

## **RezStream Myth Buster: Does Website Design Relate to Conversion Rates?**

This month's myth buster will examine the quality of website design and how it relates to website conversion rates. It is widely thought that if a website looks attractive or if a property owner gets positive feedback from visitors to their website, the website will perform well by converting a high percentage of visitors into paying customers.

### **Myth: Hotel websites that are visually appealing convert "lookers to bookers" at a higher percentage.**

A website has many component parts that contribute to its success or failure. This article will focus on two of these components. The first element to address is the visual appeal or **artistic component** of the website. The second element to study is the website's functionality or **technical component**. These two factors are very closely related in the success of website conversion rates. It is very important that both the artistic and technical components of the website are given meticulous attention to detail. If one of these components is not properly addressed, the website will perform poorly and will make little money for the hotel that it represents.

The artistic side of a website design is generally what gets the most attention. This is the component that people react to on an emotional level. Is the design cohesive? Do the colors and shapes blend well with each other? Is the photo quality high? Sometimes the question is as simple as "Do I like it?" Most designers feel that they have a successful design if the answers to these questions are yes. If one or more of the answers to these questions is no, most would agree that more work is needed to make the website a business success.

Here are a few questions to think about that address the functionality or technical side of the design. Is the website easy to understand? Are links to frequently requested information readily available? Is it easy to make a reservation and is there a comfort level for an online user wanting to make a reservation? In order for the technical side of a design to be successful, the answer to these questions must be yes.

Now that we have identified the key components that make a website successful, let's examine a few typical website scenarios. What if you have a website that answers "yes" to all of the questions from the artistic component, but the property has elected not to use a booking engine? Perhaps the booking engine used is not user-friendly or is not

hosted on a secure server? In this case, you would have a website that looks great, is easy to understand, but only functions well up to the point of booking a room. By most measures, this website would be "a success," but still would not generate the anticipated online revenue. How about a website that is generally artistically attractive but is not complete with room photos or rates readily available to the visitor? This scenario would lure the website visitor down the reservation path, but quickly frustrate them by not providing all the information that a visitor requires before booking. Another example is the use of flash movies for a home page or what is commonly referred to as a Flash "intro". While this may be beautiful and high tech, it really just adds another "hoop" for your visitor to jump through on their way to booking a room. Aside from potentially frustrating your website visitor, flash intros are also difficult to optimize for search engines and usually get fewer visitors than similar websites that do not have an intro. Again, these websites might look great superficially, but they will not generate nearly the amount of online revenue. These websites do not contain BOTH the artistic and technical functionality required for online revenue success.

Another common situation is one in which all the feedback about a hotel's website is positive, but the website still underperforms. Often, feedback that property owners use to make business decisions are from people not qualified to offer sound website advice. The best approach to measuring the effectiveness or success of your website is to work with a professional design firm that specializes in website conversions and revenue. These companies will be able to combine years of tested experience with scientific statistical data gathered from your website to determine your website's strengths and weaknesses. Once these are identified, you will be empowered with the information to correct problems and insure that your website generates the most possible online revenue for your hotel.

As you can see, having a website that looks good but still does not generate the desired revenue is possible. From our experience at RezStream, this scenario is quite prevalent in the hotel business.

**This month's myth:** Hotel websites that are visually appealing convert "lookers to bookers" at a higher percentage is.....**BUSTED!**

***About the author***

Joe Pawlak is the Vice President of sales and business development for RezStream. Joe also heads the Internet marketing division. Joe has

over seven years extensive experience in the website design, hosting, and marketing arena.