

Hoteliers Guide to Location-Based Services



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To a hotelier, “checking-in” means welcoming a guest at the front-desk and handing them a room key. Checking-in means something completely different to almost half of all smart phone users who use the GPS chips in their phones to pinpoint their whereabouts and share their location with their networks of friends.

While numerous “location-based services” (LBS) exist, foursquare is continuing to emerge as a leader. As of July 2011 foursquare had announced big milestones of over 10 million members and 500,000 merchants on their platform. Other players in the space include Facebook, Google Places, Gowalla, and Twitter Places.

At a glance, most of the aforementioned services work in a similar manner. From a GPS-enabled smart phone, a user launches an application, such as the foursquare app, which immediately identifies the person’s location as well as nearby “venues”, or places. Venues can include any type of location, including businesses of any type, homes, parks, offices, tourist destinations or even street corners. The user then selects their specific venue and “checks-in.” Users can leave tips and messages for their friends or any other people checking-in at the location. Some platforms, such as foursquare and Gowalla, have added game-based elements in which users can compete against each other to collect rewards (e.g. badges and stamps), “mayorships” (specifically on foursquare) etc. Foursquare and Gowalla are also linked to Facebook and Twitter so users have the ability to publish their check-ins and tips to their social networks.

Why should businesses care?

Any business interested in knowing even more about its customers should participate in this new and growing platform. Hoteliers can learn a lot about what guests think about your property and amenities by reading tips and comments about your venues, which can include your hotel, restaurant, bar, spa, beach, golf course or any other facility (even your lobby restrooms). You can also engage with customers based on their location, either at or even just near your property, by providing relevant and timely special offers.

Location-based services are a great way to entice people to come to your business, since these services allow business to offer a variety of deals to people who check-in. Because it’s free for businesses to create their listings and add specials on these networks, it’s not only free word-of-mouth (if people see their friends checking into a location they may be more inclined to also visit that location) but it’s also

a cost-effective way to reach and nurture loyal customers. Also, as customers check-in, their networks of friends are notified that they are at your business. This is free viral exposure for your business and it carries clout because the person who checks-in is endorsing your location as one worth sharing. Users are broadcasting their check-in to their network and showing that they feel attracted enough to the business that they'll spend their time (and money) there. People are selective in where they are checking-in, and they're not just checking-in but also talking about what they're doing and sharing tips and opinions about businesses.

Also, virtual check-ins provide a great opportunity for businesses to surprise and delight guests who like to share information with their networks. By providing guests with a remarkable experience when you know they're on-site, chances are great that they will share that experience with their friends and raise your location's exposure.

Why do consumers participate?

Some location-based services, such as foursquare and Gowalla, have incorporated game-like features that make usage surprisingly addictive. For example, as you check-in, you might pick up virtual rewards, such as badges and passport stamps. Other game mechanics include ranked lists of friends, so you can compete with them for top ratings. Additionally, many people like to check-in with the hopes of becoming "the mayor" (the person with the most check-ins on foursquare), which conveys status as the "ultimate regular". Furthermore, many businesses now are officially recognizing "mayors" with special offers or even dedicated parking spaces!

Other users simply like to share their whereabouts and tips with their network of friends. In this way, location-based services are used by many groups of friends to coordinate nights out on the town, or days spent traveling in new locations. People who aren't active on social networks often struggle to understand why people update their status or share mundane details about the day. Rest assured, however, that routine location updates are becoming commonplace for the connected generation so it's important to understand the opportunities this new behavior offers to businesses.

Getting Started

Foursquare

Foursquare is one of the most popular and widely-used location-based services. In addition to allowing users to check-in to 'venues' and track their friends' whereabouts, foursquare also includes compelling game elements where users can earn rewards and compete against friends and other users in various contests. One prominent contest is the drive to become "Mayor" of a location. The Mayor of a location is the user who has recently checked in most often. Foursquare users can also earn "badges" based on their check-in. Example badges include the "Super Swarm" badge, awarded to users who check-in to a popular location (such as a concert) simultaneously with a large number of other users, or the "Gym Rat" badge, awarded for consistent trips to a gym. Foursquare is also integrated with Facebook and Twitter so that users can share their check-ins with their social networks.



Getting started on foursquare

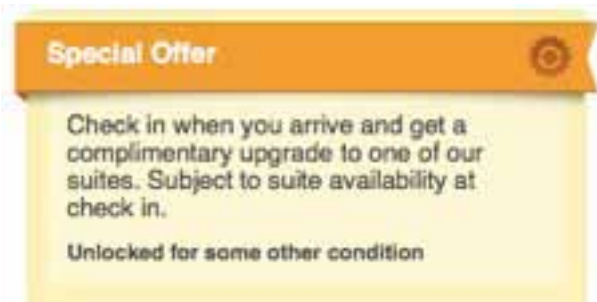
- If you're completely new to foursquare, first check out the official overview: <https://foursquare.com/overview>
- Next, sign up for a foursquare account: <https://foursquare.com/signup/>
- Once you have an account, you'll need to claim your venue. Begin by Finding your venue(s): <https://foursquare.com/search>.
- When you've found your business, click on the "Claim this venue" button. If you don't see your business listed, you can add your business for free, by going to https://foursquare.com/add_venue

Once you've claimed your venue(s), you can go to the "Manager Tools" tab on the foursquare homepage to access your management dashboard. From the management dashboard you can begin to create Specials and monitor your 'Venue Stats.' Available statistics include total daily check-ins, most recent & most frequent visitors of your venue, the gender breakdown of customers, the times of day when people check-in, and the percentage of your venue's check-ins that have been shared on Twitter & Facebook.

You can also allow multiple employees to manage your venue at foursquare. To add employees to your venue, visit the foursquare user page for the user you want to add as a manager. On your employee's foursquare user page you'll be able to add them as either an employee or as a manager.

Foursquare Specials

Foursquare Specials are a great way to attract new customers and reward your most loyal customers.



Specials can be thought of as coupons, and according to foursquare guidelines they must offer real economic value (marketing messages are not allowed) and must also be uniquely available to foursquare users. Foursquare does not charge any fees for Specials; the only cost to you is the economic value you offer to users.

Once you create a Special it will become available to all foursquare users, who must satisfy certain conditions that you select in order to “unlock” the Special and redeem it. Foursquare users redeem Specials directly with your business.

Foursquare makes it easy for users to find Specials by displaying any Specials near the user as they use foursquare on their mobile devices. As long as the user is near a venue with a Special, the Special will be displayed. Users don’t have to check-in to the location to see it. When a user meets the conditions of a Special, they “unlock” the Special and are then eligible to redeem the special directly with you. “Unlocked” specials are easily distinguished from “Locked” specials, making it easy for your employees to identify if a customer has qualified for the Special. You’ll also be able to see the date and time that the Special was unlocked by the user.

There are a number of different types of foursquare Specials:

- **Friends Special** – The venue sets a criteria for the minimum number of people that are needed to check-in to a venue together, in order to qualify. The Special is redeemed if the minimum number (or more) check-in, based on a user’s foursquare friends (e.g. check-in with 5 friends and get 10% off your next stay).
- **Swarm Special** – The venue sets a minimum for a group of foursquare users it wants to reward for visiting its venue within the same window of time. The Special is only redeemed if that many people, or more, check-in (e.g. 20 foursquare users must check-in to your restaurant, and they get a free dessert).
- **Flash Special** – This is a Special that will expire – first come, first serve, which creates some urgency. The venue can set the number of Specials it wants to unlock per day (e.g. first 20 people who check-in get a free drink at your lounge).
- **Newbie Special** – This Special rewards users for their first time visiting a business (e.g. first time staying with us? Take 15% off at our gift shop).
- **Check-In Special** – Available to customers every time they check-in. You can also create conditions (e.g. foursquare users take 10% off any spa treatment. 20% off your meal at our



restaurant on Mondays).

- **Mayor Special** – The person who checks-in the most frequently at a business over the past 60 days is given the title of Mayor. You can create a Special to reward the Mayor, your best and most frequent visitor (e.g. the mayor receives a free room upgrade for every day of their stay at your hotel).



- **Loyalty Special** – There are some options for Loyalty Specials:
 - Allow customers to redeem a Special every X times they check-in at your location (e.g. your 3rd time checking-in to your hotel, they get a free drink at your bar).
 - One-time reward for coming X times.
 - Reward loyalty within a given time – checking-in X times over the next Y days.
 - Specials & Campaigns: As you get started with Specials, it's important to understand the distinction between Campaigns and Specials. Specials can be thought of as a coupon. For example, “check-in at our hotel and receive a complimentary beverage at our bar.” A Campaign is the method by which Specials are associated with one or more venues. So in order to launch a Special at your hotel, you'll first need to create a “Campaign,” then choose the venue(s), then create the Special to launch. Campaigns can also have Start and End dates, allowing you to schedule Specials in advance.

Foursquare + Revinate

Revinate makes it easy to get started with foursquare. Our intuitive foursquare integration allows hoteliers to track multiple venues (such as their hotel, bar, restaurant, spa or any other facility), so that users can monitor check-ins, tips and photos posted by people at their venues directly from their Revinate dashboard. Revinate users can also keep an eye on frequent visitors, including their current mayor, and respond to users who check-in via Twitter or Facebook.

Revinate users can also easily create and run foursquare Specials (free of charge). Foursquare Specials can be used to attract customers, reward loyal guests, and also drive ancillary revenue through incentives for restaurants, bars, spas or any other service. Revinate clients can access the foursquare User Guide on our Help Desk for more information on our integration.

Google Places

Google Places is a service that allows businesses to create free profiles, or listings, in Google's directory,

and allows consumers to discover and research businesses (and other places). Google Places business listings are featured in Google search results, so there are certainly benefits for hoteliers in creating a business listing. Not only can you provide up-to-date information about your property (such as your correct address, phone number, business information, and website URL), but you can also upload photos and videos to showcase your property, list features to make your property stand out (e.g. hotel amenities, pool hours, nearby attractions, etc.) and provide coupons.



For consumers, there is a Google Places mobile application that allows people to rate the places they visit and get personalized recommendations. Within the mobile app there is a category for hotels that allows people to discover hotels near their current location and get additional information on those properties.

Getting started on Google Places

- To create a Google Places listing (for free), go to Google Places (<http://www.google.com/places/>), click the “Get Started” button and sign in with your Google account. If you don’t already have a Google account, click the “Sign up now” link. It’s a good idea to create a Google Places account using an email address that you don’t mind sharing with others, in case you wish to transfer or share management of your listings with a colleague.
- Once you’ve signed into Google Places, follow the directions to customize your listing by adding information about your business, such as contact details, hours of operation, photos, videos etc.
- Google will then need to validate your listing, which they’ll do either by phone or postcard.
- Once your Google Places listing has been verified, you’ll have access to a number of features that can be found on the Places Dashboard.
- You will have access to visitor statistics of your Google Places page that will help you learn more about the performance of your listing. Click on “View reports” to see the number of visitors to your page, and how those visitors interact with your listing.
- You can also post to your Place page to share recent updates (note – there’s a 160 character limit). Currently each Place page will only show one post at a time. If you write a new post, it will override the one currently showing on your page.
- As a verified Google Places business owner, you can also publicly respond to reviews posted directly on Google.
- You can also create coupons. Coupons are displayed in a prominent location and can help



entice people to patronize your business. Coupons can either be printed by a customer or displayed on their phone.

Google+

As you may have heard, Google recently launched Google+, their latest attempt to build a social network. Google+, which includes elements of both Facebook and Twitter, has received a lot of attention for some unique features (such as more intuitive privacy controls) and for quickly building up a sizable base of users. At this time Google has not yet released details on how they plan to include brands and businesses on Google+, nor have they indicated if and how Google+ might be integrated with Google Place. There's no question, however, that Google+ will be a service to watch closely in the near future.

Gowalla

Gowalla is a location-based social network where users check-in at "spots" and build "stories" out of their travels, either through a dedicated mobile application or through the Gowalla website. Users can post photos and make comments about a general location, and tag other users. The act of tagging that user will then allow him or her to join in the narrative of the "story." Within Revinate, you can also monitor who is checking-in to your location on Gowalla within our "Social Media Searches" and TweetConcierge features. If someone has shared their Gowalla check-in on Twitter and a keyword in their tweet matches one of your social media search terms, you'll receive notification of the check-in.



Getting Started on Gowalla

- To claim your business, go to <http://gowalla.com/business> and type in the name of your business.
- If your business exists on Gowalla, you will see a map pinpointing the location of your business.

On this page you will find a link that will allow you to claim your listing.

- If your business is not found on Gowalla, go to <http://gowalla.com/business> to get started claiming your business.
- Once you've claimed your business listing you can edit your business details. You can also add a greeting, message or special offer that is shown to



people when they check-in at your location. You can also feature your location by paying for promotional features. (e.g. a custom passport stamp).

- You can also encourage users to “Highlight” your business. Highlights are little shout-outs that people can give to their favorite places on Gowalla (e.g. best live music, best cup of coffee, best kept secret, etc.). Businesses that have the most “Highlights” are featured on Gowalla City Pages which provide great additional exposure on the service.

Gowalla Terminology

There are some terms that are used regularly on Gowalla so we’ve provided a glossary for your reference:

- **“Passport”**: displays a collection of stamps that show where users have been.
- **“Spot”**: the name of a location where users can check-in (analogous to foursquare’s “venues”). You can buy a custom stamp for your spot to get noticed.
- **“Trip”**: a number of “spots” combined to make up an experience in a given area.
- **“Pins”**: special rewards received by users for doing things like finishing a trip, visiting a certain number of places, taking photos, etc.
- **“Highlights”**: these tell a story about a user’s favorite places. Users can give these graphical badges to businesses that they really like. Each Highlight is an award of excellence based on certain criteria. For example, someone might give the “Takeout Highlight” to a favorite Chinese restaurant.
- **“Stories”**: group check-ins where a user can tag multiple friends at one place and once complete, any tagged person can give photos and other content to the story, capturing it as a communal experience.
- **“Guides”**: curated guides for cities around the world that help tell people where to go, must-see spots, and what to see.

Facebook

In August 2011, Facebook announced that it was phasing out the previously standalone “Facebook Places” feature of its mobile app as part of a larger redesign to emphasize privacy. So from now on, rather than operating a separate “Facebook Places” service where users could simply “check-in” as they do on foursquare, Facebook will now integrate location as just one aspect of users’ status updates. This means that users’ locations will exist only as a description of regular status updates, and will be added onto the end of a user’s status message (rather than being displayed as a separate News Stream item).

As this change in strategy is new, it is still too early to gauge the impact of the shift. It may be that Facebook is surrendering the location-based “check-in” game to Foursquare. Or it may yet be revealed that Facebook is cooking up a new way to make their location functionality even more valuable to users by more deeply integrating location into more general social networking functionality. In either case, with such a large and active user base hoteliers clearly need to pay attention to Facebook. Even after this

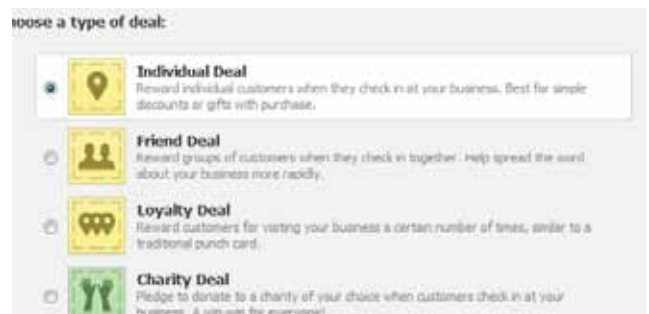
change, hoteliers should still claim their business location on Facebook (which is separate from any Facebook Pages you may have created), and also consider offering Facebook Deals.

Getting Started on Facebook

- Search for your business name using the Facebook Search bar
- If a page for your business/hotel already exists, click on it.
- If a page for your business doesn't already exist, you need to visit the business/hotel's physical location with your mobile device and create a place for it.
- Once you find your business, click the link on the left that says "Is this your business?" From there you'll be directed to a claiming flow in which Facebook will ask you to verify that you are the owner through a phone verification process. Alternatively you may be asked to provide documentation to verify. Once your claim is confirmed, you'll be able to administer your business's page on Facebook.
- [NEED TO CLARIFY/EXPLAIN HOW THIS RELATED TO FACEBOOK "Pages"]

Facebook Deals

Once you have claimed your business, you can then start to offer deals. Facebook Deals give businesses the opportunity to attract and reward customers. Hoteliers can use Facebook Deals to generate awareness, encourage in-store traffic and build customer loyalty. There are four types of deals you can create to pursue different business objectives. (Deals are currently free to create.)



- **Individual Deal:** This is a one-time deal you can offer to both new and existing customers. These deals are useful when you want to launch a new promotion, get rid of excess inventory, offer seasonal incentives, or simply attract more people to your hotel.
- **Friend Deal:** Businesses can offer discounts to groups of up to 8 people when the group check-in together. These deals can provide businesses with great exposure because more stories are generated in users' News Feeds on Facebook when people check-in.
- **Loyalty Deal:** This deal provides businesses with an opportunity to reward its most loyal customers, and can be claimed by Facebook users only after they check-in a certain number of times. Businesses can determine the number of check-ins required to qualify for the deal.
- **Charity Deal:** This deal allows businesses to show that they care about a charity, and not just the bottom line. Businesses can select a charity and then each time someone claims your deal, the business will donate an amount of its choice. This is a great way for businesses to give back to the community while also adding a human touch.

Other Location-Based Services

There are a number of other location-based services to keep an eye on. Keep in mind that not all services are popular in all markets, so before creating/claiming your profile, do your homework and see if your target audience is using them.

- **Google Latitude:** This is an application that allows people to see where their friends are on a map, share their location and check-in at Google Places. When people check-in at a Google Place, they're directed straight from the Latitude profile to the location's Google Place page to learn more about it. People can check-in from Google Latitude or from a Place page on Google Maps. And for Google+ users, Latitude check-ins are also integrated with their Google+ accounts.
- **Twitter Places:** Twitter Places simply allows you to add a location to your tweets, so followers can see from where you're tweeting. The value to Twitter users is that they can select a place and see all the tweets coming from that location. So, for example, it's possible to see what people are tweeting about when they are in your hotel lobby or your rooftop bar.
- **Yelp Check-In Offers:** Yelp has developed an application for smartphones that allows users to check-in. With Yelp Check-in Offers, business owners can create incentives for repeat check-ins and reward customers with three different offer types: Percent Off, Free or Fixed Price offers. Businesses are able to offer one check-in special at a time, and patrons can redeem earned rewards by presenting a special mobile certificate showing they've unlocked a particular offer. Yelp Business Owners can go to the "Offers" portion of their business dashboard on Yelp to specify the type of offer and check-in criteria.
- **MyTown:** MyTown is a location-based game that is like monopoly for the real world. With MyTown, users can "buy" their favorite places to unlock virtual rewards or "collect rent" from others. To "own", users buy locations with points and then charge "rent" to others. MyTown still drives people to check-in at businesses and locations but the larger driving force is for users to be able "buy" those properties, instead of telling their friends where they are. The main goal is to accumulate as many properties and as much "money" as you can through check-ins to locations.
- **Brightkite:** Brightkite is a location-based service that allows users to connect with their existing friends and also meet new people based on the locations they visit. Once a user checks-in at a location, they can post notes and photos to that location and other users can then comment on the posts. Users can control privacy of their updates and optionally share their check-ins on Facebook and Twitter. Brightkite allows businesses to create a dynamic pages and advertisements for their locations.

How to Capitalize on Location-Based Services

1. Become familiar with these platforms

In general, before you dive into location-based services, spend some time to become familiar with these platforms as a user. Setup your own personal accounts and get an idea of how people using the tools. This will also help you to gain insight into the type of specials you want to create, what your competitors are doing, and how successfully businesses are taking advantage of these new opportunities. Remember also that not all services are popular in all markets, so before getting started make sure to see if your target audience is using any given platform.

2. Monitor check-ins

Once you decide to get started with a given location-based service, the first step is to start monitoring check-ins. Whether or not you offer specials, you should be monitoring check-ins at your locations because it is the perfect opportunity to surprise and delight your guests when they are on-site. A new service, <http://ifttt.com> (If This Then That) makes it easy to monitor check-ins, with push-notifications sent to your phone or email whenever someone checks-in to your hotel, bar, or business. If you're offering rewards, monitoring the check-ins to your location is a good way to determine which specials are effectively driving more people to your business.

3. Take action

Most of the location-based services are integrated with Twitter and Facebook, so if a check-in is shared on Twitter as a tweet, reply to that tweet to welcome the guest to your venue and ask if they need anything, or if they're enjoying their stay so far. Likewise, if someone posts a check-in on their public Facebook account, reach out to the person.

You can also use the person's name from their post to look up her room number and send up an amenity and a personal note welcoming her to the hotel. If someone posts from your hotel's bar or restaurant and you can identify him, have the bartender send over a drink or stop by and introduce yourself and thank him for sharing his experience with his network. So few businesses are taking action in this way that just a little effort will go a long way.

4. Create specials

Before you start to create specials, determine what you want to accomplish. For example, perhaps

you have a property-wide goal to encourage more guests to try out your new lobby bar. A happy hour special for guests that check-in might be the perfect way to get guests to try it out. Or, if your goal is to strengthen relationships with loyal guests, offering a free upgrade to the mayor might be a great tactic. Think outside the box and be creative and make sure the special provides enough of an incentive for people to stop by your hotel. Make people excited and willing to share their check-in at your hotel with their networks. Also try to experiment with different deal structures and see which are being redeemed more often.

Make sure people know that you're on these location-based services and promote your specials. People are still relatively new to these specials so the more you promote it, the more likely they'll be to check-in and utilize your specials. For example, include signage on premise, send an email blast, tweet about your specials, or post updates on your Facebook page. Be creative!

Also keep in mind that these services are still young and usage is still growing, so it may be hard to measure your success right away. With the prevalence of smartphone usage and social media, location-based services are here to stay, so now is the time to embrace these new tools, to engage with potential customers and reward loyal ones.