

Hotel Online Marketing - Thoughts on 2009



INTRODUCTION

2009: This year may well go down for some as the year that the worst recession since World War II hit the world economy ...and threw travel off-balance. Others may remember this year for the exciting challenges posed, opportunities seized and progress made towards a brighter, more profitable and tech-savvy future. Whichever way you chose to remember it, there's no denying the fact that as travel and hospitality professionals, we'll all have to break some moulds, get creative, optimize use of resources and collaborate like we're never done before!

This document was inspired by a similar effort in the field of Online Social Media, initiated by Peter Kim, where prominent bloggers and authors collaborated to share their thoughts on the future developments they saw in 2009. My natural reaction was... collaboration should be a natural fit for the hospitality industry right? After all, we're all about people! Thus this initiative was born...and I set out to seek the knowledge, thoughts and advice of prominent industry leaders and bloggers, on what they saw as important developments and tips in the field of online hospitality marketing this year. Of the 18 or so people contacted, 5-6 were kind enough to respond and share their remarkable thoughts. **Common themes that seem to emerge include:**

1. It's time to get back to basics and cover these well
2. There will be an increasing reliance on online technology in the year ahead
3. We'll have to work together, both offline and online, for the best results
4. Utilization of mobile and on-the-go marketing will increase moving forward
5. There will be a renewed focus on internationalization and destination marketing
6. ROI measurement and analytics will become keystones to online success
7. A better understanding of our customer needs, niches and experiences will be required
8. There will be an increasing use of rich media and online PR in hospitality
9. The Hospitality industry will start experimenting with social media in earnest
10. Creativity and common sense will reign supreme (or so it ought to!)

A big *Thank You* to those who've taken the time to share their thoughts, ideas and insights in this document. This just wouldn't have been possible without you.

The purpose of this work is to spark discussion, debate and refinement. So please feel free to share this document as needed and do give credit to the thinkers represented here when their ideas are redistributed or republished.

Jitendra Jain / JJ (<http://www.HoteleMarketer.com>)

Professor Dimitrios Buhalis

Hotel Online Marketing Predictions 2009: What do you think are the 3 key internet developments and online opportunities the hotel industry is likely to encounter & benefit from this year?

1. Technology to assist cutting costs
2. Location-based services and geography mash-ups increasing
3. Tour operators investing more in bedbanks and repackaging the package further

Leveraging technology to bear the recession: What are your Top tips to Hotels hoping to leverage Internet tech to beat the recession?

Many friends and colleagues have been asking me what to do in their tourism business during these difficult economic times. Here is the advice I gave to a hotelier friend recently:

- look after your customers better - engage with real CRM and work with you client base
- look after your domestic markets and people who can visit you within 90 minutes drive/train/ferry
- identify markets that are less affected or their perception is not affected as others
- create events and work on your value added propositions
- enhance your PR footprint
- work closely with your intermediaries and do not always believe that demand will be at the level they would have hoped
- expand the number of intermediaries available
- work closely with your staff to go reduce costs and to save through operational management
- work closely with your local suppliers to bring local products and reduce transportation, logistics and storage costs
- open your distribution channels as much as possible
- use technology and the internet to be in front of both your individual and trade customers as often as possible
- address you cost base and cut any unnecessary costs throughout
- reduce fixed cost - even if you pay higher variable costs for production
- work with local associations and clubs to organise events, conferences, charity gatherings etc
- be prepared but be cheerful - we have seen it all before !

More: Managing Tourism and Hospitality in Recession - 101 - by Dimitrios Buhalis
<http://buhalis.blogspot.com/2008/11/managing-tourism-and-hospitality-in.html>



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Todd Lucier

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- Blogsites will replace Websites as the principle marketing tool
- Handheld devices will start to play a significant role in the travel choices of travelers – i.e. en route planning for meals and accommodations will be much easier.
- Travelers will expect free wifi, but handhelds and 3G access will be more important to the digital traveller.
- Consumer influences on one another will be much more pronounced with wider acceptance of social media and giving and receiving advice on tools like Twitter, Tripadvisor and Facebook.
- Tourism businesses better be good and have ways of encouraging good word of mouth and monitoring the attitudes of visiting guests.

Leveraging technology to bear the recession: What are your Top tips to Hotels hoping to leverage Internet tech to beat the recession?

Partner, Partner, Partner: Collaboration will be the single most effective way to counter global economic upheaval. We're all in this together. The stronger presence your community has - via partnerships, co-marketing and raising word of mouth marketing, the better positioned your community will be to compete.

This requires significant trust and care for those we normally compete with. It might sound counterintuitive to the idea of seeking as much business as possible, but it is what is required to succeed in tough times.



Todd Lucier is the creator of Tourism Keys Internet Marketing for Tourism blog, podcast and learning materials. Since 1999, he's been showing tourism businesses and communities how to make the most of the Web in seminars, hands-on workshops and with keynote presentations that inspire, motivate and transform thinking about the Internet. <http://www.tourismkeys.ca/blog>

Patrick Landman

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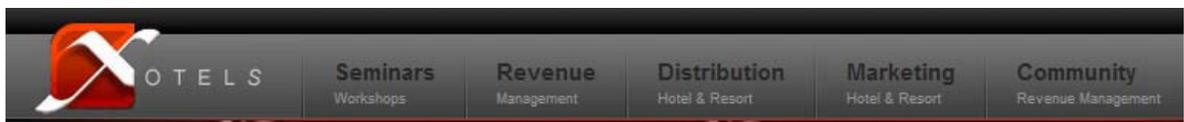
I have but one advice for most hoteliers during challenging times. And that is **going back to basics**. Lets not try to move forward with websites, implementing so much new technology.

More important before doing so is making sure the bare necessities are taken care of. Unfortunately too many hotel websites are still in too poor of a shape in terms of relevant content, site structure, meta-tags etc.

Lets go back and look at the hotel websites from a guests perspective. What does he want, how will he be able to find your hotel website. Stop thinking as a hotelier and become more of a destination marketer...

In the end they are most likely not coming or looking for your hotel. You are merely a consequence of the trip.

So lets sell what they are coming for, target the motive of the trip. We have to speak to consumers from each individual micro-segment!



Patrick Landman, a Hotel Revenue Management, Online Distribution and Internet Marketing Guru is the Founder of Xotels.

<http://www.xotels.com/>

Jan Tissera

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2009 will be an important year for Online Internet Marketing strategy. As marketing budgets tighten and are increasingly placed under the microscope, more emphasis than ever will be placed on tracking the return on spend. Online Marketing offers hotels the most trackable and cost effective means of marketing their rooms direct to the consumer. The three major areas that I see developing in 2009 are as follows:

1. **Social Media Optimization and Online PR** - The Search Engines are not the only channels used now to find information via internet. Channels such as YouTube account to 10% of total internet traffic. Social websites such as Facebook are increasingly popular, highly visited and used to find information and links. The search landscape in Google has also changed to include maps, blogs, news, images, videos etc all provided by Web 2.0 and social media websites. With all these developments, it will be essential for the hotelier to implement a professional strategy to embrace such developments and maximize the benefits given by exposure to such channels.
2. **International Approach to Paid Search** - Many hotels are now successfully running Paid Search campaigns but are ignoring a huge potential market. Running campaigns internationally does not only mean checking a box to show ads across the globe. To attract visitors and tourists from other countries requires a specific strategy and game plan. Once you have outlined your likely feeder markets, research needs to be conducted to ascertain which keywords they will use to find your type of hotels. Also, Translated landing pages and keyword creative's need to be produced and of course, if possible the hotel booking engine should feature the appropriate languages to encourage conversion. Making the effort to reach travelers in their own language can seriously improve conversion of paid search campaigns and attract a whole new market to your hotel. Most importantly increase hotel occupancy using a direct, cost effective and measurable channel.
3. **Search Engine Optimization & Geo Search** - One of the most cost effective methods of driving traffic and reservations online is a robust and effective SEO strategy. There is no charge per click, once an initial investment has been made, the sky is the limit for the benefits achieved through SEO. It's wise to work with a company that knows the marketplace and will support, edit and amend keywords and strategy through the year for optimal impact and quality traffic. As with Paid Search, it's also important to consider a multilingual strategy for SEO not only considering language nuances but also the variety of Search Engines used to find information. Integral to a successful SEO strategy would be a consideration of the Geo Search, i.e the increased usage of mapping tools to locate businesses. Hotels need to make sure that they are registered as a minimum with Google local and Google maps and all of the correct information is present within their listing. Hotels that have successfully optimized a map listing were able to jump to top position in Google for broad keywords like "Hotel in [Insert City]".

Jan Tissera

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1. **Make sure that Hotel Websites are current and optimized for conversion.** This involves making sure that your Hotel website is based on a CMS system that allows internal staff to update the website content, news, offers and images with ease. The visitor should arrive at the website and find reassurance immediately that they have arrived at the right place. Information such as prices, photos, offers, room types and booking should be easy to navigate to and above the page fold.

It's important to keep the website current and create offers that will attract users convert online. Also of high importance is the ability to offer visitors a "Best Price Guarantee". When users arrive at your website, they should know that they don't need to go anywhere else to shop for prices. Most users will prefer to book direct with hotels when assured that they are getting the best deal. Higher conversion generally leads to higher ROI and happier website owners!

2. **SEO** - Work with a professional company to optimize your website for increased performance within the Search Engines. This is a cost effective means of driving increased traffic to your website. A good SEO company will work with you to make sure that a professional and effective revenue driving strategy is in place and you are getting good return for your initial outlay. Regular reporting and campaign analysis should be conducted to achieve optimal performance and benefit tracking both ranking and more importantly traffic gained from the Search Engines. Don't ignore the opportunity to create individual SEO strategies for countries that could potentially produce a good stream of bookings to your hotel. Working with a company that has experience performing SEO across countries and continents can be of great benefit when expanding your Search Engine reach.
3. **Use the Data from Web Analytics** - Whatever web analytics package you are using, make sure it is set-up correctly to record numerous conversion metrics. Regularly review and more importantly act on the data and information that you receive from the reports to increase conversion, quality traffic and customer experience. Doing this will increase the effectiveness of your website to maximize the potential for conversion that each visitor to the website has. Learn to understand what the reports mean for you and your hotel and what actions should be taken as a result of the information gleaned. Using such data can also allow you to evaluate the success of various internet marketing efforts that you are carrying out. Proactive analysis and action based on your web analytics can offer a real edge over your competitors.



Jan Tissera is President, TravelCLICK International and directs TravelCLICK's sales activities in the Europe, Asia Pacific, Middle East, and Africa regions. An experienced international hotelier and hotel industry consultant, Jan advises clients on how to maximize their performance in electronic distribution channels. www.travelclick.net



Guillaume Thevenot

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Online Marketing gets better ROI

In 2009, the hotel industry has better control about the ROI on their online advertising than offline, it's a fact not a myth anymore. Online analytics tools are becoming cheaper if not free, and they should be used to understand where your traffic comes from and how your visitors behave on your hotel site. Also hoteliers can target better the audience they want to reach. For example, there is a community of bloggers who share a lot of travel tips on their site that becoming a more important voice to the consumer's eyes, so why not sharing with them what your hotel is about. But this needs to be done with a personal touch, forget the traditional press release.

Engage with your customers

Today, you have to be stubborn to avoid all the online hotel reviews available to the consumer and the social communities built into travel. You have to engage with your customers by responding to their hotel reviews when something wrong happened at your hotel. Also don't hesitate to share with them your blog where you can feature the latest events happening at your property. Finally, only embrace social networking sites if you are comfortable with this and try to find somebody in your team who understands these sites and can be the ambassador of your hotel. It could be your receptionist or a housekeeper. But remember you need to allocate some time in the week to engage with these sites.

Understand how search engines behave

There have been some dramatic changes in the way search engines behave recently. No more you have the results page with only paid listing and organic results. Today, you can find in the results page links, videos, pictures or local business results. You need to be there, hence why you should use sites like YouTube or Flickr to feature your hotel in all these media portals.



Guillaume Thevenot is a French Londoner working in the Online Hospitality Industry. After graduating from ESSEC/IMHI with a MBA in International Hospitality Management in 2000, Guillaume decided to live in London with his wife and work for online travel companies such as Priceline and Active Hotels. Besides being the founder and editor of Hotel-Blogs.com, a leading blog for the hospitality trade, Guillaume also works for Amadeus - a great European travel technology company. His passion towards the Internet and the hotel world has helped him to discover different ways of doing business with hotels and the travel industry in general.

Guillaume Thevenot

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#1 Be clever with who you work online

Make sure your contract gives you the flexibility to close down inventory if you believe you can sell direct. Also look carefully which online travel agent or hotel booking agent can bring you guaranteed business for the year. Don't hesitate to ask them how many bookings they could deliver you this year. Finally, ensure that the commissions you pay to your online distribution partners don't affect your targeted margins.

#2 Choose the right booking engine on your site

There are many players in the online tech industry who say they have a fantastic booking engine for you. Be careful about what you choose. Customers like simplicity when booking online. So if they are ready to book on your own website, it has to be clear, fast and efficient. If you are unsure about which booking engine to choose from, ask a trial phase for 2 weeks and run another one for another 2 weeks and compare how your visitors behave on your site. The look to book ratio is still very important to measure.

#3 Be honest with you customers

Whether it is on your website or with your online distribution partners, please be truthful with what your hotel can offer to consumers. Upload recent pictures with all room types and not necessarily the most beautiful one. Make sure your customers have a more positive surprise than a negative one. If you have a camcorder, make little films about your hotel and conduct interviews with your team and share this on your website and online video portals. Consumers will feel the atmosphere of your property more than just reading a formatted text description.

hotel blogs

Let's talk about hotels...

...He feels there are still many opportunities to develop on the Internet which aren't explored yet. Too much of this business is just about making bookings for flights, hotels, packages...but what about communities of travellers, exchange of hotel tips, customized destination guides, sharing photos and videos, guest reviews, interaction between travellers and suppliers. His hobbies are very diverse. He listens to a lot of music, play squash, golf and of course read a lot of blogs.“

<http://www.hotel-blogs.com>

Jitendra Jain (JJ)

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I think the time is right for the following radical shifts to occur this year...hopefully we'll see moves in this direction as far as the hospitality & travel industry is concerned:

1. **The emergence and adoption of Experience Engines:** Hotels, destinations and OTA's break down the units of guest experience and start building superior experience engines that allow for total revenue management as well as maximum personalization.
2. **Utilizing hotel guests as a distinct and structured distribution channel:** CRM and the world of electronic social networking collide to provide hotels with a first look at monetizing and rewarding guest referrals.
3. **Stepping beyond the boundaries of traditional interaction:** Hotels step up from behind the curtain and start interacting with their guests in earnest, both offline and online. Corporate and brand hesitation is no match for the voice of the customer...and the hotelier that wants to hear it and respond to it.

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1. **Get back to basics and get these right** – There are plenty of hotels who still haven't got their feet wet with the online revolution. These hotels will have to make haste to capture the benefits they're missing out on (all possible at low costs too!). Those that are at the top of their game will need to go through their 'basics' checklist and ensure everything is ticked off and super-optimized.
2. **Measure everything** – The year of ROI. Every penny will be spent wisely, measured to go the distance and the whole exercise analyzed for future improvement. Invest in good analytics and more importantly USE the results!
3. **Get out of your comfort zone** – Hoteliers will need to cross the barriers of ePhobia and embrace the 'e' revolution. Luckily, like swimming, once you've made that jump and floundered a little...the rest to follow is easy and quite enjoyable!



At work, Jitendra Jain (JJ) is employed with Starwood Hotels & Resorts in Dubai as an E-Commerce Manager and handles hotel online marketing & distribution. At play, he is the founder of various online initiatives like www.hotelemarketer.com, www.thetalentjungle.com and www.younghotelier.com (among others) that dream, connect, educate and share all that is glorious about hospitality, technology and most importantly...the people that define our times.

Other interesting resources

Here is a listing of other articles and further reading that may be of interest to hoteliers, whether you're actively engaged in online marketing or just looking to get started right...

Hotelier's 2009 Top Ten Internet Marketing Resolutions
by Max Starkov and Jason Price at Hospitality eBusiness Strategies (HeBS) -
http://www.hospitalityebusiness.com/documents/Jan09HeBSArticle-TopTenInternetMarketingResolutions_000.pdf

Hoteliers...No Resolutions, It's Time to Take Action- By Neil Salerno
<http://www.hotelnewsresource.com/article36485.html>

Milestone's Top 10 Internet Marketing Tips category:
<http://blog.milestoneinternet.com/category/milestone-top-10/>

120 Marketing Ideas for Hotels in 2009
<http://www.hotelmarketingstrategies.com/120-marketing-ideas-for-hotels-in-2009/>

Seven Top Online Marketing Trends for 2009
<http://www.clickz.com/3632306>

Hotel Recession Marketing - When the going gets tough, Hotel eMarketers play harder
<http://www.hotelemarketer.com/hotel-emarketing-best-practices/hotel-recession-marketing-when-the-going-gets-tough-hotel-emarketers-play-harder/>

Revenue Management Doesn't Take a Back Seat During a Downturn
<http://www.hsmaieconnect.org/news/154000370/4039351.html>



The original inspiration for the format of this document and a great source of insights on the world of online Social Media:

Social Media Predictions 2009
<http://www.beingpeterkim.com/2008/12/social-media-2009.html>