

How to Maximize your Hotel's GDS Distribution by Melanie Methven, June 30, 2009

The goal of improving distribution and raising the profile of individual hotels and chains within the Global Distribution Systems (GDS) is not as complicated as it may appear. Hoteliers can take control of their distribution within the GDS by gaining a better understanding of the opportunities available and by proactively marketing their properties.

Opportunities can range from specific targeted advertising to ensuring hotels obtain top placements on a hotel list. Through a few simple steps it is possible to ensure the maximisation of bookings and revenue using such features as "Best Available Rate" and "Hotel UpSell". There are a wealth of advertising opportunities within the GDS, which opportunities are appropriate depends on the end result the hotel is looking to achieve. Hotels may be trying to promote their brand, a specific property, and or specific destinations, while others may be looking to push a special promotion or perhaps pursuing a new target market.

Several of the advertising and marketing opportunities are similar across all four GDS and textual targeted options are available by working directly with TravelCLICK, a provider of interactive distribution solutions and marketing services to independent and chain hotels worldwide. Many of the GDS can also provide a customised program, which includes a variety of advertising tools available through their system. These can reach a specific audience or even advise travel agents on new promotions and benefits.

GDS Specific Advertising

Each GDS provides specific and targeted advertising products. Hotel companies can use these to help promote their brand, a specific hotel property or a promotion to a targeted trade audience. Other advertising tools such as online itineraries, travel agent portals and online brochures are either maintained by the hotel chain itself, booked through the GDS directly or depending on the individual GDS, handled by Travel CLICK. Textual only or combined textual/image advertising tools found in the major GDS comprise of:

- Sign in Advertising: Direct and customised advertising messages at time of signing in to the GDS by the travel agent. In the major GDS these are called: Sabre Sign-In, Galileo Front Page News, Worldspan PrimeSine and Amadeus Sine in message.
- Targeted Textual Advertising: This tool enables hotels to reach their targeted audience with relevant promotions at the time of decision-making. In the major GDS these are called: Sabre PromoSpots, Galileo Headlines, Worldspan Accents and Amadeus Display messages.
- Travel Agency Portals and Graphical User Interfaces (GUI): These allow hotels to target travel agents with a combination of graphical images and text such as badge or banner advertisements during the booking process or at the time of decision-making. This is particularly beneficial in promoting brand awareness or a specific property with images.
- Online Itineraries: Hotels can promote their brand and hotels with a more visual context and this time directly to the targeted travel consumer allowing them to promote a specific destination, hotel or brand with strong images. In the major GDS these are called: Sabre TripAdvisor, Travelport ViewTrip, Amadeus Checkmytrip.com

- Reference Systems (online brochures): This electronic brochure is an effective communication and advertising tool provided free of charge by the GDS for the dissemination of information about the hotel chain and its properties. Some GDS have the ability to transfer this information into a web format in order to provide images. In the major GDS these are called: Sabre Direct Reference System, Galileo Brochure Line and Chain Keywords, Worldspan Global Reference System and Amadeus Information System.

- Vapor Text Messages: This is an interactive confirmation response message managed by the hotel chain through their GDS and displayed to travel agents on screen at time of confirmed booking. This is used mainly to highlight benefits and features of the rate and/or room booked. Sabre, Galileo, Worldspan and Amadeus all offer Vapor Text Messages.

- Broadcast Messages: Advertising messages are displayed in the Travel Agents "queue" where they usually retrieve messages from suppliers regarding their bookings. For example, Amadeus Broadcast messages.

GDS Marketing Opportunities

There are a number of other marketing strategies available through the GDS. These are not specifically advertising tools but opportunities to promote a hotel brand, a specific hotel property or a promotion using such features as UpSell and Best Available Rate. These marketing tools are highly effective and are usually provided for a fee by the GDS directly or in some cases by TravelCLICK. They provide the hotel chain with the ability to promote itself and increase revenue at time of decision making without using direct advertising.

- Hotel UpSell: such as Sabre's UpSell enables hotels to increase their revenue by providing the ability to "upsell" the room selected by displaying the price difference for an upgrade or to purchase additional features.

- Best Available Rates (BAR): This feature allows hotels to guarantee the rates in the GDS are the same as those offered on their direct website or by calling the hotel. This ensures total confidence to the travel agent and enables them to provide better service to their customer knowing they will not get a better rate elsewhere. In return for providing parity with their website, hotels participating in BAR are highlighted to the travel agent. In the major GDS these are called: Galileo Best Available Rate, Amadeus Best Available Rate and Sabre Rate Assured.

- Priority Placement for Hotels: A highly competitive tool and an opportunity for the hotel to highlight and position a property at the top of the hotel search list for the destination and dates requested. In the major GDS these are called: Sabre Spotlight, Galileo Feature Property, and Amadeus Instant Preference.

- E- Newsletters: These are periodic electronic publications distributed to Galileo and Worldspan travel agencies. They can be used for special promotions or to advise travel agents on a new promotion, rate or destination.

Even in these economically challenging times, marketing a hotel in the GDS needn't be difficult and can be extremely cost effective. There are advertising and marketing tools available for all scenarios and can be tailor made for each individual situation. So why not give it a go and see how the GDS can support increased hotel distribution.

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