

Signature Press

CATERING TO A NEW BREED OF BUSINESS TRAVELERS – NOT JUST “SUITS” ANYMORE



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For more from Ely, visit his blog, [Once Upon a Customer Experience](#).

By John Ely
Hotel & Motel Management

Although it's new to me, it's probably not new to all of you — the hotel chain under the Starwood brand, Aloft. I first saw the new Aloft Hotel going up near Dulles International Airport last year and didn't think too much about it until it was nearing completion. At that point, it just “looked” different. I didn't get to experience the real difference until a few weeks ago.

A friend told me, “Just stay there. I think you'll like it.” I stayed, and I liked it. As soon as I pulled up to the hotel, I noticed its huge, contemporary neon sign. Before you even go inside, you know this place may be more fashionable than most! Walking in, I noticed a round reception desk in the middle of the lobby flanked by self-service kiosks. Even as I approached the desk, I found myself looking past it to the corners of the room for the typical reception desk. There's really nothing “typical” about the Aloft, and that's good.

The rooms have a European feel with no wasted space, all the creature comforts I needed wrapped up in a stylish package. I've been in hotels that try to overwhelm me with opulence, but Aloft was clean, simple and elegant.

From the ultra-hip w xyz bar in the re:mix lounge to the contemporary décor to the young staff behind the round reception desk, this place just screams cool! And remember, I'm a baby boomer. Yet I still found myself walking around the lobby, soaking it all in. Although Aloft is obviously targeting the younger traveler, we boomers need not be intimidated. The staff was more than eager to show me around the hotel and make me

feel comfortable.

So, what does Aloft know that others might not? That a new breed of business traveler is upon us and they don't respond to service and amenities the way my generation did. Ten years ago, I was satisfied with a comfortable bed and a good restaurant nearby. Today even baby boomers are demanding more, and we're learning from the Millennials and younger generations. I even turned to Facebook to interview some of my “millennial” friends for this article!

It starts with the booking experience. Aloft's Web site is a great example of being clean, easy to navigate and uncluttered, much like the property. The site also caters to the new age of traveler with a great “social” area to explore the brand on Facebook, Twitter, “a go-go” blog and links to YouTube videos.

Once on the road, the younger traveler is not satisfied with just a nice place to stay. They're looking for an experience at every turn — sleek flat screen TVs at the bar, fashionable surroundings in the lobby, clean contemporary rooms, and a “green” policy are just a few features that help attract this new breed.

And what will keep every generation coming back to places like Aloft? It's not just the style — but the substance. Backed by a staff that truly cares about every customer touchpoint, Aloft has made a positive and lasting impression on this boomer.