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Hotel Website Design Trends Guide

The Future of Hotel Website Design

Keeping up with the latest website design trends is a near-impossible task for any hospitality marketer. Design trends change quickly as technology evolves and consumer trends shift. Meanwhile, business pressures and other important hospitality marketing strategies can make it difficult to justify the time and expense of updating a hotel's website design on a regular basis.

Given all that, it's important for hospitality marketers to occasionally take a step back and closely examine the current state of their hotel's website. Direct bookings are now out-pacing pre-pandemic levels according to industry data. In September 2021, direct booking stays were up 116% compared to the same period in 2019, the only channel to exceed pre-pandemic numbers. All hospitality marketers want direct bookings, which help cultivate one-to-one relationships with travelers, create brand loyalty, and save on distribution commissions.

Yet the direct booking strategy comes back around to every hotelier's most important tool: The hotel website. Sure, travelers are increasingly booking directly with hotels, but results vary from hotel to hotel and the common denominator remains the same — hotels with unique websites that tell a story and focus on user experience are leading the pack.

Is your hotel website keeping up with the latest hotel website design trends? Are you struggling to determine the best plan for your aging hotel website? Let's look deeper at the ever-changing hotel website landscape and how hospitality marketers can adapt.

Consumer/Industry Trends & User Experience

Have you ever wondered why a traveler falls off your hotel website without booking? It can be frustrating as a hospitality marketer to see the website data but feel blinded when trying to make website enhancements that will lead to notable change and more conversions.

The bottom line is, a traveler's exit from your hotel website often comes down to one of two factors: Poor user experience or unmet needs. According to Google's Customer Journey study, 47% of people decided not to book because of unmet needs (compared to 26% due to price). Further, 53% of website visitors will leave if the web page takes more than three seconds to load. Designing a hotel website that converts is all about creating an engaging and compelling website with a strong user experience — especially on mobile devices!

Redesigning a hotel website is a big investment that takes long-term thinking, strategic planning, and input from key stakeholders. When done right, though, that investment can pay big dividends with increased traffic, engagement, and direct bookings.

Many hoteliers will begin looking at a website redesign as their hotel website nears the 3-year-old mark, though website design isn't one-size-fits-all. Some hospitality marketers might look into a website redesign or more modest updates if their hotel website has low engagement or if there is a downward trajectory in conversion rate. Others will make the move due to technical issues, a cumbersome setup, or a poor mobile experience.
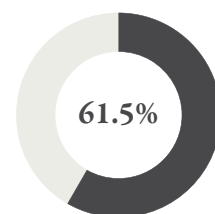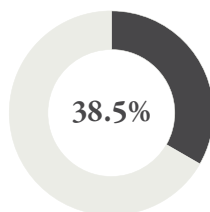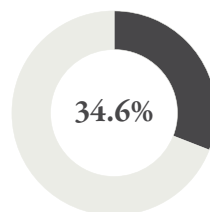
TOP REASONS VISITORS LEAVE A WEBSITE
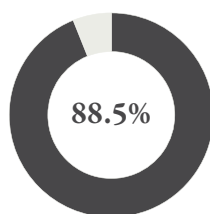
88.5% — Slow Loading
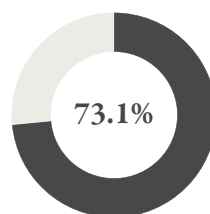
73.1% — Non-Responsive Website

61.5% — Bad Navigation
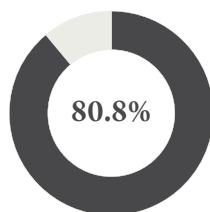
38.5% — Outdated Design

34.6% — Poor Content Structure
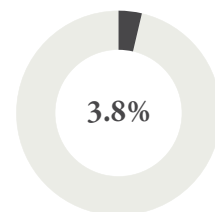
3.8% — Obtrusive Use of Audio/Video
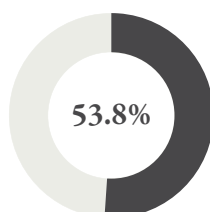
WHEN TO REDESIGN A WEBSITE?

80.8% — Low Conversion Rate
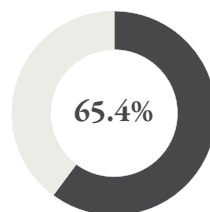
65.4% — High Bounce Rate
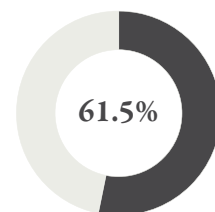
61.5% — Needs Better UX

53.8% — Not Responsive for All Devices
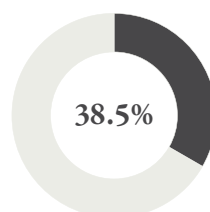
38.5% — Outdated Website
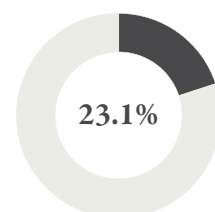
23.1% — Not SEO-friendly

Hotel Website Best Practices

While website design trends are often changing, there are a number of tried and true hotel website principles that have stood the test of time and give any hotel website a strong foundation. Regardless of what design trends come and go in the next year, five years, or 10 years, these foundational best practices will almost certainly remain.

VIVID PHOTOGRAPHY

Travel is all about experience, and there may be no greater tool for hospitality marketers than stunning and vivid photography. Large and immersive photos allow a hotel website to sell the experience to prospective travelers. It's imperative for hotels to have current, professional photos that showcase the property and its amenities. Let photography tell your hotel's story and create an emotional connection.

INTUITIVE BOOKING EXPERIENCE

Nothing is more frustrating than a booking experience that's long and clunky. The booking page is the most important in the customer journey, and a cumbersome process and poor user-experience could lead to drop off and an increased exit rate that leaves bookings on the table. Design a process that limits the number of steps, is easy for traveler's to understand, and most of all, ensures security and user privacy.

SHOWCASE THE TRAVELER JOURNEY

Booking a hotel is about more than finding a place to sleep. Sure, prospective guests want to see photos about where they're going to sleep, but it's important to take them through the journey — from the front door to the lobby to the bathroom and amenities. Walk people through their stay and help them feel the experience before they step foot on your property. That means thought-out content and photos of the entire experience.

CLEAR CALLS-TO-ACTION

Don't assume every traveler knows exactly how to move through your hotel website. A clear user flow with vivid call-to-action buttons can lead to more direct bookings. Mobile speed, a clean navigation, and a simple design all lead to this. Provide travelers with design cues and make your CTAs clear. You can do this with color as well as actionable content that leads the traveler through the customer journey.

SOCIAL PROOF

Hospitality marketers know how much prospective travelers want to know what other people think. That's why reviews play such a major role in hotel bookings, whether directly or through an Online Travel Agency. Showcasing guest reviews, including awards, or even displaying user-submitted photos from Instagram are all ways hotels can market their hotels with real-world experiences and testimonials.

FOLLOW SEO BEST PRACTICES

Organic search is one of the primary ways for a traveler to reach any hotel website, but it takes work to be discovered. Hotel websites should optimize their hotel website pages for SEO with keyword-driven titles and meta descriptions, incorporating keywords based on location and local attractions. Meanwhile, SEO content such as a blog with destination information, a sub-page for a wedding venue, or schema markup for Google can take a hotel's SEO efforts to the next level.

5 Latest Hotel Website Design Trends

Following hotel website best practices is certainly a great start for any hotelier. But in today's landscape, hospitality marketing is all about setting your hotel apart from the competition. Whether you're a branded hotel with a vanity website aimed at creating a unique identity outside of the Brand.com template, or an independent hotel trying to showcase what makes you unique, the design of your hotel website can make all the difference.

Like with all technology these days, it's impossible for a hotel website to always be up to date with the latest trends. Websites have come a long way since the dot-com boom in the late 1990s, and techniques and trends are constantly evolving. There is a fine line for hospitality marketers to straddle when attempting to keep up with the times of changing hotel website design and standing out. But one thing is for sure: User experience and hotel websites that can tell a unique story are leading the charge for direct bookings.

The shift to minimalism

When it comes to marketing a hotel, it's all about the experience, and a bold design and photography can often say much more than an overload of words. You've got three seconds to capture your visitors' attention — that's not much time! And if your hotel website doesn't capture a traveler's attention immediately, they'll move on to the next hotel website that might.

In that way, the shift toward minimalism that started in web design is now influencing hotel website design as well. Minimalism in website design is about creating a design that's simple and free of distractions, one that strips away any clutter that might cause the user to lose focus. It aims to direct the user's attention toward the main content which, when done properly, can create a beautiful interface that showcases your hotel.

Minimalism is a design aesthetic that encourages simplicity and elegance. All you need is the essentials: the most important content and user interface elements. But the 'less is more' approach doesn't mean 'boring.' Minimalism on a hotel website means less information for your prospective guests to sift through, a clean color palette, a nice balance of white space, and a responsive design. This particular trend has been influenced by the popularity of mobile and tablet browsing. Designers and developers have started designing and developing websites with smaller screens in mind: first mobile, then tablets and finally desktop.

The growing trend has resulted in hotel websites that utilize white space to allow content and imagery space to breathe, leading to clean designs with minimalistic, yet attention-grabbing elements. And white space doesn't always have to be white. Another design term commonly used is 'negative space,' which is that breathing room that allows your website's elements to stand out — and a bold color can still achieve that same minimalistic effect.

GOING FURTHER

Minimal design has become popular in the hotel industry because it allows hoteliers to utilize those vivid photos of their property. But unique, bold and large typography has also become a top trend in website design. Web designers have started paying more attention to the relationship between page elements and the copy that accompanies them.

When done correctly, typography can be an effective tool for conveying a hotel's personality.

A watchful eye on page speed

No marketer wants their website to load slowly, but optimizing the design to ensure it doesn't load at a snail's pace has become more critical than ever before.

Not only is optimizing a hotel website for speed best practice for user experience, it's also crucial to keep prospective guests on the website. Given today's fiber Internet and 5G mobile speeds, consumers have run thin on patience for slow-loading websites. If user experience isn't enough reason to build a faster hotel website, Google gave marketers a second reason in 2021 when it released its page experience update. Those algorithm changes combine several page experience factors to help determine where your hotel website ranks on Google — a pretty important place considering the search giant controls more than 90% of all search traffic.

As hoteliers evaluate the performance of marketing campaigns and their hotel website, it's important to consider how long it takes your current website to load. What experience do travelers encounter when they first arrive? Optimizing an old website for speed often means updating or replacing plugins, cleaning up poor or old code, optimizing images for the web, or switching to a faster website hosting service.

When it comes to new website designs, a focus on minimalism and simplicity allow hotel website's to run faster, website developers are utilizing new development techniques such as offscreen loading to ensure the website loads quickly for travelers, and hospitality marketers are increasingly creating simpler home pages and moving content to deeper-level pages.

GOING FURTHER

Google's Page Experience Update focuses on what it calls six 'core web vitals.' Without diving into the details, essentially all six vitals come back to page speed. Yes, strong content still plays a large factor in where a hotel website will be ranked on Google, but page speed and user experience has never been more important to the algorithm.
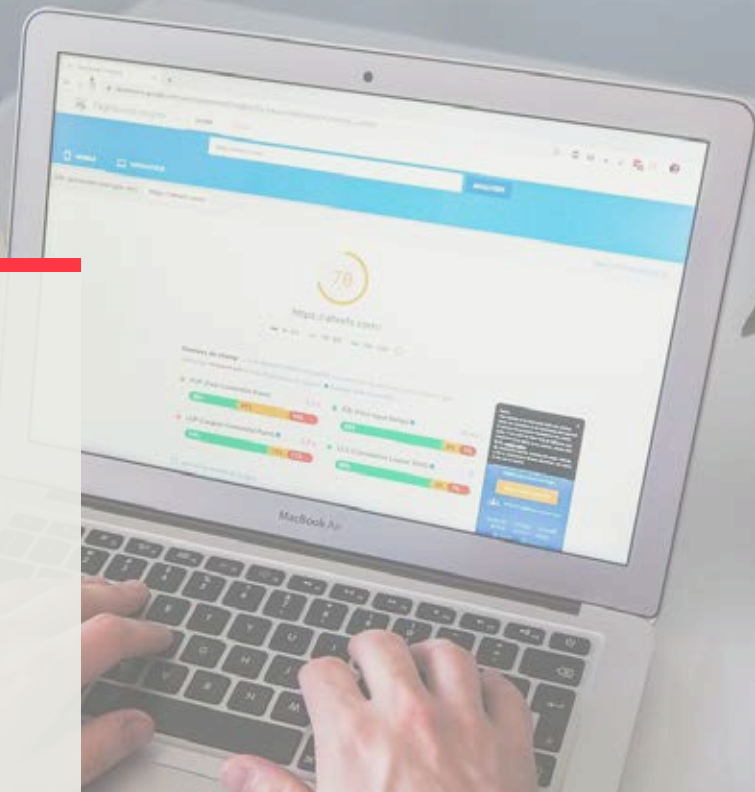
Responsive design drives user experience

Responsive website design is no longer an option. With more than half of all traffic on the Internet now stemming from mobile devices, creating a website that responds to screen sizes across the spectrum is a requirement.

According to industry data, 27.3% of total bookings in 2021 came from mobile devices. Looking at direct bookings in September 2021, mobile bookings were up 197.3% compared to the same pre-pandemic period in September 2019. Mobile bookings appear to be on the rise and the trend is likely to continue. People are using smartphones to accomplish nearly everything online. For hotels, that means everything from research to booking. When thinking about responsive design, hoteliers shouldn't only focus on their primary website pages, but also the ones where user experience is especially critical to conversions — including the booking process, hotel restaurant reservations, and the online payment process.

While design trends are constantly evolving, web designers are beginning to focus on mobile optimization and cleanly designed sites with simple navigation. These sites emphasize the content, allowing visitors more time to concentrate on making decisions about where they'd like to stay instead of being distracted by superfluous design elements. The shift toward minimalism, for example, was influenced in part by the popularity of mobile and tablet browsing. Designers and developers have started designing and developing websites with smaller screens in mind: first mobile, then tablets, and finally desktop.

That has led to a trend called 'thumb-friendly' design. This idea places emphasis on designing a mobile website experience that is user-friendly across many screen sizes. According to one study, 49% of respondents use their smartphone with one hand. That's why it's important for websites to place important functions above the 'fold' and within thumb distance of people using their mobile device. If your homepage covers information that you know guests are looking for, keep this information within thumb distance so it is easily accessible.

GOING FURTHER

Many new websites are designed with a mobile-first approach, ensuring elements such as navigation, buttons, typography and more adapt well to small screens. From there, it's often easier to scale to a desktop size. Trends such as a hamburger menu for navigation and mobile-specific buttons ensure user pathways are top-of-mind for mobile.

Immersing travelers with dynamic content

If the pandemic sped up one website design trend, it was virtual tours. For many hotels, 360-degree videos (of rooms, wedding venues, and more) created an experience that wouldn't have been possible for many prospective travelers during lockdown.

People love videos, and virtual tours create a dynamic that can't be matched with static photos.

As business people began planning for conferences and future brides began searching for the perfect wedding venue, many turned to virtual tours to find the hotel that best met their needs. Since then, many hotels have tried to make their virtual tours more immersive and offer them on every device possible — from a smartphone to a laptop or desktop computer.

The next step beyond virtual tours for many hotels is conversational marketing, or chatbots. Like the popular voice assistants that now fill millions of homes, these chatbots are becoming more sophisticated and human-like, allowing people to get information within minutes and hoteliers to qualify them for sales faster than ever before.

GOING FURTHER

A study by Best Western found that hotels with virtual tours on their website had a 48% increase in bookings compared to those that didn't. As virtual reality has taken off, consumers have begun making decisions based on immersive virtual experiences. While AR and VR haven't fully arrived in the hospitality industry, there's no telling what might come next.
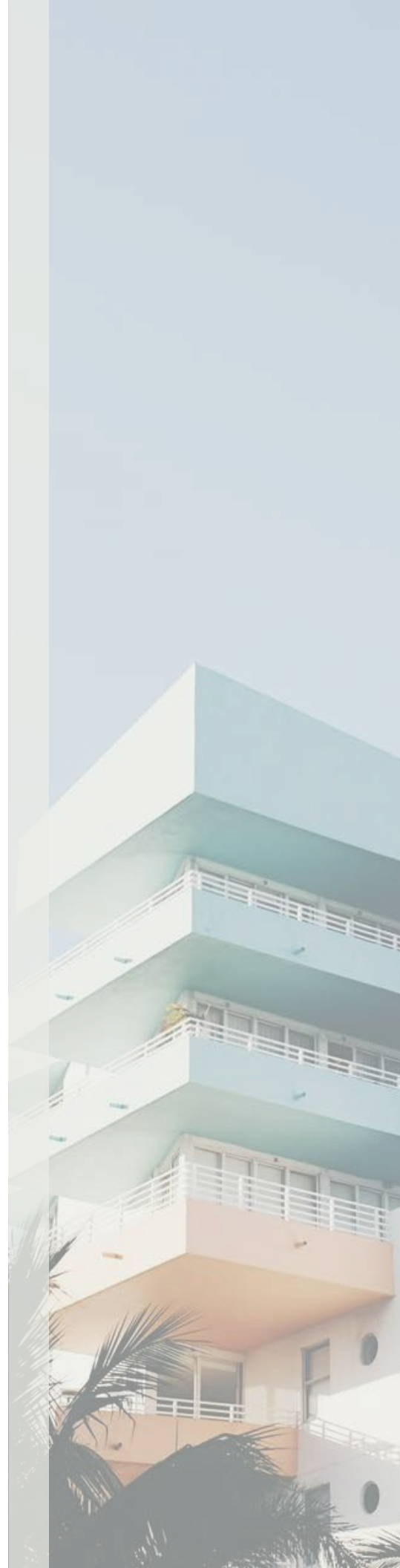
Telling a hotel's story with content and design

A hotel website is a traveler's first impression before they ever walk through the front door. Whether you're a small boutique hotel or part of a large international chain, your website should be clean and easy-to-navigate. Most of all, it should tell a story and create an experience.

A hotel website that makes someone feel something is a hotel website that can convert. Hoteliers have the ability to create that sense of experience through immersive features such as virtual tours, but website design is now playing a bigger role too. **Several website design trends have come together to help tell a story while answering questions along the way:**

- What can I do at the destination?
- What does the hotel offer?
- What amenities are available?

Creating a 'sense of place' is a big factor in hotel website design these days. Website headers focused on large photos, oversized typography, and standout text have helped hotels draw focus and showcase personality while micro animations, which are subtle on-screen movements, are a major design trend that help create emotion and a sense of engagement. The bottom line is, many hotel websites feel much the same. By combining these design trends with interesting copy, many forward-thinking hotels are setting themselves apart.

GOING FURTHER

How a branded hotel tells its story might be different from how a boutique hotel tells its story, which could be different from a luxury hotel. There is no right or wrong approach. Hotels across many spaces are using these design trends and crafting them in their own way. That might include bold colors, tall hero banners, or flat design. Keeping up with the latest website design trends doesn't mean you can't tell your own story.

Strategic Hospitality Marketing

With more than 20 years of hospitality marketing experience, O'Rourke uses a comprehensive and strategic approach to help both independent and branded hotels take their digital marketing to the next level. We create an online presence for your brand that captures guests from their initial online engagement with you and seamlessly transitions them to your real-world experience.

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To discuss your business challenges and see how we can help, please contact Brian Fitzgerald, VP Digital Strategy, at **(978) 465-5955, ext. 221,** or **bfitzgerald@orourkehospitality.com.**