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Jean-Philippe Nuel

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EXPERT INSIGHT

By Jean-Philippe Nuel

It has been more than a year since COVID-19 developed into a pandemic, along with its panoply of urgent measures to contain, combat and defeat the devastating effect of the virus including confinement, curfews, travel restrictions—including the recent border closures in Europe—and frequent mandatory quarantines for international travel.

In the U.S., New York City has gone dormant. The dynamism of the American megalopolis—the world's meeting point for business, art, diplomacy and tourism—has collapsed. The luckiest New Yorkers have been living in the countryside or in Florida for a year, and tourists are logically absent.

More than 67 million visitors were expected in New York in 2020. Only 23 million came, a staggering 66% drop. The impact on the hotel industry is spectacular. Iconic hotels have permanently closed their doors. Thousands of people lost their jobs. To get back to the numbers of 2019, we will have to wait until 2024, according to the New York tourism agency, NYC & Company.

Hospitality is one of the main collaterals and economic victims of COVID-19. The decline in clientele will continue even beyond the economic consequences of the health situation. Businesses have also realized that they can prosper with less travel. They can switch from in-person meetings far away from the office into virtual online meetings. Tourists are now more concerned about the environmental impact of short trips. While tourism is not expected to decrease, the consideration of carbon footprints of air travel may dissuade many in the future from flying around the world just for a weekend in New York. The fight against climate change should eventually lead people to travel less for short and distant tourism.

The only alternative to this crisis is to reinvent, revitalize and reposition the entire hotel industry by

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The hotel will thus become a multi-purpose living space, both traditional and new, and will be able to propose synergies between all its services.

A new space layout will allow the hotel to offer:

- Workspaces not unlike the ones in a home or a meeting room in a business office. The objective is to create environments that are conducive to meeting, creativity, isolation and/or presentation. These work rooms can be rented on a one-time basis. Some of them, such as connected tables in a hallway opened on a green garden, could even be made available free of charge to guests or as a subscription for people living in the hotel's neighborhood. In order to optimize the return on investment of these spaces, the meeting rooms could even become a children's club on weekends, led by professionals, as part of a staycation offer.
- More diversified entertainment services to welcome daytime, weekend and local vacationers. There will of course be areas for sports, swimming, yoga, meditation, connected bicycles and treadmills, and the possibility of taking group or individual classes. The hotel will offer an almost infinite list of possibilities to get together with friends or to get some fresh air: a private screening room, a cooking class, a bike ride to discover the city in a different way, an art exhibition or a conference with a local author. Finally, there will be shops that meet the needs of guests and residents alike. The hotel will thus be able to create more life in the establishment and diversify its attractiveness.
- More personalized, perhaps bigger, rooms with a more functional space for heating and preparing a meal; a more discreet desk; and homier and more flexible than ever furniture and décor. The objective is to cater more to families and win back customers today seduced by community rental platforms such as Airbnb.
- The second floor could be connected by a brighter and wider staircase, lit with daylight to offer a hybrid function: suites composed of family and mini-meeting rooms. The living room of the suite (equipped with a sofa bed, a table and a micro kitchenette) can be transformed either into a living space for a family connected to one or two bedrooms, or a small meeting room for six to eight people.

Above all, let's create products for everyone.

- Local customers will find along with sports, swimming, cinema, shops, catering and workspaces, a whole series of products to be consumed punctually or as a subscription. Nothing will prevent them from also choosing a hotel for a local getaway, a staycation.
- Travelers will first look for an accommodation in a different setting, close to that of a house or an apartment, but will find within the hotel an access to entertainment, professional meetings and sales services, which will constitute a definite advantage over renting an apartment from an individual.

These two clienteles will constantly cross paths.

The hotel's sources of revenue will become even more diversified. Hotels will no longer be just a place to sleep, work, play sports, eat and attend a conference, but will become a personal destination, a club in the heart of the city, inhabited by locals and a reflection of its environment. This upcoming hospitality industry does not break entirely away from the past. The pandemic is just accelerating its transformation.

Jean-Philippe Nuel is a French architect and designer who serves as president of his eponymous design studio. His portfolio includes hotel projects in France, as well as work on hotels across the globe for brands such as Hilton, Marriott, IHG and Accor, among others.

This is a contributed piece to Hotel Business, authored by an industry professional. The thoughts expressed are the perspective of the bylined individual.

Expert Insight

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March 15, 2021

Christina Trauthwein, VP, content & creative, Hotel Business, shares some of the stories in the March 15 edition, such as a cover story on diversity and inclusion in the hospitality industry, as well as the annual construction report and list.

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