



For **independent hoteliers** and owners of guest houses, B&Bs and pubs with letting rooms



Michael Cockman's **Hotel Profit Systems**

Sell more rooms, make more profits and have more time for yourself

10 Ways For Every Hospitality Operator To Boost Their Image

Every day I am amazed at just how little attention is paid by some hospitality operators to how their businesses are portrayed: do some of you walk around with your eyes closed?

Often it's the small details that let down the whole enterprise – the badly written A-board, the long forgotten broken sign, the photographs taken years ago or just the weeds in the front garden. Talking of A-Boards, why is it that white chalk on a black board indicates something more up-market than a mixture of blue, red and green chalk on the same board?

Research indicates that you have about 20 seconds to make a first impression. In that time your prospect has had a chance to view your product and weigh up in his or her mind whether or not it meets their expectations. Time is really of the essence!

Address these 10 aspects of your business and you will certainly be on the way to boosting your external image:

1 Colour

The choices that you make about colour are more important than you imagine. Because colour is energy, it affects our mood and influences our behaviour.

Angela Wright is a colour psychologist and she used to run a hotel. She realised that given a choice of two bedrooms that were identical in every way except the colour scheme regular guests would prefer one to the other. They were never able to explain their reasons except to say that they felt better when they were in a particular room. We underestimate the psychological impact of colour to our peril.

There are only eleven basic colour words in the English language and these colours have fundamental properties that are universal, regardless of shade or tint. For instance:

Red is a strong physical colour, lively and friendly but can be seen as demanding and aggressive.

Blue is a calming colour, affecting us mentally. It can appear to be cold, unemotional and unfriendly.

Yellow is the colour of confidence and optimism and lifts our spirits. The wrong tone can cause fear and anxiety.

Green is the colour of balance and reassurance. It can be seen as too bland and indicate stagnation.

Angela Wright says of her hotel days 'We quickly learned how to use colour. Blue never works in a restaurant. A little bit of red in the bar worked well. Green seemed to work pretty much anywhere. Too much yellow in a bedroom and you'd have bad-tempered guests'.

In looking at how colour is used in print or decoration it is not enough to just refer to blue or red, since there is no such thing as a universally attractive colour. It is the variations in each colour that are important since two variations of the same colour can have completely different effects. Our response is not to one colour but to colours in combination.

2 Photographic images

Quite frankly I am appalled at how complacent some operators are about the images that are out there in the public domain. I know everyone has a digital camera and thinks that they can save money by doing it themselves. This may be true for the internet which is reasonably forgiving but photography is still an art and great photos will repay your investment for years to come.

Just look on any of the third party hotel internet sites (Booking.com, LateRooms.com etc) and you will see hotels trying to boost weekend occupancy by showing images of their conference rooms. Bizarre!

Make sure you know what you are going to do with the images before the photographer arrives. Tell him the shape of the brochure and make sure he sees your new website design before he starts clicking. It may be too late to ask for a vertical image after he has shot horizontal and gone home.

3 Names

In general, a name is not important enough to get hung up about. If your business is already running then the name is usually OK unless it had a terrible reputation and you are changing markets. It looks as though VW made the right decision to stick with the Skoda name but they had to invest huge amounts of money on the product and advertising.

Always check out that you can register the name, since if you can't it is likely that someone already has it and might chase after you, which can be very expensive.

For new ventures the name is a bit more critical, but remember that your reputation comes from how you run your business, not from the name. Who would have thought that a hotel called Holiday Inn would

become one of the most successful brands in the corporate market? However do make sure that you avoid any negative connotations.

4 Typography

It is not possible to have a coherent image unless your use of typography has a unique personality. Although it may seem a simple issue of 'just choosing a typeface' there are so many options for getting it wrong (font, size, alignment, spacing, shape, paragraphs etc) that you will soon recognise a page layout for a letter or a website that has been set up by an expert. You don't need to pay to have all your literature and signage set by a graphic designer each time. Far better to have a sample design template to use as a standard and then make sure that this is followed each time you produce a piece of print.

5 Logo

A logotype is set of words in a determined type font. Again legibility is imperative, as is its universal applicability on various different media, such as signs, letters and T-shirts. Logos need to be distinctive but also durable. You do not want to spend time and effort being recognised only to change every few years. Indeed you won't find many large companies changing their logos very readily. How long do you think Ford have had their distinctive logo? You can use recognised typefaces or design something entirely new and individual. Whatever you use, it needs to express your positioning and your personality. The colours you use will also be an expression of the palette that you chose to represent your hotel.

6 Paper

Your use of certain types of paper or card is again an expression of what you are trying to achieve with your target market. For instance, using a piece of flimsy 80gsm paper will not be a very good advertisement for a gourmet dinner at £55 per person. Appropriateness is the key but don't go over the top.

Look at the competition and see where you fit. Brochures that are 12 pages and have tissue paper interleaves might give a misleading impression about your great value budget hotel!

7 Wording

Every hotel has to develop its own personality and the words you use reflect this. If you are an essential part of the service delivery then the 'voice' that comes across has to be yours. Whenever you write a letter or copy for a brochure try and keep the copy simple and direct. If your product is a bit 'alternative' then you need to use an 'alternative' copy style. Humour is always interesting but can be a little aggravating if you try too hard. Quirky works well if it is done well, but only if it reflects you and your business.

But do be careful. I received a mailing from Virgin Media (a cable company) that said '...it's a doddle for one of our nice engineer types to pop round and make it happen.' Oh that it were true!

8 Outside

The outside is what prospects see first so, if it puts them off, they will never know what the inside is like.

There are many different types of signage products, from plastic to wood with much in between. Plastic suits fast food outlets and traditional wooden signs suit traditional businesses, such as country house hotels. Keep the wording simple and to the point and make sure that these words are readable from the road and well lit at night.

9 Inside

Once clients or guests are inside you don't want to destroy the image that they have already built up about your venue. This is where your

colour palette comes in and needs to guide every decision you make about the soft furnishings that you use.

Constantly check out the atmosphere to make sure that it is warm enough, smells good and is not too noisy. I was in a bar the other day where you couldn't hear the waiter, but when I asked why the volume couldn't be reduced I was told that head office set it like that and the staff hated it too!

10 Consistency

You need to be consistent in all your communications so that you start to build up the value of all your efforts and expenditure. For instance your recruitment adverts need to have the same style as your promotions. Any and every communication from you needs to be instantly recognisable as being from you, either in the consistent use of your colour or the way that the words are laid out.

Make considered choices about all these 10 aspects and your business will definitely prosper.

Michael Cockman is a writer and mentor who helps accommodation providers maximise their room revenue.

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