

AIHP Visits TripAdvisor to Talk Innkeeping

Before the holidays, I had the opportunity to meet with several senior staff and the marketing team at TripAdvisor. I was thrilled to have Kevin and Trish Robinson, members of AIHP, accompany me on this visit. For quite some time, AIHP has been working with TripAdvisor to address industry concerns and to find ways to forge a partnership and voice within the company. Brian Payea - Global Head Lead of Optimization - and I have been working on some exciting initiatives for quite some time, now, but more on that later.

I had reached out to Brian in August after Kevin informed me that he and his wife had experienced some issues during the summer - essentially, some testing had been conducted that significantly reduced their TripAdvisor traffic on Tripconnect. In Kevin and Trish's case, the issue was that when a prospective guest would search for availability in Falmouth, Cape Cod, TripAdvisor would tell the searcher that there was "No availability from our partners." Unfortunately, Kevin and Trish have plenty of availability, and this problem affected them during a very important week during the summer. Once the testing was completed, Kevin and Trish realized that their cost-per-click had increased as well.

We discussed this issue with TripAdvisor and stressed the importance of independent innkeepers in our industry remaining engaged online and aware of changes that may affect their business. We also discussed ways that the company can refer to our industry for feedback and clarification as TripAdvisor explores new products and services.

Prior to the meeting, I had a chance to survey our members to find out which issues you wanted me to discuss with TripAdvisor. Many of these concerns were not only addressed in our meeting, but will be considered long-term priorities that we would like to see addressed on behalf of our industry. Here's what you told me:

- *What are the priorities you would like to see AIHP address with TripAdvisor?* Bed and Breakfast heading in the Menu, ensuring that Inns website is most prominent rather than OTA's, cost of business listings, better visibility for B&Bs and don't put paid listings for other properties on my page.
- *What should TripAdvisor be doing to partner with small independent lodging?* Better process for B&B's to defend against an unfair guest, more digital ads for B&B's and view all professional lodging as equal.
- *What does TripAdvisor do well for our industry?* It's a main source for quality reviews and these do help potential guests as they decide when and where they will spend their money and any size business can be listed.
- *What TripAdvisor Products do you use?* Business Advantage (79%) and Free Listings for Reviews (21%).
- *Do you promote TripAdvisor as the best place for your guests to leave a property review?* Yes (87%) No (13%)
- *How would you rate your experience with TripAdvisor overall?* Excellent (27%), Very Good (13%), Good (33%), Fair (20%) and Poor (7%)

Along with addressing the concerns that Kevin and Trish raised, we also had an opportunity to talk about other topics related to what you shared with me. Brian set up a number of meetings with other team members within TripAdvisor. Here are the highlights from those conversations.

Guest Experience Products

We had an opportunity to meet with team members from this department. They were very interested in hearing about the guest experience from an innkeeper's advantage, and Kevin and Trish were able to share the type of experiences that innkeepers typically experience. We were also able to give feedback on their Review Express, discuss how inns promote local attractions to their guests, and how Viator, a TripAdvisor company, could provide innkeepers the ability to provide some concierge type services for guests. By promoting trips and excursions, the property would receive a commission for booking an excursion through Viator. We also discussed how to manage the photos that guests post (which may not be the innkeeper's preferred image to reflect their establishment), and how to incorporate videos into their profile.

Hotel Solutions Team

We sat down with Brian and about forty TripAdvisor associates to share our perspective on innkeeping, such as how we provide a unique hospitality experience and how innkeeping is different from traditional hotels. Interestingly, about 95% of the 40 associates were under the age of thirty-five, and most have stayed in an inn or bed and breakfast! The group was very interested in our industry and finding out what is most important to us. This was a great way to inform those that are on the front line at TripAdvisor every day as they help us to promote the small independent lodging experience.

We spent some time over lunch with Robin Ingle - Senior Vice President of Global Sales - and Heather Leishman - Vice President of Industry Marketing. We were able to talk specifically about AIHP and our mission and vision for the industry, as well as hit on the priorities shared through the survey that are important to our industry. Along with Brian, we will be working with Robin and Heather to help TripAdvisor to become more engaged in our industry and with AIHP.

New Product Concepts

We finished our day meeting with some folks from the product concept team. We were able to explain the challenges that guests face in finding a professional bed and breakfast listing on the site, and how we would like to see TripAdvisor address this concern. We suggested that TripAdvisor could use members within AIHP as a beta testing group, so we could weigh in early on products that their company is considering.

Our commitment to our members includes sitting down with those that have an impact on our industry and representing our members in the best way possible. These relationships take time, and we will continue to do our part to be a great partner and to hold fast to the priorities and issues that are important to your business.

Someone once said, "If you are not at the table, you are on the menu." Our motivation will always be to get AIHP a seat at the table. We are very grateful to Brian and the TripAdvisor family for taking the time to set up a full day of meetings for Kevin, Trish and I. They were extremely productive, and we look forward to having more opportunities in 2018! Also, we'd like to share our congratulations to Kevin and Trish, who this week will become the former owners of the Captain's Manor Inn in Falmouth, MA, as they have sold their inn.

Speaking of 2018, **Save the Date of Tuesday, March 13th**. AIHP will be hosting a special meeting at the TripAdvisor headquarters and our members are invited. Stay tuned for more information to be out in the next two weeks, along with registration information.

I hope this format helps to keep us engaged with you on critical topics of importance to our industry. Please continue to share ideas, issues and thoughts with me throughout the year. Here's to a prosperous and successful 2018!!!

Until next week -

Rob Fulton