



## Action Plan to Ensure Your Hotel Website is ADA-Compliant

| By Gabriel Aponte

### What's the Issue?

The Americans with Disability Act (ADA) is a civil rights law created to increase accessibility for millions of Americans with disabilities. The law was updated in 2010 and now calls for new ADA Standards for Accessible Design which included revised requirements, for everything from outdoor recreational areas to websites and online booking processes, to be implemented by March 15th, 2012. The crux of the law is to make sure that everyone, including those with disabilities, has access to the Internet.

### **What Does it Mean for Hoteliers?**

There are approximately 41.3 million Americans with some form of disability. People with disabilities spend over \$13 billion on travel each year and if able use the Internet to help plan and purchase.

It's important to note that the 2010 ADA changes limit the obligations of third-party reservation operators that do not own the hotel such as the OTAs or GDS to have the same level of detailed ADA information on their websites compared to the property's own website and online booking engine. In other words, the property is liable for any adherence to the ADA requirements.

This is just another reason to focus efforts on turning the hotel website into the main customer engagement tool and booking channel. Always ensure that the property website is updated and accurate because the obligation falls with upon the property owner.

### **What is the Solution?**

Follow these simple steps to make sure the online channel is ADA compliant:

#### **On the Hotel Website - Amenities and Services**

- Create a new **ADA Amenities & Services** landing page describing the ADA-compliant amenities and services at the property, positioning the hotel as an ADA-friendly property. Include information about the facility's accessible entrance, wheelchair accessible rooms and other important accessible information (e.g. Information about the facility's accessible entrances).

#### **On the Hotel Website - Accommodations**

- Create a new **ADA Rooms** landing page describing the ADA rooms and their amenities. Make sure to include accessible room type, number and size of beds, type of bathing facility and in-room communication features (e.g. identify if the room has a shower or bathtub with handrails or roll-in shower).

#### **The ADA-Compliant Online Booking Engine**

- If any ADA room is featured on the hotel website, then a user must also be able find it on the booking engine and it must clearly be referenced as such.
- All other rooms must be sold before accessible rooms can be sold to those without special needs.
- Accessible rooms may not be double-booked and they may not be placed back in circulation once they are booked by and a confirmation is sent to guests with special needs.

#### **On Property Support of Your Website ADA-Compliance Efforts**

- Ensure guests with special needs can reserve accessible guest rooms during the same hours and in the same manner as all other guests
- Be sensitive to ADA guests. Training client-facing staff to use more appropriate terminology can make guests with special needs feel more welcome.
- Provide additional front desk training such as which ADA rooms are best suited for a guest with particular special needs, maintaining inventory lists of accessible rooms & features, and inquiring about members with special needs when reserving group travel.
- In cases of high occupancy periods, arriving guests with ADA room reservations should be properly screened to determine whether they qualify for an ADA room. If they do not, they should be given regular rooms and the ADA rooms kept only for qualified guests. Please note that not all disabilities and special needs are visible or immediately recognizable.

## What Do the HeBS Digital Marketing Experts Recommend?

While some of these changes may seem challenging, they will ultimately help hoteliers become ADA-friendly properties and highlight business to a substantial demographic. With the latest HeBS [CMS Premium](#) content management tool hoteliers will be able to create and edit unlimited pages at their choosing in order to stay ahead of ADA changes. Hoteliers can also make changes to their copy on the fly to ensure that their website complies with all ADA regulations.

[Contact HeBS Digital](#) to speak with your account manager or an industry consultant on how to align your online presence with ADA hospitality rules and guidelines today.

### About the Author and HeBS Digital:

Gabriel Aponte is Account Executive at HeBS Digital. Founded in 2001, HeBS Digital is the industry's leading full-service hotel digital marketing, website design and direct online channel strategy firm based in New York City ([www.HeBSDigital.com](http://www.HeBSDigital.com)).

HeBS Digital has pioneered many of the "best practices" in hotel digital marketing, social and mobile marketing, and direct online channel distribution. The firm has won over 180 prestigious industry awards for its digital marketing and website design services, including numerous Adrian Awards, Davey Awards, W3 Awards, WebAwards, Magellan Awards, Summit International Awards, Interactive Media Awards, and IAC Awards.

A diverse client portfolio of top tier major hotel brands, luxury and boutique hotel brands, resorts and casinos, hotel management companies, franchisees and independents, and CVBs are profiting from HeBS Digital's hospitality digital marketing expertise. Contact HeBS Digital's consultants at (212) 752-8186 or [success@hebsdigital.com](mailto:success@hebsdigital.com)