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HeBSdigital

Establish metrics, achievable goals for successful e-marketing

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In recent weeks, we have discussed the essential elements of an action plan to capitalize on reemerging demand in the travel and hospitality market, including direct web marketing, multichannel marketing, website redesign, social media and mobile. All of these are tools that can help more efficiently connect with their best existing and potential customers.

Any effort, however, requires clear establishment of metrics to measure success and parameters for achievable results.

Action Plan: Measure your return on investment (ROI)

Take a hard look at what you are doing: are you taking chances with new and unproven marketing formats? Is your Internet marketing budget ROI-centric? Are you a smart marketer, or are you advertising blindly, distributing limited marketing dollars in unproven or incalculable areas? Are you measuring conversions and ROIs from your marketing campaigns?

- Focus on marketing formats that generate above industry-average returns.
- Implement the latest website analytics+ campaign tracking technology:
- Remember, no matter which channels you use, make sure you are tracking results and conversions (e.g. Omniture, DART, etc). Phone tracking is now easier than ever (e.g. a unique 1-800 number to be used for calls resulting from your Google AdWords, another from Yahoo, etc.), and even with print you can send people to private landing pages or use promo codes.
 - Track post-impression and post-click activity
 - Track bookings, roomnights, revenues from every campaign
 - Adjust marketing spend instantaneously based on ROIs
 - Don't fall for "free" analytical tools—they simply do not work
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Action Plan: Establish achievable objectives for the remainder of the year and 2011

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The sky is the limit when hotel internet marketing is concerned. There are so many formats and initiatives, "hot news" and sensational claims that the industry is justifiably confused as to where to start and what the priorities should be.

The litmus test for any marketing initiatives hoteliers do should be a.) revenue generated, and b.) return on investment (ROI). In other words, before budgeting for or embarking on any marketing initiative, hoteliers must answer a simple question: "Which initiative will generate the most revenues and the best ROI?"

Here are a few objectives achievable in the remaining months of 2010 and early 2011 with re-allocation of funds in the existing hotel budgets or included in the 2011 budget:

Website re-design:

Time and again this has proven to be the single most effective initiative to boost hotel bookings and engage your customers via Web 2.0 enhancements on the site. This is a 90-120 day process so you can start it in 2010 and complete it in early 2011.

Direct online channel:

There is no doubt this is the most cost-effective distribution channel. The hotel budget should be especially generous to any direct marketing initiative: from search engine marketing (SEM) to email marketing, strategic linking and online sponsorships, to the new emerging formats like social and mobile marketing.

Social marketing:

Start by enhancing your hotel's presence on the social networks. Creating or optimizing your hotel's Facebook fan page and twitter and LinkedIn profiles is a good start. Engaging your customers on the social networks via interactive contests and sweepstakes, cross-promoted via the hotel website, email and SEM campaigns will make your efforts in social media worthwhile.

Mobile marketing:

Launching a 10-20 page mobile site for the hotel should be a top priority in 2010. Even if your booking engine provider does not have a mobile version of the booking engine, your mobile site will generate a lot of telephone leads and bookings. Start building the mobile opt-in list for customer service alerts and SMS text promotions. Experiment with simple mobile contests, quizzes and sweepstakes as part of the hotel's multi-channel marketing initiatives to gain experience with this new channel.

Website analytics and campaign tracking:

Measure and re-measure conversions and ROI of every marketing initiative. Before you invest in any marketing campaign or website re-design, make sure you will be able to track conversions and ROIs. State-of-the-art technology like Omniture SiteCatalyst (website analytics) or DART (banner campaign tracking) is easily accessible today. This will not only make you a smarter and better marketer, but enable you to justify current marketing spend and defend future budget increases.

Conclusion:

In this uncertain economic environment, focusing on marketing initiatives with proven ROIs is the hotelier's most prudent marketing strategy. The Internet is by far the largest and most important marketing and distribution channel in hospitality. By using the step-by-step action plan outlined in this article, smart hoteliers can generate incremental revenues, increase market share, and outsmart the competition with a ROI-centric online marketing strategy.

As you re-evaluate your hotel marketing plans for 2010 and plan for 2011, seek advice from an experienced and ROI-centric Internet marketing firm to help you adopt industry's best practices, implement latest trends, and utilize the Direct Online Channel to its fullest potential.