

**Monthly Myth Buster:  
Cutting corners on website design & management:  
practical thinking or potentially a pitfall?**

At RezStream, we believe that a lodging property website should be designed with the end goal of generating as much online revenue as possible. Because there are so many variables involved in the creation of an effective website, **RezNEWS** is providing the following summary of pitfalls and their practical counterparts to help our subscribers make sure that they stay focused with the goal of creating and sustaining an efficient, profitable online revenue stream.

If you intend to make money with your website, the first and most important rule in website design is to create a website with the end-user's needs in mind. I have seen many instances where a property manager (not a professional web designer) becomes so excited and engrossed in the design process that this process turns into an "opportunity" for him to illustrate personal artistic expression. In the end, the manager feels a huge sense of accomplishment and although may appear the envy of his friends, the end result is actually a dysfunctional and underperforming website. Travelers that want to book a room online have fairly simple needs; they need to trust the source, they need to have information available easily and quickly, and they need a safe, streamlined booking process. While there are other important factors, it is critical to make sure these simple guidelines drive the design process. Websites should always be designed to deliver what the visitor *actually* needs, not what a property manager needs or thinks the visitor needs.

Another common mistake is using an amateur designer or entrusting someone "local" to do the design work. Let's face it, everyone has a brother or cousin or nephew that thinks they are a website "guru". While this may initially save money and help out a friend or relative, there are many aspects to consider before going down this road. There are four main factors that affect website design quality and these factors all change constantly. Design software, designer skills, website visitor preferences, and bandwidth all have a profound impact on what you can and cannot do with website designs. In this example, we will focus on software and designer skills as these elements go hand-in-hand. As software changes, it is important that a design shop is dedicated to using state-of-the-art tools and the most current design software versions available that will allow designers to apply the best of their skills. Professional designers create new designs and code websites every day. It is just unrealistic to assume that someone with outdated software and/or limited experience will deliver the level of product that will guarantee success. The second mistake in this category, placing too much emphasis on using a local company, can also be easily avoided. Using email, fax, telephone, and the postal service makes it very easy to hire a professional anywhere in the world and still have nearly the same access level of communication that you would with someone local. While it is nice for your designer to experience first hand the "look and feel" from a personal visit to your property, having a professional create a beautiful design that functions well and generates revenue far outweighs this one benefit.

Many studies and statistics now support the fact that a booking engine, which provides a safe transaction and a confirmed reservation for the online user, converts at a much higher rate than availability calendar tools. If your property wants to make more money online, do not go with an overly simplistic solution. Use the following three guidelines when choosing a booking engine.

1. Make sure that your booking engine is integrated into your website design. This will ensure that your visitor does not feel as if they have been "bounced" to another site where they will have to re-establish trust.
2. Be sure that you can take credit card transactions via a secure server that offers credit card encryption.

3. Make sure your booking engine has a step-by-step process for online users and offers confirmed reservations. The step-by-step process (like you see on most major travel portals) is proven to be more accepted and effective than a single page booking process. A real-time confirmation is also essential. People want to book a room and feel confident that a real reservation has been made. Fewer and fewer people are willing to wait to see if your property can handle their request. Would you want to spend the time researching and trying to book a room only to find out that you were unsuccessful and had to start the process over? Probably not, and neither does your website visitor. Many property managers feel that they must have the ability to make website updates on their own without using their Webmaster. Here are several considerations to defend NOT making your own changes. A well designed website will contain compliant code and search engine/keyword optimization. When inexperienced individuals try to make these changes, they run the risk of altering important keywords and code that can render the website less effective in search engines. With multiple editors, the website also becomes vulnerable to overwriting previous work. Updates made by one party can be inadvertently replaced with the updates of another and in effect, could erase important content. One simple way to avoid these pitfalls is to hire a lodging specific Webmaster that understands the time-sensitive nature of special offers, discounts, and seasonality. A two to three business day turn-around for website changes is a good standard to strive for.

As with many things, it is always tempting to cut corners, save money, and purchase lower quality tools that appear at first glance to offer the same benefits as higher priced options. Due to the enormous income potential of a lodging property website, and as outlined by the points above, your website is **not** the area in which you should cut costs. In many ways, a professionally designed and maintained website will pay for itself many times over. By following these basic tenets, you can be sure that your website will generate the most possible online revenue.

This month's myth, whether it's a smart idea to cut corners on website design and management is...**BUSTED!**

***About the author***

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