Independent HotelRescue
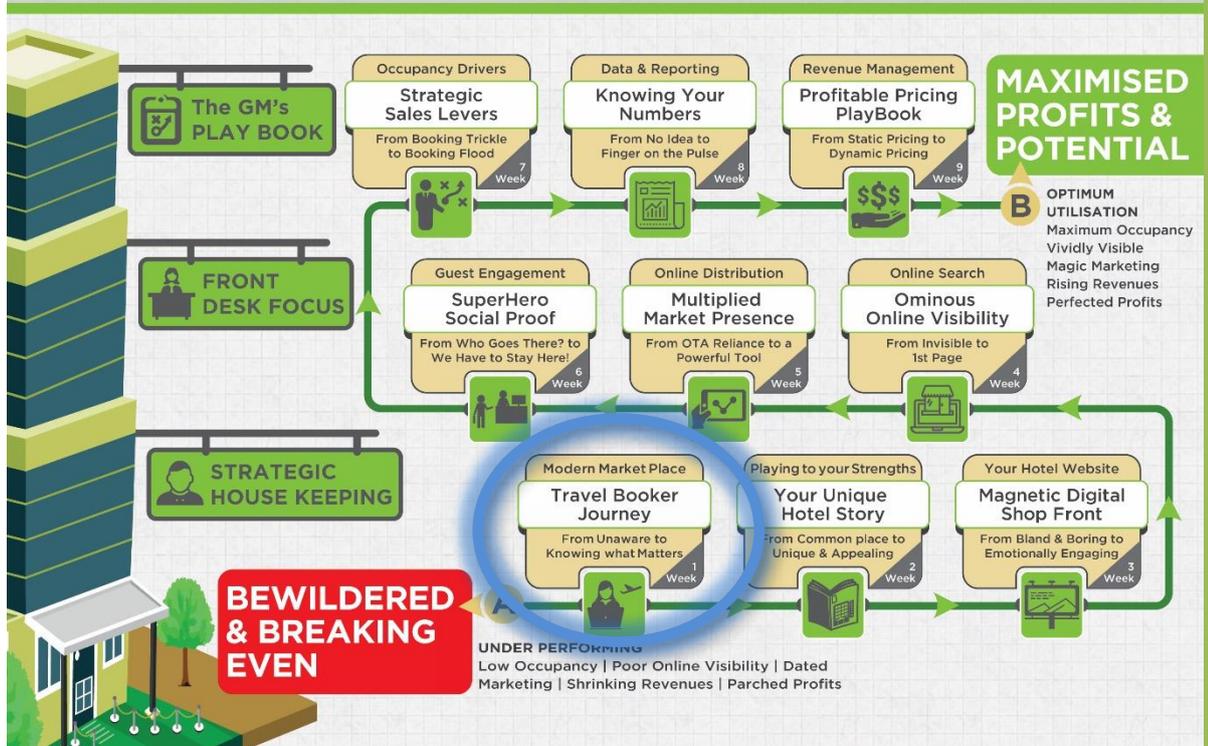## A Clear Strategy for Hotel Growth

63 Day
80%+ Occupancy
ROADMAP

The 63 Day 80%+ Occupancy ROADMAP

A proven step by step system for Independent Hoteliers to increase their profit by up to 50% in 63 days without increasing stress or work load

Independent HotelRescue
A Clear Strategy for Hotel Growth

The GM's PLAY BOOK

Occupancy Drivers	Data & Reporting	Revenue Management
Strategic Sales Levers	**Knowing Your Numbers**	**Profitable Pricing PlayBook**
From Booking Trickle to Booking Flood — Week 7	From No Idea to Finger on the Pulse — Week 8	From Static Pricing to Dynamic Pricing — Week 9

MAXIMISED PROFITS & POTENTIAL

B OPTIMUM UTILISATION
Maximum Occupancy
Vividly Visible
Magic Marketing
Rising Revenues
Perfected Profits

FRONT DESK FOCUS

Guest Engagement	Online Distribution	Online Search
SuperHero Social Proof	**Multiplied Market Presence**	**Ominous Online Visibility**
From Who Goes There? to We Have to Stay Here! — Week 6	From OTA Reliance to a Powerful Tool — Week 5	From Invisible to 1st Page — Week 4

STRATEGIC HOUSE KEEPING

Modern Market Place	Playing to your Strengths	Your Hotel Website
Travel Booker Journey	**Your Unique Hotel Story**	**Magnetic Digital Shop Front**
From Unaware to Knowing what Matters — Week 1	From Common place to Unique & Appealing — Week 2	From Bland & Boring to Emotionally Engaging — Week 3

BEWILDERED & BREAKING EVEN

UNDER PERFORMING
Low Occupancy | Poor Online Visibility | Dated Marketing | Shrinking Revenues | Parched Profits

Module 1

The New Travel Booker Journey

Michael Harper & Andreas Palmqvist

Hotel Rescue 2017

Module 1 – The Game Has Changed

The New Travel Booker Journey

From being unaware to knowing what matters

Section 1.

The Game Has Changed

Welcome to Hotel Rescue's 80%+ Occupancy Road Map. By know you would have heard us say many times that in the accommodation industry 'The game has changed', and by the end of this course you will no doubt be sick of hearing those words. However, if you've spent any significant amount of time in the hotel industry, you would have had to be living under a rock, to not notice that old habits are dying hard!

What used to work 5 or 10 years ago, no longer does. As we see it, there have been four significant shifts;

1. First was the shift to the internet where slowly but surely, rooms were able to be not only promoted, but booked online, with real time availability. From hotel websites to third party operators, the race to online bookings began. This was the early days of travel agents moving to online platforms such as Wotif.com, in what we now commonly call OTA's (Online Travel Agents). We call this the **Search Shift**, where no longer do people rely on paper-based accommodation directories, followed up by numerous phone calls to various properties, checking current rates and availability before eventually, making a booking decision. Rarely do guests just 'walk-in' to see if you have any rooms left. The first port of call for 85% for all travel bookings is now conducted online.

2. Next was the shift in hotel technology, where property management software (PMS) became more readily available to the smaller operators, helping them to keep better track of their bookings and their guest information. With this, came new learnings and overwhelm for operators. The promise of streamlined operations, guest experience and performance reporting, while all were largely delivered by new PMS installations, it is what followed that has caused the greatest disruption to Hoteliers. This new found digital database technology, enabled software companies to develop all sorts of wonderful packages to 'help' hoteliers do better. Things like channel managers that automatically update rates and availability to OTA's, website booking engines, instant website templates, review management software, door key systems, chargeable WiFi access systems and the list goes on. The plethora of choices available to hoteliers is now overwhelming and we call this the **Technology Shift.**
While the technology is exciting, they all take significant configuration and set up, on-going monitoring and optimization, all of which takes time and effort and technical nous, which places pressure on already busy hotel operators

3. More recently it was what we call the **Mobile Shift.** Basically take everything we mentioned in the last two shifts, speed up its development to a rate of knots, and then place the end product in the hands of the consumer with ready access anywhere, any time on multiple devices. Travel bookers will search as many as 22-38 different web sites and third party platforms, moving across multiple devices from mobile to tablet to desktop and back to mobile, before feeling ready to make a booking decision. Your hotels ability to be in front of your guest at the right time when they are ready to make a booking decision, and ensure all your digital platforms have the ability to influence and even convince the booker, that your property is the right choice for them, is a multi-faceted and technical feat to have everything aligned.

4. Finally, in amongst all the technology, configuration, optimization and monitoring, when it comes to managing the reputation of your property, the power has shifted to the people. The guest now has the ultimate ability to 'publicly crucify' (or praise) a property based upon their experience with the use of online reviews. Potential future bookers at your property read these reviews and hold them in high regard when making a booking decision. Online reviews on sites such as TripAdvisor and Google heavily influence bookers arguably to the point where cumulative review scores and their comments are relied upon more heavily than official star rating systems that have been around for years. We call this, the **Social Shift,** where the power of influence lies squarely with the guest when it comes to assessing accommodation quality and experience.

Our position is that all this change is actually fantastic, we love it and it is an exciting time with almost endless possibilities of how to setup, market, price, promote and optimize your accommodation business. The down side is there are, endless possibilities, which leads to confusion and overwhelm. What is the right combination of what solutions with what configuration?

In other words, your overall strategy. Or as we like to call it, your **"Hotel Growth Strategy and Action Plan"**. You see the technology is fabulous, but in and of itself it is not the answer. What combination of Strategy, Technology, Distribution Platforms, Reporting & KPI's and Optimization Flows, will work for your Property, your Location, your Guests and your Staff?

Many decisions to make, and that's what we're here to help you with. By the end you can create your own Hotel Growth Strategy, before going out and buying the latest 'shiny object' with the promise of profits and performance. Build the plan, implement the plan, stick to the plan, but be ready to adjust, because this industry doesn't look like it's about to slow down anytime soon.

Section 2

Statistically Swamped – How the Accommodation Industry Has Changed

A statistical view to demonstrate how much the Game has Changed;

SEARCH

- **85% of all Travel Research is now conducted online.**
- **Google represent 71% of all online search queries.**
- **A travel booker will visit as many as 22-38 different websites before feeling prepared to make a booking decision.**
- **52% of visitors on third party (OTA) travel websites will visit your hotel website for more info (Google/Yankton).**

MOBILE

- **In 2014 Booking.com saw their bookings from mobile devices grow by 260% (booking.com).**
- **77% of people don't leave home without their mobile device.**
- **67% of leisure travellers and 78% of business travellers indicate they use a smart phone throughout the 5 stages of travel (see below).**
- **47% of last minute hotel bookings are made from a mobile device.**
- **Of visitors who experienced a non-mobile friendly website on a mobile device, only 23% actually pushed through and continued their research.**
- **A poor mobile website was the number 1 reason for not making a reservation (Google).**

TECHNOLOGY

- **63% of consumers who visit an OTA end up booking directly with the hotel (ehotelier).**
- **87% of hoteliers were highly focused on increasing their direct bookings online in 2017 (Siteminder).**
- **54% of Hoteliers rated the dominance of OTA's as the biggest factor facing the industry in 2017 (Siteminder).**
- **75% of Hoteliers believe that 'Apps' & 'Mobile' are highly likely to dominate the guest booking journey in the future.**

SOCIAL

- **53% of travellers won't book a hotel without reviews (ReviewPro).**
- **78% of consumers trust peer recommendations whereas only 14% trust ads (ReviewPro)**
- **TripAdvisor has over 350 million monthly visitors (hive-marketing).**
- **22% of customers will not buy after reading one negative review. After three, that number jumps to 59.2%.**

Section 3

The Five Stages of Travel

The concept of 'stages of travel' is no longer a new one. It was conceptualized quite well by Google back in 2011. Then in 2016, Siteminder (a prominent cloud based distribution platform in Australia) used this research in a further explanation of the concept in their article "The 5 Stages: of Travel: How to Maximise Your Hotel's Marketing Impact".

There are numerous variations on this 'stages of travel' concept, and we encourage you to discover which one best suits your property and your ideal guest. Some are better positioned for luxury escape destinations while others more to the corporate and transient markets.
The main point is that you acknowledge that there are in fact, distinct stages that consumers go through before, during and after a travel event, and that **by understanding these stages it gives you a better understanding of how to reach and influence consumers'** research and purchasing decisions as well as how they spread the news about their experience.

The Siteminder article provides a good, succinct overview of "The 5 Stages of Travel" and so we have included it below for your reading, and we also encourage you to explore other models that may suit you better;

"The 5 Stages: of Travel: How to Maximise Your Hotel's Marketing Impact"

Stage 1: Dreaming
Every holiday starts with a dream. An advert on TV; a cooking show featuring the latest celebrity chef; or a movie location may be the spark of inspiration. Or perhaps their itchy feet are telling them the world is calling.
Either way, dreaming of that escape has begun and it won't take long until they are planning the trip.
Online marketers can reach the dreamer through social media by encouraging their followers to share their travel stories and interact with their online community.
It's important to be in front of potential guests when they are dreaming of a holiday which in turn will encourage them to start planning.

Stage 2: Planning
The customer is now in the planning stage where, the statistics tell us, they'll be visiting around 20 different websites in order to find the 'perfect' hotel.
According to Google 66% of people spend time shopping around before booking travel. So how do you get your website to stand out from the rest?
Search Engine Optimisation is important to ensure your website rates higher than your competitors. Also take a look at your local listings and optimise them on Google maps to make it easier for the customer to find you.

Stage 3: Booking
The jet-setter has now completed the first two stages of dreaming and planning and is ready to book their dream holiday – hopefully with you!
In the booking stage it's vital your website is easy to navigate and your brand keywords are strong for when people are searching your hotel name.
Every hotel must be discoverable especially within online channels. Consider using 3rd party platforms, such as Siteminder products, (eg The Channel Manager and TheBookingButton) or STAAH.

Stage 4: Experiencing
The customer has chosen your hotel and while online marketing is important, the outcome of the experience stage is largely reliant on the staff at the hotel and the experience the traveller has while staying with you.
This is all about customer service and ensuring the person leaves with a smile on their face.
A great customer experience is critical for lots of reasons but also because happy customers will share their experience online with their network.

Stage 5: Sharing
Most people book accommodation on recommendations from friends and family.
So whether your customer posts a photo of the incredible views from their hotel balcony or takes the time to write a five star review of the hotel service, sharing the moments they had will encourage other travellers who are at the dreaming stage to book with you.
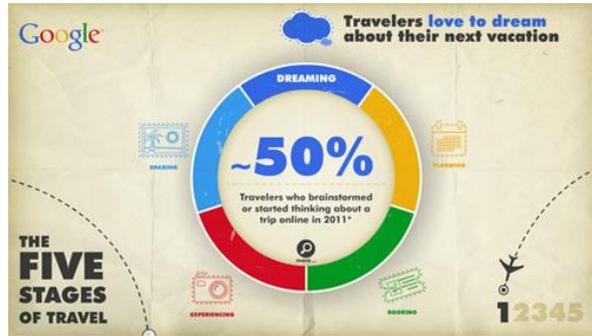
By targeting your customer at each one of the five stages of travel not only will you ensure you're brand is with them along their journey, you'll also stand out from your competitors by enabling your customers to share their experience with their extended peer network.

The Five Stages of Travel Infographic – Google 2011
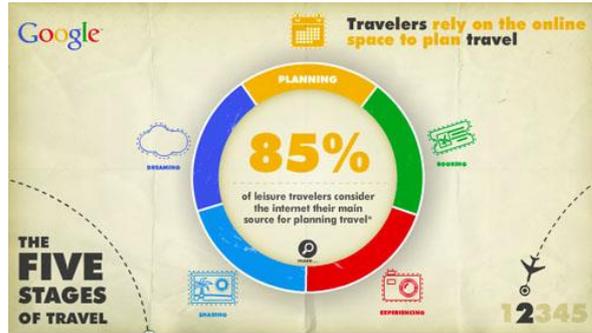

DREAMING

PLANNING

BOOKING
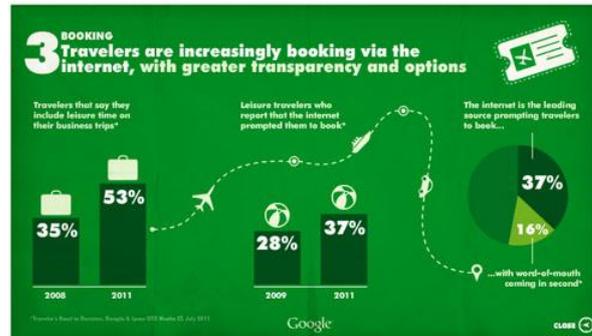
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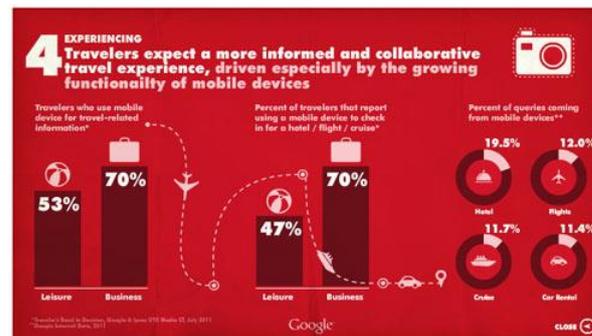
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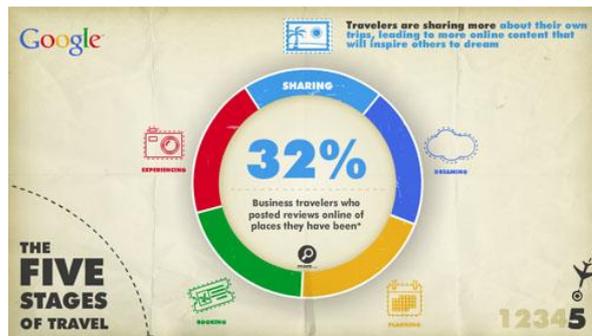
SECTION 4

Tips and Tricks related to the 5 Stages of Travel

Following the description of the five stages, we will list below, by stage, some tips and tricks you as a hotelier can implement to take full advantage of the "Travel Booker Journey".

Tips for DREAMING:

- Leverage yourself by teaming up with your local **regional tourism body** or chamber of commerce.
- Reach out to past guests with a well-timed **email marketing** campaign.
- Encourage (or even incentivize) past guests to share their experiences on **social media.**
- Endeavour to **start a blog** and write content on your website that promotes all the local features and attractions. This is good SEO (search engine optimization) practice and will hold you in good stead as people search your area.

Tips for PLANNING

It is critical your property is presented in the best light possible on multiple mediums in this phase. Planning or research takes multiple visits to multiple sites via numerous searches. If you are not well distributed and presented, well you won't capture the imagination or needs of the potential client.

- Ensure you have a well-presented and **mobile optimised hotel website.**
- The booker can **easily discover** your facilities, room types, rates and availability via your web site.
- List and optimise your presence on the two main OTA platforms **Booking.com** and **Expedia**. Ensure a high ranking on searches by getting your content ranking score as close to 100% as possible.
- Manage your **online reputation** by regularly checking and responding to online reviews.
- For further assistance in managing your online listings/rankings please refer to modules 4 & 5.

Tips for BOOKING

Once the client has decided on where to stay and when they want to stay they will of course book. At least they will try. The booking process must be easy, quick and fast! Needing too much information, can be a burden and cause cart or booking abandonment. Think carefully about what you need and why you need it?

Too much and you can turn a client off booking with you, too little can leave you exposed to fraud and unreliable reservations. More information can always be captured later on in the client's journey with your hotel.

- Make your website **easy to navigate and use** with as few clicks as possible to make a booking.
- Include a **book now button** or **reservation widget** on every page and make sure it is always visible.
- **Reduce website noise** and bells & whistles. You are only putting roadblocks in their path to book.
- **Own your brand** with good SEO or PPC advertising for your property name. Others may try to ambush your brand in a hope to capture your guest when they remember you and try to return to your website.

Something to remember in a digital age, communication is rarely by post and if a credit card is required the transaction should be secure and via an appropriate portal. Minimum requirements may be dictated by your merchant facility and require some additional support by your own marketing requirements.

Tips for ANTICIPATIING

** Here we introduce 1 additional stage not mentioned in the Site Minder Article

Stage 3.1 Anticipating

This is when it gets really fun to communicate with "Your Client". You want them knowing: what and who to expect and know who you are. A short simple welcome video can go a long way to creating anticipation and making sure they know what to expect e.g. tonight's specials or events going on in the area can embed a positive experience. Remember they are coming to you for a reason, which can be as simple as a bed for the night or for a special getaway.

On any occasion they will want to know some of the basics to help improve their stay with you through reduced stress. Make sure they know how to find you easily, be able to contact you with ease via whatever channels you have available for example:

- Text – SMS is becoming increasingly popular as a means of communication with higher than average engagement and response rates.
- Phone – always answered or at least have the opportunity to leave a message that will be responded to in an efficient manner.
- Mobile Apps – eg Whatsapp, Instant Messenger.
- Facebook – within post engagement or even direct messaging.
- Email – Just remember in this age where people are trying to separate work and life, they may not be on their e-mail in the lead up to a stay with you.

Tips for EXPERIENCING

- Ensure your product is what you say it is. A bad product will always cop criticism and don't try and be someone you're not. Keep your marketing **real and authentic** to the product you are.
- Hotel basics here, but it's time to deliver and provide the guest with the **service they deserve**.
- Make sure it is **easy for a guests to communicate with you** via their chosen means, setting up a 24/7 mobile number they can call and text to and an email address they can use. All of these must be monitored all the time, if they are not, the client needs to know this as soon as they try to reach out. An auto response would be the best way to do this with anticipated turnaround times and one you know you can beat. Being accessible stems off any 'bad' online news, and helps promote positive.

Tips for SHARING

- Obvious one, however, remember to **promote your online channels** for tagging, sharing check-ins and reviews.
- In this day of feedback in public forums make sure you beat them to the punch! **Always ask for feedback** all the way through the stay. The only thing we can assure you of is that not everything will always be perfect, but you can improve how poor experiences are turned around by getting to them in a fast, efficient and simple way.
- **Incentivise creative user generated content** on social media to extend your reach.
- Be sure you are capturing appropriate **email/mobile/social contact details** for future communications.
- **Always respond to guest reviews.**
- Please refer to Module 6 for further support in responding to guest reviews.

Section 5

Changes in Guest Expectations

In one word, <u>choice</u> – the variety and ability to choose between available accommodation products is so much more advanced. The days of only choosing a Motel or Hotel on their main traffic rout has shifted. AirBnB home stays, farm stays and boutique property availability has significantly impacted on the traditional operator. The average consumer's awareness of available products and prices for those products is at their fingertips. To summarise, it really means bookers are looking for more product for less money (aren't we all?).

So, what are some of the key changes in Guest Expectations:

Design

Shows such as "The Block" and "Selling Homes Australia" have increased consumer awareness around design. This education supported by good quality products moving on to the market in the boutique fields supported by travel blogs, review sites and travel writers, has placed increased pressure on products to ensure they provide the most up-to-date and potentially non-traditional products.

Likewise, this heightened expectation of design has over-flowed into the lounge rooms of everyday people. Where once the majestic and luxurious feeling evoked from a beautiful Hotel lobby or guest room, can now be easily attained at home. Which leaves owners of accommodation business needing to try and provide an even better design, look and feel to wow their guests, otherwise guests simply won't be willing to pay the same money for what they can now achieve at home. In short, we have to work so much harder to create the 'wow' factor.

Technology

Access to a screen, good quality Wi-Fi and convenient power outlets has become as critical as a hot shower and comfortable bed. There are huge a number of blogs, travel articles and research papers showing support for this area. Having **no** Wi-Fi will, in the short term, kill the volume of consumer traffic through your property. Second to no Wi-Fi is **bad** Wi-Fi. In this day and age, it should not be difficult to develop and install good quality infrastructure to support this. The only way to get around having Wi-Fi is to develop a product supporting a low tech boutique product; however, some caution and specialty marketing support should be sought out if you go down this path. This area also continues to evolve and will require consistent enhancements to keep pace with guest demands if you want to again maintain pricing.

Food and Beverage

The average consumer's expectations in relation to the quality, value and availability of a good F&B offering, has never been higher. The need to experience local produce and hear a story behind the dish is becoming a foundation piece for the average operator.

More for less

Pricing visibility and product expectations pressure is increasing every day. As the competitive landscape increases, there is an expectation that pricing will shift on a daily basis and everybody wants a deal. Watch the below interview with respected industry leader, Tish Nyar, on how he has seen dramatic changes in guest expectations. https://youtu.be/TOcbaLRMuJY

Section 6

So, What's Really Important Now?

In an industry where leaders say 'everything' is important, and that you can't afford to drop the ball on any area of your sales, marketing, service delivery or management, it is unrealistic for independent hoteliers to try and keep all plates spinning all of the time.

We could write a mile-long list, but we feel it is of much higher value to actually develop a much shorter **list of key priority areas** and ensure adequate operational and management **focus is placed upon them**.

The 'focus' that we are talking about here, should look like one of two things:
1. **A Specific Mini Project**
   a. The set up or installation of a new concept, idea or improvement.
   b. An example could be configuring some new software or technology.
   c. Another example is establishing a new work process with staff members.
2. **An Ongoing Program or Agenda**
   a. The ongoing monitoring of a situation with continual adjustment, optimization and enhancement.
   b. An example could be daily yield meeting monitoring holdings, pickup and pricing.
   c. Another example is establishing a habit for monitoring and responding to reviews.

PROJECTS vs PROGRAMS

Based upon what we are seeing, we suggest you should always have either Projects or Ongoing Programs focused on the below top 4 priorities:

1. Online Visibility & Book-ability.
2. Dynamic Pricing & Demand Measuring.
3. Guest Experience & Engagement.
4. Performance Monitoring & Growth.

By always having a program or a project focused in these areas (and having action and energy put into them), you will ensure that your property is always improving, growing and evolving. In this rapidly changing environment, that is so critical to your future successes.

If you take note of the above, we believe you will be well on your way to becoming a local market leader within your community and most importantly adding value to your business.

See FRAMEWORK – Project & Programs Audit

Section 7.

FRAMEWORKS

Explore the frameworks for Module # 1

Logon to the Hotel Growth Gurus Portal and download the available FRAMEWORK files.

Module #1 Frameworks

#	Name	Type
1	HOTEL SPEAK	Resource
2	The 4 SHIFTS	Concept
3	STATISTICALLY SWAMPED	Concept
4	5 Stages SCORE CARD	Action
5	PROJECTS & PROGRAMS Audit	Action
6	BASELINE NUMBERS	Action - MILESTONE
7	Baseline CHARTS	Your Historical Patterns

Click on the Hyper Links