

MASTERING Vacation Rental Marketing



**Behind the
Doors of
Vacation
Rental
Marketing
Mastery**

BUILD UP YOUR BOOKINGS

Conrad O'Connell

MASTERING Vacation Rental Marketing

**Lessons learned from over
\$50 million in direct bookings**

Conrad O'Connell

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Dear vacation rental manager,

Thank you, first and foremost, for picking up this book. I don't take your time for granted; I know there are a hundred other things vying for your attention in your vacation rental business right now.

But I think you'll find it to be worth your time. Within these pages, you'll learn how to create truly world-class vacation rental marketing and take greater control of your brand and future of your business.

Why the confidence? Because I've spent the last eight years working on nothing but this exact thing. I've seen failures. I've seen successes. And I've been able to observe what works.

Yours in hospitality,

Conrad O'Connell | Founder of BuildUp Bookings

P.S. Don't miss the free resources at www.vrmarketingbook.com

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Welcome To The Book

Welcome to Mastering Vacation Rental Marketing: Lessons Learned From \$50,000,000 in Direct Bookings.

I must share: the subtitle of this book is not entirely true.

I've not overseen \$50,000,000 in direct bookings.

Since 2016, my clients have actually seen more. A lot more. Almost double that amount, in fact.

But I wasn't sure you'd trust me *and* I wasn't sure you'd pick this up if you thought this was only for giant vacation rental managers with six or seven-zero revenue.

It's not.

This book is for *any* vacation rental manager, host or STR professional that wants to master their own vacation rental marketing.

It's divided into boxing-ring inspired sections—from Featherweight to Super Heavyweight—that correspond to different phases of the journey.

Each section features case studies, actionable tips, and a helpful mapping of where you are, and where you can go.

I promise I won't peddle the latest "hacks" of OTAs (online travel agencies, a.k.a listing sites) like Airbnb, Vrbo, or Booking.com. My focus is to help you build a marketing machine and a memorable brand that drives repeat and referral business your way, no matter what the OTA algorithms are up to today.

(As I was writing this book, in fact, Airbnb released major updates that hurt the performance of many hosts on Airbnb. Chasing the OTAs is going to consume far too much of your time if you let it!)

Instead, I want to help you create a hospitality brand that performs, even when the sands are shifting under the feet of the industry.

I won't recommend that you remove your properties from the OTAs. Far from it. But I do want you to see that OTA bookings are a "nice to have" and *not* a crutch that you rely on for all (or even most) of your bookings.

Keep reading if you want to build your skills in the highest-performing marketing channels that give you more control of your business—search, social and email—and set up those channels to perform for the long haul.

How This Book Works

For this book to be worth your time, I have to hold up on my end of the bargain. I intend to be as transparent as I can be, sharing almost everything that's worked in my experience in driving direct bookings (the only exception being that I must anonymise some of my clients' data to protect their privacy).

Also note that in each chapter, I ask questions that help you consider your stage in the game. Knowing where you stand is important to help slot you into the right path for improving your marketing and increasing revenue.

No matter where you are right now.

Who This Book is NOT For

Building traffic and drawing attention to your vacation rental business isn't easy. A few posts on social media and a landing page may be a solid starting point, but it's not enough to master vacation rental marketing and earn exponential traffic and bookings.

Mastery will require study, time, effort, attention and dedication. Many hosts and property managers do not make that time. These so-called "average Joes" (or "Janes") will also be reliant on the large OTAs to send them bookings.

If you view your marketing as an afterthought, or less important than day-to-day operations, then this book may not be right for you.

But if you see the value in working on your business rather than just in it, and want to understand what's needed to get exemplary results for all your efforts, then this book *is* for you.

Here's What You're Going To Learn

Tier 1: Figuring Out Your Starting Point

Section 2: Welcome To The Ring – You're a Featherweight

Section 3: Lightweight – Phase II of Vacation Rental Business

Section 4: Middleweight – Phase III of Vacation Rental Business

Section 5: Heavyweight – Phase IIII of Vacation Rental Business

Section 6: The Super Heavyweight Round – Phase V of Vacation Rental Business

Section 7: Real Talk. No Shortcuts.

Mastering Vacation Rental Marketing:

Lessons learned from over \$50 million in direct bookings

What's Your Starting Point?

You may have activated location services on your phone... but do you have them activated for your business?

Here's what I mean.

Whenever you use a GPS app, you must allow it to access your current location. It's impossible to get an accurate roadmap without knowing where you are in relation to the endpoint. The same is true when it comes to scaling your business to reach your goals.

All too often, vacation rental business owners spend so much time visualizing the endgame they miss the vital step of evaluating their starting point—essential for accurately mapping the next steps!

I'll be the first to admit, focusing on results is a lot more appealing than taking a moment to look at where you currently stand. It also calls for a lot of introspection, which can be difficult if you're working overtime to get 5-star reviews while being chained to your inbox and the business of turnovers.

The problem here is that it could be delaying your path to financial freedom and the benefits that come with working in hospitality.

So let's take a good look at where you are.

Performing A Marketing SWOT

Progress is made where progress is measured.

~ Jack LaLanne

First, a quick note: SWOT audit is a very powerful tool—when used correctly. But if you are dishonest (even with yourself!) about the true weaknesses and threats your vacation rental company faces...then the SWOT analysis is worse than useless. It could actually hurt your business. It's time for clear-eyed evaluation, here.

What's a Marketing SWOT Audit?

The term SWOT is an acronym for **Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, and Threats**.

This exercise will help you examine your short-term rental business from the inside out, by asking key questions and revealing relevant data for each of the above categories.

A thorough audit, conducted with complete transparency, will help you, as the manager or owner of the vacation rental company, identify areas that need improvement and uncover new opportunities.

At the end of the audit process, you'll be left with a clearer picture of your vacation rental business and insights on how to leverage areas like marketing and pricing for maximum return.

So let's get started. Open a Google doc or pull out a pen and paper and get ready to answer some questions.

Key SWOT Analysis Questions & Examples

Strengths

Strengths are the positive attributes of your business that can be leveraged to give you an edge in the marketplace.

They include internal factors such as the skills, resources, and capabilities of you and your team, as well as the selling points of your properties.

1. **What are our unique selling points?**

Vacation rentals provide guests with many unique selling points, from amenities like private beach access and swimming pools to cozy indoor living areas with comfortable furnishings and lots of space for gathering. Plus, as a vacation rental owner/manager, you can be as creative as you want in offering a unique experience. Clarifying these benefits and taking stock of them will be critical in building a strong foundation for your marketing plan.

2. **What does our company do better than any other company?**

The answer can very often be found in your reviews. Examine your reviews and look for any patterns and/or repeated praise. You may find that guests are excited about your location and proximity to a specific venue, or maybe the fabulous kitchen, or how responsive you are to requests. Make note of what you're doing well and, where applicable, who on your team should get credit for these strengths.

3. **What unique resources does our company have that other vacation rental companies do not?**

Start first with **your people**. This portion of the analysis is where you really zero in on the strengths that make your team crucial to your success. If you don't find your team to be crucial to your success, or don't have a team yet... then mark it down as an opportunity to fill in your experience and knowledge gaps.

Also identify everything else your company has going for it, such as location, design, or any other areas of excellence.

4. **What brand equity have I built up?**

Brand equity is the value that you've built for your business. For example, do past guests **know**, **like**, and **trust** you to deliver a great vacation experience? Are your brand name and logo recognizable? Likewise, consider the relationship you've built with your homeowners. Is your brand strong enough to garner loyalty, so that property owners are willing to stick with you, even through relentless marketing from large, national-brand property managers?

Before putting pen to paper on a marketing strategy, these crucial questions help you understand your brand's value and see where you can increase your brand equity and maintain market share in an ever-changing industry.

5. **What marketing assets do I already have, or can access today?**

There are a lot of moving pieces in today's marketing landscape. It's easy for overwhelm to set in. But if you take the time to inventory what you already have, you may be surprised that you have enough to kick start your efforts in a more intentional way.

For example, do you have a bank of property photos that you haven't used, or ones you can repurpose? Do you have videos or a direct booking website already earning a high conversion rate on traffic?

Make a list of these resources, pat yourself on the back, and start to think about how you can maximize them.

Weaknesses

Ready to start being honest? Here's where we talk about the shortcomings that might be hindering your vacation rental business.

Leave no stone unturned, here. Examine your organizational and operational processes, including technology, skill sets, and even role definitions. Are any of these outdated or lagging behind?

Because we're focusing on marketing, you'll also want to take a good look at your branding to see if you've created a memorable brand that resonates with guests, while clearly communicating what you have to offer.

And then there's your online presence. Ask yourself how consistent you've been with creating new content, and whether or not you're engaging with potential guests. Staying in the game means getting this right and tweaking as needed...because, as we know, the online world is constantly updating. You're going to need a plan.

1. **In what areas do I or my team find the most frustration?**

This is where you get to write out what is frustrating about your business. Does it take too long to book a guest? Are you tired of updating calendars and keeping your listings fresh? Or is keeping up with turnovers and managing third-party vendors burning you out?

Whatever it is that's getting under your skin but you aren't acknowledging (until now), this is your chance to pull the curtain back and shine a light on it. In the end, you'll be glad you did.

2. **What are our guests saying about us?**

Just as it's essential to look at the positive things guests have to say about you, it's equally (if not more) important to take a look at any negative feedback.

If you've received a bad review, I'm sure you've noted that guest's complaint in detail. But it's also essential to be tuned into any micro-complaints in *good* reviews that might have escaped your notice.

Also note what guests communicate during their stay. For example, if you receive an email saying something like "I've been trying to get in touch with you," or you get frequent requests for more towels, these note places to improve. If not attended to, little things can stop

guests from recommending you to others, or coming back as repeat guests. Even if they don't mention it in a formal review.

Proactively addressing these micro-complaints can also help you avoid having these grievances show up in a poor review down the road. Meeting a need before it is even realized goes a *long* way in hospitality.

3. **What areas of the business do I feel least confident about?**

List the areas of your business where you feel less-than-capable. Perhaps you're a huge people person, but not so great at interpreting your numbers.

That's okay to admit! After all, no one is great at everything. You can use this information to see where you need help and to determine if anyone on your team has strengths in these areas, or if there's a contractor or freelancer who might be able to assist you.

Or, maybe it's something you could be great at; you just need to figure out the process or create the space in your calendar to learn it.

4. **Are my properties truly unique?**

We've all read enough OTA listings to know that you're likely to find the word "unique" somewhere in the property description.

How true is that, though?

Guests are savvy and can easily see past cliches. Be specific about what makes your property unique. This will help make your property the obvious choice compared to other vacation rentals that *claim* to be distinct, but don't have the substance to back it up.

When you take stock of what makes you truly different, you can compare that to your competition and get a clearer picture of how to market each property effectively, or decide what needs to change.

5. **What geographic weaknesses do I have?**

Being geographically removed from your properties, for example, can put you at a disadvantage. You don't have the same opportunity to drop by and inspect the property, or to quickly address issues during a guest's stay, having to rely instead upon third-party vendors.

Being a remote host/manager also doesn't allow for face-to-face interactions, which build a rapport with guests and turn them into fans of your brand.

Or maybe you are located in a remote area. It's true that for many guests, this is also a selling point. However, it can still be challenging to get cleaners and maintenance out to the property quickly and can deter some potential guests who look for places with amenities like public transportation and restaurant options nearby.

6. **Is my brand ID weak?**

Having a weak brand identity simply means that your brand is lacking a clear, consistent message and look that makes you easy to remember.

At this stage of the audit, get granular and identify what it is about your brand that might be forgettable. For instance, maybe you are using a domain name like www.vacationrentalcompany.net instead of a strong and original brand name that's "sticky" for potential guests (or potential homeowners looking for a property manager).

Opportunities

Okay, that's it for the tough stuff. Next: opportunities.

Opportunities are external factors that can help you gain an advantage in the marketplace. They include trends, technologies, and changes in consumer behavior which can present new ways to reach potential customers and retain existing ones.

By assessing these opportunities, you can identify areas with untapped potential and develop strategies that capitalize on them.

1. **What is the specific market I serve?**

Take a look at the demographic that is repeatedly renting out your property and try to spot patterns.

Are you finding that executives inquire when they're in town for business, or do you more often get families? Dog owners?

Maybe it's a mix of all of the above (it often is), but consider whether one demographic/type of traveler is choosing you more frequently than others.

Next, consider what amenities specifically serve that demographic (comfy desk chair, fenced yard for the pup). Does your property have these? If so, are you communicating them effectively in your marketing?

If the answer is "no" to one or both questions, you've found an area of opportunity.

2. **What are the major trends currently affecting the vacation rental market?**

Over the last three years, we've seen significant shifts in how people travel, like the explosion of employees who not only have the flexibility to work from home, but to work from *anywhere*.

This has opened up a huge opportunity for vacation rentalists who can create exceptional workspaces at their properties, and has led to cascading trends, like more and more people traveling with their pets.

Who knows what other changes are on the horizon!

In short, be sure to keep updated on what's going on with and in your market.

(Hilton Hotels and Resorts, n.d.)

3. What specific problems do my ideal guests have that our brand/property can solve to make their experience better?

Try to be specific about the problem + solution set. For example, maybe your target guests have small children, who have a tendency to get into everything... which means the parents can never fully relax into their vacation.

Your solution could be that your home has been baby and toddler-proofed, so that parents can check-in, relax, and not worry about moving vases up higher or little fingers touching electrical sockets.

Or, maybe you host international guests, who often arrive exhausted and jet-lagged. Offer eye masks and blackout curtains so they can nap (some strong coffee or tea for when they wake up wouldn't hurt, either!).

You can now begin reframing guest headaches into opportunities to increase your appeal. Even minor tweaks can make a big difference.

Threats

A marketing analysis wouldn't be complete without looking at what the possible or very real threats are to your efforts.

Threats can be external, such as changing consumer preferences and economic downturns, or internal, such as a lack of motivation to build the brand within your team.

Considering your company's specific potential threats means you'll be able to develop strategies that either reduce or remove them altogether.

Here are some questions to get you started in identifying those threats:

1. **Are there any local regulations or government rules that could affect my vacation rental business?**

You may already be well aware of the local regulations in your area for managing or owning a vacation rental.

In that case, it's important to understand how those regulations affect your business and the best strategy to maximize your returns with those regulations in play.

If you aren't sure about regulations or their specifics, I highly recommend visiting your city's website to do a search or making a call to the township to get detailed information. This helps you avoid fines—or worse.

Some common vacation rental regulations are:

- Requiring a license to operate
- Length-of-stay requirements, i.e. all stays must be for 30 days or more
- A limit to the number of short-term rentals you are permitted to own

2. **What kind of insurance coverage do I have (or need) for my vacation rental property?**

Insurance is essential to protect your business from unforeseen risks, financial losses, and other liabilities.

Vacation rental-specific insurance policies (as opposed to general homeowners policies, which often fall short) provide coverage in the event of an accident, loss of income, or damage caused by guests.

They can also help protect an owner's personal assets, such as

furniture and appliances, as well as the rental property itself.

As an integral part of running a successful vacation rental business, these insurance costs should be factored into your SWOT Analysis so that you can confidently move forward.

3. What is my plan for off-peak seasons?

An off-season plan for your vacation rental property is one of the key indicators that distinguishes a good VR business from a *great* one.

Strategies can range from offering discounts and promotions, to diversifying income sources and utilizing new online marketing channels. (More on that later in this book.)

With a well-thought-out plan in place, you can actually use the off-season for some much-needed relaxation, instead of stressing about where the revenue will come from.

4. Are we able to consistently update our online marketing to keep things fresh (and search algorithms happy)?

Starts and stops are a persistent problem with vacation rental owners and managers when it comes to online marketing efforts, which is entirely understandable!

Creating a consistent churn of content for listing sites, blogs, social media, websites, etc. is *hard*. To do all of this effectively, you'll need a plan.

Ideally, you have a member of your team who excels at content creation for your online marketing. But if you don't... hang in there. The following chapters will address measurable strategies and tactics to help you achieve results.

5. Do any of my local competitors have stronger branding or better-performing marketing assets?

Are other vacation rental companies more well-known, locally? Do they appear ahead of you in search results on Google?

Knowing this is valuable as you start crystallizing solid goals for your marketing plan.

6. Do I have a significant national competitor in my market?

National vacation property management companies have massive marketing budgets that can threaten your business.

Not to mention the willingness to lose money in the short term to gain a larger market share in the future. They may even go as far as to promise vacation rental owners guaranteed revenue. That's a heck of a threat!

Take stock of any of these big players in your area, and make a plan for retaining property owners and attracting new ones. Maybe you're able to give white-glove service to your owners and take better care of guests than the bigger companies, for example.

7. How is my screening process (or lack thereof) working?

Parties. Property Damage. Illegal Activity. How do you know if you've rented to stellar guests or problematic ones? When guest screening is not done correctly, you may be left with angry neighbors and extensive cleaning and maintenance fees. A quick search in Google reveals many horror stories of vacation rental owners renting to "bad guests."

Screening is a major tool in avoiding this kind of headache. To perform a background check, you'll need a valid first and last name as well as a date of birth. From there, you can submit the information to a reputable company that provides background check services. It's essential for you to choose a company that has a proven history of fair and accurate background checks.

Prominent online travel agencies offering background checks to hosts are far from perfect, and have made errors like confusing two people with the same name, or denying a perfectly fine guest the ability to rent a space due to a minor infraction that happened years ago.

Hilton Hotels and Resorts. n.d. "Pet-Friendly Hotels – Book Top Dog & Cat-Friendly Hotels with Hilton." Hilton. Accessed February 1, 2023. <https://www.hilton.com/en/pet-friendly/>.

USA Today and Katie Wedell. 2022. "Airbnb draws ire over ban on customers with criminal records." USA Today. <https://www.usatoday.com/story/travel/2022/12/11/airbnb-bans-criminal-background-checks/10751848002/>.

Bonus: My Tips For Screening Guests

1. **Adjust your booking requirements** on the OTAs to require a verification process. Sites like Vrbo, Booking.com, and Airbnb will have different processes for this.
2. **Ask potential guests good questions**, like what brings them to the area, who they'll be traveling with, and where they're coming from.

Having an inquisitive attitude will also make hosting easier. You'll be able to discover if they're celebrating a milestone... or arriving for a less-than-celebratory occasion, like a funeral or a visit to an ill family member.

Learning details like this will give you insight into what type of items to include in a welcome basket or what area recommendations would be appropriate.

3. **Do a quick social search.** If you have enough information to find the guest on social media, you can check their Facebook, Instagram, or LinkedIn to get a more complete picture of who they

are and if they're a good fit for your property.

4. **Use an online background check tool.** If it isn't in your budget yet to use a background check service, a quick online search will help you perform your *own* background check that could potentially help you dodge a "bad guest." It's not as foolproof as a full background check, but it's better than nothing.
5. **Read reviews.** Finally, don't forget to read the reviews of guests that sites like Airbnb provide to document previous hosts' experiences with that specific guest.

Next, when it comes to screening, you best believe that guests are also screening *you*. Guests are more market savvy than ever and won't make decisions based solely on an aesthetically pleasing Instagram account. They'll want to dive into any reviews they can find, including on Google, social media, and the OTAs.

That's why having a review strategy component to your marketing is a vital piece of the puzzle. I'll cover that in-depth later in this book.

Visit www.vrmarketingbook.com to download a complete guide to conducting an effective SWOT Audit.

Now Hold On Just a Second . . .

An interesting phenomenon happens when you execute a Marketing SWOT audit. You start feeling the warm fuzzies you got when you first started out—and that itch to hit the pavement and make improvements sets in. Therein lies the trap.

What trap is that, you ask?

It's the "*Tactic vs. Strategy Trap*."

Tactic vs. Strategy

These two may sound like the same thing, but there's an important distinction.

A **strategy** is a multi-step plan of action designed to achieve a long-term or *overall* aim. **Tactics** are the more short-term means of getting there—the individual campaigns or actions you take along the way.

These tactics could include promotions, email campaigns, website optimization campaigns, or using influencers on social media platforms.

Tactics are great, but what they *aren't* is a strategy.

A **strategy** requires a more comprehensive, zoomed-out approach, focusing on your target guests, long-term goals, a plan of action, and a way to measure the results.

Your strategy is also more holistic than a tactic and will consider resources, positioning, pricing, product offers, and promotions.

The problem with executing short-term **tactics** to address issues that popped up during your audit is that, without an overall **strategy**, you may lose focus.

Without the necessary processes and protocols in place to maintain consistency, burnout will inevitably set in.

Let's stop that cycle dead in its tracks and start strategizing.

Welcome To The Ring

Welcome to the ring, friend. Starting a vacation rental business can be both exhilarating and intimidating!

It's an exciting opportunity to build something on your own, while also taking on the challenge of smart scaling in order to reach a comfortable balance between hard work and financial reward.

When most of us start out, we're fuelled by dreams (and coffee), and we're barely tracking our hours, because if we did... we'd get depressed.

Instead of watching the clock, we're busy learning as much as we can about the industry. But, after the fatigue sets in (and we physically can't consume any more coffee), trying to get your business off the ground can feel like jumping off a cliff and building an airplane on the way down.

Sometimes you just have to go for it, right?

The purpose of this chapter is to help you make the most of this phase and avoid burnout, so you can progress to the next level.

By the end of this chapter, you'll have clarity on whether, in fact, you are in Phase 1... and how to move forward so you're well-positioned for growth when it comes time to graduate to your next "weight class."

We'll cover topics such as your ideal guest persona, how to write a compelling property description, and setting up your social pages.

Follow these steps closely and you'll have a better shot of achieving long-term success with your vacation rental business!

Skim, Don't Skip

If you are at a more advanced level in the industry, there may be elements of the first stage that you know like the back of your hand.

Still, in my experience working with property management companies, even the biggest contenders can miss important building blocks that can support their marketing strategy and take their business even further.

For that reason, my advice is to *not* skip over the sections of this book detailing stages that you think you've already cleared. Skim if you must, but don't skip... you never know what pieces you're missing that could help unlock new revenue streams and growth!

For example, I recently worked with a company who maintains a significant portfolio across multiple locations (they're certainly not Featherweight anymore!). And yet, they didn't have any strategy or infrastructure for email marketing.

That meant they were leaving bookings and money on the table!

We opened up an automated email marketing account and integrated it with their property management software and direct booking site. This move gave them a revenue boost they didn't even know they were missing.

Featherweight - Phase I Vacation Rental Businesses

Am I a Featherweight?

If your yearly gross booking revenue is anywhere from \$0 to \$200,000 annually, you find yourself in "The Featherweight" class. This is a scrappy stage and can feel a lot like you've entered vacation rental training camp.

As a Featherweight just entering the game, or looking to level up, this stage requires a lot of hustle as you figure out who your competition is, what your best moves are, and how to stay focused.

Common Problems Facing Phase I Vacation Rental Businesses

Featherweight vacation rental businesses face several challenges as they aim to scale and grow.

First, you're almost entirely at the mercy of the OTAs in terms of revenue and bookings.

Has Airbnb had a slow year? I guess bookings are down...

It can feel a lot like being a small fish caught in an aggressive tide, carried along wherever the current takes you, with little control over what happens next. The mantra to "just keep swimming" will definitely get tired after a year or two in that tide.

But, it's not just being at the mercy of OTAs that plagues Phase 1 Featherweight operations.

Typically, Phase I businesses have:

- No brand awareness or defined brand that guests search for
- No property management software platform (Tech stack? What's that?!)
- No direct booking site
- Minimal or nonexistent presence on social media
- A small email list (under 500 or so) and no single source of truth for booking data

To gain the traction you need and be able to weather the waves that come your way with any sense of control, you should work to have these elements working efficiently.

Where should I start?

Create your ideal guest persona

Creating a guest persona means understanding who your customers are and what they want. To properly define your perfect guest, determine their age (roughly), interests, needs, and reasons for travel to ensure your business meets their expectations.

Clearly understanding your target customers will also help you develop marketing strategies to attract those guests, as well as inform your decisions about pricing, amenities, and other factors to help you scale more efficiently.

In order to create your guest persona, you should also take some time to find out who your competitors market to, as well as their pricing strategy, amenities, reviews, etc. This helps you to see what they're doing that you're not, and to identify gaps in the market that you could fill with your own brand.

The more in-depth you go, the better picture you'll have of how to attract guests that are a great fit for you and your brand, and a greater understanding of the best way to make them happy.

Getting this right is incredibly rewarding. Once you start attracting the type of guest that you best serve, you create positive experiences and receive positive feedback in return. Then, your work can feel less like a job and a lot more like leaning into your purpose.

But... we cater to everyone!

A frequent objection I hear when I ask clients to define their ideal guest is that they serve *everyone*— to which my response is twofold.

First, we should broaden what we think of as a demographic. Instead of narrowing your ideal guest to a specific gender or age bracket, they can be grouped by wider categories and interests.

For example, I worked with a client who has themed homes in Florida. One home, in particular, is decorated in a wizard theme and attracts guests from all over with an affinity for a particular book series (we can't name it for copyright reasons, but you can probably figure it out!).

In their case, it isn't only young families with kids who are dying to make a reservation, but people who love those books and their subculture. This guest persona will likely be into wizardry, magic and young adult fiction, which certainly isn't constrained by age or gender.

Second, it *is* possible that you have a home that attracts a few different types of stays. Perhaps you often host business travelers because of your location, but your home is also big enough to accommodate families.

In that case, you can cater to the business traveler persona *and* the family persona—though you may want to consider the family's needs first, since they will likely stay longer and bring in more revenue.

A travel persona isn't meant to constrain you, but to give you measurable parameters and directions for your marketing. The alternative is like throwing spaghetti at the wall and hoping something sticks. Sure, you may get bookings, but it's also a waste of resources.

Targeted marketing saves you time and effort.

If you're a property manager, we also recommend creating the ideal homeowner persona to help you target additions to your portfolio. If you specialize in Florida condos, your target homeowner/investor may look quite different from those who own beach houses in Baja, California.

It's important to make sure your business model and management services you offer are serving their goals, as well as yours.

To get you started, here's a list of questions you can use to start piecing together the persona your marketing is trying to reach.

1. Who is your target market?

You need to know who you are trying to reach with your marketing efforts in order to create messaging that resonates. Are you targeting families, business travelers, leisure travelers?

Once you know your target market, you can begin to create a guest persona that represents them.

This information will also be helpful in determining what channels to use to reach them.

We all know “The Big 3” OTAs, but there are also niche online travel agencies that may do very well for you, depending on your location, property type, and amenities.

For instance, if you cater to a last-minute crowd, there are sites that cater to last-minute bookings. Or if your property is pet-friendly, you can post a listing on dog-friendly listing sites. Have a picturesque property located near a popular wedding venue or destination? You may want to advertise on wedding sites as a prime location for brides or grooms to host their getting-ready festivities and have their photos taken.

2. What are their demographics?

While you should look beyond these factors in your guest personas, knowing the age, gender, and homebase of your guests can help you create a more accurate picture and choose your marketing channels accordingly.

3. What are your ideal guest's interests and hobbies?

Understanding the interests and hobbies of your target market can help you get a clear picture of who they are and what they value.

Maybe they love outdoor adventure. Or maybe they are the type to enjoy a nap and a novel on a cozy afternoon. Understanding this subtle difference can help with marketing *and* stocking your rentals to meet their needs.

Similarly, understanding the interests of investors and property owners can help you add more properties to your portfolio. Maybe they love to golf, for instance. You can make sure to let them know that having a dedicated property manager will free them up for more time on the green. This also signals a potential way to network... especially if you love to golf, too.

(Family Travel Association and NYU SPS Jonathan M. Tisch Center of Hospitality 2021)

4. What are their travel preferences?

Consider what guests expect and prefer when they travel. For example, if you suspect your target guests are still a bit skeptical about vacation rentals and prefer hotels, it's worth considering ways to infuse a more hotel-like experience to fit their comfort levels.

Highlight how easy it is to get in contact with you or your team, and remind them of your strident cleaning policy and luxurious bedding.

As another example, the Digital Nomad travel persona prioritizes accommodations with a dedicated workspace and reliable Wi-Fi, as well as places where they can work with other Digital Nomads.

If this is your target guest, you'll want to highlight your property's workspace (desk, comfy chair, printer, etc) as well as the co-working spaces around your property, the different ways they can access your community for social activities, why your space is ideal for productivity and creativity—and, of course, how stable your Wi-Fi is.

(A Brother Abroad 2022)

5. What is their budget?

Consider the base nightly rate you want/need to charge in order to be sustainable, and then ensure that your target guest is able to afford at least that much.

Also keep in mind that there may be opportunities for a little flexibility. For example, a middle-class guest may not be able to afford a week at a luxury-priced rental, but perhaps they *can* spring for a weekend or an off-season getaway.

6. What is the purpose of their travel?

People travel for various reasons that we all know well: business, to visit family, to take a break or to have new experiences. Knowing the purpose of their trip will help you tailor your marketing and pricing, as well as the guest experience.

If you are trying to reach families headed for the beach or theme park (which accounted for 51% of stays in 2021!), you may want to ensure that your home is equipped with gear, like a playpen and a high chair, that will make a family's stay much less stressful.

Then, of course, you want to make it clear in your marketing that you provide these amenities.

7. What type of atmosphere do they prefer?

The atmosphere/interior design of a property can be just as important as its location or amenities.

If you're in Nashville, for example, your target guest may include the ever-popular bachelorette/bachelor party guests. Which, in turn, influences the colors you choose and the Instagram-worthy vignettes you incorporate into your design.

Other atmospheres include: spa-like serenity for business travelers, sleek

and modern for urban adventurers, wine country chic for mom getaways, etc. Again, think about your target guest, location, and property strengths, and create your interiors accordingly

For more information on how to create your ideal guest persona and a list of consumer archetypes, make sure to visit www.vrmarketingbook.com

Ideal Guest Persona Sample

Vacation Rental Property Overview Example:

You have a charming ground-floor condo in Fort Lauderdale, located in a mature community that is the perfect place for an active middle-aged woman and her guests to stay.

The unit offers a spacious, open layout with two bedrooms, two bathrooms, and plenty of natural light. The living area has an inviting couch and comfortable armchairs that provide a cozy retreat after long days of exploring.

Your kitchen features stainless steel appliances, a gas stovetop, a dishwasher, a refrigerator, microwave oven and a wine cooler for a traveler that loves to cook and entertain. The condo is fully furnished and features a private outdoor balcony with patio furniture and stunning views of the ocean—perfect for hosting get-togethers or relaxing in the evening.

Ideal Guest Persona Example:

Hannah is a value-conscious traveler in her mid-forties to fifties who doesn't mind paying extra if it means a better quality unit and a professional property manager to ensure she has a great vacation.

She loves exploring the local sights and sounds of a new city and enjoys taking time to relax on the beach. After years of living in Virginia, Hannah looks forward to an escape to the beach and the excitement of Fort Lauderdale each year. With its laid-back vibe, stunning views of the ocean and plenty of outdoor activities, Fort Lauderdale is the perfect choice for

Hannah.

Although she could afford to stay in a luxury hotel, she prefers a condo with an open layout, as this will give her more space and privacy than a hotel room. She also likes having access to a kitchen so she can cook meals throughout her vacation and stay on track with her healthy diet, as well as the option to host friends she vacations with year after year.

That's precisely why this ground-floor condo is Hannah's top pick. It has two bedrooms, two bathrooms, an open layout that allows for plenty of natural light, an excellent chef's kitchen, and a wine fridge...which is key for her. Hannah also knows she will make good use of the private outdoor balcony with patio furniture, where she can relax and admire the stunning views of the ocean.

In addition to its convenient location, Hannah loves this unit's easy access to a variety of beaches, parks, and local attractions – all within walking distance!

With so much to do right outside her doorstep, it's no wonder why she faithfully returns year after year to her home away from home in Fort Lauderdale.

“Give ‘em the ole one-two”

Every business needs a solid foundation, just like any potential prize fighter needs to learn the basic punches and the proper fighting stance before they're ready to get in the ring.

If the fighter doesn't lay this foundation and instead chooses to “wing it,” you can bet they'll get knocked out in the first round.

Similarly, the foundational building blocks for a Featherweight vacation rental business will need to begin with solid branding, property management software, and your own direct booking site.

Ready to schedule a chat to discover how we can help build up your direct bookings?

[SCHEDULE A CALL WITH OUR TEAM](#)

Conrad O'Connell
Founder - BuildUp Bookings
www.buildupbookings.com
conrad@buildupbookings.com