-first and connects directly to your PMS — so availability and pricing are always accurate.

Guests see the total cost before entering payment details, which reduces abandonment. On-hold reservations let undecided guests secure a room without completing payment, keeping them on your site instead of returning to an OTA.

Book direct

\$295

You keep \$295 · total shown upfront

Same room via an OTA

\$236 kept

\$59 lost to 20% commission

Checkout · Deluxe Queen, 2 nights

Room	\$590.00
------	----------

Taxes & fees	\$82.60
--------------	---------

Total due	\$672.60
-----------	----------

Book now

Hold for 24h

“

"The **roommaster Booking Engine** has enabled us to help people envision what the experience will be before they actually experience it. When they get here, they're always really excited — they see a product that matches what they envisioned."

David Garabedian, Owner, Newbury Guest House

BOOK A DEMO

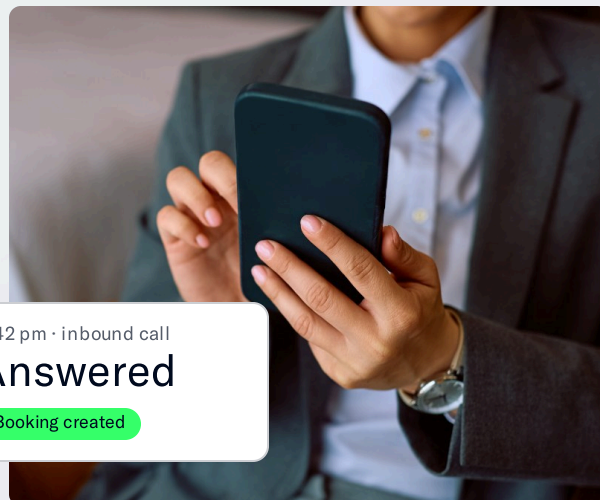
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Can guests **reach** you when they need you?

Between looking and booking, most guests want one question answered. Is there parking. Can we check in late. Is the room actually quiet.

It is rarely complicated, but it is almost always a blocking question — and it arrives on four channels, each with its own expectation.



Channel	Who uses it	What they expect	What usually happens
Phone	Groups, older guests, urgent questions	An answer now	Rings out at 9pm or during check-in rush
Web chat	Guests on your site, close to booking	A reply in a minute or two	Answered next morning, too late
WhatsApp / SMS	International and repeat guests	Conversational, same day	Sits on one person's phone
Email	Planners and corporate bookers	A considered reply within a day	Lost in a shared inbox

The quiet cost of an unanswered call

A missed call is not a missed conversation. It is usually a missed booking, because the guest calls the next property on their list rather than calling you back.

Measure it rather than assume it: ask your phone provider for inbound calls, answered calls and ring time broken down by hour. Most operators are surprised by how many arrive outside front desk hours — and during the 3pm to 5pm window when the desk is least able to pick up.

40%

of front desk call volume is repetitive guest queries that could be automated

HOTELINKING

73%

of front desks still process check-ins manually, creating queues at peak times

HOTELINKING

47%

drop in guest satisfaction after just a five-minute wait at check-in

CORNELL CHR

60%

of callers report higher satisfaction when their query is resolved instantly

INDUSTRY AGGREGATE

roommaster in action

One inbox, and a voice that never rings out

roommaster AI Guest Management brings web chat, WhatsApp, SMS and email into one shared inbox, so nothing sits unread on one person's phone overnight.

roommaster Concierge, powered by Sadie AI, answers calls around the clock in the guest's language and creates reservations directly inside your PMS when the caller is ready to book.



"Our guests come to disconnect, but they still deserve answers the moment they reach out. With **roommaster Concierge** across all our sites, no call goes unanswered and no question waits."

Duke Christopher, VP of Lodging, ExplorUS

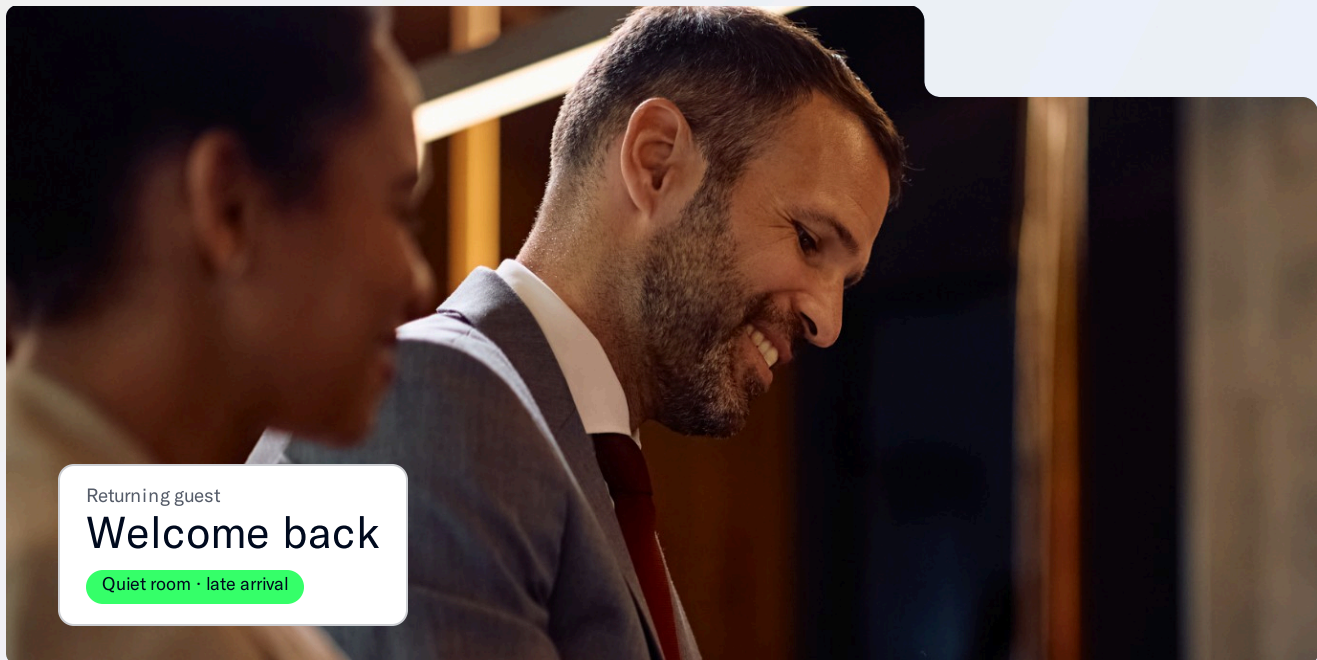
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Does every stay feel **personal**?

Arrival is the first moment the guest meets the property rather than the marketing. It is also the only moment where a queue is possible, which makes it uniquely fragile.



In practice, guests mean four specific things by "personal" — and none require knowing their favourite flower.

01. **Do not make me repeat myself** – If a guest told you at booking they are arriving late, the desk should know at arrival.
02. **Recognise that I have been here before** – A returning guest greeted as a stranger learns how you keep records.
03. **Honour what I already paid for** – The upgrade bought at booking should be on the room already.
04. **Let me skip the parts I do not need** – Some guests want a warm welcome. Others want a key and silence. Both are hospitality.

THINK LIKE A GUEST

Friday, 4pm, behind your own desk

Count the questions your team asks that the property already knows the answer to: arrival time, card details, number of guests, late checkout requests.

Each one is a minor inconvenience the guest absorbs because two of your systems are not sharing information with each other.

61%

of guests say they would pay more for a stay that feels personalised to them

MEDALLIA

23%

of guests say their hotel stays actually feel personalised today

MEDALLIA

71%

of travellers are more likely to book a property that offers contactless check-in

INDUSTRY SURVEY

82%

of guests rate digital check-in as important when choosing a hotel

INDUSTRY SURVEY

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roommaster in action

Their history, on the reservation

With roommaster, guest preferences and booking notes live on the reservation — so when a returning guest arrives, your front desk sees room preferences, past requests and special occasions without switching screens.

roommaster Hotel Guest App lets guests who prefer speed check in from their phone, use a digital key and make requests, while your team focuses on the guests who want a personal welcome.



"We're no longer stuck behind our computers doing spreadsheets. With AI doing the heavy lifting, we can focus on our guests."

Susie Conway, General Manager, Flamingo Motel

BOOK A DEMO

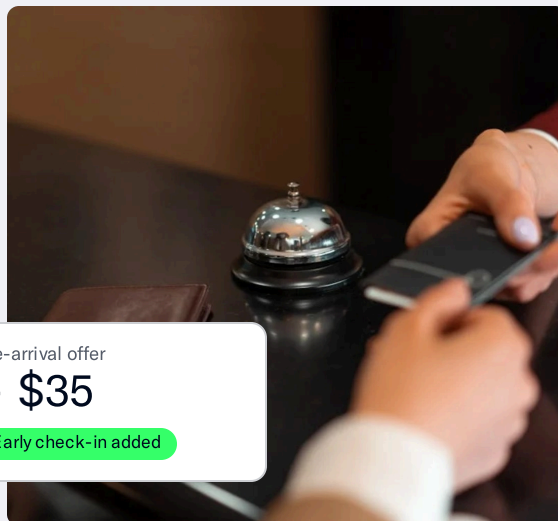
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Are you creating revenue beyond the room?

Most properties treat the stay as a service window and the booking as the revenue window. That is backwards.

The guest is already on site, already committed, and already spending — the least expensive revenue available to you. The mistake is rarely the offer. It is the timing.



The four moments to make an offer

When	What works	Why it works then
At booking	Room upgrades, parking, breakfast	The guest is in a spending frame of mind and comparing tiers
Before arrival	Early check-in, transfers, a dinner reservation	Trip logistics are being finalised and the guest wants problems solved
During the stay	Spa, late checkout, F&B, experiences	The guest knows the property and can picture what is offered
At checkout	Late checkout, next stay, a rebooking rate	Goodwill is at its highest point if the stay went well

Attach rate

The percentage of reservations that include at least one paid extra. Track it for the property, then per item, to see which offers are landing and which are not.

12% → 18%

400 reservations a month with 48 paid extras is a 12% **attach rate**. Moving the early check-in offer to a pre-arrival email could raise that to 18% — 24 more sales a month.

At \$35 each, that is **\$840** in additional monthly revenue without any new guests or staff.

18%+

of total hotel revenue now comes from sources other than the room rate itself

INDUSTRY AGGREGATE

20%

higher average booking value when add-ons are offered during the booking flow

INDUSTRY AGGREGATE

15%

typical uplift in total revenue per booking when upsells are timed well

INDUSTRY AGGREGATE

27%

higher direct booking rate for properties using a mobile-first booking engine

INDUSTRY AGGREGATE

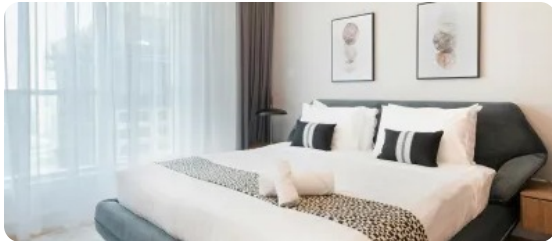
roommaster in action

Every extra on one folio, one report

Because roommaster Booking Engine, the Hotel Guest App and the PMS are one connected platform, an upgrade at booking, a dinner package before arrival and a late checkout in the app all land on the same folio and the same report.

That makes your attach rate a number you can track, not something you estimate.

Offer at check-in · Room 214



Upgrade to a King Suite

More space, a city view and late checkout until 1 pm.

+\$40 / night

Accept upgrade

Upgrade accepted

+\$80

added to the same folio

Attach rate · this month

18%

Best moment to offer

At booking and before arrival

Brought to you by



What happens after checkout?

Checkout is brief, routine, and the last thing a guest experiences before deciding what to write about you. It is the only point where the guest reviews every charge on their bill.



The three checkout failures

01

The bill nobody recognises

A charge on the wrong folio, a minibar item nobody took, a rate that does not match the confirmation.

02

The split that will not split

A company paying room and tax, a wedding block. If routing was not set at booking, it is improvised at the desk.

03

The wait

A guest with a taxi outside forgives almost anything except "the system is slow this morning".

The rule

Billing decisions belong at booking, not at checkout. Who pays for what, which folio each charge routes to, what the deposit covers — record it the moment the reservation is made.

Properties that reconcile at checkout do the work twice: once badly under pressure, and again the next morning when accounts finds the error.

The hidden cost of manual work

89%

of hoteliers save 2 to 10+ hours a week once billing reconciliation is automated

INDUSTRY SURVEY

6–9

hours a week the average hotel team still spends on repetitive manual admin

INDUSTRY SURVEY

35%

of lost operational time comes from manual re-keying and duplicate data entry

INDUSTRY SURVEY

91%

of hoteliers say their PMS directly contributes to revenue growth

HOTELTECHREPORT

Why the post-stay window matters

81%

of travellers read online reviews before choosing which hotel to book

INDUSTRY AGGREGATE

5x

more expensive to acquire a new guest than to retain an existing one

INDUSTRY AGGREGATE

30%

increase in repeat bookings with structured post-stay follow-up

roommaster

Arrivals today

24

Departures today

18

Occupancy

87%

Housekeeping status · 62 rooms

Clean

41

Dirty

18



"Beginning of each shift, our staff pulls up the dashboard which gives the arrivals, the checkouts, how many rooms we have as far as dirty, clean, out of order. On one screen, it gives us basically all of our information that we need to start our day."

Stacy Dadson, General Manager, Harrison Hall Hotel

BOOK A DEMO

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The three jobs of the post-stay window

The stay is over and the guest has stopped thinking about you. This is when most properties go quiet — which is why it is the least expensive place to stand out. Post-stay has three distinct jobs, often collapsed into one email.

01

Capture the review, while it's fresh

A 4.6 with a review from last week reads as open and busy; the same 4.6 with nothing since March reads as declining.

02

Learn something you can act on

A score never broken down by room type, floor or arrival hour is a number, not information.

03

Earn the return

A repeat guest costs almost nothing to acquire. What works is recognition, and a rate that acknowledges past stays.

Review velocity

How many reviews you gather per month matters more than your lifetime total. 300 reviews gathering 2 a month usually ranks below 90 gathering 15 a month.

Asking 60% of departing guests instead of 20% is a change to your departure process — not your product.

A simple test: look at your last thirty reviews and count how many the property responded to — and how many days it took. Guests read your replies carefully, because that is where they learn how you behave when something goes wrong.

roommaster in action

Thank-you, review request, recognition – automatically

roommaster AI Guest Management sends thank-you messages and review requests at checkout, triggered by the departure itself.

Guest history stays in the system — so when that guest books again, your team sees the room they preferred, the rate they paid and any issues, without anyone maintaining a private spreadsheet.



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Is your hotel **connected**?

Read the seven moments back to back and a pattern appears. Almost none of these are failures of hospitality. They are failures of information arriving too late, or not at all.

Where it gets lost	How it shows up to the guest	What it costs you
Availability out of sync	A room they booked is not available	Walked guests, refunds, a one-star review
Guest context stranded	Being asked the same question twice	A stay that feels transactional
Manual re-keying	Slow check-in, slow checkout	Hundreds of staff hours a year
Reporting split by channel	Nothing — they never see it	Pricing decisions made on partial data
Knowledge held by one person	Service that changes with the shift	Real risk when that person leaves

Try this

How to find these gaps in your own property

Take one real reservation from the last month and trace it end to end. Write down every system it touched and every manual handoff. Most operators find between four and nine on a single booking.

The cost of a fragmented stack

A fragmented technology stack does not fail all at once. It loses small amounts of time, accuracy and revenue every day — minor individually, significant over a year.

322–470

hours lost every year switching between disconnected systems

ACCESS HOSPITALITY

24%

of hotels say their core operational systems are fully integrated

INDUSTRY SURVEY

41%

fewer double bookings when PMS and channel manager are synchronised

INDUSTRY AGGREGATE

88%

of operators cite measurable cost savings from PMS automation

RESEARCH GATE

TODAY

Six tools, six logins



Booking engine



PMS



Channel manager



Payments



Guest messaging



Reporting

Data re-keyed by hand between each one

WITH roommaster

One platform, one record



Booking engine



PMS



Channel manager



Payments



Guest messaging



Reporting

Entered once, shared everywhere

Brought to you by



SCORECARD

Your guest journey scorecard

Score each moment from 1 to 5, based on what a guest experiences rather than what the system is capable of. 1 means it is not happening. 5 means you would be comfortable if a competitor watched.

- 01

Can guests find you?

We appear on maps and metasearch with accurate live rates, and our newest review is recent.

1

2

3

4

5
- 02

Can guests book you easily?

Our rate matches everywhere, the total is visible early, and the flow works on a phone.

1

2

3

4

5
- 03

Can guests reach you when they need you?

Every call and message gets an answer, including after hours and during peak.

1

2

3

4

5
- 04

Does every stay feel personal?

A guest never has to repeat something they already told us at booking.

1

2

3

4

5
- 05

Are you creating revenue beyond the room?

Extras are offered at the right moment, and we know our attach rate.

1

2

3

4

5
- 06

What happens after checkout?

Folio routing was set at booking, and we ask every departing guest for a review.

1

2

3

4

5
- 07

Is your hotel connected?

A guest's information reaches every department without anyone re-keying it.

1

2

3

4

5

Your total

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Reading your score

30–35

Your journey is coherent. Focus on the two lowest moments, not the total.

22–29

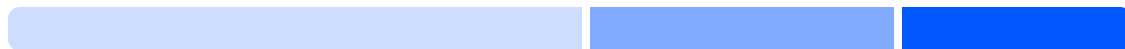
Typical for an independent property. There is real money in the gaps.

Under 22

The issue is almost certainly structural rather than effort. Start at the lowest score and work up.

Your total score

 / 35



7–21 · structural

22–29 · typical

30–35 · coherent

Your two lowest moments

1. _____

2. _____

NEXT STEPS

Where to start, **in order**

Not every fix is worth the same. This is the order in which most independent properties get the best return, based on effort against revenue recovered.

1

Can guests find you? Fix rate accuracy on Google and metasearch first. Wrong rates undo all other marketing.

Days

2

Can guests book you easily? Show the total price early and count your steps to confirmation. Remove one.

Days

3

Can guests reach you? Measure unanswered calls by hour. Then decide: staffing or coverage problem?

A week

4

What happens after checkout? Move folio routing to booking, and automate the review request.

A week

5

Does every stay feel personal? Get booking-time information onto the arrivals screen.

Weeks

6

Revenue beyond the room? Move offers to the pre-arrival window and track attach rate.

Weeks

7

Is your hotel connected? The structural one. Tackle it once the process fixes have hit their ceiling.

A project



"Items 1 to 5 are mostly process changes you can make with the systems you already have. Items 6 and 7 usually stall, because they depend on information moving between systems that were never designed to talk to each other. That is the point where most properties start looking at their platform rather than their process."

One caveat, stated plainly



FOR REFERENCE

How roommaster maps to the seven moments

Since we build for these seven moments, here is where each part of the platform sits — so you can judge it against the gaps you scored, rather than a feature list.

Moment	Challenge	roommaster solution
Find me	Weak online visibility, rates that disagree between channels	roommaster Hotel Website Builder + Hotel Metasearch , with roommaster Channel Manager keeping availability consistent across OTAs and the GDS
Book me	Booking friction and OTA reliance	roommaster Booking Engine — live PMS inventory, total shown up front, mobile-first checkout, on-hold reservations
Reach me	Slow or missed responses	roommaster AI Guest Management for written channels, roommaster Concierge for voice
Stay with me	A stay that feels transactional	Guest history on the reservation, plus roommaster Hotel Guest App for mobile check-in and digital keys

Brought to you by



Moment	Challenge	roommaster solution
Spend more	Missed ancillary revenue	Offers at booking, pre-arrival and in-stay, with revenue on one folio and in one report
Remember me	A wrong bill, then no repeat business	Folio routing at booking via roommaster Payments ; automated post-stay messaging and review requests
Connect it all	Information stranded between systems	One platform rather than seven integrated ones — no boundaries for information to fall through

The reason it is one platform

Every challenge in this playbook occurs at a boundary — between the booking engine and the PMS, the PMS and billing, the front desk and housekeeping. When those boundaries disappear, so do most of the problems.



Flamingo Motel runs its booking engine, channel manager and metasearch on one roommaster platform — and says repeat guests notice how much easier booking has become.

Brought to you by





Brought to you by



One journey, one system

Guests do not experience your property as a set of departments. They experience it as one continuous impression, formed across seven moments — most of which happen when nobody is watching.

They notice when the rate is wrong, when nobody picks up, when they explain their late arrival for the third time. And they rarely tell you — they simply book somewhere else next year.

The scorecard on page 30 gives you an answer without waiting for a guest to volunteer one. Start with your lowest score. Fix the process first. Look at the platform only when the process fix runs into a boundary between two systems.

Own the whole journey.

Bring your scorecard to a demo — we'll walk through the two moments you scored lowest.

BOOK A DEMO