

Adapting your offering from 'new' to normal

 By [Guy Stehlik](#)

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There is no question that travellers will return, but to move into the tomorrow of what that means for hotel establishments, our industry needs to work today on convincing people, first and foremost, to leave their homes. We believe that South Africans require very little convincing to travel. But for that to happen we need to reassure them that they will be safe, not only in our own venues but also in the vicinity of where our establishments are located, while they are our guests.



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With the relaxation of lockdown and permission being granted for inter-provincial leisure travel, our industry needs to get the new hygiene, sanitation and social distancing processes right the first time. There is truly no room for error here, particularly considering how long our establishments have had to adapt and introduce these measures.



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Business travellers may have initially been less critical of shortcomings in this regard, but this too shall quickly dissipate. Leisure travellers will be unapologetically critical of non-compliance by hotels and accommodation establishments and will no doubt vote with their feet when they encounter it. As potential guests regain their curiosity and confidence to start travelling again, the industry also needs to ensure it is ready for them from the time they start searching online.

Adjusting operational policies

It is simply no longer enough for hotel websites to still have just their standard booking pages up front. This speaks to a time that simply no longer exists. A message around how the establishment is meeting Covid-19 head on needs to be among the first things potential guests will see. In terms of all the hotels, lodges and resorts we either own or manage and which are spread across a number of African countries, our own policies for both guests and our in-house teams is front and centre of our own online presence.

Loyalty programmes are also key right now, but again tailored realistically to the market as it emerges from shelter and into severe economic constraints. We should see these as opportunities to expand these programmes to a lower or wider entry level to get new clients on board with our brands.

This also means aggressively marketing to local travellers. According to global travel insurance comparison site Squaresmouth, domestic travellers have already increased by [15 percent](#) over the last year, while international booking site Travelocity has noted that most hotel bookings starting to come through are within 160km from where travellers live. Local is lekker!

As this is the market from which guests will first come, establishments must have offerings that appeal equally to local pockets as well as promote things locals will want to do. This will entail extending a hand in partnership, support and just good plain business practice to venues in close proximity to your own and with whom you can craft itineraries and experiences for your guests, whether they are looking for spas, food, landmarks and attractions or even places to exercise or experience nature.

Your front-of-house staff will be centre to this process; ensure they are well informed and well-trained to be able to offer options and advice confidently.

That said, however, people will also seek less crowded venues. Begin by adapting the public spaces in your own venue to accommodate this, and make use of vast areas that may already exist such as lounges, meetings or conference venues to encourage social distancing in terms of dining or even the relocation of exercise facilities.

And let guests see for themselves that you care about their safety. For us, we've extended our motto of "Good people. Good thinking. Good feeling" to embrace every aspect of staff interaction with guests, to assure those guests that our teams are well-trained, have guests' best interests at heart and are a source of confidence to all with whom they interact.

For example, along with the PPE we provide to all staff, our reception teams are instructed, after each and every guest interaction, to wipe down countertops, pens or keypads, telephones and credit card terminals. All personnel handling cash do so wearing disposable gloves. And, wherever possible, we encourage online check in and check out, paperless processes and minimal contact while never losing the courtesy.

Many will recall how people commented on airline travel changing after 9/11, until they didn't comment anymore. It became standard procedure. And similarly, while Covid-19 has had a far more powerful and devastating impact, across the globe, we too will experience the day when there's nothing new anymore about our own normal. Embracing a new way of doing business today will bring tomorrow a lot closer.

ABOUT GUY STEHLIK

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