



Guest Service

Six Tools for Measuring Service Performance

By Jesse Boles, Executive Director of Operations, FreemanGroup, January 2012

With so many measurement tools on the market, it can be difficult to determine which ones are the right solutions for your hotel or property. How do you know which ones you need? How can you combine them in order to get a well-rounded view of the guest experience you're delivering?

In my experience, there are six measurement tools that, when implemented properly, can generate a truly 360-degree view of performance. Below is some information that will help you navigate through your best measurement options and come up with the measurement plan that best suits your organization.

1. Guest Comment Surveys

Guest comment surveys are the most common, and probably most important, measurement tools that a hotelier can employ. The three big picture questions that all guest comment surveys should ask are:

- As a paying guest, do you feel you got a good value for your money?
- How satisfied were you with your experience at our hotel?
- What is the likelihood you will return to our hotel and recommend it to others?

Most everything you ask beyond these three questions should be designed to determine what is driving the responses to these three questions. Your aim is find out what will make the guest perceive greater value. As you develop your survey questions, try to remain focused on what the guests want rather than on the service elements that you, as a manager, would like to see measured. Not all of the service elements that you would like to see measured are going to be in line with what's important to your guests. All guest comment survey questions should focus on the things most likely to influence whether or not a guest will return and recommend.

2. Intercept Guest Comment Surveys

Traditional guest comment surveys are delivered via e-mail after the guest has left the property. Intercept guest comment surveys allow you to obtain responses from your guests before they leave your property. A representative may approach guests during the middle of their stay, during checkout, or in the lobby after checkout, and ask them to fill out a survey on site.

The biggest benefit of employing intercept surveys is the ability to capture guests' experiences while the experiences are still fresh. Intercept surveys also allow management to take corrective action immediately and address guest complaints that



otherwise might have gone unaddressed and/or been made public via travel review and social media networking sites.

Intercept surveys are typically more costly to implement than traditional guest comment surveys. Not every hotel needs to implement intercept surveys, but if you determine that they will be of particular value to your property, incorporating them into your current guest comment program should be relatively easy.

3. Quality Assurance Inspections

In general, quality assurance (QA) inspections are used to measure the physical assets of your property or properties and the presence of specific brand elements. QA inspectors answer questions like: Are the right mattresses in place? Does the property store the right brand of oatmeal in the kitchen? Is the right signage posted properly?

QA inspections are critical because they determine whether or not the bones of your property are intact. Do you have the right number of towels in the exercise room? Are the towels the right brand? Do you have the right number of treadmills on the floor? Are they located in the right area? QA inspections tell you whether or not you have the required items in place and whether those items are good.

What QA inspections can't tell you with accuracy are things such as whether the towels being provided are in ample supply each day, whether the treadmills are being properly maintained, and, most importantly, whether these types of brand elements are being provided by a staff that treats the guest with genuine hospitality. This type of information can only be obtained through mystery shopping.

4. Mystery Shopping

Mystery shopping measures the quality of the delivery of your brand elements. Objective third-party analysts measure what happens when employees think that nobody is watching. Is breakfast being served throughout the right hours? Is the front desk agent using the guest's name during check-in? Are staff members on your property promoting your frequent stay program according to standard?

Bad mystery shopping programs focus on too many things and/or don't reflect clear priorities. Avoid standard checklists and one-size-fits-all programs that aren't customized to suit your particular property or brand. Often, an ineffective mystery shop answers questions that are too general to be useful. Avoid questions like: Was the concierge friendly? Was front desk check-in completed in a professional manner? Was the hotel room in good condition?

A good mystery shopping program is based on guest feedback that measures the quality of the delivery of your established standards. If your guest comment survey scores show low guest satisfaction when it comes to a location's food and beverage service,



you can design mystery shops that will help you determine whether the items being served are fresh, whether breakfast is being served during posted hours, whether the attendant is greeting guests appropriately, and other important details pertaining to food and beverage service delivery. Mystery shops are great tools for uncovering the reasons behind low guest comment survey scores.

Sometimes, mystery shops are ineffective because they try and answer questions better left to QA inspectors. Mystery shops should focus on the things that matter most to the guest from the perspective of the guest. QA inspections should focus on the fundamentals of your property. If you keep these two maxims in mind, you can avoid the headaches that come from implementing a convolution of the two solutions.

Mystery shops reveal very different things than QA inspections, but they tend to support QA inspection results. You will know that your mystery shopping program is working when it enables you to successfully drive employees to improve in the areas that your guests have indicated need improvement.

5. Travel & Social Networking Site Monitoring

When I see unresolved guest issues or guest complaints that have not been addressed on a site like TripAdvisor, my spine twitches. Modern technology has made it so easy to monitor travel and social networking sites that there is simply no good reason for a hotel not to attend to the online reviews and guest complaints that appear on the Web.

That said, there are certain challenges when it comes to travel site and social media monitoring. Turning guest comments made on public websites into valuable, measurable data can be labor intensive. Accurate reports that enable executives to make high-level decisions can be difficult to produce consistently. In addition, benchmarking data gathered from multiple sites against competitor data gathered from multiple sites can be a challenge.

For the majority of hoteliers, partnering with a third party that has a travel review site and social media networking monitoring and reporting system in place is going to be the most practical way to manage their online reputation. Reputable third-party partners that specialize in customer service technology solutions for the hospitality industry should have in place a customizable dashboard that allows management to develop consistent metrics and set and reach attainable, data-driven goals.

No matter how challenging it may be to turn travel and social media site reviews and complaints into actionable data, there is no excuse for hotels not to respond to the online reviews made on any of the major travel and social networking sites. Having a Web-based dashboard and online reporting system in place can make it relatively easy for a designated online response representative to respond to guest reviews and complaints and manage your online reputation.



6. Employee Opinion Surveys

The last measurement tool on my list shouldn't necessarily be the last on your list. Employee opinion surveys are typically wildly underrated measurement tools, and yet they can be extremely valuable components in a guest service strategy.

Employee opinion surveys enable you to keep a pulse on the attitudes and values of your staff, and uncover the things that are keeping your employees from providing service that is up to standard. When you know what is troubling employees, you can create training, coaching, and reinforcement solutions and initiatives that dissolve those troubles, reinforce the standards, and generate happier employees and guests.

For most hotel managers, it is not practical to implement all of these measurement tools at once. Implement them all at once, and you run the risk of overwhelming your team with data that they don't yet know how to use. Start by implementing guest comment surveys to find out what your guests really want. Then, charge your team with determining what actions will improve the guest experience and implement the best solutions. Next, layer on mystery shops and QA inspections to measure how well the solutions are being delivered. The process of reviewing guest feedback, finding opportunities for improvement, and designing, implementing, and measuring solutions will quickly become second nature. When it does, add social networking site management and employee opinion surveys to the mix. By starting small, you can create a solid foundation for a measurement program that you will be able to build upon as circumstances, priorities, and budgets permit.

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