2013 Hotel Marketing Trends: From standout social media to marvelous mobile marketing
2012 was a year of rapid evolution in online hotel marketing. Thanks to a quickly growing online travel agency presence, an expanding mobile space, social media and corporate channels, travelers have more options for researching and booking travel than ever before. They’re consuming high-quality images and videos while doing their travel shopping on different devices, through different platforms, and from multiple locations.

These evolving trends mean it's more important than ever for hotel marketers to be prepared, adaptable and to engage travelers in new ways. The good news is, as the internet generation becomes more mature and the web more ingrained in our lives, there are statistics and research available to help us predict travelers' behavior.

We’ve broken down our 2013 forecast into five key areas that we believe hotel marketers need to focus on:

1. Making the most of visual merchandising on third party travel websites
2. The high-growth of mobile
3. Surging social media
4. Capturing corporate travel opportunities
5. Content-rich web marketing

For each of these areas, we’ll take a look at some of the 2012 trends we observed; offer three informed predictions for 2013; and discuss some recommendations and best practices you should consider to stay ahead of the competition.
Making the most of visual merchandising

The popularity of travel related sites is no secret; almost 50 per cent of all online travel purchases are made through online travel agent (OTA) sites\(^1\). Clearly, ensuring your hotel is listed on major OTAs such as Expedia and Orbitz continues to be a must – but simply “being there” isn’t enough. Ensuring that your property stands out from the rest of those listed in the same places is critical.

Trends to be aware of

1. Almost 20 per cent of all internet hotel bookings are made through an OTA\(^2\). While a majority of bookings are still made through hotel-branded sites – and even if you’d rather focus your marketing efforts on your own site – you can’t afford to ignore almost a fifth of your potential business.

2. Travelers are consuming video as they research and shop online. OTAs experienced a 15 per cent growth in travel referral traffic from YouTube in 2012\(^3\), and 89 per cent of leisure travelers (and 93 per cent of business travelers) watch video online\(^4\).

3. Travelers like to read and write reviews. The average number of reviews per hotel on OTA sites is 238, and 81 per cent of travelers find reviews important\(^5\).
Predictions for 2013

1. Visual storytelling is the future of digital. The web has always been a visual medium, but thanks to the proliferation of high-quality screens and high-speed internet – particularly on mobile devices – travelers expect hotels to use high-resolution photos and videos to tell their story. Next year, it’s predicted that that 73 percent of U.S. internet users will watch video online (up 6 percent from 2012), and over $4 billion will be spent on online video advertising in the U.S. (a 41 percent growth over 2012).

2. More people will watch videos throughout all phases of their travel research and shopping journey. Google already notes that 66 per cent of video viewers watch travel videos when thinking about a trip; 64 per cent do so when choosing a destination; and 57 per cent do so when deciding on accommodation.

3. Online reviews will continue to play a key role in the decision-making process. Forty-three per cent of travelers read online reviews, and two-thirds of online traveler reviews are posted to OTAs.

Suggested best practices

1. Build a visually compelling presence on travel websites be that OTAs, review, planning sites. Include high-resolution pictures, virtual tours, panoramic photos, and detailed descriptions of your property, its amenities and the local area. Tell your hotel’s story in a way that makes a web visitor feel like they’re visiting your hotel. Always remember: your competition is just a click away.

2. Use video to help tell your story. Thirty-one percent of all web users have watched a travel video, and faster data speeds and superior screens have made high-quality video a much more viable marketing tool.

3. Manage your online reputation carefully. Respond to every review if you can and always take a careful, positive tone—especially to the negative ones. Sixty per cent of travelers said an aggressive response to a bad review makes the hotel look worse.
The high growth of mobile

Taking advantage of the mobile market is just as important as merchandising your hotel on third party travel websites. There are now more than one billion mobile web users worldwide\textsuperscript{13}, and mobile shopping revenue worldwide doubled in 2012\textsuperscript{14}. Those numbers are sure to continue growing; in fact, the adoption rate of iOS and Android devices has accelerated faster than any technology in history\textsuperscript{15}.

Trends to be aware of

1. Forty-three per cent of consumers use more than one device when planning their travel purchases – and 90 per cent of those use those screens sequentially (for example, starting their research on a smartphone, then continuing later on a tablet)\textsuperscript{16}.

2. Tablet shoppers spend 20 per cent more per purchase than traditional computer users and over 50 per cent more per purchase than smartphone users\textsuperscript{17}.

3. iPad users account for almost 90 per cent of all mobile shopping revenue\textsuperscript{18}.

Predictions for 2013

1. Online research and shopping will be done on multiple devices – but we’ll continue to see decreases in traditional desktop and laptop computers, and increases in tablet and smartphone browsing. Research firm IDC, predicts that more U.S. internet users will access the internet through mobile devices than PCs by 2015\textsuperscript{19}.

2. iPad use will continue to grow – to more than 70 million U.S. users in 2013, with more than 25 per cent of the U.S. population using an iPad at least once a month by 2015\textsuperscript{20}.

3. As people become more comfortable and familiar with mobile shopping, and as mobile device penetration rises, mobile spending will continue to increase.
Suggested best practices

1. Make content optimized for a variety of platforms. Keep in mind, a “one-size-fits-all” approach to mobile-optimized sites is not effective – tablet and smartphone users expect experiences designed for the device they’re using.

2. Focus on the iPad to start, but put Android in your plans. Apple’s tablet remains the market leader by a wide margin; an iPad-optimized site is critical. However, Android adoption rate and use are catching up, so use your iPad site as a starting point and then branch out to other tablets. Use standard iPad-optimized best practices – avoid drop-down menus and hover states, and focus on clean, clear design, large navigation buttons, and finger-friendly swiping.

3. Give users the option to book from whatever device they’re using. Mobile users, particularly tablet users, are ready to purchase from their devices.
Surging social media

Social media use has grown almost as fast as mobile – the percentage of U.S. users who use a social network daily tripled from 2009 to 2012\(^2\).

Ninety-two per cent of travelers say they trust word-of-mouth/opinions of people they know above all other advertising\(^2\), making social media an ideal way for hotel marketers to reach and engage travelers. If you haven’t already done so, 2013 is the year to ramp up your hotel’s social presence.

Trends to be aware of

1. People are taking – and sharing, and engaging with – more photos and content than ever before. 380 billion photos were taken in 2011, and 300 million were uploaded to Facebook – daily\(^2\). Social media in particular has made connecting to events, people and places more common; 3.5 billion pieces of content are shared each week on Facebook\(^4\).

2. People are using social media in their travel research and planning; in 2012, 52 per cent of travelers reported using social networks for ideas, with 29 per cent of travelers starting their research on Facebook\(^2\).

3. After booking, more than half of travelers go straight to Facebook to announce their upcoming vacation status and “like” pages related to their getaways. From there, 38 per cent of U.S. travelers – and 64 per cent of non-U.S. travelers – use social networks while traveling\(^2\). When their trip is over, 76 per cent of travelers post vacation photos to social networks.

Predictions for 2013

1. Travelers will share more details of their trips online. Already, 70 per cent of travelers update their Facebook status while on vacation, and 46 per cent “check in” to a social network\(^2\). These numbers will continue to grow, particularly with the rise of travel-friendly mobile devices.

2. The influence of social media will increase. As more content is posted to Facebook and other social networks, more people will allow that content to influence their travel choices. Of users who use social networks to do travel research, 48 per cent report changing their original plans (including 33 per cent who changed their hotel) after seeing what people were saying about their travel choices on Facebook\(^2\).

3. More users will “follow” businesses online. From 2010 to 2012, the percentage of Americans following a brand on a social network doubled from 16 per cent to 33 per cent\(^2\).
Suggested best practices

1. Make sharing your hotel’s photos and videos as easy as possible for your web visitors. People want to show their friends and family where they’re going, and this is a perfect opportunity to grow your business through word-of-mouth. Include “share” buttons and social “chiclets” for one-click sharing.

2. Make your property available on social networks, and give it a visually compelling presence. People are doing travel research on Facebook, Twitter and Pinterest, so it’s imperative that you have a presence – because your competitors certainly will. Build a Facebook page with rich visual content that tells your hotel’s story, and tweet relevant information about your hotel and the local area.

3. Don’t spam users with useless ads. Your followers “like” you because they value what you have to say, and if you abuse that trust, they won’t hesitate to un-follow. Deliver good content and relevant information – including deals – to keep users engaged.
Capturing corporate travel opportunities

Economic uncertainty has led to belt-tightening on corporate travel budgets. So beyond price, how do you make your hotel stand out and attract business travelers? Start by ensuring your hotel is represented on the channels used by those booking corporate travel, and by ensuring your content and messaging are rich, engaging, and relevant to business travelers.

Trends to be aware of

1. Travel consulting firm Advito expects increases in hotel rates to range from low in Europe, to moderate (six to seven percent growth) in North America, to robust (double-digit percentage growth) in Latin America.

2. Business travelers are mobile-connected travelers. A PhoCusWright/Rearden Commerce survey showed that 84 per cent of business travelers used smartphones for business purposes while traveling.

3. Young business travelers are active on social media. Almost 50 per cent of business travelers under age 35 report using social media to look for hotel and local information, but only 25 per cent of business travelers over 55 do the same.

Predictions for 2013

1. Growth in the corporate travel market will be slow but steady. The Global Business Travel Alliance predicts U.S. travel spending growth for 2012 will finish around 2.6 per cent, and grow to 4.9 per cent in 2013.

2. Business travelers will look for more mobile capabilities. Seventy per cent of business travelers report using a mobile device to research travel information (compared to 53 per cent of leisure travelers); the same amount said they’ve used their mobile device to check in at a hotel, flight or cruise (compared to 47 per cent of leisure travelers).

3. Use of corporate booking tools will continue to rise. While the travelers themselves might prefer OTAs or social media as their research tools of choice, businesses will implement corporate booking tools to help manage both their budgets, and their travelers’ requirements.
Suggested best practices

1. Despite the slow growth, business travel is still a $250 billion dollar market in the U.S\(^3\). To tap into it, start by using the tools that those in charge of booking use. That means having a presence on corporate channels and booking tools, such as Worldspan and Concur.

2. When using corporate channels, remember that rich, engaging visuals are critical when making your hotel stand out from the competition – and remember to focus your efforts on the things that matter most to your customers. According to Business Travel News, complimentary in-room Wi-Fi remains the most important amenity for business travelers, along with a fitness center, a business center, and a loyalty program\(^3\). Be sure to highlight these amenities when telling your hotel’s story.

3. Consider business travelers when developing your mobile and social presence – both are growing platforms among business travelers.
Content-rich web marketing

Throughout this article, we’ve mentioned rich, engaging content as being critical to your marketing efforts. But what does that mean, really? It starts with enhancing all of your online initiatives – regardless of platform or device – with content that catches a visitor’s eye, and keeps them interested once they click through. From there, it carries through to everything your property does online – from delivering targeted content to specific users to how you respond to customer concerns on social media.

Trends to be aware of

1. As users engage across multiple platforms and devices, cross-channel consistency and optimization are key. According to a study from Harvard Business School, businesses that engage in cross-channel marketing – leveraging traditional websites, social, mobile, and more – are more profitable than those that don’t.

2. Users expect relevant, targeted content. All web users, not just travelers, are inundated with a near-constant stream of content. “Relevant” content, that means something to that user specifically, stands out. Seventy-five per cent of marketers state that compelling content is a factor in closing sales.

3. People want to talk about their experiences – through social media and through online reviews. TripAdvisor has over 60 million user reviews, and although the average hotel user rating on TripAdvisor is positive, customers won’t hesitate to leave poor reviews if they feel they had a bad experience.
Predictions for 2013

1. Customers will find and engage with you in more ways than ever before. Look for customers to find you through Google searches, through OTAs, on mobile and social, and through your own hotel website.

2. Users will continue to find value in custom, targeted content. Ninety per cent of consumers already say they find custom content useful, and 77 per cent acknowledge that although they know the content provider is trying to sell them something, they don’t mind as long as it provides value.41

3. More users will post travel reviews online. Already, 46 per cent of travelers write online hotel reviews; as social media and OTAs become more connected, that number is sure to rise.

Suggested best practices

1. Develop a cross-channel marketing strategy. Create a plan that covers the platforms through which travelers engage with you, and develop consistent messaging to reach them.

2. Make use of targeted – and relevant – content. Custom, targeted content can shorten the traveler’s decision path, and add perceived value to your property – in fact, “interesting content” is one of the top three reasons people follow brands on social media43. It doesn’t hurt to deliver timely deals and seasonal promotions as well.

3. Don’t be afraid to reach out. A little interaction can go a long way: 71 per cent of travelers said that seeing a management response to reviews by an official hotel representative is important to them; a further 79 per cent said a good management response to a critical review reassures them, and 78 per cent said a management response to a good review also gives a good impression.44
Conclusion

Economic uncertainty and the rapidly evolving digital landscape can make long-term strategic marketing planning a real challenge. But by observing and examining key trends and statistics, marketers can make informed decisions about our 2013 initiatives.

At VFM Leonardo, we see leisure travelers interacting with hotels that offer rich, engaging visual content, and we see that interaction occurring more and more on mobile devices, through social media, via OTAs and through hotel branded sites. We also see business travelers doing the same – and using corporate booking tools as well. For hotel marketers, leveraging web marketing best practices – namely, engaging travelers with feature-rich content, high-quality images and videos, and detailed, up-to-date property and local information – will be the key to staying in front of the competitive curve.

To learn more about how VFM Leonardo can help you develop an engaging web presence that tells your hotel’s story with a “you-are-there” feel, don’t hesitate to reach out to us today! VFM Leonardo’s VBrochure™ is an ideal solution for hotels looking to deliver consistent, visually rich, optimized online experiences to travelers across multiple platforms. Visit VFM Leonardo online to view a demo and learn more about how VBrochure™ can help you build a great online experience for your visitors.
About VFM Leonardo

VFM Leonardo is a technology and online media company for the global hospitality industry. We provide e-marketers at hotel brands, management companies and hotel properties with technology, sales conversion tools and a global travel media network that enables them to better visually merchandise their hotels to millions of in-market travel shoppers monthly. Our core products, the VScape® Digital Asset Management System and VBrochure™ Online Merchandising System, leverage the VNetwork™ - the largest media syndication network in the industry. It includes all major search engines, Global Distribution Systems, online travel agencies, travel research and supplier websites, search portals, review, travel editorial, local directories and major social media and video sharing sites. Taking advantage of VBrochure’s mobile and social media platforms, hotels can ensure that their rich visual presentations reach consumers on their mobile devices and through their social graphs.

For more information about VFM Leonardo, visit [www.vfmleonardo.com](http://www.vfmleonardo.com).

@VFMLeonardo

[www.facebook.com/vfmleonardo](http://www.facebook.com/vfmleonardo)

[blog.vfmleonardo.com](http://blog.vfmleonardo.com)

[www.vfmleonardo.com](http://www.vfmleonardo.com)
Sources:


5. Statisticbrain.com: Internet Travel Hotel Booking Statistics

6. iMedia Connection: Why visual storytelling is the future of digital [http://www.imediaconnection.com/content/32879.asp]


11. Mediabistro: Online Travel Industry Statistics


18. Richrelevance.com: 2012 Q1 Mobile Study

20. Monetate: How tablet shoppers are changing online sales (http://monetate.com/infographic/couch-commerce-how-tablet-shoppers-are-changing-online-sales)


25. MDG Advertising: Vacationing the social way (http://www.mdgadvertising.com/blog/vacationing-the-social-media-way-infographic)

26. Tnooz: Impact of social media on the travel industry

27. Mediabistro: Online Travel Industry Statistics

28. Tnooz: Impact of social media on the travel industry

29. Socialnomics.net: 10 Wow Social Media Statistics


37. HBS: Crafting Integrated Multichannel Retailing Strategies (http://www.hbs.edu/research/pdf/09-125.pdf)
38. Content-plus UK: The Anatomy of Content Marketing ([http://www.contentplus.co.uk/marketing-resources/infographics/anatomy-of-content-marketing](http://www.contentplus.co.uk/marketing-resources/infographics/anatomy-of-content-marketing))


42. Mediabistro: Online Travel Industry Statistics

43. Content-plus UK: The Anatomy of Content Marketing