

# 2007–Internet Marketing Must Do's and Web 2.0 for the Adventurous

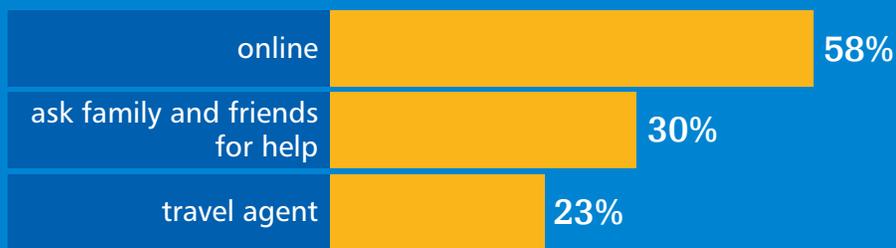
Benu Aggarwal

Did you do your holiday shopping online? It's very likely that you did, along with millions of consumers who plan vacations, trips and travel on the Web. A survey conducted by [Travelfocused.com](http://Travelfocused.com) tells us that more than 50% of consumers today are planning vacations and travel online.

According to JupiterResearch's "US Travel Forecast: 2006-2011," online travel revenues will reach \$128 billion in the US in 2011—38% of all travel revenue for that year.

## Vacation Planning Methods of US Internet Users, 2006

(% of respondents)



Source: *morefocus for Travelfocused.com, November 2006*

## Gaining the Lion's Share of the Internet

Where are marketers spending their money? In 2007, more businesses will allocate dollars on online ad spending, which will increase seven times faster than any other media.

ZenithOptimedia forecasts that Global Internet advertising spending will grow by 28.2% in 2007, while ad spending in other media will grow by only 3.9%. Researcher's data shows worldwide spending on Internet advertising exceeding outdoor advertising this year—surpassing radio ad spending in 2009. The survey found that 58% of respondents plan their personal travel online, compared to 23% who use travel agents to plan their vacations.

As you sit back and ponder the New Year, take into your consciousness how Internet marketing is exploding with opportunities. See it, feel it and understand the potential and how you can earn the lion's share of the market. Get on the cutting edge with these hot picks to accelerate your Internet marketing in 2007!

## Must Do's for 2007

### Web Site Promotion

Whether you have a branded Web site or an independent site, if you are not maximizing Internet marketing and promotion through your Web site you are missing a significant chunk of the market that your competitive hotels are biting on. Your promotion strategies should have a mix of organic search engine optimization and pay-per-click promotion.



**Organic promotion** involves enhancing your site with search engine-optimized rich content, enrollment in different search engines and directories, as well as getting links or references from 3rd party Web sites at local, regional and national levels. Hoteliers should also aim to get listed in relevant niche directories such as spa, pet friendly, and weddings, depending on their target market segments. Dollars budgeted to each type of promotion could vary depending on your market, budget, and aggressiveness.

**Pay-per-click advertising** allows your site to rank high for relevant keywords in the paid results section of the search engine results page. You can bid for local events, attractions, and city-wide terms. You should see excellent returns on PPC campaigns if the keywords are selected carefully and the campaigns are monitored and managed on a regular basis. Always track conversions on your PPC campaigns.

### E-mail Marketing

Strategic E-mail Marketing has been an essential tool for e-marketers, but today we have to work smarter to engage our customers to listen and purchase. The key is creating quality opt-in e-mail lists (customers that requested information), and sending rich content and value offerings. Since e-mail marketing has a powerful snowball effect, hotels should send out monthly newsletters, promotional campaigns, and last-minute deals via e-mail. It is crucial to track your results carefully so you can make sure your ROI increases with every e-mail blast.

## For The Adventurous: Web 2.0

There are new technologies and applications in the search engine world that are changing the way consumers use and interact on the Internet, offering brilliant opportunities for marketers to get products in front of target audiences. Top technology trends that will impact the lodging industry are:

- Mobile Compatible Web sites
- Blogs
- Podcasts
- Social Networking
- Online Videos

## Mobile Compatible Web Sites

If you didn't ask Santa for the new Treo, it will soon be on your wish list. The convenience and capability of mobile devices is unbelievable. Surf the Internet; share files, download music and photos, and receive e-mail wherever you are. In spite of somespeed issues, millions of consumers are using mobile devices to search and link on the Internet. In a recent report, Juniper Research estimated that the global mobile entertainment market (including gambling, adult content, mobile games, mobile music, mobile TV and infotainment) will be worth \$17.3 billion in 2006 and rise to \$76.9 billion by 2011.

What can hoteliers do to obtain mobile customers? First, create mobile-compatible Web sites which are easily and quickly downloadable with a mobile device. Second, see if your site is "mobile ready" at <http://mr.dev.mobi>. Third, enroll your mobile-compatible site in mobile search engines, mobile directories and local directories. Once you have covered the basics, you can run a PPC with Google for mobile.

## Buzz on Blogs!

Blogs are an excellent media for hoteliers to get closer to their customers. A Blog (also known as a weblog) is essentially a Web site that allows visitors to post their thoughts and interact with people—like an interactive online journal. Hotels can develop blogs focused on their destination markets and start interacting with their customers to understand what's driving their needs and travel interests. Blogs are powerful marketing tools as they are extremely search-engine friendly. Blogs with interesting subject matter can spread virally (from consumer to consumer), the "Holy Grail" of search engine marketing.

## Podcasts

The hot button of Internet marketing, podcasts are Internet audio shorts that offer the flexibility of listening when you want. Listen to news, tours, newsletters, and lectures. Search your favorite podcast, download and listen when you want. Hotels can create compelling podcasts with time-sensitive offers, local attractions and events, and hotel news.

## Online Searchable Videos

According to eMarketer, over one-third of the US population ages 3 and older have viewed video on the Internet at least monthly during 2006. In three years, more than half of Americans will be part of the online video audience. "At this point, nearly 60% of all Internet users watch video regularly, and that share will increase to over 80% by the end of 2010," says David Hallerman, eMarketer senior analyst. "There will be 157 million US Internet video users in 2010," he says, "up from 107.7 million this year."

Where are people going to watch online video? YouTube, MySpaceVideo, Google Video, Yahoo!Video, MSNVideo, and several other sites now offering video.

How can you access this lucrative market? Optimize your video files, encode your video files with the right keywords, create a Video Site Map and upload, promote and submit videos to video search engines such as Google, Singing Fish, Blinks, Yahoo! and many others. Normally, search engines offer video submission tools. Just take a video of your hotel, add destination information, optimize it for search engines and submit the video to the major video search engines.

## Social Networking

The new wave in the search engine world is social networking: a personalized, connected, online experience. In addition to relevant content and expert rank, the newest trend in search engines is based on socializing with people who are most relevant to your business online.

Social Networking is a group of individuals with similar interests and business needs connecting, communicating and sharing experiences—through reviews, feedback and tips—in an open Internet community. People are flocking to networking sites like Facebook, My Scape, Digg.com, Delicous.com, and YouTube. And e-opinion sites such as Trip Advisor and Travel Blog.com are soaring. People want to know and learn from other people's experiences. For hotels, it is vitally important to participate on Social Networking sites by participating in local destination forums, securing good reviews on e-opinion sites, creating profile pages, showcasing what you offer, and also inviting people who meet your criteria to be exposed to your property and locality.

## Final Thoughts of 2006

Whether you are an aggressive marketer or a conservative spender, Internet Marketing and Promotion should be an integral part of your 2007 marketing campaign. If you are a Web site veteran in your market and have always been on top of search engine rankings until your competitors caught up, dig your heels into these latest trends and discover the edge you are searching for.

*Benu Aggarwal is founder and president of Milestone Internet Marketing, experts in creating completeInternet marketing solutions for the lodging and hospitality industry. Please contact Benu at [benu@milestoneinternet.com](mailto:benu@milestoneinternet.com).*