

How to increase your on line bookings

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Internet Marketing Ideas for Your Hotel

9 Reasons Some Hotels Are Getting More Bookings From The Internet

by Josiah Mackenzie on July 6, 2009

This post is by guest expert [Neil Salerno](#).

At last, most hoteliers would agree that the only way to measure the effectiveness a hotel website is to track the number of reservations being generated from it. For those of you who are still satisfied with simply knowing how many visitors your site gets, you may be missing the big picture. Getting more visitors doesn't necessarily mean you are getting more reservations.

There are actually two separate issues at hand:

1. Driving visitors to your site
2. Converting lookers into bookers once they visit

Many people are quick to consider search engine optimization, but more people need to concentrate on WSO, website optimization. WSO is your site's ability to sell your hotel, once users visit the site.

There are many WSO points which contribute to making a productive hotel web site. Contrary to the belief of some site designers, a hotel website is not just an attractive online brochure with moving parts, bells, and whistles; it should be a tool to generate sales; and that takes marketing expertise. Unless one is designing a site for a museum, there are definite marketing principles involved in the design itself. Perhaps the most difficult undertaking is to make people understand that their attractive web site may be a marketing failure because it lacks the sales tools to produce reservations; such as well-written, keyword rich, sales text, technically acceptable photography, an easily understood navigation scheme, researched and carefully chosen search terms/phrases, workable description and title Meta Tags, and a good link strategy.

Here are nine steps that others are using to help ensure that their site will capture a greater share of online reservations.

Avoid Flash Intros and Other Flash Elements

An introduction landing page may look pretty, but they don't do a thing to help your site's popularity nor its productivity. I'm sure one of the most frequently clicked links on these web sites is "skip intro." People aren't looking to be entertained, they are looking for information. Tell your web designer, no thanks on flash intros.

Search engines only read text. A little flash can be attractive, but too many web designers get carried away with it. Your web designer needs to spend more time developing text, which is far more important to the success of the site.

There appears to be a growing preference towards developing the entire site in flash. It sure is pretty but it has some huge problems. It's costly to produce and costly to make changes. Most flash requires navigation links to be double-clicked in order to function. This may sound like no big deal, but many users will assume the link is broken, since we are all so accustomed to single-clicking links. This type of site may be perfect for an art gallery or museum, but dysfunctional for a hotel sales site. Second, flash confuses search spiders and almost always encourages a low site ranking. Third, take a good look at successful booking portals like Expedia, Travelocity, etc...No flash!

Be Careful with Photos and Other Graphics

Photos create interest, but text sells. You can make your photos more interesting and searchable by simply adding text descriptions to every photo. This works especially well for "photo galleries" on your site. Since search engines only read text, your photos will become part of the search process and actually increase the popularity of your site.

Navigation Scheme on your Site

The first rule of hotel site design; don't make it necessary for visitors to "learn" how to navigate your site. Website designers, who lack hotel marketing expertise, tend to become overly creative when designing and naming navigation elements. Your site's navigation scheme is among the primary evaluation essentials for search engine spiders when ranking your site.

Drop-down menus are acceptable, but stick to common labels. You can't go wrong with common labels such as "facilities", "amenities", "activities", etc. Talk about confusing, we even saw one web site that labeled their home page "lobby." Don't try to reinvent the wheel. Navigation elements do not need to jump, twirl, or flash in order to create interest in your site.

Meta Tags and all that Technical Stuff

There is some debate over the importance of Meta Tags, some search engines swear by them, some don't. It only makes good 'ole common-sense, however, to make sure that you have the proper tags attached to your site-they are free. Want to see your tags? It's easy, go to Explorer and find your site, then click view, source. There are various tags, such as Title Tags, Description Tags, Key Word Tags, etc. If there are tags entered, how well were they researched? How accurate are they? For most search engines, tags help them find your site. By the way, some Meta Tags should be different on each page of your site. There are several web sites which will allow you to see how many searches were performed, during the previous month, for each search term used. They will even suggest search words and phrases you might never have thought of. Don't guess; you could be wrong.

What Does Your Site Say? (and how does it say it?)

The most common error on hotel web sites is poorly developed text. I can always recognize a site designed by a techie; the text usually looks like an after-thought. Text is the most important element of the site for two reasons; text is the only element that search engines can see, and second, text is what sells your hotel. Photos create interest, but text sells.

Realizing that most visitors will rarely read your entire site, it's essential that the text is written in order of importance from top to bottom. The first two to three paragraphs should include as many key words/phrases as possible to facilitate searches. Be careful not to overdo it, you could be accused of spamming.

Home page text is obviously most critical. This is your opportunity to clarify your location, not simply your address and the most important selling features of the hotel. The location description should contain distances to room generators, such as attractions and businesses, etc.

Don't forget to ask for business; you are writing sales text, not a brochure. The old concept of features and benefits still apply. Write as if you are talking to your visitors; forget ninety-dollar technical terms: talk plainly. Developing text should consume the most time and thought in designing your site.

A Booking Engine Could be Your Best Investment

For the life of me, I can't think of a single reason why every independent hotel site shouldn't have a booking engine attached. Independent hotels need a booking engine to gain equal footing with franchised hotels. Simple fact is that more and more users are booking reservations in real-time online. Email availability inquiries just don't do it, anymore.

Not all booking engines are equal. Look for an engine that can be easily maintained; you will have to maintain rates and room inventory. Look for a well-designed engine, which is user-friendly and professionally designed. Look for an engine that charges a flat fee each month with no commissions or booking fees. Look for an engine that has a good technical staff to assist you.

Above all, don't expect Internet users to be satisfied with email reservations on your site. We can only guess how many reservations you could be missing. For those of you, who think that a booking engine is financially out of reach, think again, the return on this minor investment is huge.

Collect and Use Your Web Site Data

There are many web site data collection software programs and basically they all collect just about the same information. You need to know your primary feeder-markets, primary referral sites, most productive search engines for your site, etc. Make sure that your web master knows how to use this information to make changes to your site. There is no "perfect" web site; only those we continue to strive to make perfect. Software such as Google's Analytics can show the popularity of each page on your site, so adjustments can be made. This service

collects data from visitors to your web site. Yes, it's affordable too; for now it's free.

In the old days of print advertising, my favorite saying was "50% of all advertising is a waste of money; the problem is we don't know which 50% it is." This is not true with a web site; we can easily see what is productive and that which is not productive.

Pay-Per-Click Advertising

In those good 'ole days, we had to spend money to advertise our hotels, without knowing what the response would be, if any at all. Pay-per-click advertising is exactly as it appears; you only pay for those users who actually go to your web site.

Check it out; it could be a great investment if you find someone who knows how to use it properly and will maintain it for you. It could help you dominate your competition.

Develop a Link Strategy on your Site

Several search engines also use your site's popularity to rank your site. They measure in-coming and out-going links. Links to attractions and relevant locations can be very useful. Use some caution, however, it helps to link to those sites that are most popular and never place out-going links on your home page.

Dollar for dollar, Internet website marketing represents the best-value sales tool available to hotels today. It still provides a great return-on-investment and is the great equalizer for Independent hotels. Don't be satisfied with a site which looks attractive, but produces too few reservations

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