



## 12 Steps to Smarter Digital Marketing

It's 2010, but truth be told, few hoteliers know—and use—the e-mail addresses of their customers. This presents both a tremendous opportunity and a threat: We must better obtain and use our customers' e-mail addresses today to enhance sales and service, or our tech-savvy competitors will spirit them away tomorrow.

Many hoteliers report their digital marketing efforts deliver returns on investments that match or exceed those reaped from local newspaper, radio, TV or telephone directory ads. We know digital marketing works. We just have to work it better.

Sending e-mail messages to customers with information of value is not spam; it's sound digital marketing. Give customers a good reason to open your e-messages, along with an easy out (unsubscribe option), and you'll protect and build your business rapidly and cost effectively.

Here are 12 quick e-mail marketing tips:

**1. Mine for gold.** Call each customer and ask what types of information he or she is open to receiving in monthly e-mails. Examples include special promotions and "insider" tips on ways to save time, money and headaches when traveling.

**2. Dig deeper.** Repeat the previous step with prospects and former customers.

**3. Plan your work.** Create a monthly e-mail marketing campaign that marries customers' digital information wants with your company's sales needs.

**4. Work your plan.** E-mail customers and prospects information of value every month.

**5. Grade yourself.** Measure the return on investment of each e-mail marketing campaign.

**6. Grow or go.** Duplicate your successes and improve upon, or discard, your failures.

**7. Reality check.** E-mail quarterly satisfaction surveys to customers. Surprisingly, many lodging properties don't even do this annually.

**8. Internal intel.** Leverage these surveys to identify and reward employees who exceed customers' expectations and create new, repeatable best practices.

**9. Boost retention.** Give disgruntled customers an opportunity to rant. Better to hear the bad news now than after you've lost this and other business.

**10. Reap referrals.** Reward your raving fans for sharing the names, phone numbers and e-mails of a few homeowners or businesses that could use your services. Give existing customers a 10-percent discount on stays for one year if they refer someone who becomes a new customer of your property/company. Not only will this very cost effectively cultivate new business through priceless word-of-mouth advertising, but in the second year, you'll also be giving yourself an automatic 10-percent raise without touching the new customer's room rates.

**11. Upsell services.** Half or more of hoteliers are not e-mailing clients to identify, and capitalize, on opportunities to upsell. In your e-mails, let customers know everything you offer, and give them a reason (discount) to add new services.

**12. Keep at it.** Continuously repeat steps 1-11.

If you don't know, and regularly leverage, your customers' e-mail addresses, then you don't really know them, yourself or your growth potential. Got e-mail?

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