

Sol Meliá partners with VFM to use videos to market resorts online

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Sol Meliá, one of the most successful hotel companies with over 350 properties worldwide, will be ramping up its online marketing. Partnering with VFM Interactive, the company will begin distributing videos for select properties throughout VFM's network of more than 5,000 travel sites and search engines.

Sol Meliá's decision represents a growing recognition that impactful digital media has significant influence on consumers searching online for hotels and resorts. And displaying it where consumers are shopping is critical. According to the Travel Industry Association of America's 2004 Edition of the Travelers' Use of the Internet, online travel agency sites are the most popular source for research, used by 70% of those using the internet for travel planning. Add that almost half of all hotel bookings begin online, and it's clear this represents a huge audience - all searching for accommodation and in a mind-set to buy.

'We have outstanding videos produced for several of our properties and it's become clear these are going to be of significant value by getting them in front of customers where they're making their travel decisions,' says Ron Roy, VP Marketing & Distribution for Sol Meliá. 'Our goal is to reach consumers with the best tools in our marketing arsenal to convince them that they should be staying at a Sol Meliá property. And these videos are far more compelling than photos alone.'

Behind Sol Meliá's marketing move are new statistics from PhoCusWright's recent Travel Trends Survey showing that 4 out of every 10 online consumers are shopping at online travel agencies but buying directly from suppliers. In this way, the online travel agencies are becoming as much a marketing vehicle for hotel companies as they are distribution or transaction channels. In fact, a report from Forrester on travel trends created for the HEDNA Barcelona conference in May indicates that 'search today is used more for marketing than distribution.'

As broadband access now outnumbers dial-up in American homes, video is becoming a prominent aspect to the online experience, with load times faster than ever. Jupiter Research projects Internet video ad spending will increase 64 percent in 2005 over last year. The travel segment figures to be an important player here given the considerable time consumers spend researching the perfect destination or hotel.

'There's no question that video and other forms of rich media convey the travel experience far better than still images,' says Paolo Boni, President and CEO of VFM Interactive. 'We're delighted to help Sol Meliá use their digital assets to impact consumers exactly where they're looking for information.'

About Sol Meliá

Sol Meliá Hotels & Resorts is one of the world's most successful hotel companies, managing five distinctive brands - Meliá Hotels, Tryp Hotels, Sol Hotels, Paradisus Resorts and Hard Rock Hotel - totaling more than 350 hotels in 30 countries. Individual reservations can be made through a travel consultant, by calling 1-800-33MELIÁ or the nearest Sol Meliá Reservation Center or on-line at www.solMeliá.com. Group reservations can be made through a professional meeting and incentive planner or through Sol Meliá's group desk (MSM) by calling 1-888-33-MELIÁ or via email: msm-usacan@sol-group.com.

About VFM Interactive

VFM Interactive is the leading distributor and producer of rich media content for the lodging and travel industry. Operating the largest and fastest-growing distribution network, VFM enables hotels to maximize their presence online using the power of rich media on more than 5,000 travel and travel-related sites where consumers are researching and purchasing travel products. In addition to sites such as Travelocity, Orbitz, Priceline and TripAdvisor, VFM's distribution network also includes major search engines and will shortly include both meta-search and GDSs. VFM also produces a variety of rich media marketing content including videos, 360° virtual tours and Flash productions. VFM's clients include over 3,000 hotels and resorts from brands and management companies such as Best Western, Choice, Crowne Plaza, Hilton, Holiday Inn, Interstate, Marriott, MGM, Outrigger, Radisson, Regent, Sheraton, W, Westin, and Wyndham properties.

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