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How hotels can work alongside Google in the post-pandemic era, part one

By Max Starkov (<https://www.linkedin.com/in/maxstarkov>) | September 7, 2020

With all the **heated discussions** (<https://www.phocuswire.com/Rethinking-Google-entry-online-travel>) about **Google** (<http://Google.com>) dominating travel and increasing calls by industry pundits and experts to lessen hospitality's dependency on the search giant, one thing is for certain: cash-strapped hoteliers today simply cannot just pause or abandon their marketing presence on Google.

Today, despite the crisis and all the industry sufferings, hotel marketers cannot ignore Google in the same manner as they could not have done this in any of the last 20 years.

On average, Google directly contributes, in the form of organic referrals (SEO, AMPs, Schema, content

marketing, etc.) and paid/performance marketing referrals (SEM, GDN, GHA, etc.) to over 50% of direct online room nights for most hoteliers.

This does not include OTA room nights, the bulk of which come as a result of the OTA performance marketing on Google to the tune of \$11 billion a year.

During the pandemic, Google has not only maintained but increased its search market share and in August 2020 Google controlled 87.3% market share in the U.S., 93.24% in Europe and 91.5% in Asia.

There are two major developments at Google that directly affect hotel marketers:

1. Google is the shepherd of the digital customer journey

Google has become increasingly adept at positioning itself at and making money in the form of referral and CPA (Cost per acquisition) fees from each of the five phases of the Digital Customer Journey: Dreaming, Planning, Booking, Experiencing and Sharing Phases.

Google now “owns” the customer in the Dreaming and Planning Phases and directly influences conversions in the Booking Phase, as well as increasingly controls customer engagements in the Experiencing (on-property) and Sharing (post-stay) Phases via Google My Business, Local Experiences, Google Reviews, etc.

2. Google is an integrated advertising ecosystem:

Google has become a fully integrated advertising platform - an advertising ecosystem - where all advertising formats are intertwined and work in concert. User engagements in the upper funnel (SEO, content marketing, YouTube TrueView, Gmail Ads, etc.) influences conversions in the lower funnel (Google Ads, Google Hotel Ads, Google Display Network, RLSA, Customer Match, etc.), and a campaign in one advertising format directly influences the results from all other formats.

Add to that the first-party user data Google accumulates, refreshes and enriches on a daily basis from any user interactions, search, communication and intent signals on Google and Google App, Chrome, Android, Gmail, YouTube, etc. and you get the full picture: Google knows more about any given Internet user and online travel consumer than NSA, FBI, CIA, DHS, Interpol, KGB and Mossad combined.

These two key developments should determine how hotel marketers budget, plan and execute their Google marketing strategy in the Google ecosystem and what initiatives they should use to reach travel consumers throughout the digital customer journey and how, hopefully, turn them into hotel guests in the post-crisis era.

Here are some concrete action steps to help hotel marketers make the most from the Google Ecosystem in these dire post-crisis times, increase occupancy and generate the highest returns and ROIs:

1. Preparing for your post-crisis Google marketing strategy

There are several steps you must undertake before you even start strategizing, budgeting, planning and launching any campaigns on Google.

Many of these steps should have already been addressed by your digital marketing partner agency before the COVID-19 crisis and would require now little or only moderate updates, which means a small budget. But if you fail to implement these steps, your investment in Google campaigns will be cost-prohibitive and the bulk of your marketing dollars will be wasted with little results to show for your ad spend.

Review your property website

Does it have mobile-first design? Mobile-friendly content? With nearly 70% of website visitors now viewing your website on mobile devices, a mobile-first website design and mobile-friendly content are a must. No ifs or buts.

Are your property website download speeds across various devices up to par?

With its Mobile Index algorithm update, Google started punishing website with slow download speeds. According to Google, 53% of website visits are abandoned if a mobile site takes longer than three seconds to load.

Besides, slow download speeds inevitably affect conversion rates on the hotel website: fast download speeds drastically improve the user experience and increase the user's desire to purchase on the site. Mobile-first websites with cloud hosting and CDN (Content Delivery Network) provide far better server response times and faster download speeds across geographies.

Review your website SEO

Google has frequently stated that it is using more than 200 major ranking "signals" with many thousands of sub-signals and variations. Finally, make sure your agency can deliver Google-specific ongoing SEO services and can handle very complex Google-specific technical SEO requirements including schema.org, Google AMP, Google Sitemap XML, Google Search Console dashboard management, and more.

The following three categories are well within hotelier marketers' control, and if the hotel website is optimized to communicate these signals to Google, will achieve a higher ranking in SERPs and reward the property with significant organic revenues:

- Content: unique, highly relevant and enticing website content that is professionally written, informative, useful and of travel guide-level quality.

- Inbound Links: links to the hotel website from highly authoritative non-paid websites like CVBs, online magazines and newspapers, blogs, social media, etc.
- Technical SEO: an ecosystem of technologies, configurations, and processes implemented to the website and server designed to optimize the hotel website and enable the search engine bots to access, crawl, interpret and index your website, which ultimately results in increased search traffic and revenue.

Do you have Automated schema markup on the hotel website?

Schema markup helps search engines understand the content and intent of websites, especially dynamic content elements such as events and happenings pages, special offers, opening hours, and star ratings.

These rich snippets make hotel webpages appear more prominently in Google search engine results pages (SERPs), thus improving the visibility of a hotel website's overall SEO performance. One of the important benefits is the Featured Snippets, which Google creates dynamically based on the content of your website and places on top of the search results.

Does your website feature Google Accelerated Mobile Pages (AMP) pages which download fast on mobile and wearable devices and are featured as news and info “teasers” in the Google AMP teaser section in mobile SERPs?

This works to increase hotel visibility and create another entry point to boost mobile visitors and bookings, as well as provide another opportunity to outshine the competition.

Does your property have a robust Feeder Market Channel Strategy vs the usual market segmentation channel strategy?

In fact, are you focusing on your short-haul feeder-markets and especially on your drive-in feeder markets? People are already traveling and will continue to do so in the post-crisis period, especially on short-haul and drive-in trips.

Do you have weekend specials, coronavirus de-stressing packages, spa packages, family packages, activity packages, special occasion and F&B packages and promotions, work-from-hotel packages, etc. that you can use to target your local, short-haul and drive-in feeder markets?

Be creative: it is not difficult to figure out what customers that have been locked at home for 6 plus months – we have all been there - would love to experience at your property and its surroundings.

Have you retained a relationship with your digital marketing partner agency throughout the crisis?

If yes, then ask them to take care of the above action steps that are within their area of expertise, and to help you tackle the rest. If not – find a good hospitality-trained digital marketing agency – they are all eager for your business!

* In next part of this analysis later this week, **[we look at how to launch a post-crisis Google marketing strategy \(https://www.phocuswire.com/Hoteliers-afford-to-ignore-Google-after-coronavirus-part-two\)](https://www.phocuswire.com/Hoteliers-afford-to-ignore-Google-after-coronavirus-part-two)**.

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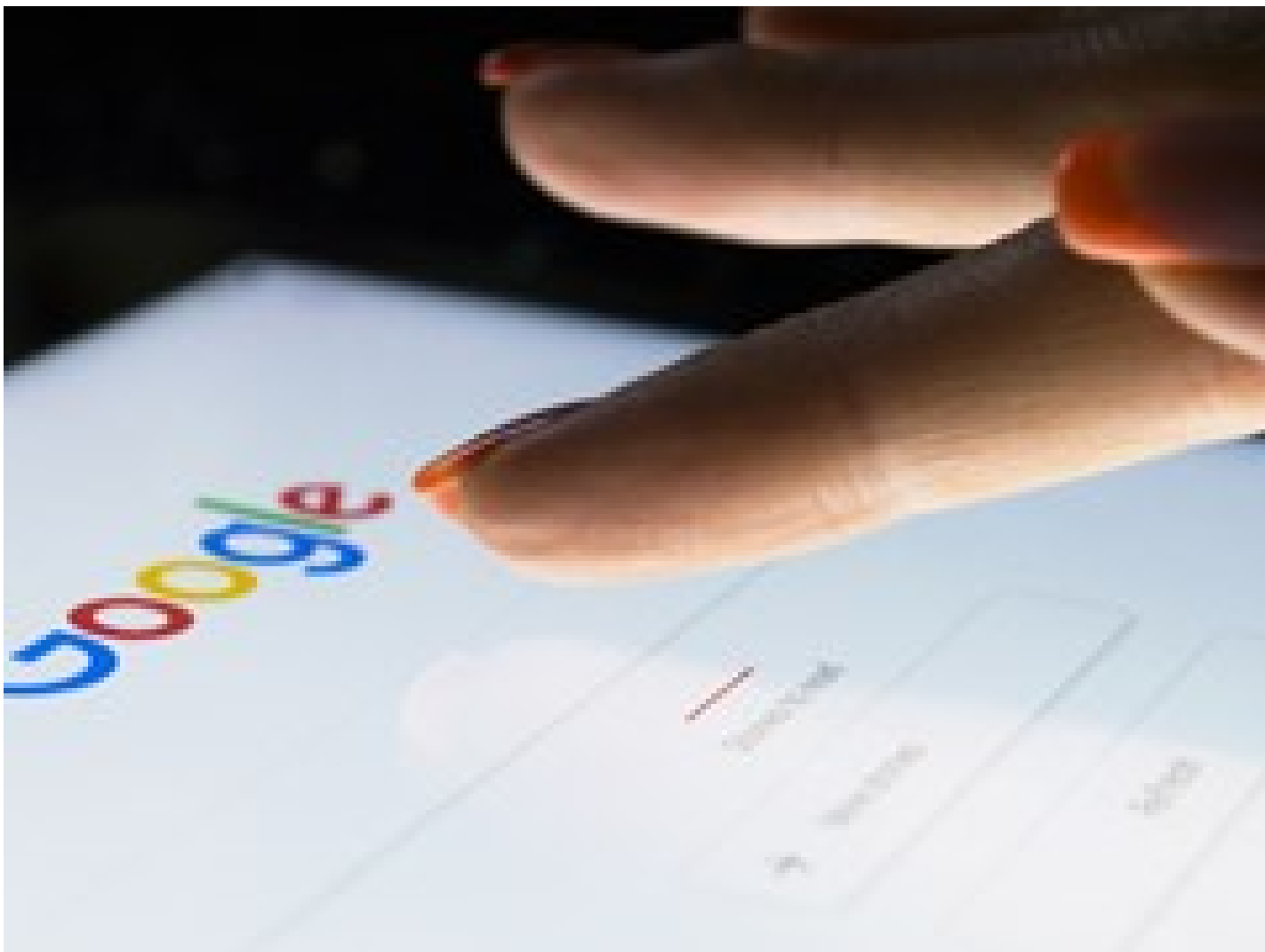


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