

Hospitality in Focus

by Dr Bruce Grant-Braham, FIH, Bournemouth University

Hotel guests encouraged to shoot their own trustworthy videos!

HotelVideoReviews.com has launched the first "Hotel Video Review" partnership programme for online travel agencies.

In the first step of its kind travel agencies may now benefit from HVR's Social Media Solutions and embed video review features in their websites. The ground breaking service offers an advanced and fully outsourced solution for gathering user-generated video reviews from the travellers of the travel agencies. HotelVideoReviews.com then publishes the videos both on the website of the travel agency and on their own customer-facing travel portal. In return, partnering Travel Agencies receive highly qualified leads to their websites.

"We believe that video reviews are very important for the booking experience on a travel website," says Mr. Jan Kooman, CEO of HotelVideoReviews.com. "Research by Tui UK and EyeforTravel shows that 78% of hotel bookers already use textual reviews when making travel-related decisions. However 42% find video to be the most trustworthy. Adding video content on a hotel booking webpage increases conversions up to 200%. They are essential to staying competitive in online travel."

Marc Duijndam of HotelVideoReviews.com says that, "The second key point is that we provide our partnering Travel Agencies with qualified leads from our traffic network. Our launching traffic network partner is WhereIveBeen.com, one of the largest Facebook applications in travel. WhereIveBeen shows our aggregated hotel video reviews on their destination pages. The booking links belong to the video reviews links back to our partnering Travel Agencies and the profits are shared."

HotelVideoReviews.com is a user-generated hotel video review site. User-generated reviews help sales at travel sites. HotelVideoReviews.com licenses their software to Online Travel Agencies for free. In return, HotelVideoReviews.com has the right to present the aggregated videos on their own consumer-facing review site. The company also incorporates video reviews from companies who use other third-party party providers or have an in-house video review system.

HotelVideoReviews is building Online Travel partnerships and distribution/traffic partnerships with companies such as WherelveBeen.com, EasyToBook.com, Gekko.com, TUI, and Hotels.nl.

Online Bookings expected to increase

Utell Hotels & Resorts (a service of Pegasus Solutions) and Milestone Internet Marketing have entered into a five-year partnership to augment Utell's market-leading representation support with Milestone's award-winning online marketing services. As the world's largest third-party hotel marketing, sales and representation company, Utell serves more than 11,000 hotels, all of which can now benefit from Milestone's revenue-driving Internet marketing services.

The partnership was forged to relieve the burden on hotels to achieve visibility in a crowded marketplace suffering from dwindling demand, according to Ric Leutwyler, president of Utell.

"Utell's member hotels, which already employ Pegasus' distribution and booking solutions, are facing an incredibly difficult task in 2009, along with the rest of the industry," said Leutwyler. "While travel demand may shrink or stagnate, we know that online bookings are actually expected to increase. Given our responsibility to help our hotels succeed, we've aligned with Milestone to provide its search marketing strategy to our members so they can break through the online noise."

Milestone, which offers Internet marketing services including Web site design, search engine optimization, pay-per-click advertising, social media optimization and email marketing, was honoured with 11 awards in 2008, including three Adrian Awards for its creative brilliance and best practices in Internet marketing. It is a leading provider of Internet marketing solutions for the hospitality industry. The company currently works with more than 700 hotels, and drives over \$100 million in annual revenue for its clients. The company is a preferred vendor for several major lodging industry brands, and works with some of the leading management.

The company will focus on offering Utell customers tailored solutions that complement their current offering from Pegasus, according to Anil Aggarwal, CEO of Milestone.

"With Pegasus' leading solutions provided via Utell, from booking and connectivity to representation, the company is already focused on driving the greatest revenue from the Internet for hotels," said Aggarwal. "Milestone's market-leading Internet marketing services take this online offering to the next level. Our online marketing technology and innovative approach to

promoting Web sites – including advanced Web 2.0 elements like online videos, blogs, and social media – make these sites among the most advanced in the hotel industry. As a result, they drive significant return on investment. With a tough economic outlook for the lodging industry in 2009, the combined forces of Utell and Milestone will enable hotels to grab a larger market share and minimize negative effects from damaging market forces.”

Utell® Hotels & Resorts is the representation business unit of Pegasus Solutions. This includes both the Utell and Unirez representation services which enable nearly 11,000 independent and small group hotels in over 130 countries to compete globally. Established almost 80 years ago, Utell is the world's largest and most experienced sales, marketing and distribution service for hotels. With a comprehensive international portfolio that encompasses luxury, boutique, value, business and resort properties, Utell caters for a variety of accommodation requirements for both business and leisure travellers.

Customized Online Surveys measure guest satisfaction

Open Hospitality, a global provider of online hotel Internet marketing solutions, designs fully customizable guest survey tools for hotels to insure their products and services meet customer expectations. The company, which focuses exclusively on hotels and hospitality verticals, sources online surveys that offer an effective method of measuring guest satisfaction.

The layouts are concise, and easy to navigate and feature real-time responses which provide hotel management with the means to measure consumer satisfaction and then appropriately respond to concerns and or kudos. The timeliness of the survey results allows hotels to improve internal communication and preserve guest loyalty.

"Open Hospitality is committed to providing our hotel clients with a variety of marketing methods that offer prompt feedback, and assist in cultivating relationships and future bookings," commented Chris Wichers, Executive Vice President of Open Hospitality. "Customized online surveys and real-time integrated reporting give hotels immediate access to feedback from guests in an informal yet confidential setting. That kind of smart e-marketing breeds consumer goodwill." he

- **Hotels helped to target customers**

Additionally Open Hospitality is tailoring Search Engine Marketing (SEM) programs for their clients which combine with other solutions to increase visitor website hits, thereby building greater reservation conversion rates.

The methodologies consistently and organically improve website rankings on search engines. "We ensure that our clients are receiving maximum exposure to consumer driven searches. We take pride in designing search programs that are among the first to attract potential customers," explained Pat Pierson, Director of SEM at Open Hospitality. "We provide our clients with detailed reporting that enables them to understand their guest's site visit habits and then monitor reservation conversions."

Lucille Yokell, Director of Sales and Marketing at New York's Wellington Hotel commented that, "Open Hospitality's SEM leadership makes the complex process of search optimization clear and understandable. I trust their SEM recommendations to leverage our Internet positioning. Because of Open's unique end-to-end reporting solution, I can see our e-marketing at work in real-time and see lookers convert to bookers."

Integrating SEM inbound marketing strategies with effective outbound marketing programs rounds out the group of e-marketing capabilities offered by the company. Account Managers help clients to create fresh and high impact outbound e-marketing programs that generate consumer interest. When combined, these practices allow hotels to sustain a robust Internet presence with new potential customers and prior guests.

Links:

HotelVideoReviews.com: HotelVideoReviews.com

Milestone Internet Marketing: <http://www.milestoneinternet.com>

Open Hospitality: www.openhospitality.com

Pegasus Solutions: <http://www.pegs.com>

Utell ®: <http://www.utell.com>

Wellington Hotel: www.wellingtonhotel.com