

E-PAIN MANAGEMENT:

Internet Marketing for Destination Properties



by Debra Kristopson

Recently a general manager said that his property's owners had asked him to take their property totally off the Internet and he wanted to know how. Needless to say, I was stunned. Images of salmon running upstream came to mind.

Upon further conversation, the issue was one of control. The hotel owners felt out of control. And you know what? They were right.

The Internet is not a beast that you control. At most you can manage your Web marketing image, but in reality the Internet has taken control out of the realm of possibility.

While a great Web site is the cornerstone to a property's Web marketing image, managing your Web marketing image is much more than that. And as is true in most cases, protecting your Web marketing image is easier and less costly than attempting to repair it. Luckily, a few easy-to-follow steps will go a long way to ensure that your Web marketing image remains unblemished.

What Is in a Name?

When registering your domain always register the variants. You'll want to register your name's dot-com, dot-net, dot-org and dot-us variants. Regis-



tration fees are very inexpensive and this is just smart business.

Why is this important? A short story may help bring this to light. Recently a hotel was marketing a weekend spa package with warm, luxurious, sensual language. Within weeks of the launch of their marketing campaign, a porn site had registered and was online with one of their name variants.

A potential guest remembering the spa package name but not the variant was possibly getting more than he or she imagined when searching for the package. Needless to say the hotel's marketing reputation was blemished.

To check out your domain names and their variants go to the Web site noted in Figure 1. This site will let you know what you currently own and who, if anyone, owns one of your variants.

But It's My Domain Name, Isn't It?

This is the most frequent problem hotels have with their domain registration. Even if you are currently using a domain name, it may not be registered to the hotel. How you ask? It's simple.

When the domain was registered, the registrant and the administrative contact, which should be the hotel, weren't. It's common to find the domain registration in the name of a Web designer/host or an ex-employee. In this situation technically the hotel has no rights and if forced can be made to cease using the domain name.

Think how hard you've worked to have your Web site recognized. It's on your business cards, stationery and marketing materials. Do you really want to be forced to change Web site names?

When you check your domain registration, the same Web site noted in Figure 1 will also tell you who your domain is registered to. If it's not the hotel – get it changed. Be proactive.

Several months ago, I received a call from a general manager. He had his Web site go offline when the hosting company that he used went out of business. He attempted to transfer his Web site to another hosting company, but

Figure 1

How to check your domain registration

To see what variants are currently registered, go to <http://www.networksolutions.com/cgi-bin/whois/whois> and enter each of your name variants.

Take a bite out of Internet misinformation.
Use this search engine listing to find out what's
being said about you.

ALTAVISTA™ www.altavista.com

AOL® www.aol.com

GOOGLE™ www.google.com

HOTBOT www.hotbot.com

INFOSEEK infoseek.go.com

JAYDE www.jayde.com

LYCOS® www.lycos.com

MSN® www.msn.com

MY EXCITE www.excite.com

WEBCRAWLER® www.webcrawler.com

YAHOO!® www.yahoo.com

was unable to do it – the registration was in the old hosting company's name and their doors were locked.

He had been to three local Web companies. Each company told him to resign himself to getting a new name. Knowing the cost of reprinting everything plus dealing with the branding issues associated with clients who knew his Web site and e-mail addresses was enormous. He just kept knocking on doors trying to find someone who would help him.

The situation is normally resolvable, but it takes a very experienced Web company to know how. We did get the general manager's domain name back for him but not without considerable effort. His Web site and e-mail were offline until we could get it resolved.

If after checking your domain registration information you find yourself in this situation, contact the persons listed on your records and request the domain name be transferred to the hotel.

While you're checking your records, verify the date that your registration expires and make sure that you renew prior to the termination date.

Is Your Hosting Company as Good as Your Web Site?

How many times have you tried to get to a Web site and given up because of the lengthy load time? Have you been frustrated with numerous pop-up windows when entering or exiting the site? Have you decided that the advertising banners were so obnoxious that reading the site just wasn't worth the effort?

We've all been there. Most people when they encounter one of these sites, just exit the site and go elsewhere. More than one quality Web site has come across as a poor experience due to these frustrations. What do you think this says about your company?

Web hosting can be obtained for anywhere from free to very expensive. The truth is, nothing is free. Hosting a Web site has associated costs and if you aren't paying them then an advertiser is.

Quality (advertising-free) hosting doesn't cost an arm and a leg. Many brochure types of sites can be hosted for less than \$25 per month. This is not a place to cut corners. Contract with a quality hosting company.

Sometimes More Is Not Better, It's Just More

We've all received the promotions, pay us and we'll submit your Web site to 200,000+ search engines and directories.

Doesn't that sound great? What could be wrong with that? Isn't the Internet all about

The Tremont Suites Hotels' Aggressive Online Marketing Strategy Triples Online Revenue

Centrally located in downtown Baltimore, the Tremont Suites Hotels are a collection of two independent all-suite luxury hotels that were looking for ways to improve revenue, increase online sales, enhance asset awareness and improve profitability through decreased reliance on third-party intermediaries.

In July 2003, Thayer Interactive Group stepped in and set in motion an aggressive online strategy to tap into the various elements of demand in the Baltimore area. A key component of the program included saturation of online media, ensuring that the property was prominently positioned in all major destination guides on the local, regional and national levels, including area travel guides, city directories and local attractions sites. In addition, Thayer launched an aggressive marketing campaign on all prominent search engines, to place the properties in front of consumers actively researching the Baltimore market, meeting and social planners looking to hold events in Baltimore, and leisure customers looking for luxury accommodations in the downtown area.

Within six months of consistent online-marketing efforts, the Tremont Suites Hotels tripled their online revenue, resulting in \$700,000 on an annualized basis, and realized significant movement in their RevPAR indexes. By directing their Web presence to the right online community, the Tremont Suites Hotels were able to gain substantial market share in the Baltimore area.

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Figure 2

Check out who is talking about you

To see who is referencing your Web site according to HOT BOT, Google and AltaVista, go to <http://linkpopularity.com/> and enter each of your name variants.

This site will show your link popularity in MSN, All the Web and AltaVista <http://www.linkpopularitycheck.com/>
The site also allows you to compare yourself to up to three other sites.

getting your name out there and the more places you're listed, the better your chances are of being seen?

Think again. Where are all those directories that you're about to be listed on? Are they places you want to be associated with?

Actually, there are probably 100 or so search engines, directories or destination-specific sites that will do you good. Doing the math that leaves 190,000 places that you just put your Web site on that either isn't of any use to you or worse yet, not something that you would consciously want to be associated with.

Don't fall prey to this e-industry practice. Protect your Web site just as you would protect any other marketing material.

It's More Than What You're Saying – It's What's Being Said About You

Your Web site is your marketing message. While important, it's not the only impression surfers are receiving about you. Equally important is who else is talking about you and what they're saying.

So the research begins. Start with the two links in Figure 2. These will let you know who is linking to you and from there you can easily and directly read what has been written. While these sites are helpful, they are not 100 percent accurate.

So on to step 2, you're going to also need to go into the major search engines and use your property name as search key words. This may pick up sites which are linking to you that did not come forward before. It will also pick up references to you where a link was not provided to your site. Luckily search engines share information, so you don't need to research every search engine. A list of the major search engines has been provided (page 32).

After recently completing this exercise for a destination property we located over 300 different directories, booking engines, tourist information centers and local businesses who were either linking directly to the hotel's site or referencing information about the hotel. The vast majority of this had occurred without the hotel's knowledge or consent.

Realize that you don't have many legal rights related to Web sites referencing information about you. If there is inaccuracy or if you are displeased with what these sites are doing, diplomacy is going to be a better tactic than the legal system. Most sites will welcome your involvement to make your information more complete or correct. The key is it's your responsibility to contact them and bring the issues to light.

Managing your Internet marketing image doesn't need to be painful, it just takes time. So invest the time today. It will be time well spent.

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