

Monthly Myth Buster:

If you're not on the leading edge of Web 2.0, you are falling behind.

In this month's Myth Buster, RezNEWS will highlight the important components of a successful Internet marketing strategy and dispel the myth that Web 2.0 has to be a primary focus in order to achieve your promotion goals. It's hard not to notice the numerous articles written about the role of Web 2.0 as it relates to the travel industry and its importance to a hotel's Internet marketing plan. It's in these articles that you find countless, Internet marketing "experts," using Web 2.0 jargon in an attempt to get hospitality businesses to jump on the Web 2.0 bandwagon. These so called experts often entice people into thinking if they do not implement Web 2.0 ideas, they will be left behind those who do. The reality is that some Web 2.0 ideas, like blogs and online user reviews, can enhance your Internet marketing efforts. However, only the largest hoteliers, with very sophisticated Internet marketing budgets and who already have basic search engine optimization covered should focus their efforts on adding Web 2.0 bells and whistles such as blogs, wikis, and online reputation programs.

Web 2.0, as stated by Wikipedia, "refers to a perceived second generation of web-based communities and hosted services - such as social-networking sites, wikis, and folksonomies - which aim to facilitate creativity, collaboration, and sharing between users." Given the lack of set standards as to what "Web 2.0" actually means, implies, or requires, the term can denote radically different things to different people. Web 2.0 is commonly associated with MySpace, Facebook, TripAdvisor, blogs, wikis, and YouTube.

A common example of Web 2.0 is blogs and online user reviews. Online reviews, as typically found on tripadvisor.com or other hospitality review websites, can impact buyer decisions. However, that does not mean that all hospitality businesses should adopt sophisticated "online reputation" programs. Why e-mail previous guests or place a card on every nightstand that says "if you liked your stay, please write a review on Trip Advisor," if your property offers pillows that are flat, beds that are uncomfortable, or your staff is indifferent to accommodating a guest's special requests? *Why not make sure to take care of proper lodging basics before getting on the Web 2.0 bandwagon?*

Instead of feeling that you must employ Web 2.0 tactics, RezStream recommends implementing an Internet marketing strategy geared to increase online revenue by having a search engine friendly website design. What good will a blog be if it exists on a poorly designed website that people do not even see? If a website is not designed for search engines and user friendliness, then search engine optimization (SEO) is impossible. SEO can include, but is not limited to keyword optimization, directory submissions, link building, content building, pay-per-click (PPC) management, and landing pages. Hoteliers have a hard enough time just completing daily sales and marketing tasks to also add Web 2.0 bells and whistles. Focusing on Web 2.0 can be meaningless especially if its time commitment takes you away from the basic responsibilities that play a direct role in increasing revenue. People often forget that the entire goal of Internet marketing is to increase your property's online revenue, not win online popularity contests.

TripAdvisor.com is a respected travel social medium where user generated comments regarding a guest's travel experience is posted to the property's Trip Advisor profile. Marketing companies are now suggesting that lodging properties monitor these social networks by responding to negative posts. While it is beneficial to be aware of your customer comments, it is only worth addressing negative or inaccurate reviews a couple times a month. The best way to manage your online reputation is to deal with complaints while the guest is still at the property. Furthermore, travel resource *PhoCusWright* believes most online guests actually make their reservation first and then, as a form of validation, investigate the travel sites to confirm whether or not they made the best choice. The bottom line is user reviews may impact buyer decisions, but more importantly, keeping your business focus on maintaining a well-designed and well-optimized website, as well as taking good care of guests while they are in fact at your property, should be your primary and long-term concentration.

Conclusion

This month's myth, that if you're not on the leading edge of Web 2.0, you are falling behind is...**BUSTED**. Hopefully, this article has illustrated that Web 2.0 is only a marketing "buzzword" used to catch the attention of business owners who would be better served making sure they have basic Internet marketing fundamentals in place.

About the authors

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