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Hotel Web Site Forms That Work

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

How much does it cost you to take a reservation by phone? How does that compare to the costs if your guest does the booking entirely online? If you consider the staff time involved in the first case, I'll bet that you save a lot of money by having your guests book themselves completely online. So it is in your interest to make that process as easy as possible.

Ms. Frank

Next question: How many people visit your site, explore it a bit, but don't end up booking a stay with you? Any idea why they don't? Obviously some of them will conclude that your hotel isn't right for them. But there's a good chance that a significant number of them are giving up because they found the process of booking online frustrating.

Often those frustrations don't hit until they are in the middle of filling out the needed forms to book their stay. What sorts of things upset them, and how can you prevent those irritants?

1. Let them know the total costs

The biggest complaint we hear about hotel bookings online is not being told total costs before entering credit card information. In a 2003 study of hotel websites, we found that only 57% of hotel bookers were confident that they knew what the total costs would be before starting to make their booking. They had to make a reservation as part of the website testing environment. In a non-test environment, most of the remaining 43% would be unwilling to continue and make the reservation. Think about it: How willing are you to buy something without knowing what it will cost you?

2. Make form fields flexible

Website designers and programmers are notorious for doing things like insisting that a telephone number has to be entered in a certain way, but that way varies across sites. At some sites, you must put brackets around the area code and a dash after the first three digits. At others you may not use brackets. At some, you aren't supposed to use dashes or spaces. If the user doesn't do it the way your programmer intended, the user gets an error message. This is annoying and, often, confusing.

One way around this problem is to put an example beside the field (e.g. "Enter as follows: (999)999-9999"). But why force them to do it a certain way? Your programmer can design the form to accept any format, as long as it has the correct number of digits, and translate whatever is entered into a consistent format behind the scenes. Insist that they do so.

3. Specify the currency

Not all of your guests will be American. And if they found your site through another country's search engine or referral, they may be unsure which currency your prices are quoted in. Dollars ($) are used by many countries, and their value may not equal that of the US dollar. Make sure they know which currency you are quoting the rates in.

MAY: The Hotel Spa
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Hotel Wi-Fi: Balancing Budget & Bandwidth

By Craig Ziegler, President, SuiteLinq, Inc.

Ten to fifteen years ago, the need for Wi-Fi connectivity in a hotel was based on the guests' needs for basic data and voice transfer. Today, multiple technologies are converging thus creating a major stress point on bandwidth allocation. Bandwidth that was once more than sufficient is no longer efficient. With the ever- increasing demand for bandwidth via guests' personal devices and desire for video transmission, hotels must analyze the metrics between costs and ROI. The debate now becomes... does the hotel offer it free of charge, thus "eating the cost for the increased demand", or do hotels create incremental revenue through various streams to help cover the cost increase in bandwidth to deliver this content? And, if the hotel wants to increase its revenue streams, in what unique ways can it be supplemented? READ MORE

Wi-Fi's New Revenue Opportunity and Operating Liabilities

By Colby Goff, Senior Vice President of Strategy and Business Development, Boingo Wireless

4. Don't force registration

Not everyone who books a stay with you wants to register, even if you do offer bonuses for "members". Often they are pressed for time, and/or have no plans to be in your city again. Why should they have to take extra time to tell you about themselves, beyond the basic information you need to confirm their booking? Let them do the booking without registering. Once they are at the end of the process, you may ask them if they'd like to register so you can save their information and make it faster to book with you in future. Make it optional, and tell them how they would benefit from participating.

5. Minimize steps

The booking form is not the time or place to find out your potential guest's life story! Ask them as little as possible. Sure it is nice to be able to personalize their stay by knowing things like their pillow and newspaper preferences. But, as with registration requests, you must make this optional, and at the end of the booking process. Every extra question you ask will lose you business.

6. Minimize pages

Try to keep your forms to a relatively small number of pages. Although people do find long forms intimidating, they get even more annoyed by having to load a new page after every question or two. Strike a balance.

7. Use progress indicators

Let users know at the outset how many pages they will have to complete, and use a progress bar of some sort at the top of the page to let them know how many more they have to do.

8. If you must ask for sensitive information, explain why

One hotel we studied asked for the children's names if the room booking included children. This upset a lot of users. They considered it both a privacy violation and a potential risk to their children's safety. If there is some legal requirement that you must know the names of everyone staying in the room, explain that right beside the spot on the form where you ask for such information.

9. Use secure forms

This should be obvious by now, but some small hotels still don't realize how important it is: Many people will look for the "https" before being willing to enter personal information over the Internet. If you are going to be requesting such information, get a security certificate for your site. This is particularly true if you are asking for credit card information.

10. Save information as it is entered

Sometimes people will be part-way through filling in a form, and suddenly want to go back and check something about the room before making the final commitment. Make sure you've saved whatever they've entered so far. Nothing is more annoying than having spent time to fill in a form and then losing it all because you diverted away to another page on the same site for a few moments.

Following these guidelines won't guarantee that everyone who starts a booking will complete it. But doing so will increase the proportion of people who stick with the booking process, saving you money by reducing live staff time and increasing bookings.

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...**

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Over the last five years, the wireless data world experienced fundamental changes that shifted the focus of Wi-Fi network operators from a niche market of laptop users to a mainstream base of smartphone users. The proliferation of devices and the explosion of data intensive apps have placed increasing pressure on Wi-Fi networks to support the digital lifestyle of a larger audience. This market growth is accompanied by a rise in security exploits and an increase in requests for information from government agencies. The newest opportunity in this landscape – 3G/4G data offload – presents a revenue opportunity that offsets increased operating costs and capital improvements required. READ MORE

Hotel Internet Security Concerns

By Ian Millar, Deputy Director of INTEHL, Ecole Hôtelière de Lausanne

For many months now the internet has not been one of the nicest places to exist. From the actions of anonymous, to the implementation of SOPA (Stop Online Piracy Acts) implemented by U.S representative Lamar S. Smith, the work of the movement Antisec, and even NASA admitted early this month that Hackers gained "full functional control" of key Nasa computers in 2011, which unsurprisingly came form Chinese IP addresses. Mr Martin of NASA outlined how the agency suffered "5,408 computer security incidents" between 2010 and 2011. READ MORE

Hotel Wi-Fi: The Biggest Challenges and Recommended Solutions

By Jeremy Rock, Principal & Founder, RockIT Group

Wireless Internet is changing the way business gets done in the hotel industry. There's a tremendous demand for wireless access - for overnight guests and even for conferences and trade shows where video streaming, audio streaming and voice-over-IP are all competing for the same Internet pipe. It's not just for email and web surfing anymore. Wireless has also created new ways for hotels to connect with their guests to generate loyalty. Wi-Fi has become a standard amenity. It's becoming a determining factor on where guests choose to stay. But few guests would say they're happy with the current sign-up and security concerns of hotel Wi-Fi. With mobile media hitting the mainstream, hotels are eager to find affordable and non-disruptive solutions to meet guest demand for reliable, consistent in-building cellular coverage. READ MORE

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Bill Kotrba of JDA Software explores hotel pricing, and provides an interesting perspective on the psychology behind numbers and how hotels can maximize revenues by sticking to a numerical formula. A very interesting article indeed!

HotelExecutive.com - Business Review - Do Hotel Prices Really Need to End In 9?, by Bill Kotrba
hotelexecutive.com

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Coming Up In The June Online Hotel Business Review

"Hotel Business Review offers weekly articles for hotel management and operation and discussion on emerging growth markets."

FEATURE FOCUS

Hotel Sustainable Development: Principles and Best Practices

Sustainability is now a daily topic that affects every facet of hotel development and operations. As hotelier Hervé Houdré recently noted "The goal of Sustainable Development is clearly to secure economic development, social equity, and environmental protection. As much as they could work in harmony, these goals sometimes work against each other". In the June Hotel Business Review, some of the industry's most recognized sustainable development experts come together to identify emerging trends and discuss how sustainability is currently affecting the hotel industry. Each author presents the most important aspects of sustainable development of much interest to hotel owners, operators,

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