Tips on Good Offers to generate Bookings on an Independent Website

By: Pedro Colaco, CEO, GuestCentric Systems

Headline

Many independent hotel managers are unhappy with the amount of business generated by their websites. This should come as no surprise, as increasingly sophisticated consumers are looking for easy ways to decide and book, but many times official websites have confusing displays and lack competitive pricing and special offers. The last article on the series on how to pursue a structured online strategy lists six simple tips to ensure best success for offers on your website. These tips coupled with creativity and discipline to manage rate parity will allow you to create an offer strategy that ensures e-commerce success for your official website. It is crucial for hoteliers to adapt technologies that provide them with tools that allows them to have an immediate response towards their competitors and to monitor the effectiveness of their promotions in order to better segment their bookable offers.

Recap: What is a successful hotel website?

A successful hotel website is a website that maximizes its economic value to the hotel, i.e. it maximizes the number of e-commerce transactions, be bookings or contacts. To maximize the economic value of your website, you should pursue a structured e-commerce strategy. A successful e-commerce strategy relies on three key factors:

1. Your website's visibility
2. Your website's sales focus
3. The bookable offers you promote on your website

Bookable offers: the ultimate goal

We spent a fair amount of time in the last article explaining the importance of trusts mechanisms, instant online booking, real-time rates and availabilities, best available rates (BAR) and rate parity. But even if you get enough, relevant traffic, and the site is designed to convert lookers into bookers, no website can be a "sales machine" if there is nothing to sell or the product is not competitive.

Even the best technology will not succeed if there is no availability online, the online offers are not relevant to your prospective customers or your offering is not competitive in your region. Doing a detailed analysis to find the right balance is extremely important to engage your visitors, so you need to make sure you offer them what they are looking for.

Have your entire inventory at the best price on your web site

In order to maximize your e-commerce results, you must use your official website as your main channel for sales and the online travel agencies to support your offers. You should always advertise a Best Rate Guarantee in your home page and your lowest rate should always be available on your hotel's website, despite the several portals that you may be listed in. You should also adopt a lower rate with booking restrictions; minimum stay, advance purchase or a non-refund policy can give a new dimension to your pricing strategy and generate more revenue.

Last room availability to enhance clients' loyalty

By guaranteeing that your website always offers the last room available of the property you will increase the traffic to your website and increase direct bookings. By doing this your clients will know that by visiting your website they will find availability at the best price. This will create more buzz around your website and captivate the trust and loyalty of your clients.

Be competitive: sell value over pricing

Give value to your offers providing them with good descriptions and best quality photos. Describe your rooms, based on a careful product segmentation that sends the message of value and power to persuade your clients to buy. Create content that differentiates from the competition and don't be led to a mediocre presence by creating descriptions with just room measures, room amenities bullets and non-sensual promotions. Remember that your website is your best sales representative thus it should transmit to the viewer the look and feel of your property. And ensure that you have the tools to immediately react if a competitor changes their prices or launches a promotion.

Innovate with exclusive promotions

Your website should be a unique point of sale where your clients find your hotel's best, exclusive and sensual promotions. Some of these promotions should only be available on your hotel's website and not distributed to other points of sale being phone reservation and other portals where your property is listed. You will be able to reward loyalty from your clients and gain key relationship information, allowing you to build powerful CRM databases to future hotel promotions and direct selling. Also this information will help you segment your offers to target clients with specific promotions created only for them.

Engage your customers: leverage social media

Create your hotel web community, where you can list your rooms, promotions, nearby attractions, what to do, where to eat etc. Use the social media tools like Facebook and Twitter to have direct communication with your clients in order to promote and sell your rooms and special offers for twitter followers or Facebook fans. This will reflect on an increase in people that follow your property and create a snowball effect on the property's brand. Have a hotel blog that you can use to communicate all your news to your clients, including limited time promotions.

Continually measure the efficiency of your promotions and rooms

Product segmentation shouldn't be a set and forget task. Your weekly to-do-list should include monitoring the performance of your room types and promotions and evaluate their effectiveness at the market. You will probably discover that some rooms and promotions are not as successful as you had expected and others are successes beyond measure. Learn from experience and improve your offering continually. A common mistake is selling and promoting single rooms when you know that single room occupancy percentage is very low.

Conclusion: E-commerce optimization is about dollars and sense

As you can infer from the key criteria identified above, it is critical to have the right offers, packaged correctly and laid out in the right outlets to maximize bookings. But that alone is not enough: your website must be sales oriented and you must pursue a strategy to get visitors to your site. Thus is extremely important for you to monitor the actions performed on your website, since they will play a key part when planning your e-commerce strategy.

At the end of the day, e-commerce optimization is about dollars and sense. Spend your dollars wisely, make most of your expense variable (i.e. a success-fee on booking through your website), and e-commerce success will follow.

Bio

Pedro co-founded GuestCentric Systems in October 2006 and has served as President and CEO since. Pedro brings extensive experience in the networking and software industries to his role. Pedro has a proven track record of driving successful product development, marketing, sales and channel management efforts in the global market.

Prior to founding GuestCentric, Pedro was Vice President of Product Management and Marketing at Corvil, an Ireland based software start-up funded by Apax Partners and Cisco Systems. During his tenure at Corvil he built a global Product Management and Marketing organization to support a sales team of over 60

professionals. Before joining Corvil, Pedro was Vice President of Marketing and Business Development for Expand Networks, a leading vendor of application traffic management solutions based in New Jersey from where he managed the company's marketing and business development activities on all six continents. From 1999 to 2001, Pedro was Director of Product Management and Marketing for Unisphere Networks a Boston startup, where he was responsible for developing and managing the market strategy for next-generation IP voice products including network and service management. Prior to Unisphere, Pedro worked 7 years for the information and communications division of Siemens where he held increasingly senior roles in product management and product development at offices in Germany and the United States.

Pedro holds a bachelors degree in Electrotechnical and Computer Systems Engineering from the Instituto Superior Tecnico in Lisbon, Portugal and studied towards an MBA at the Florida Atlantic University in Boca Raton, Florida