

How to Make Agencies Sweat

THE ULTIMATE HOTEL
DIGITAL MARKETING
RFP GUIDE



Contents

Introduction	3
Understanding the RFP Process	4
Evaluating Your Current Digital Marketing Situation	5
Defining Your Digital Marketing Goals and Objectives	6
Creating the RFP Questionnaire	7
Identifying and Pre-Qualifying Potential Vendors	8
Distributing the RFP to Qualified Vendors	9
Analyzing Vendor Responses	10
Conducting Vendor Presentations and Interviews	11
Making the Final Selection	12
Implementation and Onboarding	13
What now?	14

1. Introduction

Let’s face it: finding the right digital marketing agency for your hotel is like trying to solve a jigsaw puzzle—except all the pieces are from different puzzles, and everyone insists theirs is the one that fits. Every agency promises the moon, but how do you make sure you’re not boarding a spaceship held together by duct tape and wishful thinking?

That’s where we come in. We’ve created the ultimate request for proposal (RFP) guide—designed to make even the most silver-tongued agencies break a sweat. This isn’t your typical “here’s a checklist, good luck” kind of document.

No, we’ve packed it with questions that make nefarious agencies stumble like a drunk uncle trying to give a wedding toast no one asked for.

Think of this guide as your marketing agency truth serum. We’ve laid out every critical question you didn’t even know you needed to ask, giving your team the tools to cut through the jargon, the fluff, and the “trust us, we’ve got this” nonsense. Whether you’re after a solid SEO strategy or the perfect Instagram ad, our guide ensures you’ll be able to identify the agencies worth your time—and weed out the ones who just talk a big game.

Buckle up, it’s time to take control of your hotel’s digital destiny.



2. Understanding the RFP Process

So, what exactly is an RFP?

If you're imagining a bureaucratic document sent out into the void, hoping for the right vendor to magically appear, we've got news for you: it's a little more strategic than that (thankfully). An RFP is your golden opportunity to make agencies work for you, not the other way around.

Think of it as speed dating with a twist—except instead of awkward small talk, you're asking hard-hitting questions that force agencies to prove they're worth the investment. The goal?

To find the one agency that isn't just full of promises but actually has the chops to deliver. A good RFP process cuts through the noise, providing you with the clearest path to identifying which digital marketing agency is ready to help you skyrocket your hotel's online presence—and which ones are just blowing smoke.

This process might seem daunting, but trust us, it's a game-changer. You're no longer guessing who's legit—you're making them show you. It's the power move your hotel needs to take its marketing to the next level.



3. Evaluating Your Current Digital Marketing Situation

Before you can figure out where you're going, you've got to know where you are.

The tricky part? Some agencies might be sweeping things under the rug, and you might not even realize it. Maybe your PPC campaigns look shiny on the surface, but dig a little deeper, and you'll find wasted budget, irrelevant traffic and hidden charges. Or perhaps your SEO "strategy" is more smoke and mirrors than actual performance.

Ask yourself: are these results actually moving the needle, or are they just dressed up to look good?

This step is all about putting on your detective hat and uncovering what's really going on behind the scenes. You need to figure out which parts of your digital marketing are pulling their weight and which areas are quietly underperforming—or worse, actively sabotaging your success. Don't just take numbers at face value. Ask yourself: are these results actually moving the needle, or are they just dressed up to look good?

Getting an honest assessment of your current digital marketing situation will not only help you understand where the cracks are but also give you the ammo you need to ask potential agencies the tough questions. You're not here to be impressed by surface-level results—you want to know if they can fix what's really broken.

Don't have the technical knowledge to work this out, then most digital agencies will offer some kind of audit or review service—*cough* three&six can do this for free.



3. Defining Your Digital Marketing Goals and Objectives

Alright, you've figured out what's working and what's not—now it's time to figure out where you want to go.

But here's the thing: vague goals like “more traffic” or “better social media” aren't going to cut it. If your digital marketing goals aren't crystal clear, you're basically handing your agency a blank check to do whatever they want—that's a recipe for disappointment, much like a decision to eat sushi from a gas station.

Your goals need to be as sharp as a freshly pressed front desk uniform.

Your goals need to be as sharp as a freshly pressed front desk uniform. What does “more traffic” really mean for your hotel? Are we talking about 20% more organic visitors from search engines by the end of the year? Do you want to increase direct bookings by 15% through targeted email campaigns? Defining these specifics will ensure the agency is laser-focused on what you care about, not what they think you should care about.

This is where SMART goals come into play—Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Relevant, and Time-bound. The more detailed you are, the harder it is for an agency to wiggle out of responsibility. You're not looking for wishful thinking; you want real, measurable results that align with your hotel's bottom line.

So, grab a pen and start writing down what you really want. The clearer your goals, the easier it'll be to hold your agency accountable—and the faster you'll see those results pouring in.



4. Creating the RFP Questionnaire

Now comes the fun part—building your RFP questionnaire.

This is where you channel your inner bad cop and make agencies sweat like they've been arrested for ‘crimes against marketing’ and the judge hates buzzwords. Your goal? Ask questions so direct, they'll be scrambling for answers like it's an open-book exam and they forgot to study. Think of it like setting up a spotlight in the interrogation room: the more pointed the questions, the harder it is for them to hide behind marketing buzzwords and general B.S.

The best part? You don't have to start from scratch. Our RFP template has all the critical questions you need—covering everything from SEO and social media to PPC, website design,

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and beyond (aren't we nice!). We've packed it with the kind of questions that make agencies sweat, forcing them to deliver hard data like actual case studies, KPIs, and proof of ROI. Forget vague promises like “we increased traffic by 200%”—you'll have the tools to demand specifics.

And don't forget to dig into the nitty-gritty: who's really going to be working on your account? Is it the A-team from the sales pitch, or will you get handed off to the interns once the contract's signed? Our template covers timelines, reporting, and even how agencies handle setbacks (because, let's face it, something always goes off script).

The more detailed your questions, the more revealing their answers will be. With our RFP template, you'll be armed with everything you need to cut through the noise and get the truth out of potential agencies. A good agency will embrace these questions; a bad one will dodge, deflect, and drown you in buzzwords.



5. Identifying and Pre-Qualifying Potential Vendors

Before you send out your carefully crafted RFP and start lighting up agency inboxes, it's time to do a little detective work of your own.

Not all agencies are created equal, and the last thing you want is to waste time sorting through a stack of proposals from vendors that aren't even close to what you need.

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Start by building a list of agencies that actually understand the hotel industry. Sure, there are a million digital marketing companies out there, but how many of them know the difference between RevPAR and a breakfast buffet or think a SMERF is a blue cartoon character? Look for agencies with a proven track record in hospitality—they should already speak your language and understand the unique challenges of marketing hotels.

Next, pre-qualify these vendors. This isn't about narrowing it down to one winner just yet; it's about cutting out the ones that are clearly a bad fit. Check out their case studies and see if they've worked with properties like yours. Are they all flash and no substance? Do they have the expertise to handle your goals? If an agency's portfolio feels like it's padded with fluff, trust your instincts and move on.

Once you've got your list of solid candidates, that's when you hit them with the RFP. But remember, even at this stage, you're still in control—our template makes sure you're asking the right questions to filter out the pretenders.



6. Distributing the RFP to Qualified Vendors

Now that you've pre-qualified your list of agencies, it's time to unleash your RFP into the wild.

But don't just fire off emails without a plan—this is where you set the tone for the entire process, so make sure you're clear, professional, and (most importantly) in control.

First, give the agencies enough time to respond properly—because we're all juggling meetings, emails, and occasionally remembering to feed ourselves. A rushed response is a half-baked response, and you don't want excuses about tight deadlines as a fallback for mediocre proposals.

Use our template as your secret weapon to keep them on their toes, and don't be afraid to hold their feet to the fire

Give them a solid few weeks to review the RFP, gather their data, and come back with thoughtful answers.

Next, communicate your expectations from the get-go. Be upfront about deadlines, formatting requirements, and how you'd like the proposals submitted. The last thing you want is to be chasing vendors or wading through disorganized submissions. It's your show, and the good agencies will fit in to that.

And remember, your RFP is designed to make agencies prove their worth, not the other way around. So if you get pushback or vague responses during this phase, it's a red flag. Use our template as your secret weapon to keep them on their toes, and don't be afraid to hold their feet to the fire if they're not delivering the details you need.

By the time the responses roll in, you'll have a clear sense of who's serious, who's prepared, and who's just in it for the sales bonus.

7. Analyzing Vendor Responses

It's time to dig into the real work—evaluating the responses you've received and figuring out which agencies are worth your time.

While it might be tempting to skip ahead to the shiny presentation stage, where agencies roll out their best pitches, this is the moment where you start separating the contenders from the pretenders.

Begin by organizing the responses—boring and hard work, but necessary. Whether you're using a simple spreadsheet or a more detailed matrix, the goal is to compare each agency's answers side by side. It's not about who wrote the most—it's about who delivered clarity, substance, and proof. Did they back up their claims with real case studies, or just toss in vague success stories? Are their KPIs realistic, or are they throwing ROAS numbers around like Oprah at a car giveaway?

Our questions are designed to expose any gaps or weaknesses in an agency's proposal, so if you notice they're dodging specifics or giving non-answers, that's a red flag. Look closely at how their timelines match up with your expectations. Are they upfront about who will actually be managing your

account? And when it comes to pricing, is everything transparent, or are there hidden costs lurking in the fine print?

As you grade and compare the responses, keep in mind that it's not just about who can deliver results—it's about finding an agency that's a good fit for your organization. They need to understand your goals, align with your company culture, and be a partner you can trust to work with long term. If you need additional help in evaluating the responses or digging deeper into the details, we're more than happy to help here at three&six, or use an experienced consultant to guide you through the process and help identify the best match.

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With your organized comparison in hand, you'll be in the perfect position to spot the agencies that can back up their talk with real action and weed out those that can't.



8. Conducting Vendor Presentations and Interviews

Now that you've narrowed down the list, it's time to see if these agencies can walk the walk.

Vendor presentations and interviews are your chance to dig deeper into how the agency works and assess if they're the right fit for your team. You're looking for more than just technical expertise—you want to understand how flexible they are, how quickly they'll respond when challenges arise, and whether they'll be reliable partners for the long haul.

It's like a job interview—except instead of just figuring out who's the best fit for your company, you're making sure their salesperson isn't just throwing around buzzwords to sound impressive. This is your chance to see if they can back up

their pitch with real, practical solutions that fit your hotel's unique needs.

Pay close attention to how they describe their processes. Are they adaptable when things don't go according to plan? Can they adjust strategies quickly if a campaign isn't performing? You're not just hiring an agency for their skills; you're also testing their ability to work collaboratively with your team, and how well they communicate when issues inevitably crop up.

Also, look at who's presenting. Is it the same team you'll be working with day-to-day, or are they sending in the A-team for the pitch, only to hand you off to juniors later? Transparency is key here—you need to know exactly who's handling your account and how involved they'll be.

Lastly, use this time to assess their communication style and how well they listen. Are they responsive to your questions, or are they glossing over the tough ones? A vendor presentation is a two-way street, and you should walk away with a clear sense of whether they understand your hotel's unique challenges—and have the skills to tackle them.

At the end of the day, the presentation stage is about more than just pretty slides and smooth talk. It's about finding an agency that can not only deliver results but is also a good fit for your team and culture.



9. Making the Final Selection

You've sat through the presentations, analyzed the responses, and probably developed a healthy skepticism of anyone who uses the word "synergy" more than twice.

Now it's time for the big decision—choosing the agency that will help take your hotel's digital marketing to the next level.

At this stage, most hoteliers start to negotiate on fees and fine-tune what's being offered. But here's the thing—your hotel's budget and the agency's proposal might not perfectly align, and that's okay. This is the moment to get creative. Maybe the full-service package is a bit out of reach, but can you negotiate a phased approach? Or are there other areas where compromises

can be made without sacrificing the key results you need?

That said, be cautious about driving too hard a bargain. If you've spent all this time getting agencies to put their best work on the table, only to lowball them with "z-game" fees, don't be surprised if their enthusiasm cools quickly. Remember, the relationship you're building starts now. If you ask for cutting-edge tactics but want to pay a shoestring budget, you're sending the message that you want the world on a silver platter but only want to pay for paper plates. And that's going to affect how the agency sees and treats you moving forward.

The bottom line: make sure the price matches the value you're asking for. A good agency will be willing to find ways to meet your needs within reason, but they're not magicians. And if you want them to go the extra mile, you've got to meet them somewhere along the road.

When making the final call, trust both the data and your instincts. This agency will be an extension of your team, so choose the one that feels like the right fit—not just for your marketing, but for your entire organization.

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10. Implementation and Onboarding

Congratulations! You've chosen your agency, and now it's time to turn all those proposals, promises, and plans into action.

But before you kick back and relax, thinking the hard work is done, there's one more crucial phase: implementation and onboarding. This is where the rubber meets the road, and if it's not handled properly, even the best-laid plans can go sideways.

First off, make sure there's a clear roadmap. You want to know who's doing what, when it's happening, and how progress will be tracked. A well-organized onboarding process sets the tone for the entire working relationship, so don't let things get too vague here. Timelines, responsibilities, and deliverables should all be crystal clear—no one likes surprises at this stage.

Next, make sure communication channels are set up early. Is there a project manager? A main point of contact? You don't want to be stuck in a game of email ping-pong, wondering who's in charge of what. And if something goes off course (because it always does), you need to know exactly who to contact to get things back on track. Regular check-ins, whether weekly or bi-weekly, can help keep the project moving smoothly.

Also, be prepared for a bit of a learning curve—both for your team and the agency. This is the stage where the agency really gets to know your business in depth, and there might be a few adjustments as they fine-tune their strategies based on what they discover. Don't panic if things aren't perfect from day one; onboarding is a process, and it's all about setting a strong foundation for long-term success.

Remember, this is where the partnership truly begins. Treat the onboarding phase seriously, and be prepared to invest some of your own time and effort into the process. The agency will need input and direction from your team to do their best work, so the more engaged you are, the smoother things will go. With both sides fully committed, you'll pave the way for a smooth, productive collaboration.



11. What now?

Well, look at you—you got through the RFP with out smashing your keyboard in frustration—give yourself a pat on the back.

You've asked the tough questions, made agencies squirm, and now you're ready to sit back and watch the results roll in. But before you pop the champagne, remember: this is just the start of the journey.

The hard work of asking the tough questions, setting clear goals, and finding the right fit has paid off, and now you're set to take your hotel's marketing to the next level.

The next level—ah, the honeymoon phase—or as we like to call it, the time where everyone smiles through meetings, pretending like revisions don't exist. But once that phase fades, your relationship with the agency will start to evolve, and so should your expectations. Stay engaged, keep the lines of communication open, and make sure both sides are always aligned on the same goals. With the right agency by your side, your hotel can stay ahead of the competition and achieve real results—without someone throwing around “low-hanging fruit” like it's a strategy.

And if you ever feel like you're lost in the digital marketing maze again, don't worry. Our RFP guide is here to help you navigate the process, ask the right questions, and ensure that your marketing efforts are always pointed in the right direction.

