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HOW TO EXECUTE

SEO LIKE A PRO

THE ULTIMATE GUIDE TO HOTEL SEO THAT ACTUALLY DELIVERS TOP RESULTS

There's one overarching benefit of a well-optimized hotel website: higher search engine rankings that bring your hotel more direct traffic. Since that traffic can be converted into commission-free direct bookings, organic traffic is the investment that keeps on giving.

Whereas pay-per-click options are linear – spending roughly correlates with traffic – the benefits of hotel SEO are exponential – they accrue over time. Since organic traffic is harder than ever to get, your hotel needs ironclad SEO tactics to underpin a successful online marketing strategy.

> "Organic search makes up 51% of all web traffic – and 40% of all revenue."
>
> **BRIGHTEDGE**

Think of it this way: SEO amplifies the work that you were doing and other traditional and digital channels. If you've purchased a magazine ad, readers may search for your hotel's name and end up booking via a third-party if your hotel doesn't rank on the first page. Or if a consumer engages with an ad for your hotel on Instagram and books elsewhere because they were enticed away by a highly ranked OTA page. In each of these cases, you spent money on both digital marketing and third-party commissions. Not ideal!

It's time to master SEO like a pro. This guide is for beginner-to-intermediate hospitality marketers who want to boost organic search rankings by understanding SEO for hotels. Equipped with this information, you too can optimize your online presence to deliver top-ranking results!

1:

Start with keyword research

The right target keywords aren't always the most obvious. In fact, effective keyword research is what separates the expert SEO from the pack. You've got to do the research to understand which words you can realistically rank for.

The first step with any keyword is to simply do the search yourself to review the results (be sure to log out of any accounts to avoid personalization). Beyond that, here are a few handy research tools to amplify your research:

Search algorithms evolve regularly and often involve updates to your infrastructure. Stay current on the latest SEO news by following SEO-related updated from both Google and Bing

Google bing

- **Google Keyword Planner.**
  This free tool from Google is a great starting point to see search volume, trends, and related keywords. A major limitation here is that it only shows an estimated range of search volume, so you don't get an accurate read on the popularity of a different term.

- **Ahrefs.**
  This tool has surged in popularity among some of the most well-respected SEO authorities. It not only allows you to see search volume and competitiveness, but it also shows you which keywords your competitors rank well for. These insights content be embedded into your own content strategy.

- **Moz Pro.**
  Long considered the gold standard in SEO, Moz Pro not only helps you research keywords but also analyzes your web pages to suggest new potential content topics.

- **Wordtracker.**
  A simpler solution for those that may not need the more robust SEO research tools from Ahrefs or MozPro.

- **KeywordsEverywhere.**
  If you want to get related keywords right next to your search results, this is a great way to infuse keyword thinking throughout your own searches.

As you explore and refine your keywords, here are some key terms you need to know.

SEARCH VOLUME	The number of searches done on a given month. This can be broken down by country or other segments.
COMPETITIVENESS	Popular terms with many relevant pages are more competitive. This measures of how hard it is to rank for a particular term.
BACKLINKS	Shows how many external links point to your domain. It's a measure of reputation, as a page with many links has more authority than one with just a few.
REFERRING DOMAINS	The number of domains linking back to your domain. Just like backlinks, more domains means more authority.
DOMAIN AUTHORITY	A score out of 100 that ranks domains based on their reputation. Backlinks from domains with higher DA have more SEO juice, since those sites have more authority.
RELATED KEYWORDS	Similar keywords that you may want to consider as they may be easier to rank for. Ranking well for several related keywords tends to boost overall performance.
SEASONALITY	For hotels, this is especially important. You want to adjust your content strategy as different keywords ebb and flow throughout the year.

With enough practice, you can brainstorm options, evaluate potential, and identify the most promising keywords to plug into your content strategy. Whether it's a blog post, product page or marketing landing page, use your keyword research tool to choose a single keyword for each. This focuses your content so search engines know what it's all about – and which searches it should rank for.

The ideal keyword has significant enough search volume without being overly competitive. Of course, many hotel-related keywords are fiercely competitive. If you can step down a notch and look for slightly less competitive terms, you can target the "long-tail" of search. Those are the keywords with lower overall search volumes that you can realistically rank well for.

Let's say your primary keyword is "NYC boutique hotel." It's a super competitive keyword, so you want to research related keywords and build out a "keyword cluster" that resonate with your target demographics. You might want to cluster around foodies, for instance, and break it down by type of food, such as "top 5 croissants in NYC". Well-researched clusters give you the framework for your content plan, which will ultimately help you rank organically for your main keyword.

A note on keyword density: Don't keyword stuff! In the early days of the Internet, it became common to see pages stuffed with one or two keywords. Today, you'll be penalized for that behavior. It's enough to use it once or twice.

Instead of obsessing over keyword density, focus on quality content that flows naturally and provides value to the reader. Search algorithms are sophisticated enough to understand content based on its context.

You want quality content that includes variations and synonyms of your main focus keyword. For instance, your focus keyword might be "weddings in Minneapolis" and your related keyword could be "getting married in Minneapolis."

2:

Build out your content plan

Now it's time to put your keyword research to work with a detailed content plan. Your plan should include a diversity of content types and cluster similar content around specific campaigns and marketing objectives. Some key parts of an SEO-rich content plan are:

Update your blog.

You do have a blog, right? This often-underused real estate is a potential SEO goldmine. Create blog articles based around your target keywords. Use this space to highlight in-destination activities, local events, and on-property happenings. Side benefit: You get to highlight your brand personality to potential guests.

Use landing pages.

Build custom landing pages that align with the rest of your content plan. Custom landing pages relevant to each marketing campaign convert better and help you rank better for relevant searches.

Plan your social.

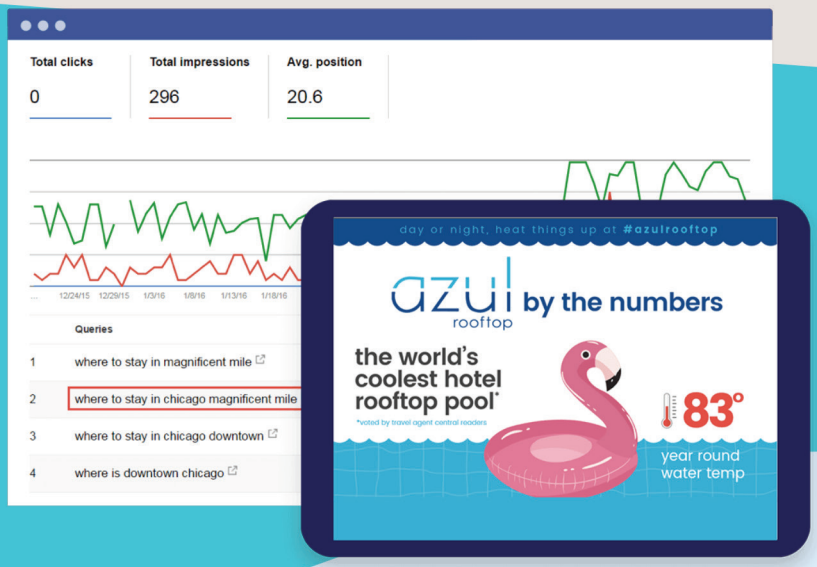
Schedule your latest blog updates and marketing campaigns to keep your social channels vibrant. Be sure to diversify your content types, such as Stories on Instagram, to nurture deeper relationships with guests.

Launch a newsletter.

A newsletter is actually a great benefit to your SEO. As your email lists interact with your content, search engines learn the types of people that engage most with your website.

Consider video.

After Google, YouTube is the world's second-biggest search engine. Videos also feature prominently in the top results for many searches. To capitalize on this, publish video and add relevant descriptions and tags. These become yet another input into search engine ranking formulas.



Custom landing pages relevant to each marketing campaign convert better and help you rank better for relevant searches.

3:

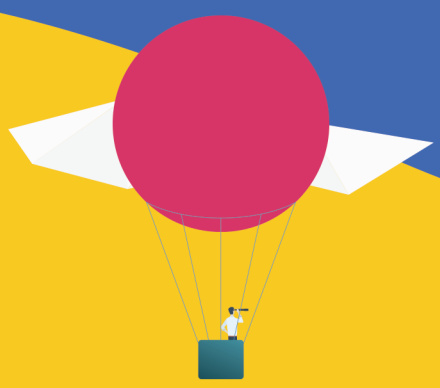
Concentrate on the metadata

After spending hours writing a keyword-rich blog post or landing page, it can seem like a chore to update metadata. Resist the urge to overlook or breeze through metadata fields, as leaving them blank puts you at a major disadvantage!

Metadata is how you speak directly to the bots that crawl your pages to determine topic, context and relevance. Your goal is to give these bots enough information so your pages will rank for the most relevant searches.

When adding content to your website, use this metadata checklist to be sure that you don't leave any SEO juice un-squeezed.

- Don't try to rank for multiple keywords on a single page or to rank for the same keyword on multiple pages. You'll just compete with yourself and cancel out your SEO work.
- Write at least 300 words on a given page. There's really no maximum length either; as long as the content quality is high, length isn't an issue.
- Include at least three relevant internal links. This helps the search bots navigate and structure the individual pages on your website.
- Write a relevant meta description that accurately explains the page's content. Include your focus keyword once. While recommended lengths vary, keep the essential stuff in the first 155 characters.
- Use your focus keyword in the page's URL.
- Headlines should be brief, descriptive, and include the focus keyword. Keep your headlines around 60 characters to avoid truncation across devices and search engines.
- For each image, fill the "alt text" field with an accurate description that includes your focus keyword. This field is often overlooked and is valuable real estate.
- Include your focus keyword 1-2 times on the page or in the article. Don't overdo it; keyword density isn't a huge factor in SEO.



The best path to metadata mastery is to work with expert content creators who can help you hit your targets. Platform-specific plug-ins, such as Yoast for Wordpress, provide visual guidance for hitting key SEO metrics.

yoast

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Learn how search bots see your site

Search bots (or spiders) are the automated creatures that crawl the web. Their sole objective is to create a real-time index of the internet's information. That index is an authority map that ranks websites according to reputation, quality, and relevance. That map decides which results to return for each search.

That's why you need to see your website through the eyes of the spider. Creepy, right? This spidey vision is achieved by signing up for Google Search Console and Bing Webmaster Tools, the website management tools for the top two search engines. Things to look for:

- **Mobile performance.**
  Many search engines penalize websites that function poorly on mobile. Sites that load quickly and provide a better user experience will rank better for mobile searches. Make sure your site performance doesn't lag or you may lose precious SEO juice!

- **Broken pages.**
  These tools will alert you to broken pages or other issues affecting your site's search competitiveness. Check back regularly and address any alerts quickly!

- **Popular search queries.**
  These tools reveal which terms brought users to your site. These insights can then be fed back into your keyword research to find alternatives or surface new SEO opportunities.

- **Up-to-date sitemap.**
  Make sure that the search engines have a recent map of your website. This is your chance to show exactly how your site looks and not only rely on the whims of the website crawlers.

5

Master the “review signals”

feature reviews, such as Google and the OTAs, use review signals in their ranking algorithms. It’s also common for search engines to highlight a few “top recommendations” that are pulled from partner sites. For example, highlighting top reviewed hotels from Expedia. Those snippet highlights are another great reason to keep you reviews flowing! As you can see in the screenshot below from Google, the search engine also pulls reviews from third parties (in this case Expedia) to highlight a few “top recommendations.” There’s never been a more important time to keep your reviews flowing!

Your online reputation hinges on four factors: review recency, density, and velocity, as well as review responses. You want a solid base of past reviews, while also maintaining (or growing) review volume, consistently over time. A dip in number of reviews will affect your ranking because of a drop in both recency and velocity, while impacting your historical review density. As another positive review signal, you should respond thoughtfully and regularly to reviews.

Thankfully, reviews are much easier to master than on-page SEO. Simply deploy your CRM’s marketing automation features and send each guest a review request after they check out. It’s automatic, so you can set it and forget it, building a cache of reviews that show your hotel’s popularity and overall quality. And, as search engines tailor results to individual users, your hotel is more likely to be shown to those who are more likely to stay. A win-win!

A checklist to bring it all together

Now that you've got the SEO fundamentals down, you can use these tactics to optimize your online presence beyond your website. The checklist below will guide you in the journey to SEO mastery. Remember that this is a marathon, not a sprint. As each improvement builds on the next, your investments compound. That's not often how digital marketing works – so invest now to reap the rewards over time!

YOUR SEO CHECKLIST

- Do your keyword research to identify "keyword clusters."
- Build your content plan around these keywords, optimizing a single page or blog post for each. One keyword per page.
- Use Google Search Console and Bing Webmaster Tools to keep your website current and error-free.
- Write at least 300 words on a given page. As long as the content quality is high, length isn't an issue.
- Include at least three relevant internal links on each page.
- Write a relevant meta description that includes your focus keyword once. Keep the essential stuff in the first 155 characters.
- Use your focus keyword in the page's URL.
- Write a brief headline, around 60 characters, that includes the focus keyword.
- Complete the "alt text" field for each image. Include your focus keyword.
- Include your focus keyword 1-2 times on the page or in the article.
- Automate your post-stay emails to keep your reviews Recent and Relevant.
- Respond to reviews regularly.

Want to find out how you can implement a strong SEO strategy at your hotel?
Contact us at info@cendyn.com or visit

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