

MaidThis Customer Success Story:

Davida H, Individual Host

✦ *"One of the biggest benefits to MaidThis' software is that it's linked to the Airbnb calendar, and it instantly creates a cleaning schedule which takes a ton of work and pressure and thinking out of managing things."*

Davida's Results:

- ✓ Ability to grow to 9 listings
- ✓ Scaled her property management business
- ✓ Looking to expand even more



How MaidThis helped Davida:

- ✓ Multiple primary cleaners, always has a backup
- ✓ Allowed her to focus on Airbnb management, not cleaners
- ✓ Allowed Davida to take same-day check in cleanings, which was not done before



Davida manages a whopping 9 properties throughout the Los Angeles area and has tons of wisdom to offer other hosts and hosts-to-be.

Below is our case-study interview with Davida to help you learn more about the systems she uses to keep herself organized and sane, what systems she uses to communicate with her guests, and her "hands-off" method for earning dozens of 5-star reviews.

MaidThis: It's so nice to chat with you, Davida! Thank you for taking the time to talk with us.

Davida H: It's nice to talk with you, too. Thank you for the invitation.

MaidThis: Of course! Well, to start us off, can you tell us a little bit about yourself and your business?

Davida H: Well, I have two businesses. My main business is that I'm a bookkeeper: I pay people's bills for a living. It just happens that several of my clients have other properties and as Airbnb and VRBO became popular, they decided to rent them as vacation rentals instead of just "regular" rentals. Through our years of working together, they asked me to manage them.

I don't actually own any of the properties that I manage – I'm what Airbnb calls a "co-host." Airbnb has a special system, though it's changing, for co-hosts that allows the co-host to see everything that the host sees. VRBO does not have the same setup at all.

But I've been managing rentals for 5 years.

MaidThis: Okay, interesting. So, how many rentals do you manage?

Davida H: Currently, I'm managing 9.

MaidThis: Nine! Wow, that's a lot!

David H: It is a lot!

Staying Organized

MaidThis: Because that's a lot, how do you typically try to keep things organized? What kind of systems do you use to help you manage so many properties?

David H: I'll just be honest: It's challenging! In several of my listings, I have different situations – they're not all the same. One is owner-occupied and is rented a couple of months out of the year when she goes away. Another one is two bedrooms in a house, so the owner lives there and we kind of co-work together.

For the ones that are regular, full-time, 100% vacation rentals, it's just become my job. I do less bookkeeping and I do Airbnb management. Every day, I check each calendar and when there's a booking, I schedule the cleaning – everyone has a different cleaning situation. I have to communicate with [the cleaners and sometimes the owners] and set up a schedule for the month.

I mean, it really varies. I do use MaidThis's software called HomeOn to help me keep things a little more organized. Obviously, one of the biggest benefits to MaidThis' software is that it's linked to the Airbnb calendar, and it instantly creates a cleaning schedule which takes a ton of work and pressure and thinking out of managing things.

There's no brilliant system that I've discovered other than paying attention every day to every one – you know, going in every day and looking at the calendar and the bookings for each one.

MaidThis: Gotcha. About how long do you think you spend every day doing that?

David H: I would say it absolutely varies between 5-10 minutes to a couple of hours because sometimes, you know, a guest has an issue and that's what can be time-consuming.

MaidThis: That makes complete sense. So, it can take quite a bit of time. Are any of your properties also listed on multiple vacation rental sites?

David H: Yes, 4 of them are listed on both Airbnb and VRBO.

MaidThis: Got it. So how do you reconcile that? Have you ever had an issue with a double-booking coming in – one from both sites?

David H: So, Airbnb and VRBO do have linking calendars so that once a booking happens on Airbnb, it updates pretty quickly on VRBO. I can't say it's 100% foolproof, but I, personally, have never had any issues. I've heard of other people having issues but it's very rare.

MaidThis: That must be a relief! A little less for you to worry about.

David H: It's a pretty good system.

MaidThis: How often do you visit your properties?

David H: I try to go every couple of weeks but, the better the cleaner, the less I have to go. That's a big deal to me, is to have people that I can rely on so that I don't have to go since they're already there. I don't want to have to go. Since they show up, one to two to three times a week. Ideally, like twice a month but sometimes, more often.

I think you just get more quality bookings when you have minimum amounts.

Working with Guests

MaidThis: And how often do you end up communicating with guests?

David H: I send them an automated welcome message 3 to 5 days before arrival. A lot of times when they arrive, I won't even hear from them. It's self-check-in so a lot of times, I'll either check-in with them later that day or in the morning and just make sure everything went smoothly.

And then I tend to leave them alone mostly and maybe check in every 3-ish days, depending on how long the booking is. The booking can be anywhere from 3 days on. So, usually, if the guest has an issue, they'll usually contact you. They welcome a "Hey, how's everything going?" once in a while, but they don't want to hear from you every day just like when I'm on vacation – I don't want to hear someone – you know, it's nice to say "How are you doing?" but I don't need them to do that every other day.

I'd say every few days and if they're there for a couple weeks, you know, I'll go for a week without reaching out to them unless there's something we need to talk about.

MaidThis: Do you typically only communicate with guests through the listing portal or do you have an external email system or something else that you use?

David H: They tend to text me privately. I leave them my phone number so they can reach me directly. But yes, I do use the Airbnb and VRBO apps a lot. I love the Airbnb app – everything happens on my phone, text messages, everything happens on my phone. It's one of the perks for working with Airbnb, that you can work from anywhere.

MaidThis: Your guests have left a lot of great feedback. What have you found to be the best way to get guests to leave reviews for you? Where are they leaving said reviews?

David H: You know, that's interesting you ask that! That's been a recent topic of discussion in one of the Facebook support groups I'm in – about leaving reviews. I was asking people, "What's your system for asking people to leave reviews?" because I don't have one – I don't ever ask anybody to leave a review. I don't know. It's weird – if I was checking out and somebody said, "Don't forget to leave me a 5-star review!", for some reason that would just irritate me or rub me wrong. I don't know.

So, I have not. A lot of people do find an eloquent way to ask. Airbnb frowns upon anything that's under 5 stars, so it's actually imperative for [hosts] to get 5 stars, but I just focus on having the space be as nice and clean and perfectly matching the representation as it is online.

You can't please everybody, but I try. I'm an instant responder, so if anybody ever messages me, they're getting a message back within minutes. So I try to just be really available and have the space be stocked and clean.

You know, I have some properties that are a block from the beach, so that just helps – having a good space and a good location. It's not downtown LA, and in the middle of Skid Row. So, you know, it helps.

But still, there's always somebody that doesn't like one thing... It just happens.

Anyways, to answer your question, I don't specifically ask for reviews. I just leave it to, you know, what it is. (Laughs)

Words of Hosting Wisdom

MaidThis: Sure! That's really interesting. So, what advice would you give to struggling hosts or hosts just getting started?

David H: Oh, goodness! Well, one of the things I've found most useful is playing with the prices – weekly. You know, the weekends are usually booked, depending on the location and usually, there's the stragglers in the middle of the week that are left empty.

If it's empty within a week of the current date, I'll drop the prices because some money is better than no money! And if you drop them low enough, you can usually always get a booking. So, it just really depends on what your situation is.

But, you know, if your normal rate is \$150 a night, it's better to get \$99 or \$89 than nothing. So, be willing to play with those prices in the middle of the week on the current, upcoming week or two.

I'd say beware of the travelers who have not been verified... if they don't have previous reviews. Although they can be outstanding, they're also the most likely to be difficult and scam you because you cannot see reviews from prior hosts stating whether they were great or not. So, that is a very tricky area because it can be totally fine or it can be totally disastrous.

I'm learning from my newest account that sometimes, there are people out there that are scamming new hosts! They're people with accounts that don't have reviews. Maybe they've set up an account through a friend or something like that and there are no reviews. So they'll go in there and start complaining about things to try and get a free stay... And they tend to look for new, inexperienced hosts that don't have a lot of business. So, I think that is a thing – I'm not 100% sure but that seems to be the consensus.

And outside of that, expect that there's no "off" switch. To be available at all times. You need to be a very fast responder to inquiries and other things. If you don't respond fast enough, they will go somewhere else because there's a ton of competition, the market's saturated – it's different than it was a year or two ago where you were kind of the only one doing it.

Now, in the winter, it really slows down or it can really slow down and you might have to lower your prices more than you would have in the past because there's so much competition.

MaidThis: Right. So, when you start to look at lowering your prices – whether it be for a seasonal change or whether it be, like you said, you have some openings the following week – what do you typically do for that? Do you set at a certain percentage point or do you guess?...

David H: I just make a guess based on past experience. My experience is that my 1-bedroom at the beach that, in the summer, easily goes for \$165, I will have a hard time getting even \$125 in the winter. It seems that not until I drop it down to between \$99 to \$95 to \$89 can I for sure get booked. It's just what I've experienced.

So, I just start high and gradually go low until I get a booking so that I don't get nothing for that day. I just keep testing.

MaidThis: Do you ever look at similar properties in the same area to see what they're doing?

David H: You know what, I don't. I just try to get a booking. It almost doesn't matter what everyone else is doing if mine is still empty.



Balancing Guests for Full-Time Live-In Hosts

MaidThis: So, you said earlier that you have one property where the host lives full-time in the house and rents out two rooms. Is that also on the beach or in the city?

David H: No, actually, it's in the inner city in a very ethnically diverse neighborhood above downtown LA. I'd say that although his house is very nice on the top of a hilltop, it's not a high-end neighborhood by any means.

He still booked a lot. It's a lower rate, but it's full and it makes him great money at a nightly rate. He basically works during the day and he doesn't have time to respond to inquiries. I book the cleaner and respond to things.

MaidThis: Does he have any specific house rules that guests are expected to follow in the kitchen or anything like that?

David H: You know, he's very easygoing. There's only one shower even though there's two bathrooms and he just states in his listing that he uses it before work from 7-8 on weekdays. So, it's just understood that it's going to be off-limits for an hour 5 days a week. Never had any issues – he's a very social guy.

He has about 70 reviews in a year. The reason I decided to take his property on (because it's not necessarily what I would normally do) was because his reviews were so great! Everybody was like, "This guy is the greatest guy!" "He's so nice" "He's so friendly!" And I was like, "Okay, sure! I'll help you out and respond to a few emails." And he's been awesome.

How and when did you get started in the vacation rental business?

MaidThis: So, in LA, there's a lot more potential hosts out there like your client – that could afford to rent out a room in their apartment or their house than there are hosts who can afford to purchase a whole other property.

Do you have any specific advice for folks who are thinking about doing that?

David H: I think you really have to be the kind of person that's into that. You really have to be a social person that's comfortable with the ins and outs of people's different ways. You're not just getting used to one roommate, you're getting used to a lot of coming and going.

I just think it's not for everybody and it obviously really depends on the space.

The other thing to consider, though, is that it's usually going to be at a lower price point than if you were renting out the entire space. Therefore, you're going to be charging a lower cleaning fee. A lot of people that are renting in their own home are doing the cleaning themselves, and that's fine, but it's also a lot of work.

So, if you want to outsource it, it can be a process to find something that will work. We went through a bit of a process to find somebody on Craigslist that would be so local, that would be willing to just come for an hour to an hour and a half, here and there, for under \$40...

So, that's the biggest consideration. If they're willing to clean themselves or if they have someone who can help them at a price point that's worth it to the person and that they'll be consistent and reliable – which is the most difficult part of the business! Finding a good cleaner that presents well, that will show up on time every time and have it done. That is the biggest challenge.

Thoughts for New Hosts and Managers

MaidThis: Do you have any specific advice for people interested in becoming property managers like yourself or just getting started with hosting their own places?

David H: I don't have fabulous words of wisdom, to be honest, because it is harder now than it's ever been. Again, the market's saturated. So for me, as a co-host, it's been harder to find properties to take on – it's been months in the making just to get one. There are so many people doing what I'm doing and there are so many companies popping up and doing what I'm doing, that it's no longer just people. So, now you're competing with companies...

As far as getting started yourself, that's the best bet: That's the best thing you can do is to have a profile, have professional photography done (it makes all the difference in the world), and have a desirable space and a desirable location. Period. That's all I can say.

And then you're just going to be competing with everybody else in terms of your amenities, your decor, and your location.

MaidThis: Do you have any final advice for hosts or maybe a good story you can share with us?

David H: Let's see... A good story. (Laughs) Well, trust your gut.

When people are pushy before they – just do a little investigation into people. My worst story is that somebody contacted me and wanted to arrive same-day. We hadn't scheduled cleaner because we weren't expecting same-day guests and I said, "Hey, it's not clean," and they said, "No worries, we'll clean it."

And they were pushy and I went against my better judgment. I even googled their email and there were some unfavorable things that came up but I didn't want to be discriminatory... Two days later, my client called me and was like, "Why is the SWAT team at the house and the whole block is shut down?!"

So, if they're a little bit pushy or too aggressive or too eager to get in or willing to take it without it being cleaned or don't have any reviews... don't take the chance because it's not worth it.

David H: *I will say this: In 5 years, that's my worst story and I have 3 other maybe "bad" stories that just amount to difficult guests, just difficult people. But I've heard all sorts of horror stories and in 5 years, with multiple properties, I've had almost none. It's been really great most of the time. It's very lucrative and that's why everybody's doing it now. It's just a great business.*

I mean, there's some really great guests! I had one girl that had never used Airbnb before and she was so nervous and asking me a million questions. I had to prompt her to get her ID verified and put a photo up. And I was a little concerned – like, "Who is this girl?" She was asking a lot of questions – she was asking if there were security cameras inside which made me go, "Well, why are you asking that?" She was so nervous. But long story short is this girl left a \$50 tip. I've never had anybody leave a tip in 5 years. Her nightly rate was only like \$75 a night, it wasn't a high-end place, it was just a decent space and she left a \$50 tip. It was just really nice – people don't do that. So that's one of my best stories.

It was a pleasure speaking with and interviewing David! She has some great nuggets of advice for other hosts and managers. No matter where you are in your hosting journey, it's always helpful to hear from others in your shoes.

If you're interested in contacting David about her management service, you may ...

