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‘Travellers don’t trust the stars’

New research by international architectural design firm Woods Bagot shows that faith in the star rating system—the guide to hotel quality—is declining while independent, online reviews are increasing in popularity. Consumers have had enough of hotels’ trend for “star inflation”.

The poll of 5,000 consumers showed that 2/3 (65 per cent) of people aged between 35 and 54 were less likely to place trust in a star rating when choosing their hotel for work or leisure and more likely to look to the internet for independent reviews from their peers.

Respondents from Scotland were also more likely to turn to the web, with 54 per cent saying they would use on-line reviews and only 49 per cent saying they would consult star ratings.

The results mark a turn away from commonly held views that younger people are more likely to source information from the net, with 18-35 year olds actually showing a preference for relying on star ratings over reviews found online.

“What this seems to suggest”, said Rob Steul, Principal Designer at Woods Bagot in London, “is that travellers with more experience have recognised the massive inconsistencies in the star rating system across Europe and the world. Once you’ve stayed at a hotel that is both inferior and more expensive than a previous hotel at the same rating, you lose faith in the rating’s ability to assure quality.”

It’s a trend that is being recognised by hotel owners across the United Kingdom, with many now setting up websites and asking their guests to comment, even, in some cases, planting reviews.



Rob Steul, who has designed luxury resorts and hotels for 17 years, explained:

“In our experience as designers, the real issue is ‘star inflation’. Hotels and, sometimes even countries, hype their own self-proclaimed star ratings.

“What travellers don’t necessarily realise is that there isn’t a consistent star-rating system across the globe. Each individual Government has an agreed set of standards with the industry, and this is measured by bureaucrats using a check system. Three stars in France is substantially different to three stars in Germany, for instance”.

To make the matter worse, hotels which appear to have burst through the five star ceiling of the rating system are appearing. “Seven starred hotels are essentially making claims to ultra-luxury, but that was the standard previously held by five star hotels,” said Rob. “It’s a dangerous precedent to set, because it makes the star-rating system little more than a marketing tool rather than an assurance of standards and quality. Frankly, it just serves to confuse people.”

The research shows that the majority of young consumers aged 18 to 35, see the most viable type of hotel for the future to be the “global boutique brand”, which offers the security of a named brand but also offers the more individual travel experience that modern consumers demand.

“There is now an up and coming generation which is constantly accruing spending power. They are looking to spend leisure and work time in hotels that afford the complete security of a trusted brand with an experience that is anything but standardised and mass market. In the future we’ll be building hotels that guests can trust to offer quality, luxury, and individuality,” says Rob, who is designing 10 Trinity Square in London, which will set a new benchmark for living and staying in the Capital.

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About Woods Bagot

International design practice, **Woods Bagot** provides its clients with innovative design solutions that are both functional and inspiring. This is demonstrated by the successful delivery of a range of high profile projects within the commercial workplace, hospitality, mixed-use, education and science sectors.

Established in 2001, Woods Bagot's London studio has a dynamic team of 65 professionals. Since its inception, its young, integrated team has developed a diverse portfolio of significant projects including:

- Inacity Tower, Ducie Street, Manchester
- Liverpool Central Village
- Multiplex headquarters, London
- Rolls building, London
- Eversheds LLP new London headquarters