

How to address the needs of the uncompromising customer

Intercontinental Hotels Group's (IHG) 2017 Trends Report - [The Uncompromising Customer: Addressing the Paradoxes of the 'Age of I'](#), launched at the World Economic Forum (WEF) in Davos, Switzerland, highlights the uncompromising nature of today's customer who expects brands to deliver experiences that satisfy contradictory needs.



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Four paradoxes drive customer decision making

IHG's research identifies four paradoxes that are driving the decisions customers make in a landscape constantly changing through advances in technology. In this environment, customers do not want either/or solutions: they want the best of both worlds where the best trade-off is no trade-off. The four paradoxes are:

- **The Paradox of Separate but Connected:** Seeking a constant belonging with people, brands, and places, while also seeking individuality and the desire to communicate uniqueness of self
- **The Paradox of Abundant Rarity:** A desire for luxury to be both scarce and available
- **The Paradox of Seeking a Better Me and a Better We:** Seeking personal self-improvement, while seeking public, civic or global improvement
- **Do It Myself and Do It for Me in My Way:** A desire to be in control while not being the controller

Six best practices through which brands can address opposing customer needs

Global brands must address these paradoxes through being locally relevant and personally differentiating. IHG has identified six best practices through which brands can create experiences that strengthen customer relationships and grow brand loyalty.

Richard Solomons, chief executive officer, IHG, commented: “Technology has changed the way we behave in our daily lives. This has had a direct, and fundamental, impact on business. Global brands need to address the complex, sometimes opposing needs of today’s customers in order to fulfill their expectations.

The six best practices are:

- 1. Aim for integration rather than balance:** Balancing conflicting customer needs is not enough; a better holistic experience needs to be created through the integration of these opposing needs.
- 2. Use needs-driven occasion-based segmentation for superior business management:** Segmentation is not solely a marketing tool but needs to be a core part of a company’s thinking.
- 3. Communicate with conversation:** Brands must listen to customers to understand their needs and communicate with them in a way that makes the experience more meaningful to them as individuals.
- 4. Manage the brand’s multi-dimensionality:** A brand must include relevant and differentiating features as well as functional, emotional, and social benefits. The combination of these builds a distinctive brand character.
- 5. Develop ambidextrous brand business teams:** A brand needs teams that include divergent thinkers, with individual strengths and passions, who can also work in an integrated manner to create the cohesive initiatives that drive brand success.
- 6. Address the paradox of brand control:** Businesses must not give up control of the brand to the external world, yet they must allow the consumers to have their say and help influence the brand’s reputation.

Making brands fit for the future

The 2017 IHG Trends Report is the fifth in a series of reports that share insights into the changing world and provide best practices to help make brands fit for the future. The insights it contains are based on a series of related studies spanning a five-year period and involving nearly 40,000 interviews with travellers across the globe.

Since the first report in 2013, the series has examined developments including the transition from brand experiences to brand relationships in the hospitality sector; delivering global, local and personalised brand experiences; the growing importance for companies to build both brand and organisational trust and how to make membership meaningful at a time when loyalty is becoming ever more important to many industries.

The 2017 IHG Trends Report has been compiled in association with IHG’s long-time partner, Arcature, and through using its own research and observations as well as a variety of external, third party sources.