Wunderkind

The Future of Hotel Marketing

Unlocking Direct Bookings with Identity Marketing

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Executive Summary

Hotels invest heavily in digital marketing to attract travelers—from paid search ads that capture intent at the moment of discovery, to metasearch engines that enable price and convenience comparisons CRM systems hold years of guest history, fueling personalized email campaigns and loyalty outreach. Yet despite these sophisticated efforts, only 2–3% of traffic to hotel websites complete a booking on their first visit. The remaining 97–98% exit without converting, often booking instead with OTAs, where friction is lower and deals are more visible. Each abandoned visit represents not just a lost opportunity—but a potential handoff to a competitor.

Identity marketing solves this problem by transforming anonymous web traffic into identifiable, marketable guests. Using real-time data and identity resolution technology, hotels can recognize up to six times more visitors, engage them with personalized messaging, and drive direct bookings at a higher rate. This approach reduces OTA dependence, increases conversion rates, and optimizes marketing spend by focusing on known travelers rather than blindly retargeting unknown users.
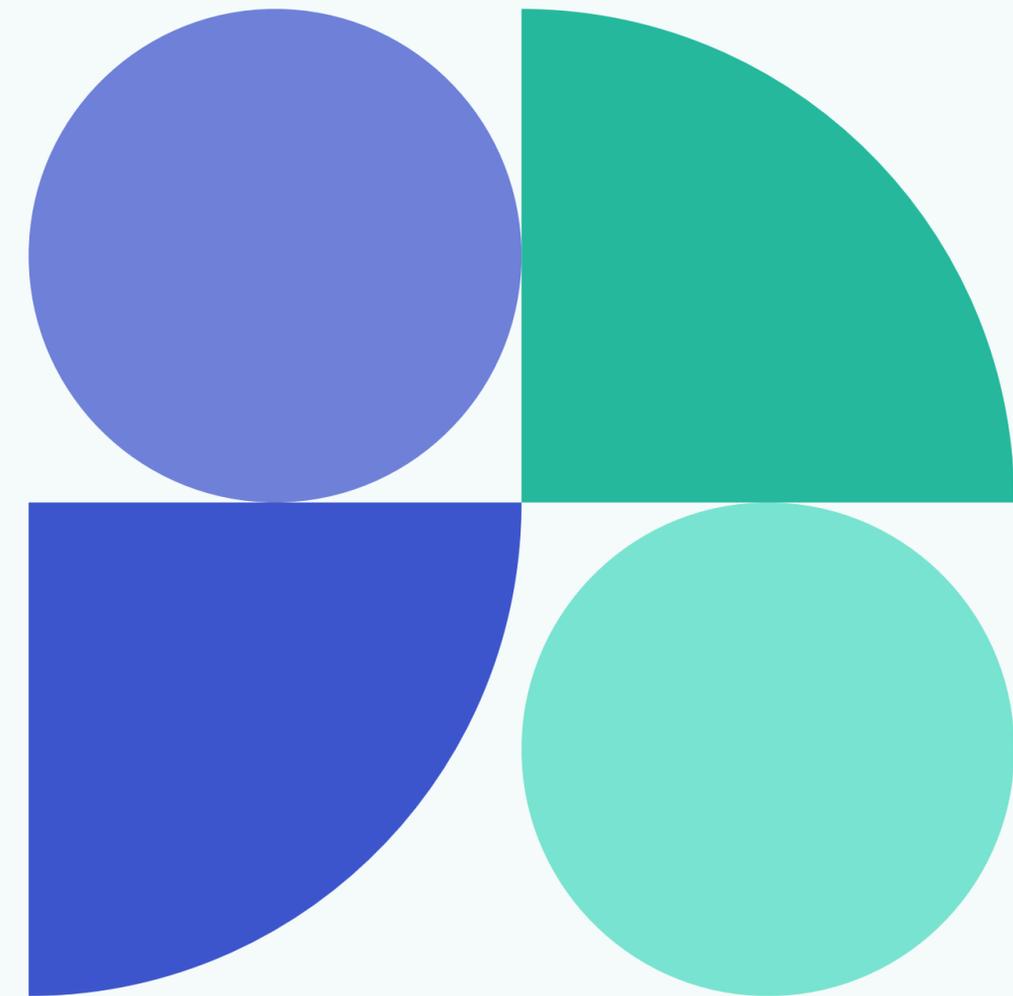
The Future of Hotel Marketing is Identity Marketing

Hotels direct substantial resources toward digital marketing to attract travelers. Paid search ensures visibility at the moment travelers are searching for accommodations. Metasearch platforms allow hotels to compete on price and convenience. CRM databases contain years of guest history, making personalized email campaigns possible. Despite these efforts, only 2-3% of hotel website visitors complete a booking, while the remaining 97-98% leave without taking action. Every traveler who abandons a hotel website is an opportunity lost, often leading instead to a booking with an Online Travel Agency (OTA).

OTAs dominate the digital travel ecosystem by investing billions (with a b) in advertising. They capitalize on hotels' struggles to convert their own website traffic, engaging travelers who leave and securing bookings through aggressive remarketing. Once a traveler books through an OTA, the hotel loses control of the guest relationship and future direct booking potential. Loyalty engagement, upsell opportunities, and repeat business all shift to the OTA's ecosystem, making it increasingly difficult for hotels to bring guests back through their own channels.

Hotels have attempted to close this gap with retargeting and CRM-driven email marketing. Retargeting has historically allowed hotels to re-engage lost visitors, though privacy changes and the phase-out of third-party cookies are making this strategy less reliable. CRM outreach delivers segmented offers, though its effectiveness is limited when messages reach guests long after they have made a booking decision. The challenge is timing. Hotels know their guests and their offerings, though they often lack the ability to recognize when a traveler is actively considering a stay. Without real-time identification, marketing efforts fail to reach travelers at the most critical moment.
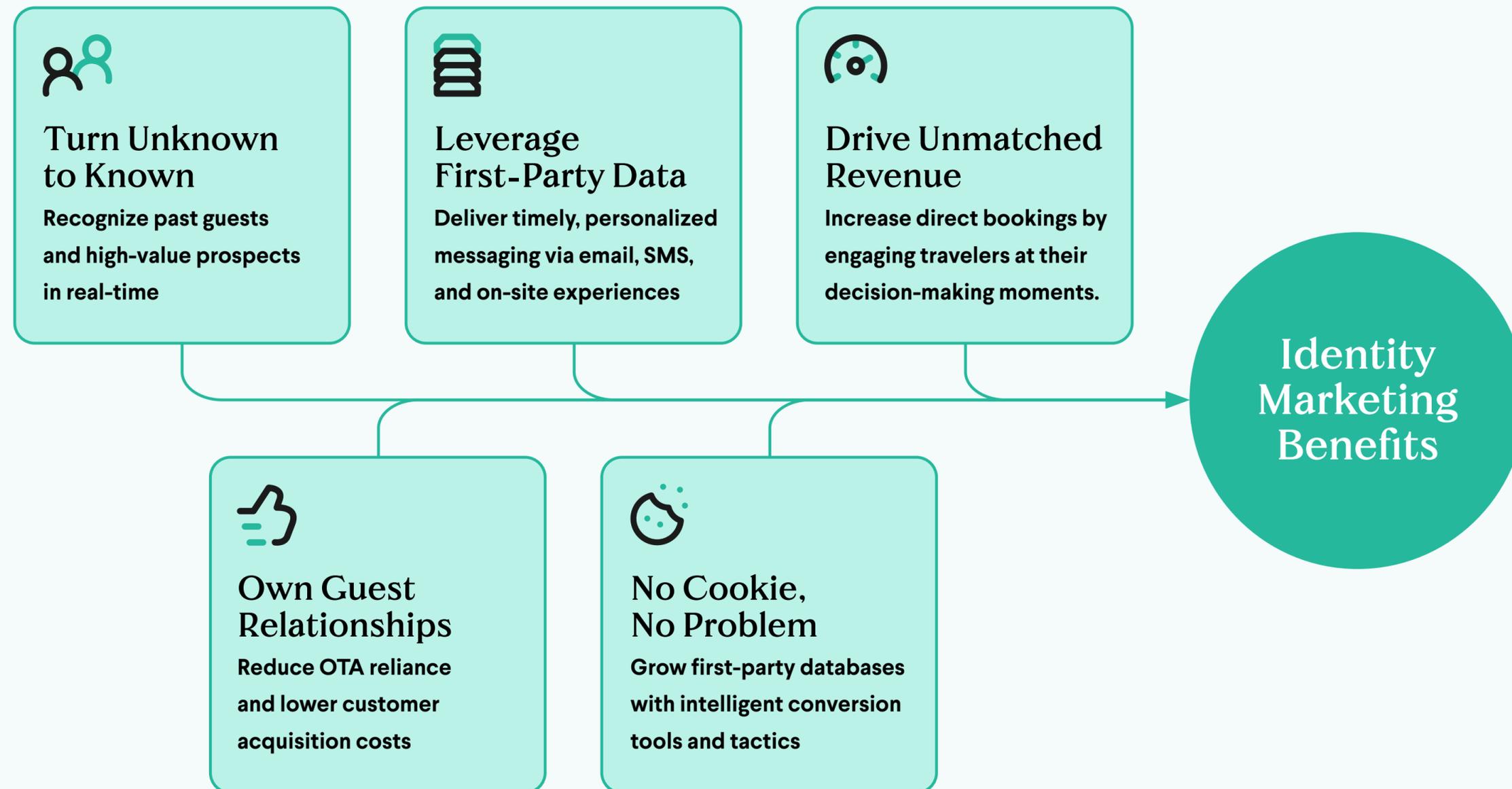
The Rise of Identity Marketing

Identity marketing bridges the gap between anonymous website visitors and recognizable consumers by leveraging a vast network of digital interactions and consumer devices into a graph. Identity resolution partners observe billions of consumer devices across thousands of websites, ad platforms, and publishers, collecting and analyzing trillions of browsing, clicking, and purchasing behaviors.

This data is used to construct comprehensive consumer profiles into proprietary graphs, connecting multiple identification methods that do not rely solely on cookies, but additionally through other device IDs, first-party data, and server-side tracking. This allows identity partners to instantly recognize the multiple devices, email addresses and mobile numbers connected to a given consumer profile while understanding if that visitor is an opted-in marketing contact for a hotel or truly a net-new visitor.

Unlike a hotel's CRM or ESP, which often fails to recognize returning visitors due to expired first-party cookies, cleared browsing data, or other technical limitations, identity resolution partners operate at scale to ensure continuous recognition through probabilistic and deterministic means. By integrating these insights, identity marketing allows hotels to identify up to 6x more anonymous visitors and engage them in real-time. With upwards of 95%+ of website traffic being anonymous to the hotel, identity closes that gap and creates more opportunities for engagement.

When a traveler browses but does not book, personalized follow-ups through email, text, or other direct channels are triggered, ensuring engagement continues beyond the initial visit. This intelligent targeting optimizes messaging, timing, and delivery channel, significantly increasing the likelihood of direct bookings while reducing reliance on third-party platforms or expensive ad remarketing budgets.

By Implementing Identity Marketing, Hotels Can:

Turn Unknown to Known
Recognize past guests and high-value prospects in real-time

Leverage First-Party Data
Deliver timely, personalized messaging via email, SMS, and on-site experiences

Drive Unmatched Revenue
Increase direct bookings by engaging travelers at their decision-making moments.

Own Guest Relationships
Reduce OTA reliance and lower customer acquisition costs

No Cookie, No Problem
Grow first-party databases with intelligent conversion tools and tactics

Identity Marketing Benefits

The Competitive Advantage of Real-Time Engagement

The digital travel landscape is shifting. AI-powered booking assistants, voice search, and privacy-driven changes in advertising are altering the way travelers research and book accommodations. Hotels must adapt by leveraging identity marketing to recognize and engage travelers before they turn to OTAs or AI-driven intermediaries.

Without identity marketing, hotels risk losing valuable potential guests to third-party platforms without a way to re-engage them. The inability to recognize and target past visitors means missed opportunities for personalized offers, reducing the likelihood of direct bookings. As acquisition costs rise due to inefficient and untargeted marketing efforts, hotels will find it increasingly difficult to compete with AI-powered booking platforms that streamline decision-making for travelers. Without a strategy to identify and convert high-intent visitors, hotels remain at a disadvantage in a digital landscape that favors real-time engagement and personalized marketing.

With identity marketing, hotels can take control of their guest relationships and maximize direct bookings. By recognizing high-intent visitors in real time, hotels can re-engage potential guests before they turn to OTAs. This not only reduces reliance on third-party platforms but also strengthens direct customer relationships.

Identity marketing allows hotels to optimize their marketing spend by focusing on known travelers, ensuring that messaging reaches the right audience at the right moment. Additionally, by identifying and targeting premium guests with personalized offers, hotels can drive higher Average Daily Rate (ADR) and boost overall revenue. In a competitive digital landscape, the ability to recognize and engage travelers at key decision-making moments is a game-changer, ensuring hotels remain top-of-mind when it matters most.

Implementation: Bringing Identity Marketing to Hotels

To unlock the full potential of identity marketing, hotels must seamlessly integrate identity resolution within their existing digital ecosystem. A robust identity marketing solution should not only include CRM, ESP, and on-site personalization tools but also offer flexible and adaptable integration options. Identity resolution partners must bring not just technology but also expertise, best practices, and industry knowledge to ensure seamless adoption. Whether through direct integrations with email and mobile platforms or via comprehensive API first development options, implementation should be both accessible and transformative. The right solution makes it easy for hotels to harness identity data, enabling real-time engagement that turns anonymous visitors into high-value, direct-booking guests—reshaping their approach to digital marketing for long-term success.

The following are key elements that help define the value proposition of an identity resolution partner. Each of these areas of value have a direct impact on building stronger customer relationships, fostering loyalty and retention with new and existing customers while driving growth and revenue and diminishing reliance on large paid media budgets.

Hotels should measure partners in their ability to help deliver on the following areas:

First-Party Data Acquisition

Collecting and expanding an owned marketing database through strategic email and SMS opt-ins.

Real-Time Identity Recognition

Leveraging an identity network to match anonymous traffic with known guest profiles.

Personalized Triggered Messaging

Automating engagement strategies that respond to real-time traveler intent.

AI-Driven Optimization

Continuously refining targeting and messaging to increase conversion efficiency

Conclusion

Hotels that embrace identity marketing will gain a significant competitive advantage in the evolving digital landscape. Beyond simply recognizing and converting website visitors in real-time, identity marketing helps hotels grow and maximize the value of their first-party data sets, transforming them into actionable insights. By leveraging this data to deepen personalization efforts, hotels can create more meaningful connections with travelers, fostering stronger brand loyalty and increasing direct bookings. As AI-driven travel assistants and privacy-first marketing reshape consumer behavior, the ability to harness identity resolution to drive tailored engagement will be essential for maintaining relevance and profitability in an increasingly competitive market.

For hotel marketers seeking a trusted partner to implement identity marketing, **Wunderkind** offers a best-in-class solution with unmatched scale and expertise. Their identity graph spans 9 billion devices and 1 billion opted-in consumers while overseeing more than 2 trillion digital browse, click, and purchase events per year. This extensive reach enables hotels to recognize and engage more potential guests than any other provider.

Beyond technology, Wunderkind has deep experience in the travel and hospitality space, ensuring that its solutions are tailored to the unique needs of hotel brands. Unlike other providers, Wunderkind guarantees performance results, making it a low-risk, high-reward investment for hotels looking to maximize direct bookings. Whether integrating through existing ESP and mobile platforms, via API's or with robust SDKs for integration with digital properties like branded hotel apps, Wunderkind allow hotels to implement identity resolution in a way that best fits their marketing stack. This combination of cutting-edge technology, industry expertise, and flexible deployment makes Wunderkind the premier choice for hotels seeking to transform their digital acquisition strategy.

Michael J. Goldrich

Michael J. Goldrich, founder and chief advisor of Vivander Advisors, is a recognized expert in crafting digital and AI strategies that drive transformative growth and enhance business value. As the author of "Too Many Hats, Too Little Time," he offers invaluable insights and practical strategies for leveraging AI technologies to boost efficiency and decision-making.

A recent highlight of Goldrich's career is his focus on generative AI. He introduced an AI Literacy and Mindset Program that trains professionals to use generative AI to become proficient and productive. This enables them to generate more revenue and grow their companies without investing in new talent as they expand.

As the Chief Experience Officer at The Hotels Network, Goldrich leverages AI and data to enhance customer engagement and boost conversion rates by anticipating guest needs and preferences. His "predictive personalization" expertise has made him a sought-after consultant in the hospitality sector. As the Co-Leader of GAIN's hospitality practice, he advises hotel leaders on best practices for AI adoption.

At Northwestern University's Kellogg School, Goldrich leads discussions on Data Strategy for Generative AI Platforms, clarifying complex material for participants. He also frequently contributes to Hospitality Upgrade on digital marketing and generative AI topics. As head of global marketing at Club Quarters Hotels, Goldrich successfully adapted the business model to appeal to a younger, local audience, significantly enhancing the brand's market presence. His expertise extends beyond hospitality; he has refined e-commerce and digital capabilities for major firms like Accenture, Starwood, Monster Worldwide, and Wyndham.

Goldrich's achievements include the Platinum Adrian Award for an outstanding social media campaign and the Gold Adrian Award for a creative website. In 2020, HSMAI recognized him as one of the Top 25 Extraordinary Minds in Sales, Marketing, and Revenue Optimization. Goldrich holds a BA in literature from the University of Michigan and an MA in business communications from Northwestern University. His academic qualifications, passion for technology, and commitment to innovation make him a leader in driving productivity and transformative solutions.

Wunderkind

Wunderkind is the leading AI-driven performance marketing solution that collects consent-based, first-party data and identifies anonymous traffic for travel brands in order to scale hyper-personalized one-to-one messages. Travel brands lean on the Wunderkind Identity Network, a proprietary database recognizing 9 billion devices and 1 billion consumers, and observes 2 trillion digital transactions every year, to trigger the most impactful offers to their target audience at the right moment and in the right channel. This proprietary data is accessed by Wunderkind's Autonomous Marketing Platform, an AI engine that integrates seamlessly into a travel brands' existing ESP to boost performance across email, text and advertising channels.

Wunderkind is the only performance solution that guarantees a lift in revenue for its clients and delivers over $5 billion in directly attributable revenue annually for brands across a number of industries, often ranking as a top 3 revenue channel in clients' own analytics platforms. Brands such as Gate 1 Travel, Omni Hotels & Resorts, Hertz and Coach USA partner with Wunderkind to drive top-line revenue through its guaranteed results.