

## **Different Views of Customer Service | The Airline “Passenger Experience” vs the Hotel “Guest Experience” | By Larry Mundy**

From: Hospitality.net | August 10, 2006 By: Larry Mundy

One thing you can say about hotels, they don't tend to move around very much, even if they have serious foundation problems.

Airplanes, on the other hand, tend to be moving all the time because they cost a gajillion dollars and make no money unless they're going somewhere. I like hotels a lot better, because they rarely crash into mountainsides. But for all their differences, the hotel business and the airline business are inextricably intertwined. If the planes don't fly, the guests don't arrive. And if there aren't any hotels in a given city, people tend not to fly there.

So it's always been curious to me that these two industries have such different views of customer service. We even call them different things: our welcomed “guest” is the airlines' nameless “passenger.” Let's track a typical customer through a flight, and a hotel stay.

Let's say the customer lives in Miami, and he wants to go to Kansas City for a couple days to see his beloved parents. He will find that there are hotels of all types and prices in Kansas City, which will welcome him whether he shows up at noon, or at 2 AM. But there are only three flights which will take him there, all of which require that he leave for the airport before sunup, or at rush hour.

He calls for a reservation. The hotel will ask whether he wants smoking or non-smoking, king or double-double, pool view or highway view, and so on. The airline will merely inquire whether he wants to spend \$500 more for a seat up front which may actually be wider than he is. The seats in the back were engineered by Mattel for the Barbie and Ken Dream Home of 1959.

He must arrive at the airport two hours early and stand in a long line of people who have removed their shoes, jewelry, and pocket change to shuffle through a portal made from a highly modified microwave oven, where his entire skeleton is exposed onscreen to a grumpy federal employee. At the hotel, he will be cheerfully welcomed and no one will ask him to disrobe in the lobby or demonstrate the functionality of his laptop.

While waiting for his flight, he will sit in a dirty plastic chair and listen to flight-cancellation announcements in three languages. While waiting in the hotel lobby, he will sink into a plush couch and listen to soothing background music.

Going to his hotel room, he will walk through a well-appointed lobby to the elevator, and he will have the option to have any large luggage delivered to his room. Going to his seat on the plane, he will drag his luggage down a narrow aisle, bench-press it above his head,

and try to fit it into a plastic glove compartment (of course, he did have the option to have his larger luggage mistakenly delivered to Copenhagen for three days).

Arriving at his hotel room, he finds a secure door leading to his private space. Arriving at his airplane seat, he finds himself wedged between the obesity clinic poster child and a mother holding a fragrant, crying infant.

His private hotel bathroom is tastefully decorated, sparkling clean, and has a neat arrangement of soaps, towels and potions. The plane's bathroom is the size of a breadbox, with transparent paper towels and an assortment of warning stickers. In this tiny environment, the mere flushing of the toilet would suck his eardrums out of his head, except he is only free to go there when the seat belt light is not on (which is, of course, when everyone else is trying to go there too).

If he is hungry, the hotel will bring him anything on the room-service menu. The plane's flight attendant will bring him a a two-inch-square bag of impenetrable foil, containing 1.7 broken pretzels. If he is thirsty, the hotel has a huge array of liquid concoctions in chilled glasses, which can be charged to his room. The flight attendant has three different soft drinks, and/or two liquors in bottles smaller than the hotel shampoo, handed to him in a small plastic cup just as the flight experiences severe turbulence. These must be paid for in cash, immediately, even though the flight attendant won't have change until they're somewhere over St. Louis.

In the hotel, the large-screen TV has an assortment of premium and free-to-guest channels, pay movies, and video games. On the plane, a 5-inch TV 3 aisles away plays yesterday's news program interspersed with ads for the airline. The hotel has a huge bed and comfy chair. The plane has a seat in front of him, right where his knees want to be. The hotel has a working desk with convenient lighting and outlets. The plane has a fold-down tray that causes a crease at belly-button latitude when the guy in front reclines his seat into your chin.

When the hotel stay is over, the guest checks out at his leisure. When the flight is over, the passenger reenacts the Bataan Death March, waiting for everyone in front of him to tug their luggage out of the glove compartments and shuffle up the gangplank.

But to me, this is the most incredible part: the flight usually costs more than the hotel! And the hotel business is currently on the upswing, with rising RevPAR and profitability in most markets, while airlines are going bankrupt on a regular basis. Could this have anything to do with the customer experience?

[View Source](#)