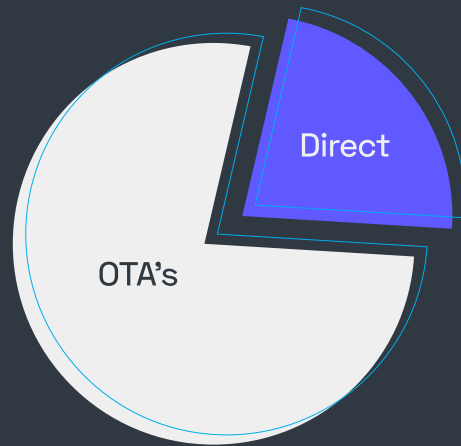


Introduction

How Hotels Can Get to 50% Direct Revenue With Zero Spending on Google Campaigns



As anyone who has opened a new hotel will testify, establishing an online presence and winning customers are some of the greatest challenges hoteliers face when undertaking this venture.

When opening a new hotel, most hoteliers rely on OTAs to put their properties on the map and generate reservations. But although this approach may be essential for new hotels in the market, far too many become dangerously over-dependent on third-party intermediaries and suffer profit losses as a result.

In fact, a recent study published in Travel Weekly reveals that nearly 40% of independent hotels and over 30% of hotel chains rely on OTAs to generate over 50% of revenue.

However, the good news is there are independent hotels that have deployed innovative technological solutions and grown from launch day to generating 50% direct revenue without spending a dime on Google.

This E-book will show you the tried and proven steps they have taken to make every hotelier's dream a reality.



Every hotelier asks, “How can we increase direct reservations?”

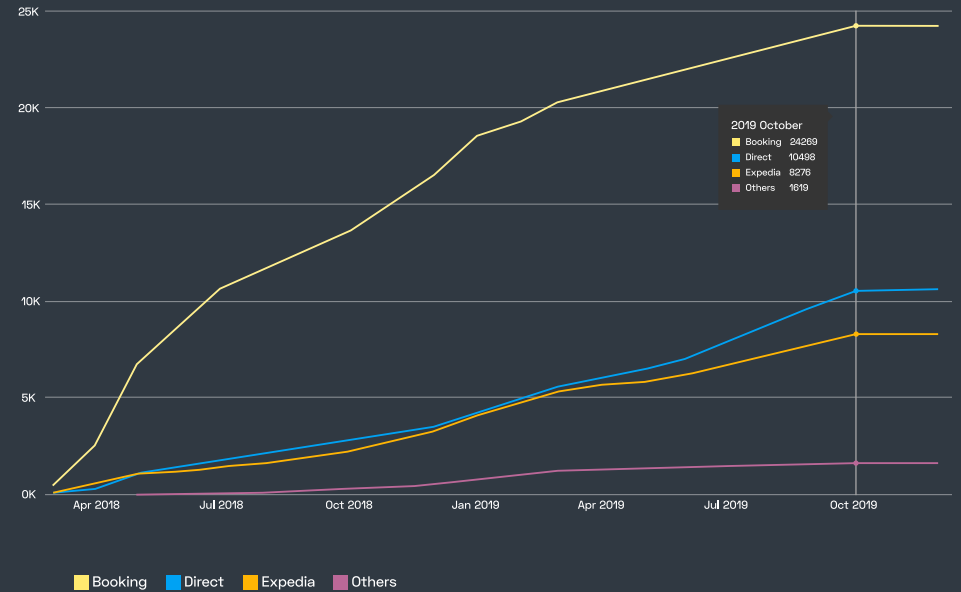
The million-dollar question on every hotelier’s mind.

However, many will leave most of the grunt revenue generation work to OTAs, and with good reason given how OTAs have historically dominated search engines and benefited from the lion’s share of online visibility.

For newly-opened hotels, establishing an online presence from scratch and competing against the giants to generate increased volumes of direct bookings becomes even more challenging.

This was the case with a European boutique hotel two months after opening its doors in April 2018. During this period, 89% of the property’s reservations were generated through OTAs, while direct bookings lagged behind at just 11%.

When our GuestCentric Lab Team began working with this property two months after opening, they knew success would not be achieved overnight. With new hotels cropping up at every corner in an expanding destination and OTAs dominating the online reservation space, competition was as fierce as ever.



It was for this reason that our client decided to bet on GuestCentric Lab’s service to achieve three crucial objectives:

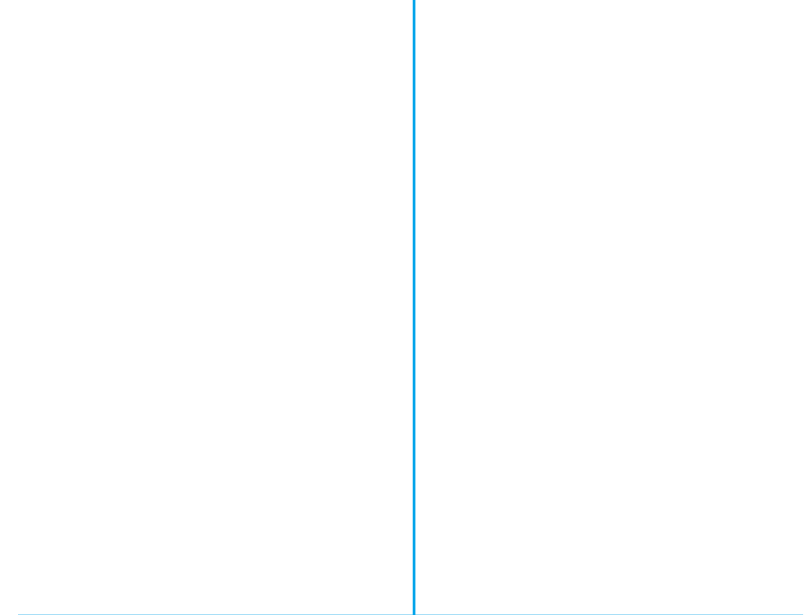
- ✓ **Boost Direct Reservations**
- ✓ **Increase Hotel Revenue**
- ✓ **Become Independent From OTAs**

For any hotel, achieving these objectives is not only a matter of increasing direct sales, but also retaining growth thereafter.

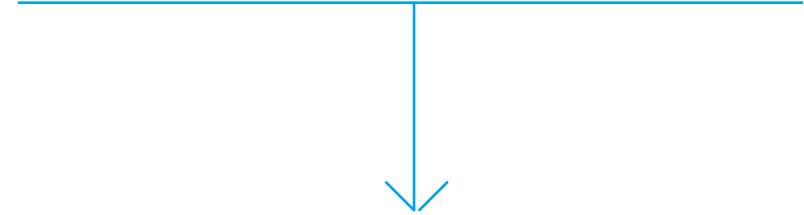
From Hotel Opening to **50% Direct Reservations** Without Spending on Google

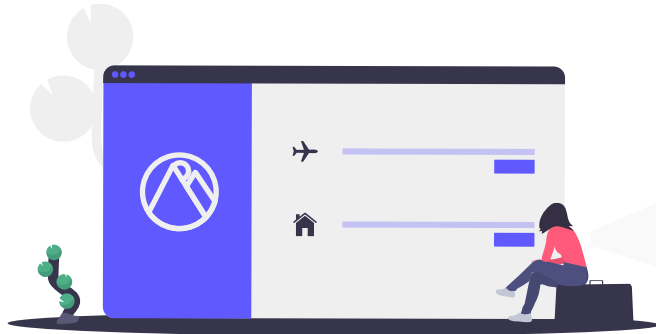
There is no silver bullet to optimizing your online presence, engaging your customers, and increasing your direct revenue. Like most great ventures designed to generate return on investment, if you fail to plan, you plan to fail.

Mapping out a strategy that effectively incentivizes customers to book directly with you and results in repeat business thereafter involves a thorough knowledge of your property's unique value proposition and comprehensive research into what your target customers want throughout every stage of the search and purchase process.



Below are 5 key strategies that this hotel, under the specialist guidance of the GuestCentric Lab team, deployed to achieve nearly 50% of total bookings over a 16-month period without spending a dime on Google:





1. Leverage OTAs to Boost Online Visibility & Drive Direct Reservations

When leveraging OTAs to boost visibility, the ultimate goal should ALWAYS be to drive direct bookings. In what we call the 'Billboard Effect', OTAs are popular for initial research and the majority of consumers will visit a brand.com website to shop around after the initial search stage on the OTA.

According to Tripadvisor, 57% of people surveyed worldwide use an OTA to help plan their travel. However, Google observes that 52% of travelers will visit your hotel website after seeing you on an OTA.

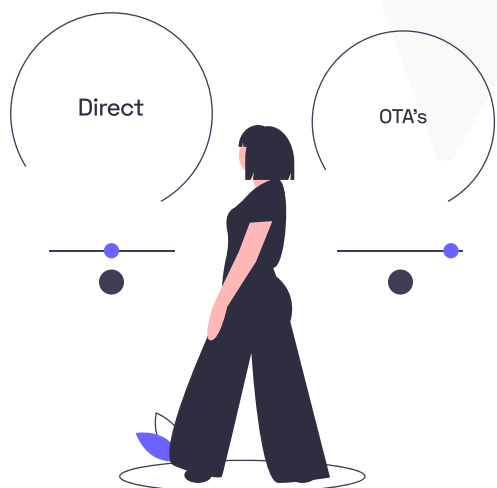
There also is a high correlation between a property's OTA ranking and occupancy - the higher your property is positioned in OTA search engine results, the more likely a consumer will be to see and book it. For example, Expedia has revealed that 75% of click-through traffic goes to the top 15 listed hotels in the search engine results.

How a property ranks in OTA search engine results is dependent on four crucial factors:

- ◆ **The property's performance**
- ◆ **The competitors' property performance**
- ◆ **Room Prices**
- ◆ **Content score**

Although the majority of customers use OTAs to research potential destinations and offers, this doesn't necessarily mean that they book through them too. If they do, our own research shows that booking.com cancelation rates average 35% annually, and this is because travelers will typically want to secure a specific price point far in advance but end up changing their minds closer to the booked date.

With over half of online visitors navigating to hotel websites after browsing through an OTA, this is the perfect opportunity to begin your engagement. Use your OTA to build awareness and your brand, but make sure you do everything in your power to ensure that once they land on your website they stay there to book!



2. Keep Room Prices Competitive in Comparison to OTA Prices

Once a customer lands on your website, they will want to find more information about your hotel to decide if they want to stay there and also research where they

will get the best deal. For this reason, it's absolutely crucial that you remember to keep your room prices competitive.

The unfortunate reality is that between 65% and 98% of hotels across numerous geographical markets offer their rooms cheaper on OTA sites rather than on their own, according to RateGain. How can you expect customers to book directly with you at a higher price than carrying out the same process via an OTA?

This not only results in the loss of a sale but also a potentially tarnished reputation.

Research shows that most customers would prefer to book directly with a hotel providing they can do so easily and the rates are comparable.

So ensure you are publically marketing competitive offers and prices via your website and through your own marketing and advertising.

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3. Focus on Search Engine Optimization, it's not Rocket Science

As Google increases its dominance over the online travel market, it's important to ensure that your property is optimized for search engines to boost visibility and to drive traffic to your hotel's website.

Search Engine Optimization (SEO) is the technique of driving targeted traffic to your website from search engines like Google, Yahoo, and Bing. It also includes ranking your website higher on these search engines.

Below are the most important steps you should take to **improve your website's SEO:**



1. Define your target audience

Think about your property.

Is it in the center of a business hub yet offers an escape from the noise, or do you offer a more ecological experience for nature-lovers? It's important that you thoroughly research who your target audience is and what you can offer them before you start populating your website with content.

2. Start with the keyword research

Once you define your target market, you need to find out what they search for online when planning a trip. The most cost-effective way to do this is through Google Trends, but for those who don't have the time, it's important to work with a trusted partner that understands the industry and what customers search for.

3. Work on the page title, meta description, and URL

Once you establish your target keywords, featuring them in web-page meta-titles and meta-descriptions will help search engines understand the content across your website and increase visibility. It will also incentivize your target customers to click through to your content, particularly if you have a call to action that resonates with what they are searching for. Remember that the character count for meta titles and descriptions must be limited in accordance with Google criteria (60 characters for titles, 160 characters for descriptions), otherwise, they will be shortened in the search results.

4. Optimize your website content

Google rewards content that is informative and accurately linked to provide a seamless experience to online visitors. For this reason, the GuestCentric Lab team undertook a website content audit to identify what was working and which areas required improvement. This helped ensure the hotel's website would consistently rank high on Google's Search Engine Results Page (SERP). It is important to understand the searchers' intent, as this will enable you to deliver the most relevant content.

5. Add ALT text to images

Although we all acknowledge the need for speed to optimize website performance, some servers may not load up webpages as quickly as one would hope. For this reason, you should add ALT text to every image on your website. These descriptions will not only help people understand what is in the image, but it's also a smart way to feature keywords without being penalized for 'keyword stuffing' by Google.

6. Work on your website's loading speed

According to the Search Engine Journal, nearly 70% of consumers say a website's loading time affects their willingness to buy. Furthermore, half of online visitors will abandon a website if they're forced to wait longer than 3 seconds. For this reason, it is vitally important that you ensure your website operates at an optimal pace. Some ways to do this include using smaller image files, reducing redirects and leveraging browser caching. Contact GuestCentric Lab for more advice.

7. Make your website mobile-friendly

Google research reveals that nearly 50% of mobile users are comfortable researching, planning, and booking an entire trip to a new travel destination using only their smartphone. However, those who have a negative brand experience on mobile are 62% less likely to purchase from that brand in the future. Find out more about how to optimize your website for mobile here.

8. Build Links

Links are the core element of hotel SEO.

There are two types of links, Internal Links and External Links. Search engines use links to discover new web pages and determine how well a page should rank in their results. Internal links help search engines understand what your most important pages are and the interconnection between them.

As for external links or backlinks to your website from industry-related and trustworthy websites, these will tell your audience that you are an authority in the market. This will give your brand credibility a significant boost.

9. Ensure Your Website has Schema Markup

Schema Markup, a recent advancement to SEO, helps to boost your website's visibility to search users. It represents the semantic vocabulary also known as microdata of the content on your website. The microdata is added to your web page HTML so search engines can better read your content and improve the way your web page is represented to search users. Furthermore, Search Engine Journal reveals that Schema Markup can increase click-through-rates by over 40%.

Fortunately, the GuestCentric solution automatically addresses all aspects of technical SEO, such as Schema Markup and mobile responsiveness.

However, holistic SEO analysis should be an ongoing process to ensure your website not only aligns with Google's best practices but also resonates with your online visitors. This should ideally be carried out on a monthly, quarterly and annual basis to measure website traffic, conversions, and overall performance.

It's also worth noting how SEO principles and Google tools continue to evolve, which in turn impacts how hoteliers should deliver their digital marketing strategies. For example, 2019 saw the rise of voice search and Google's BERT algorithm which enables search engines to better understand the nuance and context of search terms and better match those queries with helpful results.

These and other changes mean hoteliers must also ensure digital knowledge is kept up-to-date and adapt their marketing strategies to remain competitive in the ever-changing digital landscape.

If you have limited resources and capacity to do this internally, it's advisable to work with a trusted partner that not only understands continuous developments and trends across the hotel and hospitality industry at large, but also how to digitally optimize your website so it adapts to digital developments and ever-evolving consumer demands.

**THIS IS WHY OUR CLIENT CHOSE TO WORK WITH US
HERE AT GUESTCENTRIC LAB!**



4. Offer a Consistent and Personalized Guest Experience

Remember, the guest experience starts from the second they land on your website, so you need to ensure you optimize their experience through consistent, straightforward, and clear communication of your room types, rates, special offers and other packages you offer.

Imagine yourself as a guest browsing through a hotel's website and find a room to book, but the buttons linking to the booking engine are inconsistently labeled. One reads, 'Reserve' while the other reads 'Book Now'. Pretty confusing right?

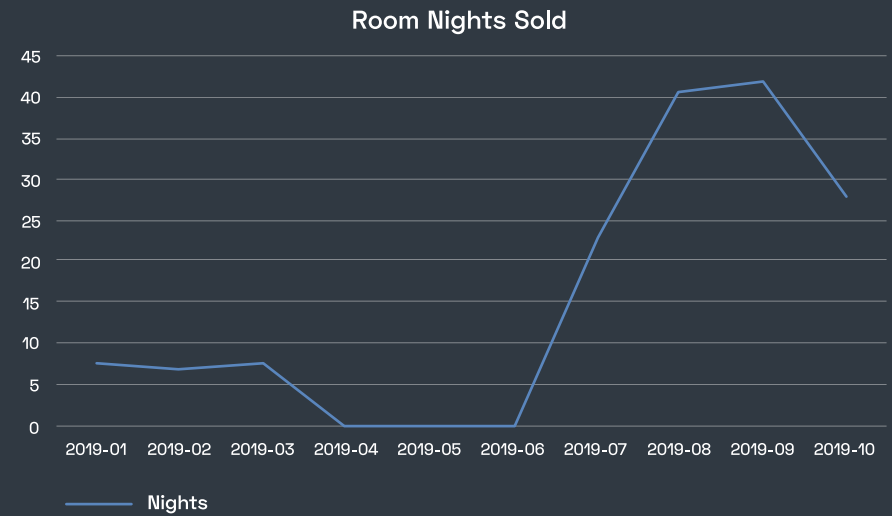
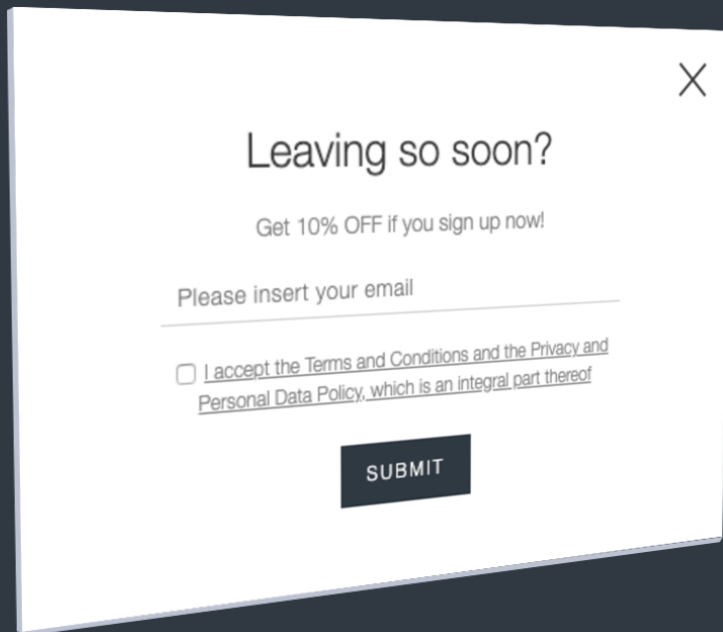
Visitors should feel comfortable when they visit your website. They should feel that your website is designed, arranged, and filled with logical information that they know how to get to.

When you are consistent, you make your website visitors happy which will compel them to return. So remember to standardize room types and names across all channels you use, otherwise, your visitors will be confused when faced with a dizzying array of options for a simple, classic double room. Personalization of the traveler and guest experience has been shown to substantially improve ROI for hoteliers and associated travel businesses.

According to a report by PhocusWright, if you tailor your information and overall trip experience based on personal preferences or past behavior, 76% of travelers may be more likely to sign up for your brand's loyalty program. In addition, 36% would pay more in return for receiving more tailored information and experiences.

You can also embed personalization into your website and booking engine by delivering customized shopping activation and shopping recovery pop-up messages highlighting your best offers based on the guest's previous searches and booking behaviors, as shown in the image below.

Through personalizing their shopping recovery pop-up message from 'We Have a Special Offer for You' to 'Leaving so soon? Get 10% off if you sign up now', our client managed to vastly improve their direct sales, as shown in the figure below.





5. Publish Exclusive Offers and Deals that Incentivize Guests to Book Directly on Your Website

People love deals and everyone asks: “What’s in it for me?” when carrying out a transaction. Travelers are no different. If you want more customers to book directly on your website, you need to incentivize them to do so.

And a great way to do this is through offering exclusive deals, promotions, and offers that guests cannot get if they book on any channel apart from your website.

According to Software Advice and Google, nearly 50% of travelers would be most likely to make a direct reservation if a hotel offered a room upgrade as an incentive to book directly on their website. The second in line is free room service, with 23% of travelers more likely to make a direct reservation due to this incentive.

Offering exclusive deals and offers involves understanding the value your property has to offer.

For example, you could ask yourself the following questions:

Does your property have the most famous restaurant in town? Offer a discount on dining, only for direct bookers;

Are guests looking forward to staying at your hotel because your Spa is top-notch? Communicate that guests will receive a complimentary wellness perk for booking directly on your website.

Is your hotel located in a picturesque neighborhood, with narrow streets? Provide a freebie to your parking service, limited to those who reserve directly with you.

Make sure you only offer exclusive deals for those who book directly on your website and nowhere else. Take advantage of your booking engine features and avoid the temptation to populate deals everywhere. Segment your sales and pay special attention to your direct channel.

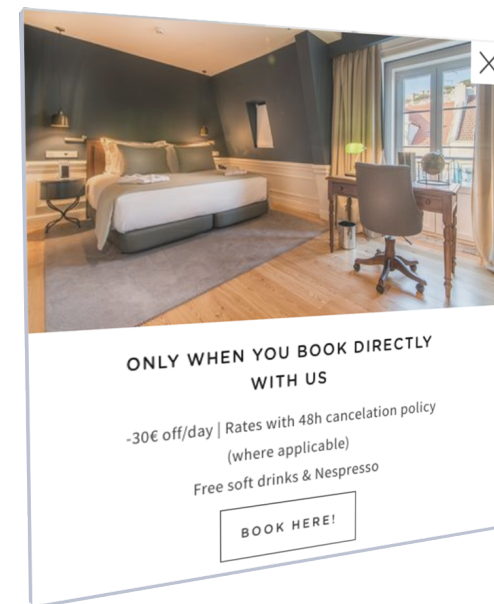
Here are some examples of exclusive deals you could offer on your direct channel:

Seasonal Promotions for Low Season: Remind travellers of how much they can see when there are less crowds. Seasonal promotions can also be a great way to bring back customers who have stayed with you before.

Event-based Promotions: Include local events in your exclusive offers. Guests will more than likely already be researching these events, so if your hotel has a deal related to a local festival, fair, or cultural event, awareness of your hotel should increase along with website traffic and conversions.

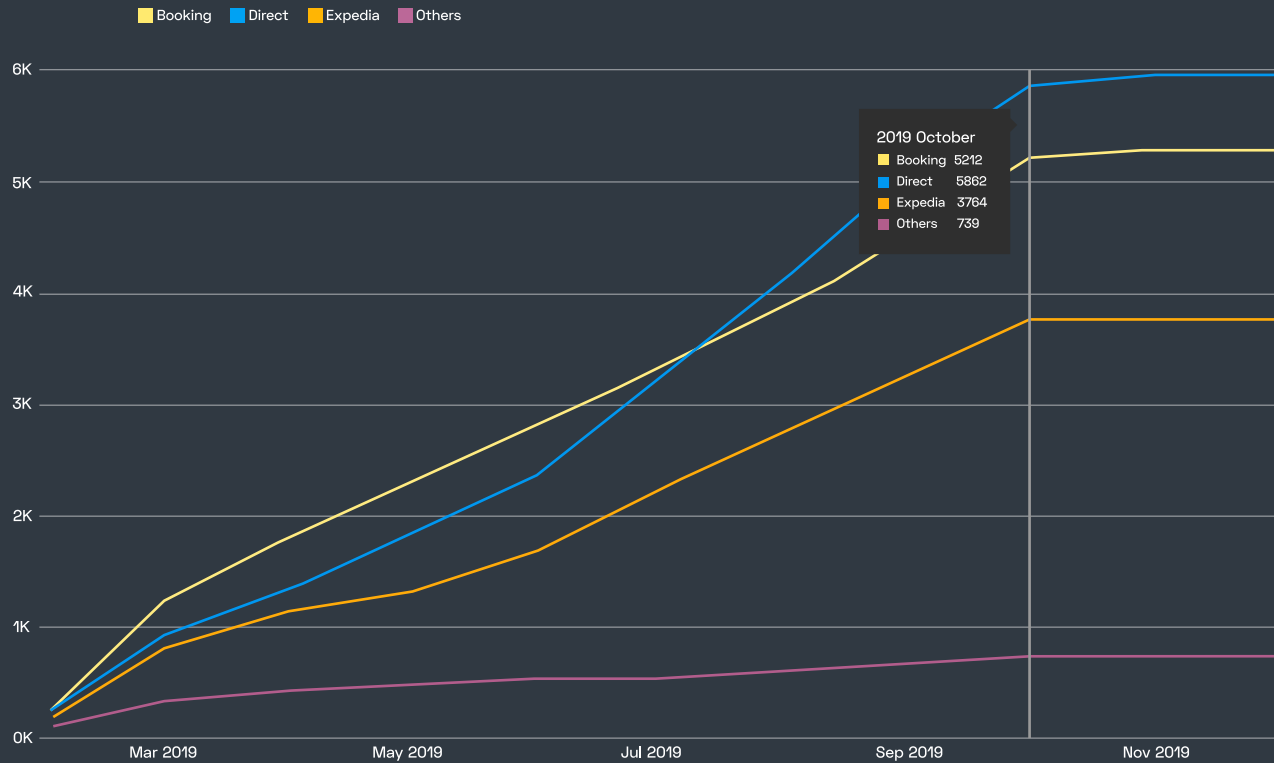
Book Now & Pay Later: Promote flexibility in your own website in opposition to OTAs. That way customers will feel more confident and privileged to book directly on your website.

One of the simplest and most impactful ways to promote your offers is through pop-up messages. When guests land on your website, they want to feel valued and that you have taken their behavior and interests into account.



Offering discounts on food and drinks, late check-out, free upgrade or an exclusive discount are all great incentives that will encourage customers to book directly on your website.

The results speak loud and clear



After 16 months of carrying out the steps listed above, this hotel drastically improved its direct reservations to comprise 50% of all revenue, without spending a dime on Google.

But the story is far from over...

The Key to Maintaining 50% Direct Reservations Going Forward

The key to increasing direct reservations is to maintain a clear revenue strategy for a healthy distribution; never forgetting to understand the guests' behavior and where the data is coming from. Organic online growth is by no means an overnight process. It can take up to 16 months before you generate the desired return on investment.

The Greek Philosopher Heraclitus once said: "No man ever steps in the same river twice, for it's not the same river and he's not the same man."

He was commenting on the nature of impermanence and flowing change as the basic law of the cosmos. This same principal applies to the hotel industry. Nothing stays the same. The pace of digital evolution and consumer demand moves too fast.

Technology is always breaking open new frontiers and in the global travel landscape, competition can come from anywhere at anytime. Just consider how Google has substantially disrupted OTAs with rising dominance over online travel search over the last five years.

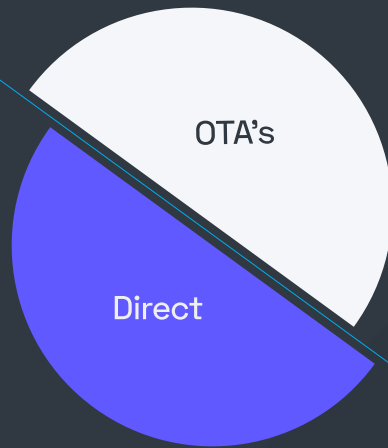
Expanding your online presence to maximize direct revenue should not be viewed as a one-off process.

In order to continue to effectively manage your customers' online journey and maximize direct reservations, your strategy needs to continuously adapt to ever-changing digital trends and consumer demands.

Knowledge is profit for Hoteliers, so be sure to consistently analyze your customers and measure your performance across all channels. This will help you both identify areas for improvement and capitalize on your strengths. Education is key to your strategic edge and to address issues of when and how to evolve your hotel's digital strategy.

As you continue to adapt your digital strategy, focus on the impact to revenue - This will give you a hardline awareness of when something is working or not. If revenue improves, you're enhancing your digital strategy correctly. If revenue declines, make adjustments and try again - Always keeping growth at the forefront of your hotel's business objectives.

Want to know more about how you can organically grow your online presence and maximize direct sales, then get in touch with the GuestCentric Lab Team!



[CONTACT GUESTCENTRIC LAB](#)

