

Getting your hotel web site right

by Alan Bell
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Apologies in advance if you've started reading this article expecting useful tips about online booking, content management systems, search engine ranking, navigation design, colour choices, stock photography sources and the like.

And it may come as a surprise that the **LAST** thing you should do if you want to build a good hotel web site, fix one that's broken, get live after months of development dragging on, increase traffic, enquiries and bookings - or whatever your particular situation may be - is to start looking around for web designers.

Not what you might expect to hear from someone who's job is building web sites, including several hotel / hospitalities sites, and who's always on the lookout for more business. But the first thing you need to address to 'get your hotel web site right' is **your branding strategy**.

Going directly to a web company whose expertise is primarily technical really doesn't work well enough. Simply put, getting your hotel web site right needs to involve 3 parties; you, a branding consultant, and a web implementation company - all working together.

Let's say you do already have the foundation of a good branding strategy in place with your consultant. I would still advise that you avoid the temptation to contact a web company. What I mean is, don't do this yourself - get your branding expert to do it for you. Sit in on the meeting absolutely, and take a personal interest in your web site. But don't be tempted to take this on yourself. I've been amazed over the years how many companies 'knock together a web site', having invested in otherwise good overall marketing strategies.

GETTING IT RIGHT The sequence of events

You and your hotel



A good brand strategy



your web site
Visual Design Direction



The right web builders

This is the first of a series of articles I've been invited to write about how to get your hotel web site working well. Having looked closely at the situation and discussed things at length with many people in this sector, it seems that in the main the hospitalities industry is struggling to make use, or even sense of the internet and it's possibilities.

It may be stating the obvious, but 'working well' means generating enquiries and bookings, and having good standards of design and content that don't let your other marketing activities down. How many hotel web sites do you see that match the quality of their printed brochures?

Many of the issues raised in this series of articles will apply to the big players, but it's really the small and medium sized hotels (and B&B's / Guest Houses) we'll be referring to. The follow-up article to this one will be a case study on the Westport Woods Hotel & Spa web site.



www.westportwoodshotel.com

Although modest in scale, this is a significant success story. Our company Adnet designed and built the site, but make no mistake - it's a success story because our client and hotel owner Michael Lennon, was brought to us by a top brand developer (Gerard Tannam of Islandbridge), who worked closely with us throughout.

By the time I was contacted about building a web site the ground work was already done, including this excellent logo re-design (thanks Monica) - our job was to use our technical and design expertise to interpret things for optimum effect online.

Getting your branding right is like 'telling your story', putting in place the framework that will really connect you and your customers.

Having worked closely with Islandbridge, who specialise in the hospitality sector, I know this is the approach taken by Gerard Tannam. He suggests that "rushing in to build a web site without first putting down the foundations of a brand is akin to putting up the walls of a building without consulting an architect. If you're not clear about what you do and how to make sense of that for your customers, there's a real danger that your website will undermine the relationships you're looking to build."

So - don't just jump in... you'll save a lot of time and money, and see the rewards, if you approach your web builder with a strong brand framework and a clear focus on what to deliver for you and your customers.

From experience, I recommend Islandbridge, but the key thing is to choose someone who is media-neutral (i.e. is not looking to sell you additional services) and who really understands the business of hospitality.

I look forward to bringing you the story of the Westport Woods Hotel & Spa web site next time.

For expert advise on planning your hotel web site, contact:
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About the author

Alan Bell is co-founder and marketing director of Adnet, Ireland's longest established web builders. Coming originally from the advertising and design industry, he has played a innovative role in bringing the benefits of the worldwide web to a broad range of clients. He is always happy to be contacted to discuss the internet, and business partnerships:

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