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Case analysis of e-commerce marketing strategy in hotel industry: taking Marriott as an example

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Abstract. Against the backdrop of the rapid development of the Internet and e-commerce, the hotel industry is facing unprecedented challenges and opportunities. The rise of the sharing economy, the emergence of online travel platforms, and the increasing demand for personalized experiences from consumers have forced hotel enterprises to accelerate their digital transformation. As a leading global hotel management enterprise, Marriott has successfully responded to market competition and changes in consumer demands through technological innovation, service upgrades and business innovation. This study takes Marriott as an example and adopts the methods of literature review, case study, data analysis and SWOT analysis to deeply explore the innovations and practices within its e-commerce marketing strategy. This study finds that Marriott International has significantly enhanced user experience, brand loyalty and market competitiveness by implementing multi-dimensional strategies. Key elements of this strategy include optimizing website and app functionality, dynamic pricing, localized market adjustments, social media content marketing, personalized email push, loyalty programs, and big data-driven personalized recommendations. During the pandemic, Marriott successfully responded to market changes and maintained strong business growth through flexible booking policies, in-depth development of the local market and live-streaming e-commerce strategies.

Keywords: e-commerce, marketing strategy, Marriott, digital transformation, hotel industry

1. Introduction

In the current era of the rapid development of e-commerce, the transformation of hotel business model to e-commerce has become an inevitable trend. Firstly, as the rise of Ctrip, Feizhu and many other online travel platforms threatening the traditional hotel direct marketing, there must be great changes in hotel marketing methods. Secondly, modern consumers have an increasingly high demand for personalized experiences. Sharing accommodation platforms such as Airbnb have provided consumers with more customized and cost-effective accommodation options, largely diversifying the traditional hotel market share. Meanwhile, the rapid rise of e-commerce also means that the hotel industry should constantly update and adapt to the development of new technologies, so as to maintain the competitiveness of hotels in the current market. More importantly, hotels need to always pay attention to network security issues to protect the privacy of customers' personal information.

In this context, as the world's leading hotel management enterprise, Marriott must take the lead in transformation and change, through technological innovation, service upgrading and business model innovation, to cope with the changes in market competition and consumer demand, in order to maintain its leading position in the hotel industry.

At present, many scholars have conducted research on the transformation of the hotel industry under the background of e-commerce. Scholar LuJingyi concluded that by effectively utilizing digital tools and technologies, not only can the high demands of modern consumers be met, but hotels can also stand out in the highly competitive market [1]. LiuJie and ZhangXuemei concluded that digital transformation, as an important technological change, not only provides enterprises with an opportunity for value reconstruction but also has an impact on the business model of enterprises [2]. Additionally, Said Elbanna and Tamer H. Elsharnouby underscores the importance of strategic learning in enhancing hotel performance through innovativeness, emphasizing its role as a critical mediator in the hospitality industry’s dynamic landscape [3].

The above studies provide a theoretical basis for the digital transformation of the hotel industry. Additionally, other hotel groups, especially some local hotels, lack experience and have relatively weak brand awareness and influence. Therefore, it is necessary to learn from Marriott's experience, and find out the reasons for the gap through comparison and identify specific directions for improvement [4].

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This study employs the methods of literature review and the case study to examine Marriott International's specific practices and innovations of its e-commerce marketing strategies, aiming to provide effective references for other hotel management enterprises.

2. Overview of Marriott Group

Marriott International is a globally renowned hotel management company founded by Mr. J. Willard Marriott in 1927. Its business scope is extensive, covering hotels of different grades such as luxury, high-end, mid-range and economy. Marriott Group has nearly 9,100 hotels and resorts across more than 30 brands in 142 countries and territories. According to the 2023 annual report, the full-year global RevPAR increased by 15% and the number of rooms increased by 4.7%, which reflects the strong performance and expansion of Marriott Group during the year [5]. Furthermore, Marriott's membership program — Marriott Bonvoy — has more than 196 million members as of 2023.

As a leading enterprise in the industry, Marriott's experiences in transforming e-commerce marketing strategies are valuable references for other hotel management enterprises in the critical period of transformation.

3. Marriott’s e-commerce marketing strategy system

3.1. Official website and mobile app strategy

Firstly, Marriott official website and Marriott app have always been committed to creating a one-stop service platform, providing users with a convenient online booking system, only an average of 3 steps to complete the booking, greatly improving the user experience and conversion rate. The launch of Mobile Key also allows members to check in directly without queuing, which helps members save much time.

Secondly, Marriott's website constantly dynamically adjusts rates to adapt to market changes and seasonal demand. The dynamic pricing strategy can ensure the best occupancy rate and profit at different times, which provides members with more competitive prices and a better service experience.

Additionally, Marriott uses a localization strategy according to the needs of different markets. In China, for instance, the 2024 '3+2+1' strategy prioritizes brand leadership, member loyalty, destination expansion, digital innovation, and talent development, all while upholding core company values. What’s more, Marriott also customizes language, payment methods and cultural content according to different markets, such as providing Alipay and Wechat Pay in China to meet the needs of Chinese consumers. This approach enhances both Marriott's market competitiveness and its brand influence.

3.2. Social media marketing strategies

Firstly, Marriott releases travel-inspired content on Instagram, Weibo and other platforms. It attracts users' interaction, and strengthens customers' emotional connection to the brand by spreading and displaying members' travel stories. For example, Marriott became the first hotel brand to enter on Rednote, creating in-depth boutique content and further enhancing the brand's influence on social media.

Secondly, Marriott promotes destination hotels by collaborating with Key Opinion Leaders (KOLs) such as travel bloggers and photographers. It also encourages users to share their accommodation experiences and tag #MarriottBonvoy. For instance, Marriott invited KOLs to launch social media challenge activities, encouraging users to generate content related to the brand. This not only stimulated users' creativity but also further expanded brand exposure and user engagement.

3.3. Email marketing strategies

Marriott employs personalized layered reach through email marketing, tailoring messages based on membership tier and historical spending habits. For regular members, Marriott will send promotional offers to entice them to spend more frequently. For high-level members, Marriott will send exclusive invitations to events such as Michelin dinners, to provide them with a more high-end, personalized experience and enhance customer loyalty to the brand. This strategy meets the needs of different customer groups.

Furthermore, Marriott utilizes automated email triggers to recover potential lost bookings. When users browse the hotel information on the official website but do not complete the booking, the system automatically recognizes and sends an "unfinished order reminder" email, often accompanied by some discount coupon to incentivize purchase. This automated trigger mechanism can effectively recover lost customers, improve marketing efficiency and enhance the customer booking experience.

3.4. Marriott Bonvoy and e-commerce integration

Marriott has built an integral ecosystem through Marriott Bonvoy. Members earn points when they stay at Marriott hotels, which can be used not only to redeem hotel nights, but also to redeem air miles or even donate to charity. This integral ecological closed loop can increase the consumption frequency of members and enhance user stickiness.

Marriott Bonvoy also offers tiered benefits. For example, Titanium members who accumulate 75 valid room nights in a calendar year can choose additional benefits such as 5-night room upgrades, $1,000 Marriott Retail branded bed discounts, and more. The differentiated rights of members can motivate them to increase the frequency of consumption to upgrade the membership level, thus further strengthening the brand loyalty of customers.

3.5. Big data and personalized recommendation strategy

To address the issue of low precision in personalized recommendations for hotel room management, a personalized recommendation method for hotel room management based on a behavioral preference model is proposed [6].

Marriott builds a 360-degree user profile to accurately predict user preferences by analyzing multi-dimensional information. For example, business travelers may prefer hotels close to airports or city centers and pay more attention to business facilities such as executive lounges and meeting rooms. Family customers, on the other hand, are more interested in children's facilities and family-friendly services. Through detailed user analysis, Marriott is able to provide more personalized service and recommendations to different types of customers.

Additionally, the official website of Marriott uses an intelligent recommendation engine to push personalized hotel recommendations of "You May Like" based on users' browsing history and preferences, helping users quickly find accommodation options that meet their needs. These personalized recommendations can effectively improve the efficiency of users' booking and increase the frequency and amount of customers' consumption through precision marketing.

4. E-commerce response to crisis

The pandemic caused widespread demand shocks across industries. Among the hardest hit was the accommodation industry, where cross-border closures, mobility restrictions, and reduced consumer confidence led to unprecedented declines in bookings [7]. Marriott implemented many countermeasures during this period.

Firstly, Marriott adopted flexible booking policies and launched "free cancellation" and "points extension" policies to reduce users' decision-making risks. This set of strategies not only increased customer trust in Marriott but also boosted bookings during the pandemic. According to the data, in 2020, Marriott's official website bookings increased by 12% compared to the same period last year [5]. Marriott has successfully maintained an edge through this policy.

Secondly, Marriott capitalized on increased domestic travel demand by collaborating with local attractions to promote "Staycations" and develop the local market. This not only met customers' needs for safety and convenience during the epidemic, but also attracted more local customers, and enhanced the brand's influence in the local market.

In addition, Marriott utilized innovative marketing by selling pre-sale packages, such as "999yuan two-night coupon," on platforms like TikTok and Ctrip. This innovative marketing method attracted a large number of customers to participate and achieved significant sales results. In consequence, Marriott successfully maintained a high brand visibility during the pandemic.

5. SWOT analysis

SWOT analysis evaluates an organization's operational condition by examining its present development's strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats. This approach may be used to determine the future course of improvement for the company [8].

5.1. Strengths

First of all, as a world-renowned hotel brand, Marriott Group has high brand awareness and reputation, and consumers' trust in Marriott brand gives it an innate advantage in e-commerce marketing. Marriott is a dependable choice for tourists, with operations in 139 countries at the moment [9].

Secondly, Marriott owns a number of brands with different positioning, such as Ritz-Carlton, JW Marriott, Westin, etc. This brand combination strategy enables Marriott to provide personalized services and products for different market segments on the e-commerce platform to meet the needs of different customer groups.

Thirdly, Marriott Bonvoy's accumulation of points and exclusive rights of members have effectively enhanced customers' brand loyalty.

Finally, Marriott has mature applications in social media, email marketing, big data analytics, etc. Through an intelligent recommendation engine, user portrait and other technologies, Marriott is able to provide customers with personalized service and precise marketing pushes to enhance the customer experience.

5.2. Weaknesses

First, the official Marriott website has some problems in page loading speed, navigation clarity and layout rationality. For example, during the booking process, users may abandon the booking because they cannot find the required information, which could result in customer loss. Secondly, Marriott's interaction on social media is not strong enough compared with some active competitors, resulting in a relatively low presence. The number of fans and the engagement of Marriott on social media also need to be improved.

5.3. Opportunities

With the popularization of the Internet and the development of e-commerce, Marriott can further expand its e-commerce platform and add more online booking channels and cooperation platforms to improve brand exposure and market coverage. According to the market demand of different regions, Marriott can further explore the local market and develop more products and services that meet the habits and preferences of local consumers.

Moreover, live streaming has great development potential as an emerging marketing method. Marriott can continue to explore new live broadcast rooms on new e-commerce platforms in different countries to promote hotels and sell preferential packages in order to attract more customers in an interactive way and increase the number of social media fans to effectively increase sales.

5.4. Threats

First, due to the fierce competition in the hotel industry in the current era, Marriott is facing various competitive pressures from other high-end hotels, mid-range hotels, homestays and online short-term rental platforms. Competitors may seize market share through price wars, service innovation and other means.

Second, rising prices may lead to increased operating costs for hotels, impacting profit margins and forcing adjustments to pricing strategies, which can then affect market competitiveness.

Third, policy changes in different countries may also adversely affect Marriott's business. For instance, changes in tourism policies or tax policies may increase operating costs or limit business development.

Finally, data breaches or other security issues in e-commerce digital marketing can lead to serious customer trust crises and significantly damage the brand image.

6. Suggestions for future marketing strategies

First, Marriott can increase its technological investment in the website and app, optimize users' experience and promptly fix possible vulnerabilities to enhance the stability and reliability of the website and app. Second, by developing a more active social media marketing strategy, posting more interesting content, and increasing the interactive content to attract users' attention and participation. At the same time, strengthen the cooperation with social media platforms, and use the platform's advertising function to accurately target customer groups and improve brand exposure.

What's more, the expansion of hotel groups should focus on spatial layout based on local government intervention, market demand and industrial environmental factors [10]. Marriott needs to pay close attention to the industry competition dynamics and market changes so as to adjust the marketing strategy in time. For example, in the face of competitors' price war, Marriott can maintain market competitiveness by providing higher-quality services and differentiated products. In addition, Marriott should strengthen communication with government departments, understand the information of policy changes, and take measures to deal with possible risks.

Finally, user data security and privacy protection is extremely important. Marriott must strengthen technical protection measures in order to ensure the security of customer information. Meanwhile, the customer feedback mechanism should be strengthened to deal with customer complaints and suggestions in a timely manner, constantly improve service quality, and enhance customer trust and satisfaction.

7. Conclusion

As a world-class hotel brand, Marriott has demonstrated strong capability and innovation ability in the field of e-commerce marketing. First of all, through Marriott Bonvoy's one-stop service, it provides users with convenient functions such as online booking, member points management and mobile key. Meanwhile, Marriott Bonvoy's deep integration with e-commerce, through cross-border collaborations and similar initiatives, has expanded revenue beyond accommodations and increased user consumption frequency. Secondly, Marriott has collaborated with KOLs on social media to release promotional videos, enhancing brand awareness and influence. Furthermore, personalized recommendation strategies enable Marriott to provide personalized services for different users. Email marketing strategies have also effectively increased customer conversion rates and further enhanced user stickiness. What's more, during times of crisis, Marriott successfully responded to market changes through flexible booking policies, localization strategy and live-streaming marketing, maintaining its competitiveness in the hotel industry.

However, this study has deficiencies in literature citation. It failed to fully refer to authoritative research and the latest data in related fields, and some analyses lack in-depth theoretical support. Meanwhile, in terms of content, the specific implementation details and effect evaluations of certain strategies are not comprehensive enough. For instance, the specific data and long-term impacts of live-streaming strategy have not been deeply explored, and future research can be improved by introducing more empirical data and case analyses.

In conclusion, from the perspective of the entire hotel industry, Marriott Group's e-commerce marketing strategy provides valuable reference experience for the industry. In the future, the hotel industry should continue to explore and innovate e-commerce marketing models to adapt to the constantly changing market demands and consumer behaviors in order to promote the continuous development and progress of the industry.

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