10 Secrets of Luxury Hotel Websites

Unique amenities, exclusive experiences and personalized service used to be the proprietary domain of luxury hotels... but now these offerings have become mainstream in hotels from midscale upwards.

This means that high-end hospitality brands have had to raise the bar even higher to convey an extraordinary guest experience and differentiate themselves in meaningful ways.

But this isn't easy in the online world, where pixels alone can't create a luxury experience. Making a webpage feel luxurious is indeed a challenge for many hoteliers.

Whether they are appealing to young affluents or established wealthy travellers, here are the secrets that luxury properties use to engage and convert their direct hotel website visitors:

1) Luxury Hotel Websites Tell a Story

When consumers buy luxury goods they are buying into a story. BMW's story, for example, is crafting luxurious cars. For Rolex, it's a long history of fine Swiss watchmaking. Consumers want to be part of a something with cachet.

Something special and aspirational.

In the same way, affluent customers don't just book rooms, they seek hotels that offer a story they want to be part of. Luxury hotel brands understand that booking a night on their property isn't a functional or financial decision – it's an emotional one. So,

they know that their website has to craft a story that transcends the brick and mortar property itself.

2) Luxury Hotel Websites Celebrate F&B

Luxury consumers consider food to be a vital component of their travel experience. So, smart upscale hotel brands know how to showcase their unique food and beverage offerings, including the connection to local, sustainable, and organic markets and purveyors, their chef's background and inspiration, as well as showing their hotel's proximity to authentic foodie finds, like local restaurants, farmers markets, etc.

3) Luxury Hotel Websites Emphasize Health and Wellness

Affluent guests are invested in keeping a healthy and active lifestyle both at home and on the road. Luxury hotels create experiences centered around their guests' strive for wellness, including fitness programs like spin classes, outdoor yoga and meditation, nature walks, "bootcamp" classes and special menus focused on clean eating. Spas are also being reinvented as wellness retreats where guests not only get pampered with spa

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treatments, but indulge in therapies for their mind, body and soul.

4) Luxury Hotel Websites Offer Social Validation

Luxury brands understand the power of social proof.

> " *Known as one of the six weapons of influence, social proof is the idea that people are more apt to purchase things that are endorsed by people they trust.*

Affluent guests are highly cynical about marketing fluff and hyperbole. But they do trust each other... so they will spend time carefully reading past guest reviews to see what other travellers have experienced before them. They want to know that you are what you say you are and that you're worthy of their investment. The best way for you to establish trust and "social validation" directly from your website is to prominently showcase select TripAdvisor reviews, previous guests' Instagram photos, respected magazine awards and any major industry accolades.
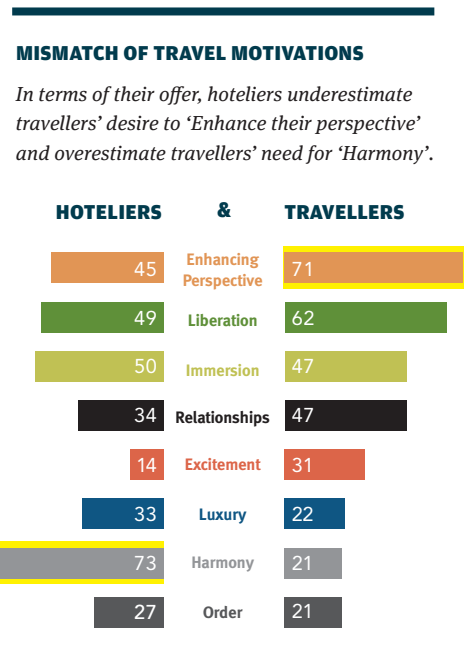
5) Luxury Hotel Websites Promise to Change the Viewers' Perspective

While affluent consumers have the ability to buy whatever they want, they invest in the products and experiences that inspire them and promise to change their perspective on life.

> " *They don't just want front-row access to the destination, they want to be a part of it.*

According to a TripAdvisor study, experiences and the promise of an enhanced perspective are what ultimately drive travellers to pull out their wallets.

Check out this chart from the TripAdvisor study, which shows the disparity between what travellers actually want vs. what hoteliers THINK travellers want:

MISMATCH OF TRAVEL MOTIVATIONS

In terms of their offer, hoteliers underestimate travellers' desire to 'Enhance their perspective' and overestimate travellers' need for 'Harmony'.

HOTELIERS	&		TRAVELLERS
45	Enhancing Perspective		71
49	Liberation		62
50	Immersion		47
34	Relationships		47
14	Excitement		31
33	Luxury		22
73	Harmony		21
27	Order		21

Luxury hotel brands respond to this desire by showcasing a culturally relevant experience that thrills and excites, rather than simply focusing on their plush beds or the premium coffee in the rooms.

6) Luxury Hotel Websites Synthesize Design and E-Commerce

Clearly, luxury hotels need to be vigilant about their online presentation and perception, but the savviest upscale properties understand that e-commerce tactics and visually arresting design CAN coexist beautifully... and profitably.

A few elements to keep in mind:

» There is nothing inelegant about a clear and consistent call to action. A "Check Availability" button in a prominent location at all times can be designed in an understated manner and regardless of your booking engine partner, the front end booking widget experience can be custom designed in a refined manner rather than using the standard default widget.

» Templates and do-it-yourself content management systems can hinder your ability to extend your brand tone into the e-commerce realm. Make sure your website developer has the ability to implement all aspects of your branding including colors, patterns, textures, fonts and photographic and copywriting tone.

» Mapping the location of the hotel and its surrounding attractions are critical to e-commerce conversions. However, you don't have to use canned/default map features and colors.

> " *Google Maps can be customized to display only the information relevant to your brand, as well as its brand colors and tones.*

» The mantra of luxury branding is: "Less is more." A more understated, "clean" layout not only harkens backs to luxury print design and branding campaigns of the past, but it also leads to faster page load speeds and better SEO results. Google is now indexing mobile

site structures first. This means, fewer mobile pages and more succinct and efficient websites.

» With increases in Internet speeds and pervasive wifi, video (the ultimate branding and storytelling medium) has become a powerful inspirational tool for luxury hotel websites. A good inspirational video extends user engagement and increases entrances into the booking engine.

7) Luxury Hotel Websites Welcome Global Visitors

Just within the past decade, the U.S. hotel industry has seen a significant uplift in wealthy international travellers. This growth in global guests and the ease of digital marketing across borders has given luxury hotels massive opportunities to expand into new markets and succeed internationally.

However, when it comes to your hotel going global, it doesn't make sense to stick with a one-size-fits-all hotel web design or booking engine. Every culture has its own assumptions, ideals and values. What works in one country may flop in another. Here's a few things to keep in mind:

GET A REAL TRANSLATION

If international visitors go to your hotel's website and just see English, it sends a message that their business isn't important or that you don't care to make their online experience an inviting one. And don't make the lazy mistake of Google translating all of your website copy, then calling it a day. Reaching international travellers will take much more than a lazy word-for-word replacement. It requires taking into account the nuances, the cliché phrases and the style of language of your specific target.

CURRENCY AND PAYMENT OPTIONS

Once you have overseas visitors hooked with a successfully localized hotel website, don't lose them to an all-American, all-English booking engine that displays room rates only in U.S. dollars. The same principle goes for guest room and suite measurements. Most of the world uses the metric system, so don't describe rooms with feet and inches.

DATES AND TIMES

Avoid confusion by displaying the times and dates in the preferred local format. This also guarantees a seamless user experience for international guests who are accustomed to different formats than what your American guests are acquainted with. Surprisingly, the format of MM/DD/YY is unique to the U.S. (and oftentimes used in Canada too, adding to the confusion). While Japan uses YY/MM/DD and most of Europe uses DD/MM/YY.

ENABLE LANGUAGE TOGGLE

We can't always assume a guest's native language based on where they live. So, it makes sense to enable guests to specify and easily toggle the language that suits them best.

8) Luxury Hotel Websites Convey a Luxury Service Culture

Wealthy travellers expect VIP treatment and the highest caliber of hospitality from start to finish. Not only do luxury hotel brands invest heavily in service training and empowering their staff, they showcase that dedication to service and genuine hospitality directly on their website itself. Ritz Carlton's staff lives by their Gold Standard credo to "fulfill even the unexpressed wishes and needs of our guests."
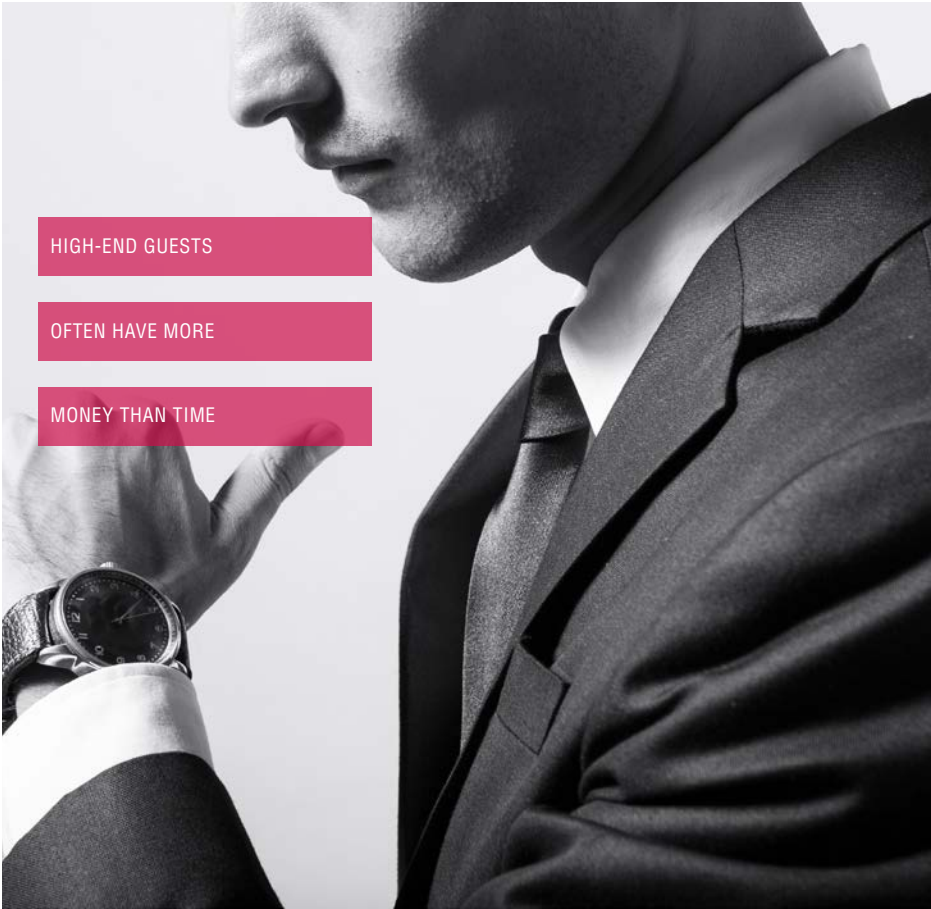
This commitment must extend to the first touch many potential guests have with your hotel, through the phone and chat agents made available via your website.

> " *These operators must understand the details of your luxury service experience and be able to convey it via chat and phone.*

9) Luxury Hotel Websites Enable Personalization

Shoppers who visit luxury stores expect and appreciate a personalized experience. Luxury hotel e-commerce is no different. Smart hoteliers in the upscale and luxury categories have built-in personalization features in their e-commerce experiences, including:

» Detection of the website user's search engine query or location and instant

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ABOUT TAMBOURINE

For more than 32 years, Tambourine has provided technology and creativity to increase DIRECT revenues for hotels & resorts worldwide.

Symphony, our flagship product, delivers all-inclusive digital marketing, channel distribution and an integrated booking engine for one low monthly flat fee per room with no contracts required.

Your property is guaranteed to be up and running in 30 days, increasing direct booking revenues and reducing the stress on your internal marketing team.

Total ecommerce. One vendor...

Competing for new guests is more complex than ever. New digital channels emerge every month. How can understaffed hotel marketers keep up with it all?

Tambourine is dedicated to reducing stress and increasing direct booking revenues for hoteliers, management firms and ownership groups worldwide. Our Symphony platform delivers everything serious hoteliers need to outperform their compset, including:

- Traffic generation
- Responsive web/ mobile/tablet sites
- Booking Engine Integration
- CRS/GDS Distribution
- Reservation Recovery
- Conversion Optimization
- Email Marketing
- Search Engine Optimization
- Pay-per-click management
- Social Media & Trip Advisor Management
- 24/7 unified ROI Dashboard

presentation of dynamic content (or offers) that match the user's interest (ex: "adjoining rooms on the beach").

» Smarter presentation of room categories that enables guests to select rooms based on their personal preferences (ex: "quiet, away from elevators, low-floor or ocean-view).

» Digital tracking of loyal past guests (and their past booking behavior) and instant dynamic presentation of offers, content and images that match their profile (ex: past guests can instantly be recognized and offered a "loyal guest" discount which creates kinship and reduces potential abandonment to OTAs).

10) Luxury Hotel Websites Respect Users' Time

High-end guests often have more money than time... So they seek amenities and services that reduce friction and allow

them to get what they want quickly. Smart luxury properties feature these capabilities right on their website, such as mobile check-in, 24/7 service butlers, on-site activities and rentals, service requests by SMS, children programs, or airport transfers.

Further, high-end customers want to know they can reach a real person at any time. So,

> " *luxury properties lower the barriers to staff by making it simple to chat,*

call or email directly from their property's website and by promising quick response times (some even offer a convenient "call-back service"). The idea is to make their affluent customers feel like a part of an exclusive community and to give them multiple direct lines of communication to your staff.