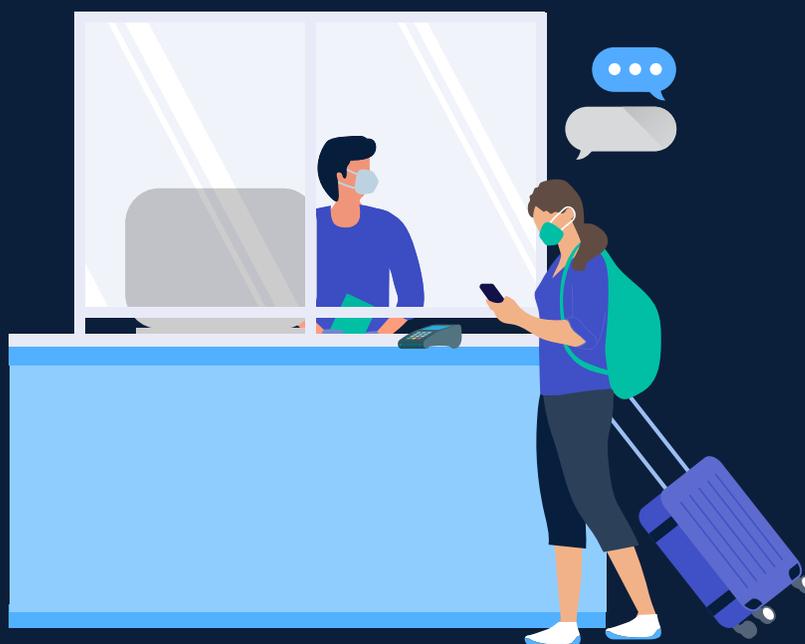




Innovative Hotel Uses Real-Time Messaging Platform to Design a Near Contactless Guest Experience



About The Hotel at Auburn University

Centrally located in a vibrant college town, The Hotel at Auburn University & Dixon Conference Center in Alabama has 236 guestrooms and suites a short walk from both the campus and historic downtown.



Rapidly Changing Circumstances

When COVID-19 began, Ithaka Hospitality Managing Partner Paul Reggio looked to Johnston McCutcheon to see what innovative solutions he could put in place — fast — to address social distancing and help overcome guest anxiety about safely traveling.

McCutcheon was only a few months into his new role as front office manager when shelter-in-place restrictions spread across the country. The Hotel at Auburn University never closed, but the university did and occupancy fell to around 25% from March to July.

50%

THE CHALLENGE:

Keep guests safe with limited in-person contact and maintain high level of service with half the staff

With news of the university reopening in August and a combined spring and summer graduation ceremony looming, the hotel was quickly selling out and now had to scale its contactless operations with a still limited staff.

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"We had to adapt quickly to keep guests informed and safe. Zingle has made it easy to communicate with our guests in real-time and we're using text messaging to create a near contactless guest experience."

- Paul Reggio, Managing Partner, Ithaka Hospitality Partners

Turning Negatives into Positives

“Our mantra through this all has been to create peace of mind for guests,” McCutcheon says. “There is so much apprehension and anxiety around travel, we want to make sure guests arrive fully relaxed knowing we’re doing everything we can.”

The hotel considered posting all the safety precautions and new check-in procedures on its website and including in the confirmation email, but McCutcheon really wanted to be sure guests got the message.

“The best way is being right there in their pocket with a text message,” says McCutcheon, who in his previous role at the hotel was tasked with getting the most out of Zingle’s intelligent messaging platform. He was quite familiar with the software and using real-time communication to drive efficiency and more personalized experiences.

He made sure those details were included in an automated pre-arrival text message sent to guests.

By letting guests know up front about changes like suspended bell and valet services, the hotel was able to turn what could have been negatives into positives by showing their commitment to safety.

The Hotel at Auburn University Uses Zingle's Messaging For:



- Communicating Safety Precautions
- Real-time Communication
- Pre-Arrival Messages
- Changes in Hotel Procedures
- Creating Peace of Mind for Guests

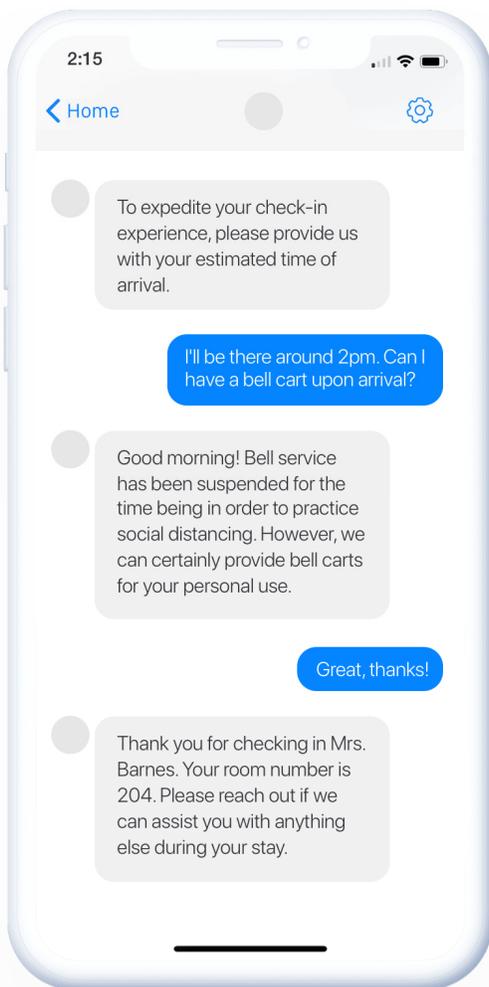
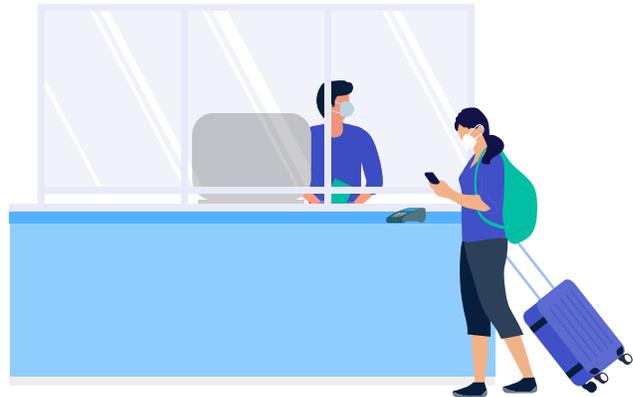
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“We obviously had to make concessions for the safety of our guests, but we didn’t want to make it about cutting guest experience. The keys have been setting expectations and clearly communicating with guests — and that’s where Zingle has really shined.”

- Johnston McCutcheon, Front Office Manager

Creating an Efficient & Contactless Check-In

Although the front desk staff now stands behind a plexiglass screen, guests can check in from a safe distance without any contact at all. Guests show their identification from the other side of the screen, insert their credit card and even create their own keycard using the encoding machine now sitting on the guest side of the front desk.



Instead of staff handing guests a keycard holder with the room number written on it or saying the room number aloud, the hotel uses Zingle to securely text the room number to the guest once the key is made, completing the 100% contact-free check-in. This innovative solution provided a much faster and less expensive option than implementing keyless entry technology or self-serve kiosks.

In the pre-arrival message, the hotel also asks guests for their estimated arrival time, which has been a crucial benefit for McCutcheon and the short-staffed hotel. "A lot of times it's just me out there at the front desk, but if I know we have 25 arrivals coming around 4 pm and 30 at 5 pm, I can schedule my desk to meet that flow," he says.

By engaging guests with messages before arrival and then during the check-in process, the hotel has begun a two-way conversation that continues throughout the stay.

Safely Serving Guests More Efficiently

As part of new safety protocols, the hotel has completely reimagined how it services rooms. Now guests simply text that they're leaving their room for the day and would like for it to be serviced. This eliminates any unnecessary contact between guests and housekeeping staff and ensures that guest preferences and schedules can be more personalized.

"Guests have been far more likely to text for that and if they need anything else," McCutcheon says. "We are getting a much higher percentage of requests coming through Zingle than calls. We have to be smart with our resources and this is cutting down on our phone volume by around 30%."

Zingle is also making it easier to identify and resolve issues before they become larger problems. The hotel, which has 22,000-square feet of meeting space at the conference center, recently hosted its first group since the pandemic began.



McCutcheon noticed the group had made very few requests since they checked in several days prior and was concerned there had been some miscommunication. With Zingle's integration to the property management system, he was able to easily filter contacts by group code and send a message to all 50-plus rooms, ensuring there was no miscommunication.

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“In less than two minutes I was able to ask everyone if they needed anything and got an almost immediate response. What if we hadn't been able to do that and they left here thinking we never even offered to service their rooms? This makes my job so much easier. Zingle saved the day again.”

- Johnston McCutcheon, Front Office Manager

Managing Cancellations & Driving More Reservations



With the combined spring and summer graduation scheduled in August, the hotel has seen a surge of bookings and the property is sold out for more than two weeks straight as students and families return to campus. But at the same time, many guests are still cancelling reservations because of concerns over COVID-19.

McCutcheon created a waitlist using Zingle that helps keep the hotel sold out and more guests satisfied. Once a date is at capacity, guests turned away can add their name to the

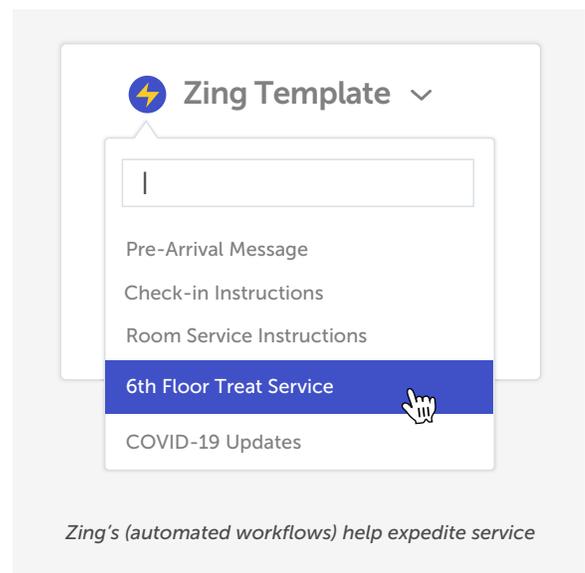
waiting list by messaging the keyword 'Grad2020.' This automatically adds them as a contact to Zingle and into a Grad2020 segment. Every time a room opens up, a message is automated to that list and includes a link for direct booking.

"That would have been an unmanageable process without Zingle," McCutcheon says. "I have this group of people who really want rooms and I'm putting them in the driver's seat and it's saving me hours upon hours of work and I can make sure my hotel is sold out."

Delivering Cookies with a Personal Touch

Guests staying on the executive sixth floor of the Auburn hotel have come to know and love the complimentary beverages, cookies and pastries baked fresh and made available throughout the day, but updated health standards don't allow for leaving food out.

Now the hotel offers to deliver those special treats to each room individually. McCutcheon created a Zing, an automated workflow within Zingle, to message all sixth-floor guests asking if they'd like to receive the special treats. If guests respond yes, a follow-up message is sent to ask guests what time they'd like the delivery. Their reply triggers an email to the front desk and the F&B team to coordinate from there.



Driving Engagement, Efficiency & Positive Reviews with Zingle

As hotels across the world are facing anxious guests, new operating procedures and limited staff, The Hotel at Auburn University has found the power of real-time communication can help create safe, efficient and contactless experiences for their guests.

Nearly 25 staff throughout the hotel use Zingle to better communicate and coordinate with guests. Call volume has declined by 30% and McCutcheon has built more than 20 automated Zings to help expedite service response and delivery.

In the four months before COVID-19, the hotel averaged approximately 75% occupancy and saw

3,400 incoming messages from guests. In the four months since the pandemic began, with just 25% occupancy, the hotel has received 3,800 messages, a 300% increase in messages per rooms occupied.

“Zingle has helped us on a daily basis use our resources more efficiently and still take care of guest needs,” McCutcheon says.

The final text message the Hotel at Auburn sends to guests is for contactless checkout. It reminds them of the COVID-19 procedures and includes a link to TripAdvisor and asks them to leave feedback if they enjoyed their stay.

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“In the three months before COVID we didn’t get a single review. But we’ve had seven extremely positive reviews since COVID and all mention our care and standards. That can all be tied back to Zingle.”

- Johnston McCutcheon, Front Office Manager



Excellent, Friendly & Extra Safe

We loved the Hotel at Auburn University! Excellent location. Staff very nice, extremely friendly & helpful & attentive. They have implemented excellent Covid safety measures and we felt 100% safe and healthy.



Stay at The Hotel at Auburn

The management and staff were phenomenal and made sure my stay was nothing but enjoyable. Hotel management answered all my pre-stay COVID-related sanitization questions.

By The Numbers



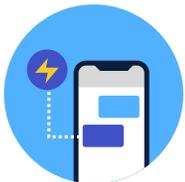
100% five-star
TripAdvisor reviews in
the last four months



30% call reduction



300% increase in
guest engagement



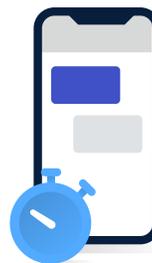
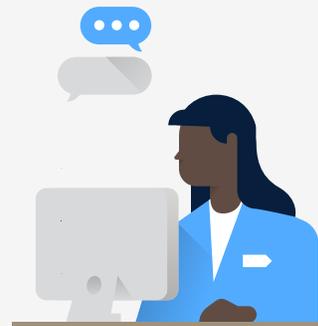
24 automated Zings



23 staff using Zingle

50%

Operating with 50%
less staff through
COVID-19



2 Minutes

to send a message to all 50
rooms that hadn't yet been
in touch with the hotel

About Medallia Zingle

Medallia Zingle empowers businesses to engage, support and respond to customers in more meaningful and impactful ways. Zingle's customer engagement platform combines artificial intelligence and machine learning with workflow automation and mobile messaging, allowing brands to easily deliver exceptional customer experiences in real time. Leading brands across different verticals, including hospitality, food & beverage, retail, and more, use Zingle to increase efficiency, improve operations and delight their customers. Zingle is a division of Medallia, the pioneer and market leader in experience management. Find out more at zingle.com.

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