



## Interview with Matt Cutts from Google Regarding Best Practices for Promoting Hotels Online

Benu Aggarwal, Milestone President and Founder, had the distinct privilege of interviewing one of the most highly regarded Search Engine experts: Matt Cutts from Google. The conversation topic was the Impact of Search on the Lodging Industry and Web 2.0. In our interview with him during SMX West, we discussed some of the most pressing issues hoteliers are facing on the internet. His responses are extremely helpful for anyone looking to gain insight into what the search engines love, and what some of the most effective organic tactics are for improving your online presence.

Here is the synopsis of the questions we asked and the explanations Matt provided in his interview with us.

**Question:** What are the top ingredients for any small business that wants to be successful on the net?

**Answer:** Content is king! If you want to have a high-quality website you need to have great content, because having great content will enable your website to rank much easier in the search engines. Once you have great content, it is important to focus on how to market your site. Think about various tactics you can use in order to capture your visitor's imagination. It can be anything from contests, newsletters, guides, festivals, etc. However, great content is definitely the primary focus.

After great content comes promotion. The question here is how to successfully promote your site? The goal is to drive interest for your website, and in order to do this you need to brainstorm, come up with cool ideas, neat tricks, and other approaches to stirring up commotion about the website. Also think about how your website actually looks in a search engine. The SERP (Search Engine Results Page) lists many different websites and what would entice somebody to click on yours. With Google, through the description tag, one has a good amount of control over what their website will look like in the SERPs.

Once you have traffic pouring into your website, the focus shifts to conversion. The key element to conversion is simple and easy to use navigation. Enable the user to convert on any page and make sure all pages are no more than just a few clicks away. A good way to tell whether your navigation is simple is to bring in an outsider and have them try to perform an action on the site without any instructions. If he/she succeeds, then your navigation is simple to use.

**Question:** If you have a very small business with a limited budget, and you are anxious to try everything in internet marketing, what should you try first?

**Answer:** A website comes first, because you want the small business to be able to make money. Or at the very least have a way for consumers to contact the business and even find the business. Then I would say a blog, because if you are a small business you probably have a unique personality and a blog would be a great way to get heard.

**Question:** Many people are scared to have blogs, because they are afraid of negative comments and entries. They do not understand the concept of moderation and do not understand some uses of a blog such as including press releases. How can hotels get around this?

**Answer:** There are many things you can do to get around this problem. You can disable comments all in all or you can easily moderate any comments and only allow constructive comments to go through. It is also important to understand the benefits that blogs have in terms of creating user generated content and the value of this content to search engines.

**Question:** If blogs are the main Web 2.0 channel you recommend, is there anything else you could recommend for small businesses?

**Answer:** Definitely videos. If you are creating a video this is a pretty simple process with great results. All you really need to start with is a tripod, a camera, and a room. Then you quickly record it and put it on YouTube for free. There is very little cost and it's very simple to start out.

**Question:** It is a struggle to explain to small businesses that organic search engine results are a moving target. Instead of focusing on ranking for a specific keyword the goal should be to focus on relevant traffic and how to increase this traffic. Some clients get phone calls or emails from companies saying we guarantee top search results. What do you think?

**Answer:** Everyone gets phone calls and emails from these spammers that promise top search results. However research reveals that most people do not just simply search for keywords such as "San Jose Hotel" instead they search for "San Jose Grand Prix places to stay". Basically look through your logs and see what people are searching for. Or you can look at your traffic and try to optimize for that.

**Question:** What are some other web 2.0 strategies that you would recommend for businesses such as hotels?

**Answer:** Web 2.0 is a great way for businesses to connect to people on a personal level. Whether it is social book-marking, social networking sites, or Flickr photo sharing communities, I think this would be a huge help. In regards to images, if you are going to be staying at a hotel you have never been to, having a virtual tour or video of the hotel would be a reassurance to anyone that they can see what a hotel looks like and you don't have to be scared to stay here. This is a way for a business to have a voice and personality. MySpace and FaceBook are great ways to get exposure in front of consumers and be able to offer consumers helpful information instead of annoying them.

**Question:** This is a common question we are asked - "why should we not buy multiple versions of our domain, misspellings, plurals, etc?"

**Answer:** It is much easier to go with one domain versus 20 domains because it will be much easier for people to remember that domain name and come back to it. In theory, one can buy misspellings but then they should redirect them to the main domain website. What you don't want is a competitor reporting you for spam abuse because you have the same exact website on 20 different domains.

**Question:** I always thought title tags should sound natural and not be keyword stuffed. Nowadays I am seeing companies keyword stuff their title tags and show up high on search engines. What do you recommend?

**Answer:** I would stick to what sounds natural and is best for the consumer. Most sites are ranking high not because of the title tag but because they have a well optimized site that has been around for a while and they simply decided to go over board and stuff the title tag. Google

gives some points to the title tag, but it is best to think about the consumer and come up with titles that are compelling.

**Question:** Do you think Google Coupons or online coupons will eventually replace print publications?

**Answer:** There is a place for everything. I do not think just because of Google Coupons and the internet that print publications would disappear. However, I would say that most hotels are not paying attention to all of the opportunities. We have mentioned blogs and videos but local is another huge one!

**Question:** We have been doing a great effort for mobile devices and I think in the past year I have been struggling with what is going to be the future? Should mobile sites be designed for iPhones or SmartPhones?

**Answer:** The short answer to this question is the target market. If your target market is in the United States, it is quite evident that phones are going to get better and smarter, and even have browsers that will be able to support richer websites. So I think the focus should be to concentrate on creating good websites that would look good in mobile browsers as well as regular browsers, instead of creating specialized websites for smart phones only.

**Question:** For a successful website what are the most important steps and the ways to go about research, content, design, and promotion? What is the most fundamental element?

**Answer:** Research is huge and content is huge. If you do good research, you save a lot of work on making the content good. Once you have good content the last step would be promoting it and letting people know where they can find this great content.