

The Onus lies with Us – Rebuilding trust to get back guests to eat & stay with us!

After a prolonged lockdown, our industry is gradually picking up the threads and rekindling operations with one of the immediate tasks being rebuilding guest confidence and trust. This is easier said than done as the guests are more cautious than ever and are watching closely!

No amount of third-party certification will get you a repeat purchase if the guest does not feel 'safe' within your premises. You may have the most attractive offers, best revenue management practices, the best food and the best of everything else, however, if the guests don't feel 'safe' then you have offered your hard-to-get guests in these circumstances a reason to make an alternate choice.

As an industry we have successfully taken the first step by getting ourselves a well-defined list of Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs) for the safety of our guests, customers, and employees. The need of the hour now is to train our associates to live by those SOPs and evolve and re-train as we learn about this new virus which has impacted us in an unprecedented way. 'Safety' should be built into our 'hospitality' DNA as that alone can now help us rebuild trust and customer confidence.

The industry needs to build back its revenues by bringing guests back to stay with us, dine with us, commit to social functions with us and all of this is possible only when we adhere to strict safety protocols. However, we find that there are still several obvious gaps while following the SOPs. For instance, while eating out recently at a pedigreed standalone restaurant, we found that during the changeover of table only the table was being disinfected with a casual disinfectant sprayed on the seat of the chair. But what about the chair's back and arms? A guest touches the chair's back first to sit and then the arms to pull it in – a very simple fact! This is just one instance of an oversight.

While the processes are defined, our job now is to ensure that on the ground the system is adhered to with 100% accuracy as even a 0.01% error rate can cause much avoidable casualties.

Restaurants and Hotels need to create safety leads under whom they should have a well-trained safety team to conduct mystery self-audits of the protocols and keep logs of those audits, red flag areas of improvement to ensure that all loose ends are being tied. Unfortunately, this comes at a cost, but keeping in mind the safety this is another milestone that hotels will have to cross and consistently deliver during the COVID Era. Our experience has been mixed on the SOPs in restaurants. In some cases, digital menus and payment options were either not available or the staff were not trained on the importance of highlighting the options and insisting on their usage as against physical menus and cash payments.

Hence, it is critical that as an industry we live and adhere by the rules and create the confidence in our guests to travel and eat out again which is in the best interest of everyone who is involved in our industry. In today's day & age 'Safety' will be the primary driver to guest demand.