

Going the extra mile: Pamela Lowther, of Lal Chambris, offers yoga, massage and meditation to her guests

Golden opportunity

IF YOU REALLY WANT YOUR PROPERTY TO STAND OUT FROM THE COMPETITION, IT PAYS TO GO THE EXTRA MILE, SAYS GLYNIS SHAW

Your online listing with a host website establishes the basis for marketing a holiday property in France. With this in place, there are many extra opportunities both to get your property noticed and to give it a competitive edge.

In my view, advanced marketing embraces three main areas. First, there are the extras you offer holidaymakers to enhance their experience, such as activities, meals and excursions. Second are the techniques that make your property stand out on your host website and these include use of video, special offers, themed listings and featured properties. Third is publicity through editorial news items or features in print or online publications. What do these options involve and how can they work for you as an owner?

ADDED EXTRAS

Activity holidays have become very popular among visitors to France, many of whom take several breaks a year and are looking for a new experience each time. Fortunately, the country itself has much to

offer lovers of sport, the great outdoors, food, wine, culture and history, giving you opportunities to arrange activities locally.

You might pick one activity that interests you and put together an appealing programme based on local knowledge and research. Or, if you have a particular talent,

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then pass it on to your guests with classes in arts and crafts, French language, sports, photography or something similar.

Relaxation and personal growth holidays are big these days, so qualified therapists can put their skills to good use. If you don't have appropriate skills yourself, then you

could bring in a teacher or therapist and target specific markets by sending information to specialist groups, journals and websites.

Gite owners living on site can offer meals as an extra – not only on arrival but during their guests' stay. If you run multiple properties and are present on site, then arrange a themed evening like wine tasting or a barbecue. This makes a nice social occasion and can be a money-earner.

Arrange excursions to local places of interest, either giving an itinerary, information and entrance tickets or acting as a personal guide. Outings to a local restaurant with live music or a vineyard might allow you to get a special deal from the owner with you yourself perhaps benefiting from a commission, a supply of wine or free meals.

Really sell your sports, activities or excursions on your online property listing, with full descriptions and perhaps photographs of the experience – and if your host site has an activity holidays page, then be sure that you are included. Finally,

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make certain that you can deliver exactly what you promise.

VIDEO FOOTAGE

A picture may be worth a thousand words but video is even more live, immediate and convincing. We've been offering owners the chance to display a professionally edited two-minute video of their properties for about three years and the feedback is always positive. Holidaymakers love getting a complete feel for what's on offer and imagining themselves already there encourages them to book quickly with confidence. As expectations continue to rise, video can be a 'deal clincher'.

Modern digital cameras make video easy to shoot and, using simple guidelines, on light conditions and camera angles make it something that you can do yourself to enhance your property presentation. It gives you a chance to show not only the house or apartment interior but also the approach to it, the immediate setting and the local landscape and town – in other words, the full holiday experience.

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CASE STUDY



Pamela Lowther

Twelve years ago Pamela Lowther bought Lei Chambris, a rose-washed cottage near Villecroze in the Var department of Provence, with the dream of creating the feel of a retreat but with independent self-catering accommodation. Now, she has a studio, apartment, cottage and log cabin, which together accommodate 10 people in a tranquil setting of outstanding beauty and natural waters.

"People are so stressed these days," says Pamela. "It's important for them to enjoy a contrast to everyday life, relax and reconnect with the peace of nature." To enhance this opportunity at Lei Chambris, Pamela offers yoga, meditation and massage to her guests. "Most guests book when reserving their accommodation, which makes it easier to organise. Others decide on the spur of the moment and I can arrange that too."

Around half Pamela's guests book massage and she gets a lot of repeat business. This is aided by her caring attitude and the trouble she takes to find out what visitors want to do; providing a service that includes information on local swimming and watersports, packed lunches for walks and booking horse riding or quad biking. She even invites small groups of visitors to dinner as her surprise guests during their stay, combining her genuine love of people with good marketing.

Lei Chambris is ID 3547 at www.frenchconnections.co.uk



CASESTUDY

MAIN FEATURE

It is often worth paying a small extra to be included in a specialist listing on your host website. This might be a Christmas and New Year seasonal section, highlighting properties open for the festive period, or a list of those offering long winter lets. In this way you can target enquiries for this market and be quickly and easily found.

Your host site may offer the opportunity to post a photograph and strapline for your property on the home page or another popular editorial page within the site. These featured property slots are virtually guaranteed to grab visitors' attention, especially if you use a really good photo to entice that crucial click.

Owners are also reporting a good response to being featured in email newsletters, sent regularly to thousands of subscribers who have previously booked or enquired through the site. This is particularly true if the email news content has a regional theme, inviting visitors to discover your part of France.

SPECIAL OFFERS

A useful marketing tool for owners – and a smart response to the current demand for excellent value – is the special offer. This is another way to get noticed, as most listing sites have dedicated offers pages and flag offers up on the property advertisement. Usability tests show that many browsers search special offer properties first – and some will look only at these listings.

Special offers are useful for getting early bookings if you need certainty for the coming season, attracting business in quiet months and selling that odd week that remains empty during peak times. In the present market, discounts are the most convincing incentive – typically between 10 and 25%. Other options are prices fixed in sterling when exchange rates are unfavourable or offering a fixed exchange rate.

EDITORIAL PUBLICITY

Specialist magazines, newspaper travel pages, journalists and travel websites all need editorial material and look for new ideas and angles. Sometimes a journalist will want to visit to research their feature and it is customary to offer accommodation free of charge in return for publicity that is specifically agreed in advance.

Your host website may have a PR department looking for stories to catch the attention of the press and media. It is a good idea to send them some information about your property, highlighting unique or unusual features, activities or offers. Photographs for publication need to be 'high resolution' – 300dpi, not reduced for use on the internet – so it pays to keep a selection of attractive images available. ■

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Josette Cook

Josette Cook's *maison de maître*, Le Moulin des Agrilles, is set among the vineyards of Charente-Maritime, close to Lagnac. Strong visual marketing is essential for a property that combines the comforts of modern living with the charm of an elegant French house and boasts eight bedrooms in seven acres. Josette has responded to this challenge with a video display that takes the viewer on a virtual journey from the surrounding vineyards, along the drive and on a tour of the house, terrace and garden.

"Video is a great facility," explains Josette. "A friend who's a good photographer came over to take the footage and now we renew the display on our listing every year. Guests love getting such a clear feel for the place when they're deciding on their holiday – one recently allocated rooms to all the members of his party when booking because he could see from the video which would suit them best."

Josette and husband Rob will soon remake the video to show improvements to the house and promote another form of advanced marketing – bookings for events such as weddings, anniversaries and conferences.

Le Moulin des Agrilles, ID 3191 at www.frenchconnections.co.uk



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