

Leveraging Technology to Create a Community of Thousands

The business need

Making personal connections is a cornerstone of the hospitality industry. A few years ago at Hampton, many of their 1,850-plus General Managers were feeling isolated, without avenues to connect with other hotels. As a brand, they had collected various best practices, but collaboration across the lines was limited. General Managers wanted the ability to electronically share best practices, ask questions, and learn from the experiences of their peers. Being a franchise organization, however, it was a challenge to connect people who work for hundreds of different employers in hotels spread across 49 states and 10 countries.

The solution

Hampton's solution – called Sharecast – was two years in the making, but well worth the effort. It has quickly become an invaluable resource for General Managers and Team Members and a great success story for Hampton. Sharecast is an example of the power of leveraging technology and innovation to celebrate the best in people, scale ideas, and enhance performance and engagement.

While Sharecast is a fresh and exciting tool for hotel managers and teams, it's not the technology alone that makes it truly innovative for Hampton's brand; it's the development process and user-centric approach used in creating the site. Hampton leaders employed an eight-step approach that centers on the user perspective. Every detail of the site came directly from users.

The first step, and the foundation of this process, is listening. Working with Root, the Hampton team listened to owners, operators, and General Managers and talked to them about the need to leverage the great things that were happening in their hotels. What they did want to share, and what information would they like that they couldn't currently access? The team also listened to key stakeholders within the brand to get input and buy-in from the beginning.

The next two steps, ideating and generating, were done carefully and intentionally. The design philosophy was a set of guidelines used to manage the Sharecast project to solve the business problems identified through insights from users. Basically, there were tenets and principles that guided actions until the site was successfully up and running.



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 **sharecast** | search, share and connect with your peers

The next four steps – generate, test, evaluate, and refine – were done over the span of a few months. With a prototype site and three rounds of testing, the team gradually built the features that users said they wanted. This rolling development was a differentiator because it gained buy-in from all stakeholders, and, equally important, began filling the site with content. To start collecting content and establish the “culture” of Sharecast, the team invited top-performing hotels to be part of the testing. By the end of testing, Sharecast was well on its way with 216 users and over 200 posts!

Implementation

Sharecast was officially launched at the General Managers’ Conference in October 2011 to over 2,500 people – General Managers, Brand Team Members and franchise partners. With Root, Hampton planned media, an e-mail teaser, and a “commercial” at the conference. Sharecast currently has over 3,000 users, and there have been at least 30,000 visits since its launch. The site has even taken on a life of its own beyond General Managers; Team Members in every position have found the site valuable. What makes Sharecast work so well is that first right step: focusing on the user. Hampton didn’t impose a new set of behaviors on its teams – they offered an easy way to do what they already wanted to be doing.

Ultimately, Sharecast succeeded in making Hampton's entire network of General Managers and Team Members into curators, experts, and anthropologists in hotel operations.

Results

Sharecast is driving performance and engagement by scaling best practices and creating a community across 1,850 hotels. People who wouldn't have been connected to each other now have a place to meet 24 hours a day – and they are! It's created a world of peer-to-peer learning that has united the Hampton community and sparked connections that wouldn't have been possible before. One front desk agent captured it perfectly in a note she sent to a General Manager she had never met, in a Hampton five states away: "I've been following your posts on Sharecast and I just wanted to thank you. My goal is to be a GM of a Hampton Inn and I love your enthusiasm and the ideas you have shared. I've written many of your ideas in my journal so I can implement them at my own property."

For the brand, Sharecast continuously delivers insights. Hampton is constantly looking at the analytics, tracking traffic to the site, demographics of users, pages they are viewing, average time spent on the site, and much more. Plans are to experiment with opening Sharecast to strategic dialogue with senior leadership from as well. Phil Cordell, Global Head, Focused Service Brands and Hampton Hotels, asked in a weekly newsletter that people help him with an issue through Sharecast posts. A guest had sent a letter claiming that a General Manager had given him bad service. Phil asked the community, "What do you do when you're under pressure and still have to give great customer service?" Because of that request, that post, Sharecast got more than 915 visitors the following day! The average at that time was about 130 visits a day, and that week alone, more than 400 new users registered.

Ultimately, Sharecast succeeded in making Hampton's entire network of General Managers and Team Members into curators, experts, and anthropologists in hotel operations. By sticking with a process and putting the user at the center of every decision, Hampton is using the best of technology to ignite its community and create connections.

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About Root

Root is a strategy execution company that helps organizations engage people as a catalyst for change using a proven framework that consistently achieves clarity, ownership, and results.



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