

# LASER-LIKE E-COMMERCE STRATEGIES

## Beat the Competition, Increase Bookings, Optimize Revenue



By Shane Etestad | Vice President, Innovation! | TravelCLICK Inc.

ARTICLE REPRINT

Lodging properties are gaining control over the increasingly dynamic online hospitality market, and many are winning business by regularly repositioning their e-commerce strategies with a laser-like focus. Here are several approaches on how to beat the competition, increase bookings, and optimize revenue from the perspective of three successful properties in three very different markets.



Jayson Smith, Trump Entertainment Resorts

### ONLINE MARKETING STRATEGY

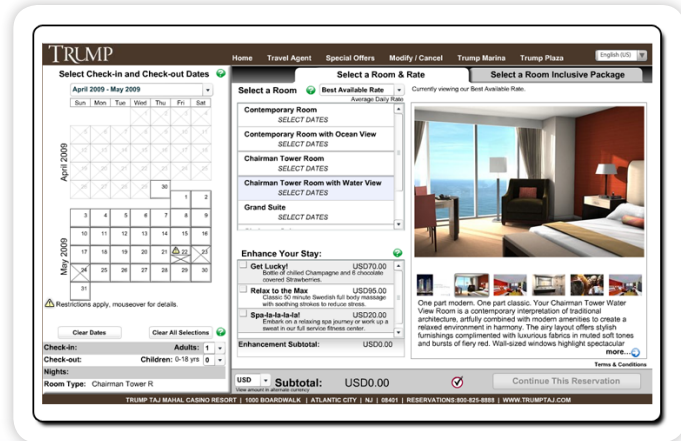
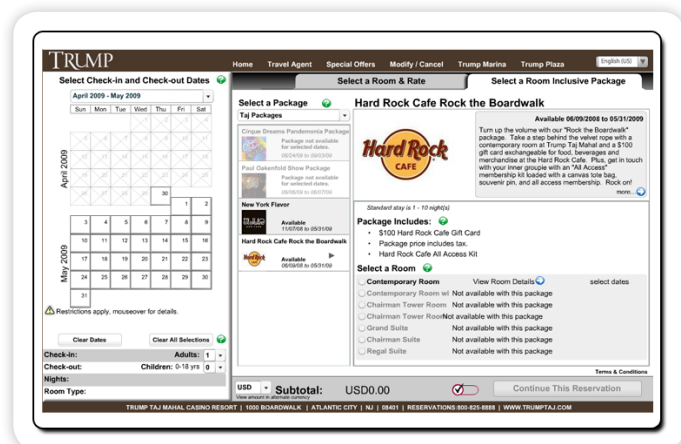
“We are constantly reinventing ourselves to remain competitive,” says Jayson Smith, director of e-commerce at Trump Entertainment Resorts in Atlantic City. “Timely messaging is vital.” Trump and other operators build integrated e-commerce marketing strategies to attract high-value, savvy shoppers with limited time to search multiple hotel and resort options on the Web.

Four key elements of an effective, integrated online marketing strategy are:

- A well-designed and frequently updated website that is attractive to search engines, and keeps customers interested through valuable content and interaction points that ask for reviews, trip sharing pointers or send-a-friend postcards. Convert them with clear call-to-actions, strategically placed throughout.
- A single-screen website booking engine that provides real-time inventory updates, optimized rates, and an ability to offer add-ons such as spa appointments and golf packages.
- Geo-targeted (localized) search engine marketing and focused email campaigns to be more competitive online and drive long-term revenue.
- Web analytics and intelligence tools to check the effectiveness of your investment by measuring search engine results and reservation conversions. Tools should also retrieve on-line chat room comments and customer reviews.

### MULTI-PURPOSE WEBSITES

The percentage of Internet bookings continues to surge — brand website bookings grew by over 23 percent in 2007. Resorts need an all-inclusive suite of Web site content-management tools that enable them to easily control their Internet content from anywhere with browser access. The cutting-edge Web sites today offer so much more content than great pictures of the hotel and a Google map. Be bold and choose to interact with your potential guests and allow them to interact with each other — through your Web site.



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Source: Resort + Recreation, September 2008

Corporate Headquarters  
Chicago +1 847 969 0820

Europe Office - Barcelona  
+34 93 520 80 08

Asia Pacific Office - Melbourne  
+61 3 9699 9969

www.travelclick.net

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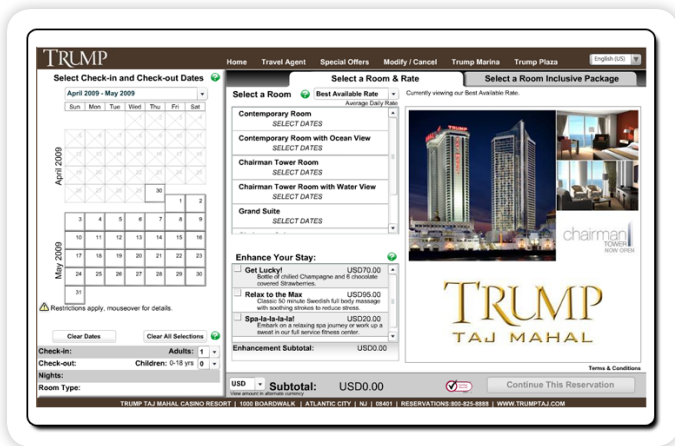
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“Making the best use of the Internet creates a level playing field for all hotels in a city, so no longer do the mega-brands and chains have the upper hand,” says Ray Senaya, sales and marketing director of Hotel Villa Emilia in Barcelona. “As an independent hotel, my marketing is completely focused on my target audience. This enables me to compete very aggressively in the search engines against my competition and the third parties both through organic search results and through our pay-per-click campaign. Having a well-built website and the single-screen booking process enables me to convert the visitors to my site efficiently, too.”

“The benefit of seeing such high demand coming through our own website means that we are less reliant upon other, more expensive sales channels,” he adds.

## DYNAMIC WEB BOOKING ENGINES

Transitioning to a single-screen booking engine can increase your website conversion by up to 50 percent. This is especially true if users are able to navigate effortlessly through room types, photographs, descriptions and rates in a truly interactive way, which creates a customized stay experience and encourages up-sell. Trump Resorts discovered this.

“When you’re trying to reposition yourself, an investment in a best-in-class booking engine is a great place to start,” says Trump’s Smith. “We transitioned from a bare bones process to full integration with TravelCLICK’s iStay booking engine. We immediately saw substantial results in web-direct conversions for hotel stays, all while leveraging integrated up-selling capabilities for tapping into additional spend. The immediate impact on our online booking revenues made us think, ‘Why were we not doing this all along?’”

## EFFECTIVE WEB SITE MARKETING ON ONE PLATFORM: JOIE DE VIVRE HOTELS

A complete marketing distribution solution for your valuable, perishable inventory makes you more competitive online and drives long-term revenue — from best-available rate guarantees on your home page to preferred placement on the global distribution systems. Proactive channel management solutions enable you to update rates, inventory, and restrictions across multiple third-party sites from a single, web-based platform.

Joie de Vivre Hotels, a boutique hotel company that manages over 35 properties in California, uses the advanced booking engine capabilities and yield management tools of its central reservation system, iHotelier. The tools help simplify inventory management.

“We can go in and create a special package for one of our 22 Bay Area properties and allow it to automatically close when we’ve sold five of them,” says Linda Palermo, chief revenue officer with Joie de Vivre. “At the property level, we can also track advertising clicks any time we run a live link on the Web or in a banner ad. At the corporate level, what’s useful is that we have access to demographic information such as what country, state and city the guests are coming from.”

“We use it as both a marketing system and a booking engine,” Palermo says.



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## MONITOR YOUR BRAND

Continually reinventing your online e-commerce strategy to remain competitive requires some insights into how your current plan is working. You must decide what metrics define success, and then measure your tactical results regularly.

Have you won competitor share?

Is your hotel rating changing over time? Is your reputation consistent across sites and time?

What are guests saying about your hotel on travel sites, chat rooms, and blogs?

What is your page rank in relevant searches on key travel sites such as Expedia, Orbitz, or Travelocity? Who appears before you (and will likely get the booking)?

“We use an online market intelligence tool that provides us with an easy and effective way to evaluate guest comments across multiple channels,” Trump’s Jayson Smith says. “We have assembled an internal team that continually evaluates feedback and reports both on areas in which we excel, and on those that need improvement. Any service experience that falls short of expectations is resolved quickly and courteously. Resort operators must be mindful that customers will be commenting about their experiences online. This presents a great opportunity for management to follow through and provide extraordinary levels of service to the customer.”

Hoteliers from these three very different properties, with varying business needs and target markets, focused the same e-commerce toolset to achieve a uniquely customized way to maximize revenue in each case. Are you applying a laser-like approach to your property’s e-commerce strategy? It’s one proven way to increase market share and incremental revenue for any property in any market. ■



Leading TravelCLICK as its chief creative visionary for the Web, Shane Ettestad is Vice President of Innovation! In this role he is responsible for advanced breakthrough product concepts and designs across a broad portfolio of award-winning Internet marketing solutions. With his ear to the ground and hands on the keyboard, he analyzes the latest hospitality industry trends, online technologies, and user experience for what’s hot and most importantly—what’s next. He was most recently President and CEO of Blue Square Studios, before its acquisition by TravelCLICK, and is the visionary behind the Hospitality Toolkit®, the industry’s most robust content management system converging effective self-management functionality with creative design tools. A 20-year veteran of the industry, Shane has extensive, travel marketing experience and a lifetime passion for fusing design and technology.



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