

Interview Plan, Guide and Summary for Marriott User Research Project

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Introduction

The following overview summarizes the user research goals, user research questions, interview questions, and interview narratives for the Marriott User Research Project. It is a summary of information that will be used in the project's final analysis and recommendations.

A. Interview Plan

1. User Research Goals

Goal 1: Determine how people choose hotels.

- Identify the amenities and features that are important to users.
- Learn about valuable hotel room features.
- Learn about the importance of hotel location and surroundings

Goal 2: Define the meaning of "lifestyle" and "luxury" for hotel users.

- Identify the ways users' lifestyles influence their hotel choices.
- Learn about users' perception of luxury and what makes a hotel luxurious.

Goal 3: Understand decisions users make when making travel plans.

- Determine how they search for flight and car rental options.
- Understand why a user would drive to a hotel destination rather than fly.

Goal 4: Investigate users' physical problems web sites and mobile apps.

- Identify difficulties users have when booking a room on a web site or mobile app.
- Understand reasons they might use the phone to book a room.

Goal 5: Explore ways in which a hotel rewards program is valuable to users.

- Identify how they earn and use points.
- Learn about the options users want in a rewards program.
- Identify difficulties users have with rewards programs.

2. User Research Questions

Theme: Choosing Hotels

Question	Learning Explanation
What amenities do users look for in a hotel?	Learning about user expectations will help Marriott understand how to better serve their customers.
What considerations make a user choose one hotel over another?	Learning what drives users to choose between two or more similar hotels will reveal how users make choices.
When do users begin to choose hotels?	Learning when the choice process begins will help Marriott understand when to approach users with advertising, bonus programs, or similar outreach efforts.

Theme: Lifestyle and Luxury Hotels

Question	Learning Explanation
How do users describe their lifestyle?	Learning how users define the concept of lifestyle and how they associate it with hotels will help Marriott expand and update its lifestyle brands.
How do users identify hotels that suit their lifestyle?	Learning about how users match a hotel's image with the image of their lifestyle will help Marriott understand the concept of lifestyle from the user's perspective.
Is luxury a concept that has a distinct meaning to users?	Understanding what a user considers to be a luxurious hotel will help Marriott form a picture of luxury as defined by the user.

Theme: Travel to Hotels

Question	Learning Explanation
How do users explore travel options?	Learning how users search for travel options will help Marriott support users' needs on their entire journey to and from a hotel.
How do users choose between travel methods (flying as opposed to driving)?	Understanding the circumstances in which users will fly or drive to a hotel destination will help Marriott empathize with users' travel challenges.
What difficulties do users have in coordinating travel and hotel booking?	Learning about the coordination issues users face will help Marriott work with transportation providers in a more effective manner.

Theme: Usability of Hotel Booking Service Web Site and Mobile App

Question	Learning Explanation
What do users like and dislike about a hotel booking web site or mobile app?	Understanding what users do and do not like will help Marriott see usability from the user's point of view as compared to its own internal point of view.
What physical discomfort do users have when using a web site or mobile app to book a hotel room?	Learning about physical issues users have with menus, buttons, colors, sounds, icons, photographs, and other aspects of the online hotel booking experience will help Marriott's design team understand user needs.
What do users expect from the experience of using a hotel booking web site or mobile app?	Learning what users expect when they visit a hotel booking web site or mobile app will help Marriott interpret their perceptions. Even when users have not experienced specific physical discomfort, they may be negative because their expectations were not satisfied.

Theme: Hotel Rewards Programs

Question	Learning Explanation
How do users earn and spend points?	Knowing how users earn and spend points will give Marriott insight into their current behavior. This knowledge will provide a basis for further research on how earning and spending can be increased.
How do they keep track of their points?	Understanding how users look up and track their points will help Marriott understand any challenges or difficulties users have in planning how to budget their points.
What rewards options do users wish they had?	Learning about options users would allow in a rewards program will help Marriott expand the ways in which its rewards program serves users.

3. Research Hypotheses

Hypothesis 1

People choose hotels and flights by finding the “sweet spot” of ideal price, amenities, location, and other features. Their main goal in choosing a hotel is the amount and type of amenities the hotel offers relative to the price. This goal is the overriding consideration when users choose hotels.

Hypothesis 2

“Lifestyle” and “luxury” have specific meanings to users. That is, these words bring to mind specific features and amenities that users expect in hotels. Users expect hotels to define lifestyle and luxury from their perspective, not from a hotel brand image perspective.

Hypothesis 3

Users make travel plans by first considering whether the trip is for business or vacation. Then they consider the distance to their destination. They would be interested in booking a hotel and flight as a package only if they have already determined that they must fly rather than drive to their hotel. Users who intend to drive rather than fly are not enticed by hotel and flight packages.

Hypothesis 4

Users sometimes have physical difficulty navigating hotel booking services on the web. They sometimes have difficulty understanding the meaning of icons that do not have tool tips, or understanding where to find information on the web site. Also, they sometimes have difficulty using a mobile app on a smartphone because the screen is too small. This difficulty sometimes leads to users abandoning the reservation and making the reservation by phone.

Hypothesis 5

Hotel rewards programs are important to users for finding bargains. Therefore, users are careful to keep track of points, know their options for earning and spending points, and have strong opinions as to how their rewards options could be expanded.

B. Interview Guide

Introduction

Hi _____, thanks for meeting with me today. I'm looking forward to our discussion. I'm Connie Godsey-Bell. I'm a user researcher working on a project for the Marriott corporation. Marriott is interested in redesigning its web site and mobile app. I'm gathering information on how you might use a hotel's online booking service to find and reserve a hotel room for a vacation. During the interview, I'll ask about 20 questions related to your lifestyle, luxury hotels, your hotel rewards program, traveling to hotels, and your use of online hotel booking services. Marriott will use your input to assist in its redesign project.

Of course, I'll take notes as we go along. I would also like to videotape our session, so I need to get your ok on that. Here is the consent form for the taping. (*Interviewee signs consent form.*) Now we'll start the video. Thanks for allowing me to tape the session. It helps me accurately report your thoughts and responses. (*Videocamera is turned on.*)

Warm-Up

Hi, _____. Thanks again for our allowing me to interview you.

First, let's go over a few general questions to get warmed up. (*Short pause*)

1. Where do you usually go on vacation?
2. Who travels with you?
3. When you go on vacation, do you fly to your destination?
4. When you drive to your destination, do you stay in hotels on the way?
5. What would be your ideal vacation that includes staying in a hotel?

Body

Great! Let's talk about your lifestyle now and how it influences your hotel choices.

1. What features must a hotel have to suit your lifestyle? (*Follow-up: What features are required?*)
2. How important is it that your hotel is centrally located relative to nearby attractions that you will visit? (*Follow-up: When staying in your hotel, will you drive or walk to attractions such as museums, ball parks, or concerts?*)
3. What is your idea of the perfect hotel room? (*Follow-up: What is your "dream" hotel room?*)
4. When would a hotel be eliminated as a vacation hotel because it didn't suit your lifestyle?

Thanks! Now let's focus on the idea of "luxury."

5. How would you describe a luxury hotel? (*Follow-up: What makes a hotel "luxurious"?*)
6. What amenities must a hotel have to be considered a luxury hotel? (*Follow-up: What is required for a hotel to attain the status of being a luxury hotel?*)

7. When would you want to stay in a luxury hotel? *(Follow-up: What time(s) in your life would your vacation include staying in a luxury hotel?)*
8. What would you expect from a Marriott luxury hotel?

Let's talk now about your hotel rewards program

9. How do you earn points in your hotel rewards program?
10. How do you use points in your hotel rewards program? *(Follow-up: How do you spend your points?)*
11. What are some options you wish you had in your hotel rewards program?
12. What thoughts come to mind when you think of the Marriott Rewards program?

Let's talk about how you make travel plans

13. When you search for information on travel to hotels, how do you conduct the search? *(Follow-up: How do you search for travel options (flight, car rental, bus, etc.)? How do you search for directions? How do you search for hotels to stay at as you are traveling?)*
14. How easy is it for you to coordinate booking a hotel room with planning your trip?
15. When would you want to bundle a hotel and flight reservation as a package?
16. When would you want to bundle a hotel and car rental as a package?

Now I'd like to get your thoughts on online hotel booking services.

17. What features would the ideal online hotel booking service have?
18. When using a hotel booking web site or mobile app, have you experienced any physical difficulty or awkwardness? *(Follow-up: Have you, for example, experienced difficulty pressing buttons that are too small or seeing icons that are obscure?)*
19. When would you book a hotel room by phone rather than use an online service?
20. When you book a hotel, would a web site be more usable for you than a mobile app?

Cool-Down

For my last question, do you have any feedback on online hotel booking services that I did not cover in the interview? *(Interviewee provides additional feedback, if any.)*

Do you have any questions for me? *(Answer interviewee's questions, if any.)*

Wrap-Up

OK, that wraps up our interview! Thanks for such an informative session! *(Stand up to signal interview has concluded.)* Marriott and I greatly appreciate your time and input. *(Shake interviewee's hand. Walk interviewee to door.)*

C. Interviews

Interviews were conducted and recorded on June 20 and 21, 2014.

D. Interview Summary

Demographic Description of Interviewees

Interviewee 1: Cynthia

- Gender: Female
- Age range: 50 - 60
- Job: Communications Manager for ReedElsevier
- How often she stays in hotels: At least twice a year, sometimes up to 6 times a year
- Whether she has used any of Marriott's digital properties in the last 6 months: Yes, in April 2014

Interviewee 2: Patricia

- Gender: Female
- Age range: 50 - 60
- Job: Librarian and Consulting Taxonomist for LexisNexis
- How often she stays in hotels: Varies; at least 5x a year
- Whether she has used any of Marriott's digital properties in the last 6 months: Yes, but she is not sure how often.

Interviewee 3: Leslie

- Gender: Female
- Age range: 50 - 60
- Job: Director of Government Content Acquisition for LexisNexis
- How often she stays in hotels: 6-15 times per year
- Whether she has used any of Marriott's digital properties in the last 6 months: No

Environment Where Interviews Were Conducted

LexisNexis Innovation Room

The interviews with Cynthia and Patricia were taped in LexisNexis's "Innovation Room." This is a special room in which groups have brainstorming sessions and special programs focused on innovation topics.

This room is very clean and has modern sleek upholstered furniture. It has large flip charts and dry erase boards for groups to use in their session. It has inspirational, thought provoking posters on the walls. The lighting can be very bright or dimmed to create a quiet mood. It has adjustable venetian blinds. Cynthia manages access to this room; she graciously offered it to me for the interviews.

LexisNexis Conference Room, Building 4

The interview with Leslie took place in a LexisNexis conference room near her office. It is a typical corporate conference room with very large tables surrounded by modern office chairs. It has credenzas on each end of the room for storage and serving carry-in luncheons. It is very clean and bright. The lighting and blinds can be adjusted to accommodate all types of meetings. Leslie was not able to schedule her interview on the day I used the Innovation Room. Her choice was to use the conference room (she didn't want to use her office because she thought it was too messy.)

Brief Narratives of the Interviews

Introduction

The interviews with Cynthia and Patricia took place during business hours. Both Cynthia and Patricia were in a "work" frame of mind when they came to the room. The tone of both interviews was relatively formal. The interview with Leslie took place after business hours. It was more relaxed and informal.

As the interviewer, I tried to be sensitive to the personalities, mood, and current circumstances of the interviewees. For example, I knew Cynthia came to the interview in an agitated frame of mind because she had received some disappointing news that day. I knew that Patricia has opinions, but sometimes has difficulty finding the words to express her thoughts. (To make things even more challenging for Patricia, there was a major thunderstorm during her interview. The lights went out briefly. I asked if she wanted to continue, and she said yes.) I knew that Leslie is very busy; she has another business trip next week. Leslie is also very friendly and casual; an overly formal interview style would have made her uncomfortable. I tried to vary my interview approach to make the interviewee comfortable.

Narrative: Cynthia

Cynthia has traveled all over the world with her husband. She has a great deal of experience with hotels. She is also a person with very upscale tastes. She expects top-notch hotel service. For example, in her feedback on how a hotel would suit her lifestyle, she mentioned wanting separate brewing machines for tea and coffee. She is a tea drinker: she does not want to drink tea that was brewed in the same carafe that was used to brew coffee. To Cynthia, an impressive luxury hotel would have antiques in the lobby and be very quiet. She is a Marriott Rewards customer, but is not very familiar with the program. When making travel plans, she checks AAA ratings. She uses the web site to book her room, but calls the hotel to see how the staff behaves on the phone. If the staff has good telephone etiquette, the hotel is likely to meet her standards.

Narrative: Patricia

Patricia is familiar with Marriott brands and sometimes stays at them. However, she prefers non-chain hotels and country inns. She vacations by herself. She likes to explore local hotels, local food, and local culture. Her vacations usually involve short trips; therefore, she almost always drives to her destination. She prefers driving because it is soothing to her. When Patricia goes on vacation, she wants to relax. For a hotel to suit her lifestyle, it must have a nice bathtub. A luxury hotel would have upscale bath crystals, towels, and full room service. She stopped using her rewards program because it was too confusing. She has not yet used a mobile app to book a hotel room, but has used web sites. She has trouble finding information on web sites. She often searches for specific words using control/f.

Narrative: Leslie

Leslie mostly travels for business, but she sometimes vacations with her boyfriend. In her vacations, she generally takes short trips that only require a few hours' travel time. Therefore, she drives because it's more convenient than flying. Sometimes she vacations by going out west to Las Vegas or San Francisco. She likes the idea of being in an upscale western style lodge with scenic views. When she searches for hotels for business trips, she is required to use the company reservation system. But when she goes on vacation, she uses Priceline or Kayak. She prefers to use a web site rather than a mobile app because a smartphone screen is too small to see the information. She would use her iPad with a mobile app, but not her phone. Leslie is a "Marriott girl" and is happy with the options in the Marriott Rewards program.