

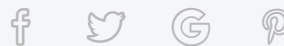


5 Digital Marketing Strategies for Hotels to Win Direct Bookings in 2020

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With the rise of digital and Google travel search, the hotel customer’s journey has grown increasingly complex. Hotel managers need not only to service guests, manage rooms, availabilities, and pricing. They are now also expected to compete for guests in new channels and digital communities that emerge every day.

Research shows that 87% of today's online travel consumers visit a hotel website before making a reservation. However, according to Google research, these same consumers visit an average of 18 websites via multiple devices across eight sessions before making a hotel booking.

So how can your hotel stand out from the competition?

To remain competitive means constantly being up-to-date with the latest digital marketing trends and customer behaviors. This comprehensive digital marketing guide will ensure you effectively manage your online marketing and room sales, as well as organically generate the best possible direct results for your hotel.

What Exactly is Digital Marketing for Hotels?

For many hoteliers, digital marketing is still novel territory. Most are too busy running their business operations and leaving online sales to the OTAs to give much thought toward implementing a comprehensive digital marketing strategy themselves. However, the digital era is here to stay, and most hoteliers will agree that it no longer be ignored.

Many are starting to ask themselves how they can expand their brand online while still having the time to run their business. The obvious choice has been to hire additional staff, but this tactic is just a temporary solution

because the demand for digital marketing is unstoppable and will continue to grow alongside the evolution of technology and consumer behaviors.



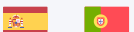
The breakthrough solution for this complex problem is a digital marketing architecture with tools that provide a consistent multi-channel experience to hotel guests and prepares hotels for future digital marketing demands.

The Hotel digital marketing umbrella encompasses an array of initiatives to maximize your hotel's online presence and increase direct sales. Such initiatives include optimizing your hotel website and booking engine, promoting your property on social media outlets such as Instagram and Facebook, and solidifying your hotel's presence on OTAs to acquire customers in the first place.

Why is a Digital Marketing Strategy Important for Hotels?

Let's face it, the OTAs have invested heavily in digital marketing and technologies (Expedia deployed up to 5,000 engineers to focus solely on digital and booking optimization) to engage online travelers at every stage of the buyer's journey.

In many cases, this has led to the monopolization of customer relationships, leaving hoteliers in a challenging predicament. In fact, research shows that 70% of online hotel bookings come from OTAs.



So how can hoteliers reassert themselves in the customer journey to get in front of online travelers and increase direct bookings? It starts with understanding the five online customer phases of behavior:



- **Dreaming Stage:** The guest is searching for their ideal holiday, without knowing exactly what they want yet.
- **Planning Stage:** The guest knows what they want, and is searching for specific rooms, prices, packages etc.
- **Booking Stage:** The guest has selected their favorite option and is ready to book.
- **Experiencing Stage:** The guest's experience starts at your website, and whether it ends at the booking engine or at check-out depends on how you optimize their experience.

- **Sharing Stage:** Your guest shares their experience. If all goes well, they become your advocates and shout about their great experiences at your hotel through rave reviews, social media posts, and referrals.

It is important to keep these five stages of the customer's journey at the forefront of your digital marketing strategy. You can then break down your digital marketing strategy into three distinctive yet interconnected categories:

- **Guest Engagement Marketing**
- **Guest Acquisition Marketing**
- **Guest Retention Marketing**

You will then be able to re-establish a firm relationship with digitally-savvy customers in all stages of their journey and win the direct bookings. This will ultimately decrease OTA dependency and lower distribution costs.

5 Digital Marketing Strategies for Hotels to Win Direct Bookings in 2020

Through new advanced technology and tools, the consumer now has access to more information and more proactive control over their own experiences. This, in turn, impacts how hoteliers build and nurture relationships with existing and prospective customers.

Here is a list of 5 tried and proven digital marketing and sales strategies which will organically generate the best

direct results for your hotel in 2020:



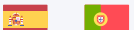
1. Your Hotel Website and Booking Engine are Number One

As mentioned above, the vast majority of prospective guests will visit your hotel's website before booking a destination. As the first introduction to your property, your website is the best opportunity you have to engage with and sell to your guests.

On average, guests spend 6 minutes on hotel websites, which is ample opportunity to engage your future guests with bold pictures, easy-to-read room descriptions and attractive offers to make the decision to book simple and consistent. It's important to show what guests will experience when they come to your destination. If you ensure video is part of your web strategy, you will mesmerize your guests.

But of course, a great website on its own is not enough. You must also have an optimized booking engine. A good booking engine is optimized for conversion by providing a seamless booking process where your guests can view rates and room types and complete a booking as easily as possible.

An effective booking engine should map data directly into your property management system through a channel manager. Load speed is one of the most critical factors



when considering a booking engine as it has an extremely high correlation to conversion rates.



Additionally, mobile is increasingly important each year and it's where guests in many markets prefer to book. If your mobile experience is poor, expect them to book on an OTA. Also, expect your PPC (e.g. Google AdWords) campaigns to be less effective.

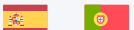
Optimization features allow for personalized offers and tactics similar to what you see on OTAs. Things like dynamic pricing, geo-targeting, integrated rate match and dynamic widgets (i.e. rooms remaining, [shopping activation and shopping recovery](#)) materially increase conversion.

If you run a chain of hotels, you may also want to consider featuring [enhanced unavailability messages](#) in your booking engine to encourage guests to book on your neighboring properties.

So, when was the last time you updated your website? When was the last time you reviewed your booking engine to ensure it ticks all the boxes above? If the answer is more than two years ago, your website and booking engine could probably be a lot better.

2. Differentiate your Hotel and Direct Channel from OTAs

Over the years, a number of hotel chains have seriously evaluated or suspended their contracts with OTAs in



order to maximize direct sales. But while this strategy may work well for more established hotel chains with a larger customer base and brand presence, independent or boutique hotels would likely find themselves at a disadvantage if they severed ties completely.

If you lack the resources to go at it alone, don't worry. You can still focus on differentiating yourself from the competition by using multiple channels and always optimizing for direct. Here are a few ways that you can differentiate your hotel from OTAs:

- **Incentivize customers to book direct:** Reward returning guests that book directly through your website. This can be easily achieved by offering, for example, a 10% discount code for any returning customer, which is still much less than the commission paid to OTAs.
- **Deliver targeted marketing campaigns:** To provide relevant offers and experiences to your guests, you need to understand what they want. Helpful resources to find such information include surveys, online reviews, Google Analytics, and Facebook and Twitter insights. By exploring existing data from various sources, you will be better able to give your guests what they want.
- **Customize the guest experience:** Provide additional options for customers making a booking. Create partnerships with local attractions, tours, restaurants,

and offer them as add-ons after the customer has booked with you.



- **Differentiate booking packages:** Innovate with room types as product offers. Use your own booking engine to offer promotions and special offers that you do not offer on the OTAs.

Regardless of the channels through which you market your property, emphasizing your strengths and offering them as perks will help you stand out from the crowd and effectively market your hotel.

3. Focus on Local SEO

Over the past 10 years, Google has significantly increased its own assets in the online travel marketplace and continues to threaten OTA dominance. Google search now plays a major role early on in the travel booking journey. In fact, research shows that [31% of accommodation searches](#) start on the search engine.

Furthermore, nearly 50% of all searches in Google have local intent, according to Search Engine Roundtable. Meanwhile, Google reports that “Near Me” searches have grown 150% faster than traditional, local-based searches.

Therefore, it is imperative that you ensure your hotel has a strong local SEO presence. You can optimize your hotel for local SEO by following this checklist:

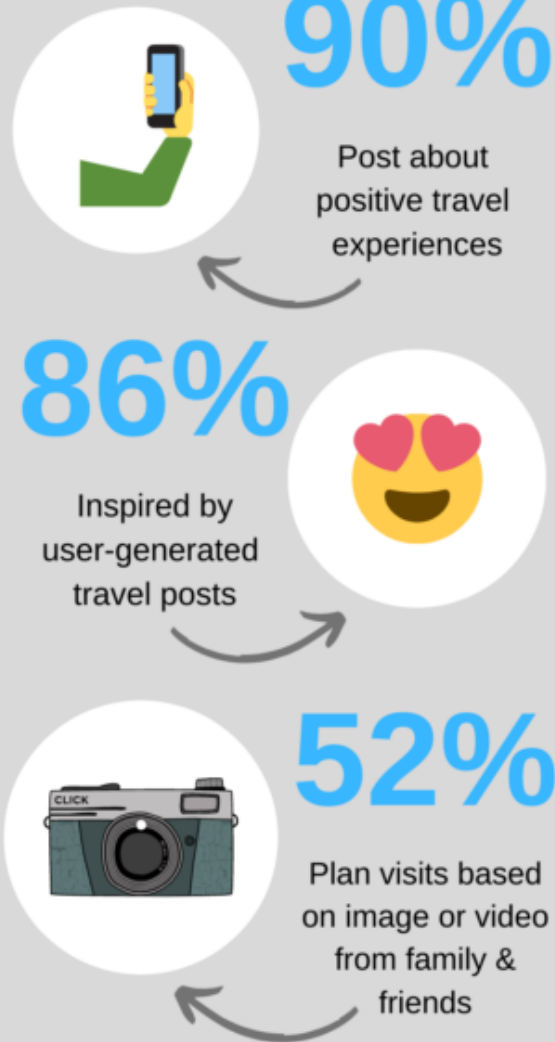
- **Research and establish local keywords:** You need to consider local intent. What would people search if looking for a local hotel?
- **Revamp your Google My Business listing:** Hotel listings can now customize their services and amenities in the 'Hotel Attributes' section. However, this is only available on desktop.
- **Encourage customer reviews:** Google uses reviews as another factor in their ranking of your website if you are a local business. While you are not allowed to monetize customers for reviews, you can encourage them through social media channels or other means.

If your hotel requires more comprehensive local SEO support, contact our [GuestCentric Lab team](#) for more information on our bespoke premium service.

4. Remember that 60% of Customers are Social Travelers

According to Forrester, 60% of guests use one or more social networking platforms during their search, shop and buy process. Below are some additional social media traveler behavior statistics to take note of:

Social Media Traveller Behaviors



 guestcentric

Furthermore, social media is critical to manage TripAdvisor ratings, have a professional-looking presence on facebook, and allow guests to engage over twitter. To use the social network to amplify your message, ensure that good experiences your guests write about are shared on the different digital communities.

For photos, we see the best results using Flickr and for videos a dedicated YouTube channel. And don't forget email: it is still the most widely-used mechanism to share itineraries and ideas of trips.

5. Ensure your Website and Booking Engine are Optimized for Mobile

It's only been 11 years since the iPhone hit the shelves, yet it's hard to imagine a trip without smartphones.

Google research reveals that nearly 50% of mobile users are comfortable researching, planning, and booking an entire trip to a new travel destination using only their smartphone.

However, those who have a negative brand experience on mobile are 62% less likely to purchase from that brand in the future.

If you have deployed a mobile-optimization solution, you will realize that mobile consumers have a much more utilitarian behavior. They are looking for your hotel's address, phone number, or want to book a room for tonight or tomorrow night. Hence, the experience to conclude those tasks must be optimized.

There are 5 key principles which must be applied when optimizing your hotel website for mobile:

- **Heed the need for speed:** More than half of people leave a website if it takes more than 3 seconds to load.

- **Offer a clear value proposition:** A good value proposition uses customer-orientated language that answers the question: “Why should I book with this company?”
- **Present a clear call to action:** Use contrasting colors and fonts for high visibility and to make the action a user should take obvious.
- **Prioritize visible content:** Above the fold space is at a premium on mobile devices, making it critical to feature what is most important to the user.
- **Customize key information:** Auto-fill the destination or product-specific search query, provide links to recent searches and use auto-suggest features.

While success can be found using mobile as a stand-alone media, it provides the largest rewards when it is used as an integrated, multi-channel engagement platform. If you can provide consistent messages across web, social and mobile, while ensuring that the most relevant offers are prioritized, then you have truly delivered multi-channel digital marketing.

Digital Marketing for Hotels Should Never Stand Still

It's important to remember that in order for a hotelier's digital marketing strategy to be effective, it must be current and align with the ever-changing trends and behaviors of online travel searchers. Organic online



growth is also, by no means an overnight process. It will take time before you generate the desired return on investment.

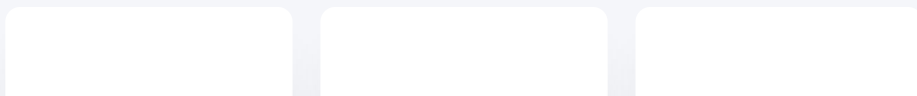
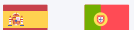
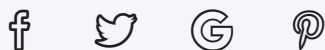
Information is power, so be sure to consistently analyze your customers and measure your performance across all channels. This will help you both identify areas for improvement and capitalize on your strengths.

And finally, a successful digital marketing strategy must provide a consistent multi-channel experience to hotel guests. This can be achieved by using a multitude of tools or an all-in-one hotel digital marketing solution.

But no matter which tools you select, at the core of your strategy should be a digital marketing architecture that prepares your hotel for future digital marketing demands.

Learn How we Can Help You Generate the Best ROI in 2020

Do you want to improve your hotel's digital marketing in 2020? Our dedicated team of digital marketing specialists works round-the-clock to ensure independent hotels grow their online presence and maximize direct reservations to comprise 50% of all booking revenue. Find out more about what we can offer [here](#).





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One Comment



Ben Walker
June 17, 2020

Very helpful article, thank you. Coronavirus has turned everything upside down - we made a quick guide of points you might want to consider in combination with these strategies, see <https://wearearise.com/digital-marketing-during-coronavirus-a-guide-for-hotels-and-restaurants> for more if you're interested.



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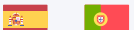
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