

TITLE: Risk Mapping the Hotel Guest Experience: An Important Step toward the Post-COVID World

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Amid a crisis such as the present COVID-19 pandemic, there is value in revisiting the challenges of the past. Not for a nostalgic escape or a chance for self-admonishment with phrases like, “ha, remember that?! We didn’t know what to do. How *quaint*.” Instead, there is value in recognizing that the solutions of the past were the result of methodical reasoning ... not knee-jerk panicking. This is the value of knowing with confidence that the challenges of today can be tackled by thinking things through.

Crisis Vs. Continuity

In 2017, HFTP reached out to me to join the GDPR Task Force. With the enforcement of the world’s most comprehensive privacy regulation less than a year away, the Task Force had a charter to guide an industry struggling with an uncertain future. (If you just thought, “how quaint”, please re-read the first paragraph).

Sub-committees were formed. Alvaro Hidalgo, Timo Ketterern, Sophie Pommois and I took on the challenge to “diagram” GDPR’s impact on hotels.

We now know that GDPR compliance became, essentially, a business continuity challenge. Hotel groups had to transform themselves from data grabbers to purposeful, transparent data stewards.

Generally, planning to overcome a potential business continuity challenge involves six steps:

1. Identify the scope.
2. Identify key business areas impacted.
3. Identify critical functions impacted.
4. Identify dependencies between various business areas and functions.
5. Determine acceptable risk for each critical function.
6. Create a plan to maintain operations.

Our subcommittee mapped the guest data journey from booking to post-stay. The resulting data processing flow charts were widely shared and gained accolades for their elegant practicality. They were practical because they graphically addressed the first four steps of steps of a business continuity plan. The revealed, even at a casual glance, the extensive (1) scope of the data processing, where guest personal information is handed from one (2) key business area to another through one (3) function/system to another supported and serviced by a (4) multitude of interdependent internal and external vendor partners.

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Inventory: a Cross-Departmental Initiative

It's time to inventory once again. Instead of the guest data journey, we must map the guest's physical journey ... as well as journeys made by employees and visiting vendors. Each process along the way must be evaluated. Questions must be asked:

- What systems (high tech, low tech) are used?
- Is the process necessary? Is it optimal? Are there other, innovative options available?
- Who is accountable?

An inventory of the guest experience to avoid the spread of an infectious disease like COVID-19 must come from a cross-departmental collaboration. It is work. Fortunately, as with a data processing inventory, the result will reveal risk areas, identify key stakeholders, and inform your priority setting.