CLICKCONSULT®

THE IDEAL DESTINATION

DIGITAL MARKETING INSIGHTS FOR THE HOTEL AND LEISURE INDUSTRIES

CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION

Your market has changed: hotel and leisure consumers today have a greater freedom of choice than ever before and much higher expectations.

Rapid technological change means users embark upon a digital journey before even deciding upon the type of leisure activity or hotel they'd like to travel to. According to Google, 83% of leisure travellers and 76% of business travellers plan their trips online; of these, 95% use search engines to locate and book hotels.

This process of researching, selecting and booking a break has evolved from brochures and high street travel agents to multi-channel, multi-device experiences. Conventional business models in the hotel and leisure industries are being challenged by new online entrants to the market as well as established peers.

Your customers are leading the way in driving technological change and expect to be able to interact with your brand on a personalised, multi-channel basis.

This can create a lot of challenges, but also opportunities to differentiate your business and help set the agenda. You need a business strategy for the digital age that provides users with what they want, when they want it.

This eBook from multi award-winning search marketing agency Click Consult will show you how enhance your online visibility to attract visitors, increase brand awareness, convert leads and increase your return on investment.

HOW DO YOU MAKE YOUR BRAND STAND OUT?

The hard sell doesn't work anymore: not only because customers are more savvy and have more choice than ever before, but also because time is now such a precious commodity that people want to feel reassured they're making the right choice before deciding where to spend it.

This eBook shows how your brand can stand out using inbound marketing techniques: creating and nurturing connections with potential customers by delivering high quality, relevant content, underpinned by a strong online presence encompassing website optimisation, search marketing and social media.

While online advertising has its place in this mix, inbound marketing focuses on the long game of ongoing engagement and building trust rather than making a quick sale.

For hotel and leisure brands, operating in a sector dependent on consumer confidence, this is an extremely powerful approach.
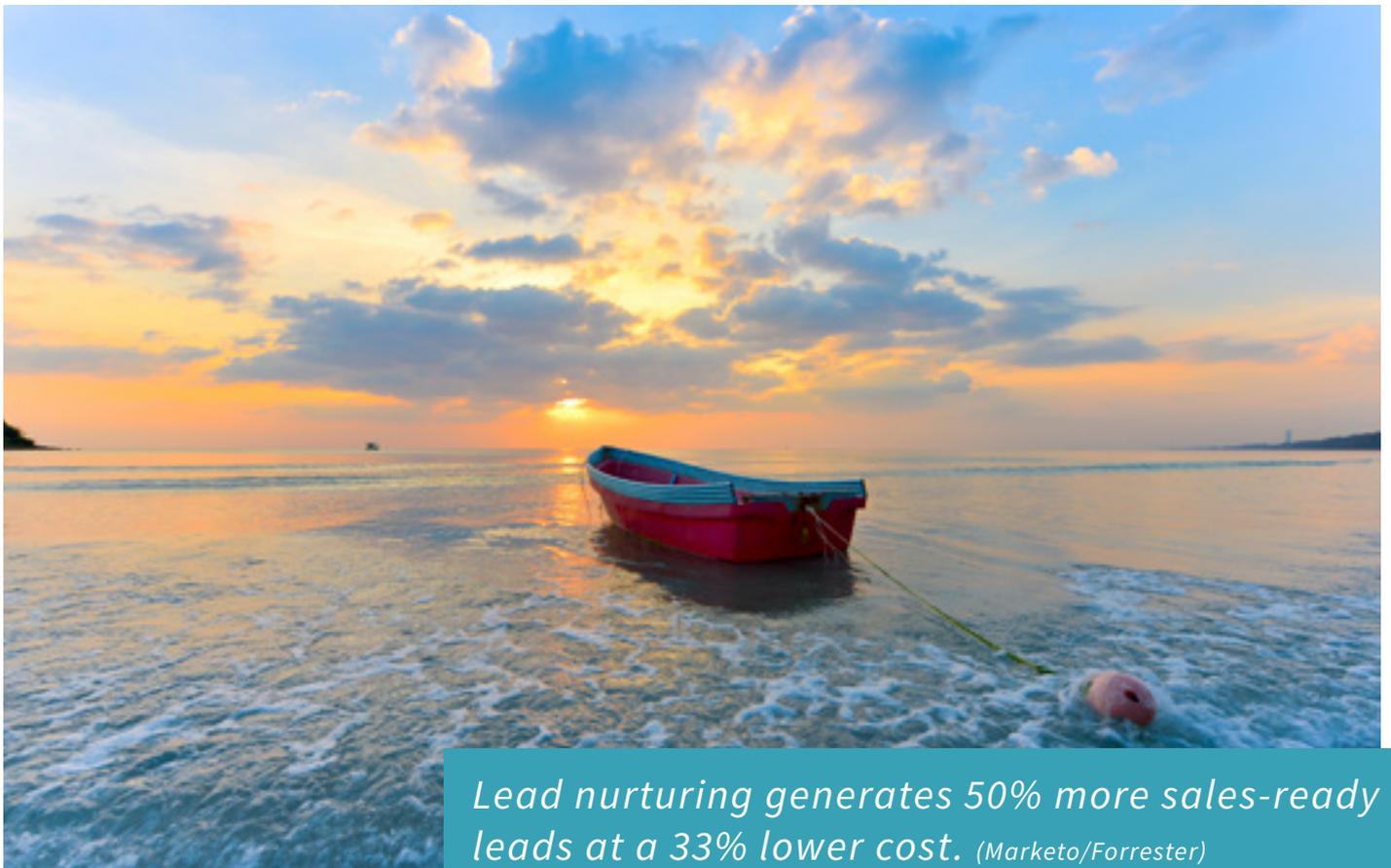
Lead nurturing generates 50% more sales-ready leads at a 33% lower cost. (Marketo/Forrester)

THE IDEAL DESTINATION

For your customers, your website is a taste of what's to come should they visit you. It's a golden opportunity to showcase the best your business has to offer with…

- Powerful visuals of your best features, such as beautiful scenery and mouthwatering meals. Or, even better, interactive video content such as 360° tours of your location - it's the next best thing to actually being there!

- Enticing descriptions of your activities, treatments, facilities and services.

- Well written, easy to follow copy with strong, engaging calls to action.

- Design and tone of voice that reflects the character of your business.

VisitFlorida.com's homepage centre's on an irresistible call to action which immediately encourages visitors to search and therefore personalise the content.
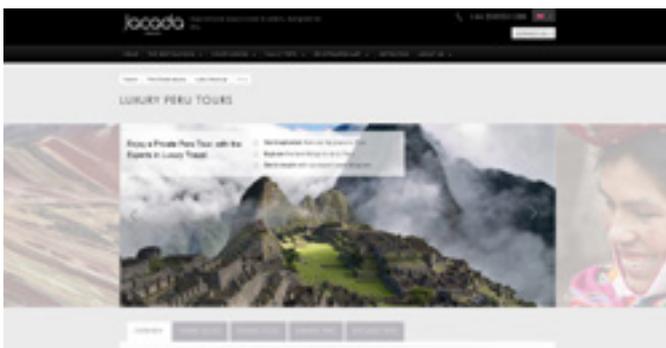
JacadaTravel.com boasts amazing visuals and tantalising descriptions of its destinations and activities.
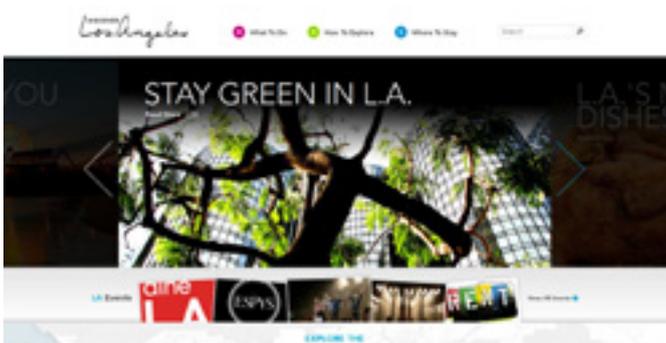
DiscoverLosAngeles.com is easily navigable, uses bold clean font across a scrolling homepage and features colourful images and great content to highlight the site's top assets, including regional guides, and celebrity itineraries.

A COMFORTABLE JOURNEY

Users expect to find what they're looking for quickly and easily: a user-friendly, intuitive site will not only keep users engaged and increase conversions, but also reflect a high level of customer service and attention to detail. Ensure your site provides the best experience possible by adhering to the following best practices:

- Clear, simple website design.

- Well-written, logically-organised content on each page.

- Fuss-free, intuitive navigation.

- Fast loading times (less than 3 seconds per page).

- Dates, times and prices updated in real-time to ensure accuracy.

- Contact details, including social media, clearly visible.

- Prompt responses to customers via email and instant chat.

Warning signs that your site's not performing as well as it could:

- Abandoned shopping carts.

- A high bounce rate (the percentage of visitors that leave after only visiting one page on your site).

- You're getting plenty of hits, but your conversion rate is low.

A SITE FOR TRAVELLERS ON THE GO…

By 2017, 88% of people in the UK will have mobile internet access, according to PwC. At the same time, mobile and tablet hotel bookings are already beginning to overtake 'traditional' desktop bookings.

According to Google, 38% of leisure travellers and 57% of business travellers use their mobiles to find travel information, while TripAdvisor research found that the number of people using mobile apps to book accommodation doubled from 2014 to 2015.

Hotel and leisure consumers want mobility, flexibility and easy real-time access to information, as well as the ability to make purchases safely and easily on the go.

Now that mobile-friendliness is used by Google as a ranking factor, a fully responsive website is no longer a 'nice-to-have': it's vital. If you haven't already, you should audit your site to make sure it's optimised for mobile, touchscreen devices.

A fully responsive site will include:

• A navigation bar that's as clear and easy to use as on desktop.

• Visible, irresistible calls to action that demand to be clicked-on.

• Text that fits the width of a mobile display.

• Content that can be viewed without the need for endless scrolling.

Some responsive designs will also format the website to hide features that are irrelevant to mobile devices.

A quick way of testing whether your site it mobile friendly is to use Google's mobile testing tool which is designed give you a definitive yes/no answer, as well as provide you with advice on steps to take to improve its responsiveness.
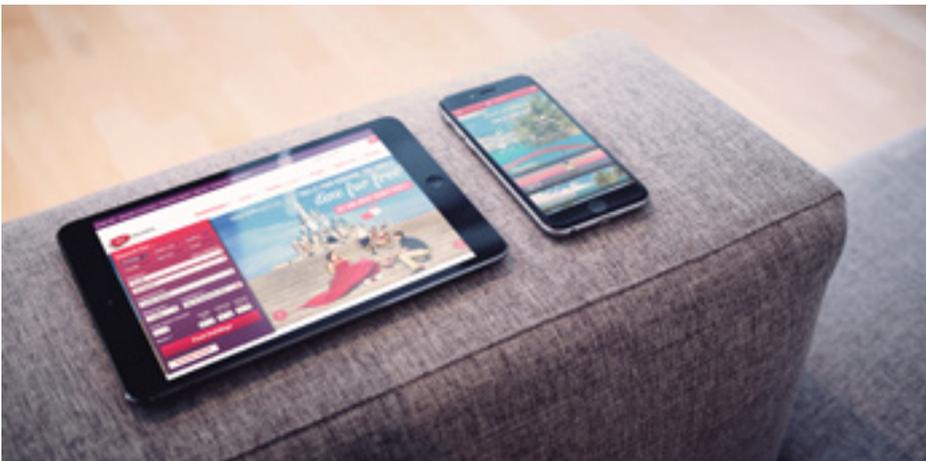
Virgin Holiday's website responds intelligently to the screen size of the device on which it is viewed in terms of content and functionality

DO YOU NEED AN APP?

If you're receiving a lot of mobile traffic, it might be worth considering whether a mobile app would suit your business.

Apps can improve user experience and boost conversion rates by making it quick and easy for customers to find what they're looking for and make a purchase or booking with the tap of a finger.

An app can also allow you to:

- Offer location based features, such as the ability to find the nearest hotel or venue.

- Offer easy to use booking systems.

- Send special offers to encourage repeat custom.

- Track valuable customer metrics, including user activity and location.

- Push notifications and reminders.

- Personalise content based on past behaviour, as users can always be logged in.

- Give customers an additional channel to upload pictures and videos.
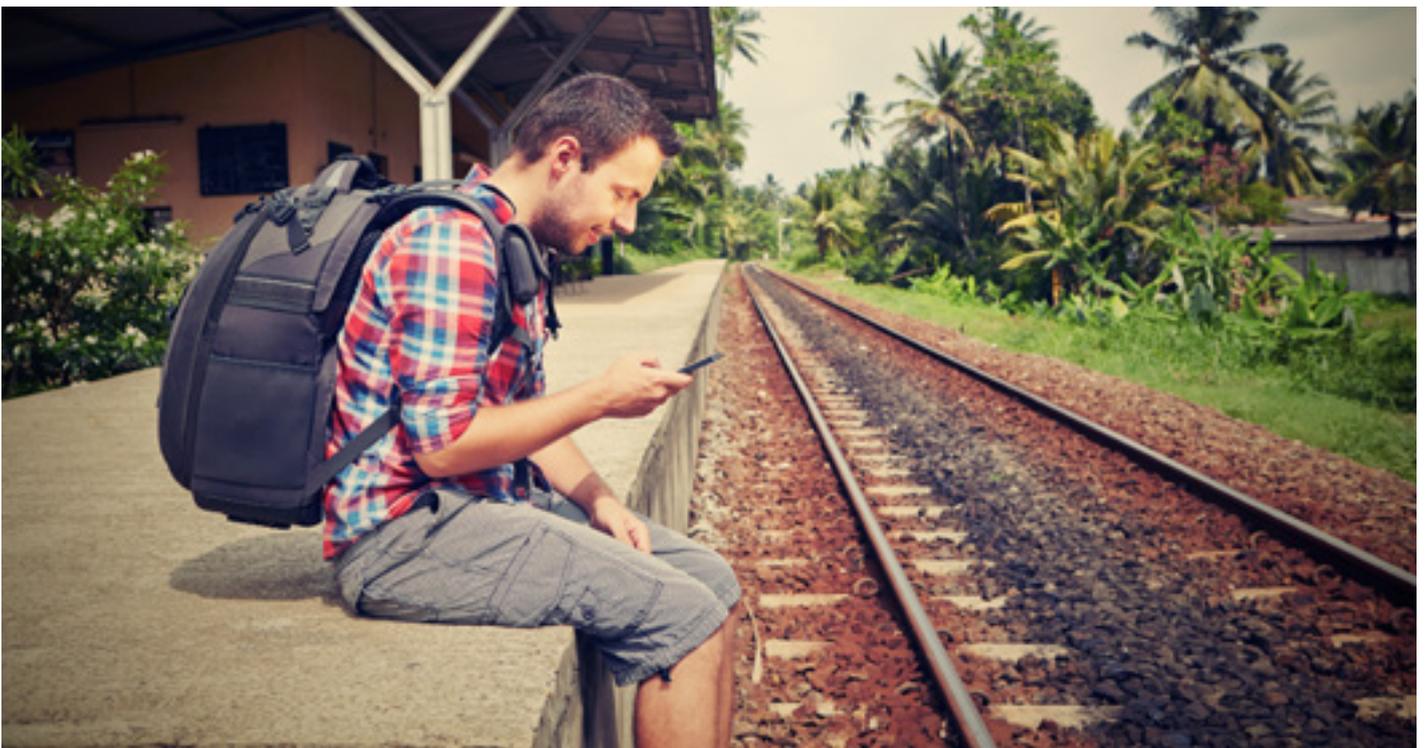
IT'S ALL ABOUT THE VIEW

Of course, a perfect website is no good if no one can find it, especially as most of us now plan and book our trips online.

But the majority of web users never look beyond the first page of search engine results: in almost three quarters of searches, users click on a page 1 result, according to Search Engine Land. That's why a robust SEO (search engine optimisation) strategy is essential to:

• Help ensure people can find you online.

• Increase high quality traffic to your website.

While no single factor guarantees top rankings or success, there are various ways of optimising the performance of your website.

Aggregator sites

Ensure your feed to sites such as Hotels.com, Trivago.co.uk, and Skyscanner.net are up to date with availability and accurate, competitive pricing, and that all of your content, including descriptions, images and customer reviews are optimised.
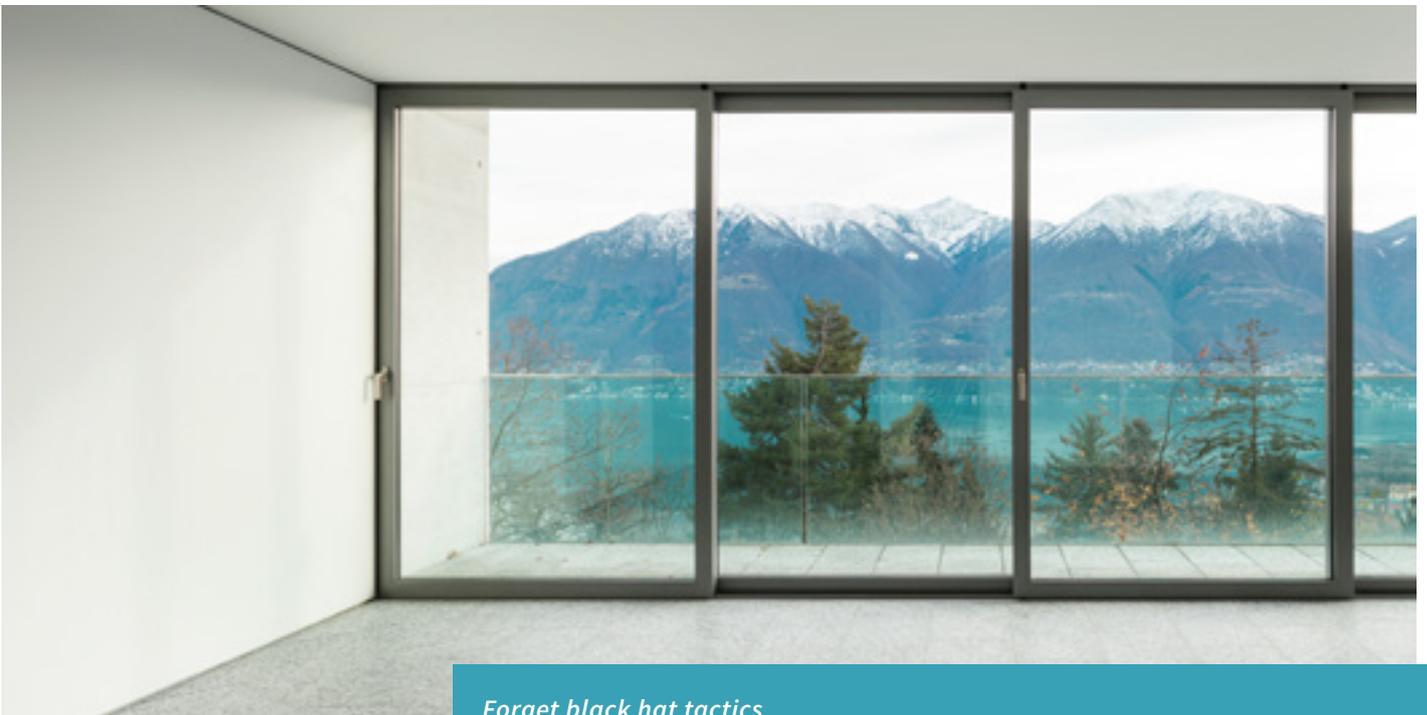
Forget black hat tactics
Search engines are now wise to unethical techniques such as keyword stuffing, hidden text/links, link farming and sneaky redirects – not only do these tricks no longer work, but could also result in your site being penalised, adversely affecting your ranking.

UNDERSTAND HOW YOUR CUSTOMERS SEARCH
KEYWORDS

You can help to make your website search-friendly by using keywords that users are likely to search for when trying to find a site like yours. Invest time in researching the words people are using to find your business. Try Google AdWords Keyword Planner Tool and Google Trends.

Think about your target demographic and the kind of language your customer is likely to use, rather than industry-related terms. Don't assume your audience will search for the same terms or jargon you use to describe your services internally.

Keep in mind that natural language search is becoming more popular and pervasive, which means people are increasingly likely to search for 'long tail' keywords: phrases of 3 or more words that are far more specific than a single, more generic keyword.

For example, 'off-road rally car racing' returns much fewer results than 'holiday', but someone searching for the more specific phrase shows a greater intent to buy and less volume means less competition. The more specific the phrase, the more likely your website will be relevant to the searcher's needs - and the more likely they are to convert.

The keywords you choose should signal to both potential customers and search engines what each of your webpages are about.

While keywords are important, don't forget the golden rule for web content is "write for people, not for search engines". The top priority for both customers and search engines is that your content is relevant and useful.

It can also be helpful to analyse competitors. Understanding what your search competitors are doing on the web provides insights into how you too could achieve higher search visibility, grow your customer base and increase repeat visits.

TECHNICAL TIPS

A clear, logical structure and intuitive navigation not only make for a better user experience, they also help search engines such as Google to find, index and rank your site.

There are other techniques you can use to improve the performance of individual pages and your website.

Examples include:

PAGE OPTIMISATION

- Meta titles (aka title tags) and meta descriptions.

- Headlines and subheadings.

- Alt text on all images.

- Substantial, readable content.

SITE OPTIMISATION

- An XML site map to provide search engines with a clear view of all the pages on your website.

- The right technologies and good navigation.

- 301 redirects to redirect traffic if you move or replace content.

- Fast page load times.

- Canonical linking to acknowledge duplicate content.

For more detail on these techniques and lots of other useful information, read our Simple Guide To SEO.
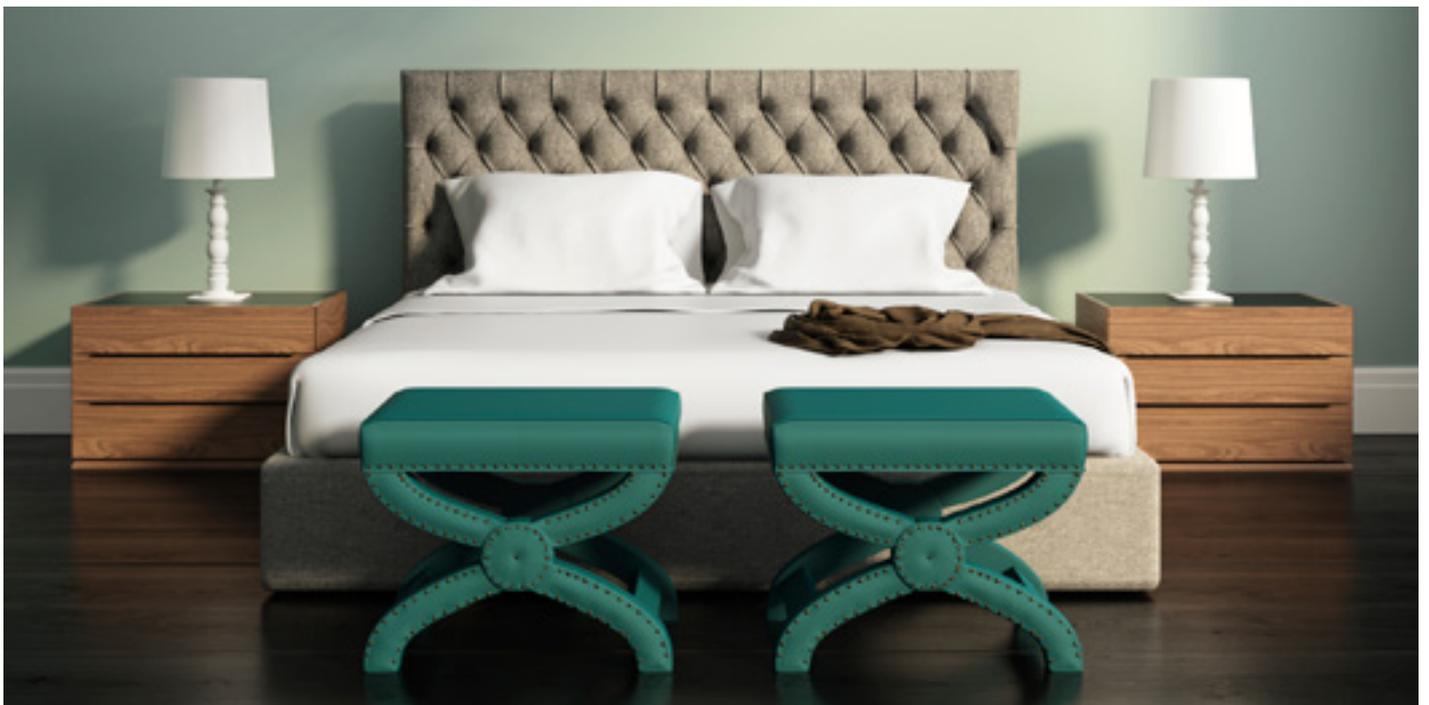
BUILD AUTHORITY WITH STRONG INBOUND LINKS

With trust a key factor for hotel and leisure consumers, it's likely that potential customers will look online for what they perceive as dependable sources of 'unbiased' information about your business.

Establishing a profile of relevant, high quality links positions your brand as an authoritative source, boosting its domain authority which is key to improving and maintaining your search engine ranking.

The best way to gain these natural backlinks is through engaging with bloggers, industry influencers, online communities and social media networks; a process known as outreach.

Links from sites such national press, Money Saving Expert and Mumsnet are valuable to your business as they have a good domain authority (DA) and are respected sources of information about hotel and leisure.

For more information about the outreach process, see our eBook, Link Building Through Outreach.
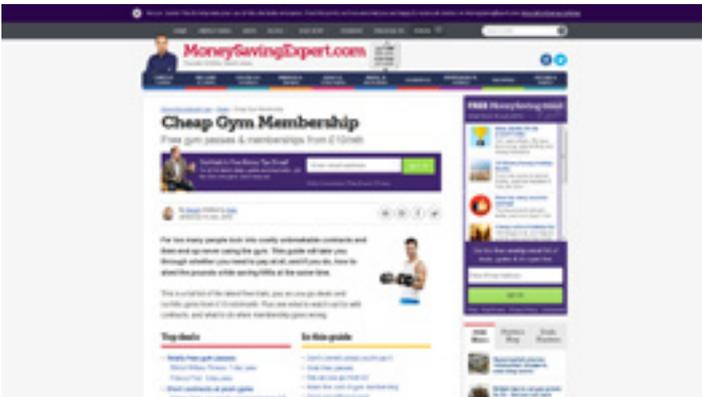
As well as giving you great publicity, having your link appear on well-established sites like MoneySavingExpert.com can boost your search engine visibility.


National press websites, such as The Telegraph, have a high domain authority (DA). An inbound link from a site with a high DA will help your site to rank well with search engines as well as giving you great exposure.

PUTTING YOUR BRAND ON THE MAP
LOCAL SEARCH IS KEY
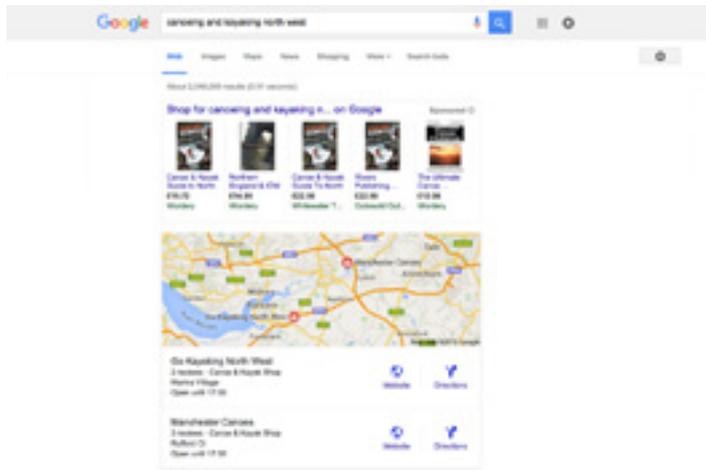
Local listings in Google search results

GOOGLE+ LOCAL

If your company operates offline as well as online, set up a Google+ Local page. This will allow you to provide contact details, photographs and other information about your company, which will be visible on search engine results pages (SERPs) and on Google Maps. Customers can then use your page to find you, write reviews and add photos.

OTHER TIPS TO INCREASE YOUR LOCAL VISIBILITY:

Provide a platform for customer reviews

'Social proof', ie, clear online evidence that others rate your services, have a huge impact on the trust people place in your business. TripAdvisor, Booking.com and Yelp are the main review sites for the hotel and leisure industries and are massively influential. Both sites allow businesses to set up a profile, giving you the opportunity to interact with customers who post reviews.

This is useful as it allows you to:

• Showcase the experiences others have had with your business.

• Build up loyalty and trust.

• Get a thorough understanding of your customers wants and needs, allowing you to tailor your offering.

• Respond positively to criticism.

Rich snippets

Rich snippets are additional pieces of information about your business that a search engine is able to identify on a web page.

You can insert semantic mark-up code on your page templates to communicate to search engines aspects of your business that you want to highlight, such as location(s), opening hours, reviews, photos, or offers and events.

This information then accompanies your search result listings, giving more exposure to your brand and allowing you to stand out from competitors. Search engines also use this information to help determine the relevance of your website's content to users' search queries, further boosting your organic search visibility.

There's particular potential for businesses in the hotel and leisure sector to use semantic mark-up to get ahead of their competitors, as users are typically interested in information relating to particular locations and venues, as well other people's reviews and ratings.

Here are some useful resources for getting to grips with it.

LANDING PAGE OPTIMISATION

Your landing pages are where visitors 'land' after clicking on a link to your website (for example, on an advert, offer or another call to action - in this context, after finding you in organic search results) and is a crucial opportunity to convert visitors into customers.

A good landing page should:

• Target a particular stream of traffic; it should lead on logically from the call to action that led the user to it.

• Focus on a single objective - make it easy for the user to take the next step in your conversion process, whether this is filling in a form, signing up for an offer or downloading a piece of content. This means a clear message and a strong incentive to take action; clean navigation with no unnecessary and distracting 'clutter'.

• Keep users engaged. If there's a form to complete, afterwards direct users to a thank you page or send an auto-response that suggests other offers they might find interesting or next steps they can take.

• Track and analyse your conversion rates regularly to learn what works best and allow you to optimise your landing pages.

The imagery and text on this landing page sums up the sentiment at the core of airbnb's offering: the chance to experience a destination from the point of view of a local.

CAPTIVATING CONTENT

We've touched upon content already in the context of user experience, which serves to emphasise how important it is - not only to humans, but search engines too. Search engines strive to return the most relevant and useful results and recognises pages that contain informative, substantial and unique content, rewarding them with higher visibility.

> *Quality content is crucial not just to your organic search visibility, but to all aspects of your online marketing efforts.*
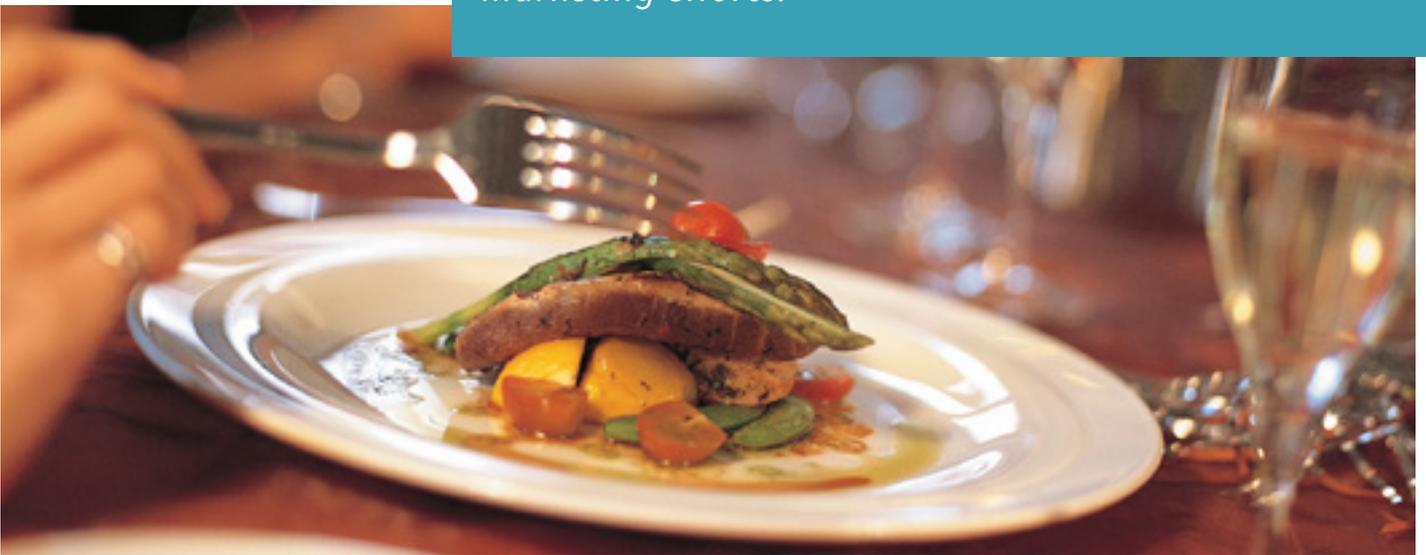
CONTENT MARKETING

Provide unique, valuable and shareable content, for example, via blogs, webinars, podcasts, email campaigns, or social media, which gives users reasons to keep your brand front of mind when they do make a decision to buy or make a booking. Content marketing is key inbound marketing technique, with the focus on building and nurturing relationships, rather than making a direct sale.

Remember, flat text isn't the only format in which to present content: think about Q&As, testimonials, videos or even interactive content such as quizzes or competitions.

Here are some ideas to get you started:

- Get customers' imaginations going with a video showcasing top 5 places to visit while they're in your area.

- Serve delicious food? Offer tempting recipes they can try at home before they visit.

- If you're targeting B2B customers with conference facilities, you could offer easy-to-customise presentation templates along with tips on getting the most from a meeting.

- Don't lose momentum during off-peak seasons; keep content and communication consistent throughout the year, for example, building excitement with early bird offers, competitions or guides to help customers plan their visit.

Another example of airbnb offering the chance to experience a destination from the point of view of a local.

McDonald's uses simple, colourful imagery on Instagram

Looking for more ideas? Why not ask for the input of staff who have day-to-day contact with customers?

Successful content marketing requires time and commitment. It's also essential to have a documented content marketing strategy to ensure a consistent and focused approach.

SOCIAL MEDIA

Social media could have been invented with the hotel and leisure industries in mind, as it's the ideal platform for your business to showcase its compelling content, such as images of idyllic locations and other elements of your services and allow users to indulge in a little fantasy browsing.

Jose Cuervo and the Wilderness Festival know how to work colours and imagery on these social posts so that users feel compelled to click on them

This example shows how one of Crystal Ski's updates has generated 143 'likes' and 24 'shares', including responses from the brand itself.

As well as the more 'traditional' social networks such as Facebook, Twitter and Google+, picture and video sharing social platforms such as Pinterest and Instagram are ideal for leveraging the element of wish fulfilment your business can offer with images and videos of aspirational activities and luxurious locations that make them think: *I want to be there.*

Buying decisions are based on 20% logic and 80% emotion.

And it follows that people share social posts that resonate with them on an emotional level, so aim to provoke a response with your content, especially interest, amusement, pleasure or excitement.

This Facebook post taps into users' emotions by evoking memories of past travelling experiences and inspiring them to go on another adventure

The hotel and leisure industries are ideally placed to the exploit these opportunities and provide unique cross-channel digital experiences.

Review sites such as TripAdvisor and Booking.com that are populated by user generated content, provide powerful examples of social proof; peer recommendations can influence the decision to buy, persuade people to act more quickly and reassure them they are making the right choices.

TripAdvisor's 2015 TripBarometer report found that accommodation ratings on a review site are the second most important factor impacting booking decisions behind price. Also, 85% of consumers are influenced by photos and videos posted online.

TRIPADVISOR

Based on user generated review of hotels, restaurants and other attractions, TripAdvisor is the world's biggest travel website, listing over 890,000 hotels from more than 45 countries.

TripAdvisor has a high level of trust among travellers and is considered a powerful influencer when customers are planning holidays and reviews tend to spread like wildfire around the web. A study by travel market strategists Tourism Economics estimated that user-generated content was "directly related to £1.7 billion of tourism spending in the UK".

How can you make it work in your favour?

- Encourage visitors to post reviews to strengthen your brand's online presence. React positively to criticism and see it as an opportunity to improve. Research found that hotels that took action to increase positive reviews on TripAdvisor actually increased their ratings and achieved a growth in visitors.

- Integrate TripAdvisor recommendations and other content into your website to showcase past guests' ratings and reviews and prompt others to add their own feedback. Not only do you gain from TripAdvisor's authority and credibility your website also gets a steady stream of up-to-date content without much effort on your part. This is easy to do using one of TripAdvisor's widgets.

TripAdvisor Insights offers lots of practical guidance about how to optimise your presence across the platform, use reviews to your best advantage and generate revenue with business listings and instant booking.

EMAIL MARKETING

Email campaigns should be a key part of any inbound marketing strategy as it's an effective way to keep in regular contact with your customer base, establish brand identity and build trust, all factors that are key to securing repeat visits and purchases from hotel and leisure customers.

Here are some email marketing best practices:

- After clicking on an email, it takes recipients only seconds to decide whether to continue reading or press delete - hook them in with snappy copy, enticing imagery and a strong call to action.

- But avoid including content that will slow down opening speed or impede usability and navigation.

- Combat inbox fatigue with an irresistible subject line.

- When planning your campaign, step into your customers' shoes to identify compelling and pertinent themes and messages.

- Consider the seasonal trends within both your industry and your own business, and plan in promotional messages for the run-up to offers and events in your marketing calendar.

- Develop a timetable of broadcasts within a campaign - sending emails too frequently is a surefire way to irritate and alienate people.

- Think in terms of developing an ongoing dialogue with your customer base; encourage and provide the opportunity for recipients to engage with your brand.

- Seek and act on feedback from your customer base and remember to provide an efficient unsubscribe facility.

- Target your campaigns as specifically as possible by segmenting your database by factors such as user behaviour or demographics and matching them with the most relevant messages.

- Consistency is key for brand awareness - ensure logos, colour and 'from' addresses are easily-recognisable and appropriate to your brand.

- Like your website, you should optimise your emails for viewing on mobile devices. Forrester Research shows that 28% of people read their emails on a smartphone and a further 16% on tablets - and this rate is probably even higher among customers in your sector who are out-and-about or travelling between destinations.

ADVERTISING ONLINE
PAID SEARCH

Pay per click (PPC) advertising, also known as paid search, gives you greater control over your presence on SERPs than a reliance on organic search results alone.

You create ads that target specific keywords related to your business, and your ads appear above or to the right of organic search results on Google when people search for these keywords (see screenshot below). The cost of your ads depends on the competitiveness of the keyword you're targeting, but you only pay if visitors actually click on your ad.

It's win-win for you and your potential customers; you drive highly targeted traffic to your website, while they get to see ads that are most relevant to their needs or requirements.

In fact, spend on paid search has overtaken that of traditional SEO techniques in recent years, according to Forrester Research, as device usage fragmentation and Google's algorithm updates has made organic traction more difficult to achieve (although most businesses find that using a combination of both is the most effective strategy).

For more guidance on paid search, download our Simple Guide to Paid Search (PPC).

Other advantages of PPC include:

•   Campaigns are quick to implement.

•   Easy to track or amend.

•   Have the potential to yield immediate results.

Other types of advertising you may want to consider include:

•   Display & banner advertising.

•   Retargeting.

•   Social advertising.
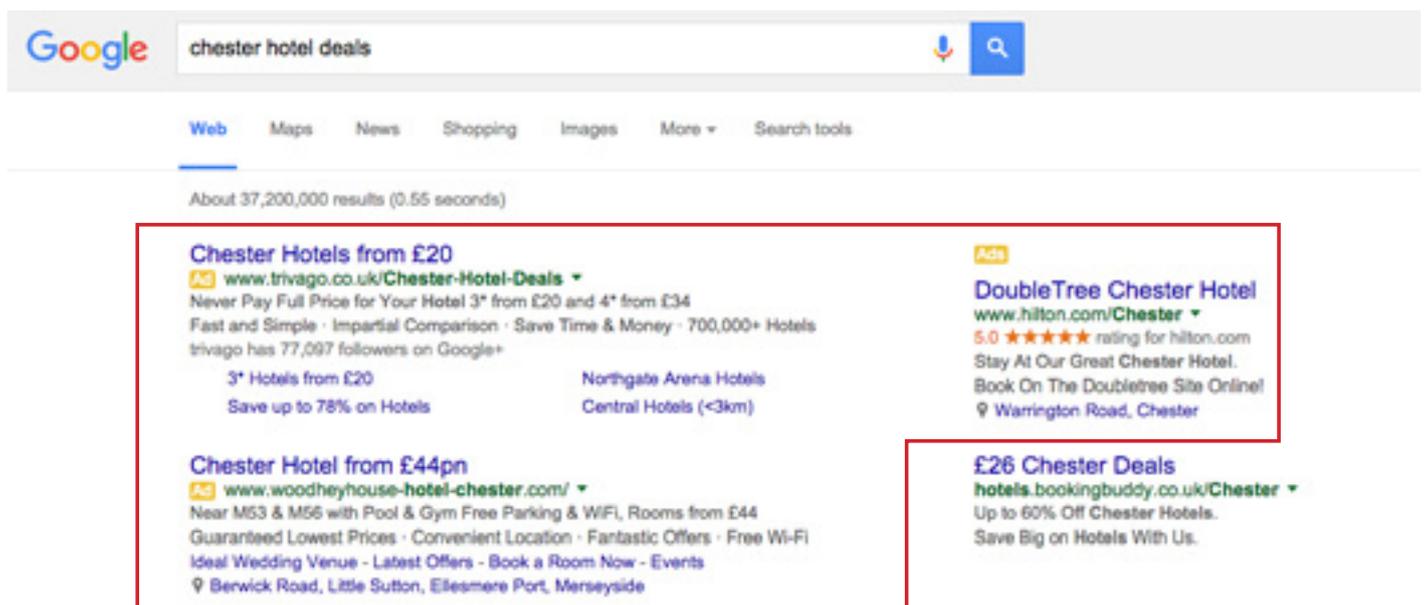
PPC ads appear above, to the right, or below organic search results.

GET IN TOUCH WITH US TODAY!

Our team of highly skilled search professionals utilise different digital marketing channels, and bring together the best practice principles of organic and paid search, along with social and other inbound marketing methods, to support your overall online visibility, brand, and messaging.

Contact us today to discuss how we could work together to take your strategy to the next level

0845 366 7589

Or visit our website to find out more

Our website also features an online resources section, full of useful eBooks. We also write a blog, where you can find an abundance of search marketing tips. If you're feeling social, get in touch on Google+, Facebook, Twitter or LinkedIn.

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