A WORD TO THE WIRED
Ways To Use Your Web Site To Build Better Relationships With Guests

By John S. Fareed

Strong marketing has always been about building relationships. As Internet usage continues to explode, web site users have grown more demanding. Here are some thoughts on how to use your hotel web site to build better relationships with your existing and potential guests.

E-Concierge – Use e-mail as an e-concierge service. Begin by collecting guest e-mail addresses when taking reservations. A week or so before check-in, send guests an e-mail to let them know that they are expected, and ask if they have any questions or needs that the hotel may attend to prior to their arrival. This has proven to be a powerful, yet cost effective tool that can be implemented immediately. An e-concierge initiative can put the guest at ease before his or her journey while providing an opportunity for the hotel to exceed guest expectations. It is risk free, as it respects the distance between hotel staff and guests, facilitates receipt when the guest wants it, and allows the hotel to respond during slow or down times. It also allows you to collect information on the guest's wants and needs, giving you the ability to forecast and track trends, and more importantly, provide a more personalized experience.

Provide live weather updates – This is a powerful, but underutilized tool. Imagine ski resorts touting the falling snow, or beach resorts letting people know that the hurricane they had feared has passed with no negative effects. A strategically placed web cam can provide a live shot of the current weather situation.

Designer vacations – Guests are demanding more control over both their vacation experiences and their transactions. Why not let your guests customize their vacations from a menu of available packages including activities (such as spa treatments, yoga

classes, or golf), special food and beverage offerings, options for pets, and other customizable features. Perhaps this could include the guest's ability to address special needs for family members.

'A la modem' – Put your food and beverage menus on the web, including any awards and recognition. Allow guests to make dinner reservations or pre-order room service. Guests want healthy menu offerings, a children's menu with more than hamburgers, hot dogs and chicken fingers, and assurances that special dietary requirements can and will be met.

Simplicity – Last but certainly not least, think about ways to simplify your site. Once someone is on your web site, they should have the ability to navigate through the site according to their individual needs and interests.

- Put your hotel's contact information in an easy to locate place on every page of your site.
- Booking that is simple and within a few clicks.
- An easy to understand set of rates.
- A short and up to date list of customized packages.
- Provide logical and easy to navigate area maps.

And most importantly, human help when needed. Let them know that they can communicate with you via e-mail, and receive individualized responses to their questions and comments in a timely manner.

Ultimately, all hotel web sites should come down to functionality first, followed by book-ability, and then cosmetics. Consumers are more demanding and less patient. Our web sites must do a better job of both accommodating those trends and building relationships.

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