

New Castle Hotels & Resorts Partners With VFM Interactive To Boost Online Booking Through Powerful Rich Media

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In the Internet age, a picture may still be worth a thousand words, but a picture that talks to you can be worth tens of thousands of dollars. This new reality is the basis for a highly successful partnership between New Castle Hotels and Resorts, a leading hotel industry management company and VFM Interactive, the industry leader in rich media management, production and distribution.

New Castle Hotels, has chosen VFM to provide many New Castle properties with PhotoMontages, a rich media production that leverages existing still photographs and combines innovative digital effects, such as motion graphics with voice-over and music tracks to give a video quality interactive experience, without having to shoot original footage.

'New Castle has always been at the forefront of using Internet technology,' says Bob Pope, vice president of sales and marketing for New Castle. 'We knew having potential customers engage in an online, visual and interactive experience would be a valuable sales tool. However, budget realities made it impractical to shoot video of all our properties. The PhotoMontage product was the perfect solution because it allowed us to use our existing photo library in an innovative, effective way.'

In addition to displaying the PhotoMontages on their own Web sites, New Castle properties also benefit from having their rich media distributed across the electronic channel through VFM's Vscape(R). Using this Web-based digital media management and distribution tool, the properties can selectively distribute their rich media to thousands of Web sites, including GDSs, search engines, meta-search engines, and more than 20,000 travel sites - using a single point of entry, giving powerful control to individual hotels.

'Research tells us that the average Internet booker will visit three to five sites before choosing a hotel,' explains Paolo Boni, president and CEO of VFM. 'We also know that visuals, including still photos, videos and virtual tours, are among the most important factors for consumers when choosing a hotel online. Because of this, we've seen over and over that distributing rich media across the electronic channel gives any property far more clout in impacting the buying decisions of consumers, providing media that engages all the senses and truly conveys the travel experience.'

Research released just last month by comScore underlines the importance of Internet-wide distribution. According to the comScore study, almost half of all consumers (46 percent) begin their travel research at travel sites such as Travelocity and Orbitz. This is nearly double the proportion of people who reported starting their research at a branded airline, hotel or car rental site (24 percent).

Pope notes that the PhotoMontages have helped New Castle properties establish better branding and awareness in the online space. New Castle operates independent resorts as well as properties under Hilton, Marriott and Starwood flags, and all benefit from using media that help them stand out in the very crowded landscape of internet travel shopping and commerce.

About New Castle Hotels & Resorts

New Castle Hotels & Resorts owns and manages 21 resorts and hotels in the United States and Canada. The hotel management company consistently ranks in the country's top 100 hotel management and development companies in hospitality industry trade publications. New Castle celebrated its 25th anniversary in 2005. For more information on New Castle Hotels & Resorts, please contact Gerald P. Chase, president, chief operating officer, at (203) 925-8370, or visit the corporate website at www.newcastlehotels.com.

About VFM Interactive

VFM Interactive is the leading end-to-end provider of online media management, production and distribution for the hotel and travel industry. VFM helps travel companies maximize their brand penetration online through the power of rich media and media marketing that includes still images, rich media videos, 360° virtual tours and Flash productions. VFM offers its clients access to the largest and fastest-growing distribution network of more than 20,000 distribution points where consumers are most often researching and purchasing travel products. These distributors include online travel agencies, travel suppliers, search portals, and GDSs such as Travelocity, Orbitz, SideStep, TripAdvisor, American Airlines, Yahoo!, AOL, and Galileo. VFM's clients include more than 10,000 hotels and resorts from brands and management companies such as Best Western, Choice, Crowne Plaza, Hilton, Holiday Inn, Interstate, La Quinta, Le Meridien, Marriott, MGM, Outrigger, Radisson, Regent, Sheraton, W, Westin, and Wyndham. To learn more, visit www.vfmii.com.

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