

HOW TO

Influence Meeting Planners To Contact Your Sales Team



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Meeting planners: A golden opportunity to drive direct sales

A meeting planner is the go-to person charged with the responsibility of planning and executing a meeting or special event. Planning a meeting can be extremely challenging. Finding the best location, inviting the correct attendees, incorporating company branding and choosing a theme (if the event warrants it) are all aspects of planning a meeting. Minor details and unexpected issues that may arise during an event are all reasons why it is critical to have an experienced meeting planner coordinating your event.

Yet many hotel websites are not optimized to cater to the needs of this important segment of the market. Most lack the tools to effectively convert planners as they view the non-meeting related pages of the website. As a result, similarly to how hotels rely on online travel agencies (OTAs) to book leisure business, hotels **rely on planner sites to generate meetings planner business.**

Imagine if hotel websites were able to seamlessly convert planners. In this case, the reliance on the third-party planner sites (and the costs related to them) could be substantially reduced, putting the hotel in a **much stronger position to win more direct business.** With bookings for groups and business meetings representing about 15% of total US room nights pre-pandemic, the potential positive impact on overall profitability is significant.

Meeting planners on the hotel website

Hotel websites are typically designed based on the assumption that the vast majority of website visitors are leisure travelers. Therefore, these are structured to take visitors through the full transient customer journey from inspiration, consideration, and decision. In this case, the most prominent and important feature of every hotel website is the booking widget.

In contrast, the meeting planner searching for a venue or accommodation for their event sees little value in the booking widget. **The meeting planner is looking for information about the facility.** Just as the booking widget is critical for the leisure traveler, the Request for Proposal (RFP) form is the digital equivalent as a first step to secure the space for an event.

A good website is able to convert the meeting planners just as smoothly and seamlessly as they do the leisure traveler. Meeting planners tend to view most of the pages on the website, yet the hotel typically only uses the Meetings and Events page to directly message the planner. In order to target planners more specifically, the key challenge is **how to differentiate between a meeting planner and a leisure visitor** so that relevant personalized messages can be activated across the entire hotel website?



The meeting planner conversion funnel

The booking funnel functions to narrow prospects as they proceed along with the various steps to becoming a customer. As prospects migrate down the funnel, the **website messaging needs to become increasingly tailored to their specific needs.**

For **meeting planners**, the conversion path doesn't follow the relatively straight line that is in place for leisure travelers.

For the **leisure traveler**, the path is hotel research on the website, availability date search on the booking widget, room selection on the booking engine, and finally entering their guest details and payment information.

Leisure traveler conversion path

WEBSITE RESEARCH

CHECK AVAILABILITY

ROOM SELECTION

BOOKING



The meeting planner conversion funnel



For the meeting planner, the starting point of the funnel is the hotel website, where the **goal is the get the planner to navigate to the Meetings and Events page to ultimately submit an RFP**. While the meeting planner can pick up the phone and call (just like leisure travelers can pick up the phone and call reservations) the hotel would ideally like the planner’s information to be entered directly into a form that can be tracked.

- The first two steps of the meeting planner funnel are clear: starting on the hotel website and progressing to the Meetings and Events page. At this point, meeting planners typically search for three different documents: capacity charts, floor plans, and hotel information sheets **to determine if the hotel’s facilities will be able to accommodate their event**.
- The next step the meeting planner takes is to **decide whether or not the hotel is a good fit for their meeting**. This includes looking at images of the meeting spaces, viewing virtual tours, reviewing testimonials of previous planners, and reading guest reviews. During this qualification process, the planner may also look at the food and beverage menus, as well as the “experiences” provided by the hotel for teambuilding opportunities.
- As the meeting planner gets ready to submit their RFP, they might also review any special offers for meetings and events relevant to their meeting. If the meeting planner feels the hotel is a suitable choice after evaluating the various touchpoints, they will **submit the RFP**. This completes the full meeting planner funnel on the website.

Leisure customer vs. meeting planners

Because the needs of these two kinds of guests are so different, it's important to separate the meeting planner and the leisure traveler messaging on the hotel website.

Meeting planners do not want to be inundated with irrelevant leisure messages, but they are aware this happens on most websites. Inversely, messaging targeting meeting planners confuses leisure travelers. So the website that is proactive in speaking to both business segments without upsetting them needs to separate out the messaging to each segment through targeting.

After the targeting criteria is established, the messaging needs to be constructed in such a way that it allows the meeting planner to flow smoothly through the funnel.



Targeting meeting planners on your hotel website

A hotel website can target different business segments in a number of ways. To target meeting planners, hotels can use individual hotel website pages, referral sites, and inbound campaigns.

Individual hotel pages

On the hotel website, there are pages that both the meeting planner and leisure traveler will visit. However, there are certain pages that the meeting planner is likely to visit but that the leisure traveler rarely visits – the **Meetings and Events page**. When a visitor arrives on this page, there is a significant opportunity to identify them in the system as a meeting planner. This identification is important because otherwise, these are unidentified on the hotel website.

Referral sites

Referral traffic is important for hotel websites because it sends on potential buyers from other sites that have the same target group. Meeting planners typically research hotels on websites such as Cvent, MPI, Smart Meetings, and Social Tables to help filter down their choices for possible meetings locations. In addition, they might start planning their meeting with a local venue, like a conference center, and then look for nearby hotels.

Regardless of where the meeting planner starts their research, if the researched website hyperlinks to the hotel website, the site is considered a referral. Any referral sites associated with meeting planners can be pre-identified and used for targeting purposes. Even sites that might not initially be known to the hotel can be discovered using Google Analytics. When the hotel evaluates its data, it can locate the meeting planner referral sites by looking at the Acquisitions section related to referral sites and then applying “page” as a secondary dimension. Now, all the hotelier needs to do is type in the name of the meeting page to review the referral sites. Once all of these referral sites are identified, they can be used as part of the overall strategy for identifying and targeting meeting planners.

Bringing people to your website when you don't know them

Through banner prospecting, keyword pay-per-click, and CRM, hotels can bring meeting planners to their website through a series of strategic campaigns.

Tagging of all these campaigns is critical for success for three reasons. First, to track the amount of inbound traffic from the campaign. Second, to attribute any website goals and revenue to the campaign. The third reason is that codes added to the inbound campaign URL can pre-identify the website visitors as meeting planners.

Prospecting campaigns

Digital prospecting is a type of marketing where businesses try to find potential customers with whom they have never had a previous interaction. If a hotel wants to bring meeting planners to the website through broad-reaching prospecting campaigns, they will leverage display media campaigns that are targeted to places where meeting planners consume information, such as venue research websites. If a relevant display ad is visible to the planner, they might click on it. The **hyperlinked URL** that brings the visitor from the ad to the website will be tagged to let the website know this visitor is coming from a certain campaign, source, and that this person is a meeting planner.

Keyword ad campaigns

Keyword marketing is identifying and then bidding on particular words or phrases that visitors might use to find the hotel's website. The types of keywords a meeting planner will use to search for a hotel are very different than those a leisure traveler will use. Keywords a meeting planner may use include: capacity chart, hotel floor plan, factsheet, RFP form, meetings offers, etc. Any of these keyword campaigns should be **automatically tagged with code** that alerts the website that the inbound traffic will be a meeting planner.

Bringing people to your website when you do know them

CRM Targeting

A hotel's email marketing/CRM solution enables hotels to manage guest relationships at scale through profiling and marketing automation. Even though these are powerful tools, most hotels simply use them to send out eblasts. The key difference between CRM campaigns and acquisition campaigns is that with CRM the hotel already has the emails of the meeting planner prospects. The challenge is while the CRM system can identify them as a planner, the website on its own cannot. Any eblast deployed as part of a group campaign should be tagged similarly to the acquisition campaigns mentioned earlier. Any and all links on the eblast to anywhere on the hotel website must be **tagged with a URL parameter that identifies whoever clicks on them as a meeting planner.**

First-time visit vs. returning visit

All of the targeting methods mentioned as part of these campaigns are used to identify someone visiting the hotel website for the first time as a meeting planner. If the same user returns to the website within 28 days, they will be remembered and identified as a meeting planner on their subsequent visits regardless of the channel that brings them to the website or the pages they read during their visit.

Now that we know some strategies for targeting meeting planners visiting a hotel website, you might reasonably ask: is targeting necessary to secure meeting planner customers? And if the Meetings and Events page typically has all the information that the meeting planner needs, why is targeting and personalization important? In this case, it is important to think of the leisure traveler and the booking widget. Although the leisure traveler only needs to book a room via the booking widget, in order to make that decision they are collecting information from multiple pages of the website. The same is true for the meeting planner. While the bulk of the information they need is available on the Meetings and Events page, they will gather information from other pages to help them make up their mind. This is where targeting and tailored messaging can be leveraged to help convert them.

So now that the website has identified the website visitor as a meeting planner, not a leisure traveler, how can the website adjust to cater to this kind of user? What can be different? **Everything.**

All messaging that is not general in terms of hotel status and availability can be changed based on having identified the user as a meeting planner. The website content can be targeted specifically toward what a meeting planner will be looking for in order to efficiently convert them into a customer.

Personalization throughout the meeting planner buyer journey

The meeting planner conversion journey starts as soon as they enter the site. What's uncertain is where they will come from, and precisely on which page will they land.

If they come through a paid acquisition campaign, a CRM campaign, or a referral, the hotel website will be ready to deliver personalized meeting planner messages no matter where they land. If the meeting planner came across the site organically and it is their first time visiting the hotel website, targeting will only start after they visit the Meetings and Events page.

The meeting planner's journey on the hotel:

Inspiration

Hotel meetings/event images, virtual tours, videos, local area information

Consideration

Floor plans, capacity charts, hotel factsheets, testimonials, reviews, menus, offers, joining the mailing list

Decision

Submit the long-form RFP, a short contact form, or call a salesperson

How do we bring the meeting planner through these phases of the buyer's journey, continually drawing them along the funnel? The answer: **personalization.**

Personalization examples to drive reservations from meeting planners

After a website visitor is identified as a meeting planner, it is incumbent on the marketing team to deliver the right message at the right time at the right location.

Meeting and Events page

The Meetings and Events page targeting and personalization should augment the information already available on the page. When a person first lands on the Meetings and Events page, they should get a warm personal greeting message from the sales team that provides their contact information.



Everything you need to plan your upcoming meeting:

- [Download](#) our Capacity Charts
- [Download](#) our Floorplans
- [Download](#) our Hotel Factsheet

[Ready to Submit your RFP?](#)

On the Meetings and Events sidebar, the hotel should provide quick links to the information the meeting planner will need to make their decision: floor plans, capacity charts, the hotel factsheet, and a link to submit the RFP.

Personalization examples to drive reservations from meeting planners

As the meeting planner scrolls down the Meeting and Events page, the following notes will appear to them. By clicking on these notes, the user can open a new tab and navigate to images or videos associated with meetings or related food and beverage menus.

[Click here](#) to view photos and virtual tours of the meeting space.

[Click here](#) to review our menus for: breakfast, lunch, break-out, and dinner events.

Call or email me if you have any questions

Please contact Joan, our meetings and events expert, below:

- email me: Joan@independenthotel.com
- call me: [212.555.1212](tel:212.555.1212)

Meetings FAQ

After a website visitor is identified as a meeting planner, a phone icon can appear on the corner of every webpage. This provides an easy point of reference for the meeting planner to find someone to contact.

Similarly, after a website visitor is identified as a meeting planner, anytime they try to leave the website a message can appear with a special offer that will move them further down the funnel.

Before you go, learn about our new Meetings and Events Offer:

- 5% off the Master Bill
- Pick three (3) perks
- Complimentary coffee break

Learn more

Personalization examples to drive reservations from meeting planners

At the bottom of the hotel website, there can be a message encouraging them to sign up to join the meeting planner database.

×

Receive Updates and Offers

Enter your email address for exclusive Meetings & Events offers

Your email

Join Today

×



Let's Get Started with Planning Your Meeting

After we receive your contact information, we will be in touch within one business day.

Your First and Last Name

Enter your Email

Enter Your Phone Number

United States

+1

☐ [Terms & Conditions](#)

Submit

If the meeting planner decides to visit the Rooms page, Dining page, or Gallery page, the following popup message can appear. This message aims to capture their basic information to start the process of booking a meeting.

If the meeting planner closes the above message, and after they have been on the page for five (5) seconds, another message can appear as a sticky note that will follow them as they scroll down the page.

×

We are here when you are ready!

After you submit your proposal request, we will get back to you within one business day.

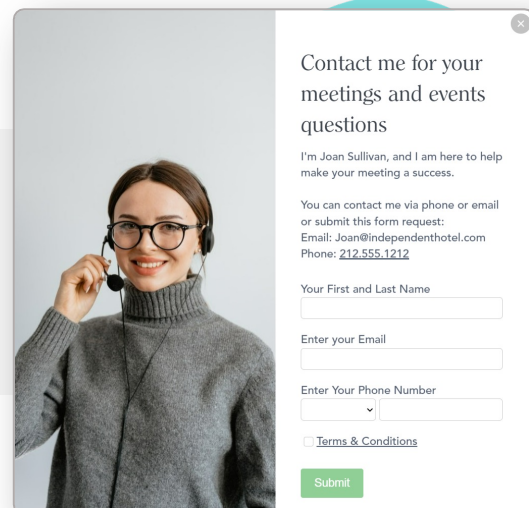
Submit RFP

Personalization examples to drive reservations from meeting planners



If they go to the Offers page, the following type of message can be displayed.

If the meeting planner goes to the Contact Us or FAQ page, they can see the following message.



Key Takeaways

If your hotel has meeting spaces, your website should cater to both leisure travelers and meeting planners.

Your hotel marketing team needs to make a decision if they want to invest time and energy to support the sales team in driving more leads through the website. By **leveraging targeting and personalization techniques**, the marketing team can successfully convert the meeting planners that arrive on the hotel website to research whether or not this is the place for them to hold their next meeting or event.



[Click here](#) to view photos and virtual tours of the meeting space. X



About The Hotels Network

The Hotels Network is an innovative technology company working with over 14,000 hotels around the globe. Boasting an international team of experts, the company offers clients a full-stack growth platform to power their direct channel. By leveraging a series of integrated tools and analytics, hotel brands can attract, engage and convert guests throughout the user journey.

In addition to price comparison, reviews summary and a full suite of personalization options, THN's Oraculo product harnesses machine learning techniques to predict user behavior and then automatically personalizes both the message and the offer for each user. The company's latest innovation, BenchDirect, is the first benchmarking product for the direct channel, providing hotels with never-before-seen competitive data that empowers smarter decision-making.

Our mission is to improve the online booking experience, grow direct bookings and strengthen the relationship between hotel brands and their guests.

[Contact us](#) today to find out more.