

## How John Knowles is Reinventing Retail (And New Media Marketing) at The Roger Smith Hotel with Pop+

*by Josiah Mackenzie, ReviewPro for EyeForTravel*

Despite the fact that retailers and hotels could be perfect partners for lifestyle branding, it rarely works out that way. From stodgy luxury stores at downtown hotels to overpriced, kitschy gift shops at resorts, shopping at hotels has been very boring for a very long time.

John Knowles at the Roger Smith Hotel wants to change that.

The Roger Smith Hotel is often referred to in marketing circles as not just one of the most innovative hotels in the world, but also one of the most creative brands in social media – in any industry. The Roger Smith management did this largely by building an environment where “everyone is a content generator.” Marketing and creating their online presence was not just the job of a few people. “We view our hotel as a media company, and our space as a stage.” They also pioneered the concept of social hospitality that extends beyond just the people staying at the hotel, and into the extended community - which has turned the property into a hub of creativity.

Now, John and his team want to reinvent the way the hotel engages with retail and e-commerce - something they have been involved in for a while with the RS POP shop.

*“The original pop-up shop concept based on Japanese consumer culture and its devotion to rare and limited edition products,” explains S.D. Rockswell in [his FreshlySerious article](#). “Initially, at a moment's notice, customers would arrive at a clandestine location that housed a particular brand or product. Once the products were sold out, usually within a matter of hours, the store would be closed until the owner received more product and was able to reopen the store again. After the first few runs the concept took shape, then evolved and took flight and landed in the mouth of corporate America.”*

The RS POP space, a midtown Manhattan fixture on Lexington Avenue near Grand Central Terminal, has hosted a number of innovative brands over the last couple years. And, as the owner and director of Panman Productions, John has spent years working with innovative brands, helping them visually communicate their story through media. In the months ahead, the environment will combine these benefits to become a showcase for what John envisions as the next incarnation of retail in hospitality.

He plans to partner with a select number of brands to provide them with not only a physical display space - but a portfolio of promotional services that provide a holistic, 360° exposure to a core group of very connected, influential consumers in New York City. This will present the partners in a completely new light, and extend both brands beyond their typical audiences.

**The concept: Pop+**

The new concept is going to be called Pop+, based on the fact that this experience is all about the partner brand plus strategy, plus marketing, plus audience, plus community, and so on.

Providing the space with all of these additional media and PR services adds a whole new level of engagement. “We see this in the pop-up shop already, but now are offering a new kind of opportunity that’s a higher level of marketing.”

The opportunity is designed for brands that understand the environment – the social space and the marketing space – and want to test out ideas they wouldn’t be able to test out elsewhere.

“As part of your pop-up, we’re going to build you an integrated SEO program, set up a Google Plus profile, set you up with Google Wallet - or provide whatever mix of services you need. Whether it’s a content strategy or mobile initiative - we can assemble the right team of people to help you reach your goals.”

### **Built on partnerships**

To deliver these services, and extend the whole “Pop+” concept, John will be engaging with local media professionals and other service providers to barter services that will be useful for the partner companies he’s engaging with.

“It’s creating an environment where everyone benefits from greater exposure and everyone builds into our greater community.”

When thinking about these partnerships, John wants the collaboration to fuel the marketing of his hotel as well. “We want to partner with forward-thinking companies. Collaboration is essential. Their success is my success.”

### **Mobile marketing to play a central role**

A key part of this project is the mobile marketing services partner companies can receive. John is developing an application - also called Pop+ - that will allow businesses to create a point of sale on the fly from their mobile phone. Every brand coming through Pop+ can participate in a mobile marketing campaign that includes access to this new tool. Products and inventory displayed in the Pop+ store will then be available for purchase from any mobile device.

The new Pop+ application will also be used by hotels to create a point of sale that links to amenities or special upgrades. Digital marketing managers can market these amenities through flyers left in the guest rooms. Through QR codes or visual recognition on their phone, the guest can quickly order and pay for a special offer.

## **Inspiration for the project**

“My motivation is the space we have,” said John. “I see our space and recognize the opportunity. Hotel have space. Space is value. So what we’re doing is not just one piece but a combination of efforts. “

“You take the existing pop-up model that happens in the pop-up shop, and the value of corner real estate on Lexington Avenue, and the value of our services - the opportunity is extraordinary.”

The hotel used to have a shoe store in the space, but John felt they were not contributing to the larger Roger Smith Hotel brand. “So I asked myself how can we regain control of this?”

## **Providing urgency and a real-world presence**

By design, popup offers are time-sensitive, providing a level of urgency. “We might run a two-day program for authors. Showcase a book signing. The benefits of having our interactive community bring their work forward is huge.” And this is critical in our era of always-on digital communication.

Imagine a thriving online company that is launching a major new initiative. Google. Amazon. Gilt Groupe.

Technology companies may have an online presence, but they’re missing the real world presence and interaction, so this opportunity will be helping these companies establish a physical presence and connect with new audiences. It’s additional value they’re unable to get elsewhere.

“You don’t have the opportunity of physical space, brick and mortar everywhere. It’s incredible for them.”

Time sensitivity - plus a real-world presence - is a new opportunity for many of these organizations.

## **Why this matters**

John’s story shows us how this is not just about creating cool hotel marketing, but innovating areas like retail and mobile communications and e-commerce. The more you can pursue projects that push the envelope, the more you’ll build buzz around what you’re creating.

“The last two years our hotel got a lot of press in the hospitality industry when it comes to customer service and new media. What I’m working on now is the story that hasn’t

yet been surfaced, and is what we'll also be focusing in the future. All of these stories are what makes Roger Smith special. We're a community and brand that thrives on staying in the spotlight."

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If this concept sounds interesting for you, email John now to discuss partnership opportunities: [jknowles@panmanproductions.com](mailto:jknowles@panmanproductions.com).

John will be sharing further insights into the Roger Smith Hotel's on-site mobile strategies at EyeforTravel's Social Media & Mobile Strategies for Travel conference, March 5-6, San Francisco.