

Booking Upgrades Go For Up-Sell

By Adam Kirby

Though it is not yet the dominant means of booking a hotel reservation, the Internet continues making inroads, logging some 39% percent of all bookings made through the central reservation systems of major brands last year, according to a TravelClick study. That figure is a 20% rise over 2005. Growth in the European sector is even greater, up 31% year over year, though market share stands at just 15%, according to Denmark's Centre for Regional and Tourism Research. Nonetheless, the trend is obvious and shows no signs of reversing. Younger travelers in particular not only prefer online booking, but they have come to expect it.

By now, the vast majority of hoteliers offer the option of booking online, but relatively few allow merchandising add-ons without talking separately to a salesperson. As hoteliers strive to regain for their own Web sites a greater share of the booking commissions nowadays being claimed by the third-party intermediary sites, giving customers the greatest possible latitude to customize their visits becomes paramount. Common sense says a traveler is more likely to book on a hotel's homepage if the site is a one-stop shop not just for rooms but also airfare and ground transportation. It is the merchandising up-sell, though, where hoteliers really stand to make online inroads.

Hotels, especially luxury products, have so much to offer beyond rooms--golf, spa, fine dining--and yet few companies allow guests to reserve tee times, massages or dinner reservations while booking a guestroom online. Do not put it to chance that the guest will order a bottle of champagne after arriving at the property--get that extra booked before the trip even starts.

Omni Hotels has been searching for months for a reservation system that has scalability, the ability to offer multiple rates over a single stay, and, of course, dynamic packaging. "We are at a point where we have just pushed that thing to the brink," says Brad Anderson, the company's director of revenue management, referring to Omni's outdated DOS-based reservations system. "With the advances that have been made in the hotel industry and all the different things we want to do in terms of special packages, we have really pushed it to the limit." Two leaders in the global distribution systems sector, TravelClick and Pegasus Solutions, are rolling out applications they believe address the concerns of Anderson and his revenue management colleagues, particularly in the area of the online merchandising up-sell...

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