

Leading hotel company uses Google Maps to enhance customers' travel planning experience



“We had a 35 percent increase in conversion rates for our United Kingdom and Denmark sites immediately after launching Google Maps.”

Steve Sullivan
Manager of Web Reservations



InterContinental Hotels Group

ABOUT GOOGLE MAPS API PREMIER

By adding Google Maps to your website, your business can help shoppers find stores or generate new leads. Combining company data with Google Maps provides relevant information that will keep your customers coming back. Even on the busiest of websites, Google Maps provides fast, relevant results within a familiar, easy-to-use interface.

For more information, visit www.google.com/enterprise/maps

Business

With a worldwide portfolio of more than 4,000 hotels in nearly 100 countries and territories worldwide, InterContinental Hotels Group (IHG), the world's largest hotel group by number of rooms, has been welcoming international travelers for more than 60 years. The company's hotels span seven well-recognized and respected brands: InterContinental® Hotels & Resorts, Crowne Plaza® Hotels & Resorts, Holiday Inn® Hotels and Resorts, Holiday Inn Express®, Staybridge Suites®, Candlewood Suites® and Hotel Indigo®.

The company's InterContinental Hotels & Resorts brand, has been the international hotel brand of choice for foreign dignitaries, heads of state, royalty, rock stars, celebrities and those seeking authentic and enriching experiences. The world's first truly global hotel brand with over 60 years of insight, InterContinental Hotels & Resorts has played host to such well-known people as George V and Queen Mary, Prince Rainier and Princess Grace, Ava Gardner, Nat King Cole, Imelda Marcos, Margaret Thatcher, Louis Armstrong, President and Mrs. Reagan, President Chirac and Prince William – to name just a few.

Challenge

In the travel and tourism business, location is often one of the primary factors in customers' purchasing decision. Prospective guests want to know if a hotel is convenient to an airport, near where they will be conducting all-important business meetings, or located in the part of town where they want to go sight-seeing or shopping.

The screenshot shows the IHG website's reservation interface. At the top, there is a banner for "No Booking Fees" and a "Book Online or Call: 1 877 424 2449" button. Below this is the "Reservation Desk" header with navigation links for "Home", "Start Over", and "Help". The main content area is titled "Search Results for Miami, FL, United States" and includes a search radius of 50 miles. On the left, there is a "Search Summary" section for "Miami, FL, United States" with options to "Add City To Favorites" and "Modify Search Results". The "Modify Search Results" section lists various amenities like "Indoor Pool", "Beach Access", and "Breakfast Included" with checkboxes. At the bottom left, it says "Only show these hotel brands:". The right side of the page features a "Hotels on Map" section with a map of Miami showing several hotel locations marked with red pins. A callout box for "MIAMI 100 CHOPIN PLAZA" is visible, showing a photo of the hotel and its address: "MIAMI, FL 33131, UNITED STATES".

For several years, IHG has offered mapping-enabled hotel locators on its sites, including IHG.com and HolidayInn.com, to help guide guests to their preferred hotel. The initial mapping solution, however, was lacking in key functionality. “Our previous maps were static. Customers couldn’t effectively pan or drag them to obtain the detail they needed. Plus, the maps just didn’t look very attractive in all instances,” recalls Manager of Web Reservations Steve Sullivan. “We needed a better more effective way to enhance our customers’ experience.”

Solution

Sullivan began searching for a mapping solution that was more intuitive and interactive – one that would provide data coverage for IHG’s hotels around the world. His search ended with Google Maps API Premier. The Google Maps API enabled the company to add easy-to-use interactive maps to its public websites worldwide, enhancing the customer experience by helping them to more quickly and easily find the IHG hotel that best meets their needs.

The company also used the Google Maps API to implement a geocoding system on InterContinental.com that enables customers to search based on the name of a place of interest or tourist attraction to find a nearby hotel. A guest could search on The Smithsonian, for example, and immediately determine that the Willard InterContinental Washington D.C. is located nearby.

Results

Sullivan notes that, despite IHG’s rather complex back-end systems, Google Maps API Premier was easy to implement. Now, customers visiting IHG’s sites can drag maps to see what else is located in the vicinity or click on markers to obtain hotel details like street addresses and driving directions. Customer and company reactions to the Google solution have been effusive. “We’ve received very positive feedback, especially from our regions and from our various brands since switching to Google Maps,” says Sullivan. “We have even gotten positive comments on our online forum from members of our loyalty program, Priority Club® Rewards.”

Customers are staying an average of one minute longer on search results pages that have maps. Sullivan and his team gather statistics on how many people are investigating hotels by dragging a map or clicking on a marker representing an IHG hotel. Sullivan reports that about a million people each month interact with the maps, 75 percent of whom click on a marker. “It’s remarkable how many maps get loaded and how many people interact with them in some way,” Sullivan says. “Clearly, Google Maps is useful and informative for our customers.”

The bottom line for IHG, however, is how often people book hotel stays after interacting with a map. Sullivan reports that conversions have increased since implementing Google Maps – visitors to the site are 10 percent more likely to book a stay if they click on a marker than those who do not. “We had a 35 percent increase in conversion rates for our United Kingdom and Denmark sites immediately after launching Google Maps in spring of this year,” recalls Sullivan.

Looking to the future, Sullivan and his team plan continued innovations like adding Google Street View and even virtual tours of hotels to the maps. As they add new functionality, Google technology will continue to be incorporated into our technology offerings. “Google just keeps innovating all the time and staying many steps ahead of its competitors,” says Sullivan. “It’s a business advantage to use and incorporate Google technology.”

