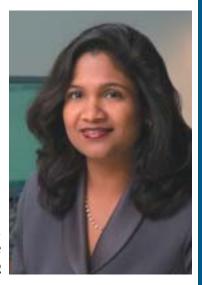# Are You Driving a Fast Car with No Wheels?

From Hotels to HTMLs

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Congratulations, you have a website! But no one can find it on the Internet. Even you cannot find your own hotel when you search. That's like having a fast car with no wheels.

Why Hotels Need Internet Presence

The Internet has become a critical marketing channel for the lodging industry, in terms of providing information, selling rooms, and most importantly making hotels visible and accessible on the burgeoning World Wide Web. With Internet users and purchasers rapidly increasing across demographic groups, independent websites have become a hallmark of modern business throughout every industry and lifestyle.

For the lodging industry, having an independent website is even more critical. Hotel websites are truly your online front desk, offering "lookers" a unique opportunity to see, feel and experience what your hotel is really like. However, even if your website has been professionally designed and is a beautiful "electronic brochure" for your property, it may be doing nothing for your business except sitting out there on the Net. That's right, unless your website is optimized to work with search engines and directories, it's not driving quality traffic to your online front doors.

Is your site a beautiful electronic brochure or an excellent marketing tool?

To ensure that your site is search-engine friendly, it should have a high conversion rate and ultimately achieve your main goal to convert "lookers" to "bookers." There are five basic golden rules of any website design. Your site should be easy to read, easy to navigate, easy to find, consistent in layout and design, and easy to use (end result).

Here are some key steps you and the website development company should take to achieve your ultimate Web marketing goals:

- Research your market
- Customer Focused Search Engine Optimized Content showcasing your USP (Unique Selling Points)
- Developing a website that is Search Engine friendly
- Promotion of the website
- Monitoring Results
- Tracking and Analysis
- Fine-tuning your website marketing and optimizing strategies based on results and search trends

Remember, your website needs to encompass the right ingredients for it to be truly effective for your hotel. A website can only produce amazing results when it has the right architecture, right technology, right source code, and the right keyword phrases. Every thing from design to creating content for the site should be based on your target audience and search engine criteria.

Use a search engine optimization specialist during the design, redesign, or template stages of building your website, not after the site has already been created. Website design practices like having a graphic rich site with a lot of animation and heavy Flash actually reduce your site's ability to work effectively on the search engines. Search engine marketing is not about enrolling your website on 5,000 search engines for a fee of $20 or paying a whole lot of money for pay-per-click campaigns. It's about creating a site that is content rich and found easily by the search engines.

What is Search Engine Marketing?

Search-engine marketing is the art and science of increasing a website's visibility in search engines and directories for a targeted list of keyword phrases. In other words, it's how well your target audience can find you when searching on the Web. Basically, there are two major categories of search engine marketing: paid search and organic search. Paid

search is the act of paying to be listed in the results of specific search phrases (or keywords). Organic search is the act of being listed in the results of specific search phrases based on the search engine's algorithmic calculations. Organic search is far better than paid search.

Here are live case-studies of some of the hotels whose Internet marketing is working with incredible results.

Case Study I - Maple Tree Inn - Sunnyvale, California

Scenario: The hotel is centrally located in Silicon Valley, an area that is depressed because of a weak economy, the fall of the dot.coms, and 9/11.

Process: A new site was created based on the unique selling points of this hotel and valid search criteria of the local and regional target audience. The specific niche we are focusing on are people looking for pet-friendly hotels, wedding packages, visiting local attractions, or just simply a weekend getaway.

Results: "After creating a customer-focused search engine optimized website, the Maple Tree Inn is receiving a tremendous amount of calls for all our packages. We tapped into a big market of people looking for pet-friendly hotels. Maple Tree has been a pet-friendly hotel for years, but after having our website optimized for customers searching for pet-friendly hotels we are averaging from 15 to 20 reservations per week. People are even emailing pictures of their pets so the hotel can get to know them before they come. The hotel is experiencing tre-

mendous returns on all our packages – wedding packages, romantic retreat packages, and packages tied up with area attractions." – Christine Smith, general manager.

Milestone Insight: Maximize local and regional presence first, think about niche marketing, and customize your strategies around them.

Case Study II - Holiday Inn Express Hotel & Suites, Oakland Airport

Scenario: Milestone identified two niches – (1) people looking to stay near Oakland International Airport and (2) sports fans coming to watch Oakland Raiders games at the Oakland Coliseum.

Process: Customer-focused, keyword phrase rich content was created to attract target audiences who were looking to stay near the Oakland Airport and all the sports fans coming to Oakland to watch Oakland Raiders games.

Results: "The hotel is experiencing totally amazing returns after having our website optimized. Specifically, Our Park and Fly packages and sports packages are doing extremely well. I don't think there is any other sales tool out there which can bring in so much return on our investment in such a short time as compared to this one. We know it works; we tracked it and feel thrilled about telling others to do it right the first time. Our only regret is that we did not spend time doing it right the very first time." – Sima Patel, owner, Holiday Inn Express Hotel & Suites – Oakland Airport.

Creating a website that's right the very first time takes a lot of effort. But, if you get the formula

right, you will create strong web presence for your hotel that will generate unbelievable and tangible returns forever. Internet marketing and search engine optimization is the one tool that is much less expensive than most trade magazine print advertising and much more effective than traditional marketing. It is critically important that today's hoteliers understand what it takes to have a website which can do wonders for their online bottom line.

Recently, Milestone Internet Marketing created a practical handbook on internet marketing for the lodging industry that really shows what it takes to create powerful Web presence for your hotel. "From Hotels to HTMLs – A Complete Guide to Internet Marketing for the Lodging Industry," is a step-by-step guide to understanding the internet as the most relevant marketing tool in today's business environment.

Milestone Internet Marketing is a full-service marketing communications firm, specializing in internet marketing strategies, website development, search engine optimization and e-commerce strategies for the lodging industry. Milestone's proprietary search engine optimization technology, MileSearch™, is currently utilized by Milestone clients throughout the U.S. For information, call (408) 244-5437, or visit www.milestonemc.com.