

Lodging Interactive Offers Thoughts for Hotel Marketing in 2009

2008-10-08

We can all agree that 2009 will be a challenge for the hospitality industry in most markets. How many articles have we seen about marketing in a down economy that just fan the flames of concern? Of course there is a concern, but there can be opportunities as well.

With the tightening and changes in available credit, fuel costs and housing problems businesses, families and individuals will cut their travel and vacations spending. But the majority of businesses will still travel, businesses will have meetings, conferences will occur and people will take vacations. Of course, there will be weddings. These are all things that drive hotel occupancy. Research indicates most reductions will be in long range conference attendance and extended vacations. Conferences and vacations are not being eliminated, but regionalized. Vacations are being reduced to activities closer to home. Consumer and business spending is being reduced by shorter stays in upscale resorts and scaling down to lower cost accommodations.

The two very clear shifts in 2009 marketing budgets are the shift from brand advertising to more direct advertising. It is inevitable that the large brands will cut their print and television brand advertising and for your independent hotels branding has to become more targeted and competitive. This all means we will see less emphasis on broad based advertising and distribution and more emphasis on direct and targeted advertising. To create effective targeted marketing you need to have a clear understanding of your guest profiles and source feeder markets.

The other shift in hotel marketing budgets will be to online marketing. In the order of importance and value online marketing methods are (1) email (2) website marketing (3) search engine optimization (4), pay per click (5) social media conversational marketing. The recommendation put forth in recent trade articles, like this one, is the point that all hotels branded or not need to consider more direct online marketing during the slow economy. Some hotels may be ok with relying totally on their brand who is generating anywhere from 25 to 60% of their bookings, but as the brands make their cuts these hotels will feel the results. You will always get your share of brand loyal frequent guest members, but even this market segment will decline. As a brand hotel you need to consider a reasonable direct online marketing plan and budget for it. And, for independent hotels this may be a time to capture a greater share of the smaller market because the majority of shoppers will be online making their decisions. These decisions are a result of the power of your online presence and information.

Across the board rate reductions is not a solution! There are markets that will maintain during this period based on strong international travel and business within regional or local markets. Value is still the primary concern for shoppers. Online marketing offers a number of effective marketing methods, update your website and emphasize your property strengths on your website. Reach out to your targeted markets with email and better search engine presence and make sure you know your online reputation and make an effort to offset the negatives while responding to the positive. And, make an effort to have a presence on the leading social media sites with fresh content.

Always, know your comp set's offerings and trump them where possible online with seasonal specials that include more in-house services, add more package choices with local services and attractions, focus specials and packages on groups and meetings where you can and make sure your wedding promotions are found on the search engines beyond simple search terms such as 'New York Wedding Hotel'. These are practices that work for most segments of the hospitality market.

Let's hope our country's economic problems are bottoming out, but we cannot make that assumption when planning for the worst and hoping for the best. The bottom line is the fact people will continue to vacation, businesses men and women will travel, businesses will have meetings and there will be weddings.

About Lodging Interactive

Lodging Interactive is a leading provider of Internet Marketing Services to the hospitality, spa and restaurant industries. The company provides a portfolio of effective Internet Marketing Services to hundreds of hotels, resorts, timeshares, spas and restaurants. Clients included branded hotels from nearly every major brand as well as prestigious, landmark independent hotels.

The Company offers effective online tools and services: ChatterGuard.com, an online social media monitoring and reputation management system, HotelSocialBlogs.com, a turn-key Travel 2.0 Distribution & Marketing service, CommentCards.com, a full-service business-2-consumer comment card service, eProposalSystem.com, an online RFP response system hotel Sales Managers, RFPLink.com, a group RFP lead generation, HotelDirectBook.com, a consumer hotel portal, and reporting system, DiningClick.com, Internet Marketing Services for the restaurant industry, and Spa Interactive, Internet Marketing Services for the health spa industry.

Lodging Interactive is a proud member of the American Hotel & Lodging Association (AH&LA), The California Hotel Association, the Day Spa Association, and a supporter of the Hotel Sales & Marketing Association International (HSMIAI). For more information contact Richard Walsh, Vice President of Business Development at rjwalsh@lodginginteractive.com or at 877-291-4411. The company's website is located at www.LodgingInteractive.com.

This article comes from Hotel News Resource

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The URL for this story is:

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