

10 secrets
of
increasing
online bookings



A Special Report by Tailored Consulting
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Introduction

Hello and thank you for your interest in this Free Report.

I've written a few reports, plenty of articles and a pretty large book. I always like to start off by letting you know who I am and what experience I have. I do that so you can make a quick decision of either of these 2:

1. **Boring!** This guy has no idea. I'm turning 'The Simpsons' back on!
2. Okay, this guy sounds like he knows what he is talking about without the usual fluff. **I just might turn the page...**

Who am I?

Okay, first off my name is Brendon Sinclair. My business (Tailored Consulting) has designed plenty of web sites for a huge range of clients. These include big businesses, major events, small businesses, and small events.

We are in this industry 24 hours a day, 7 days a week, and have been for years. We see what works. We know what works. We do what works.

We actually do it ourselves

And unlike the vast majority of web design firms, we don't just do it for others. We own and manage 5 commercial web sites – amongst them is a site that is one of the most successful health product web sites in Australia.

- This site once did **\$200,000 of sales (of a \$40 product) in one- (1) night.**
- We redeveloped a client's Gold Coast resort web site. Sales generated via the web site went **from 2 sales worth \$400 in 18 months, to a massive \$63,000 in bookings in the first month** alone.
- We did some **behind the scenes search engine work** on another client's web site – it went from not generating an enquiry to doing very nicely in a matter of weeks (and all for a very modest outlay).

And the ***"10 secrets of increasing online bookings"*** I'm about to tell you really do seem to be secrets. Because very few resort managers seem to know about them.

I'll say this. If you develop a web site based on the principles I'm about to disclose you will give yourself the absolute best possible chance of success of generating online bookings.

Okay, let's get started.....

Secret 1: Be serious about your web site

Your web site can be a tremendous asset to your business. You can generate very significant direct bookings from it. That's bookings free of commissions. Bookings that provide significant opportunities for add-on sales.

Treat it as such.

Case Study done in five- (5) minutes

One of the hotels I stayed at in Sydney a month or two- (2) ago was the “**Sir Stamford on Circular Quay**” – the old Ritz Carlton.

Just now (May 6, 2004) I visited www.wotif.com.au (an online seller of discount accommodation). On that web site I can get a room this Friday and Saturday night (Superior city view room) for \$245 a night.

But if I visit the *Sir Stamford's own web site*, that same room on the same nights will cost me \$290 a night!

That's a business that is undercutting themselves in the marketplace AND discouraging visitors from visiting their web site!

Now that's not being serious.

Commit some resources

Your web site, properly developed and managed, can raise your level of profitability to new heights. Commit some resources – in time, money and education – to develop the best web site to help grow your business and your success.

Secret 2: Avoid the unnecessary

What your web site **doesn't** have can be as important as what your web site does have.

Your web site needs to be as simple as possible. People just want the information they are after as quickly as possible.

Here are the top 4 things to avoid on your web site:

1. **Flash'** – Flash is a program that enables the design to incorporate movement and sound fairly easily. Flash cannot be index by search engines, takes a long time to load, the program to read Flash is not on all computers.....the list goes on.
2. **Frames** – some developers use a type of design called 'frames'. Frames make the navigation bar of the web site static. There are some advantages in this – but the disadvantages far outweigh the advantages.
3. **Animation.** Just because you can make things move on your web site doesn't mean you should! Animated graphics detract from the usability of your web site. More than one- (1) animation on a web page makes it very difficult for the eye to focus. And when that happens the visitor will leave.
4. **Requiring special software to view the site** – keep your web site as simple as possible. Some sites ask visitors to download special software just to view the site – it simply won't be done by the web visitor. People can leave at a click of a button – and they do if things aren't easy.

Your site must be developed to give your visitor exactly what she wants. Anything that gets in the way of your visitor booking must be removed.

That way, every person who visits will be able to benefit from the quality content you provide. And that equates to great business. And more bookings.

Secret 3: Give your visitor the information they really want

The critical part of that sentence is this bit:

“.....the information they really want”

We've researched this extensively and know that the very first bit of information your web visitor wants is the **room rate**.

When the person hits your web site and is trying to ascertain its suitability for their holiday, they'll be assessing a whole range of criteria. But the first bit of thinking is this:

“Okay, can I afford to stay here?”

Once you have answered that question for them they can continue to explore (becoming a qualified prospect) or leave (they're not your target market).

I once had a client who thought his Yellow Pages advertising was hugely successful because he had 100 prospects a year ring him up. Upon closer inspection we found that 99 were people just looking for a price – and in his industry it took hours of work to arrive at a price.

My client spent 99% of his time quoting to people who weren't even 'qualified' as possible customers. It almost destroyed his business.

Give your web visitor that crucial piece of qualifying information and you'll instantly become more efficient in managing your resort business and your web site.

Where should you put that information?

Well, how about smack bang on the front page at the top? Make it the most obvious, outstanding bit of text on your page. Your web visitors will love you for it. After all, it's the only bit of information they need to move on.

Secret 4: Show your availability

As soon as your visitor knows she can afford to stay at your resort, she'll want to know if you have available the nights she requires.

Again, make this as simple as absolutely possible.

I see a lot of sites that ask for the visitor to input in what dates they'd like to stay. The system then calculates room rates, etc and spits out the final price and availability.

Don't do that.

Don't do that. The reason being that if you have only a small amount of availability then your visitor will receive "Not available for those dates".

And you don't want your visitor getting frustrated by having to re-enter the dates they want to stay (and perhaps getting rejected again). It's far easier to have your availability displayed immediately.

Check out www.wotif.com.au for an excellent example of showing rates and availability.

Which brings me to this point

People are far more likely to use a booking system on the Internet that they are familiar with and have used before. **Wotif.com.au** is one of Australia's most successful online accommodation booking systems.

And they have been replicated by other online accommodation web sites.

So it is highly likely that your web visitors will be familiar with that sort of booking system.. Not to mention the rates and availability are displayed very well.

There may be some terrific advantages in benchmarking your booking system against the most successful and popular ones.

Secret 5: Enable on the spot bookings

In the instant world we live in today, people expect almost instant service on everything. And the Internet is no different.

Let's say we have two- (2) web sites that are fundamentally the same.

- **They both show their rates and availability**
- **They are clean, neat and tidy**
- **They both look okay**

The only difference is in the booking procedure

On site 1, when you click on the 'Book Now' button you are taken to a page where you put in your name and address, add your holiday details and hit 'Send'.

Within two- (2) seconds you are on a new page that says "Thanks for your booking. It has been confirmed." You check your email and there is a "Welcome" email, thanking you for your booking and confirming all of your details.

On site 2, you click on 'Book Now.'

This takes you to a page that says "Please let us know when you want to stay and we'll get back to you."

10 times more bookings

It's been our experience that site 1 will have 10 times the bookings of site 2.

People want instant confirmation and they want it now. If you cannot confirm the booking with your web visitor immediately they will almost always go away and find a site that will.

Secret 6: Make sure it's the write stuff

When a visitor comes to your site they want some romance. They want to be wooed. They want to think “Wow, I've found a jewel here! I'd better book before it gets booked out.”

As the resort or hotel owner, you have to establish your market and you have to establish what is important to them. For instance, if you manage a family resort these aspects of your place might be appealing:

- Heated swimming pool
- BBQ area
- Tennis court
- Close to SeaWorld
- Games room

So you mention them on your site.

But write it right!

It's not a “**heated swimming pool.**”

It's “Imagine the hours of fun-filled family fun as the kids frolic freely in the cooling, clean and perfectly safe waters of your huge heated pool. Slide in for a refreshing dip before dinner, or kick back and relax with a spa! Fun, relaxation and family. That's Our Resort!”

Besides the fact that it is a corny example (!), the thinking is solid. Your web visitor wants to know why they should stay. So provide them with the benefits of staying with you. Give them a description they can't resist.

The pool is the feature. Being able to take a relaxing dip is the benefit. Your guests want benefits.

Have your web site written to entice your market. If it's a family resort, the copy will be significantly different to that of a singles resort. If it's a mum making the booking decision (and it usually is on the web), then adjust the copy to her (use lots of feeling words).

Your web site copy is crucial to generating that booking. Take the time to get it right.

Secret 7: Respond quickly to enquiries

We once developed a web site for a client that generated a substantial number of booking enquiries. The site wasn't doing so well in converting those enquiries into bookings and I organised a meeting with the client to try and find out why.

We were sitting there going through the statistics which showed a healthy improvement across most areas. I had no idea why he wasn't receiving any bookings.

I asked his receptionist when she responded to email enquires. The answer "Yes, I'll get to them tomorrow."

Turns out that the site had generated plenty of enquiries over the first month of operations, but none had been responded to!

Respond now!

I've read a few people who say that 24 hours is too long before providing a response. They say you should respond within a couple of hours.

Wrong!

You must respond immediately, right now and instantly!

My recommendation is to try and capture the web visitor's telephone number in your enquiry form. **And call them immediately.** You'll find that this increases the number of bookings better than any other way.

People want to make contact. They want to develop a trusting relationship. They want you to make that call and make their life easier.

Next best is emailing the visitor immediately. Not as good as ringing, but better than waiting.

For many resort managers, it simply isn't possible to have the emails checked and dealt with immediately. But there is a simple solution.

Ask your web person to set up what's called an auto-responder. This is basically a program that sends out an automatic response to the person who has just emailed. It can easily be personalized and includes whatever text or photos you care to send back. It's a great way to provide an instant response to your visitors, even whilst you are away from the office.

Secret 8: Show off your resort

Once your web visitor has checked out the rates and availability she will be very interested in taking a look at the place. And that means photos.

But photos usually mean trouble on a web site. If the file size of the photographs are large, they'll take ages to load and you visitor simply won't wait.

You need to find the balance between providing a great visual feast and annoying your visitors with a long wait as your photos download onto their screen.

What we find is a very effective way to show off your resort or hotel is a page dedicated to photos.

Have approximately twelve- (12) small photographs (called "thumbnails") on the page – this way your visitors can get an idea of what each photograph is like. When they click on the photograph, the larger photograph is provided.

On a 'Photo Gallery' page web visitors are aware that download times will be a bit higher than normal because of the photos. To make doubly sure they know, we have a headline that says:

Click the image for a larger size. Please note, larger photos will take approximately 12 seconds to download onto your computer screen.

This provides the visitor with great quality photos, and you've made them aware that these photos will take a little longer to download. By giving the visitor that information you have given them a choice. And they appreciate that.

Secret 9: Keep in touch

I go to Sydney (from the Gold Coast, Queensland) most weeks. I generally book my accommodation the night before I go down on www.wotif.com.au.

I've stayed at numerous Sydney hotels for both business and pleasure over the past year. Of those hotels, approximately 75% have had a box to tick for "Would you like to receive emails promoting this hotel" on the check in form.

I always tick that box just to see what happens next

And this is what happens.

- All of these **top Sydney hotels**.
- All with **highly qualified marketing** departments.
All with hugely **sophisticated computer systems**.
- All with **superb managers**.
- All **too dopey** to say to a previous guest (the person most likely in the entire Universe to stay with them in the future) "Thanks for staying last time. Here's a special offer just for you. Please stay with us again." (I would have almost certainly stayed again if anyone had asked me and had made it very easy for me to book. I'm a normal person – I love a bit of attention.)

Keeping in touch can be as simple as using an e-newsletter script on the web site. Simply put in the guests email address and you're done (you'll also have web visitors signing up for your e-newsletter if you promote it as a way to get great deals).

Develop a relationship

By keeping in touch with your web visitors and previous guests, you'll develop a relationship and have the opportunity to educate prospects on why they should stay with you. That will put you miles ahead of your competition.

It's free to send emails. It's simple. And it works.

Secret 10: Market your web site

You've probably heard the old saying: "Build it and they will come."

Well, it's a lovely saying that doesn't actually apply to the web.

"Build it so it is informative, useful, quick loading, attractive and well marketed and they will come."

THAT should be the saying for web sites!

Once you have developed your web site you have to market it so that your potential guests can easily find it.

Here's some ways to market your web site:

- **via search engines:** your site needs to be what's called 'optimised' (developed to be highly ranked within a search engine). Without question the most important way to market your web site.
- **via Pay-Per-Click services:** you basically bid on where you want your web site to appear on pay-per-click services. The more you bid the higher your ranking on that search engine.
- **via links from other web sites:** critical for a number of reasons.
- **via word of mouth:** another reason why your web site should have great information.
- **via print media:** I've seen little classifieds work wonders for resort and hotel web sites.
- **via ads on other web sites:** decreasing in popularity, but can still work well.
- **via email newsletters:** send a newsletter out to web site subscribers and previous guests.
- **via providing content for other people's e-newsletters:** provide an article (with a link back to your web site)

The marketing of your web site can encompass a whole range of activities additional to what I have briefly mentioned above. Please seek additional advice from a web expert on how best to market your property.

10 secrets of increasing online bookings

I hope this Free Report has been of benefit to you.

With the right knowledge applied, along with hard work and perseverance, your web site can be successful.

There is nothing more frustrating for us as web developers than to see web sites that have been badly done. These poor web sites cost the owners thousands of dollars in many cases – and that's not taking into account the lost bookings and opportunities that will never be recovered.

Do it right and reap the rewards.

If you have any questions or comments please email me at admin@tailored.com.au.

Thanks again and all the best

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