

The hotel experience

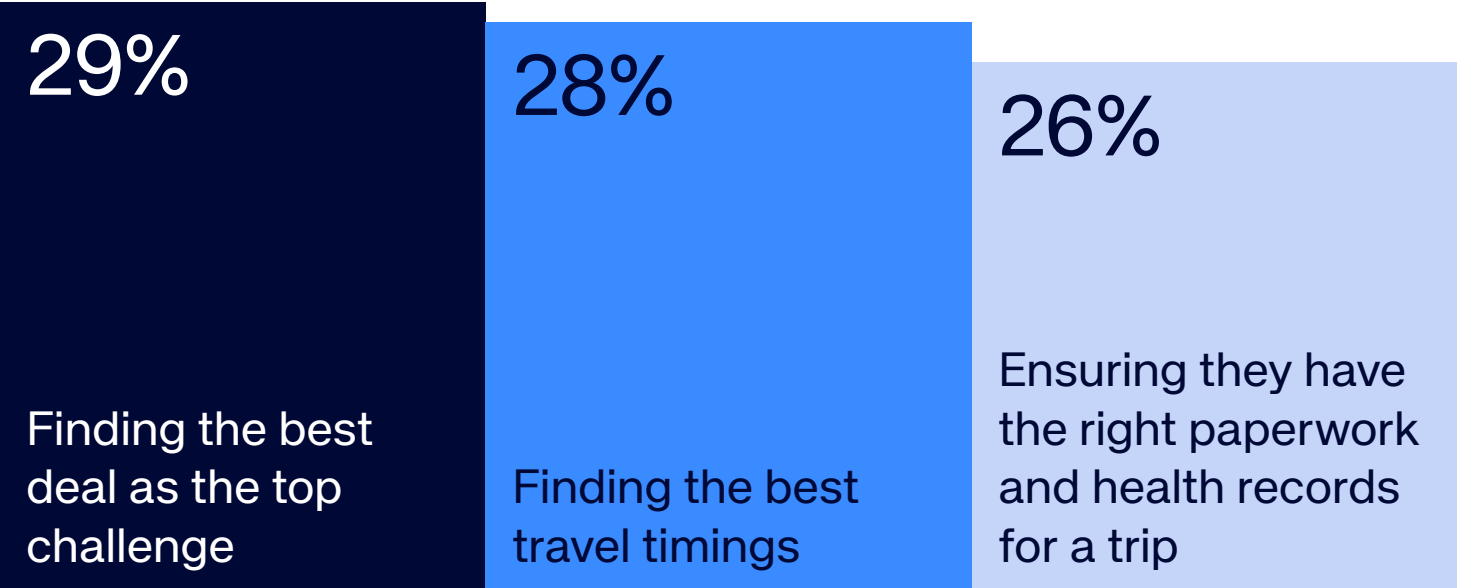
The subjective booking experience

There are (and always have been) a variety of core factors which inform travelers' decisions when it comes to choosing a hotel.

There is the 'hard', fixed factor in terms of location – is it close to amenities, venues and the experiences that are the reasons for travel? Are tourist attractions within easy reach? What are transport links like? And for business travelers, is the meeting or conference venue easily accessible?



Price (and here we’re talking about cost), is also relatively ‘hard’ in terms of it being an objective aspect of a booking. Its importance in the overall travel planning process is reflected in it being the biggest priority to get right for travelers (29% of respondents in research commissioned for this report, cited finding the best deal as the top challenge – above 28% finding the best travel timings and 26% ensuring they have the right paperwork and health records for a trip).



A business traveler may simply want somewhere to put their head down prior to a meeting, whereas a family may need a week’s base without breaking the bank. Every demographic has a different budget for a different purpose.

Finally, there are benefits and add-ons. A spa; swimming pool; on-site gym; restaurant; workspaces; communal areas for meetups, family areas – all are ‘fixed’ in terms of being present or not.

So, while these all inform decisions, they’re not subjective influences, and when we look at the more emotive needs of travelers we must look at the softer side of hospitality. This is where true personalization becomes the secret to success.

Me, me, me

Ultimately, guests want the experience that matches their hopes and aspirations for the stay. This means that, as well as delivering on the practical, hotels must increasingly focus on the emotional needs of guests to stand out.

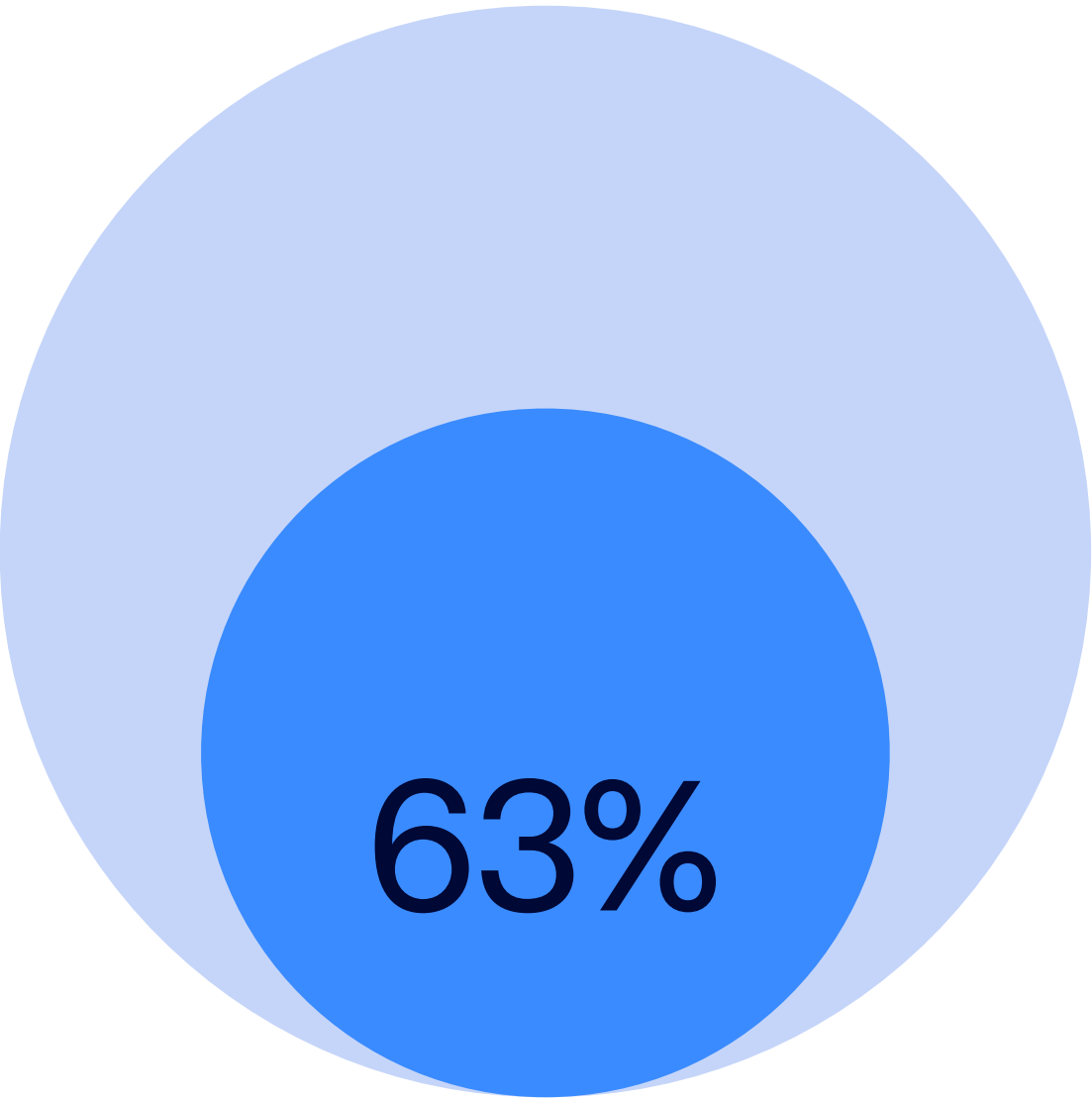
If we look at the current norm, guests can book a certain room type with standardized facilities. Essentially this is down to the size and number of beds – taking aside the suite option – and where possible a choice of view.

It’s relatively formulaic and constricted, and historically, there’s rarely the option to book a room with specific facilities apart from a category (e.g. executive room with a tea and coffee maker). And if hoteliers only allow fixed options, then we’re not looking at all the routes to fulfilling guests’ hopes and delivering an experience.



Personalization through attribute-based selling

When it comes to differentiation (and the brand loyalty it brings), we fundamentally have to look at true personalization. This demands a shift to attribution-based selling experiences, as demonstrated by [recent research from Amadeus](#) which found that 63% of global travelers are willing to pay significant sums for room attributes on top of their standard average daily rates.



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“When you go onto a website, travelers want to be able to say, ‘I want a room with a bath, with a view, that’s near the lift, and has a king bed’ and the booking system will create that offering for you.

“Sometimes it’s the simple things which prove the need best. My husband is over 6 feet tall for example, so there is no way he’s sleeping in a queen-size bed. He just doesn’t fit, his feet hang over at about his knee, but try confirming a king bed during a booking. It’s not happening unless you go to a five-star hotel and even then, they might call it a double, when it’s a queen and not a king.”

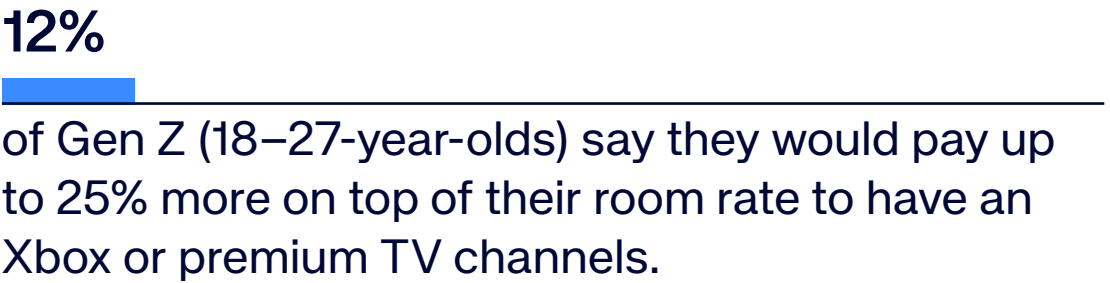
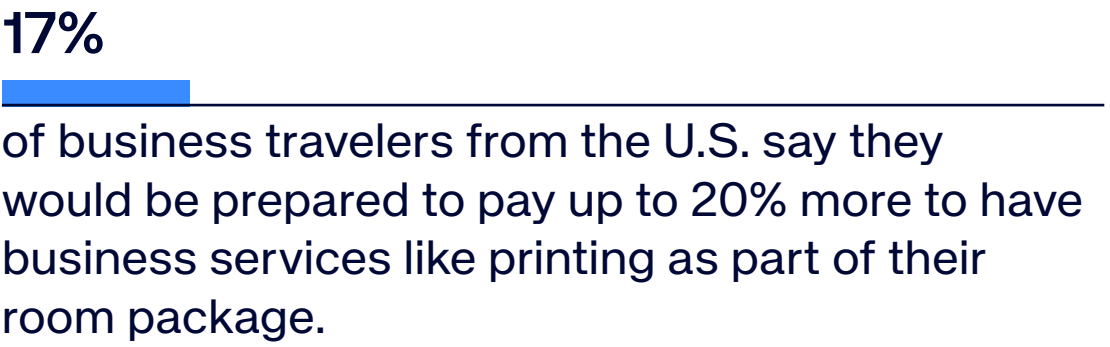
Maria Taylor
Senior Vice President of Marketing, Partnerships & Commercial Operations, Hospitality, Amadeus



Paying for extras

Importantly, personalization can be transitional – simply adding options can be a natural first step to building more accurate data-based personas and guest records.

Hotels need not see the opportunity as binary. The shift from persona-based profiling to a hyper-personalized, attribution-based, and ultimately guest-centric one is big, but a tailored approach can be adopted and rolled-out gradually. The same research demonstrated this clearly:



If we look at the cost of an Xbox, this 25% increase could repay itself within just a few bookings, an incredible return on the investment. (This goes beyond the gamer. If you’re a parent away with your teenager, knowing they can keep themselves busy and not complain about being bored is worth the additional room fee.)

Making the move from PMS to CRS

Critical to the success of attribute-based selling is the shift from a data-siloed PMS system to a more connected solution, which is where the Central Reservation System (CRS) comes to the fore. This acts as a single source of truth, bringing data and insight from a variety of channels to give a single view of the customer and operations alike, and to ensure that the ability to tailor individual stays can become a reality.

Customer-centric PMS technology is in its relative infancy however, although this should simply be an imperative to act sooner rather than later. Better to be an early adopter than customer-chasing laggard, and Amadeus is already working with many PMS companies to pioneer such solutions.

Initial deployments of attribute-based selling are already happening with some [large-scale hotel chains](#) [on board](#) for this [transformative technology](#) [on board](#), and once this widens out it will start to become a [guest differentiator](#) [on board](#). Importantly, this needs to be a consideration for OTAs as well – hospitality brands will take the march through hyper-personalization and potentially own the customer if the approach isn't adopted at a wider scale.

A two-way street

The personalization opportunity in hospitality champions a view on the customer that hasn't previously been possible and yet is one which can underpin longer-term adaptation and evolution to match guest demand.

In knowing – through search and booking data, as well as post-stay insight – the changes that modern guests want from their experience, hotels can start to upsell more offers and services. This becomes a significant customer convenience aspect of any stay – something key to driving loyalty and brand preference.

Data provides this window into expectations but if personalized booking options are limited, then hotels can't know what customers want if they don't see what's actually in demand. Limitations in choice bring limitations in customer insight.

“As attribute-based selling rolls out, hoteliers will start changing their physical offerings based on how many people are selecting which attributes. It's very hard to tell with traditional room type selling what customers actually want, because you don't find out about it. So, it will give the hoteliers a lot more information about what the customers value and what a customer looks for in a resort is very different than what they want in a city hotel.”

Maria Taylor

Senior Vice President of Marketing,
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Explore to expand

In order to keep innovating and differentiating the guest's stay, hotels can explore add-ons and additional services as proof of concepts. This can be done without expensive leaps of faith – taking a beta-test approach to new initiatives can become a major driver of commercial growth.

Under this model, hotels can offer a benefit or bespoke booking preference in a handful of rooms within a property and if the uptake is strong, they can start to roll it out wider without undue risk.

This is how it's possible to see the hospitality industry truly transforming as it builds out the options hotels can offer which, in turn, deliver more insight into specific guest hopes and expectations. If parents book children into onsite kids' clubs (while they enjoy the spa), then bundling these into a package becomes a differentiating benefit.

Imagine your own recent business trip and what you may have asked reception for support with – a taxi booking for example to HQ or a customer's office – or you made the request when you went down to breakfast. Now consider that the next time you book that property, you have a table reserved during your regular breakfast slot and an email from reception ahead of your visit asking when you'd like them to book a cab.

It can also become an upsell in the event of a change to a guest's travel plans. If the destination is aware of a flight delay for their guests, then it can offer these perks free of charge when they arrive or give them a voucher for a dinner or spa trip. The insight gleaned from attribute-based selling means that benefits become more than simply value-add, they become points of differentiation.



Winning the battle for share of wallet

Understanding the guest demands a data-first approach, with attribution-based selling among the first steps in making such personalization a reality. The importance of this can't be overstated – return bookings (and the associated word-of-mouth recommendation) are the lifeblood of any hotel.

The move from objective, functional booking to fulfilling hopes through more subjective, emotive experiences is a big opportunity for the hospitality industry. The details may seem in isolation, relatively minor, but once ladder up to the macro demographic level and individual guest habit, they can become significant sources of growth and loyalty.