

### Define Your Online Marketing Strategy

If you want to secure your share of the lucrative online marketplace, think about all the steps you will take to target Leisure, Corporate, and Group markets for your lodging or resort. Then, create a well-defined e-commerce market plan by clearly identifying the tools that people use to find and book hotels online. Open your eyes to the myriad of online channels, such as Search Engines, Independent/Brand Websites, Email, Blogs, GDS sites, and Travel Sites that will help you gain presence and profit on the internet. These ten elements will make your internet journey worth your while.

### Search Engines and Independent Websites

Get the best out of your independent and brand websites and soar on the search engines by defining your online marketing plan. Your initial move will be to identify why people are traveling to your neck of the woods.

- 1. Know Your Internet Market – Identify your target market by researching what people are searching for in your area on the internet.** Then, market for local and regional factors. Use offline and online methodologies to determine which factors are bringing visitors to your area. Group these reasons into a clearly identified online marketing bucket, for example: Groups, Corporate and Leisure.
- 2. Content is King . . . Create content which addresses the needs of your customer.** Develop unique reasons (USPs) for your hotel and destination, and develop a differentiated approach for key customer segments. Create unique specials and packages, event-related getaways, seasonal promotions and launch one-to-one marketing initiatives to provide unique value and personalization. If your online audience is looking for Paramount's Great America theme park, then offer relevant content regarding the theme park, along with your hotel room, tickets, transportation, etc. Make sure you have high quality, rich and relevant content on your electronic distribution channels whether it is your brand site, your travel site, your hotel website, GDS, or your email marketing campaign. Talk about your USPs, packages, promotions with local events, and getaways.
- 3. Link Building . . . Make link building an integral part of your online marketing efforts.** You want to be listed wherever your customers are going and looking. Good quality links from relevant websites tremendously boosts your online presence and organic ranking. Secure links from relevant and good quality local, regional, national, and niche specific websites.

4. **Increase Conversions – You will increase your online conversions by offering convenience and value.** Remember, you do not have to discount your rooms to create value packaging. Get close to your customers needs. A good idea is to bundle local attractions, things to do and activities as part of your hotel packages. Packaging and quality photography converts! Make the booking process for your hotel easy and efficient. Give your customer ways to book your packages and rooms online.
5. **Lowest Rates Guaranteed –** The dynamic internet is changing the way people are making their travel and hotel arrangements. You can secure your customer directly by employing best practices such as rate parity across all sales channels, creating a strong links program, email marketing, loyalty programs, pay-per-click campaigns and last minute offers, etc. Your ultimate goal is to create a powerful presence on the internet through both independent and brand websites . . . and gain customer trust and loyalty.

### Following A Successful Email Marketing Plan

6. **Email Marketing – Develop a well defined and ongoing e-marketing plan.** Offer your online guest a reason to “opt in” to your Email Offers program. Send compelling email messaging that gives them what they are looking for. Give reasons to come back, such as local events and last minute offers. Track the results of all your campaigns.

### Get the Best From Your Distribution Channels

7. **Participate In Distribution Channels & Check HODs!** – To optimize your online marketing channels, check what your GDS (Global Distribution Systems) and IDS is saying about you. Call your Franchise GDS department and request a copy of your HODs (Hotel Description on Airline systems). Make your rates and limited inventory available on third party websites. Always practice rate parity. For independent hotels, participate in your GDS system.
8. **Return on Investment –** Track your online and offline results. Since most people searching online will call the hotel to close the sales, offline tracking is essential. Typically, for every one person who books online, 5 people will call you. Establish a unique phone number for your website, whether it is a 800-number or local number. Train your staff to track phone results and to become familiar with what is sold online. Your Front Desk staff is an influential sales tool especially when it comes to closing the deal. Establish a good tracking system at the front desk.
9. **Online Tracking –** Review your website stats regularly! The key things you should review are how many unique visitors are finding your site every day, the top 10 referral sources, top 10 Keywords people are using to find you, the top 10 pages generating the most traffic, your click-through to goal conversion pages -such as reservations, manager specials, special offers pages – and the top 10 feeder markets. Your online marketing is constant process of researching, strategizing, implementing, tracking, and analyzing – not a one-time event!

**10. Build A Good Online Reputation** - Worry about what consumers say about you online? Check Trip Advisor, E-Opinion Sites, Yahoo Travel, Hotel Chatter, and local travel blogs in your area! The realm of e-marketing is far-reaching and very rewarding if you utilize the many sales channels available to your hotel – from websites to personal emails. Creating search engine friendly brand and independent hotel sites, compelling content, maintaining email campaigns, and participating in travel sites and GDS will help you achieve the competitive edge on the internet. Remember, tracking your results will let you know what's working and where your revenue is coming from.

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