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Web-direct bookings: The top five mistakes hotels make

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 By: [Scott Farrell](#)

For hotels of every size and destination, the hotel Web site is an increasingly critical source of profits. In 2007, Web-direct bookings climbed to over 34 percent of total reservations for major hotel chains, while independent hotels achieved an annual growth of 20 percent for direct bookings. Despite these trends, however, a large part of the hospitality industry is still missing out on the highly profitable opportunity to maximize their Web site's potential. Here are the top five mistakes hoteliers make in Web-direct bookings:

1. **Believing that "If you build it, they will come."** If you build a Web site but don't market it properly, you're throwing money away. Leveraging your site for maximum return requires a successful Internet marketing strategy, including comprehensive search engine optimization and pay-per-click (PPC) campaigns. Also, essential is marketing through all the channels where potential guests are shopping. For example, studies have found that nearly 60 percent of travelers who use the Internet will engage search engines to research hotels, and 66 percent check rates from at least three Web sites before purchasing. To maximize your Web presence, becoming visible to consumers must be your first priority.

2. **Neglecting a compelling call to action.** Like it or not, price is still an important variable in consumer buying behavior, particularly when the 'bang for the buck' is perceived to be high. Price is more than just a rate loaded into a booking channel; it can be a compelling call to action that attracts customers and drives demand for your hotel. Hotels that use a compelling call to action as part of their marketing strategy see a 20 to 30 percent increase in their Web site traffic.

3. **Failing to build confidence.** It's essential that prospective guests trust you. If they believe they can find a better rate for the same product on a third-party site, you'll forfeit as much as 25 percent profit for that booking--if not lose the booking completely. Best rate guarantees and rate parity are widely discussed in the industry, but their value is often overlooked. Both are essential parts of a good marketing strategy to build confidence and convert more bookings direct.

4. **Showing no availability.** The most common reason hotels lose customers is simply there is no product that can be booked. Once you've attracted guests to your site, make sure you have the inventory to give them what they're looking for. As demand increases, you should have the capability to automatically adjust your inventory, ensuring that the last rooms you have to sell are always through your most profitable channel, your Web site.

5. **Missing the value proposition.** Often hotels post too many room types and rates. The result is confusion for the customer—and a missed opportunity for the hotel to gain more revenue through upselling. Make sure you're conveying a clear message to shoppers. Accurately describe the value proposition of each type of room, and support it with rich digital media and enhanced navigation. If you show the value difference for an increased price for different room types, you'll empower shoppers to upsell themselves.

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In sum, your Web site is your most powerful tool for marketing your hotel, and Web-direct bookings are your best channel for driving demand, converting shoppers to buyers, and generating the most profitable, repeat business. Understanding and, more importantly, avoiding these five mistakes can help you maximize your hotel Web site for greater demand, stronger brand, and higher profit.

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