LOST + FOUND

Your guide to a better lost-and-found experience

LOST AND FOUND
MADE EASY

SOP GUIDE INSIDE

Discover how lost-and-found software can help you save time and why streamlining your lost-and-found process is more important than ever!

Tips and best practices you can use right away for setting up and managing your lost-and-found department more efficiently.

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WELCOME, BIENVENIDO!

Curious how streamlining your lost and found can lighten your workload and improve the guest experience?

We've created this publication to help answer your questions. You'll find articles that inspire and inform, along with some of our best tips for setting up and streamlining the lost-and-found process. We hope you'll find the articles useful as you explore options for for managing lost and found at your property!

Here's what you'll learn:

- Industry trends that make handling lost and found efficiently more important than ever.
- Common features of lost-and-found software.
- Helpful suggestions for getting your stakeholders on board with new technology.
- Best practices for setting up and managing your lost-and-found department.
- A bit about us and the service we provide to our hotel partners and their guests.

Delivering your best

Nolan and his buddy Gerald the Giraffe live in Virginia. When they travel to Massachusetts with Nolan's mom, who practices law in both States, they usually stay at the Hyatt Place. This trip was no different—except for Gerald the Giraffe's plans to go sight-seeing!

As luck would have it for Gerald, Nolan and his mom were rushing to get to the airport when they checked out. It wasn't until they got home, as Nolan was getting ready for bed, that they realized Gerald was missing.

Dana had a feeling he might have been left behind at the hotel. And sure enough, when she called to check, the housekeeping staff had already found him. Dana was relieved that the hotel had a simple process to get Gerald back. She opened the email from the hotel, paid for the shipping label, and soon got a text letting her know the wayward giraffe was on his way home.

When the package arrived a few days later, Nolan was thrilled. "It was like peace had been restored," said Dana, who was very proud of her son for staying calm and taking the ordeal in stride. "He told my parents that Gerald had stayed behind to go whale-watching. But I'm not sure he would have been so lax about it

had we not been able to get Gerald back. I can't thank the hotel staff enough for caring for Gerald, keeping him safe, and returning him to us so quickly."

The lost-and-found dilemma

We'll be the first to admit that not every lost-and-found story is as heartwarming as Gerald and Nolan's. But their experience is a sweet reminder that your guests really do appreciate your help when they leave something important behind. The problem is you wear a lot of hats. And that makes it difficult, if not sometimes impossible, to go the extra mile.

So how do you deliver your best effort while juggling a busy schedule? And given all that you have to do, should helping your guests get their stuff back be a priority?

We thought you'd never ask!

Why lost and found
matters today

Why it matters to your guests

It will likely come as no surprise to learn that today's guests are more independent and have higher expectations than ever. Comfortable with technology, they expect easy access to services on their devices while they still appreciate and expect the hotel's help in making their travel experiences easier.

A 2017 Deloitte report, Next Gen Hotel Guests Have Checked In, examined how guest expectations have evolved and how these changes impact the services hotels provide today.[1] They surveyed over 6,600 guests (who had collectively stayed at 25 brands across different hotel tiers) to find out what guests believed made a great hotel experience.

Six years and one global pandemic later, their findings are still relevant. Guests today want *"the one-click, right-this-instant utility they receive from other industries, with the feeling they get from an evening at a fine dining restaurant."*

The study revealed that guests want hotel staff to engage with them in a personalized, authentic, and attentive way. And when things don't go as planned, they expect staff to listen to their needs, empathize with their situation and follow through with a solution. How these "service recovery situations" are handled is critical. Guests reported that when a problem is fixed quickly, they are 40% more likely to share their experiences and promote the hotel.

When a guest leaves something behind and reaches out to you for help, it's a perfect opportunity to listen, empathize, and help them solve their problem. Lost-and-found technology makes it easy for them to report their lost item, get updates from your team, and pay for shipping arrangements. Providing help and support throughout the lost-and-found process ensures your guest feels cared for and valued by you.

Why it matters to your team

We know that a lot is expected of hotel staff today. And a heavy workload can make it challenging to do your best work. It can also lead to workplace stress and job dissatisfaction and, eventually, impact the hotel's reputation.

While travel has returned to pre-pandemic levels, staffing challenges continue to impact the hotel industry. According to the 2023 State of the Hotel Industry Report, published by the American Hotel & Lodging Association in January 2023, 79% of hoteliers reported a staff shortage at their property, while 22% considered it a severe issue. 45% said that housekeeping staffing was at a critical level.[2]

While workforce levels have improved over the past few months, the problem is expected to be around for a while. In their report, the AHLA acknowledged the importance of technology in helping hotels move forward despite lingering staffing challenges.

"Guests today want the one-click, right-this-instant utility they receive from other industries—with the feeling they get from an evening at a fine dining restaurant."
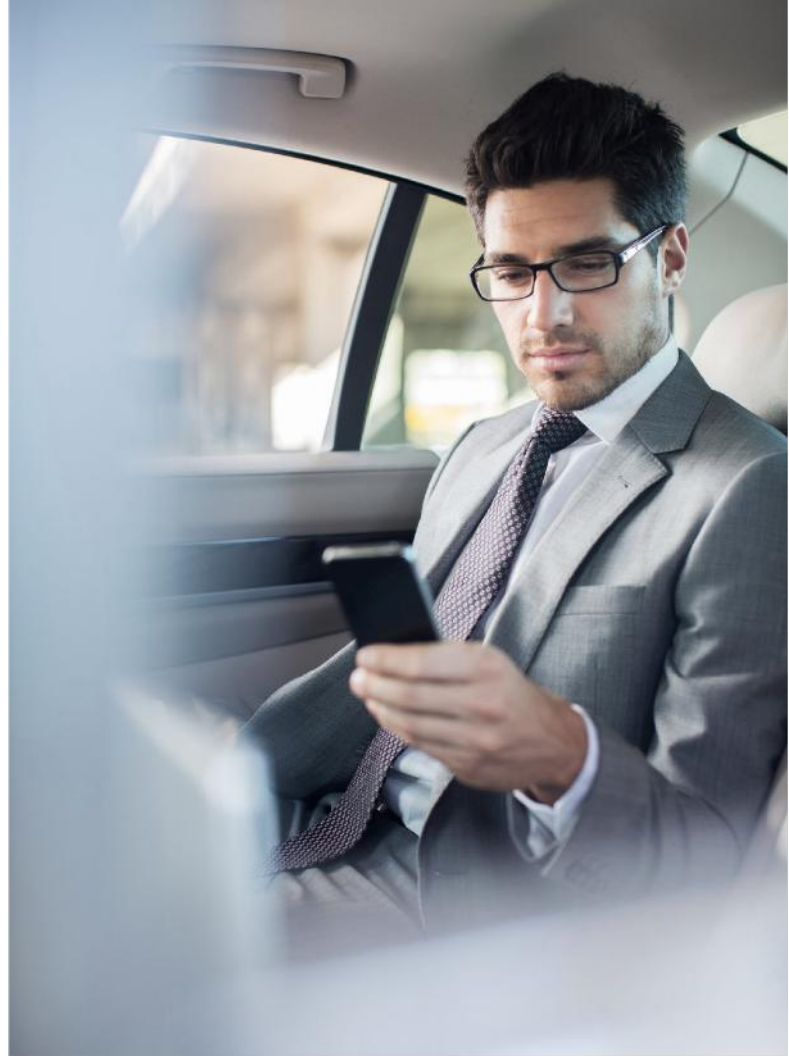
Technology may seem counter to the spirit of hospitality. But when used to lighten your team's workload and support their efforts in meeting guest expectations, it can be an effective and empowering tool.

Lost-and-found software creates efficiencies by eliminating unnecessary tasks and streamlining inventory management, communications, and shipping—freeing your team up to do what they do best.

Why it matters to your bottom line

The Deloitte Study identified an opportunity for hotels to set themselves apart by providing services and supporting technology to satisfy guests' needs and solve their problems.

The report recommended that hotels develop "partnership ecosystems" with other businesses to provide services that complement and support their offerings. These partnerships allow hotels to address guests' needs without the added expense of setting up and providing the service themselves:

"This partnership ecosystem benefits all types of hotels, as it helps them provide the experience guests want while reducing the hotel's total cost to serve."

"The path forward includes the development of a partnership ecosystem. This partnership ecosystem benefits all types of hotels, as it helps them provide the experience guests want while reducing hotels' total cost to serve." Hotels can create "a portfolio of assets that they do not own and do not have to maintain, helping drive diverse experiences without the big capital outlay."

It's not unusual for a hotel to partner with another service provider to enhance the guest experience while reducing costs—think Starbucks or a local independent café in the lobby. The same benefits can be realized by partnering with a lost-and-found service. The right solution will bring technology, expertise, and support services that provide value to guests at no cost to the hotel. ❖
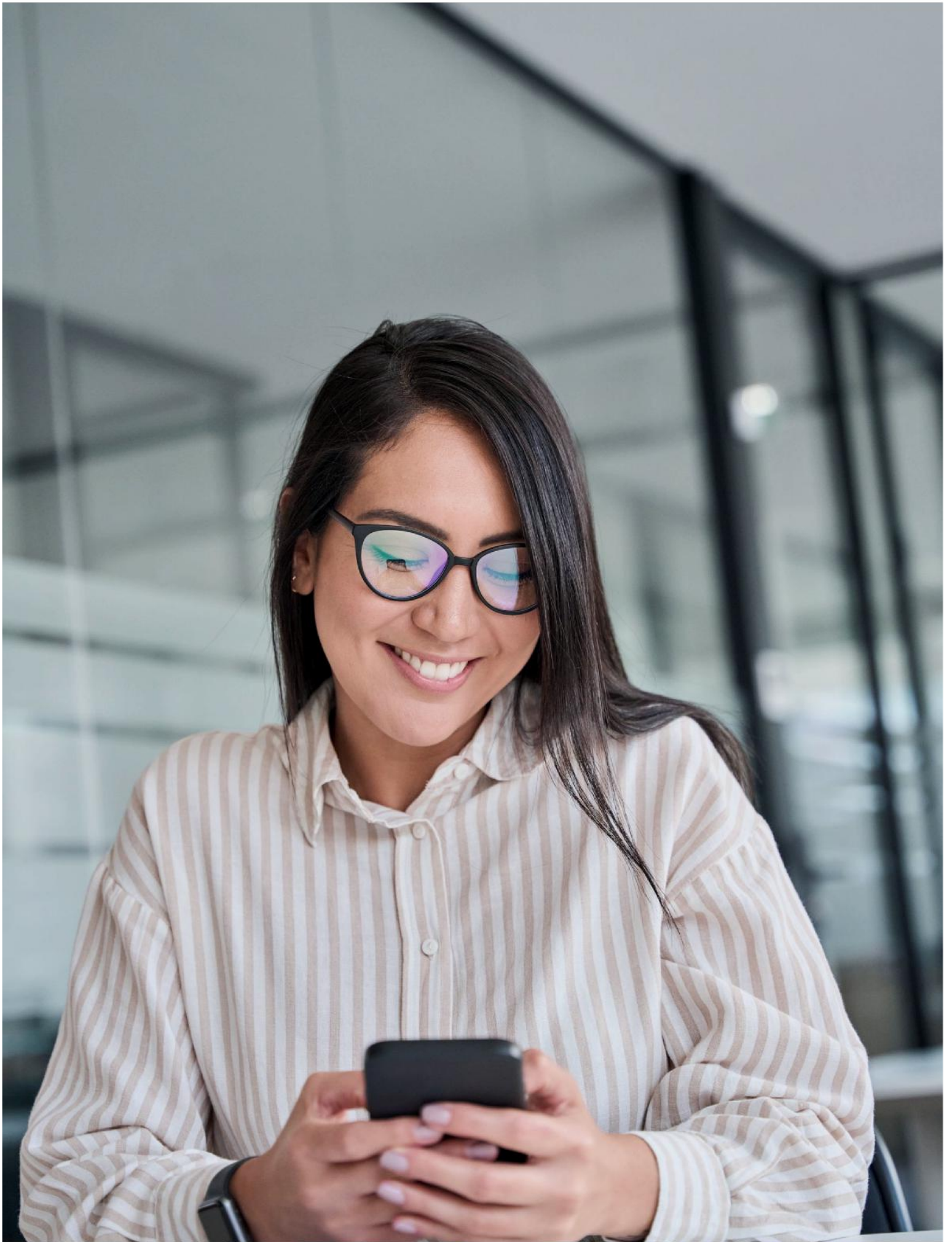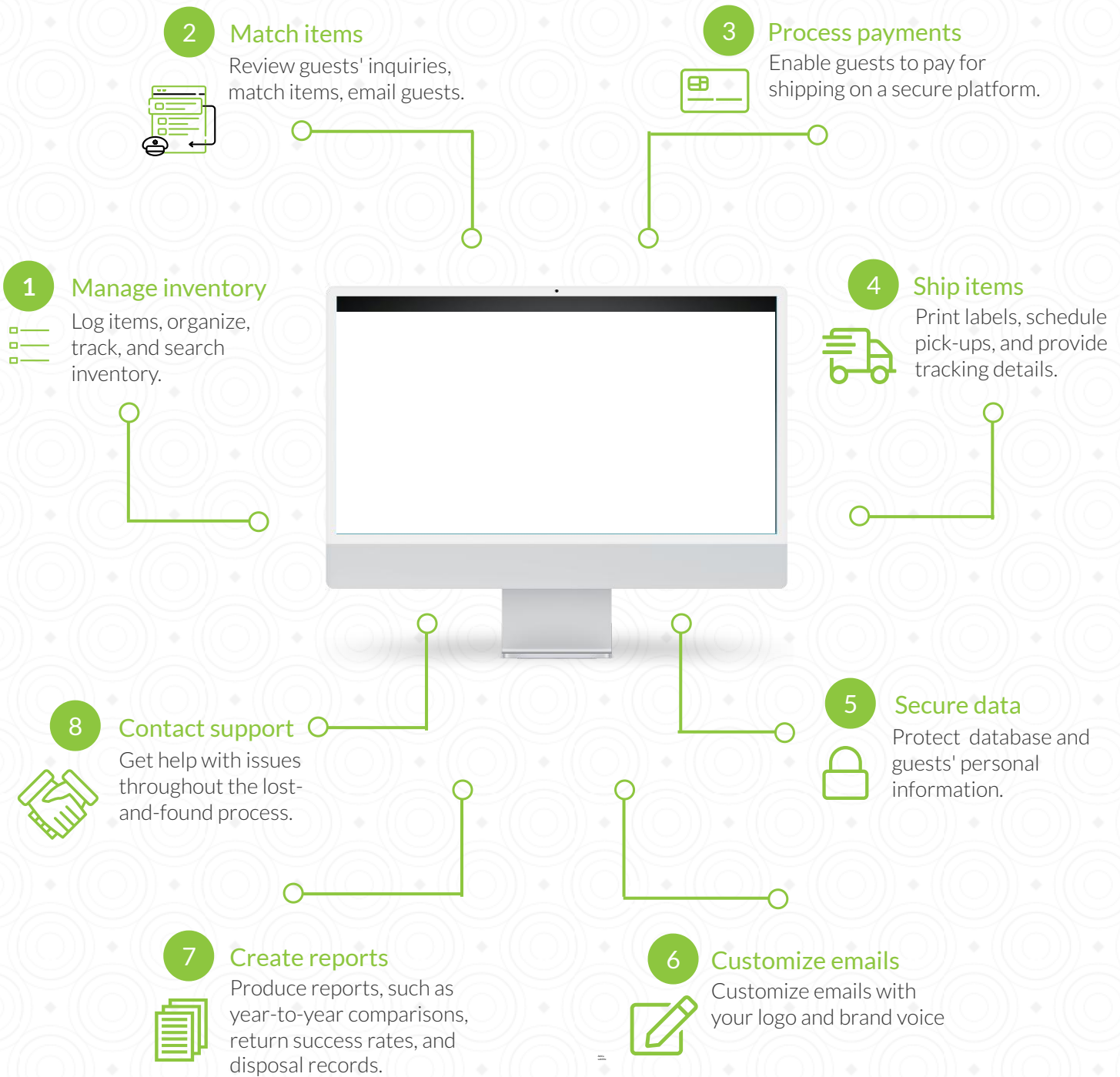
THE ANATOMY OF
LOST + FOUND SOFTWARE

Creating efficiencies often involves software to facilitate managing inventory, communicating with guests, and shipping. The right solution should also address security and logistical support issues. Some hotels choose to partner with a stand-alone lost-and-found service. Others purchase software that integrates with their property management system. The important thing is finding a solution that works best for you and your guests.

1. Manage inventory

Most lost-and-found applications provide a database where items are recorded and tracked. Depending on the software, items are added manually or with the help of AI. Some record the user and date/time stamp for each transaction and offer a search feature to find items recorded in the database easily.

Custom storage fields, QR codes, or bar codes allow you to identify where items are stored physically. You can also enable inventory control IDs, set custom retention periods, and track items reported missing, shipped, picked up, or removed from your physical inventory.

2 Match items
Review guests' inquiries, match items, email guests.

3 Process payments
Enable guests to pay for shipping on a secure platform.

1 Manage inventory
Log items, organize, track, and search inventory.

4 Ship items
Print labels, schedule pick-ups, and provide tracking details.

5 Secure data
Protect database and guests' personal information.

8 Contact support
Get help with issues throughout the lost-and-found process.

7 Create reports
Produce reports, such as year-to-year comparisons, return success rates, and disposal records.

6 Customize emails
Customize emails with your logo and brand voice

2. Match items

Guests report lost items through a customer-facing website using a unique code or the hotel's address to identify the property. Some services allow guests to search the database themselves, while others protect the inventory's security by providing hotels with a database that guests cannot access.

If a guest calls the hotel directly, staff can assist them with submitting their lost item report. Once the details have been entered, the software searches the database for a match. A confirmation email and text can be quickly sent to the guest with instructions and a link to pay for shipping.

If a match isn't found, the inquiry is saved to a list of items that have been reported missing. If the item is added to the database in the future, the software will alert you so you can quickly follow up with the guest to let them know their stuff has been found.

3. Process payments

In most cases, guests are responsible for providing their shipping address and paying for shipping. This eliminates the risk of collecting guests' personal and credit card information over the phone. The software creates a shipping label that is automatically forwarded to the hotel when the guests' payment is processed.

4. Ship packages

In some applications, printing the shipping label automatically schedules the courier to pick up the package from the hotel and emails tracking information to the guest. (Some lost-and-found services offer free courier pickups, while others require you to take the package to the courier or wait for a pickup the next time the courier stops by. Not all services provide tracking information.)

5. Secure data

Security features protect your database from internal and external threats:

- Data encryption protects your data and operating systems from unauthorized access.
- Permission settings allow you to grant access privileges to team members.
- Chain of custody records shows who worked on a record and when it was accessed.

Items like passports and cell phones contain personal identifiable information (PII). They must be handled carefully and in compliance with data privacy regulations. Compliance with regulatory standards and regulations, such as GDPR and PCI, means your database meets specific requirements for properly handling guests' data.

6. Customize messages

Some applications let you customize email communications to guests with your logo and preferred messaging.

7. Create reports

Some applications allow you to produce reports, such as year-to-year comparisons, item return success rates, and item disposal records. Others make it easy to filter this information within the database.

8. Contact support

Depending on the company providing the software, support may be available via chat, email, or phone. Support services can include responding to guest inquiries, following up on shipping delays, handling lost and damaged package claims, rescheduling courier pickups, and facilitating international shipments when necessary, etc.

Where you'll see improvements:

Handling guest inquiries: Guests can report lost items through an online portal and get updates about their inquiries through the system. This saves time and reduces phone calls.

Inventory management: Lost-and-found software helps your team organize and track inventory more accurately, reduces the risk of misplaced or lost items, and allows staff to review and match lost item inquiries quickly. Entries are recorded with a date, time stamp, and user information.

Operational efficiency: Using lost-and-found software, your team can improve operational efficiency by eliminating time-consuming tasks associated with retrieving and returning guests' belongings. Instead of spending time on tasks such as collecting payments over the phone, arranging shipping, and driving to the courier, your team can focus on providing better hospitality and service-related tasks. For example, our partners have reported saving at least 30 minutes per item handled.

Managing risk: Protect guests and reduce risk using a GDPR and PCI-compliant platform.

Internal communications: Set up individual user accounts for everyone on your lost-and-found team and subscribe to automatic notifications to ensure team members know when a guest submits a lost item inquiry or purchases a shipping label. Transaction logs make it easy to follow up with team members for training when necessary.

External communications: Communicate more efficiently and consistently with guests—no more phone tag and leaving messages for a callback. Send out automatically generated texts and emails with one click.

Shipping: Guests enter their shipping details and payment online, eliminating the need to collect payment and make shipping arrangements. This saves time and protects guests' privacy. It also reduces errors and additional address correction fees.

Handling questions and problems: Services that provide guest support will allow you and your guests to get help and eliminate the need for your team to handle and resolve shipping problems when they arise. ❖

Onboarding stakeholders

Change is never easy. And introducing new technology comes with its own set of challenges. Regardless of the benefits, getting everyone to embrace a new system may take a little planning and preparation. You'll need to get three stakeholder groups on board: your leadership team, your staff, and your guests.

1. Getting leadership on board

We hear from many hotel partners representing various properties, management, and ownership groups. When approving new systems and solutions, each hotel has its own protocols.

The Hotelier Technology Sentiment Report published by the NYU School of Professional Studies in partnership with Stayntouch in January 2022 found that hoteliers have three main concerns when approving new technology. They include the cost and return on investment, its complexity and compatibility with existing systems, and the potential impact it will have on delivering a personalized guest experience.[3]

How much is this going to cost?

Cost plays a big role in getting new technology approved. Depending on the lost-and-found solution you're considering, the total cost may include subscription fees, staff training, and the time and effort involved in implementing the new process. While you may already appreciate the benefits of streamlining your lost-and-found process, decision-makers must believe the long-term return is worth the initial investment.

If cost is an issue, remember that not all lost-and-found solutions come with a price tag. Developing a partnership with a service outside of the hotel may make sense for hotels looking for a full-service solution without the cost of expensive proprietary software.

Be ready to explain the value the new system will bring to hotel staff and operations regarding productivity and performance and how the process will improve the guest's lost-and-found experience. Feel free to share this resource to get the conversation started.

Is the software user-friendly, and will it work with our current system?

According to the NYU report, hoteliers are more willing to invest in technology that can integrate with the property's existing technology and scale as the hotel grows. The ease with which staff can learn and use the software is also critical. Choosing user-friendly technology is the easiest way to address this concern.

While necessary for many in-house technologies, compatibility may not be a requirement for lost-and-found software. It's important to weigh the costs of customized software against the functionality of stand-alone options to determine if integration is necessary. A ready-to-go solution may make better sense financially, operationally and from a guest service perspective.

How will it impact our ability to serve guests?

As a personalized guest experience becomes increasingly important, hoteliers seek to balance technology and in-person interactions. The NYU report found that hoteliers believe technology can enhance the guest experience, and many plan to invest in technology that lets guests choose how they wish to be served.

On the other hand, many hoteliers expressed concern that new technology might deter staff from providing the "warm, memorable, and personalized experience that is the essence of hospitality." Knowing that technology can sometimes be unreliable, they prefer using human resources to ensure guest expectations are met.

For hotels that are fully staffed, lost-and-found software enables employees to have more time for hospitality and service-related tasks. Hotels that face staffing challenges, particularly in housekeeping, can benefit from lost-and-found solutions that make it easier for employees to manage larger workloads—creating better working conditions and, ultimately, a better guest experience overall.

2. Getting staff on board

For your team, adopting a new lost-and-found process may involve changing how things have been done in the past. According to Michael C. Mankins, a partner in Bain & Company, a global management consulting firm in San Francisco, "There are always some people who have their routines, and they just don't want to change." [4]

Old habits can die hard, and it's normal for staff to have questions. Once they understand the new process and how it can improve their lives, getting them on board will become much easier.

Have a plan to train and enable your team. Consider introducing the changes in small logical steps to help build confidence and reduce their resistance to change. Remember that your team's ability to communicate and work together will impact the success of your new lost-and-found process. Ensure you have tools for effective communication and collaboration across departments.

Why is this change necessary?

Help your team understand the software's usefulness and how the new process improves how lost and found has been handled in the past. Discuss current frustrations and how the new system will help to reduce or eliminate them.

How will this change effect me?

Show your team how the software will lighten their workload, reduce stress, and give them more time to focus on guests. Let them know how they will be involved with setting up the new process and any new roles and responsibilities they will take on going forward.

How will I learn how to use the new software?

Your team members will have different levels of comfort and knowledge regarding technology. Make it a priority to choose intuitive and easy-to-use software and consider what type of training will be helpful. Depending on the solution, you may have access to one-on-one training, in-app training videos, live walk-throughs and demonstrations, webinars, and webinar recordings.

Hands-on training is often the most effective. Build the process into your team's daily routine and help them get comfortable with the software by using it. Lead by example and have team members shadow you to see how the process works. You may find it helpful to train your most influential staff first so they can coach others on how to use the software effectively.

Why should I care?

How your team's performance is measured can impact their reaction to new processes. Establish clear objectives for your staff and tie them with the hotel's goals so they see adopting the new process as a team effort that benefits everyone. Reward your employees in ways that are meaningful to them. Share good news stories and recognize their efforts in helping guests retrieve their stuff.

2. Getting guests on board

Ensuring guests know what to do when they leave something behind is the final step in onboarding your lost-and-found process successfully. You'll also want information to address questions regarding cost and who to contact if they have questions.

How do I report a lost item?

Your team should know your property's lost-and-found process and set reasonable expectations when speaking with a guest. Provide your frontline staff with training and a script for handling guest inquiries. Many hotels set up a dedicated lost-and-found phone extension with a voice message explaining how the process works and a link on their website that takes guests directly to the service provider's website.

How much does it cost?

Unless exceptional circumstances make it necessary to return a guest's item at the hotel's expense, guests are generally expected to cover the shipping cost. We like to think of it as a shared effort where the hotel employees are hands and feet on the ground, our team provides the software and support, and guests cover the cost of their shipping label. Ensure your staff is comfortable and prepared to politely share these expectations when a guest reaches out to inquire about the cost of retrieving their items.

Who do I contact if I have a question?

Depending on your chosen solution, your guests will contact you or your solution provider's team for support. Ensure frontline staff is familiar with directing guests' questions to the right person so guests don't feel frustrated by being unable to get help when needed. ❖

Setting up for success

These SOP guidelines are based on best practices used across the hospitality industry. Feel free to tailor them to your property's needs, policies, and procedures.

Step One: Getting started

☐ **Designate a lost-and-found administrator**

A department head is often designated as the administrator. They will assign access permissions to staff involved in lost-and-found activities.

☐ **Choose a secure storage area**

The storage area can be in a separate room, a closet or cabinet, or a caged area in a larger room. It should be well-lit with shelving for storing items of different sizes.

Use a separate lock and limit access to department heads and supervisors. Only these team members should have access to this area.

☐ **Set retention periods for high-value and low-value items**

Determine how long items will be kept for guests to claim and how they will be handled or disposed of if not claimed before the retention period expires.

Many hotels retain low-value items for 30 days and high-value items for 60 to 90 days.

When emailing or texting a guest to confirm that their lost items have been found, it's helpful to include the retention date.

Some applications will allow you to set the retention period depending on the value of the items.

☐ **Train staff on lost-and-found procedures**

Staff who handle and report items should receive training and a copy of the property's standard operating procedures. Have them sign and date an acknowledgment to confirm they understand and agree with the process.

Step Two: Handling and reporting found items

☐ **Establish procedures for handling found items**

Determine how items should be turned in, who will report them, and how certain objects (ex. hazardous materials, certain clothing items, etc.) will be disposed of.

☐ **Print blank "Found Item" forms**

Employees should have access to a printed "Found Items" form to document all items when discovered. It should be stocked on all housekeeping carts.

☐ **Report items of value to guests as found**

Items of value may include clothing, stuffed animals, personal pillows, sundry, medicine, electronics, power cords/chargers, business papers, etc.

☐ **Ask a manager or supervisor for help when the item's value is unclear**

Check with a manager or supervisor for clarification on an item's value. They can help you decide if it may be valuable to your guest. Consider it valuable and handle it as a lost-and-found item when in doubt.

☐ **Determine if alcohol or recreational drugs left in a guest room should be retained or disposed of**

Contact a manager when alcoholic beverages or recreational drugs are found in a vacant guest room. They will decide whether to dispose of them or retain them as lost-and-found items.

Open containers and partial bottles are generally treated as having little value and must be disposed of. It's good policy to have a witness present to verify the disposal. If an open container is deemed valuable and retained, the bottle must be sealed and tape placed over the seal with a witness present.

Staff or other guests should never remove alcohol left behind in a guest room from the hotel.

Alcohol cannot be shipped back to the guest. It must be picked up in person and a signature obtained.

☐ **Report unattended firearms to authorities**

Staff must report unattended firearms found in vacant guest rooms or other locations to their supervisor.

The general manager must contact the local police department by calling the non-emergency number to get help handling all firearms and ammunition safely.

Local law enforcement must check all guns to ensure they are not loaded and safe to move. Employees must never touch, move, shift, or otherwise handle a firearm until deemed safe.

All firearms must be logged and labeled as lost-and-found items. These items cannot be shipped back to the guest. They must be picked up in person and the appropriate signatures obtained.
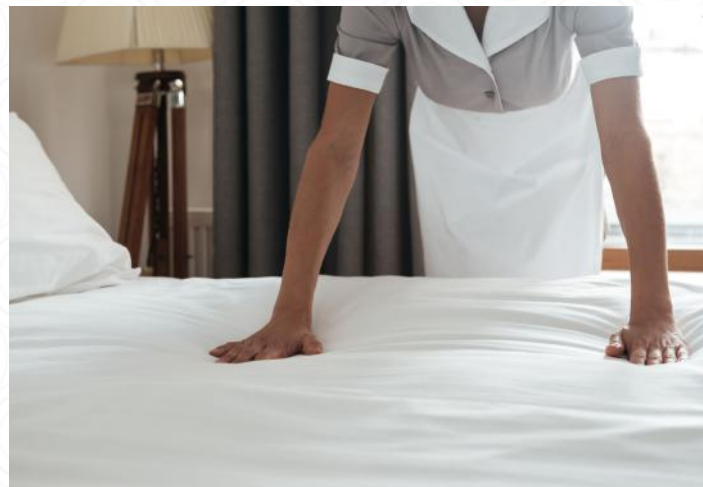
☐ Label lost-and-found items

Complete and attach a "Found Item" form to each recovered item. Place the item and form in a clear bag with the form visible through the bag. Twist or tie the top of the bag securely to ensure the form cannot fall out. The item and the form must always remain together.

Multiple items found together can be placed in the same bag and logged in the same inventory record. You may find it helpful to add a photo to document the belongings.

☐ Record items in a log book, spreadsheet, or database

Found items with forms must be turned in and logged within a specified number of hours of being found. The physical storage location of items must be noted.

☐ Check lost item reports for a match

Check if a guest has filed a report for a lost item that matches the found item.

☐ Keep accurate records

The inventory listed in your log or database must always match your physical inventory in the lost-and-found storage area.

Recording found items and items returned to guests promptly will keep the inventory list updated and accurate. The manager must ensure that any disposed or donated items are documented.

Conduct a regular audit to maintain consistency between the physical and logged inventories.

Step Three: Safeguarding high-value items

☐ Store high-value items securely

Lost-and-found items reasonably deemed to have a value greater than $___ must be secured in the hotel safe or a secure locked area.

The general manager or designated manager(s) are the only individuals authorized to access high-value secured items.

High-value items may include but are not limited to wallets, cell phones, cameras, assorted small electronics, credit/debit cards, PII, etc.

☐ Handle credit/debit cards as high-value items

Credit/debit cards should be treated as high-value items and secured appropriately.

☐ Keep personally identifiable information secure

Personally identifiable information (PII) can be used to identify a person, such as their passport, driver's license, etc. PII should always be treated as high-value and secured appropriately to protect your guests' privacy.

☐ Do not ship cash

Cash should never be shipped. Determine if the funds will be transferred into a check and mailed to the guest.

☐ Handle firearms and ammunition with caution

Firearms and ammunition must be treated with extreme caution and secured appropriately. Firearms must be unloaded to be moved and stored.

Any ammunition must be turned over to local law enforcement when they respond to view any recovered firearms. Law enforcement personnel may request to take possession of recovered firearms and/or ammunition. They must be allowed to do so if they make a lawful request.

Recovered firearms and ammunition that remain at the hotel to be retrieved by their owners must be secured in a safety deposit box, and only the hotel general manager may have key access to that box.

The general manager or senior manager must always be informed if a firearm and/or ammunition is locked in a hotel safety deposit box. Ammunition must always be stored in a separate safe deposit box and never in or with a firearm. This includes clips and magazines containing ammunition.

☐ Return high-value items to guests when possible

Every reasonable effort should be made to return high-value lost-and-found items to their owners. Research the last guest to occupy a room where the items were found and, when possible, proactively notify the guest that an item has been found in their room.

☐ Witness recorded information and storage of high-value items

Having a witness verify that high-value lost-and-found items are logged and secured is good practice. This will confirm that items have been logged and placed in the hotel safe or safety deposit box.

Step Four: Handling guest inquiries

☐ Determine who will handle guest calls

PBX operators, guest services, security, and housekeeping staff can handle lost-and-found inquiries from guests. Determine who will handle calls and if these team members can access the inventory list or only record lost item inquiries.

☐ Set up a voicemail message

Alternatively, guests can be transferred to a voicemail message for instructions on submitting their inquiry online.

☐ Record lost item details

While speaking to the guest, staff should record the lost item details and guest's contact information directly into the log, spreadsheet, or database.

☐ Check the in-stock inventory list for a match

If staff can access the in-stock inventory list, have them search the list of found items for a match. This process will be completed automatically if you are using lost-and-found software.

☐ Notify the guest if their item has been found

If a match is found, email and text the guest to confirm their item has been located. Include information about how long their item will be retained and offer shipping options to have their items returned to them at their expense.

☐ Notify the guest if their item hasn't been found

If a match isn't found, email and text the guest to inform them that you will keep their inquiry active and email them if their item is found later.

Here's a script for helping a guest when they call to report a missing item:

"I'm happy to help you! We have a easy process to help you retrieve your stuff, and we'll do our best to reunite you with your missing item. I'll just need to ask you a few questions."

If using a lost-and-found application, the staff member will log in and ask the guest if they can provide some information to open a lost item report:

1. What is your name?
2. What is your cell phone or phone number?
3. What is your email address?
4. When did you lose the item?
5. Where did you lose the item? (Room number or other location)
6. What type of item did you lose?
7. Can you describe the item in more detail? (Color, size, brand, other identifying features.)

"Thanks for providing that information. I've submitted your report. Our lost-and-found team will check their inventory for your missing item. If they have it, you'll receive an email with instructions on how to retrieve it. The email will provide several options, including picking it up or having it shipped back to you. If your item isn't found, it may not have been logged into our system yet. In that case, we'll keep your inquiry on file, and if your item is located, we will follow up with you by email and text."

Step Five: Setting up your shipping center

The easiest way to ensure your guests' items arrive intact is to follow best practice guidelines for packaging items securely. Here's a list of shipping supplies to keep on hand to ensure an efficient packaging process:

☐ **Shipping boxes:** You'll find that small and medium-sized boxes will accommodate most items. Remove or cover up old labels or barcodes if you reuse a box. **Never use boxes with hazardous waste symbols or warnings.**

☐ **Shipping tape:** Use heavy-duty shipping tape and a tape dispenser to assemble your boxes and seal them shut. Triple-tape the box closed and double-tape the seams of your boxes if the item is heavy.

☐ **Shipping scale and tape measure:** Couriers use the package dimensions and weight to determine the shipping charge. Use a dedicated shipping scale to get an accurate shipping weight.

☐ **Printer:** You'll need a printer and paper to print shipping labels.

☐ **Packaging materials:** Use bubble wrap to ensure your guests' lost-and-found items are not damaged during shipping. The hotel will be responsible for reimbursing the guest if an item is damaged or lost due to insufficient packaging.

☐ **Note cards and pen:** Consider what your packaging says about your hotel. A thank you note and evidence that the carefully packaged item will not be lost on the guest.

Step Six: Returning items to your guests

☐ Picking up items

If the guest is still at the hotel, contact them and arrange to return the item.

A local guest may return to the hotel to retrieve their item or delegate someone to pick it up.

Tagged items should be left at the front desk for the guest to claim by showing photo identification.

Get a signature on the inventory record to confirm they received their property and show the item as picked up in the log, spreadsheet, or database.

☐ Shipping items

This process will vary depending on the lost-and-found service you use. For example, with our service:

Guests pay for their shipping labels on our secure payment platform.

When hotel staff prints the label, the software automatically emails the guest their tracking information and schedules the courier for pickup at the hotel.

Staff pack the item securely and apply the shipping label to the package. We recommend having the driver scan the label before leaving the hotel.

If a pickup is missed, staff can request a new pickup from our support team at no charge.

Step Seven: Disposing of unclaimed items

☐ Send guest a reminder email

Sometimes, a guest will miss the initial confirmation email with instructions for claiming their lost item, so it's important to contact them again before the retention period expires and an item is disposed of.

Here's a sample email template you can edit to suit your needs:

Dear {Guest Name},

We're contacting you to remind you that we still have your lost-and-found item. We want to allow you to have the item returned before the retention period expires and your items are discarded.

We have resent the confirmation email with instructions and a link to pay for your shipping label. Please check your spam/junk folder if you haven't received it.

Thank you again for staying with us. We hope to hear from you soon.

☐ Determine how unclaimed items will be disposed of

The general manager or designated manager responsible will determine the method of disposition of unclaimed items after the specified retention period expires. The method of disposal is at the discretion of the property management team in conjunction with company policy.

☐ **Disposing of alcoholic beverages**

Alcohol unclaimed after a specified number of days requires a special exception to the regular disposition rules. Unclaimed alcoholic beverages must be disposed of according to your hotel's policy. It is good practice to have a witness observe this process and record their name to attest to the disposal of the item. Empty containers must have any state tax stamps scraped off and then recycled or disposed of the container.

☐ **DIsposing of firearms**

The general manager and senior manager responsible must be informed of unclaimed firearms after the required retention time has expired. They will contact the local police to identify how guns and ammunition can be disposed of.

☐ **Disposing of credit and debit cards**

Credit and debit cards unclaimed after a specified number of days must be shredded in the presence of a witness, and their name must be noted in the log or database, attesting to the destruction of the card. A crosscut shredder or secure, third-party shredding service may be used. Such companies must supply a certificate of destruction that the lost-and-found staff must retain to prove the item's disposal.

☐ **Disposing of cell phones and other personal devices**

Establish a procedure for the safe disposal of cell phones and personal devices. A secure, third-party shredding service may be used. Such companies must supply a certificate of destruction that the lost-and-found staff must retain to prove the item's disposal.

Here are several options for disposing of items (not already listed) that are used at other properties:

• Offer the item to the employee that initially found the property.

• Retain the property for hotel use or offer it as a spare (ex., device chargers).

• Hold an employee yard sale that offers all unclaimed items at a reasonable cost to all employees. The money collected may be donated to a local charity and a receipt obtained.

• Donate unclaimed items to local charities, nonprofits, and shelters. Check online to find organizations in your area that accept donations. (See our list on the adjacent page for suggestions to help you get started.) Visit the organization's website and call ahead to double-check what donations are still needed and to arrange a drop-off.

☐ **Record the disposal of unclaimed items.**

The final disposal of all unclaimed items must be noted in the log, spreadsheet, or database. The movement of items from the hotel safe or the designated storage area must be documented to ensure the information is available if required.

☐ **Clean out inventory regularly**

The lost-and-found and high-value storage areas should be cleaned out regularly to avoid excessive accumulation of items.

Consider donating unclaimed items to local non-profits and shelters. Here are some resources to help you get started:

☐ **Cell phones**

- Salvation Army Thrift Stores
- Cell Phones for Soldiers
- Medic
- National Coalition Against Domestic Violence

☐ **Clothing items**

- Salvation Army Thrift Stores
- Goodwill
- Local shelters

☐ **Electronics, computers**

- Salvation Army Thrift Stores

☐ **Eyeglasses**

- Lions Club International
- OneSight
- Walmart Vision Centers
- Local Lions clubs
- Lions Eyeglasses Recycling Centers
- Vision care specialists in your area

☐ **Hearing Aids**

- Lions Club International
- Hearing Charities of America
- Hearing-care specialists in your area

☐ **Media, books, children's toys**

- Salvation Army Thrift Stores

Exploring our solution

The most effective guest experience combines efficient technology with great customer service. Our easy-to-use software streamlines the lost-and-found process and provides a simple solution to help guests retrieve their stuff.

At ileftmystuff, we consider ourselves an extension of your guest services team. Our team brings years of customer service experience, many of whom have worked in the travel and hospitality industry.

Our expertise in shipping and logistics means your team will never have to follow up with a payment dispute, scramble to obtain customs information for an international shipment, or spend hours on the phone trying to track down a lost package.

We're here to ensure your success by providing a seamless experience throughout the lost-and-found process.

How our process works

1. Submit lost item inquiries

When a guest reaches out to report a lost item, your team can refer them to our website or log in and enter the information for them. When submitting their inquiry through our website, guests use the hotel's address or a unique client code to identify your property. You'll get an email from us to let you know when an item has been reported lost. It will be available for review when you log in to your account.

2. Record found items

When a found item is added to the database, our software searches a list of your guests' reported lost items for a match. If you are reviewing a lost item report, the software will alert you if an item matching the description has been recorded.

3. Communicate with guests

You can email the guest instructions and a link to make shipping arrangements directly from the inventory record. Guests pay for shipping on a secure platform. You'll get an email when it's ready to print. (You can also set up your user account to get text messages.) Documents for international shipments will be available to print as well.

4. Ship packages

Printing the label sends your guest their tracking information and schedules the courier for pickup at the hotel. When the driver scans the tracking number into their system, the guest will get an update to let them know their package is on its way. If something unexpected occurs during the process, our team is ready to help you and your guests sort it out.

5. Additional features

There is no limit to the number of users that can be set up with login credentials. Your account administrator can set access levels, quickly review who worked on each record, and see what tasks were completed and when.

Our PCI-compliant software protects your data and guests' privacy from threats. You can customize storage areas and item lists, identify inventory past your retention period and keep a permanent list of items removed from inventory. Email communications can also be customized with your logo and messages edited to match your brand voice.

Our partners benefit from their guests' positive feedback as satisfied guests who complete our post-delivery survey are provided a direct link to the hotel's TripAdvisor to share their comments.

A sustainable partnership

We offer a premium lost-and-found solution with no subscription fees. Shipping rates include a small markup that guests incur when purchasing their shipping label.

Hotels report saving at least 30 minutes per item handled—making our solution an effective and sustainable partnership for hotels of all sizes! ❖

Helping you fill the gap

Our partners count on us to assist with questions and problems that sometimes come up during the lost-and-found process. Here are some issues we regularly handle to help ensure a consistent guest experience.

1. I need help getting my stuff back!

Guests often contact our support team for help with a lost item inquiry. They may be asking how to report a missing item, following up on an inquiry, or wanting to submit or request information to help identify a lost-and-found item. We know hotel staff are busy, and we're here to assist guests by responding to inquiries directly or forwarding them to the correct department at the hotel for follow-up.

2. Declined credit cards

Guests with payment problems can contact our support team for assistance. We'll help them troubleshoot and can even call them directly to help them process their payment over the phone.

3. Chargebacks

We handle all chargebacks. Hotel staff never have to spend time resolving this issue with guests.

4. Why hasn't my stuff shipped yet?

Guests' shipments can be delayed at the hotel for several reasons. Sometimes the shipping label hasn't been printed. Other times, the package isn't ready when the courier arrives, and the package is overlooked until the guest contacts us.

Our team helps facilitate communications between the guest and the hotel, and we can coordinate a new pickup at no additional charge.

5. I need to change my shipping address!

It's not unusual to get an urgent email from a guest who has provided an incorrect shipping address. If the package hasn't left the hotel, we work with the guest and the hotel to create a new shipment with the correct address.

Whenever possible, have the courier scan the package before leaving the property. Hotels are responsible for the package until it is scanned and the lost package insurance comes into effect.

Packages already in transit require a call to the courier. If the address can be changed, we'll get a quote for the new label, collect any additional charges from the guest, and arrange to have the package rerouted to the correct address.

6. Why haven't I got my stuff yet?

When a guest reports a delayed shipment, we contact the courier to determine the cause and provide a resolution. We also follow up on shipping alerts sent directly to us by the courier.

Delays can occur because of operational issues, weather conditions, an undeliverable address, or incomplete customs documents. In all cases, we work closely with the courier to get the package on its way as quickly as possible, providing the necessary information without the hotel needing to be involved.

Sometimes, a hotel uses a recycled box with a hazardous materials warning on the outside. This serious problem always results in a delay as the package must be returned and repackaged. In these cases, we'll follow up with the hotel to provide information and can assist them with initiating a new shipment.

7. I never got my stuff, or my stuff arrived damaged.

Our team assists the guest with an insurance claim if a package is lost or damaged in transit.

8. This is not my stuff!

Sometimes the wrong item gets shipped to a guest. When this happens, we work with hotel staff and their guests to help coordinate the return and reshipping of the items involved. ❖

What you do best

When it comes to managing lost and found, our mantra is to keep the main thing the main thing. You and your team are experts in hospitality. And we know lost and found—including inventory management, shipping and the service that goes with it. Whether answering a guest's question, handling a chargeback, or following up on a claim when stuff is damaged or lost during shipping, we've got you covered so you can focus on doing what you do best!

If you've got a question, we're here to help from 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. EDT/EST, Monday through Friday. Call us at 1-877-877-6727, ext. 200, or email us at support@ileftmystuff.com.

Notes

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