H HOTEL MANAGEMENT

Technology is key to driving revenue at hotels

by *Alicia Hoisington* | Aug 22, 2017 5:07pm

The key to driving direct business lies within technology. Hotel websites need more and better qualified website traffic—and to get that traffic, they need more searchers landing on their pages. That boils down to a discussion about the technology used to get there, according to Chris Rockett, SVP of sales for Milestone, a digital marketing and technology company.

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The technology that hoteliers use can shift share from third parties and online travel agencies to direct business, he said during a recent webinar hosted by the Asian American Hotel Owners Association titled "Leveraging Disruptive Technologies to Drive Direct Bookings and Compete with OTAs."

"It's the technology that drives the surge that drives the traffic to the website that drives online revenue," he said.

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How to Get Found

Search and search-engine optimization are about being the right answer for users while also providing the best user experience, Rockett said, adding that hoteliers should keep in mind that the future of search is voice. He said that within the next couple of years, 50 percent of the searching that is done is going to be voice search with tools such as mobile phones, in-home devices like Google Assistant and Amazon Echo. And unlike online search, there is only one right answer with voice search.

"They only get one shot at that. They are looking for answers they can depend on most," Rockett said.

He said the term all hoteliers should learn and know is "schema."

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"Search engines' goal is to control search and have all search run through them, and 90 percent of your content is tagged with schemas to make your site easy to find in search engines and Siri, Alexa and Google Home," he said.

The key to giving search engines the best answer is to tag content with schema, which provides context to the content. The more schema included on the website, the more likely that search will point to that website in results. Schema that can be included for hotels: address, location, shopping, reviews, things to do, events, images, specials, videos, rooms and breadcrumbs.

"You can ask a website provider if they have schema on their website," Rockett said. "You want schema that provides much more context via structured data than the fact that you're a hotel." Schema needs to be tagged on most of a hotel website's content, and for that it must be built into the content-management system.

"It's low-hanging fruit and really easy money for someone who is interested in driving traffic and revenue," Rockett said.

Engagement and Personalization

"You can't get away with building a website and let it sit there. Most websites need to be refreshed every two to three years," Rockett said.

He suggested hoteliers look to conversion rate optimization, which involves fundamental testing such as A/B. A control website is created, then a change is made to the website in order to test whether the update works better.

"You need to run these on a regular basis because consumer taste is not totally static. It's changing all the time. Smart digital marketers will run A/B testing all the time, too," Rockett said, adding that in order for testing to be meaningful, websites need at least 500 daily visitors.

Hotel websites also need to cater to an Americans with Disabilities Act audience, he said. One in 10 Americans has a disability, he said, so hoteliers need optimize their sites for these visitors.

"There are two reasons to do this. One is that the disabled population will certainly thank you for it and second is that there is a fair amount of legal population that makes its living looking for websites that have problems conforming," Rockett said.

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Personalization is also important. Searches are looking for experiences on websites that apply more to them than the general population, Rockett said.

"You can do geographic personalization to target guests from certain locations," he said. "You can personalize to people who click on an ad so they are fed a certain type of content in response to the ad click."

Hoteliers who use a customer-relationship-management system can personalize marketing on their websites to searchers who identify as previous customers. Also, they can market personalization to preferences users indicate while conducting search on the site. If someone searches for families or weddings, then personalization on website allows the site to feed up certain content targeted to that profile.

Speed Matters

Google now includes site speed as high ranking factor when it is searching. What that means is that faster websites will rank higher in search results. Thus, speed should not be taken lightly because fast websites can increase revenue, Rockett said.

He cited an example that shows that as site load time increases, so, too, does revenue loss. For instance, a website that took between 10 and 12 seconds to load saw a 30-percent loss in customers. A site that took 14 seconds to load saw a 32-percent customer loss.

"As you lose customers, the projected loss of revenue over the course of a year is significant," Rockett said.

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