

HOTELS' COVID-19 SURVIVAL GUIDE





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CHAPTER 1

UNDERSTAND THE GUEST JOURNEY





The room is booked.
The bags are packed.
The journey begins.

But what prompts a guest to book their room with that exact hotel?

The answer to this question is all about understanding the guest journey.

Times have changed. The products and techniques used 10 years ago must adapt.

Today, hoteliers need to leverage technology and tools that capture and move their customers emotionally, physically and digitally through the entire guest journey - from the moment they begin researching all the way through the important post-travel communication.

There is an incredible number of considerations to make for a hotel to optimally support the entire guest journey, and we will discuss these in detail in this guide.

But first, let us take a closer look at the five important stages of that guest journey as the backdrop for all those considerations.



The 5 Stages of the Guest Journey

1

INSPIRATION

Guests are inspired to travel by many factors and find that inspiration in a variety of information channels. Today, these channels almost always include digital sources from search engines, general news sites, and travel-specific websites, to social media, email, and more.

2

RESEARCH

Once inspired, the guest knows where they want to travel and starts researching the how and where, including where to stay. This part of the online search utilizes search engines, metasearch sites, online travel agencies (OTAs), your brand website, social media platforms, landing pages, specific apps, etc. to evaluate the best accommodation choices for their trip.

3

BOOKING

Upon conclusion of the research, it is time for the traveler to decide and commit to a purchase. Most of those purchases happen online in one of two places: either on the hotel's own brand website and booking engine, or on a third-party platform like an online travel agency.

To increase direct bookings and avoid a disproportionate amount of costly OTA fees, a hotel must employ an effective direct booking strategy by pairing a great brand website and booking engine. To maximize conversion rates, the booking process must be seamless and frictionless.

4

STAY

The crucial part of the guest journey is the property stay itself, and hotels should consider the activity before check-in together with the experience on-site as part of the stay. In addition to the standard marks of satisfaction including cleanliness and hospitality, it is essential to have a software solution that makes the experience great for both the guest and the hotel.

Quality communication before arrival, easy check-in and check-out processes, flexibility in room management, upsell opportunities, useful and accessible information, and secure payment processing are all important factors of a hotels' property management system.

5

POST-STAY

As the property stay concludes, the goal of every hotel should be happy, loyal, and referring customers. Remind them of their positive stay, thank them for booking with you, encourage sharing their experiences, and entice a future visit.

Repeat business is incredibly important for most properties and tying in your historical guest list with ongoing communication should be an automatic and repeating process. Hotels that utilize integrated operational and marketing tools and services, from the right property management software to the right social media platforms, are more successful in enhancing the post-stay guest relationship and nurture future business.



Regardless of the type of property, guest, budget, location, season, or market condition, there are specific tools and strategies a hotel should employ to stay competitive and maximize results along every step of the guest journey.



When using these tools and strategies correctly, hoteliers can gain more control and achieve a multi-faceted approach to success.

The next chapters of this guide provide detailed recommendations on how to achieve that success by discussing opportunities and implications during every step of the guest journey. Uniquely designed for independent lodging and delivered by one trusted team, an ecosystem of lodging tools and services will strengthen your business and drive better results, in nearly all circumstances. Approaching this with the guest journey in mind, we will discuss the tools and techniques of a complete ecosystem as they are employed sequentially along that path.

INCREASE ONLINE VISIBILITY

How to deploy online marketing tactics such as search engine optimization, pay-per-click advertising, email marketing, social media promotions, and blogging to capture travelers when they search online. We also discuss how OTA connections can provide enhanced visibility and play an important complimentary role.

DRIVE MORE DIRECT BOOKINGS

How to guide the consumer through the process of making an online purchase decision with joy and confidence. Enhance their experience with a powerful combination of a high converting website and booking engine that are streamlined, secure, responsive, fast, ADA (Americans with Disabilities Act) accessible, and visually stunning. Turn “lookers into bookers.”

AUTOMATE & STREAMLINE OPERATIONS

How to make the most out of your property and guest services with a powerful property management software. Utilize a variety of functions with built in automation, easy access to information, guest tagging and communication, OTA channel connections, encrypted and secure payment processing, and access from anywhere on any device.

NURTURE YOUR BUSINESS

How to build strong and long-lasting relationships with guests for maximum repeat visits, positive reviews, and constructive guest referrals.

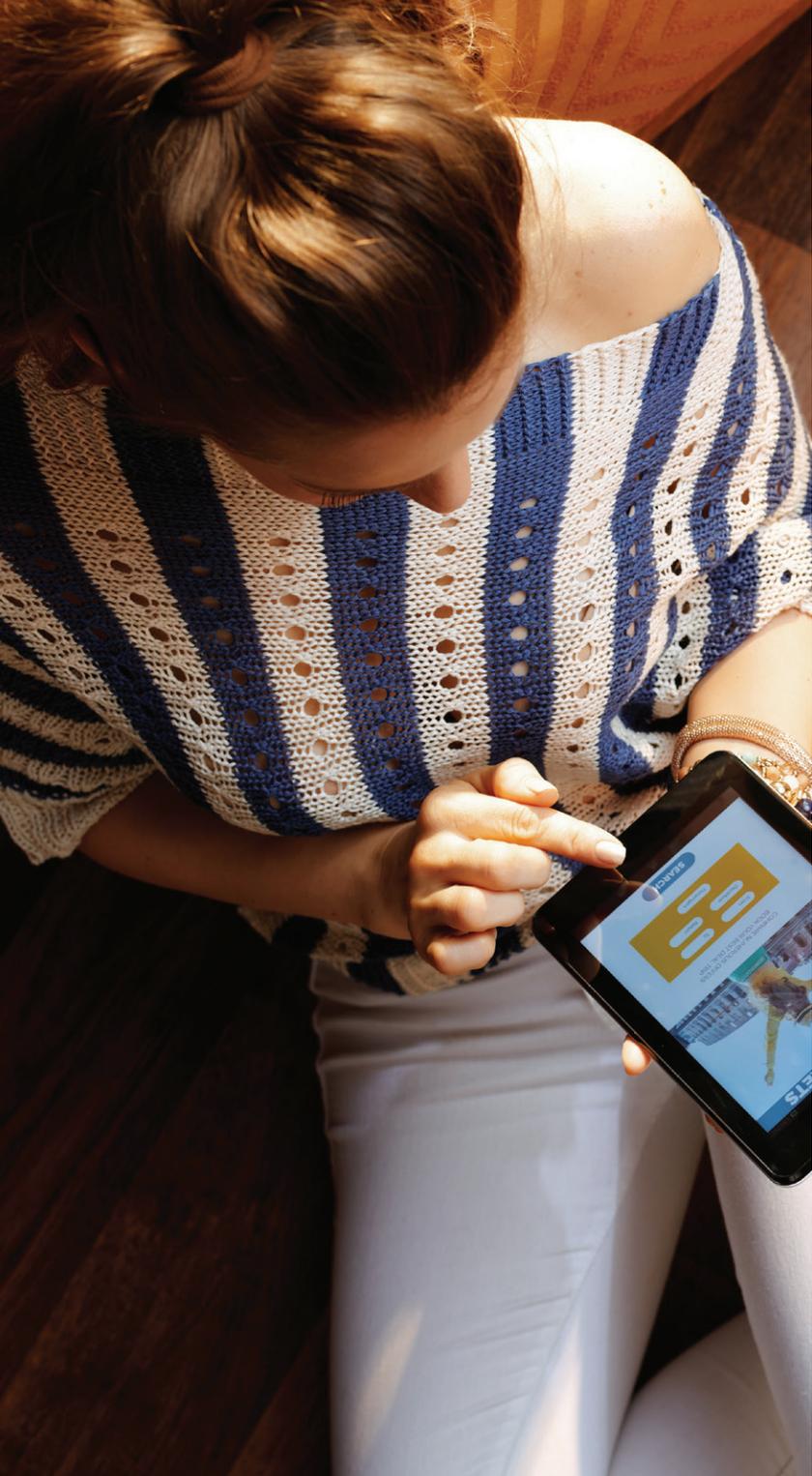
CONTROL YOUR SUCCESS

How to take control of your growth and success by employing 90-day review cycles in partnership with a single hospitality expert.

A man and a woman are sitting together, looking at a laptop screen. The man is on the left, wearing a blue button-down shirt, and the woman is on the right, wearing a light green top. They are both smiling and appear to be engaged in a collaborative task. The background is a bright, modern interior with a window and some furniture.

CHAPTER 2

INCREASE ONLINE VISIBILITY



The first step for a hotel in capturing guests is to communicate with them at the initial stages of the guest journey – the inspirational and research stages. So how do hotels accomplish that and what role does internet marketing play?

With over 40,000 search queries performed every second of every day, it is essential that online visibility is a top priority for hotels to remain competitive in today's travel market. Moreover, online bookings make up roughly 65% of all hotel reservations, with half of those made from a mobile device.

So, if you operate a hotel, your online presence is essential to your success. And to increase your online visibility, you must create and invest in a focused internet marketing strategy. That strategy must incorporate your budget, your main goals, your timeline, your resources, your plan of execution, and your cadence and data points to debrief and adjust. Such an internet marketing strategy should be foundational to the modern hotel, and it should be viewed as a marathon, not a sprint. At rezStream we organize every digital marketing strategy by four cornerstone tactics as described below, then weave those tactics together into long-term plans.

SEARCH ENGINE OPTIMIZATION (SEO)

Search engine optimization is considered the backbone of internet marketing. In short it is the practice of optimizing your website to improve search engine rankings from free and organic search results. When implemented correctly at a hotel, the search engine marketer will use a combination of paid and unpaid online tools to identify what search terms travelers are using in their online research and what information and type of content those travelers are seeking. This process is generally described as keyword research and must be done if you are serious about attracting visitors to your brand website.



Once you truly understand consumer habits, and specifically the habits of the type of consumers you want to attract, then can you implement the changes that will bring those types of guests to you. Website experts do this by adding, deleting, or changing website components - page titles, meta descriptions, page URLs, header tags, keywords, internal linking, and the overall content - to match up to the keyword research and the goals of the hotel.

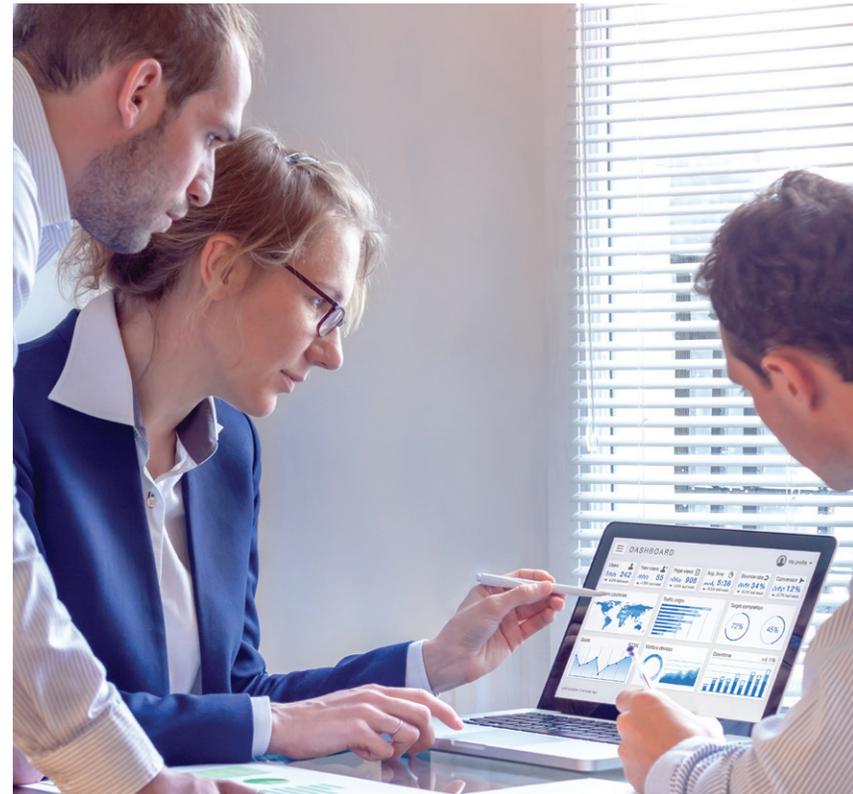
Like any marketing tactic, foundational SEO is an ongoing process that requires fine-tuning and adjustments over time. We live in a dynamic world where people's interests change, competition changes, travel changes, and information changes. Keyword research must be updated, website traffic and results must be reviewed, data must be analyzed, and the existing website components must be updated, expanded, deleted, and adjusted. The cycle of plan-execute-debrief is ongoing to ensure content attracts the right searchers at the right times.

PAY-PER-CLICK (PPC)

A second foundation of internet marketing is paid advertising. Because organic search (the target of SEO) is a highly competitive space, paid advertising is an additional tactic that hotels should employ, even if only sporadically or modestly when budgets are tight. With PPC, the marketer bids for popular keyword terms that the business otherwise would not rank for in an organic search. When a property wins those bids and the consumer clicks on the displayed link, the search engine charges an amount for that click and the consumer is directed to the website page (landing page) that the marketer has chosen.

As the marketer chooses the bid words, PPC can help drive better/higher quality traffic to the landing page than what is initially achieved through search engine optimization alone. Because search terms vary in competitiveness, some terms can get very expensive and quickly eat up established budgets. Accordingly, it is important to proceed carefully and lean on professional marketers with experience in setting up and managing paid campaigns.

When PPC campaigns are effective they bring immediate visitors to the website (and bookers to the booking engine) to cast a wider net for more visibility, short-term traffic and revenue, and penetration in highly sought out market segments.



METASEARCH ENGINES

Google Hotel Ads and TripAdvisor are probably the most common travel metasearch engines and being able to accept direct bookings through these channels is generally very effective. These online marketplaces are essentially search engines that filter through other travel websites for hotel rates and availability and then aggregate those results. Metasearch engines are important, as they allow smaller properties to maximize direct bookings and be on the same playing field as larger hotels. As with SEO, search engine marketers and website designers employ a variety of tactics to ensure their hotel websites are optimized for metasearch engines.



EVERYTHING ELSE

In this fourth category of internet marketing we group the remaining slices of the pie. From blogging to email marketing, combining these tactics will help tell your story and stay connected to your guest. A well-versed digital hotel marketer should provide guidance on the cost-benefit of investing in one or more of these programs within the larger strategic plan.



BLOGGING

A website that ranks high on search engines is one that pumps out quality content regularly. One way to do that is with a blog. Blogs are an easy way to add new content to your website and can provide more detailed information about your hotel, the area, and things to do. Each new blog is essentially a new page on your website, which allows for additional keywords to be optimized for and drive domain authority.

SOCIAL MEDIA

Social media can be a powerful tool when used correctly to reach and connect with past, present, and future customers. A focused approach to social media will help create a strong brand, allow world-wide exposure, support some sales, and create and retain better relationships with guests by leveraging a platform to directly interact with them.

Since social media applications are unique websites and communities, they support both paid and organic listings (like search engines). We recommend that most of a hotel's social media posts be done organically, but with the help of experienced marketers a paid advertising campaign can help target your desired audience for guaranteed exposure.

With a plethora of social media platforms available, it's a large undertaking for any hotel to deploy this tactic correctly.

EVERYTHING ELSE (CONTINUED)

EMAIL MARKETING

Email marketing is a great tool to help strengthen your relationship with current loyal guests and potential new guests. Before your guest even books with you, email marketing allows you to present your message to your audience and enable them to engage if they choose to. Email content can range from pre-stay and post-stay emails to straight forward sales promotions where you can showcase your offering. One key element of all emails is personalization. Knowing a guest's preferred language, location, dining, and shopping habits will increase the email response rate and loyalty to your hotel.

REFERRAL SOURCES

These can include free and paid directories or listings. Free listings are nice to have but you have more control over your paid listings to ensure the right information is displayed.

REMARKETING

Win your guests back with remarketing ads. Remarketing uses ads to target people that have already interacted with your brand but have not yet purchased. These ads can either be in visual or text form and will appear on various online platforms. With remarketing, you can access these customers again at different points during their online journey, reminding them to visit your website again and book with you.

BOOKING ENGINE ABANDONMENT

When a potential guest starts a booking process for a room reservation, but drops out of the process before completing the purchase, booking engine (cart) abandonment is an important feature that allows you to be proactive and reach out to those individuals to entice them to complete their reservation.

As you see, there is a plethora of choices to invest in and spend time on to market a hotel online. To remain relevant and competitive you should have a defined strategy in place guided by seasoned marketers. If you do not you can quickly burn through your budget with poor results. For hotels that lack this expertise amongst their own staff, you should look outside the organization.

CHAPTER 3

DRIVE MORE DIRECT BOOKINGS



As the guest journey continues, travelers move from inspiration and general research to more specific research to arrive at a decision and purchase commitment.

Two of the most important sales tools to your hotel to support that research and capture that commitment are your website and booking engine. These two components must work seamlessly together to create an enhanced guest experience, make your property stand out against the competition, and ultimately drive direct bookings.

With a website and booking engine that work in concert, hoteliers will enjoy lodging specific and search engine ready tools, ADA accessible components, and a smooth, continuous process for guests to advance from general inspiration and research to an enjoyable and confident purchase.

To assist hoteliers in evaluating their direct booking tools, we discuss some important considerations that apply globally to both websites and booking engines, from SEO friendliness to optimal booking engine flow.



RETURN ON INVESTMENT (ROI)

A hotel website and booking engine are significant assets and must offer a long-term return on the investment. As critical business tools they should be evaluated based on data and business merits alone. Do not let strong personal preferences or highly emotional judgments (or relationships) be the dominant influencer in your decisions. Input from experienced lodging professionals can provide some useful perspectives and objectivity.

CONVERSIONS

A pretty website and booking engine mean nothing if they do not deliver results. In the hotel industry, brand sites on average should drive conversion rates at or above 1.5%. To ensure you convert as many of your website visitors as possible into actual customers you must perform three tasks well: (1) manage your Google Analytics to collect your data, (2) compare your data to relevant industry and competitive benchmarks, and (3) have the capacity and discipline to regularly implement changes in your online marketing programs based on your analysis. If you are not doing this, you are missing out.

HIGH OTA DEPENDENCY

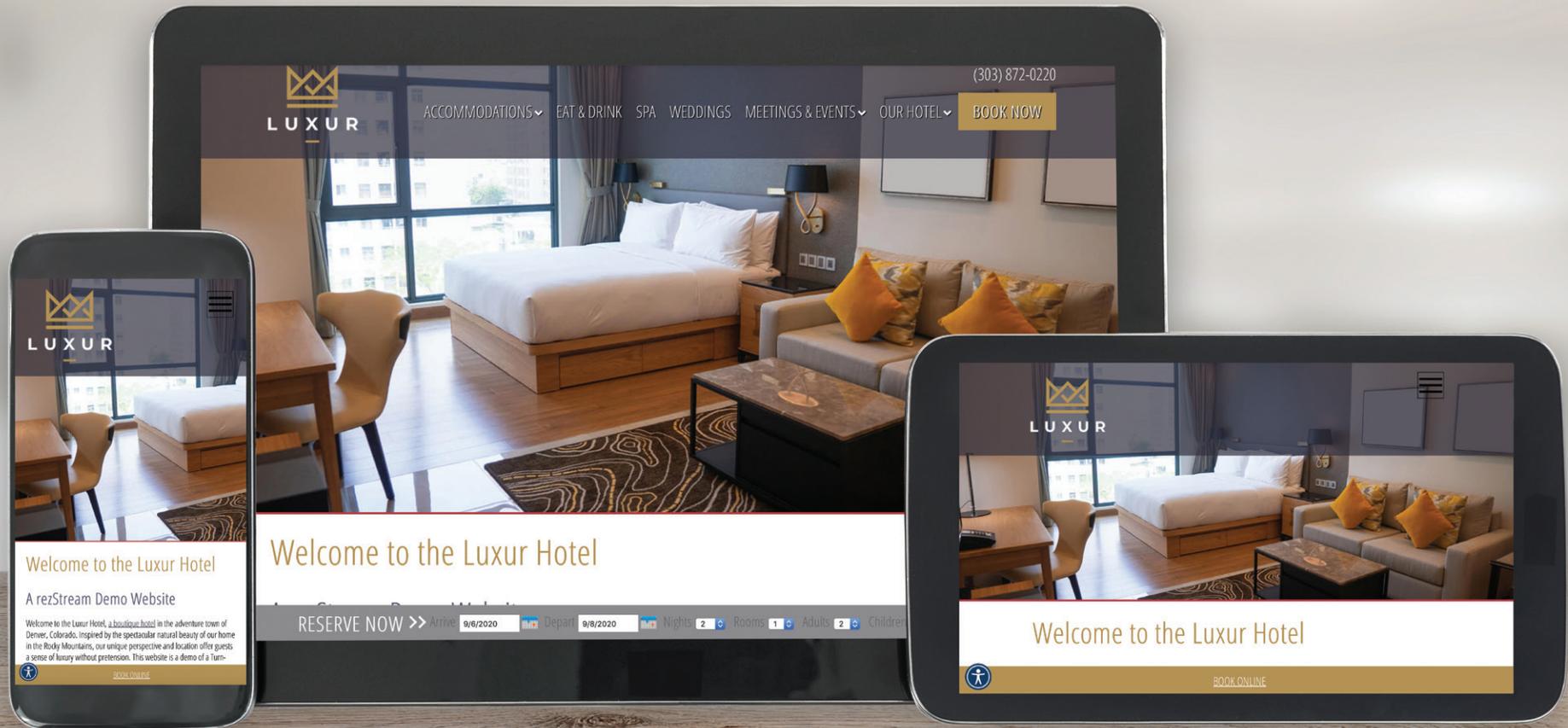
Your website and booking engine solution serve as the best source for direct bookings. If you are heavily dependent on online travel agencies for bookings, your tools and associated online marketing deserve a close study. Each market is unique, so professional firms can provide the relevance needed to assess if your dependency is abnormally high or low.

BRAND RECOGNITION

A website and booking engine should reflect your character and brand. They should tell your story using high quality visuals including layout, your logo, photos, other images, font type, and colors. Then you need to wrap that in a lodging friendly package built by a professional that knows the purchase patterns of modern travelers. Further, your booking engine should be themed to match your website so that guests do not feel they have left the website when they enter the booking engine page.

SOFTWARE-AS-A-SERVICE (SAAS)

Websites and booking engines must be current and continuously adapt to changes and updates in search engine technology and user preferences. As a result, subscription-based SaaS platforms that are built to easily adapt to evolving technology should be a strong consideration for both components. SaaS based software that allow for regular enhancements to website and booking engine usability features and back-end infrastructure are good choices for independent hotels that typically do not employ full-time in-house engineers to manage this technology.



LODGING SPECIFIC

Your website and booking engine should be created with lodging in mind. When you use a lodging-specific platform it should offer multiple designs and themes to cater to your specific business needs. Our experts specialize in the design and development of hotel products that enhance the user experience with the following considerations.



CALL TO ACTION (CTA)

The CTA is the component of your website or booking engine that a visitor uses to take the next step you want them to (i.e. the next step in making the purchase). Therefore, your CTAs on your website and inside your booking engine must flow naturally and logically in both design and sequence. As an example, your “book now” button should be available on every page of your website, should be in the same location on each page, and should be inviting and clear. For example, a “quick-book” reservation widget should be continuously visible as a searcher scrolls down a page listing multiple rooms. On the booking engine guests should easily know where they are at in the booking process.

IMAGES

We cannot stress the right use of images enough, because unfortunately, too many properties do not take full advantage of this important sales tool. It is true that in marketing, as in many other fields, “a picture is worth a 1000 words”, and we know from analytics that hotel guests are swayed (in both directions) by pictures. In addition to using pictures by a professional/highly skilled photographer, hotels must showcase those pictures optimally on their website and booking engine. That means large, high-quality images to promote your property to a reader. It also means strong “alt tags” (alternative text/attributes) within the HTML code to accurately describe the appearance and function of an image on each page to positively impact the hotel’s website in search engines.

UNIQUENESS

Every hotel has something that is unique that is worth promoting. Some combination of factors, from location to amenities to personality, that nobody else has or can easily copy. When considering a lodging specific website, hotels use this uniqueness to tell its property’s story. Once that story is clear, hoteliers weave the brand into quality content to attract their ideal customer. That content will be used on the brand website and booking engine, as well as in marketing on social platforms, in email campaigns, in display ads, in blogs, and in other promotional channels to relate the experience of what the guest can expect.

SEARCH ENGINE FRIENDLY

One of the most important components of any webpage design is making sure it is search engine friendly. Your search engine optimization needs to be built into the design at the beginning and not added later. An SEO-friendly webpage allows a search engine to discover and read pages across the entire site, interpret the content effectively, and ultimately share it in search results. The following are key components of what is needed to be SEO-friendly...

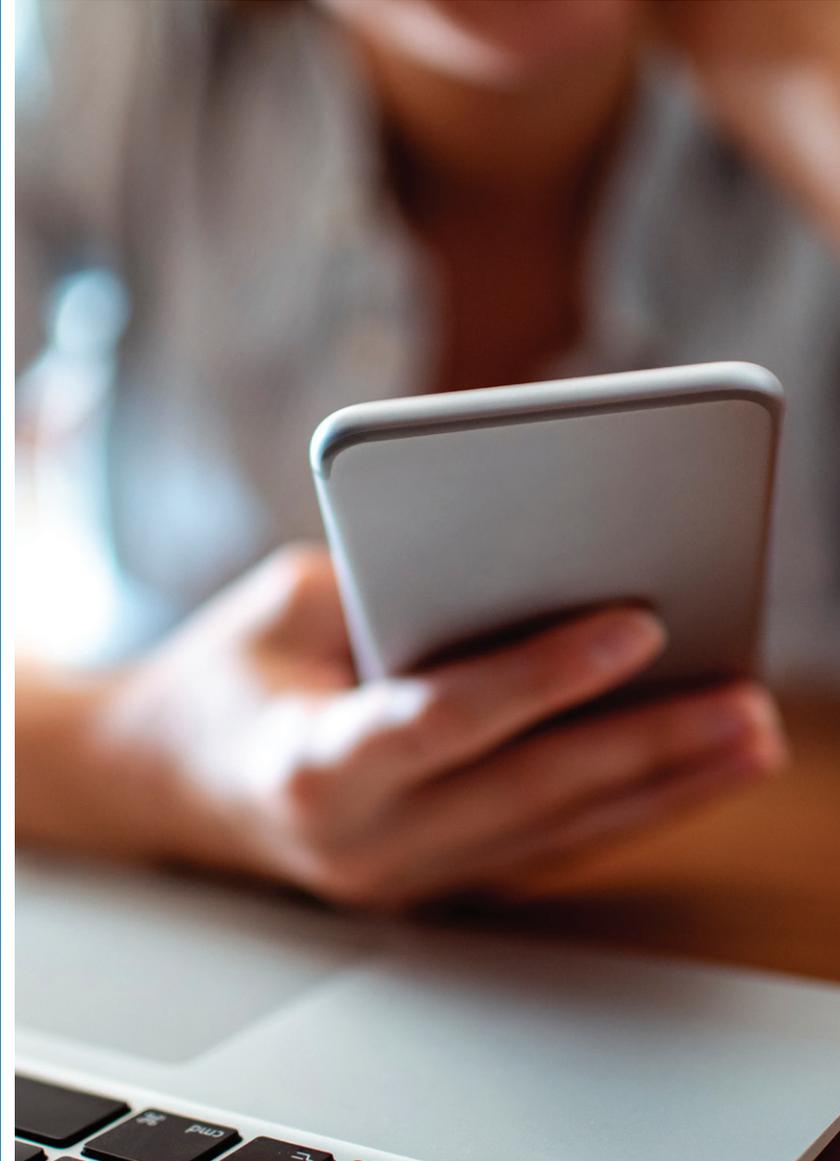
PAGE SPEED

Ensure your pages are like a well-oiled machine that load quickly across desktop and mobile devices. Page speed has become a direct search engine ranking factor ever since Google's algorithm speed update. Professionals will run Google's Page Speed Insights as a starting point for page loading velocity. The test delivers both an overall score (0 to 100, with 100 being best) and suggestions to make individual pages faster.

However, the exact speed is not as critical as the general time it takes for a visitor to wait for pages to load. Additionally, Google suggestions are only as good as the ability to implement them, which requires the technical skill to interpret and implement changes. On average, 53% of users leave a site if it takes more than three seconds to load, so most hotels should not get wrapped up in the singly page speed score, but rather think about putting guests first by ensuring they land on a website that runs efficiently.

MOBILE FRIENDLY

"Mobile first" has been a mantra in technology for years because everyone predicted mobile will be the platform/device of choice for most users in the future. That prediction held true, and today the most popular device to use for any online search is the mobile phone, including searches in hospitality. Moreover, 42% of global hotel room reservations are also made on mobile devices, and this share is expected to continue to increase. It stands to reason that every hotel website must offer a mobile-friendly, responsive design.



SECURITY

Online security is another factor that impacts the search performance of a website. The primary mode of communication between a web browser and a website takes place in a technical procedure termed HyperText Transfer Protocol (HTTP). HTTP is the method of how data is structured when shared online, and the secure version of HTTP utilizes data encryption in the communication protocol and is called HyperText Transfer Protocol Secure (HTTPS).

To promote HTTPS, search engines actively check for the type of HTTP and reward sites using HTTPS standards. Additionally, in modern web browsers such as Chrome, websites that do not use HTTPS are marked differently than those that do. Travelers that are online will see a green padlock in the URL bar to signify the webpage is secure. HTTPS should be commonplace, but many hotel websites are still not utilizing this more advanced data structure. As a result, many hoteliers operate with increased exposure to security leaks, lower Google rankings, and depleted trust from website visitors.

USABILITY

From all aspects of your website and booking engine, you want to make sure usability is seamless. Usability is a combination of several factors including, page layout, visual hierarchy, strong calls to action, navigation, site search (particularly for larger sites), clean design, and much more. Search engine algorithms can detect usability factors and design experts should be able to do the same and make necessary corrections.

METADATA

Metadata is data that describes other data. While that might sound vague, when it comes to the Internet and websites it is very important. When your website incorporates metadata, it provides search engines with titles and descriptions of what your individual pages are about, thus allowing them to understand what each page portrays. If your hotel website pages are lacking these appropriate descriptions on some or all its pages, you have room to enhance your website searchability which in turn influences the amount of traffic you receive. As a result, it is hugely important to consider the metadata quality of your content when you build or expand your website. Unfortunately, many content producers do not understand or know how to incorporate an optimal use of metadata in their writing.





STRUCTURED DATA (SCHEMA)

Structured data is a standardized format, or code, that is written in a certain way so that search engines understand it. Search engines read this code and use it to show search results in a specific way. This is code that your website professionals will look for and add or optimize.

EVERYTHING ELSE

And then there are a handful of other components to consider for your website and booking engine to be search engine friendly to visitors and highly ranked by search engines.

- Apply user-friendly URLs that are unique for each page.
- Create an XML Sitemap to help search engines understand your website's structure.
- Use Robots.txt files. These files tell search engine crawlers what to crawl and what not to crawl on your website. This is used to avoid overloading your site with crawl requests which would slow down the search engines.
- Avoid duplicate content. Search engines will detect when a website has too much duplicate content and will lower your rankings as a result.
- Use internal linking to help build page authority. Plus, this allows the user to easily move through your website.
- Make sure to optimize your images by naming your images properly, adding alt tags, and loading an appropriately sized image.
- Avoid keyword stuffing by only using your keyword 2 – 3 times within your content of 300 words or more.

ADA ACCESSIBLE

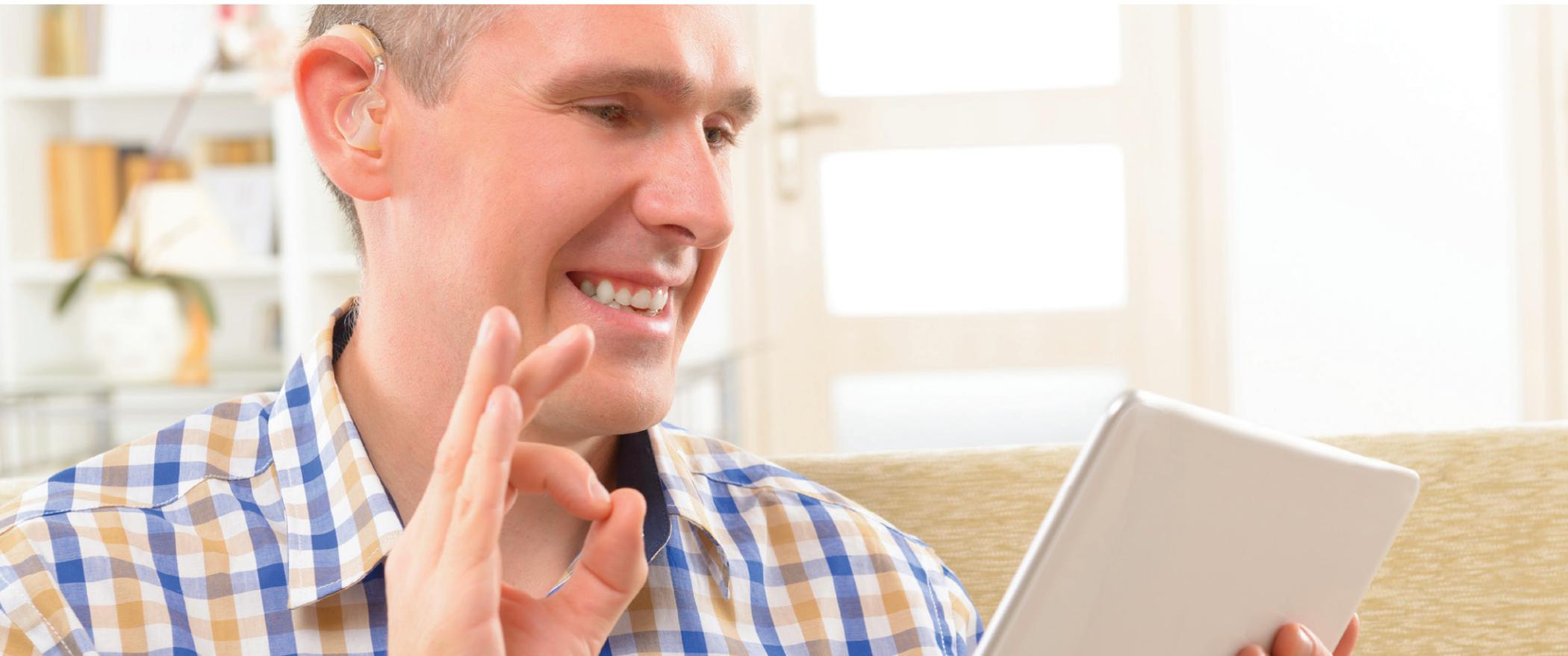
Did you know there are 50 million people with disabilities in the U.S., and that they spend \$17.3 billion annually on travel? For hotels wanting to get more business from this market, an important step is to make their website and booking engine ADA accessible. Not only will it open your doors to more customers, but it will also mitigate costly lawsuits for non-compliance. To ensure your tools are ADA accessible they should include the following components...

TEXT ALTERNATIVES (ALT-TAGS)

Your non-text content, such as images and graphs, need to include text alternative tags. Alt tags allow users with disabilities to read or hear descriptions of content they may not be able to view.

COLOR CONTRAST/HIGH-CONTRAST MODES

Select text and background colors that provide ample contrast. Colors must have enough contrast between text color and the background, including text on images, icons, and buttons. This is ideally incorporated during the beginning of the design phase.



KEYBOARD NAVIGATION

Some users with disabilities navigate throughout the internet using a keyboard rather than a mouse. Make your website keyboard-friendly by allowing access to pages via keyboard commands and not just the mouse.

HIGHLIGHT LINKS

This feature highlights important links to make them stand out from the rest of your content. Normally this is done with the use of the mouse changing shape when hovering over the linked text, or with alternative colors and/or underlined words to signal to the reader there is a link associated with the words.

READABILITY

This feature enables bigger text, increased text spacing, and legible fonts for better readability.

READ PAGE

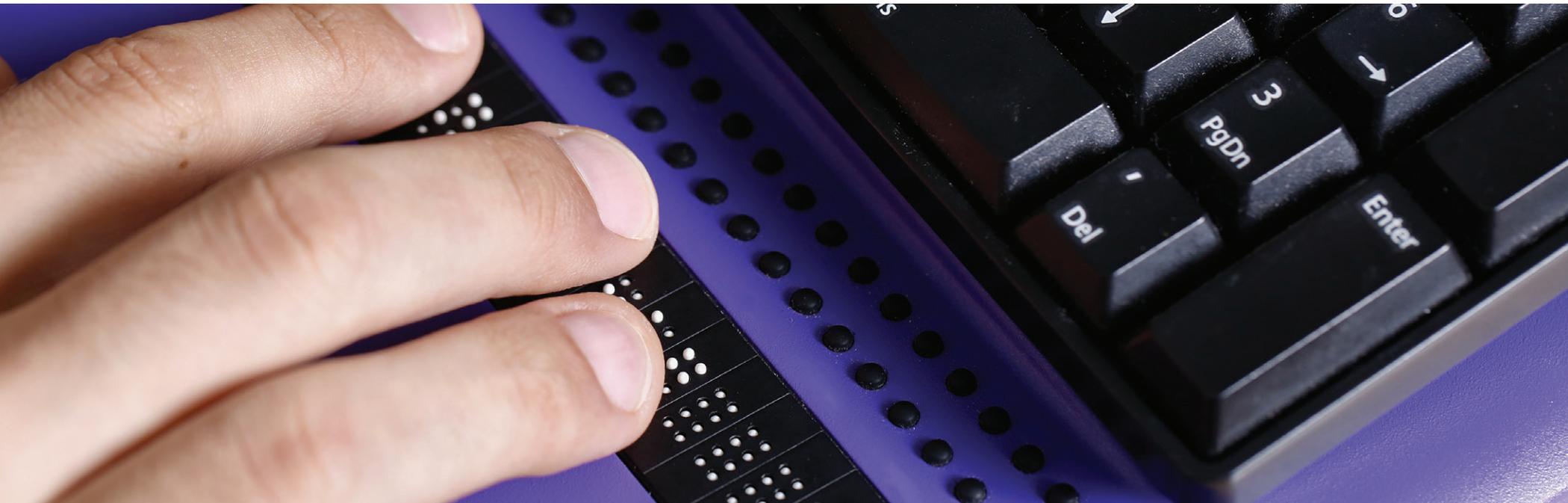
When a read function is built into a website a vision-impaired searcher can have text on pages converted to audio and be played back to them.

LAYOUT

Navigation, links, and buttons should be organized so that they are outlined from one another and easily accessed throughout the site.

BOOKING ENGINE FILTERS

An advanced booking engine filter will allow a searcher to quickly narrow down their options to suitable rooms for guests who are handicapped from disabilities.



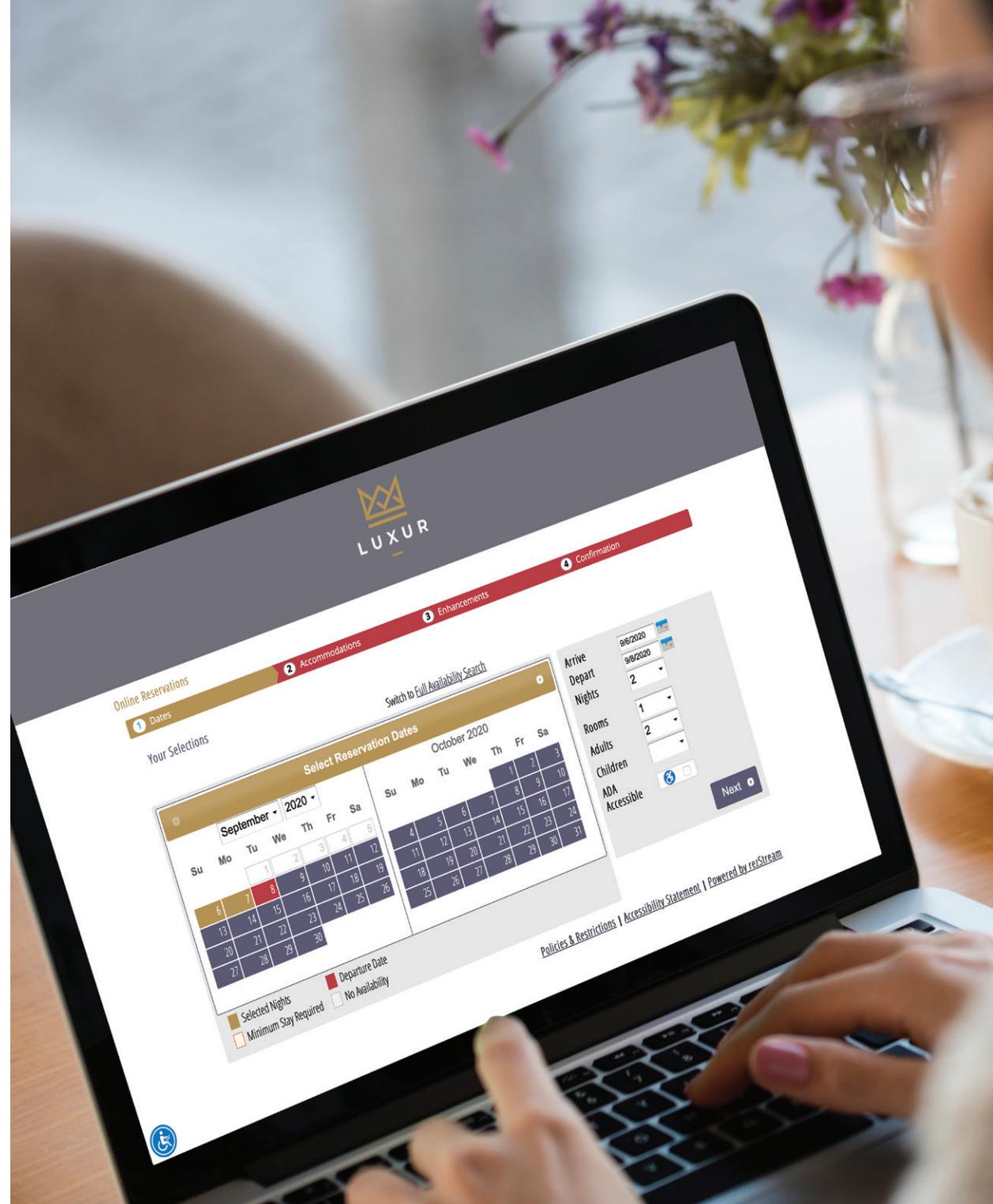
CONTENT MANAGEMENT SYSTEMS (CMS)

Because your website is the go-to as a source of information about your property, you must easily be able to update key information about specials, contact data, your local area, and new events and attractions. A CMS type website will let you do this without having to lean on technical people to ensure your information is accurate, current, and fresh.

In the same manner, when your property management system and your booking engine are truly integrated, your PMS will act as the content management portal for your booking engine.

SEAMLESS CONNECTION

As a final point, a seamless connection between your website and booking engine will maximize your conversion rates. That means that room descriptions, images, and policies are automatically synchronized between your website and booking engine. Not only does this ensure your information is current and comparable in both places, but it saves time and reduces management of data and information to one place.





ALWAYS OPEN FOR BUSINESS

It is easy to forget that your booking engine might very well be your most productive employee – working 24/7/365, never calling in sick, and never having a bad day. Moreover, your sales channel must be “open for business” whenever travelers are ready to make that purchase commitment.

FRICTIONLESS

As a hotelier you should regularly act like a guest and experience what it is like to interact with “your best employee.” As with any other employee, you must know how your booking engine performs and be aware of its strengths and weaknesses. Then, work with your vendor/partner to ensure you optimize its configuration to ensure the booking process is inviting, smooth, and as short and linear as possible. Only then will you maximize your direct bookings. As a rule, the booking process should be able to be completed in four steps/screens or less.

CALENDAR CHOICE

Every property and its target audience are unique. That is why your booking engine must provide the flexibility to “greet” your guests in the manner THEY prefer. Some want to focus on the immediate future, some would like to consider the next couple of months, and some already know the type of room and price range they are looking for. By employing a booking engine that can flex between a two-week calendar view, a two-month calendar view, and offer individual calendars for each room/room type, you have the power to set the optimal configuration for you and your guests. Mentioned above, a “quick-book” reservation widget that follows a reader during website scrolling supports optimal conversion rates.

CUSTOM FIELDS

A website and booking engine should reflect your character and brand. They should tell your story using high quality visuals including layout, your logo, photos, other images, font type, and colors. Then you need to wrap that in a lodging friendly package built by a professional that knows the purchase patterns of modern travelers. Further, your booking engine should be themed to match your website so that guests do not feel they have left the website when they enter the booking engine page.

MULTIPLE RATES

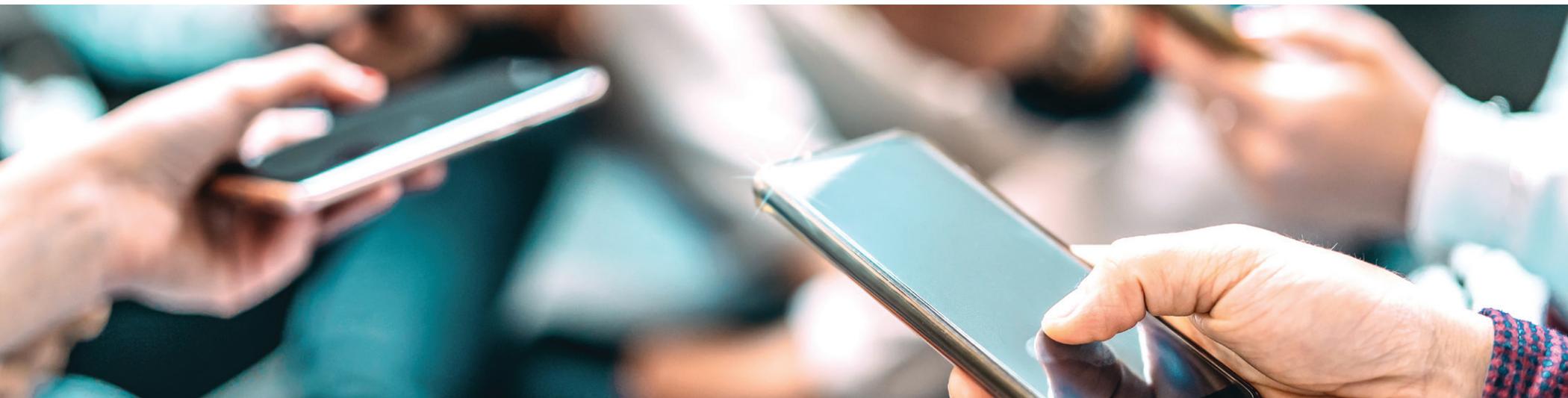
High converting hotel booking engines need elasticity in how to display rates in the booking engine. Hoteliers should set rates based on a combination of historical and current rate trends. Hotels should manage multiple rate-plans that account for time of year/month/week, length of stay, type of customer, and special promotions using “promo-codes” to maximize their conversions and ROI.

PROMOTE UPGRADES

Your booking engine should automatically propose upsell opportunities to your guest during the booking process. Offering add-ons, packages, and other value-add opportunities will enhance their experience and increase your “per transaction value” without raising your rates.

MOBILE RESERVATIONS

Given the large share of hotel bookings from mobile devices and expectations of further growth in mobile bookings, the mobile experience on your booking engine must include all the considerations that a guest would have on a large screen. Again, test-drive your mobile booking engine often and compare your thoughts with professionals that has the data on what does and does not work for the average user.



REVENUE TRACKING

Speaking of data, if you have not connected your booking engine directly to your analytics tracking account you are missing out big time. Business savvy hoteliers study their guests buying journey to gain objective insight into where guests succeed and where they fall off in the process. Make sure your booking engine provider offers the flexibility to install tracking scripts regardless of the analytics tool you use to track visitor behavior.

SOCIAL SHARE

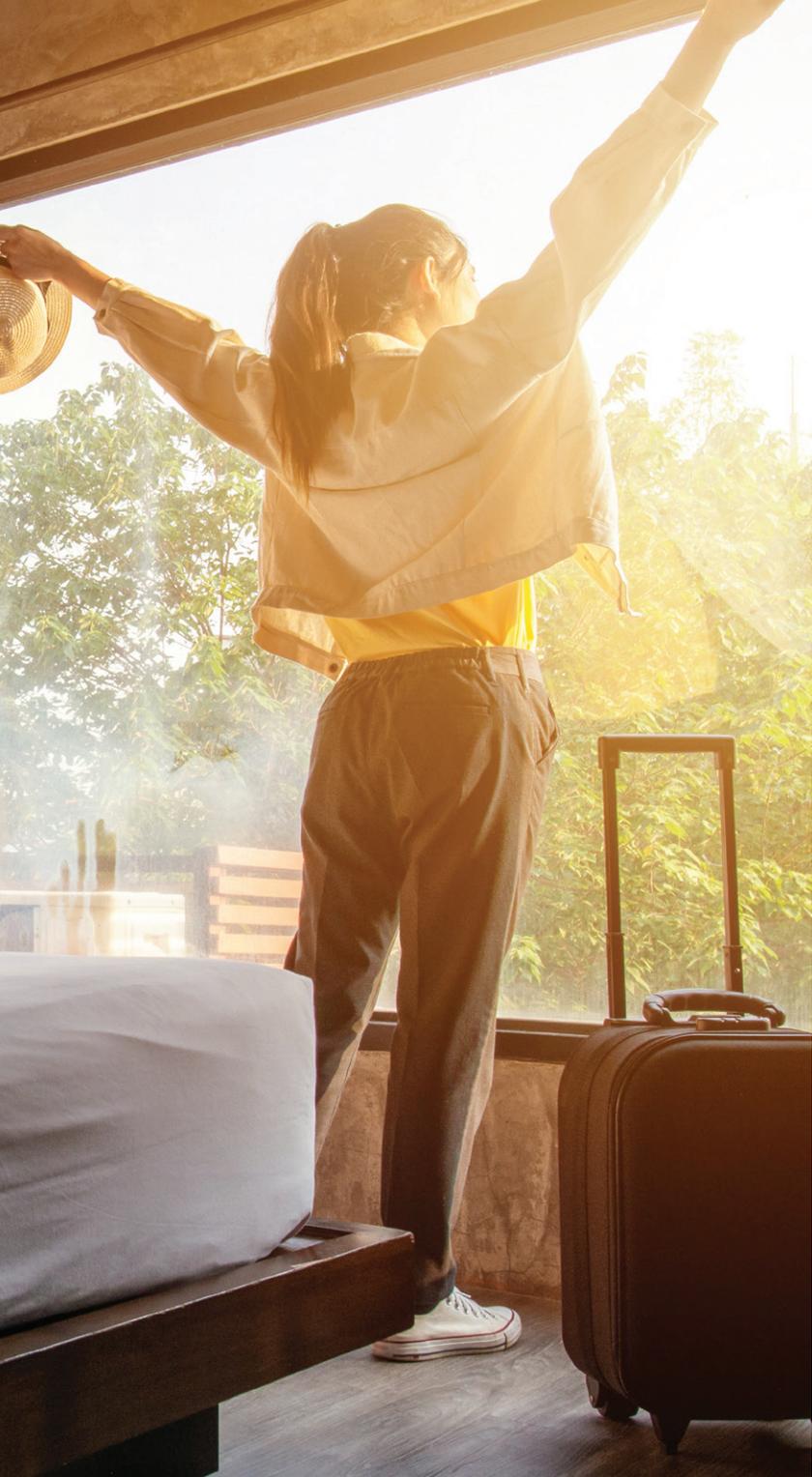
With the ever expanding and changing social platforms, hotels should also make it easy for their guests to share their upcoming stay with their social networks. A booking engine is first and foremost a sales and marketing tool that is connected to your operations (PMS), so working with a software vendor that extends their expertise into the marketing realm, including social media marketing, makes a lot of sense.





CHAPTER 4

AUTOMATE & STREAMLINE OPERATIONS



Now that we've identified ways to inspire guests and drive quality traffic to your website with internet marketing, and discussed the tools you need to support guest research and guide visitors through your website and booking engine to complete an online reservation, it is time to shift gears to the next step along the guest journey.

That next step is the guest experience with the property, and it starts before the guest arrives, peaks during the stay, and concludes shortly after departure.

At rezStream we develop our products and services with a focus on how to support the hotel in maximizing the guest experience before, during, and after the guest stay. We also focus on streamlining internal hotel operations to make daily tasks easy, enjoyable, and smooth. Finally, we offer managers and owners important tools to drive financial success.

Recognizing there are many flavors of property management systems for hotels to consider, in this part of the guide we will touch on some of the basic, but key, considerations we believe hoteliers must consider, as well as some powerful aspects of how rezStream Cloud makes the most of enhancing the stay portion of the guest journey for both guest and hotel.

AUTOMATION

A key component of any PMS is automation. When hotels can automate tasks and processes, they achieve more in less time, leaving more time to focus on their guests. Additionally, automation reduces human errors frequently found in manual tasks, and with the right kind of system can still be designed and personalized for maximum effect.

SYNCHRONIZE AVAILABILITY ON ALL CHANNELS

Every system should automatically synchronize reservations between the PMS and all online channels. This must go both ways, from online bookings to the PMS and vice versa, so that all reservations are concurrent on all platforms and booking sites. On that last point, rezStream connects to more than 80 different third-party booking sites allowing hotels to experiment and find those that works best for them. Additionally, our PMS alerts hoteliers real time when new bookings are made and where they come from for instant intelligence.

COMMUNICATION

Another important aspect of automation for hotels is to utilize pre-scheduled automated communication based on certain triggers. These include (1) reservation confirmation emails to guests immediately after a guest has booked a room, (2) pre-arrival messages that provide practical information and excites the guests with welcoming greetings, (3) communications during a guest stay that can support upselling or value-added information, and (4) post-stay emails to thank guests. They will all build repeat business and generate goodwill, loyalty, and referrals. The more flexibility your system affords you to fully customize and brand this type of communication, the better off you are.

YIELD MANAGEMENT

Yield management has become a common feature of hotel reservation systems in the last decade as another way to automate price changes to maximize revenue. Long employed by the airline industry, yield management in a property management system allows hoteliers to establish rules that automate price changes up or down depending on supply and demand factors.

WEBSITE INTEGRATION

A less common feature in hotel reservation software is an automatic connection between the software and key website pages. While the booking engine looks and feels like it is part of the website, it is in most cases a separate software from the website. As a result, information on the booking engine pages are managed independent of similar information on the website pages. At rezStream we have connected the two so that room descriptions, photos, rates, availability updates, etc. are only managed in one place (the PMS) and auto-updates the information on the website when changes are made.

REPORTING

Reporting automation is also rare among many property management systems but should not be. A modern system should be able to auto-deliver any number of reports in any number of file formats to any number of stakeholders. Owners and managers, housekeeping and kitchen staff, and external parties like accountants, will all save precious time by not having to log in manually to retrieve operational and financial information.





OCCUPANCY BLOCKS

Blocking availability for any reason should automatically update all online channels ranging from your booking engine to every OTA a property lists inventory on.

SMART WIDGETS

Booking engine widgets should automatically populate standard number of guests and minimum night stay requirements. Such automation eliminates unnecessary steps for a guest to take when they are at the purchase point in their buying journey.

PAYMENT PROCESSING

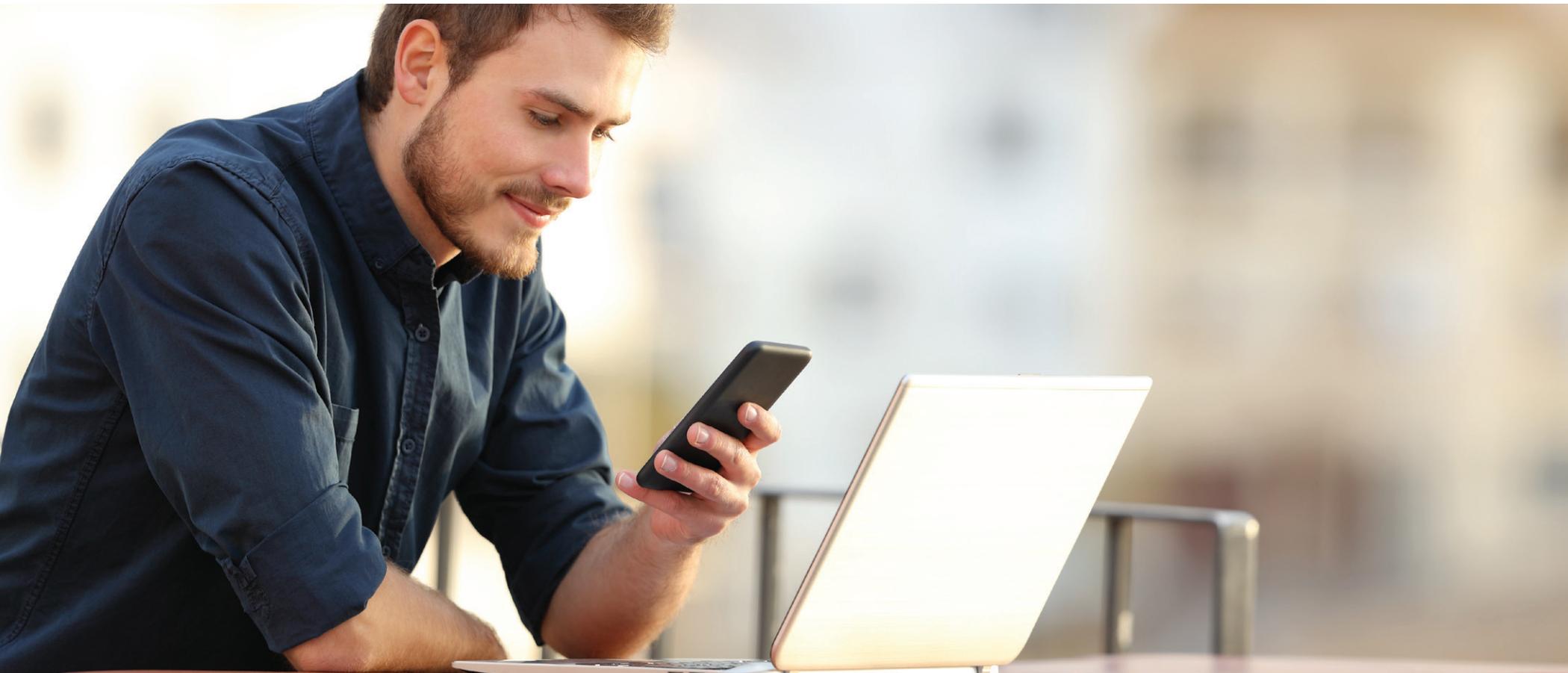
Automate deposit payment processing via the online booking engine at the time of reservation. This saves a manual transaction for those properties that process a deposit at the time of reservation and a final payment at check-in/out.

OTHER

Many other tasks can and should be automated with the right system. Examples include operational shortcuts and gift certificates to key items and housekeeping features. Hoteliers should pay attention to these time savers and work closely with their vendor for maximum product knowledge and adoption as SaaS platforms continuously evolve.

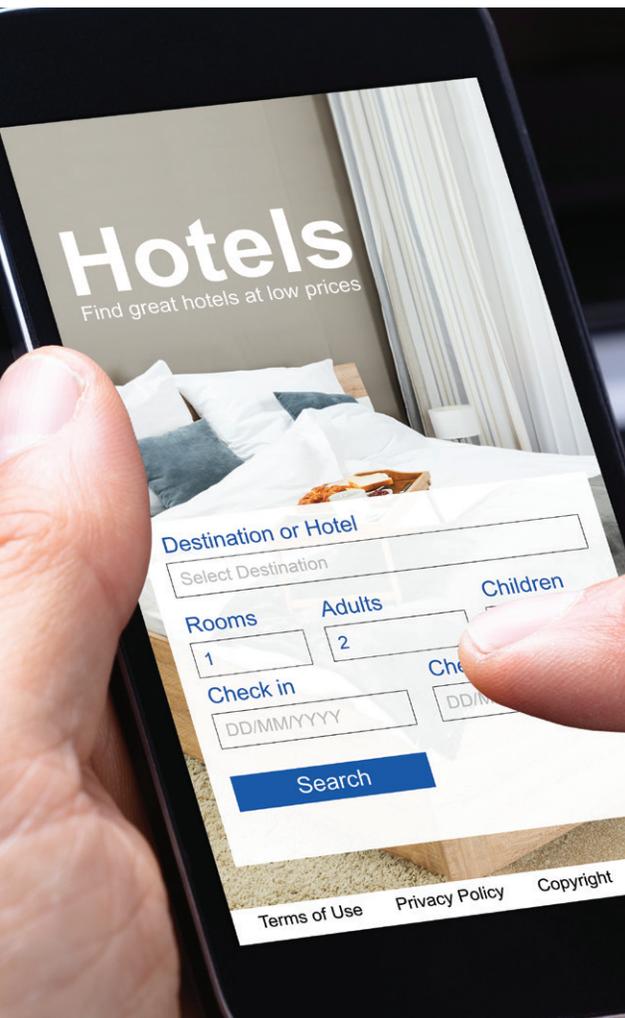
WEB-BASED

Perhaps less of a concern today as most systems are web-based, you should nevertheless pay attention to all considerations of being web-based. Frequent and regular updates, as mentioned above, is one important consideration as you want a vendor who continuously invests in its platform. Quality access at all times is also paramount and your PMS should be hosted in an environment that is highly available, highly redundant, and highly secure. At rezStream we achieve this with a de-coupled application and data model running on the Microsoft Azure platform. With a reliable solution you will stay connected to your business and your guests no matter the time, even if you are not at the property.



CHANNELS

Gain access to online hotel agents around the world with a system that connects to a multitude of travel booking sites from online travel agencies, global distribution systems (GDS), directories, and specialty travel platforms. Few property management systems connect directly to enough online variety, so a system that leverages a third-party channel manager will aid hotels in having wider distribution. Below are some of the benefits of an OTA channel manager connection.



VISIBILITY

Channel managers help to expand your reach and secure new guests by expanding your online visibility.

SYNCHRONIZE

Effectively distribute and update rates, availability, minimum night stays, changes in policies, and more, and synchronize bookings across all online sales channels.

CHOICE

Choose which channels you want to work with. With rezStream's channel manager integration, gain access to over 80 channels including Booking.com, Expedia, TripAdvisor, etc.

MANAGE

Easily manage your inventory by closing inventory during peak times or fill your mid-week and/or low season.

CREDIT CARD PROCESSING

Because most guests want to book online, accepting online payments is essential. When your reservation system is paired with the right credit card processing solution it removes unnecessary administrative steps for guests and hotel employees and reduces exposure to online fraud. A property should ensure their credit card vendor have the following:

SECURITY

Your PMS must adhere to Payment Card Industry Data Security Standard (PCI-DSS). This globally adopted standard is required for all those who process, store, or transmit cardholder data to reduce the risk of users having their information stolen or compromised. rezStream achieves the highest security possible by circumventing PCI-DSS with point-to-point encryption in partnership with Shift4.

Shift4 is the largest independent payment gateway in North America and inventor of payment data tokenization. This way hotels receive the best of both worlds: a system that is affordable and PCI compliant (through Shift4) combined with the maximum security because real credit card information is never stored in the PMS.



CHOICE

Another important consideration of a payment solution is the ability to have flexibility and choice. With the rezStream/Shift4 integration hotels can choose between a stand-alone payment gateway only, or a complete payment gateway/merchant services processor. With the gateway only, properties can continue to use existing merchant relationships if they wish (i.e. local bank). With the Shift4 gateway/processor combination hotels achieve some of the most competitive pricing available in the hospitality industry combined with the best security.

FULL INTEGRATION

Finally, hotels should evaluate the ease of processing within their PMS. To make it smooth the system needs to automatically update all payment information on contact records as well as the guest invoice and all reports connected to the transaction.



REPORTING

Reporting is one of the main focuses of a property management system. Gain a clear insight of your property's performance analysis, housekeeping, revenue, sales, and so much more with the right depth and width of reports from your PMS. For efficiency, make sure your PMS offers the following features for reporting:



FLEXIBILITY

Flexibility to run reports covering the date range of your choice. A date widget that offers standard date range options will save time and improve ease of use.

DEPTH

Depth of reports that will cover both sales (time of transaction) and revenue (time of earnings) of units on all channels, ancillary revenue, pending deposits, pacing for future planning, taxes, and the overall performance of the property to make informed business decisions.

EXPORTING

Ability to export reports to multiple formats including PDF, CSV, and Excel allows storing, sharing and further analysis.

AUTO-DELIVERY

Ability to set up automatic delivery of any report to your inbox at whatever intervals you choose.

ANALYSIS

Compare bookings, occupancy, and revenue using year-over-year data.

DETAILS

Ability to drill down into the details of any report by viewing its sub data points.

SHORTCUTS

Simplify the process with your “Favorite” reports list.

VISUALS

Visualization of data with the use of graphs and charts.



DASHBOARD

Most reservation systems offer a “tape chart” to work off and visualize reservations and availability by unit/unit groups over time. Then they support this time-line view with a series of reports to help guide you to the information you need. In more modern and innovative SaaS systems, vendors are now adding dashboards to show hotel staff quick and efficient snapshots of what is most important on a given day.

GUEST TAGS

For independent hotels that seek to provide excellent customer service, it is powerful to be able to understand and react to guests as individuals that have unique profiles and preferences. A reservation software should enable a hotelier to build those guest profiles dynamically over time to truly deliver customized service. Tagging guests for considerations from allergies, repeat guest, and military status, to VIP or “difficult” guest, will support that effort.



EMPLOYEE CONTROLS

By choosing a reservation system that incorporates good employee controls, a property can simply and effectively make hotel staff more productive, while also reducing system risk and vulnerabilities from malicious acts to innocent mistakes.

As an example, housekeeping does not need access to make reservations or review financial reports and front desk personnel should have limited controls over revenue and channel management functions. The more granular these controls are, the more control a hotel has.

RESOURCES

Most hotels offer additional items to guests that may or may not be charged for. These items can include in-room add-ons like rollaway cots and cribs, to on-/off-premise parking, to tickets and tours in partnership with third party vendors.

Your PMS should provide the convenience of tracking such inventory, or resources, that are either sold or need to be delivered. A resource concept helps know how many of any item is available and what is remaining, thus ensuring you never oversell or over promise delivery to enhance a guest's stay.



CUSTOM FIELDS

Most reservation software vendors think they know your business and their “one size fits all” software should work. A system that incorporates custom fields will allow you to customize your solution to meet your specific needs as few properties are identical in their offering.

USABILITY

A final note on reservation systems relates to their ease of use, logic, workflow, and level of intuitiveness. Hotel staff comes and goes, and many properties rely on part-time help, especially in peak seasons. The easier your system is to learn, the less training and errors, and the greater efficiency and enjoyment, your staff will display.





CHAPTER 5

NURTURE YOUR BUSINESS



The final step of the guest journey takes place after the guest has left the property, and it extends (ideally) far into the future.

In some ways, this step overlaps with the first step of the guest journey (Inspiration), completing a full circle, but its focus is on using the property management system in combination with online marketing strategies to nurture more business.

After a guest leaves your property there are many things a property should evaluate to fully capitalize on all the work they have done to that point.

We offer a brief discussion of the most common activities that we recommend, support, and manage for our clients leveraging our ecosystem product of technology and expertise.

GUEST ANALYTICS

A reservation software should support the ability to query guest data. That guest data should be exportable and allow for filtering and further analysis based on sub-data like location, emails, preferences, life events, time reservation was made, arrival date, and unit preferences. With in-depth and detailed guest data and analytics we help hotels understand their customer base and how to maximize on it.

CONTENT GENERATION

rezStream's content writers will work closely with properties in generating and delivering regular communiques to a hotel's loyal fan base for informational and promotional purposes.

EMAIL MARKETING

At rezStream we deploy our white-labeled email marketing program to generate successful email marketing programs that yield new bookings from past guests. A/B testing and detailed reports allow for fine-tuning such campaigns. By cross-pollinating multiple tools and services across the entire spectrum of our ecosystem we demonstrate what works and what does not work with proven results.

LOYALTY PROGRAMS

Hotel loyalty programs are not a new thing and have long been employed by large hotel companies, especially within chain hotels. However, independent hotels can be equally effective utilizing loyalty programs if their tools and systems support it. rezStream Cloud integrates with a leading guest loyalty platform, Stash Rewards, to feed loyalty activity.

SOCIAL MEDIA MANAGEMENT

Social media is another great tool for hotels to nurture ongoing relationships with past guests. We discussed the many choices of social platforms available, and how they work to increase online visibility in the beginning of the guest journey, and social media is equally effective at continuing the conversation during and after the stay.

In fact, happy guests are most likely to post pictures and share their stories on social media during and right after their happy experience. Wait too long and you will lose much of the promotional opportunity and effect. In the absence of in-house expertise, hotels should evaluate vendors that understand how to effectively get the most out of different social media platforms to promote and build their brands.

SMS GUEST TEXTING

Email has clearly become a mainstream tool for communication between businesses and consumers, and your reservation software must take full advantage of that channel. But with mobile usage continuing to expand and most phones literally being powerful computers, the use of texting for sending messages continues to grow as a more and more accepted style of communication. Accordingly, a hotel software should support SMS texting as well as email.

Partnering with a hospitality focused SMS communication platform, the rezStream Cloud property management system integrates to enable hotels to text with guests pre-, during- and post-stay.





CHAPTER 6

CONTROL YOUR SUCCESS



We have now explored the entire guest journey, but a hotel's "success journey" requires one more layer of activity. Success does not just happen overnight, nor is it something that is achieved with a "set it and forget it" mindset.

All hotels operate in a dynamic environment where facilities, staff, guests, competition, and technology evolve and change. To advance, hotel activities and performance need to be continuously re-evaluated and adjusted to ensure you are taking the right steps to reach your goals.

To that end, rezStream approaches client work with a lifecycle in mind. Even before clients join the rezStream Ecosystem, we spend a lot of time finding the "right fit" for the hotel. We discuss property history, personnel, budgets, past vendors, goals, timing, levels of partnership, communication, and expectations to set everyone up for mutual success.

There is a lot of work involved in getting a client ready for the rezStream Ecosystem, and with our "money back guarantee" the last thing we want is to engage with someone on the wrong premises, and then fall short of expectations. Like most hotels, we pride ourselves on exceptional customer service, demonstrable results, and repeat clients that prove excellent referrals.

When a fit has been established and a hotel has bought into the program, the next stage of the life cycle is our onboarding process.

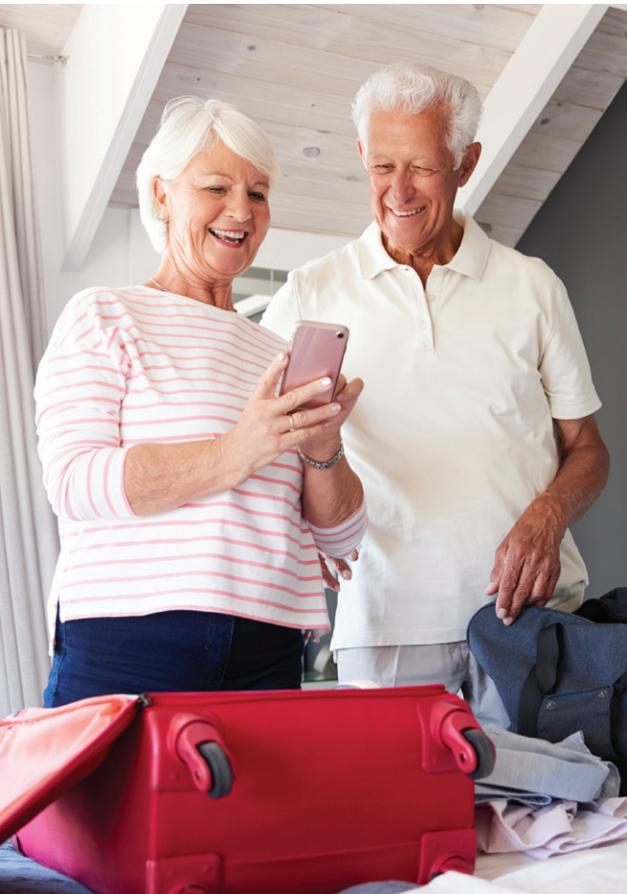
This is a gradual process during the first 90 days and involves things like data conversion, program configuration, third-party linking, system integrations with partner companies, website and booking engine preparation and theming, go-live at various stages, extensive hotel staff training, and business analysis and planning.

Once a hotel is fully up and running on the ecosystem, we implement our proactive 90-day success cycles. Studies on companies, and in our experience with hotel clients, show that shorter 90-day sprints are most effective in staying focused and generating specific results. Accordingly, every 90-days rezStream and clients meet to debrief results from the last sprint, discuss new opportunities, review/adjust objectives, and agree to the plan for the next 90-day sprint.



Of course, we are also there for the hotel when daily/weekly/monthly support issues arise. But we want to do more than just answer inbound requests for help. We want to be proactive!

We want to identify those issues before they become acute and require a client to ask. Moreover, in many cases clients do not even know what to ask for. And who can blame them? They “don’t know what they don’t know”, and rezStream has the benefit of decades in the industry talking to thousands of hotels across the entire spectrum of the guest journey. This proactive approach magnifies the benefits and advantages of the rezStream Ecosystem.



ONE CENTRAL TOOL

You are assigned a dedicated customer success consultant. They are intimately familiar with your business, goals, and annual strategy of how the ecosystem is working for your property. You will have one point of contact to coordinate everything related to your business.

ONE COORDINATED PLAN

There are no fingers being pointed at someone else. You will never have multiple meetings with multiple vendors discussing the same or overlapping initiatives.

ONE STRATEGIC PARTNER

You work with one vendor for your marketing, website, and reservation software. One team who understand all the components you need, how those solutions work together, and is compensated on delivering you the results you desire.

ONE FOCUS

We do a lot of the heavy lifting, to allow you more time to focus on what is most important: **the guest**.



CONCLUSION

In the end, it is all about the guests and the experience you provide them, from the beginning of their online search to post-check-out.

To provide a seamless guest journey, we believe it is essential to work with a partner who understands how your website and reservation software integrate and a marketing team who knows how to enhance both of these elements to attract and keep the right guest.

With the rezStream Ecosystem, the people and the tools work together during each step of the guest journey.

Our **internet marketing experts** understand how and where guests search for lodging and will position your property ideally.

Our **design folks** build websites that inspire and help guests visualize their future onsite experience.

Our **software professionals** deliver a lodging optimized booking engine to conclude the purchase and a property management system to support a fantastic staff and guest experience.

Finally, our **people in customer success, technical support and administration** provide the glue to bring it all together.



THE RESULT?

A single team collaborating and bringing synergies and value to choice hotel clients.

If you do not have the experience in-house, consider partnering with our team of professionals, one family of products, supporting you through every step of your guests' journey.

With two decades in the lodging industry and a 99% customer satisfaction rating, rezStream can be that partner for you.



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