



# Virtual Concierge Service

## Installation & Best Practices Guide for Google Home Devices

### Abstract

How to set up the Virtual Concierge to provide maximum value for your vacation rental when using Google Home devices.

# Overview

In this guide, we will cover the best practices associated with installing and configuring a Google Home device in a vacation rental. You will find a description of the value proposition for guests and owner/managers, exactly what you need in order to deliver that value, and setup instructions, including specific resources to take advantage of.

## Value Proposition

Vacation rental owners and managers have insight and knowledge to the local area that can make a big difference to the guest experience. This is nothing new - for years we have had a welcome binder with information for guests or even a tablet with local content. With Google Assistant, guests can get that same kind of personalized information delivered in a way that is like having a real concierge right at your vacation rental. Just speak a question, and get it answered. This natural interface offers the promise of replacing a welcome binder or tablet with a conversation. The [Virtual Concierge](#) is available at your VR via Google Home. It is also available to guests on their phone prior to their arrival with the Google Assistant app..

By simply saying, “**Hey Google, talk to the virtual concierge**”, guests will have immediate access to all the things you would like to make available to them. Your customized content is delivered in a conversational interface. You can extend a personal welcome to each group, and then share your ‘insider’ tips. That can include specifics on your VR property itself, as well as information about the local area - places to go, things to do and events to attend.

Here are some examples of the kind of things you can provide your guests with the virtual concierge:

- A group orientation when guests arrive
- Check in & check out information
- How to connect to the internet
- Instructions for dealing with garbage & recycling
- Ability to contact the owner or manager
- Upcoming events, and other reasons to come back
- Fun group games available with Google Assistant
- Restaurant recommendations
- Insider tips on local attractions
- Local shopping opportunities
- Detailed information on things to do in the area
- Spots to rent recreational equipment

- Who to contact in an emergency
- What to know about parking
- Important safety information
- How to use Google Home to help guests sleep better
- History of the residence and area
- Location of the nearest hospital
- How to use the dishwasher and laundry appliances
- How to play music using Google Home
- Telephone, climate control, and lighting info
- How to get meal ideas and instructions from Google Assistant
- How to use the sound system and TV
- Describe smart home capabilities available to guests

## What You Will Need

### A Google Home device and the Virtual Concierge

The [virtual concierge](#) is available as an application on any device within the [Google Home](#) family of products.

### A separate Google account for your property

You will want to set up the Google Home device(s) in your vacation rental property with a separate Google account that is specific to that property. If you have more than one device at your property, use that same account for all the devices at that location. There are a few reasons to set up your devices with a separate account:

First, if you were to use your personal Google account with the device at your vacation rental, Google Home can be set up to tie into to a number of things that you would not want to share with your guests. For example, voice purchasing. You may have heard [the story](#) of the 6 year old ordering an expensive dollhouse and 4 pounds of cookies - that might be cheap compared to what an enterprising guests with free reign in your Google account might order! There is also your personal calendar to consider, as well as shopping lists and the like.

The second reason to use a unique Google account for each of your VR properties is that it will allow you to establish unique custom content for that property that can be delivered through the virtual concierge. Content you define for the virtual concierge to deliver is linked to a Google account. Each set of content will have its own associated account. This will allow you to specify customized welcome messages for your guests and provide helpful information specific to each

property. If you have multiple properties in the same location (for example multiple units in the same condominium complex), there may be no reason to have unique content for each unit, so the properties could share a single account.

If you will be streaming music with your device with a service like Spotify, there is a third reason why a separate account makes sense. It involves digital rights with music. The Google account that you use when setting up the device(s) at your VR will be linked to the music service that you subscribe to. Unfortunately, Spotify is only licensed to sell 'personal' subscriptions which means **you can only stream on one device (or set of devices if you set up whole house music) at a time with a given account**. That means if you used the same account at multiple VRs, a guest in one VR might be happily singing along until a guest in a different VR tells Google Assistant to play music. At that point, the music will stop playing at the first VR, and start playing at the second VR. This is clearly not the best situation for building a great guest experience!

## Setup Instructions

Before you get started with the initial setup of your device, be sure to first create that separate Google account so that you can login with that account in the Google Assistant app to begin the setup process.

### Setting up a separate Google account

1. Open up a new Gmail account by going to [this page](#). Here's an example:



## Create your Google Account

First name	Last name
Jane's Beach Condo	VR
Username	
janesbeachcondo@gmail.com	
You can use letters, numbers & periods	
<a href="#">Use my current email address instead</a>	
Password	Confirm password
Use 8 or more characters with a mix of letters, numbers & symbols	

[Sign in instead](#)



One account. All of Google working for you.

2. Once you have your new Gmail account setup, you will want to take the additional step of setting up email forwarding on that account. That way, all email that may come to that account can show up in the inbox that you check regularly. Follow [these instructions](#) to setup email forwarding on your property's new Gmail account.

## Setup your Google Home device

Now that you have a separate account for the Google Home device(s) at your vacation rental property, you can follow the [basic Google Home setup instructions here](#).

## Enable the Virtual Concierge

1. Once you have the Google Assistant app installed on a phone or tablet, ensure **you are logged in with the account that you created for your vacation rental (not a personal account)**.
2. In the Google Assistant app, say "talk to the virtual concierge". The response will be "Before you can use the virtual concierge, I need to link your 'The Virtual Concierge' account to Google. Is that OK?". Saying yes will initiate the process where you can sign in with that same account.

## Ensure guests know about the Concierge during their stay

With a voice interface, it is critical that guests know the concierge capability that you have provided them. To communicate this effectively, place signs next to each Google Home device. At a minimum the signs should share how to open up a dialog with the concierge (“Hey Google, talk to the virtual concierge”). For better clarity with you guests, use a larger sign and provide examples of things they can ask about at your property.

We have a prebuilt 5” x 7” sign templates available. You can download it [here](#). Customize it to your liking using Microsoft PowerPoint, and then print and place it in an acrylic sign holder, available [here](#).

## Alternatives to the phrase “Hey Google, talk to the virtual concierge”

If you would like to change the way that guests access the Virtual Concierge, you can do so. Here are some examples:

- To keep it short and sweet, you can bring up the Virtual Concierge with “Hey Google, concierge”.
- If your property was called ‘Rustic Roost’, you can personalize the experience and make it possible for guests to say “Hey Google, Rustic Roost information”.
- If you have guests that have a hard time pronouncing ‘concierge’, you can invoke the Virtual Concierge with the phrase “Hey Google, house help”.

To do this, create a Google Home Routine in the Google Home app (the app is available for iPhone or Android). [Here are instructions](#) for creating a Routine (look under ‘Create a custom routine’). Specifically for the Virtual Concierge:

- Under ‘When’: Choose ‘Add command’, and then enter the phrase you would like.
- Under ‘Assistant will’: Choose ‘Add action’, and enter “talk to the virtual concierge”.

## Using the VCS Portal

### Add your points of contact

Further down in this document you will see that there is the ability to be notified for a variety of reasons. You can add points of contact that can be selected under any given property for a

particular communication. To do so, choose 'Contacts' from the Account menu in the upper right corner of the Portal screen. You can add either a phone number to receive text messages, an email address, or both.

## Provide your custom content

You are now ready to use the Virtual Concierge Management Portal to equip the virtual concierge to deliver the custom content you would like to provide your guests. To get started:

1. Navigate to <https://portal.virtualconciergeservice.com>
2. Create a Virtual Concierge Service account by entering an email address that you regularly use for other online services to communicate with you.
3. You'll get started in the Portal by adding a property. You will see two login buttons, one for Amazon and one for Google. Click on the Google button and login with the Google account you created for your vacation rental.
4. Follow the steps in the wizard to add your property.

The wizard will get you started with some property basics. Extending that to include other custom content is easy. Simply add items that you would like to share information about with your guests - what the item is, and what the Virtual Concierge should say about it. Be sure to add tags to your items, [as described below](#).

All content can be completely customized to your liking. Guests can ask for specific things (such as "Tell me about restaurants in the area", or there is also a menu of options that is available for them. The menu can be tailored as you see fit, and presented in any way that you would like to organize your content. You can drag and drop items, reordering them or making them children of another item. This provides for maximum flexibility.

## Share the Virtual Concierge with guests before their arrival

One of the key use cases of the virtual concierge is to provide all the information you have defined to a group of guest before they arrive at your property. This is made possible by the capability to access the virtual concierge on your guest's smartphone or tablet. Guests can hear all about places to go and things to do before they even arrive. The virtual concierge is available on smartphones via Google Assistant without any additional content setup. Guests can speak to the app and get a verbal response, or use it silently with text and buttons.

### **Here's how to provide the concierge to your guests before their arrival:**

On Android phones, the Google Assistant app is built in. On iPhone, guests can add it, here is the [link to the app](#). In the virtual concierge Portal, there is a menu on the left called 'Mobile Access'. That is where you can get the mobile access code that is assigned to a given property. Give your guests the code, and tell them to open the Google Assistant app and say "Use the

Mobile Concierge." They will be prompted for that code, and will then have access to your customized Virtual Concierge.

## Leverage calendar integration features

The Virtual Concierge platform integrates with your property's reservation calendar, enabling some great features. [Here are instructions](#) for linking your reservation calendar to a property in the Portal. Once that is complete, some of the features available are:

### Greet Guests By Name

You can provide personalized greetings using your guest's name. Support for this personalization with your guest's name are available for a variety of reservation calendar systems. To enable this feature, go to the 'Calendar' menu. Once your calendar has been imported, you will see a tab called 'Integrations'. Choose that tab, and click the button to enable 'Personalized Greeting'.

### Provide a One-time Welcome Message for each Group of Guests

Providing a warm welcome to new arrivals is a great way to use the Virtual Concierge. In your welcome message, you can also give guests information that you consider important, without depending on them to ask for it. Even better, you can provide this welcome using your own voice. This is optional but highly recommended, as it provides a great way to personalize your welcome.

When a guest uses the Virtual Concierge for the first time after their arrival, they will hear the custom welcome message that you have defined. This is a one-time only welcome for each group of guests. When they use the VC again, they will get the normal greeting.

To enable this feature, go to the 'Calendar' menu. Once your calendar has been imported, you will see a tab called 'Integrations'. Choose that tab, and click the button to enable 'Host Welcome Message'. Then specify what welcome message you would like the Virtual Concierge to deliver.

## Get notified when guests check-in or check-out

With the Virtual Concierge, your guests can both check-in and check-out with their voice. By enabling these features, you can be notified when either occur. Once inside the Virtual Concierge skill, they can say things like "I'm checking in", or "We're checking out". You will

receive an immediate notification. This can be especially useful at check-out, as it may allow you to send the cleaning crew in early. To enable these features, go to the Guest Communication menu item in the Virtual Concierge Portal.

## Get valuable real-time feedback via a quick exit survey

You can receive immediate feedback about your guest's stay. When guests say "We're checking out", they will be asked if they are willing to provide feedback on their stay via 3 quick questions. When they say yes, they will be asked:

1. How they rate their stay overall on a scale of 1 to 10
2. Areas they would recommend for future investment (you can customize these)
3. If they are interested in rebooking.

With these answers you will have direct feedback that you can use toward continuous improvement and repeated bookings. To enable this feature, go to the Guest Communication menu item in the Virtual Concierge Portal.

## Configure VCS to handle questions when there are no answers defined

Virtual Concierge Service includes patent-pending technology that will protect the guest's experience in cases where you as the host have not yet provided answers to questions they might ask. To take advantage of this, there a couple of configuration parameters you will want to set in the VCS Portal.

In the Virtual Concierge Host Portal, you can configure how this system works. Under Settings, you will find a section called 'Notification Preferences'. There you can:

- Opt-In or Opt-Out to receive periodic reports via email that summarize the things your guests are asking about. You can also set the frequency of these reports to weekly, monthly or quarterly, as well as select who should receive them. **Note: the default is set to Opt-In, and a frequency of monthly.**
- Opt-In or Opt-Out to receive real-time notifications via text when a guest asks a question about the property that the Virtual Concierge does not have an answer for. You can also not only choose which point of contact should receive the text, but also the hours during which they should receive these notifications. **Note: You must specifically Opt-In to enable this capability, it is not turned on by default.**

## Allow your guests to contact you via the Virtual Concierge

You can provide your guests the ability to contact you regarding specific issues that you define. For example, requesting late checkout, reporting damage, ideas for improvements, questions about the house, or anything else you would like to specify. Guests can say “contact the host” (or a variety of other alternative phrases) to initiate contact. They can then pick from the list of things to contact you about. You will then receive either an email or a text message with the request.

## Multi-Property Management

In the ‘Properties’ menu at the top of the screen, you will see an option for ‘Multi-Property Management’. This feature will allow you to quickly copy your custom content and configuration settings from one property to multiple others.

By selecting a source property as well as one or many destination properties, you can have all the settings that you apply to one property copied across to your other properties. The ability to copy the custom content from your source property is optional as well.

## Tips and best practices for defining your content

### You Are the Expert

When you think about the kind of information to provide, consider the expert local knowledge you can share with guests. Your guests can google almost anything - what are the unique perspectives or insights that you can offer to make their trip truly special? You may not realize the extent to which you are truly a subject matter expert - include that personal knowledge of your vacation rental and the surrounding area. Think about ‘insider tips’ that only locals may know about, or how to leverage relationships you have in the area to truly differentiate your guest experience.

### Collaborate with Local Businesses & Provide Guests Digital Coupons

One of the amazing experiences you can offer through the Virtual Concierge is to offer them personalized connections to local businesses. For example, you can send customers to your favorite local establishments, and in return those proprietors can give you a special discount or other benefit that you can give your guests. The Virtual Concierge makes this easy, by making digital coupons available for your guests.

Here is how to do this:

- Connect with local establishments like restaurants, coffee shops, attractions, tour operators or equipment rentals in your area that you recommend. Let them know that you will be sending business their way, and in return ask them for a special offer you can share with your guests as an additional incentive. For example:
  - 20% off ski and snowboard rentals
  - Kids under 7 eat free
  - Buy 3 tour passes, get one free
- In the Management Portal, choose a content item or add a new one. In the Edit panel for that item, select "Show More Options". You will see an option to "Add a Digital Coupon". Simply enter the offer that you worked out for that establishment.
- [Here is an example](#) of how this works and what Alexa will say.

## Keep It Short

The best content is brief - in a dialog with a voice assistant, we generally want relatively quick answers without waiting through a long monolog. A good rule of thumb that the portal will help reinforce is to keep your descriptions at 500 characters or less. If you have a lot of content for an item and just can't make it short, consider breaking it up by making it a 'parent' item and adding 'children' below it as additional options that guests can hear about. That will help make your guests' experience with the virtual concierge more conversational.

## Listen and Tune Your Content

Be sure to listen to the content you define and make sure you are happy with the way it sounds. As necessary, make tweaks if Google Assistant isn't able to say something quite right. Here are few tricks that you can incorporate as well:

- When Google Assistant sees a comma, a brief pause will be inserted
- When you include a period, a slightly longer pause will be included
- Combining the capabilities of commas and periods, you can help make Google Assistant speak more slowly and make your content easier to follow. For example, if you would like to share the phone number of 425-555-1212, you might include the following: '4, 2, 5. 5, 5, 5. 1, 2, 1, 2'.

## Incrementally Improve Your Content Over Time

Don't worry if your content isn't perfect after the first draft. You will get further inspiration over time, and there is no need to complete all the items at one time. Simply hit save and your responses will be available at the next login for further expansion. Plus, [the Virtual Concierge](#)

[will notify you](#) about things your guests are asking about that you haven't yet provided content for, so you can follow their lead in terms of what items to include.

## Chat with the Virtual Concierge to Test Your Content

No Google device handy to test your content? No problem - the Portal has a built-in capability to chat with the Virtual Concierge. You can find the button labelled 'Test Content' on the Custom Content page, right next to 'Save Inputs' at the top of the screen. Please note that not all features are available here. For example, you won't hear Google Assistant include information about a digital coupon that you may have added to an item.

## Content features you will want to take advantage of

Be sure to leverage these capabilities of the Virtual Concierge to get full value from the service:

### Use Tags

Guests can find the content they are interested in by using the menu. This is useful, but it is also important for guests to ask for information directly, with a simple question. **Tags make it possible for guests to ask for information directly.** They also include built-in synonyms, so that different ways of guests asking the same thing are recognized. **Use tags wherever you can.**

Here are a few examples of how tags work and add value:

- Let's say you have an item called 'Rocky Ridge Lookout'. There may be a great picnic area there, so you could include the tag of 'Picnic Spot'. Then, if your guests ask the concierge a question like "Where is a good place for a picnic?" the content you provide about Rocky Ridge Lookout will be provided. You can also add the tag of 'Hiking Trail', 'Mountain Biking' and 'Scenic View'. This would allow the content of Rocky Ridge Lookout to also be delivered anytime a guest asked about hiking, mountain biking, or places with a great view.
- Tags enable flexibility in how you organize your content. For example, let's say you may have a favorite restaurant called 'Bubba's Place' that is great for kids, but naturally you have it listed together with other restaurants. Likewise, you might have 'Fishing' as an activity together with other things to do at the lake. By applying the 'Kid's Activity' tag to both 'Bubba's Place' and 'Fishing', you make it possible for guests to hear both choices when they say "Tell me about activities for kids". They can then choose to hear more detail about either option.
- You may want to include an item called 'Garbage and Recycling' that provides information for guests about how to deal with garbage and recycling. By adding the

'Garbage' tag, the words 'garbage', 'trash', 'recycling', 'composting', 'refuse' and 'rubbish' will all be recognized in a guests question. So they could say, "What do I do with the trash?", or "Give me information about recycling" and either way your 'Garbage and Recycling' content will be provided.

Further, the Natural Language Understanding (NLU) capabilities of the voice assistants are much better at recognizing tags than they are at recognizing item titles. This is because tags are included as part of 'training' the interaction model, and item titles are not. There are hundreds of tags available and in general, you will want to include a tag for most items to provide flexibility for your guest experience. You can add multiple tags to an item, and use the same tag on multiple items.

## Respond to Guest Questions with Your Own Voice

We know that one key to success in the vacation rental business is maintaining a personal connection with guests. One way to do that is to have them hear your own voice as part of their experience in your property. With this feature of the Virtual Concierge, you can record an audio file and attach it to a content item. When guests ask about that item, the VC will say "I'll hand it off to your host for that information", and then your own voice will provide the response to the guest's request.

To record an audio file on a PC, you can use a free utility like [this one](#) to record an audio file, or [here is a resource](#) that describes how to do it with your phone.

To add an audio file to content item, click on the item to edit it. In the pop up window, you will see a link for 'Show More Options'. There you will see the ability to attach various file types to that content item.

## Leverage Yelp Integration

When a guest requests information from the virtual concierge, your custom content for that item will be delivered. Some of your items will be local businesses in the area, such as a restaurant, coffee shop, golf course, place to rent paddle boards, etc. This is a great opportunity to leverage the built-in integration between the Virtual Concierge Service and Yelp. If you use the integration with Yelp in your items, once your content is delivered, the guest will be asked if they would like the address, phone number or business hours for that place of business. This information will be automatically delivered, there is no need for you to specify any of those three things in your content. Should this business information change, we will automatically update your content.

To connect an existing content item to Yelp, select it in the virtual concierge Portal as you normally would, then:

- Hit the 'Connect to Yelp' button.
- Find and select the restaurant or other business you are interested in and hit Save.

That's it. You can also add new Yelp-connected items by using buttons we've made available in the Portal.

## Make Use of Automatically Updated Local Events

Guests can say "tell me about events in the area" (or similar phrases), and they will get a list of top events happening nearby. This information is constantly updated and requires no data entry on your part. Events are provided based on their proximity to the address of your property. They are sorted by date and presented to guests with events underway at the time of their request listed first.

The ability for the Virtual Concierge to share local event information is enabled by default. However, if you choose to not have this feature available to guests, you can disable it in the Portal. On the left side menu you will now see a tab for Local Events, where that selection can be made. You can also go there to see the list of events that will be shared with guests when they request it.

## Include Special Items

### Conversation Opener

The first special item in the custom content section of the portal is the Conversation Opener. Here you can define any message you would like guests to hear when they initially open up a dialog with the virtual concierge. Guests open up that dialog by saying, "*Hey Google, talk to the virtual concierge*". If you leave the Conversation Opener field blank, when the dialog is opened up the Virtual Concierge will say, "*Welcome to <Property Name>*." and present your guest with your content as a menu of options.

You can alter that behavior by specifying a Conversation Opener. For example, if you enter "We're glad to have you.", when the dialog with the concierge is opened up the Virtual Concierge would say, "*Welcome to <Property Name>. We're glad to have you. Would you like a menu of options?*". It is important to keep the welcome message short. This is because the Conversation Opener will be heard every time a guest opens up a dialog with the virtual concierge. If it is too long, it becomes boring and repetitive.

A best practice is to use the following for your Conversation Opener:

**“To get started, say, give me some tips, or,”**

Leaving the trailing ‘or’ with a comma may seem a little strange, but when you put it all together it makes sense. When the dialog is opened up, the Virtual Concierge will say “*Welcome to <Property Name>. To get started, say, give me some tips, or, would you like a menu of options?*” That is a nice welcome message, it isn’t too long, and importantly, it provides the linkage to the ‘Some Tips’ Tag, described below.

### Special Items Included in the Pre-Defined Template

Included in the template are two special predefined items that are associated with the best practice welcome message described above. You should definitely take advantage of them, because they can expose things that guests can ask about without going through the entire menu.

- **‘Some Tips’** - this item is also defined with a ‘Some Tips’ tag. Best practice is to include this item along with the description that begins with “*Here are some tips for using the virtual concierge. You can respond to my questions, or you can tell me specifically what you want. For example you can say, tell me about...*” Then, enter your own custom information about the items you have defined. For example, you can continue with the phrase “*restaurants. You can also ask about: attractions, wineries, hiking, and lots more.*” Then, at the end be sure to include “*To hear more things, say: What else do you know?*” This will then provide connectivity to the 3rd special predefined item with the tag, ‘what else do you know’..
- **‘More things I know about’** - this item has the tag, “What else do you know”. In the content of this item, you can list all of the options that guests can ask about. For example, “*Here’s a list. Interrupt me at any time by saying, for example, Hey Google, tell me about wifi. Here are some options. Wifi. Climate Control. Making calls. Garbage and recycling. Sound system. Lighting. TV. Stores. Ghost towns. Brewery. Palmer Lake. Yard games. Golfing. Winter activities. Horseback riding. ATVs. Gold panning. History of the place. Parking. Transportation. Events. And finally, health and safety.*”

### Do You Arrange Guest Activities? Make Use of Daily Itineraries

We know the importance of building an independent brand. Thought leaders in this community are constantly finding new ways to do this. Some have begun building custom itineraries for their guests, providing activities, attractions and dining selections with a personal touch. They are engaging local business owners and providing connections that make their visitors feel special.

You can provide your guests custom itineraries through the Virtual Concierge. To use this

feature, simply add the "Today's Itinerary" and/or the "Tomorrow's Itinerary" tags to custom items you define that contain the plans you set up for your guests. Here's an example of how it can work:

Guest: "What is the plan for today?"

Virtual Concierge: "You've got a fantastic day ahead. At 9am, Bob is going to meet you at the house and you'll head out with him to go white water rafting on the Okanogan River. You'll have a gourmet lunch riverside. At 6pm you have dinner reservations at Campo Marina Italian Restaurant."

Guest: "What is the itinerary for tomorrow?"

Virtual Concierge: "Tomorrow the adventure continues. Your day begins with a visit to the Osoyoos Desert Mountain Railroad, a world-class exhibit. Then you'll have lunch at Inka Meep cellars, where Jenny will meet you at 2pm and lead you on a wine tour of the Okanogan valley. Along the way you will visit Gehringer Brothers Estate Winery, Burrowing Owl, and our personal favorite, Hester Creek winery. The day concludes with reservations at Dolce Thai Bistro. Try the mango salad!"



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