

Taking a Web Site to the Next Level

OUR OWN HOTEL-ONLINE.COM

By Richard Zwicky,
Metamend

The Challenge: Take a highly respected industry resource which is turned to and trusted by market and industry leaders on a daily basis for their news, updates and commentary, and improve it.

The Strategy: Update this institution's Web site to make it more functional and easier to use, so that key information is presented in a more relevant and meaningful way. At the same time, add new functionality which would result in visitors accessing more information. Lastly, employ a strategy which would attract new users to the Web site, and will raise the overall visibility of the property in relation to competitors, through the addition of RSS feeds, permitting syndication of the content.

The Issue: Why should the industry leader need to update? If it's not broken why fix it?

This was the debate which started after Metamend submitted a few search engine optimization (SEO) -related articles to Hotel Online for distribution. The question arose: "how would optimization help Hotel Online?" It was at this point that the leaders of Hotel Online and Metamend sat down and began to do something which most organizations do internally on a regular basis: What's the state of the union? Are we where we want to be, and where our customers expect us to be?

Herein was the challenge: Hotel Online is the industry leader, so why mess with success? This is the market leader after all. But the market leader was not showing up in the search engines. It was not succeeding in its most obvious client acquisition strategy. The market leader needed a tune-up. Hotel Online was virtually invisible to anyone outside the industry. Since industry insiders weren't the only ones interested in their materials, and non-insiders use search engines to find resources, this meant that Hotel Online was not competing for a large share of its own potential marketplace. An optimization strategy and campaign was required.

Optimization is not just about getting traffic in your door. It's about streamlining your business processes so that your clientele get what they want quickly and easily.

Once customers arrive, your Web site's design will play a crucial role in the decision that visitors make whether or not to remain at the Web site. This was a key decision making factor when the Hotel Online site was reviewed. Graphics, layout, load time, fonts and ease of navigation all influence on users' decisions; the better designed, the better it will perform, the more sales you'll make. In the case of Hotel Online, the design did not encourage visitors to read further articles. It actually was laid out in a manner which inadvertently encouraged visitors not to proceed deeper into the Web site, thus missing out on an easy way to increase advertising opportunities.

This brings us to an important point. Imagine people arrive at a hotel Web site because it happens to be advertising the local wine festival, and not realizing that they could book their room at the same time. That's analogous to the position Hotel Online was in.

This is a common problem for most Web sites: how to get customers to the site quickly, and how to improve usability once they arrive? Solving this problem is usually just a question of optimizing a Web site. But sometimes it

requires more than just optimization. In the case of Hotel Online a complete site facelift and update was required prior to optimization. Optimization alone might have been done, but it would not have been anywhere as successful. That's where Falcon Software came in. They're Web design firm that specializes in rich media presentations, as well as Web design. Once engaged, they were able to not just redesign the site, but also meet all of Hotel Online's exacting standards in the process.

Apart from the obvious and dramatic improvement in esthetics, you should also note the overall increase in functionality which was added by Falcon: A clean, simple navigation layout; an easy to find and use internal search feature; a more natural, cascading layout of the core sections; subscribing to the newsletter became easier; and lastly increased prominence was given to the advertisements – they now are functional part of the content, and more actively viewed than in the past, without being intrusive.

When any company is entering into a redesign, everything about the design and construction of a Web site should be done from the perspective of functionality of your clients, but also with an eye to search engine performance. What's the point of having an award winning Web site to advertise your property, if no one knows how to find it?

Once the site was updated, the optimization campaign could begin. Web design is all about sharing the experience, SEO is all about customer acquisition. In the case of a hotel, SEO is about delivering visitors who are looking for hotel rooms in the area your property services.

Optimization is the process of ensuring a Web page is correctly found in the search engines by customers searching for the services you offer.

For optimization to be successful you must speak to your customers in their language – your site must properly incorporate the language your customers in its textual content for it to be found under those terms. This is the key: within the search engines, every Web page has dozens of possible searches for which it can be found. One common mistake made by companies in every industry is to use their own industry terms on their Web site. Unfortunately, most customers don't know your industry terms. They will use their own language and phrasing. An optimization campaign recognizes this, and analyzes actual search engine data to compare the content on your Web site against the terms that people are actually using when searching for your service. Any SEO company you engage must use this data to create or update your Web site's textual content to match the language your customers are using.

HOTEL ONLINE

Where the Hospitality Industry Meets...Online!

-  HOSPITALITY NEWS
-  WELCOME!
-  CLASSIFIEDS
-  VIEWPOINT FORUM
-  ONE-ON-ONE INTERVIEWS
-  IDEAS & TRENDS

Mystery Shopping
Hotels Restaurants & Spas

Shovels don't promise. They dig. 

RateTiger Channel Management
by eRevMax Technologies, Inc.

THE KNOWLAND GROUP
Increase Revenue Through Group Sales

The Boston Globe **boston.com**

New Hotel Construction Projects

Florida International University
School of Hospitality and Tourism Management
NEED TO ADVANCE IN YOUR HOSPITALITY CAREER?

To receive Daily Hospitality Industry Headlines via Email, please sign our free subscription form just once. It takes just a moment. Thank you.

[Click here to subscribe or unsubscribe](#)

Hospitality Headlines

October 1, 2005

- [Mississippi House takes step toward rebuilding economy, passes casino bill](#) (The Sun Herald, Biloxi, Miss.)
- [Christians lobby against rebuilding Mississippi coast casinos](#) (The Sun Herald, Biloxi, Miss.)
- [Alton casino's owners plan to sell it](#) (The Sun Herald, Biloxi, Miss.)
- [Illinois board approves Penn Nation](#) (The Sun Herald, Biloxi, Miss.)
- [Montana's tourism loss in August](#) (The Sun Herald, Biloxi, Miss.)

Hotel Online's Top 25

Most viewed pages During August, 2005

1. [Amenity Cresso Making It Almost Impossible for Housekeepers](#)

2005 TRENDS IN THE HOTEL INDUSTRY
(866) 842-8754

Revenue Management Accelerator Seminar

Here are before and after Web sites.

A Web site's textual content presents the only data that a search engine can accurately use when indexing your site. The better the content and the more in tune with what customers are searching for, the greater online success your business will enjoy. Therefore, a successfully optimized Web site succeeds online by attaining and maintaining a very high position in the search results for the most appropriate and relevant keywords and keyphrases used by your customers.

There's a simple reason that search engine optimization (SEO) has become the premier marketing vehicle on the marketplace today, both in terms of acquiring new customers and for overall ROI. It's comparatively inexpensive and extremely effective. Just as a company without a marketing strategy is a company awash, an online marketing strategy without a SEO component is doomed to fail. A visitor from a search engine is someone who is actively searching for the product or service the Web site is promoting. If search engines bring qualified traffic, how can a Web site succeed without even the most basic search engine marketing strategies?

With regards to ROI, the cost of acquiring a customer through a search engine is virtually zero compared to traditional advertising, which can cost hundreds of dollars per client. A good optimization strategy is about ensuring that a Web site has meaningful and relevant content, to ensure that only potential customers are delivered from the search engines.

In the case of Hotel Online, their ROI was immediately evident. With the new design in place, their visitors spent more time on the site reading



The screenshot shows the Hotel Online website interface. At the top is the logo and tagline. Below is a navigation menu with links like 'WELCOME!', 'NEWS', 'CLASSIFIEDS', 'FORUM', 'ONE-ON-ONE', 'INDUSTRY RESOURCES', 'MEDIA KIT', and 'CONTACT US'. A prominent 'InnLink' banner is visible. The main content area is titled 'HOSPITALITY HEADLINES' for October 1, 2005, and lists several news items with their respective sources. On the right side, there is a sidebar with 'Hotel Online's Top 20', a search bar, and a 'Mystery Shopping Calls' button.

their news and commentary. This translated to more page views per client, and greater exposure for their advertisers. With the success of the optimization campaign, more new visitors were finding the Web site every day, and recognizing it as a trusted resource in the hospitality industry. This further increased their total page views per visitor, and overall reach for their advertisers. Together, a new design and optimization campaign helped deliver a new boom in business to an already successful Internet landmark.

Richard Zwicky is the president of Metamend. He can be reached at zwicky@metamend.com