

*Our*  
**Christmas**  
*gift to you*



**AVVIO**

# AVVIOSELF A VERY MERRY CHRISTMAS

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It's that time of year again, the dark nights have crept in and festive lights illuminate the bustling streets as we prepare for the holiday season. Christmas shopping is in full swing and more predominantly, the rise of online shopping!

In recent years Black Friday and Cyber Monday deals have dominated the Irish and UK markets as they have done for many years in the US. Shoppers are believed to have spent up to £8.57bn across the 4-day black Friday weekend with spending in the UK predicted to be the highest in Europe.

We are guilty of living in an instant gratification society, accustomed to having things arrive at our door in less than 24 hours! Online shopping has never been easier and the world is, quite literally, ours at the click of a button.

Consequently, we often find ourselves wondering how we buy for someone who has everything? How do we give the perfect gift? The answer is simple.. It's all about personalisation!

How can hotels capitalise on this in the lead up to Christmas whilst driving revenue and optimising their website? From gift vouchers to Christmas deals, visitors come to your website because they want ideas on what to buy for their loved ones. Take the time to showcase all that your property has to offer. Keep them on-site by getting that sense of personalisation just right.

Our gift to you this Christmas is this e-book, where we share our insider tips to get you prepared for 2020. Whether you're a GM, head of revenue or Marketing - there's something to takeaway, for everyone.

We want to ensure that both you and your guests are making what's left of 2019 a memorable one - from all of us here at Avvio, have a very Merry Christmas and a prosperous New Year!



# WORK OUT YOUR MERRY COST OF NET SALE

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Undoubtedly your planning for the new year will already be in full swing. Our key tip to hoteliers looking to become more profitable in 2020? It's a deceptively simple one: start tracking your net cost of sale.

The OTA 'billboard' effect is the invisible chain locking hotel's into outrageous OTA commissions. Booking.com and Expedia charge anywhere from 15 to 23% for an independent hotel to nibble at the dominant market share they have cultivated over the past 20 years.

Surely it's impossible for independent hotels to become masters of their own brand? To lower their cost per sale whilst becoming less reliant on the OTAs? This myth is still buried in the distribution noise. With the help of an experienced digital agency, a hotel can drive its own brand awareness and increase direct revenue at a fraction of the cost of an OTA. The Avvio Digital Marketing team typically returns a cost of sale of 7-9%. That is more than half of the cost of Expedia and at our very highest of 9% that is half the cost of the genius programme!

So how do we calculate 'cost of sale'? Various factors need to be taken into account: ad spend across google, bing and metasearch, potential booking engine commission and any official site management or license fees. These all contribute to your overall 'direct booking' cost of sale.

It's important to remember that an official website generates more than just room revenue. Dining, wedding, conference, leisure and spa - to name a few - are all ancillary revenue streams that are not taken into account when considering official website ROI. Booking.com and Expedia take their excessive commission slices on room revenue only whereas the digital marketing efforts for the official website do not consider any ancillary revenue generated when measuring against ROI. Of course why would you? It's not reflective to the whole picture as there are so many other contributing factors. So how do you balance this against the OTAs to get a fair comparison?

The best way to do this is to compare like with like so you should only be comparing the booking engine commission and the media ad spend on the high intent channels, rooms specific licence fees vs the booked room revenue. Hosting costs, ancillary marketing spend and digital marketing management fees should be considered by the hotel when looking at the overall ROI however they should be discounted when comparing booked room revenue vs OTAs booked room revenue.





# GOOGLE SHOPPING IS COMING TO TOWN

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Google is always evolving.

Whether it's a new style of video, new display formats or new bidding strategies, they like to keep us on our toes! One of the Google products that we believe is going to have a big impact in 2020 is Google Shopping Ads.

Google Shopping Ads have been growing from strength to strength over the years and Google's recent expansion of the marketplace should result in a busy 2020 for shoppers.

The concept of Google Shopping has actually been around since 2002 and was formerly known as Google Product Search, Google Products and Froggle. Google's services grew as they expanded into the hospitality market. What will these services look like in 2020 and how can hotels use them to their advantage?

## **Google Shopping**

Google Shopping are sponsored shopping ads that are powered by two platforms: Google AdWords and Google Merchant Center. They showcase related products to those that you were searching for on Google. The reason they have become so popular is because they get a lot of exposure online. They are very visual and more importantly, more people are using their mobile phones to complete purchases.

The Google Shopping Ads aren't going to become the new go-to area for booking hotel rooms on the Google search engine as this space is very much occupied by Google AdWords, Metasearch and Organic traffic, but hotels can benefit by using this platform to sell Gift Cards/Vouchers.

Google has also revamped the Google Merchant Center to make it more user friendly with clear workflows and better insights. These new features will help advertisers to manage the Gift Cards/Vouchers more efficiently and spot new opportunities for sales.

## **Lead Form Extensions**

Another new feature added to mobile ads is 'Lead Form Extensions' which we predict will be quite popular for weddings! Google lead form extensions will show beneath your search ad on mobile and tablet devices and allow a user to provide their contact information directly through your ad on the SERP. This replaces the need for a user to visit your mobile site to convert. The form displays as a 'contact us' option, which can be personalised.

Once submitted the customer will get a customised thank you page with the option to visit your site or go back to Google search. Another useful element is that form submissions can be downloaded in CSV or connected to a CRM so you can gather all the data submitted!



# IT'S SNOW JOKE – 2020 IS NEARLY HERE!

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2020 is less than a month away. Now is the time to think about how the constantly evolving hotel and tech landscape continues to change and how we should adjust our own thinking to keep up.

Technology plays a fundamental role in supporting your environment and supporting guests from pre-booking pre-stay right the way through to post-booking post-stay. The inception of the modern internet nearly 30 years ago along with the start of the proliferation of mobile devices were watershed moments for humanity. As data speeds keep up with the computing power of smart devices, more changes have been needed: having a device that runs your life is just another norm. Millennials and Gen Z have grown up in a world where “instant gratification” is part of everyday life – having things now, being constantly bombarded with news and images, almost leading to an information overload.

Hotels and available inventory have also been disrupted. Airbnb showed us that traditional hotels are not the only solution. A bubble suite in Mexico to a sheep wagon in Wyoming have produced new experiences compared to a concrete bed bank in New York. Room inventory is often secondary (if at all) to Spa and Golf resorts, as an example, as people seek new experiences to change things up. “More breaks more often” rather than two weeks in the summer are becoming the new way of holidaying. Loyalty for brands let alone loyalty for individual properties is becoming a thing of the past, in exchange for advocacy over loyalty.

From check-in to check-out, brands are thinking about guest interaction, often changing screens for faces and substituting real people for robots. Modern thinking hotels are using this as the new experience.

Imagine a hotel that has people queuing in reception to watch a robot deliver your suitcase to storage – It’s an incredible piece of engineering that is practical but also a genius new feature that drives a ton of social traffic, meaning more people will stay. Your online journey for your guest is as important as your physical property. Your online experience has to evolve to give all potential guests an individual and tailored journey from the start, to build a sense of personalisation ahead of their stay. The technology ‘key’ is personalising guest experience, the hotel hospitality ‘key’ is making your guest’s stay incredible and memorable.





# YULE BE SORRY YOU'RE NOT USING METASEARCH

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If your hotel isn't already using Metasearch to drive direct bookings, then you need to review your strategy for 2020!

## What is Metasearch?

Metasearch engines are unique search engines that display the current rates of many different hotels in a given destination. Examples of this include Google Hotel Price Ads, Trivago and TripAdvisor among others.

## What are the benefits?

The key benefit is to make the booking process more convenient for bookers, as they can compare rates at a glance from both OTA's and independent hoteliers. Today's travellers want hotel searches to be as quick and painless as possible. Unlike acquiring guests from an OTA, when you acquire a guest via Metasearch you will 'own' the customer data and be able to build more personalised relationships. Google's dominance of the travel sector is growing - their Hotel Ads platform is quickly becoming an indispensable opportunity to market to the masses.

## Here are some reasons why we recommend using Metasearch:

1. Hotels can reduce their dependence on OTA's and drive more direct bookings thereby reducing your overall cost of sale.
2. It offers a link directly to the hotel's booking engine so it funnels the user down the booking path.
3. By advertising on metasearch, hotels can take up more 'real estate' on the SERP (Search Engine Results Page) and drive additional brand awareness which is key when competing head to head with the OTAs.
4. Hotels can advertise on various channels - Google, Tripadvisor, Trivago, Kayak, Skyscanner, Wego and Bing.
5. Hotels can potentially reach new customers and markets globally.

With its real-time availability and pricing, alongside guest reviews, it combines everything travel consumers want for convenience, on platforms they're already using. Those not doing it are losing potential bookers to the OTAs. So if this is not on your to do list for 2020, you may want to check it twice!





# NO CLAUS FOR CONCERN.

## ACCESSIBILITY WILL KEEP YOU ON SANTA'S NICE LIST

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When we think about hotels and accessibility, we often think about it from a physical point of view, designated parking, wheelchair ramps, accessible toilets and lifts. We rarely think about the digital world and how ensuring your website is accessible is as important as any physical changes made within your property, to ensure universal access for all.

So how do you make a website accessible? For the most part, good practice in terms of how the website is developed, how the content is written and how images are managed will take care of most accessibility issues. Some of the key areas to look out for are:

- Ensure all images have descriptive alt tags which are read by screen readers, players and voiceover to describe elements on a webpage.
- Use headings correctly to ensure your content is well organised and easy to interpret by screen readers.
- Choose colours carefully ensuring there is sufficient contrast between foreground and background colours to ensure legibility for users with colour vision deficiencies.

But there are still other factors that need to be considered. For a website to be fully accessible, it needs to be navigable via keyboard for users who are not able to use a mouse or trackpad. Dynamic content needs to be considered to ensure its sufficiently accessible and does not trap a keyboard-only user within a page or piece of functionality.

Google Lighthouse is an audit tool for code based queries as well as conducting visual reviews to check for issues with layout and colour contrasts.

Using these best practices has resulted in one of Avvio's recent hotel websites scoring a perfect 100/100 for accessibility on desktop through Googles Lighthouse accessibility audit tool.

We will continue to keep improving our process and keep informed of current accessibility regulations and improvements.



# SLEIGHING SPEED

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Can the speed of your website really have that much of an effect on your sales? The answer is yes, it does. Google and other search engines penalise sites that load slowly – but more importantly, so do users. They stop visiting, bounce, and don't convert. You'll lose out on sales and traffic if your site loads slowly.

At Avvio, we've known about the importance of page speed for a long time and we are constantly optimising our platform to ensure that your visitors are engaging with a highly adaptive, performant and reliable booking engine.

As customers are more mobile-reliant than ever, it is important to cater for them by optimising for all device types. Our responsive booking engine specifically caters to the mobile customer. Our engineering team ensure that content and network constraints are properly considered when designing user workflows.

The impact of every code change on our platform is measured to the millisecond, and constantly monitored. Our average booking engine page takes just **0.1 seconds to load**. That's fast!

All media content is streamed from network edge locations around the globe – reducing latency for your customers wherever in the world they are. A broad range of additional tools (both internal and external) are also used to ensure the highest levels of performance and reliability of the Avvio platform.

With the ongoing investments made by Avvio in infrastructure, platform and processes, we are well positioned for the ongoing changes in customer behaviour and increased expectations from the mobile generation.

In order to maximise your website performance, consider things like the size of images that you are uploading. Many tools such as TinyPNG ([www.tinypng.com](http://www.tinypng.com)) allow you to compress images without any loss in picture quality. Smaller images result in faster websites.

Third-party trackers can also massively impact your page load times. We would recommend periodic reviews of the tools and trackers that are enabled on your website and booking engine and remove any that are no longer required.



# IT'S BEGINNING TO LOOK A LOT LIKE CHRISTMAS

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What do you associate with the festive season? Is it the smell of cinnamon in your seasonal red cup? The sound of Michael Bublé playing on every radio station? Or simply being in front of a fire on a cold winter evening?

For most, the festive season is not a 'what', it's a feeling: of excitement, of gratitude, of contentment. The hospitality industry has the ability to capture human experiences, with Christmas being the perfect time to tap into those heightened emotions. However, in order to effectively do this, you need to appropriately optimise your website to connect with potential guests.

Take the time to showcase all that your property has to offer. From gift vouchers to Christmas deals, visitors come to your website because they want ideas on what to buy for their loved ones. Keep them on-site by getting that feeling just right.

## Christmas landing pages

Help the decision-making process by creating specific Christmas landing pages, loaded with great gift ideas and seasonal imagery. Remember that most visitors consume information visually, which is why using festive imagery is vital. Include images of your finest interior spaces and your carefully decorated Christmas tree and shining lights. If you offer festive food such as mince pies, Christmas puddings and mulled wine we recommend displaying them on your website!

## Some takeaway tips:

- Be sure to include seasonal imagery, videos, graphics and colours to portray a 'Christmas' feel within your property.
- Consider bespoke elements such as animated buttons, graphic tags and snow effects.
- Promote vouchers, gift ideas, offers, dining, and any exclusive celebrations that are unique to your property.

And if you're feeling really jolly, why not create an immersive Christmas microsite which promotes all events and offerings you have running over the festive period? This will not only entice your guests, it will also encourage multi-night stays.





# CHRISTMAS TIME, INFLUENCERS ONLINE

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In a social media consumed world where 'Influencers' dominate our news feed – brands and businesses find themselves turning to 'micro' and 'macro' influencer marketing to create brand awareness while reaching a wider audience. The travel and hospitality industries can certainly reap the benefits of collaborating with the right influencers – and turn engagement into direct bookings.

## **The Right Match**

If you choose to work with Influencers ensure that you review their followers and that they are the right match for your property, brand and desired guest. It's no good working with an Insta-super-star with a gabbillion followers if those followers are 10,000miles away and all under 15! (Thus making them very unlikely to visit your €400 ADR, 60 room boutique hotel in North Carolina).

Ensure you know the worth of the media they are generating, don't pay more out than you are generating, get a detailed influencer agreement signed that lists out how many mentions, tags, story / gallery posts they are going to be creating (and that they are permanent), the theme and what is and isn't acceptable for you.

## **Strategy**

Create a community of followers, target similar influencers, brands and properties that all share the same audience. Ensure the content you are creating is appealing to them, yes you have to love what you are creating, but remember so do the people you want to engage with you.

## Flow

Ensure a continuity of content that follows a pattern, theme and structure. Create a content plan and follow it, perhaps your entire wall is abstract photos in black and white, maybe you always post movement shots, whatever your theme, ensure you stick to it. Post regularly and often and on the same days, routine is something that will assist you in the management of your social channels and campaigns. Most importantly, if you always post on a Monday, Wednesday and Friday your followers and audience know when to expect something new from you. Don't forget to bring in seasonality and hook into events, news and current affairs to get the biggest engagement.

## Engagement creates engagement

It's one of the keys to success in social - create content that opens a conversation and creates dialogue with your existing follows and those you want to follow you. Don't be divisive (unless that's your strategy) and remember every follower post and comment within or surrounding your social is a review, so reply to it! Think of your social engagement and comments as if it were someone in your lobby - you wouldn't ignore a guest who walked up and told you how stunning your atrium is, so why would you not respond just because it's on Instagram or Twitter.

## Promotion

Lastly, create an offer or some form of incentive to run inside your posts, mentions, hashtags and tie it in with any influencer collaborations you have agreed. It can be a bit deflating when you've / they've posted endless pics, videos and live feeds which may create great engagement but doesn't convert into many real bookings. Content is great, collaboration is great, targeting is great, but if you didn't give those you were reaching a reason to come visit then it was all a waste of effort.

Sometimes all it takes is a free Mince Pie or glass of Eggnog on arrival!



# TREAT YO'ELF

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Imagine the concept of going in to a supermarket, ticking off your shopping list and leaving. No extra items were added to your basket. Goals right?

Supermarkets subliminally set the tone for buyer behaviour. Those confectionary stands don't line the checkouts by accident, you did not wander through the bakery aisle or past the fresh flowers coincidentally. This is a science, known as strategic placement: the epitome of dangling the carrot.

You just have to look at the Instagram phenomena to know that the average shopper is a highly influenced individual and these retail giants know exactly what they are doing. The product placement from picking up a basket, to check out, is a finely honed art and this is not a niche strategy. In fact this has never been more relevant to what hoteliers are trying to achieve:

***Show them what they want and what they never thought they wanted!***

Avvio's booking engine has been designed with this practice in mind. The common goal is to drive ancillary spend and optimise conversion revenue. The carrot is the placement of cross selling and up selling opportunities within the booking funnel. The idea is to create a guest centric flow through subconscious sales messaging and engagement. It goes back to our 'Think like a Guest' approach. Without understanding who it is you are targeting it is impossible to pre-empt their wish list. Start with the following:

## **Wholeheartedly embrace Dynamic Packaging:**

In addition to selling rooms, our booking engine can also sell add-ons that can considerably increase the total transaction value. Avvio's Dynamic Packaging enables our customers to create extra add-ons that the guest can choose to add to their reservation at the time of booking to personalise their stay. Hotels should be incentivising guests to add on dynamic packaging at point of booking to make sure their guests have the best experience possible. As a hotel you get free choice as to what products you want to make available to add to a booking: it could be a late check-out fee, a round of golf or a spa treatment.





## Offer early check-in / late check-out:

Currently, the only way for Avvio customers to optionally offer early check-in (ECI) or late checkout (LCO) to a guest is by adding it to the reservation as an upsell. This is not ideal as you cannot control the inventory or pricing for these options on a date or room basis. A new solution has been created which enables you to configure ECI and LCO, with options to configure the price and allocation per room type. This is an easy way to maximise revenue off guests who are already checking in to your hotel whilst ensuring operational efficiency.

## Add bespoke upsells to Vouchers:

To help drive average booking value, Avvio customers now have the ability to add bespoke upsells to vouchers. The new bespoke upsells allows hotels to create a completely unique experience for the recipient! This means that you are able to complement a voucher sale with a pre-configured upsell(s), not unlike dynamic room packaging.

## ***If at first you don't succeed, try again!***

There's more to ancillary revenue than just increasing booking value. By creating unique, customisable packages you create a truly personalised booking experience for your guests.



# GIVE THE GIFT OF VOUCHERS

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We believe that vouchers are a great way to drive revenue this festive season! Follow our checklist for festive success!

## 1. Complete a Voucher Audit

Before driving traffic to the voucher booking engine, check your inventory. Have a look at which vouchers have been booked in the last year. Make sure your best-sellers are front and center on the booking engine order. Remove any that haven't performed well in the last year – they only clutter your online store front.

## 2. Update your Voucher Imagery

Next, check the voucher imagery. Does each thumbnail on the booking engine show your hotel off to the best advantage? Are you confusing potential bookers by using the same image on more than one voucher?

## 3. Check your voucher template

As most vouchers are digitally downloaded and printed, check if your template is up to date. Make a great first impression by using templates customised to your hotel's branding.

## 4. Add Voucher Sales Messaging

Sales messaging (highlighted text) makes it easier to see the benefits of each voucher at a glance.

## 5. Allow Voucher Upsells

Voucher upsells allows bookers to add more hotel services to their voucher sale. E.g. for an overnight B&B voucher, you can allow them to add dinner or flowers in the room. This gives your guest the option of a more personalised gift.





## 6. Define Voucher Groups

If your property has multiple vouchers live, voucher groups allow you to organise them by topic. These voucher groups can also be deep-linked off of different sections of the site. E.g. create a voucher group for golf vouchers, and use this specific URL on the golf section of your site and in golf advertising.

## 7. Use Discounts on your Vouchers

To encourage higher uptake on voucher sales, you can now discount voucher cost to the customer, while allowing them to receive the full value of the voucher purchased. This works for both fixed and variable value vouchers.

## 8. Drop a hint on Social Media

Allow voucher users to share specific vouchers with family and friends. Social media or mail links can be included on the vouchers, to make sharing possible with one simple click.

## 9. Design a Voucher Tag for the Home Page

Making it as easy as possible to click through to the voucher booking engine increases the likelihood of a conversion. Why not get festive by adding a Christmas themed gift voucher tag to the homepage with a design that aligns with your brand!

## 10. Drive Brand Awareness for the Vouchers

Once your website is ready, it's time to drive traffic its way. Display (image ads shown on Google partner sites) & Bumper Ads (six second ads shown on YouTube) are the most cost effective options. If you avail of digital services with Avvio, our team will show these to audiences in market for gift experiences, as well as hotel gift cards. Y



# HELP YOUR(S)ELVES

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Imagine you are away on a city break with your other half trying to find the art museum you have always wanted to visit. It's less than a mile away, but you just can't seem to find it. Do you stop and ask? Of course not! We instinctively want to figure things out for ourselves and not admit defeat! The same is increasingly true for how we want to get our support from teams and companies that we work with. Our hypothesis is backed up by considerable industry research:

According to Forrester,

***“72% of people don't want to call for support. They prefer to search in your product itself, browse your help and FAQ pages, Google or use chat.”***

Gartner also supports this change in direction, showing that self service will ***“increase from 48% to 64% over the next few years”***.

## **We asked our customers**

So with the working hypothesis that we needed to rethink the way we deliver education and support, we asked our customers (in a series of interviews in November '18) what they actually wanted.

## **They told us:**

- That they are “time poor” – Operational hotel roles are very busy
- Traditional training is easily forgotten and hard to pass on
- That they wanted more self service training online in bite-size chunks
- Available 24 x 7

With all of that in mind, we started working on the two core elements that could make a real difference: Great self-help articles that are easily available and an online chat functionality.

Our Customers now have access to an amazing online help centre at [help.avvio.com](http://help.avvio.com) with over 200 in-depth articles that explain everything from setting up a new rate to enabling the new anti-abandonment feature.

The search box at the top of the page auto-suggests as soon as you start typing so you are able to quickly see articles related to your question.

Messaging is now more popular than social media and the majority of people use it as part of their everyday lives to keep in touch with friends and family. It makes sense that this way of communicating should now extend into our work lives.

If you don't immediately see what you need you can always chat to us directly. The quickest way to do that is to use our online chat feature which is enabled and live on every page on the helpdesk. Look for the chat icon at the bottom right hand side of every page. There is a dedicated team available for you to chat with Monday-Friday 9-5.

So the next time you need help, why not take advantage of what the help desk has to offer - there is a fountain of knowledge at your fingertips!



*Merry*  
**Christmas**  
*from*



AVVIO