

Show me the room! (marketing accommodations on-line)

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When it comes to reserving a hotel room online, what criteria are important?

According to a recent survey of US internet users, **being able to see the place is key**. With the increased adoption of high-speed internet, suppliers can now do a better job selling an experience, rather than just a price.

According to a recent survey of approximately 2,900 adult US internet users conducted by Harris Interactive for VFM Interactive, after considering price and location, consumers now want to see photos when they reserve a hotel room. In fact, 73% of the respondents who stay in hotels said they went online to research their accommodations. Of this number, 71% considered the written description very important while 69% said the same of the visuals.

The survey also showed that some groups of online travellers are more interested in the visual aspect than others. This is true for the following:

- women (36%), compared to 21% for men
- families with children; in fact, 35% of households with children find visuals important, versus only 25% of those without children
- For 28% of online travellers, visuals were rated "very important," ahead of:
- description of property (23%)
- information about the destination (17%)
- star ratings (14%)
- customer testimonials (13%)
- hotel brand (11%)

Internet and streaming video

Streaming video is a technology that should encourage the travel industry to take a second look at the internet. With its ability to transmit both audio and video, the internet is ideal for conveying information, and with the increased use of high-speed (broadband) connections, streaming video is now more common.

Although still photographs work well as promotional tools, streaming video is an even more effective medium. All businesses using the internet to sell or promote products should consider the use of this technology.

Streaming video can present a highly realistic portrait of your business: a virtual tour, an overview of the site, a demonstration of a product or service, a commercial, filmed testimonials from satisfied customers, etc.

Video can capture dreams, desires and longings. It is therefore an ideal communication tool well-adapted to the tourism and recreation sector. Video can inform and reassure consumers; it inspires trust and can help break down the final barriers to the act of purchasing.

SHOW ME THE ROOM – *Marketing Accommodations On-Line*

Internet and Streaming Video continued

It is not complicated to add streaming video to a website (webcasting). However, for visitors to be able to view it, they must have an appropriate multimedia application (that can be downloaded for free). Although Media Player is the most common program for Windows users, it is always a good idea to offer videos in several different versions so they can be read by other applications like Real Player and QuickTime, for example.

Although the quality of the video depends on the user's connection speed, the technology is very promising because it can make information available in real time, just like television. And with more and more homes now enjoying the same type of high-speed connections found in workplaces, the market should really explode in the coming years.

When speed is an advantage

According to a recent survey of 3,000 Canadians conducted in May and June of 2004 by the Canadian Internet Project (CIP), 72% of the Canadian population uses the internet, either from public or private sites. Some of the survey's other findings:

- a majority of Canadians use the internet a lot: 56% say they spend at least seven hours per week online
- most of the time, they use the internet at home or at work, rather than in public places
- internet users spend less time than non-users on traditional media like television or newspapers and magazines

In Canada, broadband internet services have made major inroads in a short time. In 2003, 66% of businesses had high-speed access (compared to only 48% in 2001). Overall, in both homes and workplaces, Canada is a world-wide leader in broadband penetration. In fact, in 2005, 67% of Canadian households enjoyed broadband access and some experts believe that this number will rise to 81% by the year 2007.

In the United States, according to the latest estimates of the Pew Internet & American Life Project, broadband adoption at home has also grown in recent years. In May 2005, 53% of the internet users surveyed had a high-speed connection at home (compared to 50% in December 2004).

In conclusion, high-speed internet and related technologies like streaming video are proving to be fundamental tools for businesses of all sizes. For users, the technology has many advantages, and with the growing popularity of media for private viewing (like podcasts), videos can be downloaded and viewed on cell phones and iPods, or saved and forwarded to friends. The possibilities are endless!

Sources:

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