

# The Center for Hospitality Research

Hospitality Leadership Through Learning

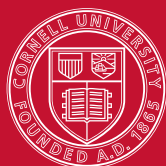


## Best Practices in Search Engine Marketing and Optimization: The Case of the St. James Hotel

### Cornell Hospitality Report

Vol. 10, No. 16, November 2010

by Greg Bodenlos, Victor Bogert, Dan Gordon, Carter Hearne, and Chris K. Anderson, Ph.D.



Cornell University  
School of Hotel Administration

## Advisory Board

**Ra'anan Ben-Zur**, *Chief Executive Officer*, French Quarter Holdings, Inc.

**Scott Berman**, *Principal, Industry Leader, Hospitality & Leisure Practice*, PricewaterhouseCoopers

**Raymond Bickson**, *Managing Director and Chief Executive Officer*, Taj Group of Hotels, Resorts, and Palaces

**Stephen C. Brandman**, *Co-Owner*, Thompson Hotels, Inc.

**Raj Chandnani**, *Vice President, Director of Strategy*, WATG

**Rod Clough**, *Managing Director*, HVS

**Benjamin J. "Patrick" Denihan**, *Chief Executive Officer*, Denihan Hospitality Group

**Kurt Ekert**, *Chief Commercial Officer*, Travelport GDS

**Brian Ferguson**, *Vice President, Supply Strategy and Analysis*, Expedia North America

**Chuck Floyd**, *Chief Operating Officer–North America*, Hyatt

**Anthony Gentile**, *Vice President–Systems & Control*, Schneider Electric/Square D Company

**Gregg Gilman**, *Partner, Co-Chair, Employment Practices*, Davis & Gilbert LLP

**Susan Helstab**, *EVP Corporate Marketing*, Four Seasons Hotels and Resorts

**Jeffrey A. Horwitz**, *Chair, Lodging + Gaming, and Co-Head, Mergers + Acquisitions*, Proskauer

**Kevin J. Jacobs**, *Senior Vice President, Corporate Strategy & Treasurer*, Hilton Worldwide

**Kenneth Kahn**, *President/Owner*, LRP Publications

**Kirk Kinsell**, *President of Europe, Middle East, and Africa*, InterContinental Hotels Group

**Radhika Kulkarni**, Ph.D., *VP of Advanced Analytics R&D*, SAS Institute

**Gerald Lawless**, *Executive Chairman*, Jumeirah Group

**Mark V. Lomanno**, *President*, Smith Travel Research

**David Meltzer**, *Vice President of Global Business Development*, Sabre Hospitality Solutions

**William F. Minnock III**, *Senior Vice President, Global Operations Deployment and Program Management*, Marriott International, Inc.

**Shane O'Flaherty**, *President and CEO*, Forbes Travel Guide

**Thomas Parham**, *Senior Vice President and General Manager*, Philips Hospitality Americas

**Chris Proulx**, *CEO*, eCornell & Executive Education

**Carolyn D. Richmond**, *Partner, Hospitality Practice*, Fox Rothschild LLP

**Steve Russell**, *Chief People Officer, Senior VP, Human Resources*, McDonald's USA

**Michele Sarkisian**, *Senior Vice President*, Maritz

**Janice L. Schnabel**, *Managing Director and Gaming Practice Leader*, Marsh's Hospitality and Gaming Practice

**Trip Schneck**, *President and Co-Founder*, TIG Global LLC

**Adam Weissenberg**, *Vice Chairman, and U.S. Tourism, Hospitality & Leisure Leader*, Deloitte & Touche USA LLP



*The Robert A. and Jan M. Beck Center at Cornell University*  
Back cover photo by permission of *The Cornellian* and Jeff Wang.

Cornell Hospitality Reports,  
Vol. 10, No. 16 (November 2010)

© 2010 Cornell University

Cornell Hospitality Report is produced for  
the benefit of the hospitality industry by  
The Center for Hospitality Research at  
Cornell University

Rohit Verma, *Executive Director*  
Jennifer Macera, *Associate Director*  
Glenn Withiam, *Director of Publications*

Center for Hospitality Research  
Cornell University  
School of Hotel Administration  
489 Statler Hall  
Ithaca, NY 14853

Phone: 607-255-9780  
Fax: 607-254-2922  
[www.chr.cornell.edu](http://www.chr.cornell.edu)

# The Center for Hospitality Research

Hospitality Leadership Through Learning

**Thank you to our  
generous  
Corporate Members**

## Senior Partners

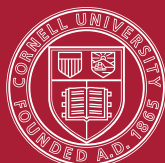
Hilton Worldwide  
McDonald's USA  
Philips Hospitality  
SAS  
STR  
Taj Hotels Resorts and Palaces  
TIG Global

## Partners

Davis & Gilbert LLP  
Deloitte & Touche USA LLP  
Denihan Hospitality Group  
eCornell & Executive Education  
Expedia, Inc.  
Forbes Travel Guide  
Four Seasons Hotels and Resorts  
Fox Rothschild LLP  
French Quarter Holdings, Inc.  
HVS  
Hyatt  
InterContinental Hotels Group  
Jumeirah Group  
LRP Publications  
Marriott International, Inc.  
Marsh's Hospitality Practice  
Maritz  
PricewaterhouseCoopers  
Proskauer  
Sabre Hospitality Solutions  
Schneider Electric  
Southern Wine and Spirits of America  
Thayer Lodging Group  
Thompson Hotels  
Travelport  
WATG

## Friends

American Tesco, LLC • Argyle Executive Forum • Berkshire Healthcare • Center for Advanced Retail Technology  
• Cody Kramer Imports • Cruise Industry News • DK Shifflet & Associates • ehotelier.com • EyeforTravel •  
4Hoteliers.com • Gerencia de Hoteles & Restaurantes • Global Hospitality Resources • Hospitality Financial and  
Technological Professionals • hospitalityinside.com • hospitalitynet.org • Hospitality Technology Magazine •  
Hotel Asia Pacific • Hotel China • HotelExecutive.com • Hotel Interactive • Hotel Resource • HotelWorld Network  
• International CHRIE • International Hotel Conference • International Society of Hospitality Consultants •  
iPerceptions • JDA Software Group, Inc. • J.D. Power and Associates • The Lodging Conference • Lodging  
Hospitality • Lodging Magazine • LRA Worldwide, Inc. • Milestone Internet Marketing • MindFolio • Mindshare  
Technologies • PhoCusWright Inc. • PKF Hospitality Research • RealShare Hotel Investment & Finance Summit •  
Resort and Recreation Magazine • The Resort Trades • RestaurantEdge.com • Shibata Publishing Co. • Synovate •  
TravelCLICK • UniFocus • USA Today • WageWatch, Inc. • The Wall Street Journal • WIWIH.COM



Cornell University  
School of Hotel Administration

# Best Practices in Search Engine Marketing and Optimization: The Case of the St. James Hotel

by Greg Bodenlos, Victor Bogert, Dan Gordon,  
Carter Hearne, and Chris K. Anderson

---

## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

**T**he website redesign for the St. James Hotel in Red Wing, Minnesota, provides a test case for the best practices relating to website optimization for search engine marketing, using Google search as an example. The goal of search engine optimization is to ensure that a hotel's website appears at or near the top of search engine results pages—in the area sometimes called the Golden Triangle. Although the case focuses on Google, the principles are similar for all search engines and meta-search engines. Search engine optimization is based on the idea of making sure that your hotel's site appears near the top of the listing when a would-be guest types a keyword query into the search engine. The goal of search engine algorithms is to present the most relevant pages for each query. To make sure that your pages are included in the “relevant” group, your website must include a logical presentation of appropriate keywords on each page. Tags for page headings and photographs should align with keywords for each page's topic. By including a site diagram, a hotel can assist Google's web crawlers in locating and indexing all pages on a website. Further authority is added when outside agencies link into a page and when a hotel is listed on the webpages of local tourism agencies. Finally, a hotel can purchase keywords or position on the search results page, in a section clearly labeled as sponsored results. This area does receive users' attention, but not as much as the “organic” search results do.

---

## ABOUT THE AUTHORS



A recent graduate of the School of Hotel Administration at Cornell University, **Greg Bodenlos** joined the Fairmont Hotels & Resorts family as manager of internet marketing for The Fairmont Southampton in Bermuda. While at Cornell, Greg was president of the HSMAI Collegiate Chapter, director of student affairs for the Cornell Hotel Society, Collegiate Chapter (CHS), and also supported two core curriculum classes as a teaching assistant. Greg has also worked at Mandarin Oriental, New York, the Hilton Fort Lauderdale Marina, and the Professional Development Program at Cornell University, in a variety of roles.

**Victor Bogert** is a recent graduate of the School of Hotel Administration hailing from Toronto, Ontario. During his time at Cornell University, Victor concentrated in revenue management. From his current base in Hoboken, New Jersey, he works for the IT Finance group of HSBC's investment banking arm.



**Daniel Gordon** holds a Bachelor of Science degree from the Cornell University School of Hotel Administration. He currently works in New York City for Morgans Hotel Group as a revenue management analyst for the northeast region. His expertise also includes social media marketing, search engine optimization, and the application of revenue management to other industries

Upon graduation from the Cornell University School of Hotel Administration, **Carter Hearne** moved from her hometown of Greenwich, Connecticut, to West Hollywood and joined the Expedia Inc California team as one of two Los Angeles Market Managers. In her new role she works with midscale hotel properties to identify areas of opportunity for revenue growth and otherwise remains an active member of HSMAI and CHS.



**Chris K. Anderson**, Ph.D., is an assistant professor at the Cornell School of Hotel Administration (cka9@cornell.edu). Formerly on faculty at the Ivey School of Business in London, Ontario, his main research focus is on revenue management and service pricing. He actively works with numerous industry types in the application and development of RM, having worked with a variety of hotels, airlines, rental car, and tour companies as well as numerous consumer packaged good and financial services firms. He serves on the editorial board of the Journal of Revenue and Pricing Management and is the regional editor for the International Journal of Revenue

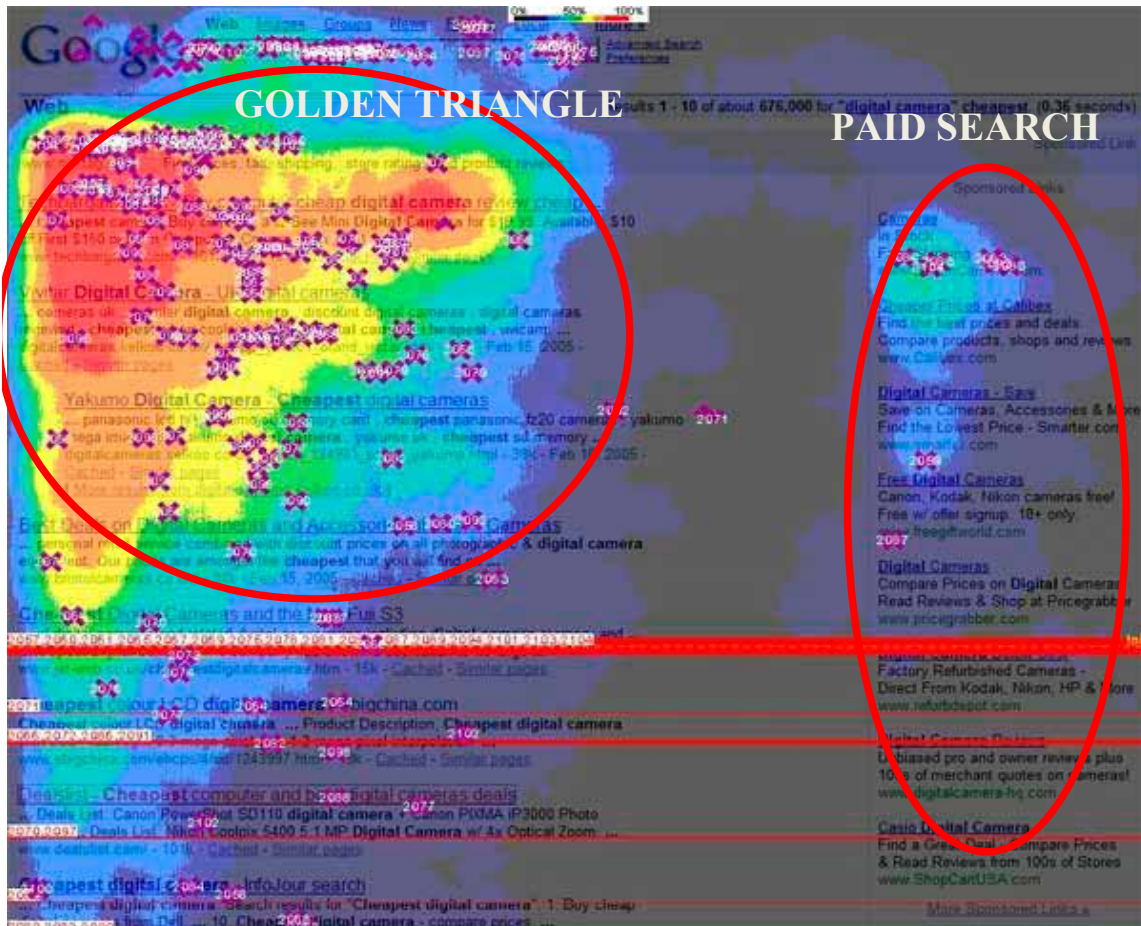
Management

# Best Practices in Search Engine Marketing and Optimization: The Case of the St. James Hotel

by Greg Bodenlos, Victor Bogert, Dan Gordon,  
Carter Hearne, and Chris K. Anderson

**T**he St. James Hotel in Red Wing, Minnesota, is an independent 63-room hotel with a downtown location and a view of the Mississippi River. Although the St. James is a member of the Historic Hotels of America and is owned by the Red Wing Shoe Company, it lacks a large marketing budget. As I explain in this case study, a property like the St. James can make use of the web to market itself to a large pool of potential guests through strategic applications of search engine marketing (SEM) and search engine optimization (SEO). Typical of the hotel industry, the St. James is by no means the only hotel that seeks to deploy this approach, because it is inexpensive to implement and can help drive measurable direct bookings. Thus, to be competitive on this virtual field, hotel marketers must have a clear understanding of how to apply both search engine marketing and its subset, search engine optimization. In this report, I explain the tactics involved in maintaining a dynamic and competitive search engine marketing stance. This case involves Google search, but the principles are the same for other search engines, online travel agents, and meta-search engines.

Google search sample depicting the “Golden Triangle” of viewing patterns



Google Search and the Golden Triangle

The main goal of search engine marketing and optimization is to increase visibility of your webpage, which will increase click-through and drive direct bookings. This requires an understanding of Google’s search mechanisms. Using a proprietary algorithm Google ranks websites based on their relevance to specific search queries. Because Google wants to return useful search results, it lists webpages containing the keywords most relevant to the words in the original query. Thus, if the user types in “Minnesota hotel,” Google will look for webpages containing those words. Since Google is looking for relevance, you want your website to be most relevant to the specific keywords that the user is searching for—which involves more than just using the keywords in the text.

Google shows its webpage hits in two lists, unpaid “organic” hits on the left and paid listings on the right. (There is also a paid section above the organic list.) Based on eye scanning studies, Exhibit 1 shows where the user actually looks

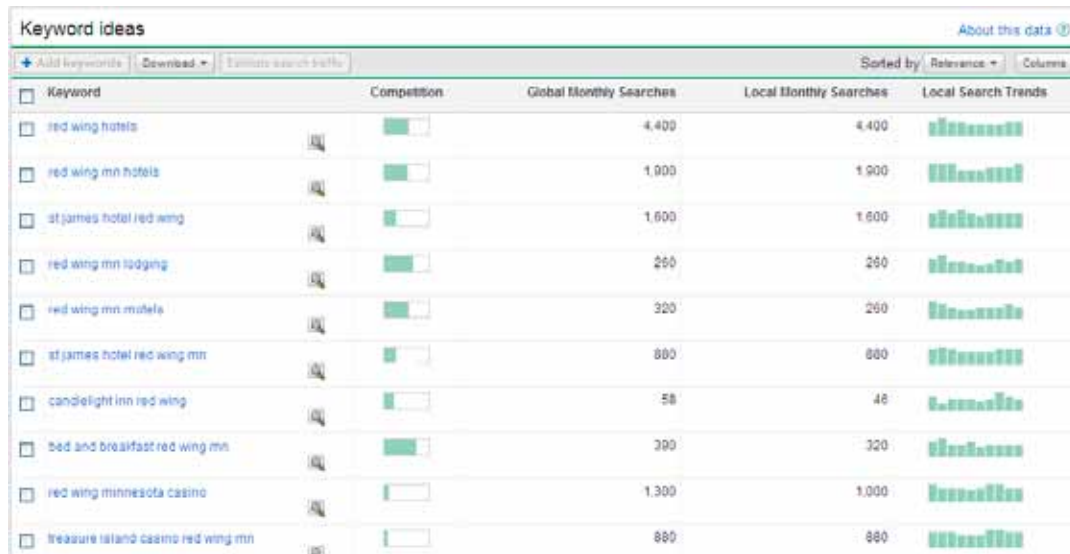
when they are viewing a Google search results page. The eye-scanning technology shows the brightest color where users’ eyes land on a page. Basically, if your link does not appear near the top of the first page of a Google search results page, nobody will see it. You want your link to appear at or near the top of the organic search listings on the left, or at the top of paid search results on the right hand side of the screen. This is the “Golden Triangle,” a term marketers use to describe this phenomenon of where Google users look when they view a search results page. To improve your position on the left side, in the organic search results, you can apply SEO, as I explain in this case. I’ll also discuss the considerations that apply to the other critical area of the search results page, the paid search results.

Your Ticket to the Golden Triangle

To appear in the “Golden Triangle,” you need to focus on the correct website keywords and proper “promotion” of your website, both on the site and off site. Let’s first

**EXHIBIT 2**

**Google keyword tool display**



**EXHIBIT 3**

**Google keyword tool Excel export**

	A	B	C	D	E	F
1	Keyword	Competition	Global Monthly Searches	May-10	Apr-10	Mar-10
2	red wing hotels	0.56	4400	4400	4400	3600
3	red wing mn hotels	0.53	1900	2400	1900	1900
4	st james hotel red wing	0.27	1600	1300	1300	1300
5	red wing mn lodging	0.66	260	320	260	320
6	red wing mn motels	0.56	320	260	320	260
7	st james hotel red wing mn	0.25	880	880	880	880
8	candlelight inn red wing	0.22	58	46	58	73
9	bed and breakfast red wing mn	0.72	390	320	320	320
10	red wing minnesota casino	0.09	1300	1000	1000	1300
11	treasure island casino red wing mn	0.08	880	880	880	1000
12	country inn and suites red wing mn	0.21	91	110	91	73
13	red wing mn casino	0.08	1000	880	1000	1000
14	red wing mn	0.25	33100	33100	33100	33100
15	americinn red wing	0.49	390	260	320	260
16	nichols inn red wing mn	0.28	58	46	58	46
17	americinn red wing mn	0.4	140	110	140	110

examine the left side of the triangle, which is the province of search engine optimization. On-site optimization involves using keywords appropriately to optimize for organic search. This includes making sure appropriate keywords are found in body content, alt-tags (part of the source code), and title tags. Utilizing a “site map” is also important for on-site optimization. Off-site promotion involves capitalizing on inbound links, as well as optimizing the Google Local page.

**Finding Keywords**

To determine appropriate keywords, you can use two tools, Google Adwords Keyword Tool and SEO Digger. Google’s keyword tool is effective at determining search demand for specific keywords, as shown in Exhibit 2. The tool provides information on keywords related to either a URL or, in this case, the keyword phrase “red wing hotels.” Exhibit 3 shows this same information exported to Excel.



## SEO Digger output

Enter domain name in the field below: (e.g.: google.com or wikipedia.org)

st-james-hotel.com

SEMRush is a SEODigger 2.0. Multilanguage. Multibase.

Organic keywords for st-james-hotel.com- 10 of 142

Keyword	Pos	Δ Volume	CPC	URL	Traffic %	Costs %	Competition	Results	Trend
<a href="#">hotel in red wing</a>	1	110	2.15	<a href="#">st-james-hotel.com/</a>	0.47	0.64	2.21	1 340 000	
<a href="#">hotels in red wing minnesota</a>	1	73	1.76	<a href="#">st-james-hotel.com/</a>	0.31	0.34	2.44	156 000	
<a href="#">red wing mn lodging</a>	1	73	1.63	<a href="#">st-james-hotel.com/</a>	0.31	0.32	4.76	39 000	
<a href="#">the historic st james hotel</a>	1	16	0.05	<a href="#">st-james-hotel.com/</a>	0.06	0.00	3.32	21 100 000	
<a href="#">hotels in red wing</a>	1	390	1.33	<a href="#">st-james-hotel.com/</a>	1.69	1.40	5.09	436 000	
<a href="#">motels red wing mn</a>	1	16	1.27	<a href="#">st-james-hotel.com/</a>	0.06	0.05	4.60	54 000	
<a href="#">the st james hotel</a>	1	28	1.23	<a href="#">st-james-hotel.com/</a>	0.12	0.09	2.47	22 500 000	
<a href="#">at the st james hotel</a>	1	0	0.05	<a href="#">st-james-hotel.com/</a>	0.00	0.00	3.74	23 100 000	
<a href="#">red wing minnesota lodging</a>	1	46	1.52	<a href="#">st-james-hotel.com/</a>	0.19	0.18	3.87	47 000	
<a href="#">hotel red wing</a>	1	73	1.83	<a href="#">st-james-hotel.com/</a>	0.31	0.36	6.18	1 220 000	

[Full Report >>](#)

Competitors are also seeking hot keywords, and Google indicates how intense competition is for particular keywords, as well as provides data on the number of searches (monthly) for these keywords. SEO Digger (Exhibit 4) is useful for finding out which keywords drive traffic to a specific website. This allows you to analyze not only the keywords that link users to your website, but also the keywords that link users to your competitor's websites.

### On-Site Promotion

On-site promotion is about making sure that your website communicates a clear message about your property and uses keywords that consumers are searching for.

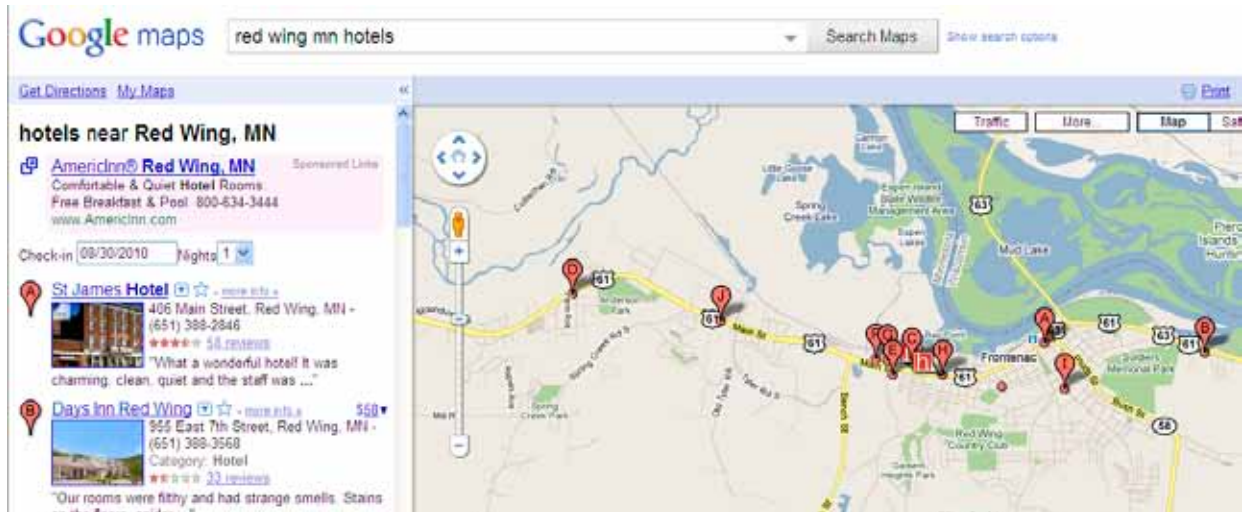
**Alt-tags.** Alt-tags are an example of meta-data that users are not likely to see unless they delve into your page's source code. In brief, these tags provide a description of pictures on your site. Google's crawler will be able to "read" the pictures as relevant, even if they fail to load, based on the text you use to identify the pictures in the source code. Google's algorithm puts a high value on using keywords in the alt-tags that make the photos highly relevant to the webpage where they appear.

**URLs and title tags.** The best approach to page URLs is to keep them organized in clear directory-like paths, as such organization enhances crawler content recognition and more easily describes a preview to site users. Title tags are what appear at the top of your browser as the main title description of any specific website. Since these are visible to site users it is best to find a balance of page content-specific material and relevant keywords in their composition. Common practice is to keep these uniquely representative of each specific page while still representing your brand—and keeping the content to less than 160 characters.

**Body content.** It is important to optimize your website's body content because this is the text that the user actually sees. Google wants to see that the text on any particular page in your website is relevant to what that particular page is all about. Best practices indicate that 3 to 5 percent of the words in your body content should be "keywords" relevant to the page's content.

**Site map.** A logical sitemap assists greatly with search engine optimization. An HTML sitemap, which should appear on your webpage, is essentially a range of relevant links, which is useful to both the potential customer and

## Google Local search—St. James, Minnesota



to Google’s crawlers. The crawlers will recognize the sitemap and use it as a guide to travel through all of the links. Properly executed, this increases the chance that all of your relevant web pages will be indexed and available for a Google search.

You would be astounded at how much of a difference the presence or absence of a sitemap makes to Google’s PageRank. Even if you have a relevant “authority” linking to one page of your website, that does not mean that all pages are linked, or that they all will show up on a Google search—the crawlers have to find them first. This is especially crucial because the products that a marketer would like to sell should be logically separated into disparate components to increase relevance, even if Google’s crawlers index them. Indeed, one way to catch the attention of Google’s crawlers is to create an updated site map. You can submit a newly created sitemap to Google using “Webmaster Tools.” Such an approach may overcome one of the problems with Google’s algorithms. If your website is not popular to begin with, Google is likely to index your information less frequently than it does a heavy-traffic page.

### Off-Site Promotion

**Inbound links.** Google puts considerable weight on “authority,” based on the number and type of webpages that link into yours. Relatively unrelated linking pages and outbound links do not carry this authority. Thus, to drive Google’s crawlers to your webpage you should limit the outward or reciprocal links that a webpage has to external sources, especially if they are not highly relevant to the

content on your page. Just as the crawlers follow the links into your webpage with a sitemap, they will follow the links outward on your outbound links. Realizing that some outbound links are necessary out of courtesy to your customers, efforts should be made to ensure that outbound links have a reciprocal link inward as well, resulting in a mutually beneficial scenario.

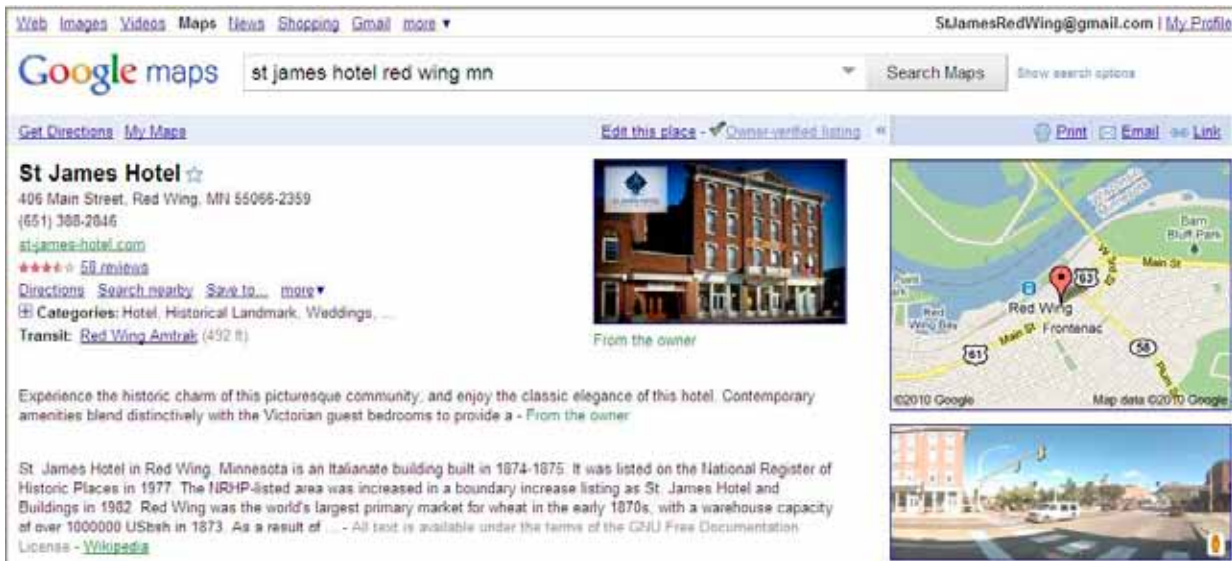
**Google Local.** Google Local listings quite often appear at the top of the page during a keyword search or a search using Google maps. Exhibit 5 shows the search results and Exhibit 6 the Google Local page when the user clicks on St. James Hotel. Local listings and directories are often aggregators of information online searchers use to find out more about a product in the market. As shown in the example in these exhibits, your Google Local listing is an opportunity to submit coupons and special offers directly to Google. It is also useful to submit your sitemap directly to Google Local, which will enhance its ability to index your website. You also have a great opportunity to submit photos and videos that could appear in media search directly to Google Local.

### Paid Search versus Organic Search

Next, let’s look at paid search, primarily found on the right side of the Golden Triangle, but also in a special paid section on the left part of the page. Paid search should be used for the following situations:

- Building awareness of special offers,
- Seeking short term revenues,
- Marketing during a specific timeframe,

Google page results from clicking on St. James Hotel

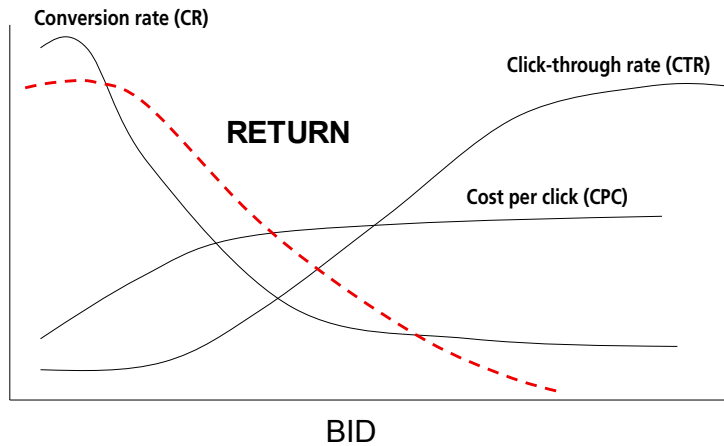


- Rolling out a new URL or website, and
  - Ensuring complete control of the listing.
- Unlike organic search, paid search offers more controlled and customized results. A paid search strategy focuses tightly on keywords, which are organized by theme. You need to define key buckets of keywords, and create an Adgroup based on this structure. Most campaigns will consist of geo-target locations, niche groups, or specific events.

A key goal is to make sure Adgroup, keywords in the group, and ad copy are all matching and pertinent to one another. In addition to identifying positive keywords, Google’s ads also allow you to formulate lists of negative keywords—which are words and descriptions that you do not want associated with your website, such as “cheap” for a luxury hotel. When a user specifies a keyword that you have specified as negative your site does not appear.

Paid search strategy also entails the determination of the prices to pay or bids for keywords. Google employs a second-price auction, where if you “win” you pay the price stated by the second highest bidder. Essentially you pay the price that the ad placed below you bid. In the context of paid search, typically the more you pay the higher your position in the list of ads. As you might expect, the dynamics of keyword bidding are nonlinear, as a function of this second-price auction.

Bidding dynamics—change in return as bid increases



Here’s how this strategy works. Typically the click-through rate (CTR), or the percentage of time your displayed ad is clicked, increases with your bid. However, the CTR approaches a maximum, because at some point your placement on the list stops changing. Similarly, your cost-per-click (CPC) will increase faster with your rising bid but then CPC also will level off. The problem is that conversion rates (CR), that is, the percentage of ad clicks which convert to a sale, tend to decrease with your bid (as shown in Exhibit 7). This is because those who are interested in booking a room at your hotel usually look for your property regardless of where it is positioned in the list. As you bid higher (and

St. James Hotel page showing booking mask



your listing appears higher on the list), your ad is seen by more people who are less predisposed to purchase from you. As a result of this we see a decrease in expected return in bid values.

If you think about your expected return per booking (on a per-impression basis) as:

$$[CTR * CR * Margin - CTR * CPC] / [CTR * CR],$$

where CTR\*CR are your converted bookings at some average margin, with CTR\*CPC as your total cost then divided by your number of bookings CTR\*CR. Again as shown in Exhibit 7, this return probably steadily decreases as you increase your bid. At some point the return becomes negative.

As a firm you will need to manage a portfolio of keywords and campaigns. These bidding dynamics are further complicated because Google does not simply employ a bid-for-position approach but rather one which maximizes its return. Consequently, similar to organic search, the results page that your ad lands on has a ranking or quality, and Google combines this ranking with your bid. Google's goal is to display ads with high CTRs, as their revenue is CTR\*CPC.

**Conversion: The Click Behind the Mask**

The point of all this activity is to drive consumer traffic to your site and, more critically, convert those clicks to reservations. Conversion is greatly facilitated by use of a booking

## St. James Hotel site map



mask, which is a portal that a potential customer can use to book a room at any point in the research process (see Exhibit 8). The user doesn't have to click a separate reservations tab and get linked off the page. Instead, the booking mask is always at hand, allowing a user to book on any page at any point in time. For example, if you are on the Romantic Getaway package page, that is when you are hooked and that is when you are going to want to book. If you can look at the packages' features and can book the reservation simultaneously, you are much more likely to actually convert than if you are forced to click off the page and then don't have all the information that is included in the package right in front of you. Milestone Internet Marketing has found that adding a booking mask will increase conversions about 15 to 20 percent.

### The St. James Hotel—A Case Study

With that background, let's return to Red Wing and the St. James Hotel. The property's management was interested in re-evaluating their SEO initiatives after the launch of their updated website. To get a better feel for the St. James and meet their management team, our Cornell student team traveled to Red Wing in mid-March 2010. Opened in 1875 and owned by the Red Wing Shoe Company, the St. James has stayed true to its roots and is truly a unique historical landmark in the town of Red Wing. Located about a block from the Mississippi and the train station, it is also home to a variety of restaurants frequented by guests and locals alike, including the Port and Jimmy's Pub.

In discussions with the management team, it became clear that the original website had been modified to be search-friendly but much of that work was lost in the re-launch. Our impressions of the new site were that we liked the aesthetic design and social media efforts but saw room for improvement with coding and off-page promotions. We identified groups of travelers who would be potential targets of a pay-per-click campaign (such as a motorcycle group which travels through Red Wing annually). The management team was extremely enthusiastic to act as a sounding board for keywords to be used in developing site content.

The St. James Hotel desired the following three outcomes from this project: (1) to optimize its online marketing initiatives for the property using proven best practices, (2) to provide analysis on the St. James's competitive set and develop performance benchmarking index recommendations, and (3) to use paid and organic search and advertising methods to drive relevant traffic to the website and increase conversions. The following is an account of the SEO action plan recommendations and techniques we utilized for the St. James project.

### Implementation

We began implementing changes to the St. James's website in coordination with their on-site IT staff. Our St. James IT contact granted us direct access to the website content managers for the St. James' various websites to change HTML code after our initial visit. To implement the changes, we used Adobe Dreamweaver to make a local copy of St-James-Hotel.com and cascaded the changed web pages on the website. This was a good learning experience for all hands, since Dreamweaver was unfamiliar and our team also was new to html coding. We read up on various websites and in-software help guides to figure out the proper technique for updating the website.

### SEO Campaign Action Plan

In conjunction with this code optimization, we set out to achieve four additional SEO-based enhancements for the St. James web initiatives. Those are: (1) develop a site map, (2) add content to the home page, (3) logically regroup package information, and (4) explore off-site promotions.

**Develop a site map.** By posting a site map, pages on your site that search engine crawlers cannot find are made accessible (see Exhibit 9). Adding this "table of contents" feature allots more site space for relevant content. Along with that improvement, we recommended a booking mask, which turns "lookers into bookers," as the saying goes.

**Add content to the home page.** We also used keywords from our research to update homepage title tags and alt-tags—increasing searchability and relevance. We started

## St. James Hotel logo tag, including hotel name



with the tags that we felt were most appropriate based on our research, using Google Keyword Tool and SEODigger. We analyzed each webpage's unique content individually, and we determined which keywords would best reflect relevance and receive a high volume of search demand. We initially thought that the search keyword terms alone were strong enough as title tags and that we no longer needed the hotel name. But we discovered that removing "St James Hotel" from the beginning of each site's title tag diminished the number of hits in the search results. Consequently, our strategy became to place the decided-upon code in the title tags after "St James Hotel."

For certain html items, such as alt-tags representing pictures, we found that once we had come up with a good formula for a tag, we could duplicate the tag across the website's pages if the image was identical. An example of this was the alt-tag representing the St. James's logo, which is found on every page. However, we changed the tag from just "logo," which would not help direct any relevant traffic, to "St James Hotel Red Wing, MN," which contains keywords with much more meaning to a potential guest as he or she searches in Google. This is depicted in Exhibit 10.

**Regroup package information.** At the onset of our project, the hotel listed all the special package deals on the same page. This made finding the St. James's package deals difficult for the Google crawlers, not to mention the potential guests. For example, the most accurate Google search term to find one of their packages would essentially be to type the description of all the promotions at once, say, "winter green eagle watching Victorian getaway." To make the search operate more effectively, we recommended creating a unique page and URL for each value-adding package offer. This way, when someone searches for "red wing eagle watching," the relevant offer will show up in the search results, with a greater likelihood of purchase. We had to adjust the strategy because the St. James has an abundance of package deals—too many to justify unique URLs for each one. So, we

modified our recommendation by categorizing the package deals by relevant keyword search terms (e.g., romance, wine and dine) so they can be more easily searched. We also recommended including additional elements of flash to convey a story or fresh social media content such as Flickr or reviews on these specific pages.

**Explore off-site promotions.** Local listings and directories are often aggregators of information that online searchers use to find out more about a product in the market. If your hotel is listed in these directories, search engines will determine

that your page is more relevant. At the onset of the project, the St. James needed to add more content to its local listing as well as enhance its Google Local Business Center Listing. Accordingly, we suggested enhancing the listing with additional content, including videos, coupons, special offers to be submitted directly to Google, and links to online coupon sites.

Moreover, we recommended that the hotel work with additional local promotion outlets to improve the St. James's web-based marketing initiatives. While we were not able to execute these suggestions due to time constraints, we left the property's management team with the suggestions to collect e-mail addresses through promotions such as "E-Mail to-a-Friend," as well as use Access for organizing potential future data mining and business intelligence efforts. Finally, local websites, LinkPopularity.com, and the websites of the local Convention Visitors Bureau and Chambers of Commerce all are additional sources that could provide more visibility for the St. James.

## Ten Lessons From the Golden Triangle

Upon completion of this study, we left the St. James Hotel and its management team with the following ten key lessons and suggestions for building on our foundation of SEO and SEM enhancements:

- (1) Use a booking mask to offer a consistent booking presence and provide seamless click-through to conversion.
- (2) Create a logical sitemap to allow Google to crawl the entirety of your site—be sure to submit the sitemap to Google Webmaster Tools and others.
- (3) Find a balance of page content-specific material and relevant keywords in composing your title tags—keep them unique and less than 160 characters.
- (4) Keep page URLs logically organized into clear paths and directories to enhance crawler content recognition and more easily describe a preview to site users.

## Google results for search on “hotels in red wing,” showing the St. James’s high position

The screenshot shows a Google search for "hotels in red wing". The search bar is at the top with the Google logo and a search button. Below the search bar, the results are categorized into "Sponsored Links" and "Local business results for hotels near Red Wing, MN".

**Sponsored Links:**

- Americinn® Red Wing, MN** (Sponsored Link): www.Americinn.com. Comfortable & Quiet Hotel Rooms. Free Breakfast & Pool. 800-634-3444.
- Red Wing's Moondance Inn**: \$89 weekday special. Wine & Dine Weekend package. www.moondanceinn.com/specials. 1105 W 4th St, Red Wing, MN.
- Hotels in Wing**: Book your Hotel in Wing online. No reservation costs. Great rates. Booking.com/WingHotels.
- Red Wing MN Hotels**: The Official Minnesota Hotel Site. Best Rates on Red Wing Hotels. minnesota-hotels.org/Red-Wing.
- Red Wing MN Hotels**: Save up to 50% off Hotels in Red Wing MN at Priceline.com. www.priceline.com.
- Red Wing Hotel**: Enjoy the landmark St. James Hotel in Red Wing, MN. Book Now! St-James-Hotel.com. Minneapolis-St. Paul, MN.
- Hotels - Up to 80% Off**: Find the Cheapest Hotel Rooms Now! Compare Rates up to 80% Off! www.Travelzoo.com.
- Hotels in Red Wing**: Hotels.com Low Rates Guaranteed! Call a Hotel Expert. 1-866-925-0513. www.hotels.com.

**Local business results for hotels near Red Wing, MN:**

- A St. James Hotel**: www.st-james-hotel.com - (651) 388-2846 - 50 reviews
- B Days Inn Red Wing**: www.daysinn.com - (651) 388-3568 - 30 reviews
- C Americinn of Red Wing, MN**: www.americinn.com - (651) 385-9060 - 11 reviews
- D Country Inn Red Wing**: www.countryinns.com - (651) 388-9000 - 22 reviews
- E Best Western Rivertown Inn & Suites**: bestwesternminnesota.com - (651) 388-1577 - 22 reviews
- F Super 8 Red Wing**: www.super8.com - (651) 388-0491 - 16 reviews
- G Rodeway Inn**: www.rodewayinn.com - (651) 388-1502 - 21 reviews

A map on the left shows the location of these hotels in Red Wing, MN, with the St. James Hotel (A) being the most prominent and centrally located.

- (5) Keep unique and relevant body content placed closer to the top of the page—logically divide your text into headers to further segment content.
- (6) Utilize free outlets such as Google Local Search for more than just contact information—use Web 2.0 technologies to share media and interact with customers.
- (7) Limit outward and reciprocal links unless a mutually beneficial or favoring decision is reached—speak with property staff about local businesses to involve.
- (8) Explore off-site promotions. Online coupon sites such as [retailmenot.com](http://retailmenot.com) provide great market reach and listings—remember to submit directly to Google.
- (9) Add relevant alt-tags to help your media increase your page relevance. Keep alt-tags relevant to picture-specific content.
- (10) Logically split and group content into separate pages for separate classes of products and services; disparate products listed together return less relevant results for Google’s crawlers, meaning that your results may not appear in the Golden Triangle.

### Outcomes

As readers probably have noticed, our focus at the St. James was largely on organic search optimization, rather than paid search. We did develop and launch a short PPC campaign after our initial recommendations were implemented. The PPC campaign deployed a relatively small budget but was designed to increase traffic the website and improve the page rank. Exhibit 11 shows a sample Google search result on “hotels in Red Wing.” As the figure shows, the St. James is now prominently displayed in the Golden Triangle, both in Google local as well as in general organic search. This search was done towards the end of the PPC campaign with both organic and paid search results displayed prominently showing the hotel. The St. James has since ceased the PPC campaign as their webpage continues to receive prominent first page organic display! ■

# Cornell Hospitality Reports Index

[www.chr.cornell.edu](http://www.chr.cornell.edu)

## 2010 Reports

Vol 10 No 15 The Impact of *Prix Fixe* Menu Price Formats on Guests' Deal Perception, by Shuo Wang and Michael Lynn, Ph.D.

Vol 10 No 14 The Future of Hotel Revenue Management, by Sheryl Kimes, Ph.D.

Vol 10 No 13 Making the Most of Priceline's Name-Your-Own-Price Channel, by Chris Anderson, Ph.D., and Shijie Radium Yan

Vol. 10, No. 12 Cases in Innovative Practices in Hospitality and Related Services, Set 4, by Cathy A. Enz, Ph.D., Rohit Verma, Ph.D., Kate Walsh, Ph.D. Sheryl E. Kimes, Ph.D., and Judy A. Siguaw, D.B.A

Vol. 10, No. 11 Who's Next? An Analysis of Lodging Industry Acquisitions, by Qinzhong Ma, Ph.D., and Peng Liu, Ph.D.

Vol. 10, No. 10 Cases in Innovative Practices in Hospitality and Related Services, Set 3: Cayuga Sustainable Hospitality, Chic & Basic, JetBlue Airlines Jumeirah Essex House, The Ritz-Carlton Hotel Company, Runtriz, The Seaport Hotel, Thayer Lodging, TripTelevision, and Xsense Experiential Design Consulting, by Cathy A. Enz, Ph.D., Rohit Verma, Ph.D., Kate Walsh, Ph.D. Sheryl E. Kimes, Ph.D., and Judy A. Siguaw, D.B.A.

Vol. 10, No. 9 Building Customer Loyalty: Ten Principles for Designing an Effective Customer Reward Program, by Michael McCall, Ph.D., Clay Voorhees, Ph.D., and Roger Calantone, Ph.D.

Vol. 10, No. 8 Developing Measures for Environmental Sustainability in Hotels: An Exploratory Study, by Jie J. Zhang, Nitin Joglekar, Ph.D., and Rohit Verma, Ph.D.

Vol. 10, No. 7 Successful Tactics for Surviving an Economic Downturn: Results of an International Study, by Sheryl E. Kimes, Ph.D.

Vol. 10, No. 6 Integrating Self-service Kiosks in a Customer-service System, by Tsz-Wai (Iris) Lui, Ph.D., and Gabriele Piccoli, Ph.D.

Vol. 10, No. 5 Strategic Pricing in European Hotels, 2006–2009, by Cathy A. Enz, Ph.D., Linda Canina, Ph.D., and Mark Lomanno

Vol. 10, No. 4 Cases in Innovative Practices in Hospitality and Related Services, Set 2: BrewerKz, ComfortDelgro Taxi, DinnerBroker.com, Iggy's, Jumbo Seafood, OpenTable.com, PriceYourMeal.com, Sakae Sushi, Shangri-La Singapore, and Stevens Pass, by Sheryl E. Kimes, Ph.D., Cathy A. Enz, Ph.D., Judy A. Siguaw, D.B.A., Rohit Verma, Ph.D., and Kate Walsh, Ph.D.

Vol. 10, No. 3 Customer Preferences for Restaurant Brands, Cuisine, and Food Court Configurations in Shopping Centers, by Wayne J. Taylor and Rohit Verma, Ph.D.

Vol. 10, No. 2 How Hotel Guests Perceive the Fairness of Differential Room Pricing, by Wayne J. Taylor and Sheryl E. Kimes, Ph.D.

Vol. 10, No. 1 [Compendium 2010](#)

## 2010 Roundtable Retrospectives

Vol. 2, No. 1 Sustainability Roundtable 2009: The Hotel Industry Seeks the Elusive "Green Bullet."

## 2010 Industry Perspectives

No. 6 The Future of Meetings: The Case for Face to Face, by Christine Duffy and Mary Beth McEuen

No. 5 Making Customer Satisfaction Pay: Connecting Survey Data to Financial Outcomes in the Hotel Industry by Gina Pingitore, Ph.D., Dan Seldin, Ph.D., and Arianne Walker, Ph.D.

No. 4 Hospitality Business Models Confront the Future of Meetings, by Howard Lock and James Macaulay

## 2009 Reports

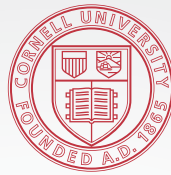
Vol. 9, No. 18 Hospitality Managers and Communication Technologies: Challenges and Solutions, by Judi Brownell, Ph.D., and Amy Newman

Vol. 9, No. 17 Cases in Innovative Practices in Hospitality and Related Services, Set 1: Aqua by Grandstand, Brand Karma, Capella Hotels & Resorts, EnTrip, Hotels.com Visualiser, Luggage Club, Royal Plaza on Scotts, Tastings, Tune Hotels, and VisitBritain.com, by Judy A. Siguaw, D.B.A., Cathy A. Enz, Ph.D., Sheryl E. Kimes, Ph.D., Rohit Verma, Ph.D., and Kate Walsh, Ph.D.

Vol 9 No 16 The Billboard Effect: Online Travel Agent Impact on Non-OTA Reservation Volume, by Chris K. Anderson, Ph.D.

Vol 9 No 15 Operational Hedging and Exchange Rate Risk: A Cross-sectional Examination of Canada's Hotel Industry, by Charles Chang, Ph.D., and Liya Ma





Cornell University  
School of Hotel Administration

# Advancing Business and Personal Success

*Explore, develop and apply ideas with  
global hospitality leaders and  
expert Cornell professors.*

Professionals from around the world are invited to attend 3-day, 10-day or online courses at the world's leading institute for hospitality management education in:

- *Strategic Leadership*
- *Finance*
- *Foodservice*
- *Human Resources*
- *Marketing*
- *Operations*
- *Real Estate*

Visit our website to apply.

## The Executive Path

— Hospitality Leadership Through Learning

Complete program information and applications available online:

[www.hotelschool.cornell.edu/execed](http://www.hotelschool.cornell.edu/execed)

Phone + 1 607 255 4919 Email [exec\\_ed\\_hotel@cornell.edu](mailto:exec_ed_hotel@cornell.edu)



[www.chr.cornell.edu](http://www.chr.cornell.edu)