

Hotels with poor websites face drop in profits

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Customers expect a host of features on hotel websites, even when looking at small hotels in developing countries, according to the researchers from the University of Portsmouth.

Arunasalam Sambhanthan, a recent graduate, and Dr. Alice Good, both from the School of Computing, published their research in the *International Journal of [Information Systems](#)* in the Service Sector. They studied hotels in Sri Lanka which aim to attract western business travellers, but say their findings apply broadly across the sector.

Dr. Alice Good said: “Hotels that rely upon web bookings are undoubtedly going to face a drop in bookings if they fail to keep pace with [website](#) design and the importance of it to customers.

“There is extensive research in how poor web design impacts upon both usability and accessibility in relation to e-commerce websites, with numerous examples of companies going out of business because of poor website design.

“A website is the interface – the shop window – between businesses and their customers and a poor user experience will reduce the chance of a customer committing to a business transaction.

“A poorly designed website will also reduce the chances of a customer returning to the website and increase the chance that they will tell others – often through social media – very quickly about a poor experience.”

The researchers say the four key elements of good hotel website design are:

- Promoting good website usability, including using ‘accessible’ typefaces, easy and intuitive navigation and key information can be found within three clicks of the mouse;
- Providing a good user experience; should be visually pleasing and encourage users to return
- Promoting trustworthiness; the website is safe and secure and ‘feels’ safe to customers.
- Ensuring that reservations can be made online and an email system to facilitate customer queries.

To help ensure profitability – or at least a growth in bookings, [hotel](#) managers should ensure their website is interactive with an online payment system; contains lots of relevant tourist information and a customer forum or comments pages to stop potential customers moving to other sites; includes features which engender trust, such as security certificates and feedback forms; and have links with virtual tour communities to make use of positive feedback.

In addition, hotels should have a security risk management plan to help ensure safety of online booking payments; staff – including senior managers – should be fully trained in how to work on and update the website; and hotels should have a social media marketing strategy to enhance the electronic ‘word of mouth’ of the brand.

Mr. Sambhanthan said: “Hotels, like any other business, should be prepared to spend a significant proportion of their budget on the security of their website. Far too many companies, security is an afterthought,

but the issue of trustworthiness and customers' perception of a safe site impact heavily upon e-commerce.

“People quickly form impressions of web security and a website that engenders a feeling of trust will inspire customers to be more confident about booking and paying online.

“It could be argued that tourists and business travellers do not expect the same level of sophistication from [developing countries](#), but ‘charm’ is essentially a quality aspect of the destination, not a way to do business. While it is a continuing concern that these destinations should not be spoiled by hoarding in excessive numbers of tourists - which then causes issues to the eco-friendliness of the destinations in long run - this is very much a separate research agenda.”

The researchers are now concentrating on a better understanding of tourism websites and their effect on hotels' profitability as well as looking at a list of critical success factors that can promote a better user experience.

Provided by University of Portsmouth

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