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Hotel Website Marketing - What You Should Do, Now... Not Later - By Neil Salerno



Times are tough and, as a result, budgets tend to shrink. In times like this, more and more hoteliers are looking to the Internet and other electronic sales channels to generate new revenue. There is actually no other sales channel that has a greater potential return on a relatively modest investment, it offers the biggest bang for your buck.

Maybe you thought that all you needed was an attractive website and the reservations would come flowing in. If so, you are probably disappointed with the results you are getting. I think many hoteliers are beginning to understand that there is more involved in online marketing.

Now that we need more sales, it's important to understand the difference between website design and website development. Most website techies are capable of designing an attractive hotel website, but that's only part of the job. Site development goes way beyond how attractive your site looks, marketing is what makes your site produce reservations.

Site development includes well-written code construction, the part visitors don't see, which conforms to search engine guidelines, it includes keyword-rich text content to optimize search, simplified navigation to encourage visitors to explore the site, a good link strategy, and carefully written, location-based sales text, written to demonstrate value and drive visitors to your reservations page.

Site development, more importantly, also includes incessant search engine optimization, keyword research, and constantly introducing new Internet marketing elements. A good hotel website is constantly under development.

Make your hotel site a true marketing tool by including attractive packages and promotions, guest comments with or without a TripAdvisor link, interactive and fully searchable photo gallery, Google approved site map, and a downloadable "quick facts" page. Don't let your site just sit there, make it work for you.

On a Website, What You Don't See is Important, Too

Many website technical designers don't think in marketing terms. Unfortunately, many hoteliers have been sold the bill-of-goods that all they need is a pretty site, so, many hotels have already invested big dollars to design a site which is now dysfunctional from a search/sales stand-point, they sure look nice though. Some hoteliers even opted to use some sort of template to build their own sites. But, I'm afraid that both ends of the scale are usually a waste of time and money.

Developing a hotel site, which is fully optimized for search and sales, is really a matter of knowing how and why consumers book hotels as well as having a technical understanding of the Internet search mechanism. Ironically, the cost of developing a functional website is usually the same, or even less than, the cost of many of the dysfunctional hotel sites on the Web today.

If your site is under-performing, get someone to review your site. The potential from the Internet is too big to ignore.

How Much Should You Spend?

The matter of cost always rears its ugly head, hotel marketing funds are not limitless. If your site is underperforming, get someone to review it to make it right.

I don't know of any hotelier who wouldn't want a fully optimized website with search engine

optimization, pay-per-click advertising, and all the other marketing accoutrements necessary for a fully productive site. For most hotels, the cost of development is modest and the pay-back on a properly developed site is amazingly quick, in most cases in less than a year.

Like you, I read all the articles about how much hoteliers should spend for all these things and somehow the numbers usually appear a little out-of-whack. The problem is that many of the fancy surveys on website spending usually include big dollar franchise spending in their data, the result is not too helpful for individual hotels.

On average, a well-done limited-service hotel website contains 30 to 45 individually searchable landing pages and will generally run from \$100 to \$175 per page. Full service, metro area, and resort hotels usually demand more pages to be effective in search and sales. Make sure that some sort of continuing marketing program, continuing keyword research & placement, a link strategy, and an online market competition study is included.

Remember that just about any techie can design an attractive website, it's the knowledge of hotel sales & marketing that really counts to develop a productive website. Choose a site developer who assumes the responsibility for your site's production, not simply the number of site visitors but also the number of online reservations.

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