

The Luxury Hotelier's Guide to Personalization





BY JANINE YU

Personalizing a guest's stay can be a tricky thing — how do you make each guest feel unique and special, especially when dealing with large volumes?

How do you standardize and automate systems and processes, so as not to strain your team's bandwidth? And how do you do it in a way that feels authentic and truly personalized, when you have to do it again and again?

To learn the tricks of the trade, we gathered insights from industry experts to determine what matters when it comes to offering personalization at luxury hotels. Here's how.

What a Luxury Traveler Expect

Julie Helfrich has long been a fan of luxury hotels that take the time and effort to personalize her family's stay. While she considers herself "low maintenance and a minimalist" when it comes to travel demands, she places a lot of value on hotels that go above and beyond to make her feel special. Several hotels and hotel chains that are consistent in offering stellar service have earned her loyalty. She regularly returns to Le Bristol in Paris and the Firmdale Hotels in London and New York.

Sometimes all it takes is an easy lift, like a surprise birthday cake for her daughter prepared by the hotel — birthdays being an easy data point any hotel can leverage. Other times it takes time and dedication, which shows real effort, like when Helfrich mentioned to hotel staff that she wanted to rent a car to explore the city. The hotel immediately set her up with the hotel car, and every time she stepped outside, the car was ready to go. "That endeared me to them," Helfrich said.

One gesture Helfrich won't forget is when The Soho Hotel in London sent someone to stand in line for tickets to a show she really wanted to see. "We thought, wow, they didn't have to do that," she said. "These things make a difference."



A Reason for Staying

Carmelita Berquist is a Supervisor of NAVIS's RezForce Lux, which works with luxury properties in handling overflow and after-hours reservation calls. She says there are three main questions you need to answer when booking a reservation:

- 1 Has the guest stayed at that property before?
- 2 What brings them to the property?
- 3 What features of the property are important to them?

"With these three pieces of information," Berquist said, "you're going to get a good idea of why they are booking."

Nico Mamon, Director of Sales at the Four Seasons Langkawi, calls this "the reason to stay" and he believes every guest has one. "Reasons to stay can vary from birthdays, honeymoons, special family occasions, holidays and even business meetings, and it is essential for our Hotel Reservations and Guest Experience Team to recognize this to make the stay more personalized," Mamon said. "We believe in personal touches, special amenities and recognizing if our guests are celebrating any momentous occasion in the hotel – to make them feel special throughout their stay."

Additionally, Marcel Thoma, GM of the Mandarin Oriental Marrakech, shares that good organization and pre-arrival preparation is key. This way your team can prepare high-touch and "wow" events that make a guest feel that it was done just for them.

Let Technology Do The Work For You

“Identifying the right tech platform to partner with now will help alleviate inefficiencies due to staff shortages and speak to both the contactless and personalization benefits, which will ultimately drive bookings.”

Phocuswire, Dec 2020

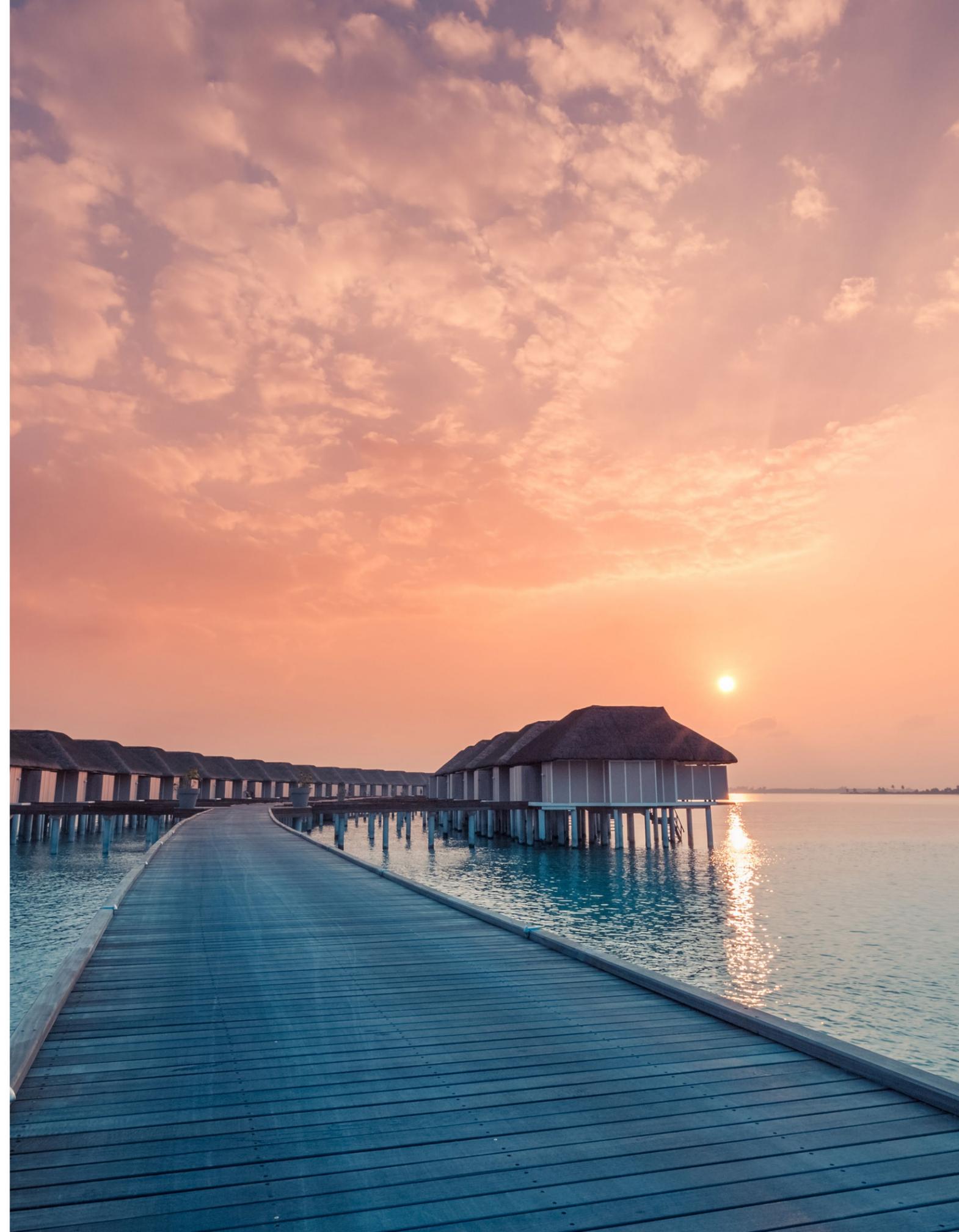
Reservation sales teams experience a flood of phone and website leads during peak periods and often they rely on sticky notes and memory for follow-up. Tools such as **NAVIS Reservations Sales** can help agents improve conversion and prompt them to ask these questions and input the responses directly into the platform. This helps organize and personalize guest lead data for follow-up and outbound selling. And when demand is too high for the team to handle, RezForce can engage directly in the property’s Reservation Sales Suite account to assist with overflow and after-hours calls.

Personalization Without Maxing Out Your Team’s Bandwidth

“Communication is key in preparing for large volumes of guests as we forecast busy periods for the resort,” shared Mamon. The brand has its own Four Seasons Chat, which provides guests the convenience of connecting personally with any request they have, from Housekeeping, Room Service, and others, with over 100+ languages. The app provides guests with flexibility and contactless engagement throughout their stay.

“We also have an internal guest recognition program globally to identify guest preferences when they stay in a Four Seasons, and to ensure that they feel right at home,” Mamon added. “Lastly, we believe in the power of our people. Our onsite Guest Experience Team creates personal connections with our guests for any special requests, customized itineraries, or tailor-made experiences.”

Similarly, the Mandarin Oriental believes in the importance of collecting and talking about guest preferences on a daily basis. “We encourage our colleagues to talk about best practices in other properties, and continuously think about ways to delight our clients” said Thoma. The MO group shares guest profiles across its properties worldwide through their Fans of MO program, where guests share their preferences that are then uploaded to an internal system.



Segmenting Leads to Personalizing

By grouping customers according to identifiable characteristics, such as demographics or even personal interests, hotels can then have a better handle on personalization. By targeting wine lovers, for example, a hotel can send automated emails for a special offer. To personalize the communication, hotels can refer to available customer data such as whether a guest prefers Pinot Noir.

NAVIS Marketing Suite optimizes the personalization process with its segmentation function, as well as its comprehensive data collection on guests.

What's the Value of Personalization?

Sometimes guests don't know what they want, said Berquist, and it's up to savvy reservation agents to guide them. Berquist cited an example of a man planning a last-minute birthday surprise for his wife. He knew which hotel he wanted to book, but he had no idea what else to do. Berquist's team recommended a spa package and arranged all the treatments in advance. He and his wife didn't have to do anything and had a really relaxing and special weekend, for which he was very grateful.

Showing expertise with a property's offerings can result in instant bookings, even for high-value rooms. Carlie Rogers, a Senior Reservations Sales agent for NAVIS, recently booked a client's stay for over \$173,000. All it took was one phone call, where she talked the guest into booking a Four Bedroom Residence at The Little Nell in Aspen for 11 nights.

The guest didn't know what rooms to book, but with Rogers's understanding of the property's offerings, she was able to identify the right unit for the group that met their needs and speak to what activities they might enjoy onsite. While there was a bit of resistance to pricing at first, Rogers assured them that they would receive VIP treatment – a note she passed on to the property. "We want to make sure the client is set up for success," Rogers said.

Onsite, it's about creating such a memorable experience that guests feel right at home. Mamon recalls a recent birthday celebration where the Four Seasons Langkawi arranged a fishing lesson for kids at a unique location on property, while the parents enjoyed sunset cocktails. "Because of this exceptional and personalized experience," Mamon said, "they have called Four Seasons Resort Langkawi their home during the holidays."

Sometimes, it's recognizing what matters to a guest, even when they don't expect it. The Mandarin Oriental Marrakech team studied one guest's social media account and found they posted a lot about their dog. The team printed a photo of the dog and put it in a picture frame in the guest's room. When the guest saw it, they were moved to tears.



How Personalization Affects Your Bottom Line

Putting effort into personalization isn't just a "nice to have" when running a hotel business – it has real impact on your bottom line. Companies using advance personalization [report](#) a \$20 return for every \$1 spent. Considering that customer acquisition costs can be very high, presenting a customer with products that match their interests increases the chance of conversion.

After all, a [reported](#) 70% of consumers say that a company's understanding of their personal needs increases their loyalty.

Personalizing is Humanizing

"Personalization can be simple," said Thoma, "but it's also hugely difficult." He posed a situation of where a guest drinks orange juice every day — how do you know if that's their daily habit, or if they just really appreciate Marrakech's superb oranges? Would they drink low-quality OJ? To truly understand the nuances of guest behavior, the Mandarin Oriental team relies on its butlers to report observations and log conversations that shed light on a guest's idiosyncrasies.

"Information is power. Without it, we can't deliver a personalized experience,"
Marcel Thoma, GM of the Mandarin Oriental Marrakech



Do's for Personalization

- » Do know the property you're selling. When guests call to book a reservation, they want to learn information they can't easily find on the hotel website.
- » Do look up guest profiles beforehand, whether through the hotel's guest database, their social media or online presence.
- » Do actively engage with a guest throughout their stay and learn their preferences.
- » Do get the little things right — for example, don't offer cocktails to someone who only drinks red wine. Find out guest preferences and take copious notes that are shared with the team.
- » Do ensure that the hotel has sufficient team members across departments, as well as a "crunch team" to provide additional support during busy times.
- » Do share feedback on how a guest was wowed during their stay. It's a fantastic way to inspire the team to keep personalizing guest experiences.



Tried & True Personalization Techniques



“Listen and engage in real and genuine conversation. If I’m engaging with a guest, it will get them excited for their stay.”

- *Carmelita Berquist, NAVIS*



“When thoughtfulness and making guests happy become effortless – this type of service culture makes the resort more fun to work for.”

- *Nico Mamon, Four Seasons*

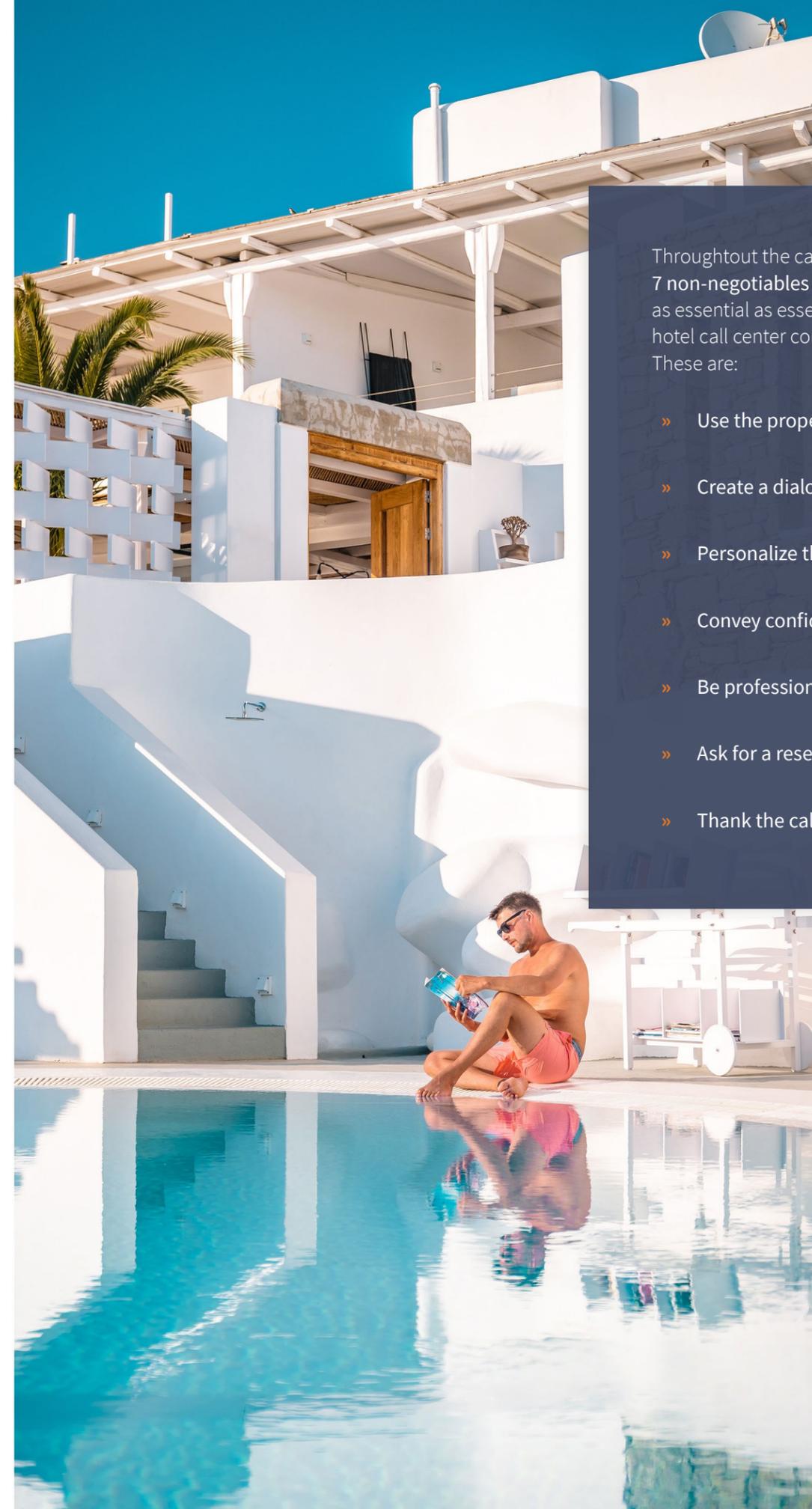


“Researching a guest’s social media, open-ended questions, and empathy can help a lot.”

- *Marcel Thoma, Mandarin Oriental*

Personalization strategies for the Voice Channel

- » **Courtesy & Manners** - Calm, clear, articulate & polite conversation. Collect every data point possible with open-ended questions
- » **Efficiency** - Confirmation sent within 24 hours
- » **Graciousness, Thoughtfulness & Sense of Personalized Service** - Display genuine interest and anticipatory service
- » **Guest Comfort & Convenience** - Offer different room types and hotel services, and solicit special requests
- » **Technical Execution, Skill & Knowledge** - Familiarity with offerings, including rate types & inclusions



Throughout the call, there are **7 non-negotiables** identified by NAVIS as essential to driving hotel call center conversions. These are:

- » Use the proper greeting.
- » Create a dialogue.
- » Personalize the conversation.
- » Convey confidence and pride.
- » Be professional and courteous.
- » Ask for a reservation.
- » Thank the caller.

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