



The impact of GDPR on the hotel sector

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GDPR and the hotel sector

When it comes to data security, there are few sectors as vulnerable to threats as the hotel industry. With the volume of processed personal and credit card information being handed over to hotels on a daily basis the hotel industry is currently one of the most vulnerable to data breaches (Verizon 2016 Data Breach Investigations). It is no surprise that the industry accounted for the second largest share of security breaches in 2016.

With the new GDPR regulations now in place, it is imperative that hotels upgrade their data protection processes, or they face the risk of severe financial penalties.

The penalties for not complying with GDPR are harsh, at a financial cost of up to €20 million or 4 per cent of worldwide annual turnover (whichever is greater), not to mention the potential reputational cost to a business in the hospitality industry. However, these possible losses can be avoided if hotels ensure they have successfully adapted to the regulation and updated their data handling policies.

What is GDPR?

GDPR is a regulation to strengthen and unify data protection for individuals within the European Union. It was approved in April 2016. The regulation replaces the previous Data Protection Directive, and following a two-year implementation period, it came into force on May 25th 2018. The legislation brought in a large number of changes, meaning that the level of effort involved in preparing for GDPR compliance is significant.

Capturing and using personal data

Personal data must be collected for specified explicit and legitimate purposes. Data cannot be further processed in a conflicting manner with the purposes outlined initially – for example, taking an email address at the time of booking and then using it, without further consent for email marketing at a later stage. The hotel must ensure customers are aware of the particular uses of their data. Hotels must employ a strategy to obtain consent in appropriate form through proper documented communications.

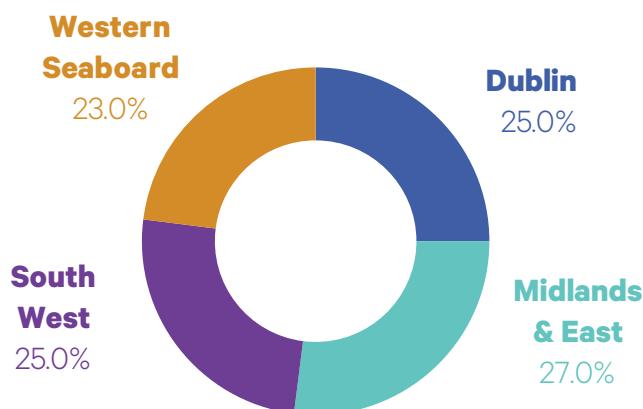
Repeat business and email marketing

With the majority of hotels relying on emails as one of their main forms of marketing, the introduction of GDPR has had a significant impact on their marketing strategy. The regulation stipulates that customers have to “opt-in” to an email marketing service, as opposed to the previously and widely-used “opt-out” system.

Hotels must be able to prove that their audience have given consent for their data to be used for marketing purposes, and must also specify which data they wish to be used. If a list of potential customers has been purchased, the hotelier must also receive documentation that proves that consent has been given for the data to be used.

Promotional marketing to a customer database is important in the Irish hotel business, particularly given that as many as one in four guests are repeat, as shown in the table below, from the 2017 Crowe Annual Ireland Hotel Industry Survey.

Repeat Business by Region 2016



Change to right of access to personal data under GDPR

Under the previous legislation individuals could write to a hotel and request personal information for a fee of €6.35 and the onus is on the hotel to furnish this data within 40 days. This personal data will relate to both electronic or physical forms and would identify an individual by their personal information such as name, address, dietary preference, medical conditions, etc. Personal information is held across virtually all hotel departments from sales and marketing to reservations, and from food and beverage to the spa.

In the run up to the effective date in May 2018 the Data Commissioner's Office ran a public awareness campaign about a consumer's 'Right to Seek' their personal data. As a result of that campaign, and because under GDPR the 'Right to Seek' will now be free of charge, we anticipate there will be an increase in consumers requesting their personal data. Also, under the new regulation hotels need to comply within the shorter period of 30 days or be subject to a breach of the regulation.

Third party partners

Hoteliers should become more wary of their third-party partners, as they can often prove to be a business's vulnerable point in terms of data protection. A major change due to GDPR is that data processors are captured by the regulations as well as data controllers. This means that if a hotel, as a data controller, is outsourcing the process of data to a third party who is not complying with GDPR regulations, the hotel will still be held responsible if a breach occurs.



Implementing GDPR-compliant policies

With the new regulations now in force it is essential that hotels ensure awareness amongst all staff and adequate resources set aside to update existing policies and procedures to ensure compliance and that staff have appropriate training for the ongoing maintenance of GDPR compliance. All managers should be aware of GDPR, fully understand it, and be able to understand the impact on their department.

It is never too late to review and update data protection policies and procedures. Below is a 5 step plan to GDPR compliance.

Step 1 – Data mapping

One of the first issues a hotel needs to tackle is that of data discovery. Hotels receive personal data details through multiple channels and touchpoints including email, fax, phone, website, forms, etc., and this data is often stored on multiple platforms across several departments. For example, the front desk will keep details about a guest such as email, telephone, previous visits, room preference and so on, the restaurant might have dietary information and the spa will have forms for a guest to fill out their medical information. Hotels will need to complete a data mapping process to become aware of what data is captured, where this information is stored, and how it is used before it can begin the process of how to protect and monitor it moving forward.

Step 2 – IT and security assessment

Once a hotel has mapped the data it captures and created a data register they will need to test and document how secure the data is and identify any weaknesses. The hotel's hardware and software applications should be reviewed along with hard copy files. A series of encryption codes, passwords or limitations on access may need to be implemented to protect access to, and the integrity of the data.



Step 3 – Update GDPR policies and appoint data protection officer

Hotels will need to review all current data protection policies such as their privacy policy, SARs policy, retention policy and other policies like shredding and breach management policy. Their policies relating to third party data contractors should be reviewed and a data protection officer (DPO) appointed.

It is vital to appoint a DPO when you are handling large volumes of personal data records, so, with the large volumes of data passing through a hotel as outlined earlier, it is eminently sensible to have a DPO in place.



Step 4 – Implementation of new GDPR policies

The onerous task of cleaning up your current data records should begin – deleting what is not required and validating the data that is required. Begin the process of reaching out to customers to inform them of the new policies and to verify their data and its uses. Document all standard operating procedures (SOPs) and invest in training of all relevant staff members to ensure they have a thorough understanding of the new procedures and the implications of the regulation.



Step 5 – Ongoing compliance and monitoring

Maintaining a GDPR awareness with staff is an ongoing process. Hotels should provide regular refresher training for all staff to ensure an awareness culture exists to protect against possible breaches. Management should incorporate data privacy into operational training such as induction, HR and security and conduct regular access request drills to ensure efficiency with ‘Right to Seek’ requests.

Next steps

It is important that hoteliers act now rather than face a breach of the new regulations. The GDPR team at Crowe can help hoteliers devise and implement a plan to ensure compliance. If you would like to find out more about how we can help you contact our risk consulting team or our specialist hotel, tourism and leisure department.

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We work with a variety of clients across commercial and public sectors. Our services include Audit & Assurance, Tax, Corporate Insolvency & Recovery, Corporate Finance, Consultancy, and Outsourcing.

We are also independent members of the eighth-largest accountancy network in the world, with colleagues in over 750 offices across 130 countries. Through this global reach we are able to offer clients a seamless service when trading internationally.

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