

10 dos and don'ts for hotels using Google

Start leveraging all that Google has to offer

Google has steadily evolved its travel products to insert itself firmly at the center of travel search. With many travelers using the global search engine as a starting place for travel inspiration, the company realized that it could leverage its information-sorting expertise to improve the search experience for flights and hotels. Its Google Hotel Ads interface is clean and effective, delivering the right information clearly and efficiently. It has quickly become central to the way many people search and book hotels.

Yet, Google offers far more to hoteliers than just Google Hotel Ads. For those looking to get a stronger handle on their hotel's digital marketing through Google's products, here are some ways to capture more value from their ecosystem of tools and products.

DO:

Use custom audiences to target more effectively

Audiences are a handy tool to match your message more effectively. With audiences, you can cluster groups of past guests according to similar characteristics, such as geography or stay patterns. Once you load these segmented audiences into tools such as Google Adwords, you'll be able to be more thoughtful in how you market to each segment.

This upfront consideration improves conversions, as your marketing messaging resonates more clearly with each audience. The custom audience feature is also a great way to show ads to guests that have stayed with you before. Engage your audience over time so that you stay top-of-mind.

DON'T:

Creep people out

It's a fine line between creepy and effective. Sure, most of us are used to re-marketing ads following us around the internet. But that doesn't mean that we're ok with it. Hoteliers must be careful about how often you serve ads to these custom audiences. An intentional approach is required, which means that you need to have a very clear objective in mind when targeting specific audiences. Know those audiences well,

and then make sure all of your messaging resonates well with them.

This keeps the creep factor low and the relevance factor high – which also happens to boost engagement with your ads, lowering your overall cost per click.



DO:

Publish videos to YouTube for deeper engagement

YouTube is widely considered to be the second-largest engine in the world (behind only Google itself). This means that hotels without a video presence lose out on some critical top-of-the-funnel marketing opportunities. Consider uploading some destination-oriented content periodically to keep your hook in the YouTube waters. As you get more comfortable with the platform, consider placing some YouTube ads. You may catch a booking!

To generate ideas, ask your staff about the local spots they love most. It could be as simple as doing an interview series that both showcases your staff and the destination.

DON'T:

Publish sporadically

Here's a common scenario: A hotel brings a vendor in to "fix" digital marketing. The vendor recommends YouTube videos. The hotel makes a few, and the vendor publishes them to a new YouTube account. Then, silence. The vendor leaves and the hotel has no content plan thereafter. This is a bad look. If you don't have the resources to support a new channel with content in the long-term, take a minute.

Find the time and resources to make the plan, and then execute it with longevity in mind. A dormant profile is often worse for your brand than a non-existent one.

DO:

Set distinct Goals to track conversion value

Analytics is a critical piece of a high-performing marketing discipline. Gut instincts and rough assumptions are only as good as the analytics that verify or dispute them. It's much easier to let the customer show you what works well. With Goals, you can identify an action you want to track in Google Analytics and build out metrics and dashboards from that. The most common Goal is a completed booking; you may also want to consider things like setting up a user account, as well as a Goal for each stage in your funnel (homepage, search page, guest details page). Then, once this Goal is completed, you can optimize each step of the journey to get a better handle on your conversions.



DON'T:

Overestimate your booking value

For goal tracking on Google Analytics to be most useful, it has to be accurate. To get that accuracy, you need to have a valid value for each Goal. Any mistake or over-estimation there will be amplified across each stage of the funnel. Pop over to your PMS and find an average value. Then you'll have a better idea of the value your website brings. This is especially helpful with AdWords campaigns, so you'll be able to see exactly how much it costs you to acquire a customer, through the lens of that customer's booking value. That way you can attract more of the highest-value guests first.

DO:

Optimize on-site SEO to drive more direct bookings

SEO maintains its grip on the web. Even as more top search spots become sponsored, there's still a great value from ranking well organically. The Google Search Console helps you improve performance on Google's search engine. Armed with the knowledge around which keywords attract visitors, you can better optimize your content. For example, deploy a content calendar that includes blog posts targeting promising keywords, or push more Adwords spending to keywords that might deliver more affordable traffic. The tool also gives you insight into how Google's invisible bots experience your site, so you can adjust any poorly performing pages.

Remember that Google now prioritizes the mobile experience and penalizes sites that load slowly on mobile, so before you even embark on a robust content calendar, make sure your website is mobile-friendly.



DON'T:

Try to outsmart the Google bots

Proper SEO optimization should never include lazy vendors that stuff keywords across your website. Keyword stuffing is when a website overloads a page with a targeted keyword in an attempt to game search results. This technique is outdated, as Google now uses machine learning to understand a page's context rather than just its content. In fact, Google has been known to penalize sites that use these types of brute-force techniques. Don't risk it. Employ staff or vendors that are knowledgeable about modern SEO. Vendors that promise a quick fix should be avoided.

SEO is a long-term strategy that reaches across how a website's structure and content is maintained for users. High-quality, informative, and valuable content is now a must!

DO:

Instill a culture of continuous learning at your hotel

Learning should be a core feature of your hotel's culture. It establishes an environment of "can do" attitudes and capable creatives. When it comes to digital marketing, knowledge is the foundation for delivering campaigns that drive revenue and save money.

To stay on top of Google's ever-changing product suite, it's absolutely critical to use online learning tools to establish expertise and learn the latest and greatest out there. Google invests heavily in its Digital Garage, an online learning platform with certifications on topics as broad as digital marketing and as deep as customer segmentation. Even if you're lucky enough to have a healthy budget, ongoing learning positions you to be more effective in meetings with vendors — and level-up your own influence when it comes to delivering and reporting on your campaigns.



DON'T:

Leave it ALL up to the experts

With limited time and financial resources, many hotels prefer to outsource digital marketing to vendors. These agencies do bring some major benefits: namely, the ability to leverage multiple data sources, and expertise gained from working across multiple client portfolios. Digital marketing vendors can also be more efficient with your budget, as they can optimize intelligently.

However, you shouldn't leave it all up to the experts. Your efforts at continuous learning should include digital marketing so that you can contribute to the conversation and ensure your vendors are continuously pushing the boundaries of what can be achieved. You want them to know that you understand the landscape and that you expect to see ROI across your campaigns.

A little preparation guarantees the biggest bang for the buck!

At Cendyn we can help

Looking to up your digital marketing game? Contact us today for a demo of our CRM and Data Driven Digital Marketing Platform and see how they can drive revenue performance at your hotel.

www.cendyn.com

