



## HEDNA

### Press Release

## HEDNA Looks Forward

*Spring Conference focuses on social media, mobile and payment technologies*

PRAGUE, CZECH REPUBLIC, July 18, 2011 - The use of social media and mobile technologies are critical to success in the hospitality industry, according to experts who shared their insights and strategies on how to best use these channels to reach travelers at HEDNA's Spring Conference in Prague, Czech Republic. The meeting was held June 28-30, 2011 at the Prague Marriott and was the 20<sup>th</sup> conference held by the Association.



#### **Responding to demand**

"Best HEDNA meeting ever," was among the sentiments expressed during the Association's three-day meeting in Prague, with praise going to the expanded content and high-level presenters. These rave reviews were the result of a clear focus to develop meeting content that addressed HEDNA members' needs.

In a recent survey, HEDNA members were asked to name the top 10 issues facing the electronic distribution network industry. Members cited connectivity, dynamic packaging, channel management, wholesale/tour, content, social media, mobile applications, marketing, revenue management, and parity among their top ten, said HEDNA President Melanie Ryan Owens of Orbitz Worldwide. "We created the program for Prague to address as many of these issues as we could," she said.

Among the highlights of the conference:

### **Become a pioneer**

Hoteliers need to be pioneers in mobile and social media, not followers, Jan Kamenicek, director of e-Commerce for TravelClick told attendees. Social media and mobile channels need to receive dedicated funding and resources at levels equal to or greater than traditional online distribution in order to meet customer demand.

Kamenicek encouraged attendees to reboot their thinking as the global economy recovers. Instead of moving rates in €10 increments, move them in €2 increments. While small, Kamenicek showed that even small incremental price increases do add up, benefiting the bottom line.

Looking at first quarter 2011 statistics, TravelClick saw an increase in all markets with only occupancy falling in the Middle East. However, that drop was more than compensated by the increase in ADR. The Asia Pacific region has shown the biggest increases year-on-year, Kamenicek said. Reviewing the channels, TravelClick found that in the first quarter 36.1 percent of bookings were made through brand websites; GDS, 23.6 percent; voice, 25.3 percent; and Internet (excluding brand), 15.0 percent.

### **Travel is taking off on Facebook**

Travel is about to take off on Facebook, according to Janice Diner, CEO of Horizon Studios. The travel industry can learn from marketers of major brands such as Starbucks and Coca-Cola who have discovered that Facebook fan bases now represent their largest web presence. These marketers are also very savvy about using mobile in combination with social media.

The travel industry must learn to handle a new breed of consumer, one that makes most decisions based on the recommendations and experience of friends, she said. This hyper-interactive travel consumer is the new breed of engaged and informed traveler. "We talk about travel before we go, during the journey and after we get back," said Diner. Don't shy away from socializing your brand. "Use brand-appropriate incentives to reward engagement, participation and advocacy," she said.

Relish the opportunity to engage with your guests, Diner said. Communicating with guests on Facebook allows you to engage with them 365 days a year, not just the few days they stay with you.

### **Optimizing mobile**

Have you ever considered that mobile is today's answer to a Swiss army knife for technology? That's exactly how Satyan Joshi, Industry Manager, Hotels, Google UK, views mobile technology. Users are looking to get the same experience on mobile as they get on their desktops. Although most mobile applications are good, they speak to customers who are loyal already, he said. Remember that mobile-optimized websites are open to all.

In building mobile-optimized sites, Joshi suggested a few "best practices," including prioritizing content; building for speed; making search prominent; designing for a low attention span by using bullets rather than paragraphs; playing to mobile strengths by using scroll menus, check boxes, limited text data entry, and top aligned labels; and accommodating click to call for phone conversions since in many countries, people are not keen to input their credit card details.

If a company isn't taking mobile seriously, it needs to. According to Joshi, a non-mobile optimized website is the equivalent of saying, "Sorry...we're closed."

### **Knowledge Workshops generate discussion**

For the first time, HEDNA ran three knowledge workshop tracks at the conference:

marketing, technology and payment. These sessions featured discussions ranging from innovations in payment technologies to fraud prevention to connectivity solutions to channel management. These tracks were informative and encouraged attendees to explore the various strategies suggested by experts in each discipline.

### **Content challenges**

Whether it is displayed on a desktop, tablet or mobile device, content needs to be consistent. The eCommerce Content Conundrum panel discussed strategies for the different platforms such as language translation challenges; formatting pages for non-English scripts such as Cyrillic and Chinese; and making allowance for distinct address formats. Use of images remains very important. OTAs and hotels are increasing the number of images on their pages. Hotels with more than 15 images sell significantly better than hotels with five images or less.

SNCF Technologies has found success in moving its business online, onto mobile platforms, and lately onto the iPad. Pierre Matuchet, general manager of technologies for SNCF, said the company is focusing on the tablet as a promising new platform.

### **Benefits of ancillary services**

Cross-selling remains an important way to generate revenue and improve customer loyalty. It's an area that shouldn't be neglected. For every billion Euros of your core business, there will be €25 million related to cross-sales, said Marcos Isaac, Director, Travel Services, Amadeus IT Group. Airlines are gearing up to take advantage of third-party ancillary services by adding more destination services and media. Third party ancillary services yield a better travel experience and increase revenue thanks to technology enabling an endless array of services to be offered.

### **Spirit of Innovation Award**

Innovative services were the focus of HEDNA's first ever "Meet the Innovators" session, which culminated in the presentation of the Spirit of Innovation Award, which recognizes a key travel innovator who is driving the industry in a new direction. The winner of the 2011 Spirit of Innovation Award was TAXEO, a service that helps international business travelers recover VAT on travel services in the European Union, Norway and Switzerland. The other nominees were menumodo, ReviewPro, ForwardKeys, and YouMove.

"The HEDNA Spirit of Innovation Award aligns with the Association's mission of educating our membership on the next big opportunities," said HEDNA President Owens. "These five innovative companies are changing the travel industry and driving it forward. Congratulations to all the nominees for exemplifying travel innovation."

### **HEDNA on the horizon**

In addition to conferences, HEDNA offers several other educational opportunities for the industry. HEDNA U is a one-day seminar to help educate hotel personnel about electronic distribution topics. HEDNA U sessions were held in Atlanta, London and Madrid earlier this year. Upcoming HEDNA U sessions will be conducted in Dallas/Fort Worth on August 9, Toronto on October 13; and Las Vegas on December 5. HEDNA's Education Committee is developing an advanced course called HEDNA U 2.0, Owens said, so watch for more information on that educational offering.

HEDNA's well-received virtual roundtables will continue for the remainder of 2011. Upcoming dates and topics are: Mobile technology in July, multilingual globalization in August, social media in September, flash/private sales in October, and consumer insights in November.

HEDNA has joined the blogosphere with the new HEDNA blog (<http://hednablog.org>), which is a way to distribute timely information in a low-key, relaxed medium. It is a one-stop shop for industry news. "The blog is being very well received by our members, it's one more deliverable to ensure our members utilize our website as a resource for information and trends pertaining to electronic distribution" said HEDNA President Owens.

HEDNA's ASPAC Conference is in development with more details to be available soon. HEDNA's Winter Conference will be held in Las Vegas, Nevada on December 5-7, 2011 at the Cosmopolitan Hotel. HEDNA will be hosting microsites for both of these conferences

as it did for the Prague meeting. The microsites will provide the latest information on the conference agendas as well as links to registration and hotels. Microsite links will be announced soon.

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### **About HEDNA**

The Hotel Electronic Distribution Network Association (HEDNA) is a not-for-profit trade association whose worldwide membership includes executives and managers from the most influential companies in the hotel distribution industry. Founded in 1991, all of HEDNA's activities are intended to stimulate the booking of hotel rooms through the use of GDS, the Internet and other electronic means. HEDNA brings all segments of the hotel industry together to evolve systems and services into electronic distribution that is easy and efficient. Additional information on HEDNA is available by calling +1 202-204-8400 or by visiting <http://www.hedna.org/>

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