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Rooms, Hotels

This Company Helps Luxury Hotels Go Analog to Get Guests to Unplug

Samantha Shankman, Skift - Feb 20, 2020 10:00 am



Skift Take

The luxury hospitality industry is trying to help guests unwind in these anxiety-ridden, tech-addicted times. It's refreshing to think that something as simple as a book can make a difference — plus drive repeat hotel visits and even foster community. Luxury properties should take note.

— *Samantha Shankman*

In this tech-obsessed era, it's hard to take a break from the endless alerts and notifications flashing on our screens. While the luxury hospitality industry can help travelers disconnect to a point — after all, at its core, travel is about escapism — chances are, vacationers and business travelers alike are still going to bed with their phones on the nightstand.

The solution to help luxury travelers find a moment of calm, away from

their digital devices? The answer might be as simple as a good old-fashioned book — or at least that's the goal of Jane Ubell-Meyer, founder of Bedside Reading.

The concept of Bedside Reading is this: Ubell-Meyer works with publishers and authors who want to get their books in the hands of travelers staying at luxury hotels. Bedside Reading then provides these books to its roster of high-end properties. Hotels leave a few book options in each room, where guests can read them at their leisure and even take them home at the end of their stay.

Ubell-Meyer is now living her dream of turning hotels into the ultimate place to pick up a good book — and has seen significant expansion since those early Mandarin Oriental days. Bedside Reading currently curates a selection of books to place in 28 luxury and lifestyle hotels.

“Every hotel has a personality. We look at the hotel and ask, ‘Who is the guest?’ Then we look at our books and determine which fit the personality of the hotel,” explained Ubell-Meyer, who works directly with authors and publishers as a marketing strategist. She then gives the recommendations to the hotel, which makes the final decision.

Ubell-Meyer has found ways to grow the company beyond paperbacks and hardcovers. Hotels have started to expand on the reading experience by adding author podcasts to their in-room TV and iPads, hosting author events, and creating book clubs. Likely this is just the beginning of Bedside Reading's story.

A BOOK FOR EVERY GUEST

A primary part of the appeal of a program like Bedside Reading is how adaptable it is to different guests and parts of the hotel. Ubell-Meyer said that thrillers and business books work best in most luxury hotels, although

there is growing demand for children's and wellness books too.

Acqualina Resort & Residences on the Beach in Miami, Florida, hosts a “story hour” for children and gifts its spa guests with a wellness book after each session. Bedside Reading’s wellness selection is usually focused on mindfulness with current books including *The Labyrinth Influence: Awake the Wisdom Within* and *The Mindful Day*.

“Wellness books weren’t as big until this year. Guests love the world of mindfulness. We’re looking for more of those books because it fits into the current luxury hotel experience,” said Ubell-Meyer. And taking time offline to relax and read alone fits into hospitality’s modern description of wellness travel too.

Programs like Bedside Reading also can help bring back travelers. “We develop new services and amenities every year, keeping in mind the current and future needs of the customer. Keeping the property fresh and relevant has helped us hold on to our repeat business,” said Alexandra Wensley, vice president of communications at Acqualina Resort.

MORE MEANINGFUL HOTEL STAYS

It can be difficult for hotels to measure the impact of “surprise and delight” elements outside of attendance at live events. But Ubell-Meyer is confident that putting books in the hands of luxury hotel guests is paying off.

“The books are leaving the room. That doesn’t mean the guests are buying more books, but we are introducing the books to new readers,” said Ubell-Meyer. She thinks the key is “discoverability” — that guests may love the book and then tell people. “It’s the word of mouth between sophisticated readers that we love,” she said.

“We’re also creating a deeper sense of loyalty. People return to the hotel looking forward to the next book,” added Ubell-Meyer.

The books are also used to drive guests to new hotels during the off-

season. This month marks the second author weekend that Ubell-Meyer organized in the Hamptons to drive traffic and spark discussion.

Bedside Reading's mission isn't solely about creating a better hotel experience — it's about finding a way for authors to distinguish themselves in a market where more than 8,000 books are published every day.

"If you're an author in today's world, you can't leave it up to the publisher's book marketing team unless you're already a best-selling author. You have to be proactive. We take the edge off being alone in this industry and promote the author," said Ubell-Meyer.

Supporting authors through a hotel experience that fosters community, champions creatives, and encourages guests to put down their phone — that's a win for everyone, no matter how you spin it.

Tags: bedside reading, books, literature, luxury & wellness travel, luxury & wellness travel report, luxury hospitality, luxury hotels

Photo Credit: Luxury hotels are teaming up with Bedside Reading, a marketing company that provides books to guests, free of charge. This strategy not only helps travelers unwind but also drives guest loyalty. Bedside Reading