



Marriott

# User Research Findings

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This document outlines preliminary research findings from conducting three user interviews for the Marriott website and app redesign project.

Our top two user goals were to:

- Understand user patterns, processes, and challenges in booking a hotel room through a digital service.
- Discover customer satisfaction and opinions of hotel loyalty programs

### Main takeaways include:

- Vacation packages and **deals are not widely used**; many feel they are not great value or find it too difficult to determine if they actually save you money.
- Location of hotel in relation to city attractions and price are **often the most important factors** when users pick a particular hotel.
- Users who may appear to “abandon” their hotel bookings **are most often conducting research** for their trip and not yet ready to reserve a room.

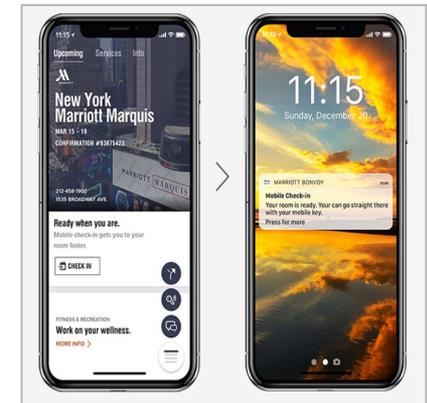
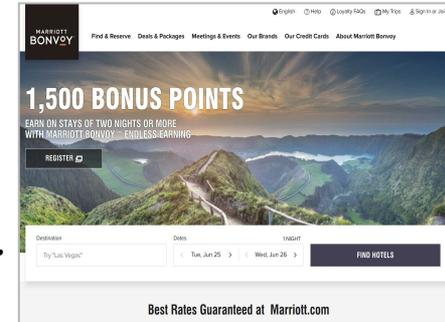
## PROJECT BACKGROUND

Arin Bhowmick, the VP of design at IBM, describes user research this way.

*“[User research] helps us to understand how people go about performing tasks and achieving goals that are important to them. It gives us context and perspective and puts us in a position to respond with useful, simplified, and productive design solutions.”*

For the Marriott project, user research was paramount in helping prepare us for the redesign of the website and app. **We conducted a brief UX review of the site and app, a survey, as well as a nano usability test.** We observed UX issues and learned initial insights into user attitudes and behaviors.

We then refined our set of research goals, research questions, and created hypotheses to test while conducting user interviews.



## BACKGROUND (cont.) - RESEARCH HYPOTHESES

1

Third-party travel sites are a popular method of researching travel.

- Examples: Expedia, Priceline, Hotels.com

2

Users have the most confidence when purchasing travel (hotel or airfare) directly from the company.

- Assumption is that users may use a third-party site, but don't often book through them

3

Users often use price as one of the main pieces of information to differentiate between hotel offerings.

- Based on the filtering options and schemes used on many travel popular sites

4

Apps need to have distinct, unique features and offerings in order to users download and continue to use them.

- Number of downloads is different than continual usage. Part of successful onboarding is convincing users that app is valuable enough to continue to use.

5

Loyalty program offerings are often confusing, and may change over time, which frustrates frequent travelers.

- Marriott Bonvoy's recent creation and constant changes to programs may affect frequent customers perception of the programs

6

One of the most common reasons someone abandons travel booking is because they are not yet ready to purchase tickets or reserve a room.

- What may look like a user abandoning a session may simply be users researching hotel prices, options, and more. They are simply not yet ready to reserve a room.

**Part of our research planning process involved understanding Marriott's business goals and research questions for the redesign project.**

### **Business Goals**

- Increase hotel bookings via digital properties by 10%
- Increase reservations for their Luxury and Lifestyle Collection hotel categories
- Gain 10,000 incremental members of the Marriott Rewards loyalty program in the first quarter after the redesign
- Decrease by 20% the number of people starting and then abandoning a reservation
- Increase by 5% the number of people choosing a hotel and flight package (vs. just booking their hotel alone)

### **Stakeholder research questions**

- What is the demographic makeup of our user population?
- How do people choose a hotel?
- Why do people start a hotel search and then not complete a reservation?
- When do people use the website vs. the mobile app?
- What value are customers looking for in a hotel loyalty program?

## UX RESEARCH GOALS



Our research goals were broad and designed within the context of the Marriott redesign project. Not only were we curious about how users interact with Marriott services, but we were also interested in more about how the public travels, uses travel sites, and rewards programs.

### **Research goals:**

- Understand user patterns, processes, and challenges in booking a hotel room through a digital service
- Discover customer satisfaction and opinions of hotel loyalty programs
- Understand user usage patterns of desktop/mobile sites vs. smartphone apps for travel related services and information
- Learn about customer attitudes and behaviors toward booking more than just a hotel room (airfare, etc.)

We conducted **three user interviews with target users**. In each interview, we asked a series of questions relating to booking travel, rewards programs, device usage, and vacation packages.

We held one in-person interview and two remote interviews with video call software.

### About the participants

- Our three participants ranged from late 20s to early 60s
- All participants travel and stay in a hotel at least 3-4 times a year
- Only one participant regularly books travel through Marriott.com; same participant has Marriott's app
- All participants have some sort of travel app on their phones, and use their phones regularly to manage travel bookings



## DATA ANALYSIS

The recordings and notes from the three user interviews were analyzed using summarization and deconstruction methods. Summarization involves collecting similar observations from the interviews. Generalization involves taking specific insights from the interviews and applying them as larger statement to form a research finding.

In total, **13 major themes emerged as well as subsequent recommendations.** Our initial research provided useful insights into user behaviors, attitudes, and goals.

*Majors themes emerged from the user interviews. However, the relatively small sample size may limit the number of insights. Further research may be required.*

### **Booking hotels**

- Location of hotel in relation to city attractions is often an important factor when picking a particular hotel. Other items users mentioned: free wi-fi, breakfast options, on-site restaurant or coffee shop
- Users who may appear to “abandon” their hotel bookings are most often conducting research for their trip and not yet ready to reserve a room.
- Third-party travel sites like Expedia are often used and trusted for booking travel arrangements. Better deals and clear methods for customer service were noted as reasons users prefer these sites.
- Hotels generally don’t do a great job at being transparent about room type; photo displays of hotels are often more focused on the business traveler and not the leisure traveler

## Vacation packages and deals

- Vacation packages and deals are not widely used; many feel they are not great value or find it too difficult to determine if they actually save you money

🕒 15:53:28 Deal of the Day Get 1 night free by booking together.



**Crystal Gateway Marriott** ★★★★★ 4.4/5  
Arlington  
✈️ 0.88 mi from Ronald Reagan Washington National (DCA)  
1-866-814-6901 • Vacations by Marriott Rate  
✈️ Economy/Coach flights included in price  
Excellent!  
(1,848 reviews)  
We have 5 left at  
~~\$1,339~~ **\$1,211**  
Per person includes flight + hotel  
Earn Marriott Bonvoy™ Points!  
11 people booked this property in the last 48 hours



**The Westin Crystal City** ★★★★★ 4.4/5  
Arlington  
✈️ 0.75 mi from Ronald Reagan Washington National (DCA)  
1-866-814-6901 • Vacations by Marriott Rate  
✈️ Economy/Coach flights included in price  
Excellent!  
(2,412 reviews)  
We have 5 left at  
**\$1,079**  
Per person includes flight + hotel  
Earn Marriott Bonvoy™ Points!  
8 people booked this property in the last 48 hours

A user noted that since packages are often listed per person, it's difficult to get a sense if the package is a better deal than booking hotel and airfare separately.

## Hotel rewards programs

- A loyal Marriott rewards member feels as though Marriott keeps “upping the ante,” making it more difficult to redeem points and free night offers
  - “[Marriott is] making you jump through hoops to redeem a free night for the credit card offering”
- The Marriott Bonvoy app can be helpful for rewards members to quickly check point values and look back at old trip itineraries



A user noted that she liked the ability to quickly see her point value in the Marriott app.

## **Mobile apps and usage**

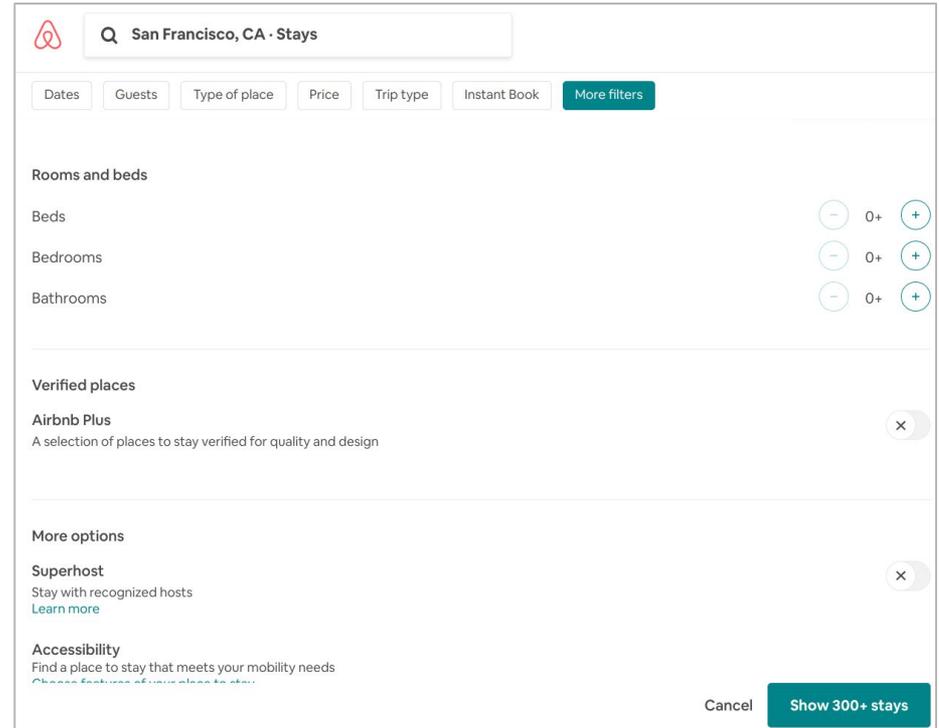
- While mobile usage is increasing, users noted that for complex trip planning and comparisons they prefer to use a laptop with a larger screen
- Mobile check-in is not a commonly used feature; most prefer to check in at a counter with a person

## **Hotel rewards programs**

- Simple perks like free water at check-in for Marriott rewards members can go a long way to demonstrate customer appreciation
- Loyalty reward programs are widely used but many feel as though they never reap benefits from them; often don't travel enough to get any perks
- Infrequent travelers feel as though the rewards programs aren't designed for them; although still would be willing to sign up for one that gave them benefits

## Hotels vs. Airbnb rentals

- Hotel rooms often don't feel as good value as larger accommodations found on Airbnb. Group travel or families looking for a hotel suite often feel priced out of a hotel and will instead look at renting an apartment or house. Hotels don't do a great job catering toward this market.



A user described how she felt like traditional hotel sites and offerings didn't cater to group trips or trips that required more than two beds. Suites often feel overpriced, she says, so she often will use Airbnb, which shown above, has extensive filters and the ability to filter places by number of beds. This makes finding a place for her group trip easy.

## RESEARCH HYPOTHESES - RETROSPECTIVE



1

Third-party travel sites are a popular method of researching travel.

**VALIDATED**

2

Users have the most confidence when purchasing travel (hotel or airfare) directly from the company.

**NOT VALID**

Users expressed that they often book travel directly from sites such as Expedia or Priceline. Often, users feel that these sites offer, better deals, have accessible number to call were top reasons people booked here.

3

Users often use price as one of the main pieces of information to differentiate between hotel offerings.

**VALIDATED**

4

Apps need to have distinct, unique features and offerings in order to users download and continue to use them.

**VALIDATED**

5

Loyalty program offerings are often confusing, and may change over time, which frustrates frequent travelers.

**VALIDATED**

6

One of the most common reasons someone abandons travel booking is because they are not yet ready to purchase tickets or reserve a room.

**VALIDATED**

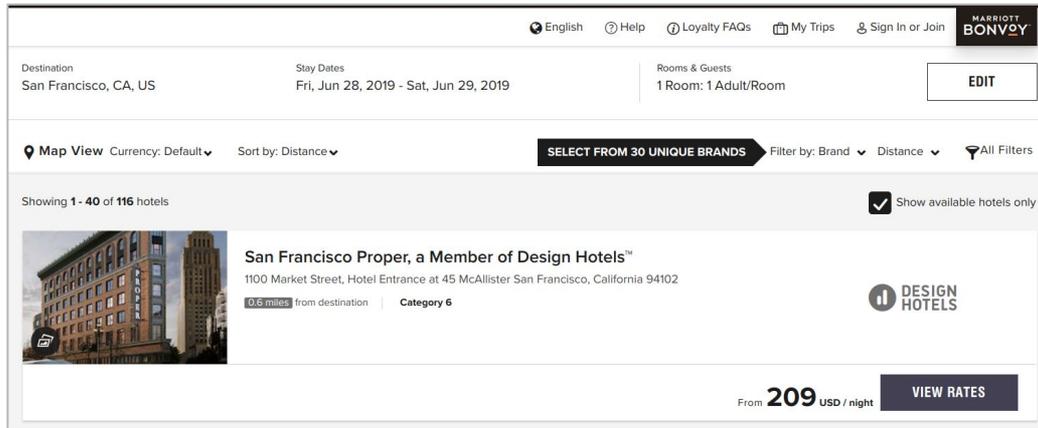
## RESEARCH RECOMMENDATIONS



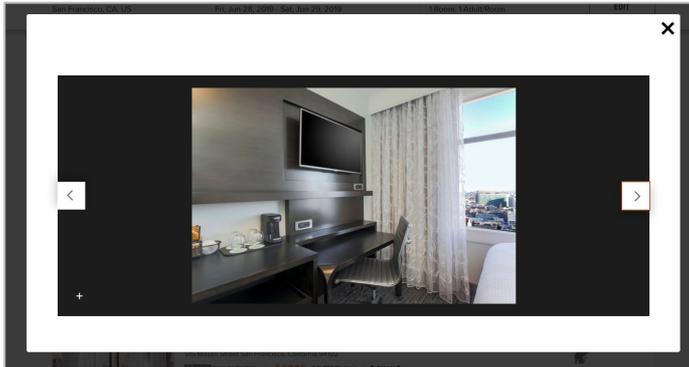
Further research may be required, but there are some key recommendations that could be addressed now. These are not in any particular order and some may be more complex than others.

1. **Explore the concept** of better advertising cost of vacation packages so that users can quickly identify its “value” in comparison to traditional booking costs
2. **Identify non-frequent traveler** rewards perks and better communicate them to travelers. This may help increase sign-ups and usage of these reward programs.
3. **Add option to filter** by price when users are browsing for hotels
4. **Conduct a content audit** of imagery used throughout hotel brands; ensure image selections are designed for the average traveler (more photos of room types, less of conference rooms spaces)
5. **Consider integrating the map view** of hotel listing more prominently to support users trying to select a hotel in a particular area of a city. Support users picking a hotel near local attractions.

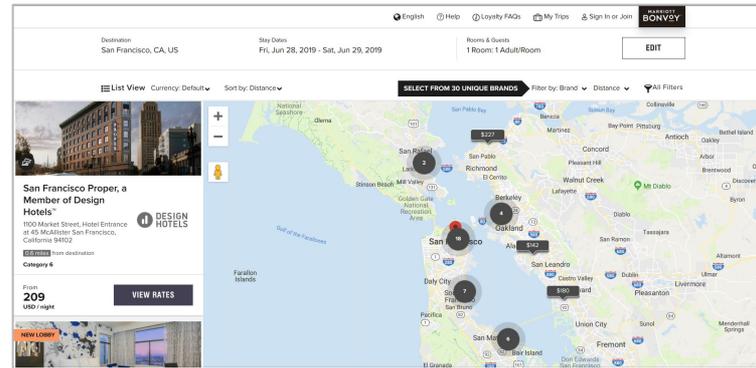
## RESEARCH RECOMMENDATIONS



Price was identified as one of the most important factors when deciding between hotels. The Marriott site doesn't currently support the option to filter by price. We recommend they add this feature.



Marriott's slideshows for room images feels outdated and is slow to control. Consider redesigning this feature and testing with users.



Location and distance to attractions is an important way users browse for hotels. Marriott offers a map view, but it's not on by default and the link is small. Consider testing this as a default or making the link more prominent.

In addition to more immediate changes to the website and app, there are a number of additional research activities that would help to uncover more information about how to improve the current product offerings.

### **Additional research activities**

- **Conduct a comparative analysis** of competing hotel brands' apps and services to better understand their offerings and features.
- **Perform more extensive usability testing** with users that are familiar with the Marriott brand to discover current customer behaviors, opinions, and attitudes.
- **Perform a card sort or tree test** to see how well the current site structure and app structures match how users think about the information.



Questions about this report or the research?  
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