



2013 Hotel Mobile Technology Trends

| By Max Starkov and Mariana Mechoso Safer

Mobile is an important travel planning and hotel distribution channel; a channel that hoteliers must embrace to be successful in 2013. One of the most notable developments this year is that the terms “mobile marketing” and “mobile technology” really evolved to include not just mobile phones.

Tablet devices such as the iPad, Samsung Galaxy and Google Nexus quickly became a significant part of the travel planning and booking process. To make matters even more complicated, while mobile phone and tablet devices are considered “mobile” devices, they should be treated as separate distribution channels with their own respective marketing initiatives.

Hoteliers that recognize there is a need to deliver content tailored to each device will generate incremental revenues, steal market share from competitors, improve ADRs and RevPARs, and decrease dependency on the OTAs in 2013. To steer hoteliers in the right direction, HeBS Digital has prepared the top trends in hotel mobile technology for 2013, complete with recommendations:

1. Mobile Channel Explosion in Searches and Bookings

Google reports that over 21% of searches come from mobile devices (7% from tablets and 14% from mobile phones) and 79% via desktops (2012). Google search statistics also show a dramatic increase in hotel queries in the mobile and tablet channels in 2012:

- Overall (desktop + mobile + tablet): +34%
- Mobile devices: +120%
- Tablet devices: +306%

If your hotel primarily drives bookings from the U.S. and Canada, it is important to note that the trend is even more dramatic. According to eMarketer and mobile ad network Chitika, mobile's estimated share of web traffic in North America is 28% as of June 2012.

This increase in activity on mobile devices also translates to bookings. Industry experts have projected staggering growth rates in leisure and unmanaged business travel bookings via the mobile channel in 2012 alone: from \$753 million in 2011 to \$1,368 million (PhoCusWright). One in five Americans will use a tablet by the end of 2012, of which more than half reported shopping on their tablets once a week and twelve percent shopped daily (eMarketer). Across HeBS Digital's hotel client portfolio, here are statistics showing the visits, bookings and revenues coming through the desktop, mobile phone and tablet devices. It is interesting to note that tablets generated 200% more room nights and 430% more revenue than "pure" mobile devices:

Sources of Traffic and Bookings by Device Category January-November 2012

| Source | Visits | Bookings | Revenue |
|---------------|--------|----------|---------|
| Mobile phones | 13.98% | 2.64% | 1.11% |
| Tablet | 8.52% | 5.52% | 5.84% |
| Desktop | 77.50% | 91.84% | 93.06% |
| Total | 100% | 100% | 100% |

What should hoteliers do to capture this growing market on mobile devices? The answer is clear. Hoteliers must deliver a customized, user-friendly experience on these devices by offering a desktop website, a mobile website and a tablet website. Content must be scaled down on a tablet site and even more so on a mobile site (not to mention tablets require highly visual content) – and the way users navigate websites on these devices must be considered (touchscreen on mobile, touchscreen and swiping on tablets).

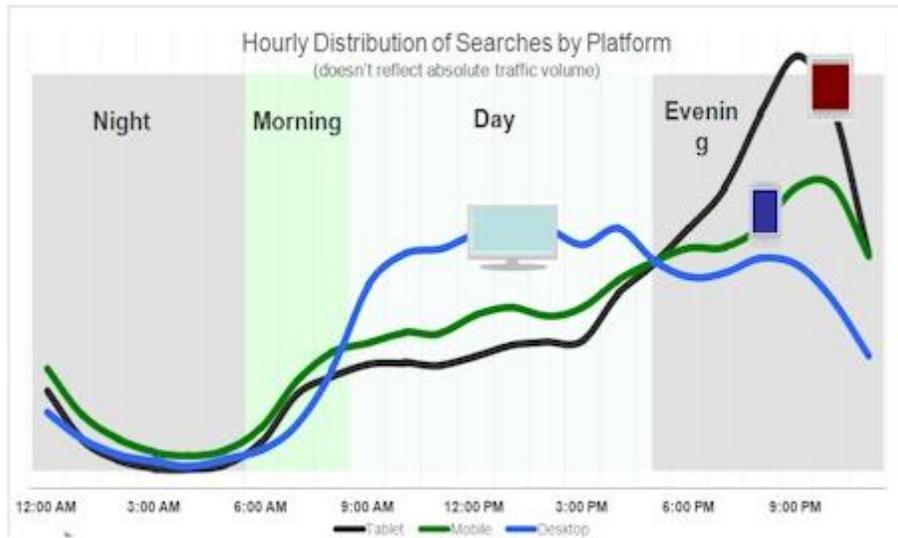
2. Multichannel “Mobile” World (Desktop-Mobile-Tablet)

Hoteliers must now create and manage content; store and distribute the hotel digital marketing assets; and circulate special offers and packages, events and happenings, all through several distinct channels:

- own “desktop” website
- mobile website
- tablet website
- social media profiles on Facebook, Twitter, Google+
- hi-res photos to the OTAs and GDSs (optional)

There is a good chance that the same traveler will try to access your hotel website via all three devices. Take a look at this chart (Google), which demonstrates how users are searching on their desktop devices during the day, mobile phones during their lunch breaks and tablets in the evenings:

Tablets Complement Other Screens



It can be difficult to update one website, let alone three websites. There is a growing need for centralized website content and digital marketing asset management technology. Hoteliers need more than just a simple website content management system (CMS) capable of adding and editing textual and visual content. They also need a CMS that acts as a centralized web content and digital marketing asset management system and can automatically push new specials and promotions to social media profiles and mobile websites, as well as present the digital content in the most appropriate format for each device via Responsive Design on Server Side (RESS).



When updating each channel, it is important to remember that specialized content is needed for each device. The on-the-go mobile user requires short, slimmed-down content with an emphasis on maps and directions, an easy to use mobile booking engine, and a click-to-call property reservation number. Tablet users require deep, visually enhanced

content about the property and its destination. This is one of the main reasons hoteliers serve their desktop website content on tablet devices today. However, the desktop website cannot accommodate the touch-screen navigation required by tablet devices along with the high-res photography and highly visual presentation necessary to display the hotel product in a way that users are quickly becoming accustomed to on a tablet device. The need for a website designed specifically for tablets is clear.

3. Marketing in a SoLoMo (Social, Local, Mobile) World

The convergence of social, local and mobile initiatives allows hotels to deliver more personalized, relevant content to existing guests, in real-time. Social speaks to how we share our travel experiences, mobile speaks to our “always on-the-go” nature, and local speaks to the need for information from our immediate environment.

One of the best examples of SoLoMo in 2012 was when Google “married” its local content listings (Google Places) with its social network (Google+) and made this content the default in its mobile search results. By converting more than 80 million Google Places listings to Google+ Local pages, Google achieved an unprecedented level of dynamic, social content vs. static directory content. For example, Google+ Local integrates reviews from those in your circles.

SoLoMo is changing the way consumers access information. Instead of researching attractions during a hotel stay, mobile applications can now detect a traveler’s location, what they are looking for, provide directions, push specials based on geo-location, and even allow guests to share their experiences in real-time.

Hoteliers need to consider how to best utilize SoLoMo to engage their guests and generate incremental revenues. In addition to offering a ‘location-aware’ mobile website, consider engaging your local customers via time- and location-relevant check-in promotions and rewards, launching social media promotions, contests, and post series via Facebook and Twitter, and blogging. These types of geo-social marketing initiatives allow hoteliers to integrate with consumers’ lifestyles and connect (and stay connected) with them in ways that were not previously possible (and are great for time and location-sensitive promotions).

4. Rise of Location-Based Marketing

Location based marketing allows hotels to reach their audience with a customized message dependent on where they are at the time. From encouraging check-ins to offering local mobile coupons and deals, brands will continue to incentivize social sharing and focus more on local engagement in 2013. Hoteliers can accomplish this in a very affordable ways, such as adding a check-in special on Facebook and Foursquare, or sending them a text message offering a discount to be used on-property. SMS marketing and geo-location offers should become key in how hoteliers target travelers not after but during their travel experience.

HeBS Digital offers ‘location-aware’ mobile websites, delivering content relevant to that users’ location. This is especially important for multi-property hotel brands, as users are automatically served information about the property that is nearest to them. This type of functionality also allows hoteliers to combine real-time customer geo-location with their demographic and psychographic information and launch time- and location-relevant promotions.

Before hoteliers even consider leveraging location based services, they need to make sure that all local content is accurate and optimized for the search engines—this is where mobile directories and mobile mapping services pull location information. Mobile search engines favor and predominantly serve local content; therefore hoteliers need to optimize their local content and listings on the search engines (Google+Local, Yahoo Local, Bing Local), main data providers, local business directories, yellow pages, etc.

Once all local information across the web is accurate, hoteliers should begin leveraging the power of location, activity, demographic and time targeting.

5. Optimizing the Booking Process for Mobile Devices

While hoteliers can still get away with duplicating the desktop’s booking process on a tablet device, this is becoming increasingly unacceptable on a mobile device. More and more technology vendors are starting to offer mobile-friendly versions of their booking engines. The three main usability issues in the mobile booking process are:

- **Mobile-enabled booking engine:** Using the desktop booking engine on a mobile website or app is extremely difficult. Drive more mobile phone bookings by offering a simplified booking engine with step-by-step processes, touch-screen interfaces, easy drop-down menus, shorter product descriptions and thumb-nail images.
- **Real-time feed of specials, packages and promotions:** the mobile booking engine should feature current special offers, packages and promotions. Do not heavily discount in the mobile channel! The mobile channel is a last-minute distribution channel by default, and bookings will happen anyway without discounts. Hoteliers should maintain rate parity at all times.
- **Mobile-friendly payment system:** The mobile-enabled booking process has to allow for simplified reservations without the need to enter a credit card. This could be done by entering and storing the credit card information in advance via the “desktop” website. Another option, since the mobile channel is a last-minute booking channel, is to accept mobile reservations for a set number of hours (e.g. 4, 6 or 8 hours), or taking “no guarantee” reservations.

The Key to Revenue Growth in 2013

In 2013, a hotel that only offers a desktop website and ignores the user experience on mobile devices will experience a significant decline in revenue year over year. Hoteliers that implement the latest technology and best practices in each channel will steal market share from competitors, decrease dependency on the OTAs and generate incremental revenues that will improve the bottom line.

*This article was co-authored by **Mariana Mechoso Safer**, Vice President, Marketing at HeBS Digital. Ms. Mechoso Safer oversees all HeBS advertising, marketing and public relations. She also heads the HeBS Digital Las Vegas office, helping the team to develop and implement website optimization and digital marketing strategies for HeBS Digital's strategic accounts. Ms. Mechoso Safer's responsibilities for these clients include Direct Online Channel strategy consulting, project management services, Internet marketing campaign management, eCRM, and more. She has been instrumental in developing award-winning Internet marketing campaigns and website re-design and optimization projects for HeBS Digital clients. Ms. Mechoso Safer is a published author and a frequent guest lecturer. Her professional experience includes over ten years of work in the global travel and tourism industry. She has held travel management and group travel management positions in the United States, England, and Australia in leading hospitality and tourism companies, including STA Travel and world-renowned attractions such as the Westminster Abbey in London. Ms. Mechoso Safer is bilingual and holds an M.S. degree in Travel and Tourism Management from New York University's Tisch Center for Hospitality, Tourism, and Sports Management and graduated with a B.A. in Anthropology from UCLA.*

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