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INCREASE YOUR HOTEL DIGITAL BOOKINGS

2021
HOTEL HANDBOOK

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Introduction to Digital Tourism

Any hotelier's goal is to increase the hotel occupancy by all means. Digital transformation in the 21st Century has provided numerous opportunities for hospitality businesses to tap into markets from all over the world. Hotels are moving away from walk in clients to online channels that enable guests to book from any part of the world.

In 2019, according to UNWTO, the tourism sector accounted for one in 10 jobs worldwide or 330 million jobs and 10.3% of global GDP (USD 8.9 trillion). It is no wonder that the tourism industry has the most expansive value chain and the most profound socio-economic footprint with accommodations in the middle of it all.
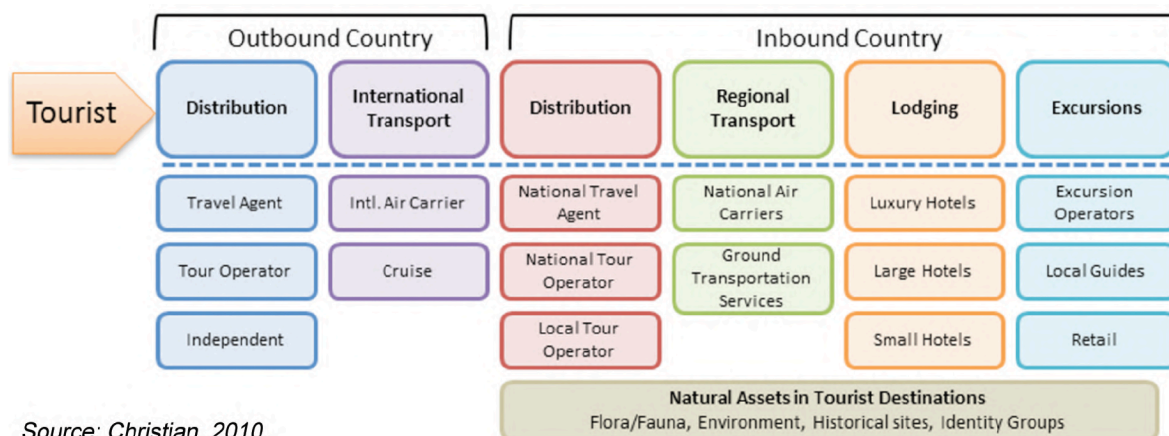
Source: Christian, 2010.

Attempting to capture all aspects of the value chain, a more detailed analysis could enhance hotel bookings by cooperating across the various elements.

In this handbook, Pesapal describes practical steps in which you can follow that can help you to increase your hotel bookings via your **Reserveport** booking engine all year round through digital platforms.

Digital Marketing Defining Hospitality

Digital marketing focuses on building a brand online, acquiring new customers, building trust and maintaining loyalty.

However, the strategies and techniques that hotels use are different from other sectors such as retail or utility companies, because they are marketing services rather than goods. Meaning, hotels should be more inclined to using emotional marketing to create the right feeling in their existing and potential target audience. Furthermore, hoteliers don't just attract new people but also retarget former guests to bring in a sizable portion of revenue.

The Hotel Handbook ~Increase Your Hotel Digital Bookings~
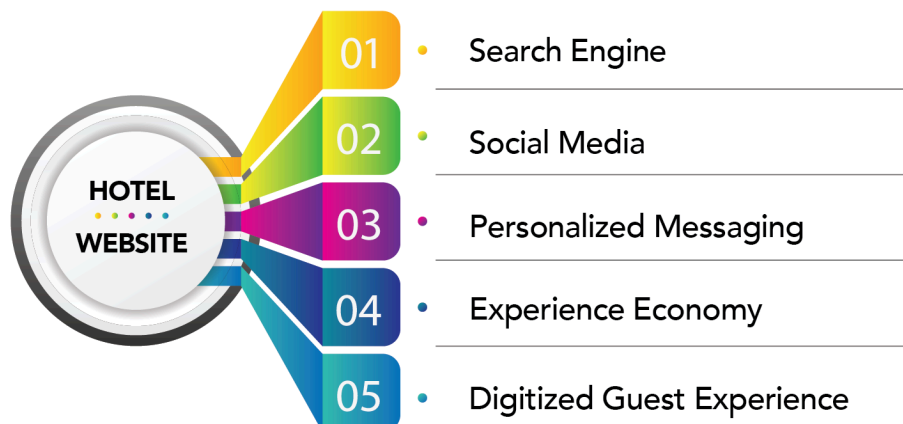
# 1. How to Rank A Hotel Website on Search Engine

If you want to get more business, you need to have a presence on the most relevant online platform. **GOOGLE.** People are constantly looking (googling) for hotels to book and if your hotel is not showing up, then you're definitely missing out on a lot of business.

A) How to Create or Claim Google My Business (GMB) Account

Google My Business is a free business profile that helps hotel owners manage their business information across Google Search and Maps. The most important feature is that you can engage with customers in showing what you do and what you have to offer – rooms with amenities and rates, hotel facilities such as spa, swimming pool and gym. You can also view and respond to Google Reviews.

I. **Create or claim your hotel business on Google My Business (GMB).**
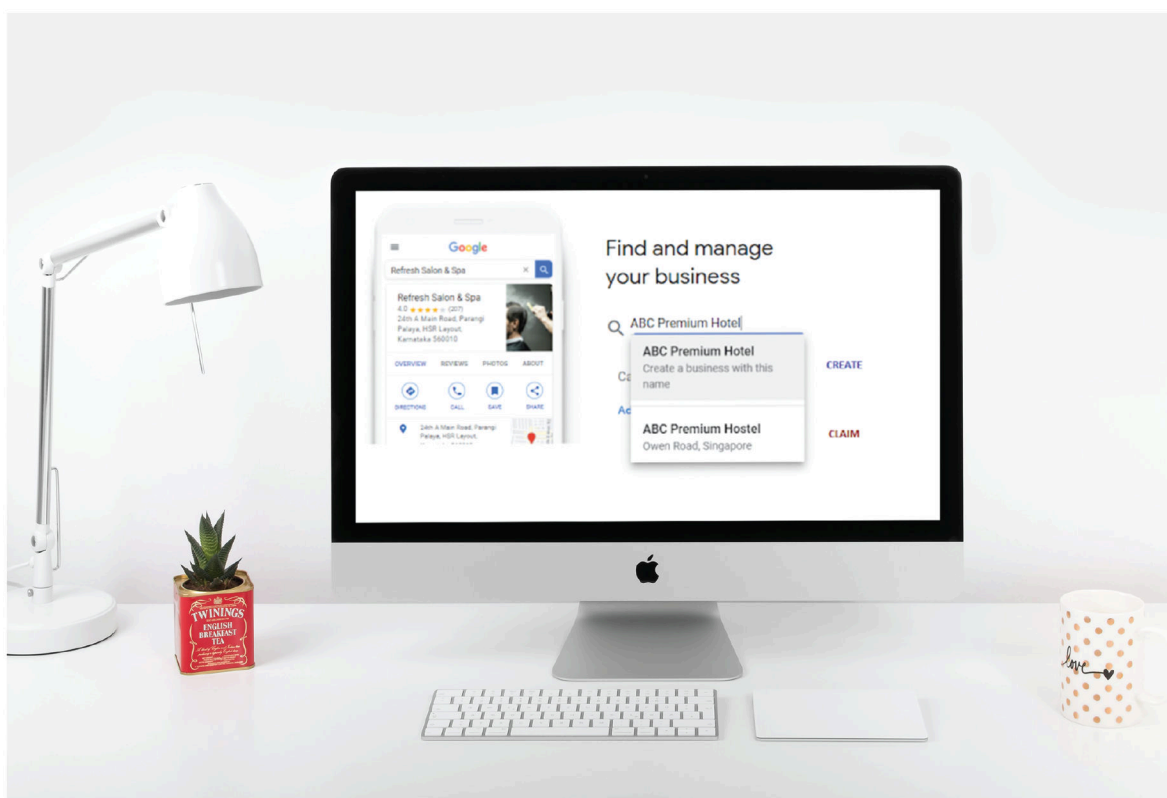
Whether you are creating or claiming your Google business profile, choose the exact location that will show up on Google Maps and Search when customers are looking for your business.

II. **Optimize your Google My Business (GMB) profile by ensuring users get the most up-to-date information about your hotel.**

Updated policies guidelines and contacts, fabulous hotel images, proper descriptions and effective Call to Actions (CTAs). Check your listing for duplicates especially after a name change and several changes of owners.

III. **Make sure your hotel name is listed exactly as you want it to appear to guests.**

If you run a hotel chain, be sure to have consistent brand resolutions across all locations, include the name of the brand in every location and have the same naming template across all properties e.g. Nairobi Serena Hotel and Kampala Serena Hotel is a best practice.

B) Promoting Your Hotel on Google Hotel Ads

Once your hotel location is verified on GMB, the next step is to sign up to **Google Hotel Centre**. This is where you display your hotel availability and rates on Google Search, Maps, and other platforms like **Google Travel,** allowing your hotel(s) to be prominently shown to the millions of travelers searching for accommodations.
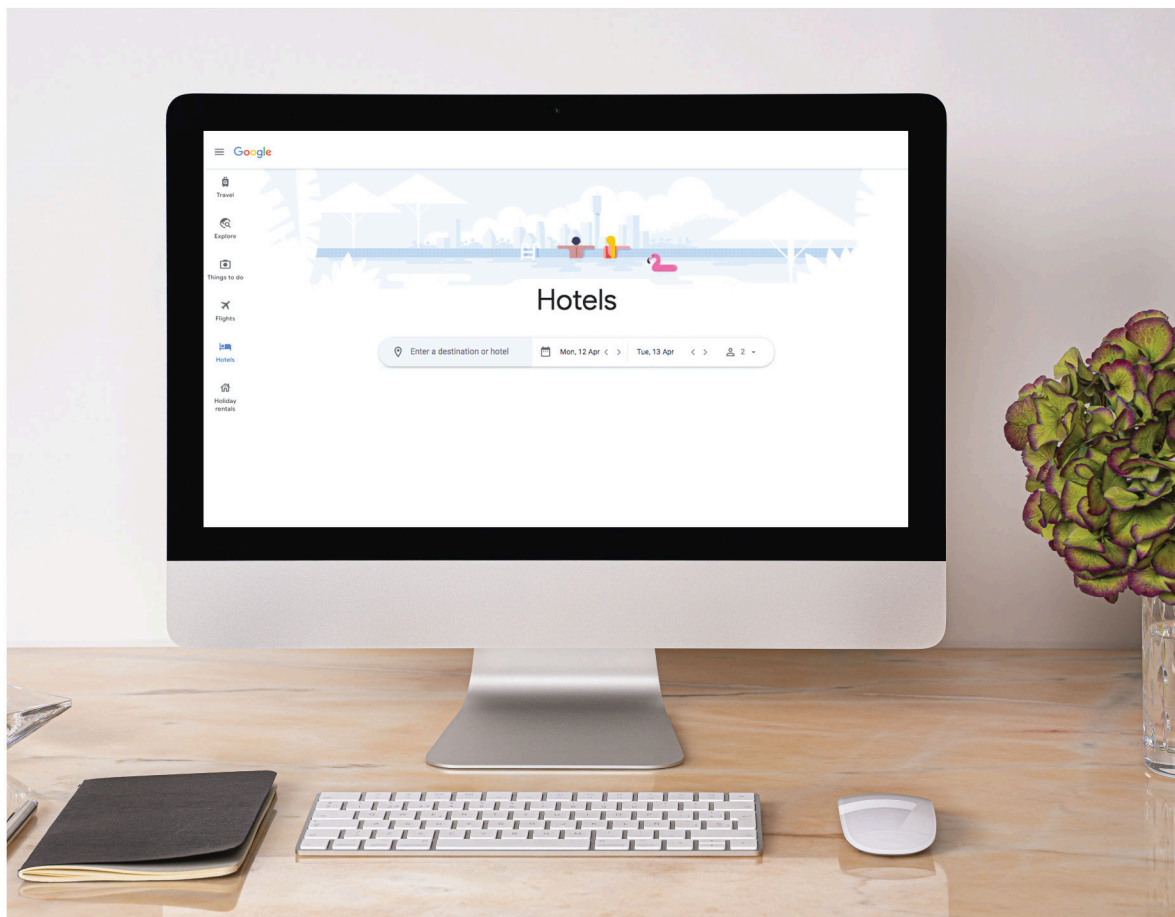
By integrating to Google Hotels you can promote your inventory with Google Hotel Ads, allowing you to connect with new and returning customers and send them to your website to book directly.

C) Importance of Travel Metasearch Engines for Hotels

A metasearch engine (or metas) is a search aggregator that takes input from a user to immediately query search engines like Google or Bing for results. A travel metasearch engine plays an additional role - a price comparison website that compares hotel rates from different sources across the internet, OTAs (online travel agents) and directly from hotels.

The most popular travel metasearch engines are Kayak, TripAdvisor, Trivago & Lonely Planet but most importantly Google Hotels.

Listing your hotel website on these travel metas is important for the following reasons:

- The OTAs are there, your hotel should be there.
- A hotel website has less visibility on Google's search results for broad keywords such as "4 star hotel in Zanzibar".
- Google wants a traveler to stay on Google during their travel research and booking process.
- Google wants to be there when users decide to book the hotel at the listed rate.

2. Social Media Marketing to Increase Bookings

Millennials represent the largest generation to date, making up 31.5% of the global population. This generation's travel plan is mainly influenced by user generated content such as reviews on travel metas and social media. This is because **97% of millennials share travel experiences on social media, with 2 in 3 posting once a day**. Being present on social networks and in particular Facebook & Instagram has a profound impact on impacting your potential guests to book your hotel.

But naturally, only posting on social media profiles is not sufficient right? The next important aspect is engagement.

"Millennials represent the largest generation to date, making up 31.5% of the global population."
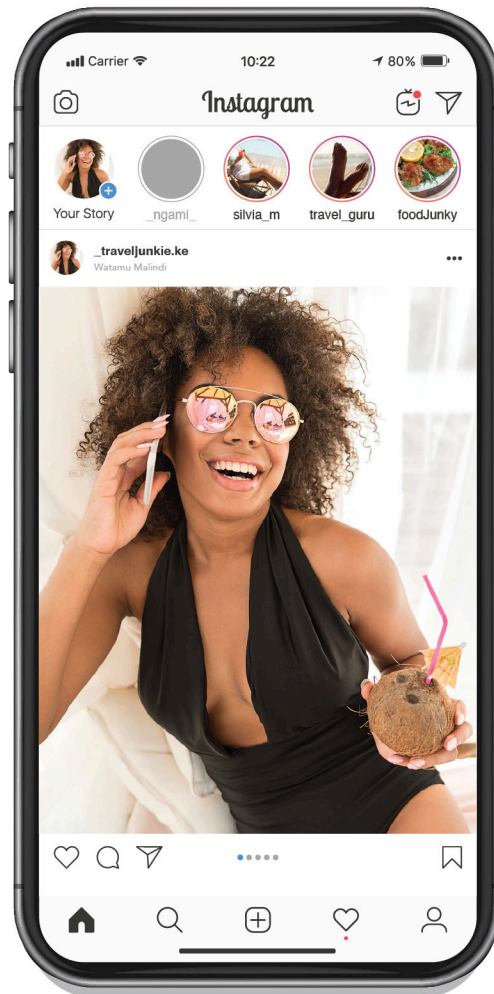
A) Virtual Communities to Connect & Enhance Marketing

Facebook's Groups provide a place to create virtual communities and connect with people who share similar interests. Hotel owners, managers & marketers can increase their customer acquisition and build up a fanbase by participating in well-established groups, connecting with like-minded people and sharing their best content or promotions.

Rwanda, Tanzania, Uganda, Ethiopia and Kenya BackPackers

🔒 Private group · 31.5K members

About   Discussion

Join Group

B) Retargeting Marketing Using Your Customer Database

A hotel's greatest asset is their customers' database - the collection of email addresses of all the guests that have resided with them. With the appropriate filtering of your database, categorizing the millennials will aid in creating an effective Facebook campaign that has a better ROI.

How To Create An Effective Facebook Ad

I. Choose Campaign Objective

This is the most important step in setting up Facebook Ads. Choosing conversions will target Facebook users interested in booking a room at your hotel.
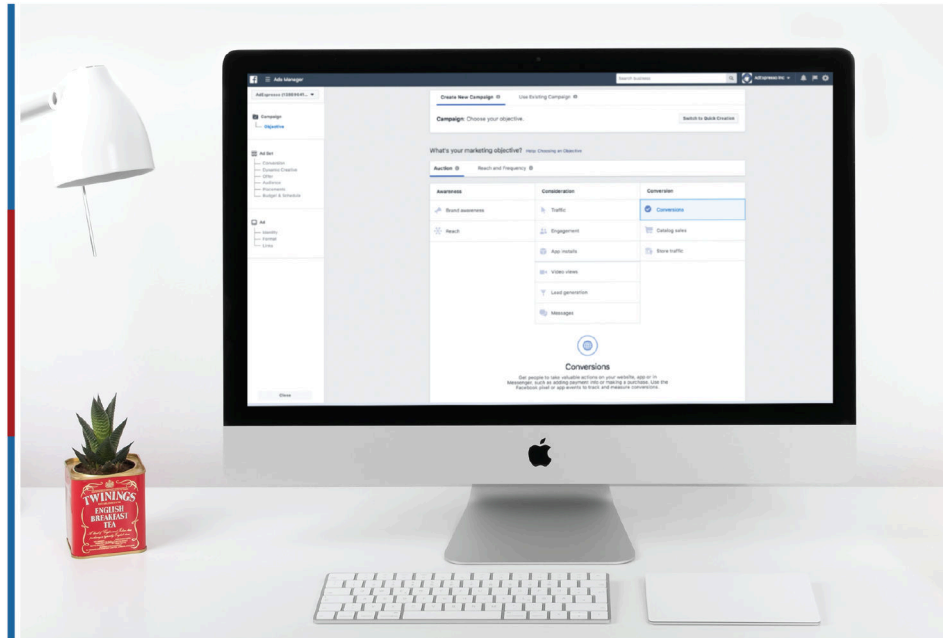
II. Create A Campaign By Entering The Campaign Name

Choose a campaign name that is easy to remember and track performance especially if it's a short-term campaign pegged to holidays like Easter or Valentine's Day.

III. Set Up Ad Account

Define where you want to have the conversion - your website, your app or text you on messenger or WhatsApp. Driving traffic to your hotel's website is highly recommended especially one integrated to your hotel's PMS to avoid misbookings and double entries.
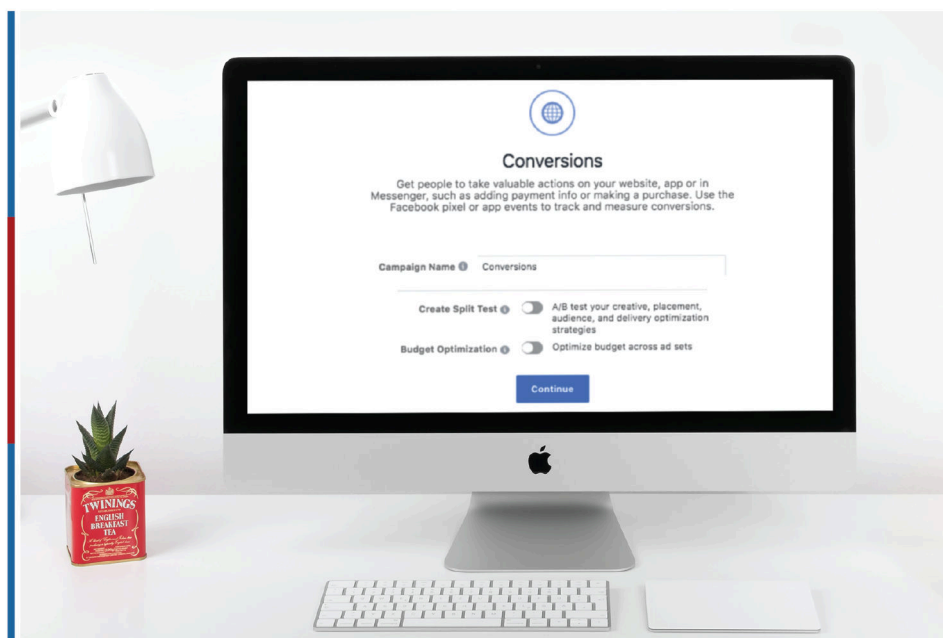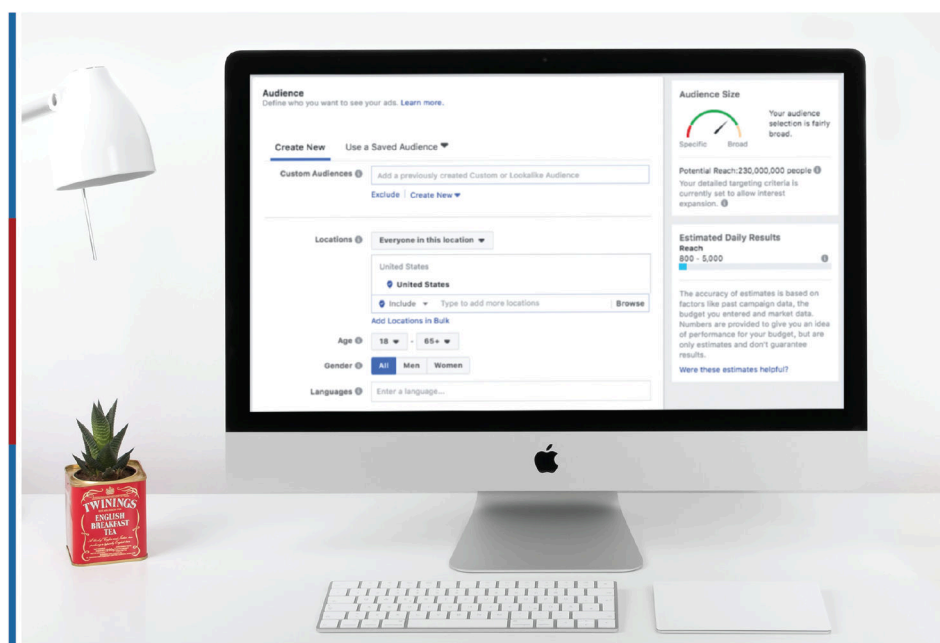
IV. Set Up The Target Audience

Including a location in your Facebook ads will help as well. Posts see 79% more engagement when a location is set. Moreover, travellers find your hotel when they look for images of your location or are closeby to your hotel and are looking to eventually book a room.

By selecting a custom audience, you can target specific users who have stayed with you and their friends who have similar interests to give you a better quality audience with more chances of conversion.

While creating an audience, you can select the location, age, gender, and even language. The option of the detailed target is very interesting as it lets you add the demographics, interests, and behaviors as well.

C) Content Marketing for Storytelling

The reason people globe-trot is to create experiences and share stories; stories which start from setting foot into a hotel room to checking out.

The largest component of creating a content strategy is in finding your brand's voice. For instance a 5 star beach resort has a different tone from a 5 star city hotel regardless of whether they are part of the same group of hotels.

Your hotel's story is more than just your building and your brand. Your content should revolve around your environment, the people (staff & local residents), and the history behind the location. Use your brand's tone to incorporate that into your storytelling.

Content marketing aims to boost sales but not to sell intrinsically.

• Use high resolution images to showcase your point of view
• Create videos that display your visual identity
• Write a blog article that talks to humans and captures emotions, not customers nor prospects

"*Encourage your guests to give honest reviews about your property and their experience while staying with you by tagging your social media profiles.*"

3. Personalized Messaging for Better Customer Experience

Encourage your guests to give honest reviews about your property and their experience while staying with you by tagging your social media profiles. Positive reviews from your guests will make your potential customers have a good perspective about your property. In case one of your guests writes a negative review on social media, making amends should accompany a sincere apology.

A) Responding to Negative Reviews via Direct Messaging

The internet has turned the world into a global village such that communication has been made simpler and faster. Using social media messaging tools allows you to respond to enquiries. Plus Instagram now lets you experience cross messaging between Facebook and Instagram. Update it and you'll be able to respond to all your queries from any of the applications you use.

I) What Type Of Emails To Send

Effective email marketing is informational rather than promotional.

- Disseminate content - share your blogs, videos and artwork, recent updates, events and everything related to your hotel to keep your guests informed.

- Guest's booking journey and cycle - engaging with your existing and past guests to keep your brand at the front of their memory.

- Converting probable guests - nurturing your booking inquiries to confirmed bookings

II) Whatsapp Business For Wider Customer Reach

Following an update by WhatsApp, many users of the app feared for their privacy. This led to WhatsApp sharing its own status on the messaging app in an effort to assure users globally, of its commitment to user privacy.

WhatsApp business offers the possibility of sending multiple messages to as

many potential guests as you wish to by creating a broadcast group! However, if misused, this powerful tool can lead to a loss of potential clients.

- Create a profile for your property to help your guests find valuable information like a website, location, contact information and room types with rates and images.

- Write business automated messaging tools to respond when away or to a first time guest.

- Use WhatsApp Web to track all your messages and respond to your customers more efficiently right from your desktop or laptop.

- Link your WhatsApp Business with your Facebook Business page for cross-platform advertising and posting. Your WhatsApp status can be posted as a Facebook story.

4. Attracting Domestic Tourists With Packaged Experiences

The development of low-cost carriers and cross-boundary trains such as the TAZARA enables more people to travel the continent at a reasonable price. Demand for accommodation continues to rise with the increase in domestic tourism. Your hotel should create unique packages that will attract more local guests and convince them to book with you.

Ensure that you conduct research to help you understand your target market so as to create packages that will entice them. For example, if your hotel attracts more of the generations Y and Z you can create a package that includes activities like water rafting or hiking that they would be interested to take part in.

Besides offering affordable prices that they would not want to miss, how should you tailor your hotel packages to attract them more?

"Ensure that you conduct research to help you understand your target market so as to create packages that will entice them. For example, if your hotel attracts more of the generations Y and Z you can create a package that includes activities like water rafting or hiking that they would be interested to take part in."

A) Create Digital Itinerary Services to Grow Local Demand

If your property is situated in a beautiful landscape, then you can take advantage by creating an itinerary. The idea is about the creation of a platform that exploits currently available itinerary planning and guidance support tools to create an online marketplace for offering additional yet related tourism products and services.

Step 1. Digital Content Creation.

Videos have higher engagement than images and create the imagery that a guest's stay at your hotel will be a highlight in their holiday.

Blogging with high resolution imagery is as effective if you do not have enough resources to hire a professional video crew.

Step 2. Digital Content Dissemination.

One of the content harvesting tools at your disposal (and free of charge) is YouTube. The multi-lingual and speech enabled support through its subtitle and captions settings will widen your audience outside the borders.

Step 3. Accommodation & Activity Bundling.

Creating a time-based navigation with tourism recommender systems may be resource intensive particularly for boutique hotels and single chain properties. However by bundling holiday and travel packages, you can sell online to a wide pool of audience on Ticketsasa. In addition, Pesapal offers access to marketing, customer and technical support for all your sales.
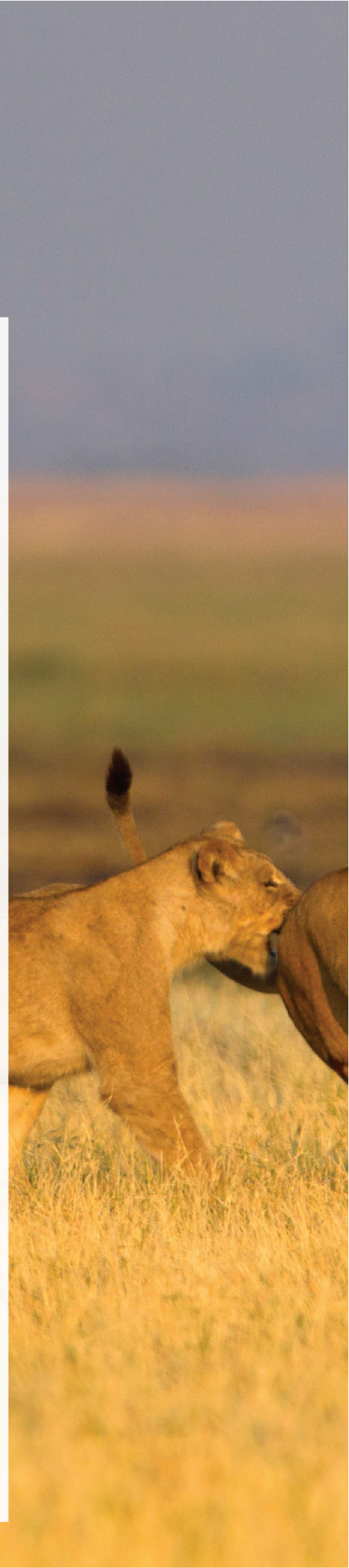
"If your property is situated in a beautiful landscape, then you can take advantage by creating an itinerary."

B) How Personalized Offers Create A Higher Lifetime Value

Guests are nowadays chasing for experiences and the ways in which they can create unforgettable memories. Once a guest books with you, they are looking forward to taking part in something they have never done before. It is prudent to try and get some information about your guests before they arrive such as what is the purpose for the visit.

For example, if it is for a certain occasion such as a birthday or an anniversary you can plan for a complimentary gift for them like a bottle of wine or some flowers.

Customer satisfaction Boosts Lifetime Value (LTV). Customers are likely to buy another product, or hang around for a few years when they have a good relationship with the hotel.

5. How Digitized Guest Experience Increases Hotel Revenue

The 21st Century has facilitated great technological advancement. Digital and creative tools offering 3D-media rich experience have enticed many a guest to book their stay with hotels.

Processes have been simplified and made faster due to technology. Apps in particular are increasingly important in the way hoteliers manage their day to day operations as well as increasing efficiency in their services. Tech has also helped improve the overall guest cycle and experience.

A) Increasing Direct Bookings Build Strong Guest Relationship

The online travel agents (OTAs) have witnessed both a spike as well as loss in the online booking market share. In the wake of the pandemic, there are a huge number of hotels that have stopped putting much weight on OTAs and started promoting direct bookings. However, to ensure direct bookings are a success, you need to:

• Have a website with a **booking engine**. Open your doors to more direct sales through online reservations by integrating Reserveport by Pesapal.

• Ensure that the booking process for your guests is seamless so as to mitigate any challenges that they might experience while planning for their stay at your property.

• Update inventory in real time by integrating the booking engine with your hotel's PMS. This will block any loopholes such as dual entries for the same rooms or missed bookings that could arise.

B) Why Is Contactless Cashless Hotel Experience Is A Must

The hotel industry has gone through critical disruptions since the beginning of the pandemic. Guest safety became of utmost priority and with contactless technologies, hoteliers could avoid compromising with it. By having a contactless and cashless system in place, guests can essentially bypass the human contact.

Card payments and mobile wallets as well as online transactions have the widest global acceptance. How, therefore, can hotels plugin to the contactless, cashless guest experience?

C) Introducing Reserveport by Pesapal and Pesapal Sabi PDQ Validated Integration with Oracle Hospitality
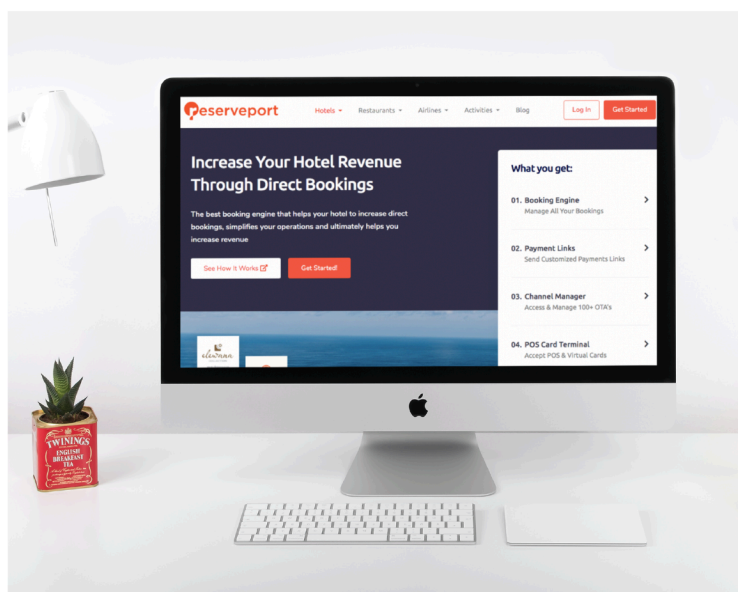
By integrating your Reserveport booking engine to your Oracle PMS (Suite 8 or Fidelio), you can push rates, availability and restriction data to the website and retrieve the bookings back into the PMS.

By **integrating Sabi PDQ** to your Oracle PMS (Suite 8 or Fidelio), you can initiate a transaction at the front desk in real time on the PDQ machine for payment and in return retrieve a reference number for reconciliation.

Conclusions & Recommendations

In conclusion, a website is a digital representation of your hotel business. By using all the digital solutions, a hotel can strengthen their global online brand recognition by creating incentives pegged to where their customer base is, in order to have a high retention rate. Suffice to say, a website improves your guest influx by a large extent especially if you invest in the digital marketing strategies highlighted in this handbook.

These include:

1. **Ranking your hotel's website on search engines such as Google by creating or** claiming a Google My Business Account, promoting your hotel on Google Hotel ads and effectively using travel metasearch engines like Google Hotels and TripAdvisor.

2. **Social media marketing** tactics such as connecting with travellers on virtual communities, retargeting customers that have stayed at your hotel as well as their friends and also creating content that aims at promoting direct bookings on your website in order to reduce your customer acquisition cost.

3. **Personalized messaging** on email, WhatsApp Business and also direct messaging your customers on social media in order to reduce customer churn rate by responding to negative reviews and inversely.

4. **Attracting local and domestic tourists** with experience packages. By enabling guests to book online the experiences they could partake while staying at your hotel, you'll generate more revenue per customer.

5. **Digitizing the guest experience** with a seamless booking process on your website and by implementing **digital payment solutions** to effectively manage bookings from your hotel's website.

Pesapal recommends its partners to follow this short checklist before selecting a digital payment service provider for your property.

» Decide which cashless payment method will suit best across different areas of your property. For example, at the spa or gift shop, guests may be more comfortable with card payments.

» Have alternative payment methods to fit guests preferences. If you restrict to mobile money and eWallets, customers who aren't active on your chosen approach may be locked out resulting in paying in cash.

» Guests' data security should be the ultimate goal and the most crucial element. Choose a service that is PCI DSS certified.

One of the benefits of the **Pesapal Sabi PDQ** is increased security of card data. Thanks to tokenization and encrypted transmission of card data, card information is no longer saved in your hotel management system. By protecting your customer's data, your reputation and brand image will grow in ripple effect.

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ABOUT PESAPAL

Founded in 2009, Pesapal provides a simple, safe and secure way for individuals and businesses to make and accept payments in Africa

We offer a variety of convenient and cost effective options for end-users to make payments for products they are purchasing both online and at the point of sale.

Pesapal operates in Kenya, Uganda, Tanzania, Malawi, Zambia, Rwanda and Zimbabwe.

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