



Alpharooms doubles overall conversion rate and increases mobile conversion rate fourfold with responsive web design

About Alpharooms

- Discount worldwide travel, including flights, hotels, car hire, insurance
- Established 1999
- Portfolio includes 240,000 hotels and apartments
- 100 employees
- Headquarters in Sheffield
- www.alpharooms.com

Goal

- Improve conversion rates on smartphones and tablets

Approach

- Designed a new site based on responsive web design (RWD)
- Used existing site to perform A/A/B testing on new developments
- Staggered rollout according to specific user journeys
- Drove traffic with AdWords enhanced campaigns

Results

- Cut time required to price itineraries by half
 - Doubled overall conversion rate
 - Increased mobile conversion rate fourfold
 - Improved usability on all devices
 - Reduced bounce from mobile traffic 35%
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Alpharooms has been offering discount travel to worldwide destinations for 14 years. By autumn 2012 however, the company began to believe its marketing effectiveness was decaying over time. It noted that smartphones had grown to comprise about 8% and tablets about 11% of all traffic. The upcoming Christmas period would put more mobile devices into the hands of users, and industry experts were predicting traffic on tablets and smartphones to double in the subsequent 6 to 12 months. Since its conversion rates on these devices were poor, Alpharooms decided to respond to these new challenges with a new multi-screen strategy.

Addressing a multi-device audience

“It was the trend that was frightening,” says Alpharooms MD Jamie Shuker. “Our sector is very, very competitive, so doing nothing wasn’t an option for us. Getting buy-in from the rest of the board wasn’t hard – the figures don’t lie and we were missing an opportunity.” The team opted to build a new site using responsive web design (RWD). “Trying to make the old site ‘mobile-friendly’ wasn’t going to work. The code and html were a mess after five years of applying sticking plasters, so it felt like the right time to rethink our front-end.”

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While Alpharooms might have chosen to build separate sites for various devices or dynamically serve different HTML on the same URL, the brand instead opted for an RWD implementation where all site content could be layered into a single HTML file. The team felt that different sets of HTML would introduce ‘feature-drift’, where multiple sets of code and user experience would become more diverse and difficult for its in-house IT team of 25 to manage. In contrast, Alpharooms’ RWD approach promised greater efficiency in QA and maintenance.

The company used internal developers in executing the RWD build. The team continued to develop the existing site during this period, so the old site provided an opportunity to perform A/A/B testing on some changes planned for the new site. “This gave us a bit of forward visibility about whether we were on the right path,” Jamie explains.

Maximising usability across devices underpinned decisions about content throughout the project. “On mobile we skip lots of the cross-sell process and get the user straight to the pay page,” Jamie says by way of example. Minimising the data entry requirements on the pay page was a key consideration too. It took Alpharooms 11 months to go from initial planning to migrating all traffic to the new RWD site, with several user journeys launched on a staggered basis during that timeframe.

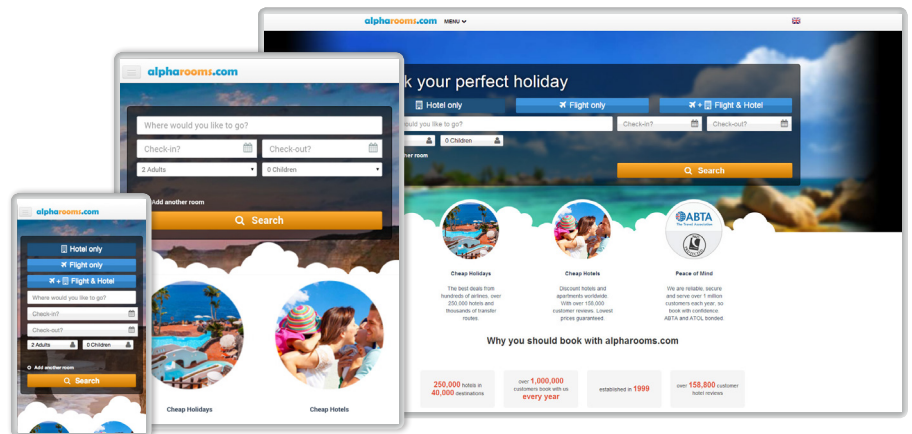
“Conversion rate was better than we expected – even whilst debugging a brand new site we made a positive ROI in week one. Conversion rate overall has about doubled on the channels we’ve tested, and the mobile conversion rate is now about four times greater.”

— Jamie Shuker, MD, Alpharooms

Marketing across all screens

With a site consumers can successfully use on mobile devices, Alpharooms has gained greater confidence in marketing to these users. AdWords enhanced campaigns is one tool that makes it easy to apply device-specific tactics. “Now we have the bid modifiers, we can ratchet up the percentage bid adjustments to the mobile channel relatively easily,” Jamie says. “We wouldn’t have been able to do this prior to the RWD site.”

Meanwhile, Google AdWords enable the company to tailor messaging directly to consumers on smartphones. “It’s very easy to use really if you’re familiar with AdWords. You can continuously test and change, and it’s a lower cost source of traffic,” he explains. “Ultimately we want more traffic at a lower CPA. Mobile being less mature and competitive than desktop gives us an edge.”



Reaping the benefits of RWD

So has all the hard work paid off? Alpharooms noticed positive results immediately. “Conversion rate was better than we expected – even whilst debugging a brand new site we made a positive ROI in week one,” Jamie reveals. “General conversion rate has improved by about 100% on channels we’ve tested so far. Mobile has been especially strong: about four times greater. The other interesting metric is that people can price an itinerary so much faster – it’s roughly half the time.”

Metrics indicate the new site has contributed to usability improvements as well. “Average time on site has dropped dramatically, from about 5:30 to about 3:30. This is good – people can now check prices and find what they want much more easily. The back button works better, there are fewer forms, you can bookmark all the URLs, and it’s just a much nicer user experience.” Mobile bounce rate has been reduced by 35%, and average pageviews are lower too. “A high average pageview per user is just kidding yourself really if the user is just on a path to make a purchase,” he explains.

The outlook holds even further promise for Alpharooms. “We can actually build new features for users and deploy them much more rapidly,” Jamie says. In terms of future mobile strategy, the plan is to increase the bid adjustment and compete on all mobile channels. Marketing budget for mobile marketing is set to increase from just 1%, in line with the brand’s audience profile. “We’d held back because we didn’t have the right tech in place. I’d expect that to move towards 10 to 15% very, very quickly.”

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