

## 10 Success Tips on Online Visibility for Independent Hotels

By: Pedro Colaco, CEO, GuestCentric Systems

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Many independent hotel managers are unhappy with the small amount of business generated by their websites. This should come as no surprise as these websites have poor visibility, and often less than 20 visitors a day. Simple techniques like being present in a few online channels and registering for Google Local Business can dramatically increase the level of visibility of an independent hotel’s website. This article suggests 5 simple and 5 advanced tips to dramatically boost the visibility of an independent hotel’s website as a first step to create a structured online strategy to ensure e-commerce success.

### Online visibility: where e-commerce success starts

Online visibility is about creating sources of traffic for your website, i.e. be present in places where your offer is available and gets the traveler thinking, “I would like to stay there”. The online visibility of your hotel is determined by lots of factors: your website’s Google ranking, your presence in online channels, links to your website, and promotions on Google, Yahoo or meta-search engines like Kayak.

### Choosing a visibility strategy

The most important thing to realize when wanting to improve your website’s visibility is how much time and money you are willing to dedicate to improve your website’s visibility. This article shows two ways: a minimum level of visibility required to make your website an effective sales tool, and advanced strategies that enable you to compete with the best hotels in your area.

### Getting found: it all starts with distribution

Finding an independent hotel online is often like finding a needle in a haystack. Thankfully over the last 10 years or so users have learned how to select hotels online, so independent hotels can leverage this information to their advantage. Hitwise.com consistently ranks the top 3 most visited sites in travel as MapQuest, Google Maps and Expedia.

Studies also show that most users start the search for a hotel in an online travel agent (OTA) site like Expedia, Travelocity (6<sup>th</sup> most visited travel site) or Priceline (7<sup>th</sup> most visited travel site) by selecting a location and a date range. Many independent properties choose not to list with OTAs because of the hefty

commission rates they demand. However, studies show that most users will not book right on the OTA, they will rather book on the hotel's official website, so consider part of being present in the OTA a marketing cost.

**Tip #1:** Select a few large distribution channels and promote your property there. The commission you pay will be partially offset by additional business on your website.

### **Google Local Business: it is free!**

Studies also show that once consumers select hotels to research further, 82% turn to Google or another search engine to visit the hotel's official website by searching for the hotel name and location. Hence, **having your official site appear as the top site in Google for someone searching for your hotel is the most critical element of online success.**

Luckily, Google has launched a free service to help users find local businesses, appropriately called "Google Local Business". So, if someone is searching for "Patti's Inn in Grand Rivers" Google shows as the first result of the search page the Google Maps location of the business, a link to the official website and the address and phone number. This is probably the most valuable link your website will have, so if you're not there, sign up for the service. It's free.

**Tip #2:** Ensure your property is listed in Google Local Business ([Google.com/LocalBusinessCenter](https://www.google.com/LocalBusinessCenter))

### **Your website can rank high in Google for your property name**

In addition to Local Business, you can easily achieve number one ranking for your property name in your location by using a website platform that has optimization tools included, as there probably are not many properties with the same name in the same location.

Look for a web platform that enables you to define:

- **Title tag:** the title that shows in your browser when you navigate to your home page. A good title is "Patti's Inn and Suites | Grand Rivers | Kentucky". A not so good title would be "Come visit us at the best inn, comfortable with a fantastic restaurant in Grand Rivers"
- **Domain URL:** a good domain is [pattisinnandsuites.com](https://www.pattisinnandsuites.com) a not so good one would be [inningranddriverskentucky.com](https://www.inningranddriverskentucky.com)
- **H1 tag:** the most important content on a website page is the title, called the H1 tag (Heading 1, just as you would have a title in a Word document). Again, here, ensure the hotel name and location are part of

the tag. “Patti’s Inn and Suites in Grand Rivers Kentucky – Hotel Overview” would be a good H1 tag.

**Tip #3:** Select a website vendor that can provide your website on the first page of Google for people searching for your property name..

### **There is low hanging fruit: offline “links” and email**

Your online visibility strategy starts with having a good online brand. And to create a good online brand you need to promote it, just like you promote your brand offline. Hence, powerful promotion channels for your website are the offline channel that you already know. Ensure that all your online, but also offline marketing materials (brochures, business cards, menus, articles in the press, etc.) include your website address.

One simple trick is to include your website address in your email signature, even the emails that you send to your friends. You would be surprised how many visitors to your website it will generate.

**Tip #4:** Embed your website address “everywhere”, even in personal emails.

### **TripAdvisor is critical for your hotel**

Studies show that 60% of travelers seek advice from others before their travel decision. Among all user review sites, TripAdvisor is the largest one and the 10<sup>th</sup> most visited travel site. Luckily, getting your hotel listed in TripAdvisor is easy and free. Please note that to be listed as a hotel, your property must offer four key features: a 24 hour front desk; daily housekeeping included in the room rate; private bathroom for each unit; and, if there is a minimum-stay requirement, it must be no more than 3 nights.

**Tip #5:** List your property with TripAdvisor ([www.tripadvisor.com/pages/getlisted.html](http://www.tripadvisor.com/pages/getlisted.html)) and encourage your guests to write reviews.

### **Sign up for meta-search, directories and promotion sites**

The Internet is full of opportunities for independent hotels. Every day new hotel promotion services are created and some recent ones are experiencing tremendous success like Kayak.com, but it is also critical to be listed in traditional directories like Yahoo Travel, dmoz.org, etc. Moreover, you should keep track of innovative services to promote your property like dealbase.com. Many of these are free, and provide valuable visibility and links to your property.

**Tip #6:** Visit [www.guestcentric.com/visibility](http://www.guestcentric.com/visibility) and sign up for some or all of the free directory services listed there.

### **You like to write? Think blogs and press releases.**

An important factor of attracting visitors to your site is keeping content fresh. There are two ways to attract visitors to your site:

- 1- Setup a blog and link it to your website but always ensure that the blog contains a booking engine;
- 2- Post press releases that link to pages with fresh content.

If you like to write, then think about stories you can write related to time-limited promotions, events, notable activities in the area, funny things that happened in your hotel or relevant changes/upgrades in your property. Use the off-hours of the night shift write posts for your blog, edit the activities or news page on your site and you will see the traffic on your website increase.

**Tip #7:** Setup a blog or a news page and keep content fresh with, events, activities or changes and upgrades to your property.

### **Search engine optimization (SEO), search engine marketing (SEM) and Pay-per-click (PPC)**

Many hotels would like to optimize their presence the Google search “hotel in XYZ” (e.g. Grand Rivers Kentucky). If you are in a primary market (e.g. New York, London, Paris), fighting for Google ranking will be the most difficult battle that a smaller independent hotel will fight as you will be competing not only against all the chain brands, but also the Online Travel Agents. Just as an example, Expedia spends over \$400,000 a DAY in Google Ads (that’s over \$10 MILLION a month!).

Alternatively, in a secondary market you have a good chance to be able to rank in the first page for those terms. You will need to build the appropriate landing pages using the same techniques described in Tip #3. There are plenty of tools online for optimizing website performance, and one I recommend highly is Website grader from Hubspot ([www.websitegrader.com](http://www.websitegrader.com)).

**Tip #8:** If you are in a secondary market invest in SEO. Use website grader ([www.websitegrader.com](http://www.websitegrader.com)) to see how you are doing.

### **Search engine marketing (SEM) and Pay-per-click (PPC)**

Additionally, if you are willing and have budget to spend, you can complement your SEO efforts with Ads on Google and Yahoo for the same keywords (SEM) and the same landing pages. Keep in mind that these ads only generate cost to you if they generate visits.

**Tip #9:** If you have marketing budget invest in SEM.

**You don't like to write but still want to be active? Then tweet.**

If you don't like to write there is a new tool in town that allows you post updates that are 140 characters or less in size: Twitter. Same content rules apply as before, so just sign up at twitter.com and start posting your micro-blogs called "tweets". For visibility purposes it is critical that your tweet includes links to your website, so as to generate additional visits. If you send a tweet once a day you will be rated as a great twitter user and your visibility will improve.

**Tip #10:** Sign up for twitter and do a daily tweet with a link to your website.

**Visibility: First step for e-commerce optimization**

Having a great website, great offers and a top-shelf e-commerce platform are key to successful online business, but it all starts with online visibility. Online visibility is about creating sources of traffic for your website, i.e. be present in places where your offer is available and gets the traveler thinking, "I would like to stay there". The 10 tips outlined above will help you generate additional sources of traffic that should increase the number of monthly visitors to your website, and therefore, the number of online bookings and ensure e-commerce success.

**Bio**

Pedro co-founded GuestCentric Systems in October 2006 and has served as President and CEO since. Pedro brings extensive experience in the networking and software industries to his role. Pedro has a proven track record of driving successful product development, marketing, sales and channel management efforts in the global market.

Prior to founding GuestCentric, Pedro was Vice President of Product Management and Marketing at Corvil, an Ireland based software start-up funded by Apax Partners and Cisco Systems. During his tenure at Corvil he built a global Product Management and Marketing organization to support a sales team of over 60 professionals. Before joining Corvil, Pedro was Vice President of Marketing and Business Development for Expand Networks, a leading vendor of application traffic management solutions based in New Jersey from where he

managed the company's marketing and business development activities on all six continents. From 1999 to 2001, Pedro was Director of Product Management and Marketing for Unisphere Networks a Boston startup, where he was responsible for developing and managing the market strategy for next-generation IP voice products including network and service management. Prior to Unisphere, Pedro worked 7 years for the information and communications division of Siemens where he held increasingly senior roles in product management and product development at offices in Germany and the United States.

Pedro holds a bachelors degree in Electrotechnical and Computer Systems Engineering from the Instituto Superior Tecnico in Lisbon, Portugal and studied towards an MBA at the Florida Atlantic University in Boca Raton, Florida