HOTEL WEBSITE
SECRETS TO
GETTING MORE RESERVATIONS
FILLING MORE ROOMS
AND TURNING ONE-TIME GUESTS INTO REPEATING CUSTOMERS

CUSTOMER ALLIANCE

HOTEL WEBSITE **SECRETS**

Getting started on researching and developing your hotel website is generally harder than doing what you had planned to do once you actually sit down at the computer. So, give yourself a pat on the back for reading this guide or if you have already started a website. The truth is that website development can have many false starts and detours. And, you really don't want to do it alone!

There are many things to know and do to get a hotel website working--it is a lot like having a wedding in a foreign country. The good news is that we understand the challenges that you face to get the big things, small things, and littlest things done in addition to finding and serving guests effectively, while simultaneously keeping an eye on your bottom line. Our goal is to share our knowledge on hotel website best practices and help you achieve your financial and marketing objectives through effective website marketing. This is the reason why you picked up this guide.

Here you won't have to plow through a lot of dusty, academic theory on the subject. Instead, we've created a concise, information-dense guide focused on specific actions you can take immediately that will pay off quickly in the three things every hotelier dreams of:

- **Getting More Reservations**
- **Filling More Rooms**
- **Turning One-Time Guests into Repeat Customers**

As consumer purchasing behavior has shifted more towards shopping on the internet, having an effective website is more important than ever. Whether you are the owner of a small lodge, hostel, guest house, inn, bed & breakfast, or hotel with less than 50 rooms, a custom hotel website can increase your operation's performance, yield direct bookings, and produce greater long-term financial growth. There are, of course, grander goals that you want to accomplish through your website. "Become the world's most profitable small hotel" or "Develop a website that can understand your feeling." We got it!

If you've been thinking about how to make an effective hotel website, then you've come to the right place. Travelers of tomorrow will spend more time and money researching a site before traveling to a destination. With that your website will need to help them find you, capture their attention, and create opportunity so your customers can make direct bookings through you.

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INTRODUCTION

The rapid growth in the use of the internet for hotel and travel searches on laptop, mobile devices, and tablets has substantially increased competition. By making an investment in developing a hotel website, you're on your way to gain a competitive advantage in the marketplace.

The first order of business for an effective hotel website is that it needs to include a number of elements. Additionally, it should be one that will deliver a good return on investment, increase productivity, and enhance the hotel performance.

This simple to understand guide can help you at any stage of your business lifecycle.

If you're just starting out, you can get going immediately along a well-traveled road to growth and profitability...and bypass some of the detours and pitfalls that cause so many frustrations.

If you're an established hotelier, this guide can serve as a valuable self-diagnostic. Use it to reevaluate whether you're doing all you can...and in the best way possible... to ensure a healthy ROI and continued success.

WEBSITES **TODAY**

More than ever, today's hotel websites need to be functional both for the hotels and the visitors. The design and purpose of your hotel's website can greatly affect your potential and existing visitors' online experiences and ultimately tap into your target markets. If you simply think website traffic will determine your marketing success, then you'll need to think again. The effectiveness of your website should be measured based on the following two major issues:

Conversion rates: **Is your website converting lookers into bookers?**

Website optimization: **Is your website driving visitors to your site?**

In today's website marketing, Search Engine Optimization (SEO) has become the focus for many businesses. Beyond that, in the hospitality context, Website Optimization (WSO) is the driving factor behind your site's ability to sell your inventory. Let's be honest, a small hotel property is often challenged by limited resources in its marketing effort.

Despite the fact that some website designers might focus on the bells and whistles of your website, we will highlight four major factors of WSO that can increase your website's effectiveness.

First, your website is a *sales tool*; therefore, speed and quality of the site's accessibility will affect your users' satisfaction. The site needs to offer a simple, easy-to-use navigation scheme and a good link strategy in addition to site attractiveness.

Second, your website needs to include *technical and marketing principles* to attract bookings. These would include well-written content, keywords, sales text, technically acceptable photography, researched and carefully chosen search terms/phrases, workable description, and Meta Tags title.

Third, you should *develop and utilize the website to its full potential*. You will need to incorporate a functional reservation booking system or inventory management system. Additionally, your site needs to include a medium that establishes e-Relationships, one-to-one communication, or a form of interactivity with the users.

Fourth, the website needs to provide the *optimal paths* to maximize sell-through and conversion rates. Your website needs to be user-friendly especially in the number of steps to make the actual reservation. The key is to maximize usability and minimize bailout rates.

Marketing Through Website

The need to search the internet for hotels is like a thing to do for many travelers of today. Your competitors tell you how their visitors found them on the internet, then they will tell you they are expecting more bookings via the internet. With that, you want to get started too. Here's something to focus on:

There are two kinds of websites: "functional" websites and "image" websites. Image websites look good, but have little else to offer. Functional websites, on the other hand, they help you keep your rooms filled in part because they allow your customers to book online 24/7.

One thing to keep in mind is that your website needs to be more than just an online brochure. Your website needs to generate bookings, simultaneously creating authentic connections with your new, potential, and existing guests to secure future bookings.

Now, let's look at some industry facts:

According to Cornell University's School of Hotel Administration, the least expensive way to receive bookings would be through hotels' own website and online reservation booking sites. Reservation requests that require handling by email or phone can become a significant cost factor. By automating the reservation process, you're on your way to increasing efficiency and reducing cost. Additionally, reservations that

come from online or offline travel agents often incur a 10% or more commission on each booking.

Google reports that the average traveler visits 22 different websites over the span of 9.5 research sessions before making a travel related booking. This means you need to have a website that is effective in predicting, responding to, and connecting with customers' needs. Your next guest may use an online travel website to discover you, but they are also likely to search for hotel websites after the initial discovery in order to shop for other hotels and promotions.

Through a functional website, you will give your guests greater opportunity to spend their money directly with you instead of through a middleman. Now...that is what we call earning more without spending more.

WINNING
WEBSITE CONTENT

The great thing about having your custom hotel website built on your ideas is that you can own and tell your hotel's story and clarify any misrepresented information out there about your property.

A website should give prospective guests the facts about what the hotel has to offer. You want to be ahead of other travel sites by having the most current information about your property and nearby attractions on your site. Get into your customers' head and understand what your target market really wants to know about your property.

Even more so than technology or beauty, you want your site to provide a unique, competitive advantage that unlocks key benefits to booking your hotel.

Hotel Size Does Not Matter

The only time when hotel size matters is when you have oversold your hotel. As you evaluate your website strategy, you just need to think about the following two questions.

First,
"Who can tell a better story and describe your hotel better than you."

Your hotel website allows you to describe your rooms, amenities, and nearby attractions that you believe to be the most important for your guests. Whether it is a small hotel with 20 rooms or medium hotel with 65 rooms, you can update your hotel information and change rates on the fly.

The second important question is,
"Are you ready to confirm more online direct bookings."

Your hotel website can provide immediate results and bookings around the clock. Once in a while, you may even get more bookings than you can handle. Direct bookings from your website cost far less than reservations coming from a travel agent. Not every hotel website performs the same, therefore you want your website to be competitive whenever and wherever possible.

Homepage

In today's world of internet, we hit the fast forward button on just about everything. So, what this means is that your customers will look at what you have to offer, stay on your site if it is visually appealing to them, and test out your user-friendly navigation system. Use your homepage to share photos of your property or pictures that have connection with your brand, products, services, and amenities. You don't need to have many photos to inform potential customers of your hotel existence.

Your mission here should include the KISS principle: "Keep it simple and straightforward". The homepage is most likely to be the first place your customer will visit, so hire a website designer to make it right. As you develop a relationship with your web designer, you as the owner of your website, still have the final say on not just what to do, but equally what not to do.

Rooms / Reservation page

Through your website, delight your customers with quality photos of the rooms, fast and simple ways to make reservations, clear and concise information on the room types, and instant access to identify available rooms and room rates.

Special offers

Your potential customers are leaving your website. Why? Where are they going? You thought you captured their attention with quality photos and imaginative texts. Well... you can't let them just go...whether you can offer value-added services or exclusive promotions, you need special offers that give incentive for your visitors to stay on your website longer. The key here is to shift your customer from booking just a room to buying more.

Encourage user-generated content - guest reviews

Utilizing user-generated content allows you to establish e-Relationships and create interactive opportunities with readers that would inspire more people to want to know about your property.

Being able to publish information such as photos, videos, blogs, or comments through a hotel website is quite powerful for viewers and publishers. Think of it this way, a user posts a review about the restaurant at your hotel, then customers in various parts of the world will be taking in the information. One of the customers reading the information could potentially be the next guest to stay at your hotel. Additionally, user-generated content can be re-posted in review-sites, social networking site, social media, forums, and wikis.

Cornell University recently released the results of a study that showed a hotel can yield great benefits from guest reviews on the accommodations. Guest reviews on review-sites or hotel's blog site can provide insight for you to improve your services and products. As the hotel gets more reviews, your hotel will become more recognizable. You can also share the ratings and reviews through other online and offline media to promote your property.

The bottom line is that on your website you need to encourage user-generated comments about your property. Ideally, you want your hotel name to show up on travel site such as TripAdvisor, Yelp, and CitySearch.

DESIGNING YOUR SITE –
FOR YOU AND YOUR GUESTS

There's so much to consider in order to blend your needs with your guests' needs into one effective website.

Hotel websites should have little or no flash elements. Making your website pretty is one thing, but offering useful information to your customers is far more important to the success of your site.

Having photos on your website will generate interest about your products and services. You also need to have searchable text and stimulating content.

Simply adding text descriptions to your photos may increase your competitive advantage. The photos on your website will become part of the search process when you attach text to your photos. This means your site would receive more "Hits" from internet search engines.

Single-clicking links are for hotel website. Double-clicked navigation links are cumbersome in the minds of many users. Single-clicking links are viewable through almost all operating systems. No flash and avoid double-clicking links!

Simple, practical, and functional with a little bit of colors is all you need. Most of the customers to your site have probably visited a number of other hotel and travel sites by the time they get to your site. So, your site needs to have naming navigation elements and schemes that are user-friendly and not overly creative.

Website without the need of a roadmap. Drop-down menus are acceptable and your menu buttons should be placed at the top of the page because people read from top to bottom. Design your site with common labels such as "amenities", "rooms", "photo gallery", and "facilities". Common labels will help your users feel comfortable with your site.

Get to know your Meta Tags. Review the tags that are on your site such as Title Tags, Description Tags, and Keyword Tags. For most search engines, tags help users find your site. You can use the Google website features to see how many searches were performed during the previous month, and each search term that was used. Some websites will even suggest search words and phrases you might have never thought of for your site. So, incorporate those search words and phrases in your content. Use different Meta Tags for each page and don't guess the search words. It's faster to look them up!

Text is what sells your hotel. Your users will find it hard to ignore a hotel website with nice photos without reading the text. So, focus on texts to highlight the most important features of your property such as location, property type, and services. Does your site read like it was written by a techie? Do you have typos that give a poor impression of your product? Do you have words in the text that search engines can't see? If you answered yes then it is time to give your content a makeover. The first two to three paragraphs should include a number of keywords/phrases to increase searches. You also do not want to overdo it or you could be accused of spamming. Write as if you are talking to your visitors. Additionally, you need to focus on sales then features and benefits. Talk plainly!
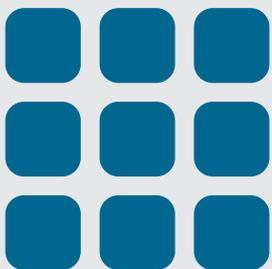
Content Management System

You've invested a lot of time and money on your website with the mission to generate reservations: selling the hotel. Effectiveness requires focus; consider deploying a Content Management System, which is a digital marketing content solution that centralizes your digital content through a depository method.

Rich Media -videos, podcasts, images etc.

Multimedia, sometimes called rich media, adds marketing value to your website. Depending on your target markets, younger generations are much more attracted to rich media than older ones. Corporate markets may be too busy to pay attention to the rich media on your site.

Audio clips, music clips, video, virtual tours, and flash animation are icing on the cake. Selling your room remains as priority. Rich media can increase your customer's interest in your site, including attracting repeat visits. You will also need to consider rich media can distract or delay your customer from booking your property. Interactivity through rich media needs to be created with the target market in mind.

For instance, the live web cam at the San Diego Zoo can be viewed from the zoo's website. Through the live video, the website showcases the Panda Bears in action, generating public interest of the zoo, and creating an emotional connection between the visitors and the zoo. If rich media is the key that sets you apart from your competitors and extends your brand, then it might be a worthy investment.

Finally, we're convinced that deploying rich media on the website is like getting married. Don't do it just because it is fun.

Responsive design

After a few years being a hotelier, you can tell what kind of users will visit your site. You know your website will show up on a desktop screen just fine. Then, your users started meeting friends at a coffee shop and your website no longer looks the same when they are using mobile devices. The truth is you need to think about your users, their network and lifestyle, then think about the devices that they would also use to view your hotel site. Creating a responsive design takes more time and resources but you will have your website working for every screen size and device.

Designing for the Future

The continued growth of mobile and tablet usage means more people will perform searches using smart devices. Your hotel website may need to be optimized to provide users with marketing materials and booking features while offering browsing at ease.

Data Collection

Effective website data collection will provide you with a lot of information about your visitors. Whether you have a small or large property, Google Analytics is a tool to use. It collects data showing information on visitors and website traffic such as popularity of your website, the web page that gets the most visitors, keywords that attract visitors to your site, and primary referral sites. This information allows you to improve your website, evaluate your target markets, and adjust your overall digital marketing strategy.

Let's take a look at the following two cases:

A hotel in Miami developed its marketing plan and website with the focus on attracting the corporate market. The hotel website included photos and text that were directed toward attracting businessmen. Through data collection software, the hotel learned that its website was mostly visited by meeting planners instead. Furthermore, the majority of the meeting planners visiting the site were female. Google Analytics would have shown the type of visitor and the hotel could have redeveloped its marketing plan and the website.

Swissôtel Hotels & Resorts discovered that the paid visitors from the UK were spending twice as much as the Australian and American visitors. Through the use of the Google Analytics software, the data revealed that the UK visitors were more interested in browsing the room and restaurants pages than to check out the hotel special offers. With that, the hotel modified the Adwords and texts to attract more of the higher paying UK visitors.

MAKING YOUR WEBSITE **SELL**

There are a number of reasons to have a hotel website, and the most important reason should be providing real-time online reservation bookings channel.

Sell...Sell...Sell...your website needs to have photos and content but most importantly a booking system that allows you to maintain rates and room inventory. Websites with no booking system, just contact information or an email button is a sure way to lose out on potential bookings.

Once you have the framework for your website, then you can shop for a booking system/engine that charges a flat fee each month with no commissions or booking fees. Attaching a booking system to your site is a minor expense because you'll be better positioned in the marketplace and to capture many direct bookings that you could be missing.

Booking Button

Location...Location...Location...A nice website with the booking button behind many layers of pages is less effective than if the booking button is on the homepage. Having the "check availability" button on the homepage will maximize your sales strategy.

For instance, in 2013, Hotel San Jose in Austin, Texas and The Wickaninnish Inn on Vancouver Island were recognized with great hotel websites. These websites have rich media, booking buttons on the homepage, and are considered to be user-friendly.

Booking Engine to Use

A hotel website with a booking engine gives customers the opportunity to "Book Now". One size does not fit all when choosing the booking engine to use. Sirvoy hotel booking system and RezOvation are two systems that offer abundant features for small to medium sized properties. While you may want features like Facebook integration and revenue management, your website will also need to have a hook that creates a reason to book now, such as one of the following:

- **Free breakfast, meal, or dessert**
- **Complimentary upgrade upon check-in if available**
- **Discounts on hotel parking and local attractions**
- **Free use of spa or fitness room**
- **A gift certificate for the restaurant or future stay**

Booking Engine Responsive Design

Your booking engine is your gateway to direct bookings from your customers. An effective booking engine responsive design allows your hotel to showcase your most important content in a correctly formatted fashion on any devices especially mobile devices. Pegasus Solutions and SmartXbe offer booking engine responsive design. Review the booking engine of your choice to make sure it offers adjustable layouts that take into account font and images when using smart devices.

CRACKING **THE CODE**

We live in an information society. This means there are many hotels like yours that are pushing information out to people. The desktop, mobile phone, and tablet will not tell your customer to visit your site just because you launched a website. Your customers may be interested in staying with you and they need to be able to find you on the internet.

Increase Visibility Through Content/Keyword Strategy

The simplest way to generate traffic to your site is with SEO (Search Engine Optimization). You do that by asking what kind of keywords, phrases, and terms your target market would use to search for your products and services.

As a hotelier, it makes sense that you might first list 'hotel', 'bed & breakfast', 'family hotel', and 'small hotel'. Now, let's dig a little deeper to reflect on your hotel. These would include location, nearby attractions, or type of hotel. The list would look something like this 'Berlin Hotel', 'hotels in San Diego', 'suite hotel', 'spa hotel', or 'family-friendly hotel Las Vegas'. You get the idea!

Here is a short list of what you need to do and not just a one-time exercise, but something you need to do as often as you can.

Develop a list of SEO keywords that are highly relevant for your site visitors to search for you.

Update and grow your SEO keywords list to appeal to search engines.

Incorporate long-tail keywords and diversify your keyword sources by using more than one web analytics tool and search query report.

Use the keywords and phrases in your headlines, subheadings, and page titles near the top of your content.

Include keywords in ALT tags and perhaps COMMENT tags that are inserted in the HTML.

Other options for optimizing your text include connecting inbound links from other sites and expanding your site with new and relevant content.

Provide your content in other languages if you plan to target visitors from other countries.

You'll also need to 'test drive' your keywords using a keyword search tool such as the one provided by Google Adwords. Google Adwords also provides ideas for words and phrases that you may not have considered.

Finally, pay attention to how many keywords that you include in your website as it can positively or negatively impact your search engine ranking. Here's why: Google might expect a 1-2% keyword density in the entire body text area. If you have more than that, you will be branded as optimized, but not informative, and your site will drop down in the rankings.

Social Sharing Buttons

One way to get the word out about your property is to optimize your website for social media. You would also want to extend your reservation and front desk services by encouraging your guests to connect with you through social media.

A lot of times, you visit a website and there are social networks buttons. The top five social networks are Facebook, Twitter, Linkedin, Yelp, and Google+, which they have become a dominate force in pushing information and pictures out through various social networks to the public as well as capturing people's attention to visit a website.

With all the social media buttons out there, your first step is to determine whether you want social media *follow* buttons or social media *sharing* buttons/links. Here's the thing with decisions. You know how to make the decision, you just want to feel sure about it afterward. The decision here is going to be so simple that you won't have to contend with going with your gut feeling or listening to your heart.

On your custom site, you want to place a few social media **_follow_** buttons on your homepage and blog page. You've seen them on other websites. Through social media buttons, users can click on the button and be directly connected to the social media accounts such as Facebook and Twitter. Here is the key, you want your users to be connected to **your** Twitter and Facebook accounts. As with Facebook, users can also "like" your hotel with just a click. A very easy decision, right? You can put these buttons anywhere on your website preferably on the homepage to maximize visibility and connect with your guests through your social media accounts.

Then, there are social media **_sharing_** links/buttons that will let your websites' visitors and content viewers share content with their friends. Think of it this way, you are in and out of your hotel all morning, you grab lunch, you post something interesting on your website, and at the end of the day you realize that you need to broadcast what you wrote to the public. By incorporating the social media sharing links/buttons to every piece of online content you create on your website, blog articles, and announcement pages, your visitors can share your content with their network and increase the number of visitors to your site. The Tweet /Share button, LinkedIn Share button, and Facebook Like button are some of the popular Social sharing buttons.

Search Engine Advertising (SEA)

Simply put, there is a ton of online advertising tools that guarantee to draw visitors to your website. And there will be more. Search Engine Advertising is a form of paid search marketing campaigns involve bidding for ads placement on a search engine as well as having the ads placed on web pages.

For example, a user types in the keyword "Bed and Breakfast hotel Hawaii". The search engine will then present a list of advertisements tailored to the search to encourage the user to click on those advertisers' sites.

Up-to-date content (blog) - why is it good for your visibility

Ideally, a hotel website should have a conversation page. Let your users get to know your products and services through blogs which are online journals. You can post announcements such as discounts and promotions on the blog that potentially increase your website's visibility. Also, if the users want to know more, this would be the place for them to socialize and share information.

IN A **NUTSHELL!**

As a hotelier, one thing that you have to love about a custom hotel website is that the website can do so much for you.

At the current pace of technology, nearly everyone you know or ever met probably owns a desktop, mobile phone, laptop, or tablet. You ought to believe that shopping for travel and hotel products on the internet is an unbelievably popular thing to do.

The key is that you need to find time and resources to work with a graphic/website designer, booking engine company, SEO experts, copywriters or content writer, photographers, and people who know how to write code and tell them what you need. The secret to an effective hotel website is combining all the elements that we have presented in this guide.

Here is a short recap:

- A simple and visually appealing site with concise messages and a user-friendly navigation system and booking system that reduces reservation abandonment rates.

- An information system that will tell you about your target markets, keywords or phrases that will bring you more customers, and types of amenities and services that work for your property.

- A manageable website so you can utilize the sales tool for its intended purpose: Sell...Sell...Sell...

Once you have crafted a functional website then focus on strengthening connections with potential and existing customers and distinguishing your products and services. You can do these by a combination of social and digital media, online and offline promotions, and the use of technologies.

Lastly, put on your travel hat. Find your site through a search engine. Book a room through your website. Evaluate your overall experience. Examine the features that your website has to offer. Write a blog about your products and services.

These are some of the tasks to perform to ensure the effectiveness of your website. The more closely you look at your site from the customer's point of view, the more likely your website will generate more direct bookings. And when that happens, you are on your way to filling more rooms and turning more one-time guests to repeat customers.

CONGRATULATIONS
ON FINISHING THIS GUIDE!

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