

Sustainability in the Hotel Industry: Behavioral Intervention as an Effective Tool for Change

Our Story:

In September 2015, five students from BCIT's Sustainable Leadership program partnered up with Tourism Vancouver's Gwendal Castellan and Vancouver Economic Commission's Juvarya Veltkamp to identify and highlight behaviors that lead to sustainable practices in Vancouver's hotels.

The project began with deep research of best practices and current trends of sustainable initiatives in hotels before meeting one on one with hotel General Managers and Facilities Managers to link the literature to reality. The students were successful in connecting with 10 Vancouver hotels throughout a variety of neighborhoods and brands. What they found was support for the literature, and a refreshing sense of the power of people in reaching sustainability goals.

Hotels that engaged both their staff and guests in their sustainability efforts had the most success and were the furthest along in their sustainability journey, while those who used targeted marketing to influence the behavior of guests showed an equally high level of success.

Project Overview

For this project, the students studied internal and external factors contributing to the success of nudging staff and guests to make more sustainable choices in order to limit the environmental degradation common to the leisure and tourism industry.

Who we are

Megan Houghton started her career at the University of Guelph. After earning a Bachelor of Science in Environmental Biology, she moved West to take advantage of what she thinks is the most beautiful place on Earth. Spending so much of her time outside on the ocean and the in mountains has given her many reasons to pursue a career in sustainability. Megan is currently working with Vancity Credit Union where she feels connected to the value of building healthy communities.



Krista Funes grew up in Chilliwack, BC. After receiving a degree in Geography from the University of the Fraser Valley, Krista moved to the city to expand her knowledge of sustainability and values-based business. Krista currently works at Vancity Credit Union where she is growing her skills in community investment.



Sarah Goble was born in Vancouver, BC. After attending Emily Carr University of Art and Design, Sarah wanted to apply her passions of animal welfare and environment preservation to the field of business. Sarah currently works at Edible Canada where she spends her time working with food sustainability and ethical sourcing.



The team also received contribution from Gursharan Banwait and Imran Mand

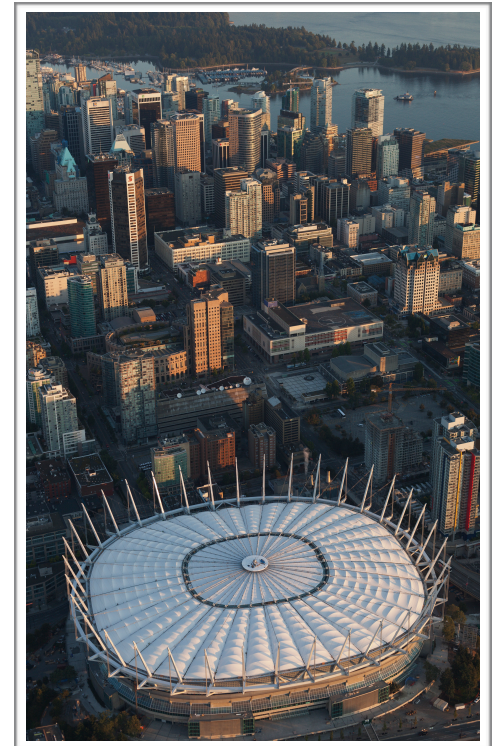
Objectives

...To identify the best practices and leaders in sustainability within the hospitality industry

...To partner with industry leaders, develop connections and share information

...To promote green leaders through Tourism Vancouver destination management strategies

...To develop relationships and enhance our networks throughout the sustainability and hospitality industries



Project Participants

Primary research was collected from staff of three to five star hotels operating in Vancouver, BC. The 13 survey and 10 interviewee respondents consisted of general managers, regional managers, and sustainability specialists.

Names of the respondents and their corresponding hotels have been kept anonymous for privacy purposes. Each participating hotel has been provided an identification code that is used to keep hotel names anonymous, while allowing each specific hotel to be aware of when and where they are mentioned.



Tourism Hotel Industry

Despite the need for sustainable practices, even the most environmentally aware consumers admit sustainability in a tourism context is hard to achieve (1).

Various studies conclude that tourists do not show the same responsibility for the environment while on vacation as they do at home (2). These studies, focusing on tourist's pro-environmental behaviours, found a 9% reduction in turning off the lights when not in use in hotels compared to domestic settings (2).

With the common on vacation attitude of tourists, it is important that hotels leave no excuse to act environmentally irresponsible and promote sustainability through adequate facilities and supported infrastructure (3).

In a 2012 study through the University of Edinburgh Business School, Tiago Diniz found these strategies have been adopted by many of the biggest hotel chains as they distinguish themselves as environmentally-friendly players within the tourism sector (4). With energy being the second largest spending category for a hotel and approximately 60% of its operation costs (5), these initiatives make sense. The impact behind the green tourism industry has grown from a place of rational consideration.

Project Partners

Primary Contact

Gwendal Castellan is the Energy Specialist at Tourism Vancouver. His work is focused on energy conservation through demand management and business community engagement. Gwendal played an invaluable roll in the Capstone project as a result of his passion for sustainability and exceptional understanding of sustainability initiatives in Vancouver's hotel industry.



Secondary Contact

Juvarya Veltkamp is the Manager of Green Economy Initiatives at the Vancouver Economic Commission. Since 2010, Juvarya has worked to achieve the Green Economy goals and targets of Vancouver's 2020 Greenest City Action Plan. Juvarya provided insights and recommendations to the group which helped shape the project into an industry appropriate format.



Project Facilitator

Mark Giltrow is the Head of the Sustainable Business Leadership Program at BCIT and the President and Chair of LEAD Canada. Mark's understanding of sustainable business worked as the foundation from which the project was built.



Environmental degradation is largely seen as a byproduct of commercial industries.

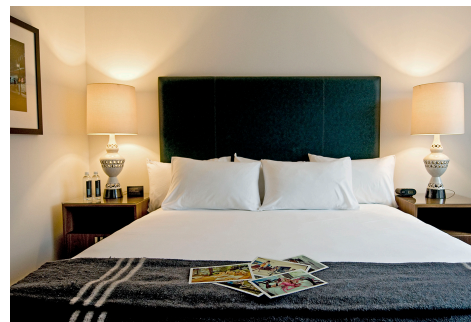
The tourism sector alone contributes 2%, soon to be 3% of the earth's carbon toll.

Guests are more likely to choose a hotel with a green award over one without.

58% of consumers want to stay in accommodation with environmentally friendly practices.

Sustainable Initiatives are becoming increasing prevalent in the tourism industry.

81% of travelers place importance on properties implementing eco-friendly practices.



Behavioral Intervention

What's nudging? A behavioral intervention used to coax or gently encourage (someone) to do something.

The idea of nudging was established during the 1970's through a critical analysis of current economic policies (6). Social psychologist Daniel Kahneman engaged in interdisciplinary work combining a psychological understanding (behavioral approach) to economic procedures (6).

Nudging has become increasingly popular in encouraging environmental consciousness and promoting change. Relevant areas of influence include social normalities, attitudes and decision context (6) and can be manipulated to provide a "soft policy" avenue to implement change.

How to use nudging to increase sustainable practices in your hotel

Customer Persona can be defined as a quick and realistic snapshot of the key characteristics of a type of guest

Customer Journey Mapping is a tool used to analyze a customer's experience with a service at each point of contact and to identify points for improvement or additional services or communication



Three simple steps!

- 1. Use customer persona**
- 2. Increase signage**
- 3. In-room compost**

Hotels use behavioral intervention such as nudging to implement sustainability initiatives.

Influencing guest behavior with nudging was found to be an effective way to implement sustainable initiatives in hotels. The majority of hotels who were interviewed reported using customer persona and/or journey mapping to link their customers to sustainability. Methods of engagement entailed a broad variety of initiatives that impacted strategic touch-points including, but not limited to, in-room composting and towel reuse programs.

Signage was chosen as the most common procedure for selling sustainability to guests. However, each hotel used, and had success with, at least three different approaches including: green key rating programs, coupons and website advertising. Hotels should therefore incorporate variety and a higher amount of marketing procedures to translate their sustainability goals efficiently to guests.



Case study: Greening Guest Rooms

The average hotel guest generates two plus lbs of in-room waste per night, over half of which is useable at time of disposal (6). Therefore, it is important to adopt measures of diversion to meet zero waste goals. H09 dealt with their in-room waste in efficient and innovative ways, allowing them to save money, support the local community and reduce their organization's ecological footprint.

How did H09 do this? They placed information pamphlets in each room, informing guests of their donation program. This "nudged" guests to donate non-perishable food products, apparel and other miscellaneous items to local charities, such as the BC Children's hospital, the Vancouver Food bank and Mission Possible. The initiative has been commonly utilized and has significantly reduced the amount of waste produced by guests.

H09 also provided in-room recycling and compost bins. The clear, well label system "nudged" guests to correctly dispose of waste products. The GM of H09 reported that guests responded well to this initiative. Not only did they use the bins, but they valued the hotel's commitment to environmental sustainability. Because of this, the majority of in-room garbage being produced by guests is being diverted from landfills, resulting in cost savings (due to minimized landfilling and transportation fees).

How to harness your greatest asset: your staff!

1. Create opportunities for staff to get involved!

2. Empower change makers

3. Engage via social media

4. Act fast!

Case study: Staff Perspectives

For best results: engage your staff!

Staff participation was found to be an effective tool to uncover potential resource saving opportunities, improve staff engagement and further participation in initiatives that have already been implemented. Marketing departments were found to play an especially important role in encouraging the sharing of ideas and building a sense of shared responsibility for sustainability within the hotel.

As many initiatives take place on the ground level where staff are most closely interfaced with guests and everyday processes, it is here where behavioral interventions were most successful.

To encourage this level of staff engagement, hotels should create sustainability teams within each department, host bi-weekly or monthly idea sharing sessions and/or develop drop boxes for staff to pitch ideas to supervisors.



Working in the housekeeping department for over 10 years, Silvia understands the high consumption of energy and product required to meet the standards of their guests and the limited opportunities to reduce in this area. Despite the limitations, staff have always been encouraged by management to be creative and look for sustainable alternatives that have no negative impacts on the quality of the stay for their guests. One afternoon while processing the laundry, Silvia commented on the amount of bleach being used to remove stubborn makeup stains from bath towels and face clothes. Determined to find an alternative, she began thinking of ways she could treat the stains to use less bleach while keeping a tight timeline and maintaining quality. Then she had an idea. Silvia remembered a biodegradation face wipe that she used to remove her makeup whenever she was on camping trips. What if they offered a high-end, biodegradable face cloth to guests for makeup removal? Could this impact their behavior? She took her idea to her supervisor who agreed this idea had great potential. The housekeeping team brought their new suggestion to the manager's meeting and by the next month, the hotel had begun sourcing biodegradation makeup removing wipes to be placed along with soaps and shampoos in guest bathrooms. The results were immediate. Although bleach is still used to remove other common stains and to meet the quality standards for towels and linens in the hotel, levels have decreased and makeup stained face cloths are no longer an issue. What's even more exciting is the guest response. Guest feedback has shown that makeup removing wipes are a nice touch to vanity packages and have a positive impact on guest experience.

So how can other hotels benefit from similar strategies? The success of this initiative comes from staff involvement. By offering opportunities for staff to be creative and a platform to share their ideas, management can foster this kind of forward thinking and encourage sustainability initiatives through all departments. From the housekeeping team to the marketing team, this hotel practices a very high level of staff engagement, and is an excellent example of the role staff play in hotel sustainability.

How to gain a positive reaction from guests

- 1. Get staff onboard first!**
- 2. Be consistent: use the same three bin disposal system in public and private spaces**
- 3. Pay attention to guest's reactions**
- 4. Evaluate what's working and what's not**

Guests respond well to the implemented behavioral initiatives as a way to promote sustainability.

For the student's Capstone project, this hypothesis was supported using a variety of qualitative questions that provided insight into guest responses to sustainable initiatives. Customer persona and journey mapping played a key role in supporting this hypothesis. This is important for the industry because it means that there needs to be a variety of behavioral intervention techniques all along the customer journey mapping.

One interviewee stated that many business travelers checkin online and do not engage with the front desk receptionist. As such, hotels that cater to mostly business travelers can influence sustainable behavior with signage in the rooms as opposed to verbally with hotel staff. Four out of ten hotels affirmed that they use verbal communication to sell sustainability to their guests.

Interviews revealed that 30% of hotels incorporate an extra cost for sustainable initiatives (such as carbon offsets). One hotel affirmed that 99% of their guests happily accepted the surcharge, suggesting that people are willing to contribute to reduce their carbon footprint, especially when the contribution is quick and easy. Interviews also determined that the majority of guests are looking for sustainable initiatives when choosing a hotel in Vancouver.



Case study: Zero Waste

H05 has been awarded the highest eco-rating for any Vancouver boutique property by the Hotel Association of Canada, as well as Platinum by TripAdvisor's GreenLeaders program. H05, with 5 green keys from the Green Key rating program widely used among Vancouver hotels is considered a leader in sustainability for their many innovative sustainability initiatives. Their two biggest sustainability successes have been the implementation of solar panels and their transition to a zero waste facility.

The feasibility of becoming a zero waste facility is much less daunting than assumed within the industry. It requires a change in governance and values that is widely known and accepted among staff. The staff is on board in making suggestions on how to become and remain a zero waste facility which includes turning all of their organic waste into compost, reusing all their recyclables and converting their non-recyclables into electricity. In order to make use of non-recyclable waste as a byproduct, the hotel pays a sustainable waste management company called Waste-less to have their garbage sent to an incinerator in Burnaby. While the interviewee admits this system is controversial due to the perceived environmental impacts of burning waste, it is still a viable option for which the hotel receives credit on that energy.

Their efforts for zero waste are further extended in the way they place orders for specific products, requesting little packaging and avoiding certain products all together. The guests respond well to zero waste initiatives that include having three separate waste containers with signs explaining how to use them. In order to reduce recycled waste in the room for instance, the hotel has changed from bottled shampoo to dispensed shampoo and provide signs as to why they have made that transition. The interviewee said that they tried to implement this initiative 20 years ago and people hated it so much they had to change it back. Today, guests respond well to this initiative and many others which set this hotel apart. H05 markets themselves as a green boutique hotel which attracts many forward-thinking guests from all around the world.

Findings

We can conclude that the practice of nudging, as used in Vancouver hotels, is an effective tool to influence more sustainable behavior in guests and staff.

Hotels that engaged both their staff and guests in their sustainability efforts had the most success and were the furthest along in their sustainability journey while those who used targeted marketing to influence the behaviour of guests showed an equally high level of success.

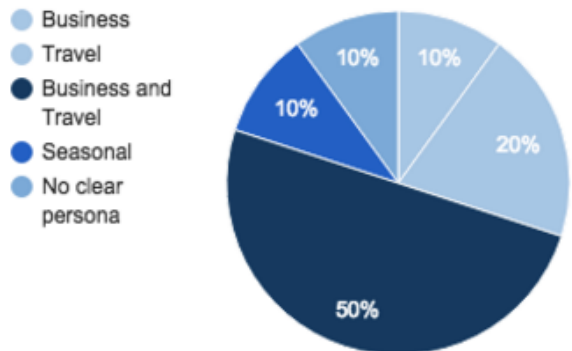
The most effective tools to apply nudging can be achieved through marketing at strategic touch points. This includes: in-room signage and through 3rd-party certification bodies, incentives and staff engagement.

Look at the type of travelers your hotel serves. This information will help you decide where to implement nudging most effectively.

Hotels that engage in nudging techniques to influence the behavior of guests and staff had more success in their sustainability initiatives because of this increased buy-in.

As a result of increased participation, hotel's engaging in nudging practices were more likely to receive the benefits of associating with Vancouver's 2020 greenest city goals.

Q5: What is the customer persona you serve?



How to engage further

1. Track your existing sustainability initiatives
2. Set targets and goals
3. Connect with others in your field
4. Share information and experiences
5. Email us!

We would love to hear your opinions, engage in a discussion or answer any pertaining questions!

References

1. Hall, C. M. (2013). Framing behavioural approaches to understanding and governing sustainable tourism consumption: beyond neoliberalism, "nudging" and "green growth"?. *Journal Of Sustainable Tourism*, 21(7), 1091-1109. doi:10.1080/09669582.2013.815764
2. Miller, D., Merrilees, B., & Coghlan, A. (2015). Sustainable urban tourism: understanding and developing visitor pro-environmental behaviours. *Journal Of Sustainable Tourism*, 23(1), 26-46. doi:10.1080/09669582.2014.912219
3. Dolnicar, S. and Leisch, F. (2003). Winter tourist segments in Austria - Identifying stable vacation styles using bagged clustering techniques. University of Wollongong Research Online.
4. Hamilton, Tyler. (2015). Hotels, Airbnb battle for Green Cred. Corporate Knights. Retrieved from: <http://www.corporateknights.com/channels/built-environment/hotels-airbnb-battle-for-green-cred-14428152/>
5. Vandam, Celine. (2015). How to Reduce Energy Consumption in Hotels. Hotel News Now. Retrieved from: <http://hotelnewsnow.com/Article/15701/How-to-reduce-energy-consumption-in-hotels>
6. Kennedy, Chris and Akerlof, Karen. (2015). Nudging Toward a Healthy Natural Environment: How Behavioral Change Research Can Inform Conservation. George Mason University.
7. Green Hotelier. (2009). Waste Management. International Tourism Partnership. Received from: <http://www.greenhotelier.org/our-themes/waste-management/>
8. All photos have been provided by Tourism Vancouver