Watch Out!
You Might Be Blogged

When Roy and Estelle Kelley started out in the hospitality business in 1947, they had a hard time disseminating information about their little five-story walk-up hotel at 351 Seaside Avenue in Waikiki. They relied on satisfied customers to carry the word back to friends and neighbors on the U.S. mainland. Occasionally, Roy and Estelle would drive up the West Coast from California to Oregon and Washington, dropping off brochures at travel agencies in big cities and small towns along the way.

Today, our past customers are still an excellent source of word-of-mouth advertising, but the power of the Internet has given them a more powerful voice than ever with which to instantly tell anyone with a computer – anywhere in the world – whether or not they were happy with the accommodations and hospitality they experienced at an Outrigger or OHANA hotel.

Every day, travelers are turning on their computers and writing about their experiences, often while they are still traveling. Many of these reports are in the form of a blog (short for “Web log”) or travel journal, which can sometimes detail almost every moment of every day—what they saw, what they did, complete with photographs. Typical examples can be found at travelblog.org. In addition to the site’s travel reviews, there are sections with travelers’ advice about what to wear, what to see, etc. There is even “A Beginners Guide to Independent Travel.”

Another site, tripadvisor.com, claims to be the “largest site for unbiased travel reviews (with) 2,463,846+ unbiased reviews and opinions you can trust ... the real story about hotels, attractions and restaurants around the world.” Going through the site, I found a number of very positive comments about Outrigger and OHANA hotels. Here are a couple of typical reviews:

“We had a fabulous time at the Outrigger Waikiki. We had our breakfast out on the lanai every morning. The room comes with a coffee maker and Kona coffee. I left a note for the housekeeper that we needed decaf and she left us two bags of it as well as the regular coffee every night. The shampoo, conditioner and lotion in the bathroom had a beautiful Hawaiian flower smell. This was just one of the many lovely touches at the Outrigger Waikiki.”

“We were originally booked at the xxx hotel (a competitor) but due to overbooking, we were sent to the Outrigger Waikiki. It was absolutely beautiful! The staff was so helpful the entire time! They did whatever they could to make our stay what we wanted it to be. The rooms were clean and comfortable. It is a great hotel and I would certainly recommend it.”

Based on 148 reviews of the Outrigger Waikiki, TripAdvisor gave it a user rating of 4-1/2 out of a possible 5!

Not all hotels in Waikiki were rated so highly. Many hotels, competitor properties as well as ours, received mixed reviews with raves listed right next to rants that ranged from “Tiny rooms” to “Really not that great” and “Horrible experience – wouldn’t recommend it.” One property, definitely not one of ours, was renamed by the guest-reviewer as “Holiday Hell.”

Outrigger and OHANA hotels in Australia, New Zealand, Guam, Fiji, and Tahiti received less attention, but generally had good reviews when mentioned.

There is a smaller but very irreverent Web site, HotelChatter.com, that is definitely
worth visiting. It has a section called "Hotel Hell," where travelers post horror stories about dirty linen, vermin, and rude treatment. Pictures of shabby rooms and even personnel may be included. "Hotel Heaven" presents the opposite end of the spectrum, with glowing stories of how facilities and service could not have been nicer.

HotelChatter also tracks celebrities and their antics in hotels. The comments are often biting and less than flattering. Check out the site’s description of Paris Hilton and Tara Reid at the Palms Hotel in Las Vegas for a typical example.

Most of the major travel sites offer free access and are supported by advertising and links to booking sites such as Expedia.com, Orbitz.com, and various smaller merchant sites. There are also paid links to hotel and airline Web sites.

Travel Web sites such as those described above have truly democratized the information available about hotels, restaurants, airlines, destinations, and activities. Roy and Estelle Kelley would be amazed. Today, anyone with a computer and access to the Internet can become a travel writer, hotel critic, and destination expert.

As the Internet grows in use all over our planet, these sites will continue to gain importance and influence. Visit them yourself and find out what your customers are saying about your hotel and department. We can all learn from that.

Finally, keep alert. The guest standing beside you today may feature you or your hotel in his or her travel blog tomorrow. “Smile! You're on Candid Camera!”