4 ROUTES TO A WINNING SEARCH EXPERIENCE

BEST PRACTICES IN TRAVEL WEBSITE TESTING AND OPTIMIZATION

PART 2
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The Search Is On

Behind every great trip, there’s a great deal of research.

Vacations, flights and hotels are not impulse purchases. With much less expendable income, consumers are inevitably pickier about who they book with, when they travel and how much they will spend.

In reality, the path to a final, booked trip is fraught with decisions, compromise and questions.

Questions only a well-optimized search process can answer.
Elements of a Search Experience

Your website must provide the easiest way for visitors to embark on their trip research. And once it has begun, they need key information to seamlessly move into the booking funnel.

When am I leaving?
It may be obvious, but dates of travel are a number one priority for would-be bookers. Your visitor might have a timeline in mind, or may be flexible in order to reap some cost savings. Either way, dates are an essential part of the search phase and should always be prominent.

Who is coming with me?
Whether it’s a solo trip or spring break for 10, being able to search and display options by group size has a big impact on final decisions. Presence of children also impacts pricing and trip type.

How much will it cost?
It’s a no-brainer: knowing the range they are going to be paying play a part in decisions, trip customization and loyalty program participation.

Where am I going?
Getting visitors started with their exact location is crucial — where they land within that location is as well. If you have multiple hotels, car pick-up locations or airports, they must be highlighted accordingly.

There are 4 elements to spruce up for an optimal search results experience...
Route #1
Search Widget

When the travel research journey begins, simplicity, clarity and ease of use are a necessity. Straightforward actions within your search widget can make or break this process, such as clicking on “date field” to trigger a calendar pop-up, automatically populating checkout or return dates, and even saving recent searches in a drop-down field, can boost conversion rates.

Just remember: make this widget accessible at all times during the search phase.
Route #2
Search Results Display and Pricing

Once your visitors have moved from the search widget into the results phase, it’s important they have accessibility to all needed information without having to leave the funnel. The first step in this process is providing a layout that cleanly displays a lot of information, including prominent pricing. Never leave them in the dark.

- Column format of results makes it easy to read times, dates and other information.
- Clean layout, including a progress bar.
- Search widget remains for easy modifications.
- Surrounding dates are included so the user can toggle between options without re-starting the search.
- Once flights are added to the cart, total pricing is displayed.

Very prominent pricing, as well as a choice to use loyalty program points.
Route #3
Sort and Filter

With the abundance of options your site has to offer for room types, flight times, price points, airports, etc., it’s important to give travelers the ability to easily scale down these results to get more custom choices based on their needs. Sort and filter widgets allow users to easily check out what they want — and don’t want — while remaining in the booking funnel.

Filter choices are static next to results. Results change upon user selections.

Simple functionality like checkbox and dropdowns, cleanly displays all filter choices.

Sliding scales provide quick ways to filter pricing, timing or room size.
Route #4
Maps

Travel often involves venturing into the unknown. Providing consumers with a visual reference point of their hotel or attraction location will not only enhance their booking experience, but keep them on your site — and on the path to a completed booking.

Incorporating maps into the search results page is becoming increasingly common and sites are often leveraging third parties, such as Bing or Google Maps, for an interactive, and familiar, widget.
Case Study

Enhancing Search Results with a Recommendations Widget

A global hotel chain wanted to understand the impact of offering a retail-inspired recommendations campaign on its search results page.

Powered by learned visitors’ preferences and previous behaviors, the recommendations widget replaced the search widget location atop the results page. The campaign reviewed specific metrics to determine its success — such as bookings, revenue, number of nights booked, and the overall engagement with the recommendations model.

Over a matter of weeks, the hotel leader earned more than a 5% increase (or $658,000!) in revenue from bookings as a result of the personalized recommendations.
Your site is now en route to becoming a great travel research resource.

Committing to a flight, hotel or vacation is a big decision, but if your visitors enjoy their search and booking experience, you’ll be golden. Providing savvy online travelers with a more optimized and relevant research experience means you’ll be able to count more of them as booked revenue, time and time again.

You’re in the homestretch.

Next, it’s time to buff up that booking funnel...

If you are interested in speaking with someone at Maxymiser, please email info@maxymiser.com.
Want more travel best practices?

Join Maxymiser and Travel Weekly for a webinar on March 6, 2013 at 2:00PM EST

Register here:

Exclusively for travel marketers who want to get on a path to better customer experiences and more bookings, this webinar takes a deep dive into three main site areas: homepage, search and sort, and the booking funnel with some of the world’s biggest brands like Delta, Hertz, Holiday Inn, Carnival Cruise Lines and many more.

We’ll cover:
- Industry case studies and best practices
- Tips, hints and tricks for CTA’s, product imagery, homepage design, shopping cart funnels and much more
- How to test these elements to ensure your content works for your site visitors