

GM's eCommerce Checklist



Milestone recommends that GMs and DOSs look at the following key items on a weekly and monthly basis. Monitoring these items will enhance the eCommerce productivity of your hotel.

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Weekly

1. Online Inventory

Make sure you have sufficient inventory allocated for all sales channels, especially on your site. Your site/brand.com site is the most cost efficient tool for a hotel to receive reservations, as the hotel does not pay any fees when a customer books through the site/franchise site.

- **Make** a reservation on the following main channels - the hotels official website, Expedia, Travelocity, Orbitz - and any other channels that may be important to you for the same stay dates every week.
- **Check** for Inventory, Rate Parity, Competition Rates, and Offers on these main channels.

2. Rate Parity

It is crucial to offer rate parity on all sales channels, including the hotel site, brand site and third party travel channels. The hotel site should offer the best available rates all the time. Rate

parity helps in gaining customer confidence and loyalty to book directly through hotel site or calling the hotel.

- **Check** Travelocity, Expedia, Orbitz, hotel site and brand site. Your site should have the lowest rates. You should offer parallel inventory and rate parity across all channels.

3. Check Online Competition

It is crucial to check how the hotel compares against its competition on different online channels.

- Check Travelocity, Expedia, Orbitz, and the Search Engines.

4. Online and Offline Tracking

Accurate tracking helps in analyzing what is working and what is not working.

Online Tracking

- **Check** your website tracking. Check to see how many unique visitors, search engine referrals, page views, clicks on the booking engine page,

and the total **ROI** produced through your website

- **Review** reservations received through the booking engine, including booked packages, reservations received at different rate codes, plans, etc.

Offline Tracking

- **Track** offline conversions against your online marketing tools such as website, PPC campaigns, email marketing campaigns, etc. Phone call tracking helps in knowing who is calling, main feeder markets/surfers for your hotel, call activity, and call conversion data. Call tracking also provides an excellent opportunity to identify what works and what does not work. Caller information can be used as sales leads.
- **You** can track how many phone calls are generated through your independent site, email marketing campaign, etc. on weekly basis. Listen to the calls and see how many phone calls are handled and converted.

5. Checking Your Online Reputation

Reviews (Reputation Management) - Review what your customers are saying about your hotel on other sites such as Trip Advisor, Yahoo Travel and other opinion sites. It is crucial for the hotel to review what is posted online on a weekly basis.

- **Check** the following sites on a weekly basis for online reviews: Trip Advisor, Yahoo Travel, Travelocity, YouTube, and Expedia.

6. Local Link Building

Work on securing relevant links pointing back to your site from other sites on a weekly basis. Qualitative incoming links to your site from local chambers of commerce, attractions, things to do, events, etc. help in gaining relevancy and ranking of your site on search engines.

- **Use** link.milestoneinternet.com to check back links of competitive sites. Create a list of websites you will target to secure links from. Try to secure 2 to 3 incoming links on a weekly basis.

7. Keeping Manager's Specials Current

Fresh content helps you achieve high conversions and frequent indexing by Search Engines. Extend your best rates and time sensitive offers to increase occupancy during low demand periods. You can list local events and special rates on the manager's special. Check if the manager's special offers the best rates, local events, news, and time sensitive offers, etc.

Monthly

8. Email Marketing

Email Marketing is one of the most effective tools to communicate with your customers. It is also one of lowest cost marketing tools. Here are some steps you should take to capitalize on email marketing campaigns.

- **Collect** Email Addresses of your current and potential customers by creating an opt-in program on your site and through offline collaterals. Divide your database based on the interests of your customers and then customize your messages.
- **Develop** Email Marketing Plan including yearly campaigns, promotion pieces and frequency of campaigns all at once. Review local events and reasons why people are visiting your location, and create an outline of what you will communicate through newsletters, time sensitive offers, e-cards, etc.
- **Send** Campaigns and Track Results Once your email marketing plan and campaign are set, analysis and tracking of every campaign are very important and include click through rates, open rates, bounce back and analysis of complete ROI.

9. Website Pictures

Pictures are worth a thousand words. Make sure you have good quality pictures uploaded on your website. The hotel should also have the copyrights of all the pictures used on the site.

- **Check** and make sure that all the channels, including travel sites, the hotel site, and brand site all have good quality pictures.

10. Enhanced Content

Make sure that your hotel site, GDS, and travel sites all have keyword-rich, enhanced content. Create specials and packages including local attractions and things to do. Packages, specials, and information pages help in converting lookers into bookers.

- **Research** what people are searching for when visiting your area.
- **Build** special value offers including reasons why people are visiting your area, USP of the property, and things to do.

Based on the above defined concepts, we have come up with a checklist of key eCommerce criteria that GMs and DOSs can use on a daily basis.

This article is written by Benu and Anil Aggarwal, founder and president of **Milestone Internet Marketing, Inc.**

Milestone is a full-service internet marketing solutions provider and an educator for the travel and hospitality industry. Visit www.milestoneinternet.com.



WEEKLY CHECKLIST

	Category		Action	Who	When		
1	Online Inventory	<input type="checkbox"/>	Make Reservation for Your Hotel on Expedia, Travelocity, Orbitz & Hotel Website				
2	Rate Parity					<input type="checkbox"/>	Check Rates
3	Check Online Competition					<input type="checkbox"/>	Check Inventory
						<input type="checkbox"/>	Check How Competition Looks on Different Channels
						<input type="checkbox"/>	
4	Online and Offline Tracking					<input type="checkbox"/>	Check Website Analytics Report
						<input type="checkbox"/>	Check Booking Engine Report
		<input type="checkbox"/>	Check Phone Call Activity Report / Listen to Calls and Monitor Conversion and Quality				
5	Check Online Reputation	<input type="checkbox"/>	Check User Generated Content Posted on Your Site, Blog etc.				
		<input type="checkbox"/>	Check Trip Advisor, Yahoo Travel & YouTube				
6	Local Link Building	<input type="checkbox"/>	Check Competition & Relevant Sites to Determine Which Links to Bring in to Your Site				
		<input type="checkbox"/>	Build at Least 1 Link Per Week				
7	Manager's Special	<input type="checkbox"/>	Refresh Manager's Special – Change Events, Rates & Packages				

MONTHLY CHECKLIST

	Category		Action	Who	When
8	Email Marketing	<input type="checkbox"/>	Email Addresses Collected Online		
		<input type="checkbox"/>	Email Addresses Collected at Front Desk		
		<input type="checkbox"/>	Send Monthly Special Offers and Newsletters To Guests		
9	Website Review – Pictures, Links	<input type="checkbox"/>	Make Sure Your Website Reflects Good Quality Pictures		
		<input type="checkbox"/>	Make Sure You Have Lifestyle Pictures Appropriate For The Season		
		<input type="checkbox"/>	Make Sure All Channels Have Good Quality Pictures		
		<input type="checkbox"/>	Check And Make Sure All Links On Websites Are Working		
10	Enhanced Content	<input type="checkbox"/>	Update Rich Content On Your Site, Brand Site And Third Party Site		
		<input type="checkbox"/>	Add Additional Relevant Content Pages Once A Quarter		