

Marketing Your Vacation Rental Home Part Two: Online Marketing

Fraser Hannah

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This article, part two of a series, will help vacation rental home owners learn more about marketing a rental property online. It is important to understand that people who are looking for a vacation rental home are generally looking for more than they can get with a brand-name hotel. They typically want space, privacy, laundry facilities and - almost always - a cheaper rate than if they stayed in a hotel.

The one major difference between booking a private vacation rental home and a branded hotel chain is that you know ahead of time what you will be getting when you book with a hotel chain. Plus, if things are not quite right, you always have the manager on hand to sort things out for you. On the other hand, vacation rental homes are almost always privately owned and operated, and in the past you never could be sure just what you would be getting.

The Internet has changed everything about marketing a rental property. Now, prospective renters can visit a website to view pictures and read information about a vacation rental home before making a final decision - which means that online marketing of a rental property should be a major priority.

The Benefits of Marketing a Rental Property Online

By marketing your rental property online, you have the perfect low-cost way of showing that vacation rental home to the world. Online marketing can put you on an even footing with the big hotel chains; in fact, it actually gives you an advantage. While their sites will be practical and informative, you can take time and TLC to make your site warm and welcoming while reassuring prospective renters that your vacation rental home will more than fill their requirements.

Plus, establishing a website for your vacation rental home gives you a global presence. While the vacation rental market in the United States may still be in its infancy, it is the norm in many other countries for families to stay in vacation rental homes rather than hotels. Marketing a rental property on the Internet can help an owner in the U.S. reach families from abroad and draw them to the home.

Putting Your Vacation Rental Home Online

There are several ways in which you can use the Internet for marketing your rental property:

- Create your own website
- List your vacation rental home with a property rental agent or manager
- List your vacation home on one of the many vacation rental sites

While all three options for marketing a rental property have their place, creating your own Internet site is essential. Having your own site gives you complete control of how your vacation rental home is displayed to potential renters. If someone contacts you wanting to rent your home, do you really want to send them to a site that contains other homes similar to your own? Remember, there are always other owners out there who are also involved in using the Internet for marketing their rental property and who will undercut you just to get the rental. Listing sites can help you reach more people, but in the end you want a renter to see your individual site.

Creating Your Own Site for Your Vacation Rental Home

Your website should consist of the following standard pages, which are all important for optimally marketing your rental property:

- Home Page
- Property Description
- Photo Gallery
- Visitor Information
- Rates
- Contact Information

The Home Page

The Home page is probably the most important part of your strategy for marketing your rental property, as this is a visitor's first point of contact with your home. Make sure the design of your home page is simple, clean and uncluttered. Consider adding two pictures instead of just one to make your site stand out from the competition. One picture can be the traditional front-of-the-home shot, while the other image can be of something that sets the rental property apart - a great view, a beautiful sunrise, a scene by the pool, and so on. You can also consider taking a picture of the house lit up at night, which will certainly make the image memorable.

The Text

You will also need to write text that helps you with marketing your rental property. This step does not have to be difficult, but you should take time and give some thought as to what you want to say. You want to sell your home, not just state the facts. The text should help prospective renters imagine kicking back by your pool with a cool drink while watching the kids splash around. Set the scene first, rather than starting with a list of the best things about your vacation rental home. Be descriptive and use your imagination so that you are marketing your rental property in a way that will make the reader want to find out more.

In order to get some ideas of what to focus on in the text, ask yourself the following questions:

- What do you your family and friends love about the vacation rental home?
- What do you enjoy doing when you are there?

- Is there something you have found that you love but is not generally known about on or near your vacation rental home?
- What special features does your home offer?
- What would you want to know if you were going to rent this property?

General Picture Ideas

The use of good quality pictures of your home's exterior and interior cannot be overstated for successful marketing of a rental property. In a highly competitive area such as Florida, pictures could make the difference between securing a booking or missing out. Sometimes a potential guest will be considering several properties with the same features and at the same cost. In this case, guests will undoubtedly choose the vacation rental home they like the look of. This means that quality pictures are critical for successful marketing of your rental property. Common faults are images that are badly lit, that are taken from strange angles, that feature pool decks and porches devoid of furniture, or that have inappropriate things in view (wet towels, piles of papers, and so on).

Some additional things you may want to consider when marketing your rental property with photos are:

- Consider using flowers. A fresh vase of flowers can be welcoming, but don't go overboard, and don't be tempted to move one vase of flowers around as you take pictures - it will look silly if the same vase keeps turning up in different rooms.
- Set the tables. In the formal dining area, open a bottle of wine, fill wine glasses, light candles and use napkins. In the kitchen dining area, set it for dinner with the family, with more casual place settings, a pitcher of lemonade, and so on.
- Make sure the kitchen of your vacation rental home sparkles. It should be spotless, with a bowl of fruit on the counter. Basically, you will want to make the home looked lived in and like you are just waiting for guests to arrive.
- Make the bedrooms welcoming by turning down the sheets, fluffing up the pillows, and placing magazines and books on night tables.
- Photograph the bathroom in the evening. Fill the tub, add lots of bubbles, light candles, have fluffy towels and perhaps a glass of red wine on hand to create an atmosphere.
- Use a digital camera so that you can take hundreds of pictures of your vacation rental home. Even if you are not a photographer, you are sure to get some good ones that you can use for marketing your rental property.

Marketing a rental property with your own website can be a part of a strategy that uses many other techniques, from print ads to online listings on real estate marketing sites, allowing you to attract more renters to your property. Future articles in this series will explore additional avenues for marketing your vacation rental home and their benefits to you.