PROMOTING INFORMATION SYSTEMS FOR HOTELS ON ROMANIAN WEB PAGES

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Abstract:
Following the global trend, the role of computer systems in the hospitality industry and in hotels has continuously increased in Romania in recent years. Therefore promoting specialized applications software should be aimed at reaching the target market easily.

Key words: hotel, software, marketing, Internet

JEL classification: M31

INTRODUCTION

The way in which software is used in the hospitality domain falls under two categories: general software, also called horizontal-market software, and specific software, also called vertical-market software. The general software includes general-purpose applications that can be supplied as an integrated suite of programs, for instance: Microsoft Office, OpenOffice, NetSuite. Programs and applications used for a specific domain define the second large group. Hotel industry uses many types of software, such as:

- *general-purpose applications*: text editors, spreadsheets, database, e-mail clients, web browsers, utilities;
- *application specific systems*: booking, calculating the cost of recipes, hotel management, systems for stock control, management of banqueting and conferences, guest billing, guest history;
- *hybrid systems* - specific hardware combined with dedicated applications to trigger a particular function: billing system calls, EPOS systems (EPOS is an acronym for <u>E</u>lectronic <u>P</u>oint <u>Of</u> <u>Sa</u>le), electronic locking systems for room doors, mini-bar systems, entertainment systems.

For the solutions offered through the Internet, our paper presents a selection that highlights some peculiarities of promoting on the Romanian web pages.

HYBRID SYSTEMS

EPOS devices are easy to use and Romanians are familiar with them mainly due to payments made through shop cards. Information about EPOS devices for restaurants is hard to find even if it uses the combination of words "EPOS restaurant" or "EPOS restaurant device". Using the Google search engine, the number of matches found is low since it only searches pages in Romania, compared to searching all Web pages, for instance 3200 for "EPOS restaurant" on Romanian Web pages and 306,000 for a general Web search. A second negative aspect is that the first results appear for online journals, not for specialized companies. In the area of sponsored ads, only one link is added, namely the "POS/store-restaurant". This link opens a page with a small image of the device, a brief list of the capabilities and the optional software for this product.

Unfortunately, the text is unclear – it is a red text written on blue and it is hard to read. There are no references to a site or to the page of the producer.

If you use the thread search "pos restaurant", the sponsored link discovers the "POS Market" company, that is, the *TOP HoReCa*. The site attends to diversified markets, the products are grouped under the category of "special equipment" and are presented in the form of hardware packages; such package recommended for a restaurant contains many articles, and each item is linked to the dedicated website. On the web site, the marketing tools used are discounts, customer retention through special programs and the gift voucher. Site visitors can use a search engine to look for the desired products.

After searching information about cash registers for restaurants, the result count is large, it is around 243,000, and is classified into two groups:
- fiscal cash registers that allow the issuance of tickets on style restaurants;
- cash registers that use sensitive screens.

Cash registers are promoted on portals for entrepreneurs (such as clubafaceri.ro, afacerist.ro). The portals offer information about general characteristics (maximum number of articles, payment accepted ways, operation autonomy, the number of operators, etc.). Unfortunately, even inside a single portal, the differences between the presentations are high: for some cash registers there appear a few features, but for other cash registers we can find all the characteristics. That is why we shall draw the conclusion that portals provide support for provision-elaborated information, but marketers do not know how to benefit fully from this feature.

Searching information about electronic locks for hotel rooms (using the search string "incuietori electronice hotel", that is, "electronic locks hotel") yields about 21,500 results, one of the sponsored links relating directly to a dedicated site for the control access to the hotel (*acceshotel.ro*). This site presents the products and the appropriate software using brief texts and images. Unfortunately, the handling of the images is rather difficult and imprecise, but since the site development appears to be at the beginning, we can assume that in the future the presentation of the products will be more attractive. Products can be searched on the site by using a search engine. A welcome feature is the list of recent articles on the pages accessed. Another marketing tool that is used, the newsletter, still does not show one section of the archive. Apparently, loyal users can connect specific pages by resorting to user and password, but there is no section for registration.

The first result can be disappointing: the link does not work; as for the second, it is a Web page in which we find little information and a link to the website of a company from Germany. Unlike previous searches, a more immediate gain is provided by the third answer that sends us to the website specialized in hotel security, *http://hotelssecurity.ro*. The site is well structured, provides significant information, including a news section, and the beneficiaries of goods and services are presented grouped by countries. Another advantage highlighted on the site download section is dedicated only to registered customers who can download special software and manuals (ELSAFE, INHOVA, TIMELOX, VINGCARD, VISION). The receptionists are not forgotten: there is a manual dedicated to their instruction too.

You can find short reviews about electronic locks for hotels on the websites specialized in the marketing of interior and exterior sealing locks or security systems, for example: *histriainternational.ro, elecsis.ro*. Like cash registers, information about electronic locks on portals may vary very much both qualitatively and quantitatively. This aspect can be discouraging.

Touch screens are provided to us by the "Unknown Level" company. Unfortunately, the web site uses low resolution images and small size images. A positive aspect is the interactive presentation that unfortunately is designed at a

resolution too small to be legible. For the packages of products, that can be a form of attracting customers, although it lacks the cash advantage.

APPLICATION SPECIFIC SYSTEMS

Searching for information about software hotels has led to using the search string "hotel software" that retrieves 243,000 web pages written in Romanian – a remarkable number when compared with values obtained from previous searches. The number of sponsored links is also higher, but the first non-sponsored links results are shown in most portals, except for *http://www.electrosoft.org* website.

The sponsored link *www.softwarevektor.com* is a web log where users can create their own entries. RSS Section shows entries in a descending chronological order. Activities do not appear to have been very dynamic since the latest entry date is on the 12 of November 2008.

The sponsored link *Hotel Soft, Paris* can be clicked to open a page on the portal *http://www.booking.com* for the Soft Hotel in Paris. The users can ask for reservations online.

The sponsored link ACIGRUP Romania opens a webpage of software solutions for hotels and restaurants such as: hotel management, restaurant management and direct sales, banquets management and events, solutions for online booking and consulting hotel promotions. Users can download the presentation as Microsoft Power Point files; through it they may obtain the basic information about the needed software. For each showed software product, the hardware needs user interface and case studies or samples. The site has two easy to switch versions: one for Romanian and one for Spanish.

The sponsored link called "Hotel ID / Passport scanner" does not function properly. A stubborn user can access the address *www.cardscanning.com* to reach the site of Card Scanning Solutions Company. The site has versions for the following languages: English, Spanish, German, French, Italian and Russian. The *Download* part provides manuals, drivers, software and programming kits.

The sponsored link called "Solutii integrate HoReCa" (Integrated solutions HoReCa) can be used for accessing the company website *TOP HoReCa* which has been offering its services since 1991. This company claims to be the first company that provides IT solutions for the hospitality market. The company shows its mission following the guidance and advice regarding this facet of marketing (Kotler & Armstrong, 2005: 61-62): simplicity, realism, making concrete remarks, adequate for the market, specific skills and motivating factors. Unfortunately, the positive first impression is ruined by the slow pace of obtaining information; for example, some demo version is sent only after a request has been made on a special page. The anonymous user must connect using a name and a password. The page request is loaded with predefined data that can be confusing (such as e-mail addresses or phone numbers). To our surprise, we will discover that we have an easy access to a presentation, a video clip that can be downloaded on our own computer. Browsing the pages may seem cumbersome. The offered solutions are various and exhaustive: software, hardware, the Internet and consumables, so we expect that the available products will be able to solve specific hotel problems.

CONCLUSIONS

What is first notable is the difficulty to find out information about software and/or hardware solutions for the hotels. Certainly, sponsored links are handy, but before taking a decision, it must be underlined, more products should be studied. We will conclude by saying that those who fail to allow the payment of advertising do not

effectively use the tools of marketing for search engines to rank Internet web site among the first results shown above.

Differences between sites designed for companies with offices in a foreign country and the Romanian companies are still high. Even if simple, as evidenced by the text and few images, they give a feeling of easiness; it is obvious that the pages are more attractive in a site that links to detailed information, contains text and image and is designed like small business cards. We can say that we still lack the designers who specialize is Internet issues.

Most of web sites manifest a lack of interest in the management of registered users. A possible reason would be that the people involved have not yet felt the need to manage their relationships with their customers in a more personal manner. Another cause could be that there is a small number of offered products for sale, so that the offer should not be personalized according to user activity on the website.

One of the remarks is the absence of the basket in software sales. This can be the result of our lack of proper legislation or of the hard access to the needed quality of electronic money transactions.

We have also noticed the poor technical assistance for the software or hybrid products: 24/7 phone support, ticket management, online or e-mail support. We estimate that the main possible reasons are the lack of qualified employees or low management skills. In the same category we can include the lack of demo versions, presentation books or other documentation, as well as a redirection to pages in different language.

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