

## The Hunt for Book Now

Every marketing manager you employ will tell you a version of the same story: Your website needs to have a 'Booking Bar' prominently stapled onto the home page and every page thereafter – big, flashy and impossible to ignore.

The central concept is that your site visitors will be compelled to immediately interact with the banner to see what spaces are available, compare guestrooms and even select value-added options to enhance their stays. Another assumption is that site visitors are just too naïve or blind to click a smaller button that says 'Reservations' and that revenues will be lost as a result.



This mandatory element, espoused by most of the leading hospitality web design agencies, may in fact be a big mistake. My belief is that this is one of the key reasons why hotel property websites are losing ground to the OTAs and Airbnb. Before you call me a heretic and bombard my email with contrarian opinions, hear me out.

In *Homo sapiens'* primeval days, we were all hunters and gatherers. Survival was far from guaranteed. It was hard work to bring home even a morsel of food for the family. Men would go out on two-to-three day hunts at a time, starving themselves throughout, while the women would forage the lands of undomesticated (that is, low yielding), and often poisonous, 'edible' plants. Any anthropologist will contend that this brutal cycle persisted for over four million years from the dawn of *Australopithecus* right up to the start of the agricultural revolution roughly ten thousand years ago. For an erudite and thorough read on the matter, I recommend, amongst many others, Jared Diamond's Pulitzer Prize winner, "Guns, Germs and Steel."

While humanity has only had a consistent supply of food for a few millennia, evolution acts on a much slower timetable, and our primitive hunter instincts still persist to this day. Ingrained in our DNA is a foundation of working hard to get results, achieving satisfaction through said work and being suspicious of things that come 'too easily'.

And this animal instinct hides in plain sight in our modern society; we go 'bargain hunting' at malls for the best deals while others peruse vintage stores for that perfect find. Indeed, there is a stronger sense of emotional satisfaction when you search through all the available options – whether it's clothing, cars, restaurant reservations or hotel rooms – and select what you deem ideal to your situation only after prudent deliberation.

So, why are we as hoteliers depriving their guests of the ability to hunt by making it too easy to buy? Guestrooms are very different standing in the cafeteria line and choosing between browned beef and soylent green – they are highly emotional purchases. And the more emotional input you have, the greater the need for 'the hunt' and any consequent satisfaction. In the process of simplifying this decision-making pathway, we are mitigating our probability of success, both in terms of bookings and guest satisfaction.

For contrast, I would encourage you to visit the fantastic site created by Airbnb. Here it's 'game on' from the minute you start your search. You start with a broad location and then slowly chisel away and refine your options in what is often referred to a 'sense of discovery'. Not only do you have to search through a wide range of different facilities and qualifications (styles, location and price points), but once you select a potential accommodation, you also have to peruse the reviews and owner comments.

All this to ensure that you buy fits just right. In other words, reaching that final purchase requires a lot of relatively hard work for what's supposed to be a leisure activity, and as such it makes the journey all the more rewarding.

With this, I'll conclude with a self-evident question stemming from my anthropological argument above: how is your website expressing this sense of discovery? How are you making consumers 'hunt' for your guestroom purchases?

(Article by Larry Mogelonsky, published by [Hotel Interactive](#) on March 1, 2016).