



# Your hotel's ultimate A-to-Z guide to beautiful website design

Sit back as we take you through the alphabet from A-to-Z and explore what makes guests fall in love with a beautiful hotel website...



# Your ultimate guide to what makes a beautiful hotel website...

Apple's Steve Jobs famously once said: "Design is a funny word. Some people think design means how it looks. But of course, if you dig deeper, it's really how it works."

Design can feel like a complex thing. You might think you're not creative enough to really take a design project on. You might think you don't have enough hours in the day to tackle the aspects of your business that you know are lagging behind in the design stakes – such as your website.

And when the design of something as significant as a website has lost its way and evolved into something you barely recognise, starting again can feel like a daunting task.

Whether you're overhauling your hotel's existing website or creating your web presence from scratch, this SiteMinder eBook will help you understand the crucial elements of a clean and functional website that looks trustworthy, professional, and well-designed.

**Thanks for downloading your hotel's ultimate A-to-Z guide to beautiful website design.**

**For more information about how to take control of your hotel's website**

**visit [siteminder.com/canvas](https://siteminder.com/canvas) today!**





## ... is for **ABOUT US**

**Potential guests looking to book online should trust you as an experienced hotelier, and feel instantly more connected to you after visiting your website.**

Despite being often overlooked, the 'About Us' section is the perfect place to tell your story – explaining why you love to host your guests, and the kind of experience your hotel offers them. It's a good place to talk about the history of your hotel, the local attractions, and of course your team of staff. Use this area to showcase your hotel's personality and give guests an opportunity to get to know you.





## ... is for **BEAUTIFUL IMAGES**

**You only have to look to the statistics surrounding Instagram to realise how powerful images have become.**

An average of 70 million photos are shared every day on the social media platform, and more than 30 billion images have been uploaded to date. Beautiful imagery is more than just a passing trend, and hoteliers are well-placed to make the most of their aspirational surroundings. Take a look at these stunning examples of [hotel photography](#) – and notice how they explore even the most unusual areas of their properties. And if you're thinking that you don't have any professional photography skills, check out these [great images](#) that were taken using just a smartphone!



## ... is for **CONTENT**

As the saying goes 'content is king'. And your website needs it. Lots of it.

Interesting content is not only great for search engine optimisation (SEO) efforts (more on that later!), it also helps to keep your prospective guests on your website for longer. Content increases the rate of conversion, especially if it's authentic, accurate, and informative. Examples of great content include local attractions, a history of your hotel, a regular and up-to-date blog (although, don't start one if you can't commit to keeping it fresh!), and guest reviews. Don't forget to include detailed descriptions of your rooms and other facilities such as a your bar, dining room, or spa – these will go a long way to helping your guests feel informed about your hotel and drive them to make that crucial room reservation.

A high-angle photograph of a woman with brown hair tied back, wearing a grey tank top and blue denim overalls. She is sitting on a grey paved surface, using a silver laptop. A blue suitcase with brown leather accents is in the foreground. The background shows a bright, sunny outdoor setting with shadows cast on the pavement.

d

... is for **DIRECT BOOKINGS**

You can have all the great elements of a beautiful web experience but without a place for your prospective guests to book, it's essentially incomplete.

Being able to accept direct bookings using an internet booking engine, such as [SiteMinder's TheBookingButton](#), is vital to ensure your website can turn lookers into bookers. Checking that your website can easily integrate a direct booking engine is your first step in the process. Making sure that your booking engine blends into your branding and website theme is even more important, because it reassures a user that your website is safe. A survey\* in 2014 found that 77% of people do not feel completely safe when they buy something online, so building trust through a professional-looking website is key to winning over your prospective guests.

\*Source: NCCGroup: Trust in the Internet 2014 Survey



... is for **EASY TO USE**

**A great website should be easy to use.**

Confusing your prospective guests with complicated design and convoluted functionality is a guaranteed way to dissuade them from making their booking decision. Think about the organisation and flow of how your users move around the website. Question whether or not the information they might be looking for is accessible and easy to find. Ensuring your website is easy to navigate around will keep your visitors on your site for longer and increase the chances of conversion. Test the ease of use yourself by seeing how many clicks it takes for you to find a piece of information, such as your room descriptions or your list of facilities – if it's more than three clicks, it's probably too many.



## ... is for **FOOTER**

It's easy to forget about the smaller parts of your website – but some are just as important as the major design elements.

The footer is a good example of a smaller part that needs your attention during your website build. It's where many visitors will go to get information such as your contact details, or your terms and conditions including your cancellation policy. You can use the footer of your website to repeat the main navigation bar (see letter N) of your website to create a better user experience, and help prospective guests find what they're looking for more quickly.

A large orange circle containing the lowercase letters 'ga' in a white, rounded, sans-serif font. The background of the page is a blurred image of people's hands reaching up with confetti falling, suggesting a celebratory event.

ga

## ... is for **GOOGLE ANALYTICS**

**Building a website that tries to be everything to everyone is not the right strategy – and this is where analytics can help you become more targeted.**

It can be hard to know where to start with analysing data but it's the key to really knowing your audience better. Who is visiting your site? Where in the world are they coming from? What pages are they most interested in? What do they click on? From a beginner's perspective, a tool such as Google Analytics can appear advanced and difficult to set up. However, it's free, insightful, and easy to use once you know how. This [free guide from SimplyBusiness.co.uk](#) is a great place to start. You should consider the time spent building your Google Analytics knowledge as an investment in making your beautiful website a real success.



... is for **HOMEPAGE**

**First impressions count. And you have less than 15 seconds\* to impress a visitor when they hit your website for the first time.**

In this time, your website needs to build trust, show a user that you're professional, and make it clear to them that every piece of information can be found on your hotel's website, in an uncluttered way. Prospective guests need to recognise your brand immediately and feel confident that they've landed on the right website. Think about using your homepage as your shop window – you're competing with other hoteliers, just as shops do in malls and in city centres. Use your homepage to sell your brand and welcome prospective guests. Get it right here and the rest of your website will be much easier to map out and build. It should be a natural progression from those first impressions. Look at this [great example of a website](#) built with real purpose by SiteMinder's Canvas.

\*Source: Chartbeat



## ... is for **INFORMATION**

**Your prospective guests visit your website for nothing other than to gain information.**

Information about your rooms, rates, facilities and amenities, room availability, contact details, your location and proximity to attractions, and things to do, to name just a few. Most of this information is viewed as standard, but your hotel can stand out from the competition by going that extra mile and supplying a comprehensive guide to what's on offer locally. Having detailed information about the local attractions can help keep a prospective guest on your website for much longer. If you're stuck for inspiration on how to present local attractions, there are some [great examples to be found on websites](#) designed by SiteMinder's intelligent [website creator Canvas](#), and you can [view them here](#).



## ... is for **JAVASCRIPT... AND OTHER JARGON**

**When you're thinking about building a website from scratch, getting to know all the different jargon web developers use can feel like you're learning a completely new language.**

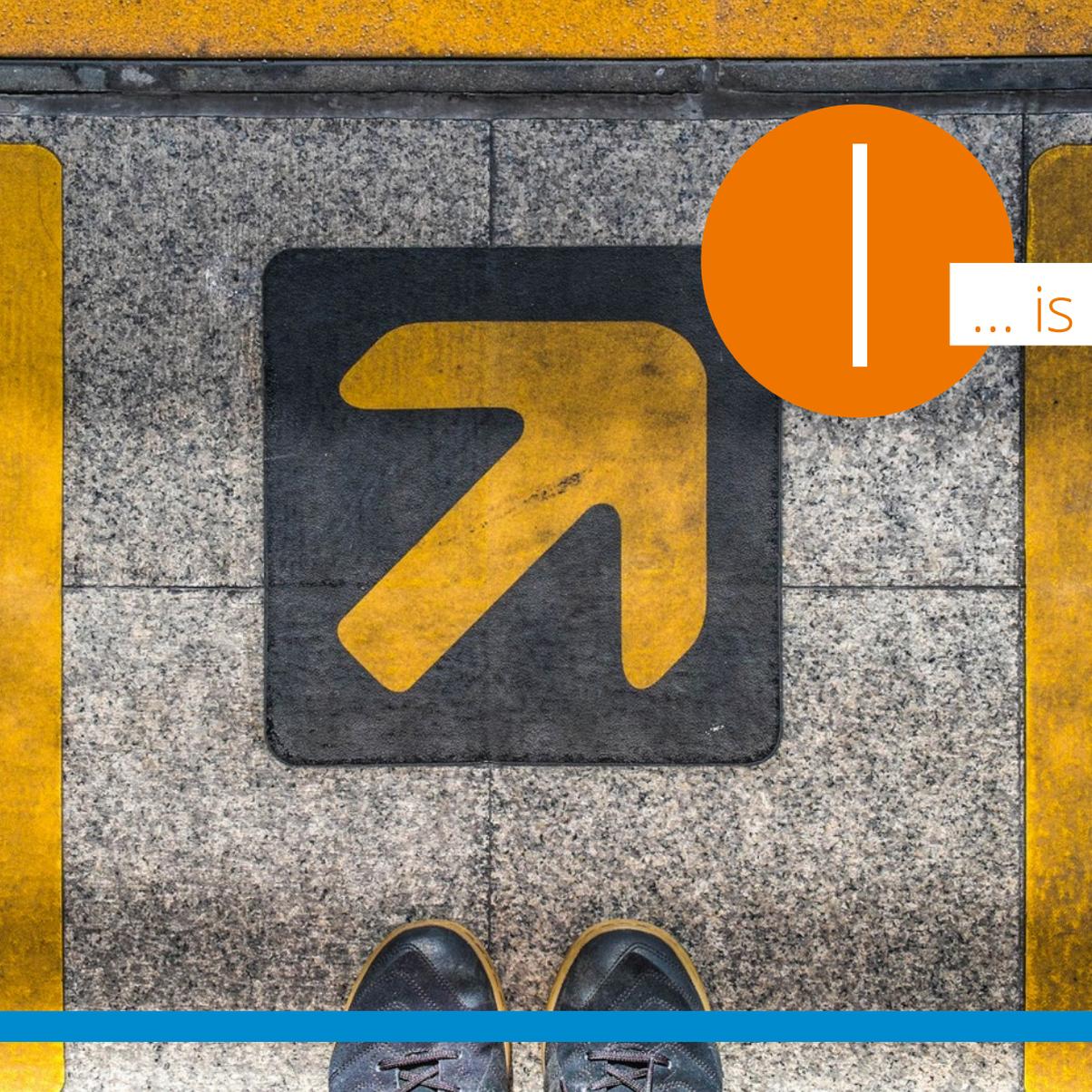
If you don't know the difference between your XML and your HTML, you could find yourself in trouble during the early stages of your build. Using a website creator such as Canvas is a great example of the support you need if you're lacking the technical expertise to complete your hotel's website redesign. Canvas customer, Thelma Gray, who runs the Cowra Country Gardens Motor Inn, finds making the changes a simple exercise without the need for costly resources or website experience. She said Canvas has really empowered her: "I can make changes to my website directly without risking its design or visual elements. As someone with only basic computer skills, this is a key benefit of the product for me." You can read more from Thelma on [our blog](#).



## ... is for **KNOWLEDGE IS POWER**

**Knowing what works and what needs improvement on your website is a crucial part of the design process.**

You can use the data within Google Analytics to assess popular pages of your website and also get to know your user profile. But the process for gathering feedback and opinions doesn't need to be convoluted. Host a focus group at your hotel to gauge feedback on your website or use a free tool such as [Survey Monkey](#) to send a questionnaire to website users. You can ask them what elements they like, what makes them trust your website, and what information they need in order to make that final booking decision. Get to know your website in-depth and dedicate the time to really assess your biggest online asset.



## ... is for LINKS

**Often overlooked or overused, links are a necessity when building a beautiful web experience for your guests.**

They lead them to the right places and help them navigation around your website more seamlessly. We're all familiar with the feeling of being lost on a website because you can't find what you're looking for. It's really frustrating and you should avoid making your guests struggle to find their way around your website. Links are key to drive traffic around your site. Think about the styling of your links too because this is important. You don't need to stick with the old blue and underlined hyperlink if you don't want to. But your links should be consistent, and they should change subtly when a user hovers over them. Have a play around with this [demo website from Canvas](#) and watch how the links change. It may sound simple but it's crucial to get this right and ensure your guests can easily move around as they click through your web pages.

A close-up photograph of a woman's hands holding a black smartphone. She has light blue nail polish and is wearing a dark jacket. The background is blurred.

# m ... is for **MOBILE**

**Ah, mobile. Unless you've been living under a rock for the last 10 years, you won't have missed the uptake of the smartphone.**

There's not much we can't do on a mobile device these days, including tablets such as the iPad, and searching for travel and hotel inspiration is a perfect example of how your guests are using their mobile devices. But when we use these devices, it can be annoying when the information we're viewing shrinks down and looks too small. We expect a web experience that responds to our screen size – and your hotel is no different. Making sure your website looks just as beautiful on a small screen is a key part of delivering a great user experience. You know you should do it, but how? Without the technical know-how and expertise, it's a tall order. Using a website creator such as SiteMinder's Canvas, ensures a mobile-friendly experience for your guests. A bad mobile experience can really put your customers off booking with you. [Practice on this Canvas website](#) by changing the size of your internet browser window, and watch how the content simply readjusts into place – now that's beautiful web design!

A person wearing an orange hoodie and a striped beanie is seen from the back, holding a large map and two trekking poles. The background is a clear blue sky with some clouds.

n

## ... is for **NAVIGATION BAR**

**If your navigation bar is clear and accurate, your users will start their web experience with a good impression.**

It's probably the most important aspect of your website's functionality. Not only does it guide people through the key areas of your website, it can lower your bounce rate, which is when people view just a single page rather than continuing to view other pages on your website. Your navigation bar should feature key pages such as rooms, attractions, your photo gallery, and contact us. A clearly visible home button should never be forgotten, as it helps those users go back and explore further pages of your website. Anything that doesn't fit into your navigation bar such as promotions, or maybe your dining options, should fold down into what's called a 'hamburger menu'. This becomes even more important when designing a mobile-responsive experience as your 'hamburger menu' houses more items from your navigation bar as the screen shrinks. Practice again [on this Canvas website](#) by changing the size of your internet browser window and watch how the items on the navigation bar tuck away into the stacked 'hamburger menu' – so simple, but effective for a great user experience.



O

... is for **ORGANISATION**

**Thinking about the organisation of your website is where your web design should start.**

How many pages do you need? What information will you place on them? And are there web pages that naturally belong together? For example, do you need two separate pages for your bar and your restaurant, or can you combine them into one informative 'Food & Drink' section? Think about where you would like to find information if you were a visitor to your own website. Map out your website, giving all your content a logical home – and don't forget to use your data and analytics to inform your decision-making.



## ... is for **PROMOTIONS**

**Creating special offers for your customers, not only increases guest loyalty, but keeps your website fresh with interesting content.**

Try to have a minimum of two offers running at any one time to ensure there are different options available for your guests. Your promotions page should sit on your navigation bar to encourage visitors to your website to explore different areas.

Done correctly, promotions should be timed to increase conversions during periods of low-bookings, such as off-peak seasons. And you should always measure your guests' responsiveness to promotions in order to secure the balance between volume of bookings and profitability.



... is for **QUALITY OVER QUANTITY**

focus on  
 quantity  
 quality

We've all visited cluttered websites that are so messy we have no way of finding the information we were originally searching for.

So when it comes to the design of your website, you must think about quality over quantity. For example, the websites built by Canvas, are deliberately designed to bring together everything your guests need to make that final booking decision online. It removes all the noise that turns them away. Look at the [difference between the old Cowra Country Gardens Motor Inn website](#), and the new one created by Canvas. You can immediately see how removing the clutter delivers a quality user experience.



r

## ... is for **RESPONSIVE DESIGN**

**Responsive design is a simple concept and it's one that you should be enthusiastically embracing.**

It's an approach to website design that aims to create a viewing and interaction experience that reacts to the chosen device of a user. It ensures the experience is smooth and that elements of the page can be seen and used properly. If a user is required to zoom in to click a link on your mobile website, then it hasn't been designed in a responsive way. Putting your users' needs first, just as you do the moment they arrive at your hotel, is crucial for the best web experience. But how do you design websites that react in this way without knowing the technical stuff? Using a website creator, such as [Canvas](#), can help fill the gap in design and coding skills. All of the Canvas templates are fully-responsive, which means your hotel can be found and explored on mobile, the fastest-growing consumer research channel. A mobile responsive website that delivers an awesome small-screen experience can secure those last-minute bookings from guests on the go.

A man in a white shirt and blue tie is looking through binoculars. A large orange circle with a white letter 'S' is overlaid on the image.

# S

## ... is for **SEO**

**Search engine optimisation (SEO) is the Holy Grail of great website design. You might have this beautiful online presence, but how do people find you?**

Of course we'd all love internet users to wake up in the morning and come direct to your website, bypassing search engines. But there are 3.5 billion Google searches every day – that's 40,000 every second – so attracting guests through search engines should be a key part of your online marketing strategy.

That said, it's another aspect of web design that needs technical knowledge, as SEO is very specialised. The team behind the [Canvas](#) websites say your design should follow the best SEO practices. For example, the Canvas templates feature clean HTML and CSS, with well-structured pages that have unique page titles and descriptions – just some of the requirements for good SEO.

And mobile-friendliness comes into play here too. Google, in early 2015, changed the way it orders search results giving more priority and importance to mobile-friendly websites. You can learn more on this topic from SiteMinder by reading '[How your mobile website can get friendly with Google](#)'.



## ... is for **THEME**

**While the Steve Jobs quote at the front of this eBook talks about the engineering behind a website's look and feel, you shouldn't forget about making your website look beautiful.**

The theme of your website reflects your hotel's personality and it shouldn't be an afterthought in the design process. Think about a colour palette. Consider which of your property's photos are the best to complement your colour theme. Think about your font style too – if you want to be seen as stately and traditional then use a serif font, or to be viewed as modern, cool, and uncluttered go for a sans serif font. Let's compare these two websites created by Canvas – notice how they both feature strong designs with a colour palette that's carried through the photos, and fonts that match the hotel's personality perfectly. That's beautiful web design. Which do you prefer [The Metropolis](#) or [The Tropical Paradise](#)?



## ... is for **ULTIMATE CALLS TO ACTION**

Once you've settled on where you want to position links to different pages, you should now start to think about the calls to action that you want to use. And yes, they are very different things.

A call to action is a button that goes beyond the standard 'click here'. It prompts and persuades users to hit that button and explore your web pages further. Think about the language you use to convince your users to create super-effective ones. Your users are much more likely to click on a button that says 'take a tour' or 'learn more about us'. A good example is 'book now' – which is more compelling and creates a greater sense of urgency, as opposed to a simple 'book' message. Creative calls to action will also go a long way to delivering a higher rate of conversion for your hotel's bookings.

A young boy with brown hair, wearing a dark tuxedo jacket, a white shirt, and a dark bow tie, is holding a vintage-style video camera up to his eye. He has a slight smile and is looking through the camera's viewfinder. The background is a soft, out-of-focus indoor setting.

V

... is for **VIDEO**

**Creating video content is an effective way to keep your visitors on your website for longer.**

Hotels are in a great position to use videos as a way of showcasing what the property has to offer. There are plenty of ways to get started and create your first professional-looking videos – you can even do it on your smartphone for FREE!

If you use an iPhone take a look at [Hyperlapse from Instagram](#) – it's free, has just one option (that's record!), and an in-built stabiliser to stop those shaky hands, creating a cinematic feel. You can immediately share your videos to Instagram and Facebook, or save them to your smartphone to upload onto your website later.

For something more advanced – and available on Apple, Android and Windows devices – check out [Stop Motion Studio](#). Fun to play with, this app features themes, soundtracks, and titles. While you do have to pay for some features (starting from \$0.99), the ultra high definition capability is impressive, and you can even add your own voiceover to give your video a documentary-type vibe. Just like Hyperlapse, you can easily share to social or export to your computer.



## ... is for **WHITE SPACE**

**Clutter, clutter, clutter. We've already covered this in detail, so you know why it's bad!**

**But here's how to declutter your website – use white space.**

It's important for usability and readability that your site has enough white space between the different elements such as graphics, columns, images, text and margins. Google is the king of white space allowing its users to focus on the task at hand – search. Obviously you won't want your hotel's website to be so minimalist, but think about how Google emphasises the need to focus. White space allows your user's eyes to relax and take everything in. Think of it this way – you wouldn't shout at your guest's in your hotel's lobby, so why do it on your website?



A large white 'X' is centered within a solid orange circle on the left side of the page.

... is for **XPERIENCE**

**X was a tricky one...it get us every time! So we've gone for 'xperience'. User experience, or UX, to be precise.**

On the surface, UX might seem too uber-cool for your hotel, but it encompasses everything in this eBook. It is the thinking behind a service or a product that makes it relevant and meaningful to the end user. Your website is your guests' first look into your hotel and the kind of business or leisure experience on offer. It's vital that you spend time dedicated to nailing your website – how it looks and how it works. If your website has been designed with the user experience in mind, it will make guests feel happy with what they see, connect them to your hotel's personality, and make them feel like they've been thought about during the website build.



## ... is for **YOUR CONTACT INFO**

**This might sound like a basic feature, but it's incredible just how many business owners get this one wrong.**

Your contact information needs to be up-to-date all the time. You should list as many contact details as you can – but here's where hoteliers can fall into trouble. Only list the contact details for the communication that is active and manned by your staff. For example, don't list [restaurantbookings@ourfantastichotel.com](mailto:restaurantbookings@ourfantastichotel.com) if you don't actually take bookings through that email address, or more importantly, if you don't ever check it. You should encourage your customers to leave you feedback, but again, only if you plan to acknowledge and dedicate some time to a response.



# Z

## ... is for ZEITGEIST

Thanks to companies including Apple, Uber, and Airbnb, we're experiencing something of a design zeitgeist. It's design that is clean, functional, and easy-to-use.

Design has become cleaner, flatter, and less cluttered. You only have to compare two Apple updates from the last few years to see how different the products look side-by-side. It's design that has become a cultural force, and is as beautiful as it is functional. As an independent hotelier, it can feel like an uphill struggle to even think about having enough skills or resources to join today's zeitgeist. But great website design shouldn't be off limits for any business of any size. And it isn't. Thanks to website creators like Canvas hoteliers can have beautiful designs that help them compete for global guests. As the saying goes: "Good design is good business."

Combining best practice in hotel e-commerce with beautiful design, Canvas is part of SiteMinder's award-winning suite of smart and simple technology catering specifically for hoteliers looking to attract, reach and convert guests globally online.

Don't have any design or coding experience? You don't need to. Canvas does all the work, so you can be found and stay up-to-date when you want to, and have a real chance to compete in today's consumer-led internet economy.

Canvas purposefully brings together only the things your guests need to make a booking decision online, and removes all the noise that turns them away.

It's the website you don't know you need, from the experts in travel technology.

LEARN MORE ABOUT CANVAS



GET STARTED WITH A 30-DAY FREE TRIAL



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