



Ms. Frank

Website / Online Merchandising / SEO

Search Engine Advertising: Happy Landings

By [Tema Frank](#), President, Web Mystery Shoppers International Inc.

One of the easiest ways to promote your hotel to non-locals is with search engine advertising. But what happens when they click on the ad and go to your site? All too often, what they see is not what they expected, so they just click back to the search engine, wasting you money and losing potential business. How can you minimize wasted click-throughs and maximize search-inspired bookings? One key is to think carefully about your "landing pages". Jargon Alert: A landing page is the page people land on when clicking your ad.

Home May Not Be The Best Landing Page

Your home page is designed to speak to many audiences. It gives an overview of who you are and what you do, and, typically, a way to probe further to get at the details. But if someone has clicked an ad, they've got a concrete idea of what they are looking for. You want to help them get to it as quickly as possible. So for each ad you run, figure out which would be the most relevant page on your site to direct people to.

Let's say you have hotels in Atlanta, Augusta, and Savannah. If someone typed in "hotels Georgia" for their search, you want to bring them to a page that lists all three hotels. But if they typed "hotels Savannah", bring them straight to a page about your Savannah hotel. If you bring them instead to the one that lists all your hotels, they might miss the Savannah location.

Oddly, even big sites sometimes goof on this.

Make Action Easy

Another key to an effective landing page is to have a "call to action" (Jargon Alert: A "call to action" is encouraging a specific action, beyond just reading the page, that you want the visitor to take.) In the Priceline page above, the search box is very prominent. If site visitors don't immediately see a hotel that interests them in the Destinations list, they know exactly what to do next.

On the other hand, limit the number of things they can do from a landing page. If you offer too many choices, people tend to find the page daunting, and back off. Here Priceline seems to have managed the tradeoff well. Each of the hotels listed on the right is clickable, but not distractingly so.

Include Pictures

Having a key photo (of your hotel, or the view from your hotel, or happy visitors at your hotel) will draw the eye to that part of your page. Several studies have shown that the human eye is particularly drawn to images. Once they've spotted the photo, the next place their eyes will go is to the caption below the photo. So use one! Tell them what they are

looking at. You can even have a call to action in that line.
"Guests enjoy our private beach with stunning views. Book now."

The "Book now" words should be hyperlinked to a reservation page.

Attention Grabbing Headlines

It can be challenging to strike the right balance between grabbing attention and conveying peaceful relaxation, which may be what your hotel offers. Photos such as the one above can help do both. So can effective headlines that convey your main competitive advantage. Let them know, right away, why they would want to stay with you instead of someone else. What makes you different?

Test & Tweak

Effective landing page design is still more art than science. Beyond following these general guidelines, it is important to keep testing and tweaking your landing page design, words, images and layouts to achieve optimum response. You can do this by usability-testing the page designs before you launch them, and also, if you have enough site visitors, by testing two designs at once in the real world. (Jargon Alert: This is sometimes called A/B Testing). Some search engines let you alternate which version of a landing page is displayed when people click on your ad. This way you get the evidence to know what really works best. Keep on testing and improving.

Tema Frank is president of Web Mystery Shoppers International Inc. Her company's proprietary website assessment uses an ever-changing panel of some 50,000 people testing web sites from their own computers and providing detailed feedback. Her company has produced research insights that have been valued by companies such as Expedia, Sabre Holdings (Travelocity), Travelweb, OctopusTravel, and many others. She serves on the research committee of the Web Analytics Association and on the Editorial Board of User Experience magazine. Ms. Frank can be contacted at 780-444-5645 or tema@webmysteryshoppers.com [Extended Bio...](#)

HotelExecutive.com retains the copyright to the articles published in the Hotel Business Review. Articles cannot be republished without prior written consent by HotelExecutive.com.