



## **A guest-centric guide to hotel marketing strategy**



## Attract the right guests. Delight them. Repeat.

It sounds simple, but hotel marketing is hard. Travelers are shopping differently—social media influences decisions and smartphone booking is on the rise. With so many options, it's harder to earn and keep attention, manage your bottom line and delight your in-house guests. A marketing strategy will help.



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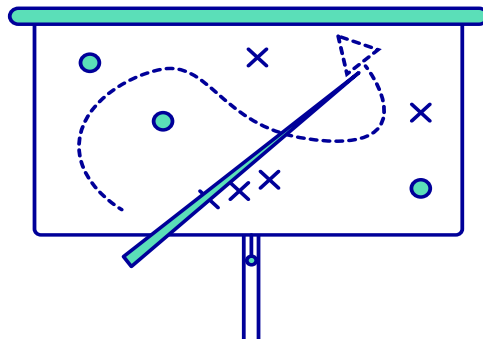
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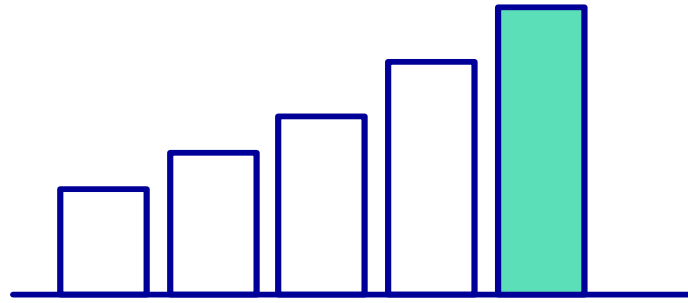
# What is a hotel marketing strategy?

A hotel marketing strategy is an overall game plan for how marketing activities will help your property attract guests, sell rooms and achieve profitable growth. A good marketing strategy will align to specific business goals, identify high-value guests, articulate why your property is the perfect place for their next holiday and prioritize the best channels to reach them.

Your strategy will define the “why” and “what” you plan to do. An accompanying marketing plan will take into account available budget and resources and lay out the detail of “when” and “where” you’ll act.

Is it worth it? Yes—and here’s why. It’s easy to be busy—buy an online ad, post on Instagram, create a promotion—and not achieve your business goals. Having a hotel marketing strategy helps you align the time and money you spend against a clear purpose and reaching the right type of traveler.

Especially if you have a lot to juggle, taking time to define your strategy will help you make good in-the-moment decisions and ultimately see your business grow.



## Start with goals

Your goals for business growth give marketing a purpose. Often that means driving revenue, but sometimes the objective is increasing repeat business or improving guest satisfaction.

Can you list your top business goals for the year? If not, let's spend a minute on what they might be. Start with your performance over the last 12 months and the key [metrics you use to measure success](#). Opportunities to improve might include:

- Drive more revenue by improving occupancy (at specific times of year or maybe at the last minute).
- Driving more revenue by increasing your average daily rate (ADR) or improving your revenue per available room (RevPAR).
- Reducing costs to operating more profitably, increasing your gross operating profit per available room (GOPPAR).

Knowing specifically how the business intends to grow, helps marketers think more strategically about the impact their efforts need to have and their goals will reflect that clarity.

### How many marketing goals should you set for your hotel?

Articulating marketing goals provides guidance for the planning, execution and measurement that follows. It's important not to commit to delivering more than you're resourced to achieve—missing the mark is demoralizing, and more importantly, can jeopardize the growth plan. Avoid being spread too thin by not setting too many goals—two or three essential objectives is a good place to start.

Another best practice is to articulate goals that are specific, measurable, achievable, relevant and time bound. This is known as the SMART format:

- **Specific:** State in detail what needs to be accomplished.
- **Measurable:** Establish how progress and results will be measured.
- **Achievable:** Define goals that are challenging, but feasible given available budget and resources.
- **Relevant:** Confirm the goal is aligned with other priorities and the timing is right.
- **Time-bound:** Establish a reasonable deadline to focus attention and energy.

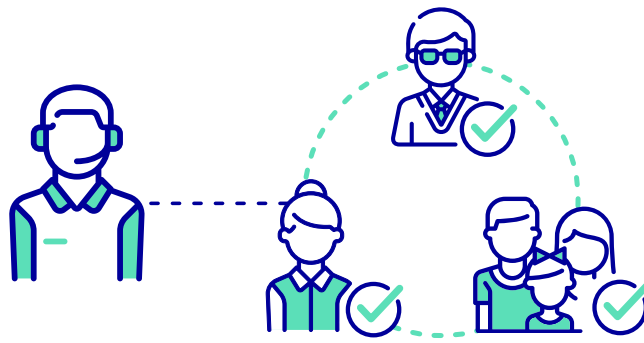
Here's an example of a marketing goal in the SMART format aligned to a business objective.

### **Business objective**

Drive more revenue by improving occupancy.

### **Marketing goal**

By June, reduce the number of last-minute vacancies by 15% through an "impromptu booking" program targeting last-minute leisure travelers who typically book on their mobile phones.



# Define your most valuable guest

## What is a target audience?

A target audience is a group of consumers with similar characteristics that are important to a business because they represent more potential value than the general population.

For your hotel, a target audience or “right guest” could be a group whose desired experience closely matches what your property offers, so satisfaction and the likelihood of a positive review is high. Another possibility is a group whose travel plans closely align to your business objectives from last-minute trips, longer stays, reduced risk of cancellation, etc.

## Why target?

Narrowing your focus on a specific group allows you to tell a truly compelling story about why your property is perfect for their needs. Support your claim with example amenities, photos and glowing reviews from previous guests who are like them. This enhanced appeal will help you win more business with the guests you want most.

## Example hotel target audiences

With millions of consumers worldwide traveling regularly, there are numerous ways to define a target audience. Here are three common segments:

## Business travelers

With expenses covered by their company, business travelers can be less budget conscious and prioritize convenience. If your property is close to an airport or offers parking or has a stable, high-speed internet connection, or has a restaurant and a fitness center—corporate travelers could be perfect for you.

## Families on holiday

Parents who want to relax will value convenience and opportunities to keep their kids busy but may be a bit cost-conscious. If your property offers parking or an airport shuttle service, is located close to must-see sites or activities, offers a swimming pool or a garden and includes a free breakfast—families on holiday could be your best guests.

## Leisure travelers without kids

These travelers are typically ready to relax and enjoy. On-property golf, tennis, swimming or spa services will likely appeal. And if your location is at the beach, in the heart of the city or near the ski slopes, or offers access to wineries, golf, hiking, cycling, fine dining or must-see sites—leisure travelers may be for you.

## Defining your right traveler

If your property has a [revenue management strategy](#), target traveler segments may already be defined. If not, let's explore how to confirm the right traveler for your property.

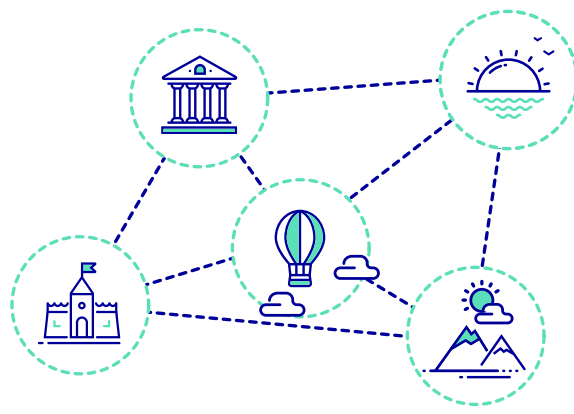
### Who do you serve best?

When it comes to marketing, it's always good to shift your perspective to that of your guest and ask whose needs and desires can you best satisfy?

- Think about your physical location (e.g. near an airport, hiking trails, amusement park) and how that fits with why a guest is traveling.
- Consider the features of your property (e.g. restaurant, fast Wi-Fi, parking) and how they may fit with a guest's plans during their stay.
- Reflect on your rooms and the [amenities you offer](#) (e.g. luxury toiletries and linens, a desk and USB ports, a kitchen or coffee maker) and consider which guests will be most comfortable.
- Your answers should reveal a potential target audience and certainly one that will be searching for the [guest experience you offer](#). And positive reviews usually result when a guest's expectations are met or even better, exceeded.

## Who stays today and what do they say?

Another way to identify your best guests is to review your occupancy for the last 12 months by traveler type and review their feedback. If you work with an OTA, this will be a less daunting task. Expedia Group's [Guest Insights](#) will help you quickly understand trends in your reviews.



# Articulate why you

## What is a hotel's value proposition?

Your hotel's value proposition is an easy to understand promise of the value target travelers will receive if they book your rooms. It clearly explains how staying at your property fulfills their dreams and provides specific examples of how your staff and amenities will make it so. Ideally, your value proposition demonstrates how your hotel is unique and better than others the traveler might consider and is supported by guest reviews (and [any responses](#)) they might read.

Your value proposition will become the foundation for your marketing messages and should be reflected in your communication with guests.

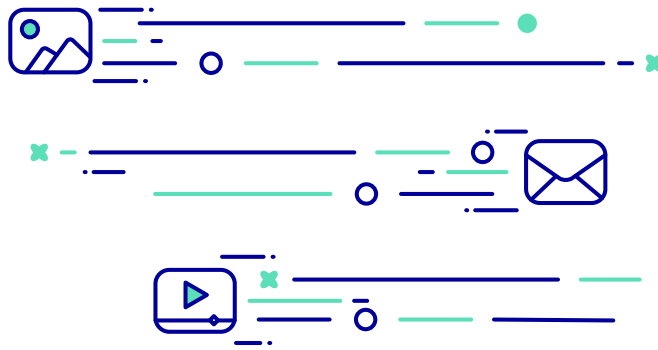
## Bringing your promise to life

Photos are the most powerful way to communicate your value proposition to travelers, especially in digital channels such as your website, an OTA listing or on social media. They allow guests to see what is unique and special—the view, the room, the pool—and, more importantly, imagine themselves

enjoying your property. As leisure travelers increasingly crave immersive experiences, include images sites near your property to help inspire them.

You'll be rewarded. Properties with high-quality photos are viewed by travelers more often (Trivago reports 63% more clicks), are booked more frequently and for higher rates, than properties without. Our quick [guide to hotel photography](#) is a good place to learn more.





# Be thoughtful about channels

Confession time. Where you reach your target travelers is typically an extension of the programs you develop and belongs in your hotel marketing plan. But, in the spirit of having marketing goals that are achievable, understanding the right mix of channels for your budget and resources seemed important to share.

## What is a hotel marketing channel?

Hotel marketing channels are the places where you can reach and influence travelers. Your website, an OTA listing, online advertising, social media, email, in-person events—these are all channels.

In fact, there are so many channels, it's easy to get overwhelmed. Thankfully the 80/20 rule applies—80% of your results will come from 20% of the channels. With the assumption that time and money are limited, we've prioritized popular marketing channels into whether they're essentials, catalysts or accelerators.

## Essentials

These channels are the foundation of hotel marketing and are core to most [distribution strategies](#). They require little budget and can reach millions of travelers a month.

## Your website

Provides full control over how you tell your story and is the only online channel for direct bookings.

- Site design and booking engine should be mobile-friendly
- Invest in basic SEO
- Include high-quality photos
- [Feature guest reviews](#)

## OTA marketplaces

Millions of travelers shop and book travel on OTA websites everyday.

- Optimize your listing/profile to match with your target guest
- Use lots of high-quality photos
- Keep your [rates and inventory current](#)
- List on last-minute or opaque sites to fill unexpected vacancies

## Catalysts

If you have some budget and a little resource, these channels build on the essentials and can boost your performance.

### OTA marketing programs

Leverage existing [OTA marketing programs](#) to reach your traveler target with enticing offers.

- Incentivize with specific lengths of stay or booking windows.
- As the booking window closes, invest in boosting visibility in search.
- Explore [travel packages](#) to capture longer bookings and reduce cancellations.

### Destination marketing organizations (DMO)

Participate in DMO campaigns to encourage travel and tourism in your location.

- Advertise in DMO publications/websites/email campaigns to target travelers in the research phase.
- Offer an incentive, such as free parking or breakfast, when guests book via the DMO ad.

### Social media marketing

Post content to social sites such as Instagram where travelers go to research travel destinations.

- Create “Instagram worthy” moments at your hotel.
- Research and use destination hashtags, so you are seen.
- Offer guests incentives, such as a free drink, if they tag your hotel in their posts.

## Multipliers

These channels require budget, specialized knowledge and possibly additional resources to help manage. They should be layered after essential and catalyst channels.

### Public relations (PR)

Create consumer awareness in travel specific and local/regional media outlets.

- Get creative with “newsworthy” moments to attract local press.
- Once you have local/regional traction, consider hiring a PR firm to generate broader media coverage.

### Email marketing

Provide regular outreach to previous guests and loyalty members.

- Publish a weekly or monthly newsletter to stay top-of-mind with past guests.
- Offer promotions or other incentives to encourage travelers to book again.
- Abide by GDPR and CAN-SPAM laws.

## Digital advertising

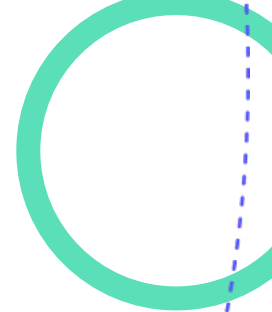
Drive traffic to your website with paid digital advertising campaigns.

- Run pilots on Google and/or Bing to validate ROI.
- Explore reaching travelers in the Expedia Group marketplace with [TravelAds](#).
- Offer a value add, like free or discounted parking, to encourage bookings.

## Content marketing

Improve organic (free) traffic to your website by adding more pages optimized with keywords. Keywords are picked up by search engines when travelers are searching for travel accommodations.

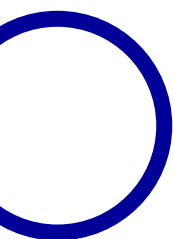
- To have an impact, you want to try to rank on the first page of results for the keyword or phrase.
- Be patient; search engine optimization (SEO) is a powerful channel that builds over time.



## Conclusion

Congratulations! You have the building blocks to create a marketing strategy that supports your growth. The next step is simple—start.

One measurable marketing goal, your compelling promise and a defined target audience is all you need. The next step can be aligning the marketing you already have to that strategy. Even if you only update the essential channels with content and photos on your website and OTA listing, it will help. Any new activity needs to align with your goal, otherwise spend that time enjoying your guests.



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