

Make Time for Internet Marketing, Especially Blogging

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From a series of articles: The Marketing of a B&B Online

In the early days of the Web, just having a Web site listed in the major search engines brought traffic to most Web sites. And interesting content encouraged return visits. Today, more often than not, innkeepers can be disappointed in the number of visitors to their Web sites. Their disappointment has nothing to do with the design of their site or the quality of the services they offer. It has everything to do with competition.

With millions of pages already on the Web, and more posted online every day, getting your Web site noticed isn't easy. When innkeepers ask me what they can do to increase traffic to their sites, I encourage them to learn all they can about Internet marketing – especially since ¾ of all new guests are projected to come from the Internet in 2006.

Internet marketing is one of the hottest, but also one of the most misunderstood, topics of interest for the innkeeping community. Most people know the Internet offers new and exciting business opportunities. But not many people know how to take advantage of those opportunities.

One exciting way to increase traffic and push Web site rankings up in search engines is the practice of blogging.

Six to nine months ago few people had ever heard the word blog – now, you hear about them everywhere, from the beauty shop to the national television news stations.

Here is a quick run-down of why search engines have a love affair going with blogs:

- 1. Blogs are relevant, organized, and contain subject-specific content:** Search engines love relevant content that's organized in simple, intuitive fashion -- similar to site maps. Often a search engine will index a site map first, and then follow those links as it indexes the other pages.
- 2. Blogs tend to index easily:** With a blog, the search engines can read the content much easier because there's nothing to get in the way. Few graphics, no Flash movies or complex javascript, just pure, well-organized text.
- 3. Frequently updated content:** New content is a signal to the search engines to visit more frequently. The more frequently they visit, the more they'll index, and the better your chances of getting higher rankings.
- 4. An abundance of links:** Blogs allow links and these links make a search engine's job a lot easier. Search engines generally index a site by following one link to another.

As a Web designer I love blogs because they give the client more control over their Web presence, which in turn creates a more satisfied customer. They also improve the Internet skills of clients. Once a blog is configured, it is an easy task for an innkeeper to go in and post, but the more they post, the more they want to learn about the technology. It is a win-win situation for everyone concerned, from the innkeeper to the inn traveler to me, the Web site designer!

So, what is a “Blog”?

The word "Blog" is an abbreviated version of "weblog," which is a term used to describe web sites that maintain an ongoing chronicle of information. From a layperson's point of view it is a diary-type commentary that contains links to additional places on the Internet. Blogs can focus on a particular topic, such as Iowa travel, or they could be of a more personal nature – one author simply journaling about daily life and their thoughts.

We are going to focus on one specific blog application: **Wordpress**. At any time you can find additional instructions on Wordpress at their Web site: www.wordpress.org. We are also going to focus on how an innkeeper can use a Wordpress blog to market their B&B.

The content on a blog consists of articles (generally referred to as “posts” or "entries") that author(s) write. Blog authors can compose their articles in a web-based interface, built into the blogging system itself. This interface is accessed with an ID and a password.

Here is a list of a few features in Wordpress that innkeepers can utilize:

Post to the future

Write a post today, have it appear on the weblog at a future date, automatically.

Multi paged posts

If your post is too long, cut it up into pages, so your readers don't have to scroll to the end of the world.

File/picture uploading

You can upload pictures or files, and link to them or display them in your articles.

You have the option of creating thumbnails of pictures when you upload them.

Save Drafts

Save your unfinished articles, improve them later, publish when you're done.

Previewing Posts

Before you press the "Publish" button, you can look at the preview for the article you just wrote to check if everything is the way you want it. In fact, you can do that at any time, since the preview is "live".

Searching

WordPress has a functional built-in search tool, which allows visitors to the blog to search for terms they are interested in.

Moderation

For the control freak in all of us, WordPress provides an array of moderation options. You can moderate:

- all comments before they appear on the blog
- comments with specific words in them
- comments posted from specific IP addresses
- comments containing more than some specified number of links.

All these moderation options keep spammers and vandals in check.

Notification

WordPress can keep you in the loop by sending you an email each time there is a new comment or a comment awaiting moderation. You make the decision to keep or delete the comment.

Writing Your Blog Posts

Think in terms of keywords and keyword phrases. You can still embellish with hospitality terms like “breathtaking views” and “exceptional ambience,” just be sure you include bed and breakfast keywords such as:

Bed and Breakfast, b and b, country inn, romantic getaway, week-end getaway, lodging, BnB, accommodations, luxury accommodations, lodging, bed and breakfast, vacation, vacation, family vacation, intimate vacation, travel, travel lodging, lodging, bed and breakfast lodging, etc.

Here are a few more posting tips:

- Keep your posts relatively short. Write as if you were in a conversation with someone, after all one of the goals of the blog is to get readers engaged and leaving comments.
- Use photos sparingly. The search engine “spiders” can index the IBBIA blog (and Web site) in a more efficient manner if they encounter few photographs or graphics of any nature.
- Somewhere in your post, link to your personal Web site. A serious lodging prospect will go and visit your inn’s Web site where they will find complete information on booking a stay at your establishment.
- Watch your spelling and language use. Use the build-in spell checker. If you are a poor typist, take a typing class! Make an effort to improve your skills. Like it or not, the computer is a tool every innkeeper should master.
- Don’t put your e-mail address or phone numbers in your posts. You don’t want to increase your exposure to e-mail spammers or sales people that love to call you during the dinner hour to take a survey!
- If you enter a lodging special package, always include a price and an expiration date. The expiration date is critical because blogs are archived and you don’t

want a potential guest to find a two-year-old lodging special and hold you to the two-year-old price listed.

- Seldom post photographs, and only post photographs that tell a story. Photos slow down the indexing process of the search engine robots, so don't use an image unless it is an exceptional photo that can tell a story better than text on the page.

Make Time for Internet Marketing

"As a busy innkeeper, I don't have time to do Internet marketing." It's a common complaint I hear regularly from Bed and Breakfast owners. When you are the only one who can serve the clients, manage the business, and perform all the sales and marketing functions, time becomes the most precious commodity you have. How can you find time for Internet marketing with so many other important priorities?

There are many time management techniques at your disposal. You can delegate tasks, chunk down projects to smaller steps, and set aside time on your calendar for making calls, writing blog posts, or updating marketing print materials. Then again, maybe you have already tried all those methods and discovered that time is still scarce.

Maybe the real answer is not to find more time for Internet marketing, but to MAKE time. Every day, you take part in many time-consuming activities that don't include marketing, yet marketing is the one activity that will ensure your business new customers. And, with so many potential guests now using the Internet as their prime source of locating lodging accommodations for week-end, business, and vacation travel, how can justify not MAKING time to do Internet marketing?

Blog Posts Take Minutes to Create

The Wordpress blog is fairly user-friendly. Once you have learned how to create a post on your Wordpress blog, you are ready to schedule a daily time to create posts. Since it is best to keep your blog posts short, you won't need to block out more than 30 minutes a day to devote to creating blog posts.

In today's competitive hospitality Internet market, you must commit to making time for Internet marketing—whether you're posting daily on your blog, attending Internet marketing workshops, preparing to add the next page to your existing Web site, or creating an e-mail newsletter -- without a strong commitment, you'll find yourself consistently putting off your Internet marketing efforts.

Make the decision today, to devote time to Internet marketing, and reap its future rewards as you connect with new guests and expand your Internet marketing skills.