# Customer Engagement Has a New Destination: the Digital Hotel

Branded social communities can be re-imagined as rooms hosting private meetings, public seminars, and places to socialize

WITH disintermediation on the rise, and with more and more customers demanding digital access to companies, there is no better way to welcome your end customers than to invite them to your "digital hotel." This concept is made possible by the social media community software available in today's market, a powerful tool that allows you to easily segment content by any number of criteria. These segmented communities, then, can be re-imagined as digital hotels that feature any number of designs but generally consist of three key meeting places: private digital meeting rooms located on the "upper floors"; public meeting rooms for presentations and seminars; and a lounge/bar area located on the "ground floor".

Private Digital Meeting Rooms: Since private digital rooms are virtual, built using social media community tools, there's no limit to the number of them that can be created. In one situation, Company A created 1,400 private rooms, one for each customer. Customers use their private room to meet with Company A's sales engineers and field service personnel to discuss ongoing business issues. When needed, Company A brings in specialists to join the digital conversation, like distributors or subject matter experts (SMEs) from its company or the industry. These rooms are also where the annual operational plan for each customer gets created with a sales engineer. The annual operational plan forms for each customer are available in the customer's digital room and are prefilled with relevant data. The sales engineer and customer fill out the current year's goals, metrics, and action items, notifying all group members when a change is made until the plan is finalized. Past year's plans and other critical documents are also stored in the room where everyone can access them.

These private rooms also host ongoing group conversations in which product or service questions can be answered, order statuses reported, and suggestions made and discussed; ongoing histories of these discussions can be stored. In all these digital rooms, conversations are private and encrypted so that what gets done there stays there.

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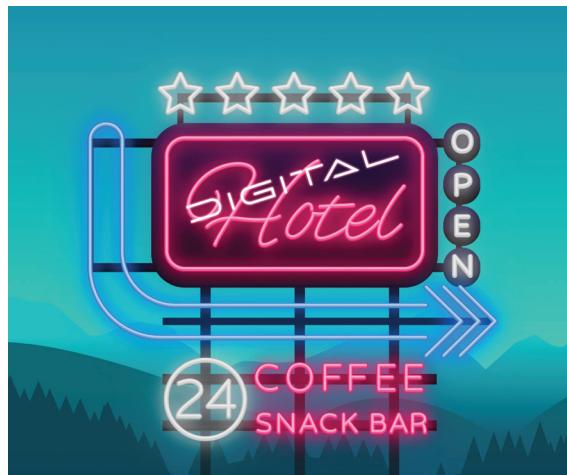
Public Meeting Rooms: These are areas where companies can showcase their thought leadership by sharing presentations, webinars, training materials, and other types of intellectual property. These rooms may be open to everyone or just to a subset based on industry, interests, role, etc. Company B uses public meeting rooms that are open only to distributors and employees to hold peer-to-peer discussions around how to address a challenging sales opportunity or share best practices on a particular sales process. Members have a chance to ask questions, share their knowledge, and gain valuable tips for improving their business.

Lounge/Bar Area: When discussion has finished in the private rooms, and assuming the customers, distributors, SMEs, and/or sales reps have the time, they take the "digital elevator" down to the ground floor where they join others who simply want to grab a drink and exchange ideas with their colleagues. Customers can join a digital forum, take a digital quiz or poll, ask questions to their peers, share success stories, participate in community activities to earn points that allow them to earn merchandise, and more. It is typically in the lounge/bar area that customer loyalty and advocacy get built. We all like to have a drink with friends, and so by hosting meaningful discussion or just providing a place for customers to goof off, companies sponsoring the digital hotel can use the lounge to enhance the visitor experience.

Does this scenario sound far-fetched? In fact, it is not only real but is happening with many companies today. These companies realize that while traditional media is important—e.g., face-to-face sales calls or telephone calls—increasingly many of their customers and distributors have grown up in a digital world and have come to expect an outstanding digital experience from their suppliers. While customers and buyers chat with one another in their private digital meeting room or in the lounge/bar area, the company sponsoring the digital hotel respectfully listens to what these customers and distributors are saying, thereby enabling the company to serve up an even better customer experience, or better products and services.

What else can a digital hotel do for your company? Here are some of the impacts:

- Leads get nurtured more quickly (See "5 Reasons why Branded Communities Are Your Best Lead Nurturing Platform" in *CRM*'s September 2018 issue or at https://www.destinationcrm.com.).
- Customers' satisfaction rating, as tracked by metrics such as the Net Promoter Score, increase.
- Customers become advocates for your company's products and services.

- Distributors sell more product and provide better service.
- Your company learns by listening carefully to what your customers are saying to you and to their peers, and this social insight is then stored in the customer profile section of your CRM system.
- Most importantly, new sales result from customer participation in the private digital rooms as well as in the public lounge/bar area.

We have measured the impact of social media communities on new sales and the results show a consistent growth in revenue.

If you wish to stay alive in today's digital deluge, where customers and buyers increasingly demand digital access, now is the time to put on your construction hat, grab a shovel, and begin to build your digital hotel. ℝ𝕄

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