

case study

Transformation: Bluegreen Jumps to Next Level with IT Innovations

by Sheila Donahoe



Technology applications and the Internet have fundamentally changed the travel industry forever. Time is the most precious of luxuries, and last-minute travel is the norm.

Because consumers now have instant gratification when it comes to booking travel online, the timeshare industry finds itself scrambling to offer the same convenience to owners. At Bluegreen, our owners have been telling us this for some time. We responded, took those insights to the next level, and as a result, have realized benefits that go far beyond the bottom line.

Remodel: Before...

One of the technological advancements that has had great impact on our business is the complete re-design of Bluegreen's Web site. BluegreenOnline.com was originally launched in 1999 as a very basic static site. As a result, the original site contained disjointed information and offered no opportunity to interact with customers.

Our owners became the impetus to build something better. They wanted something more robust that would allow them to maintain their accounts and research vacations at their convenience. They wanted features such as on-line payments, account and Vacation Points management, and a Bonus Time booking engine. Bluegreen also had its own goals (1) to increase owner satisfaction and understanding of the Bluegreen Vacation Club[®], (2) reduce the number of phone calls per reservation, (3) reduce the amount of time owners were on hold, and (4) reduce the cost per reservation.

...And After

Re-launched in May 2005, BluegreenOnline.com is a powerful integrated Web site with distinct areas that serve our owners, prospects, job seekers, and investors. Owners can access more timely information online than in the hard copy *Resort Ownership Guide* (i.e., new resorts, new benefits, and company updates). The impact this level of service, information, and convenience has on the Bluegreen[®] brand is immeasurable.

Since launching in 2005, more than 83,000 owners—roughly 50 percent of our owner base—have logged on to the Web site over 1 million times. We also doubled the number of valid e-mail addresses in our database, which allows us to deliver news and offers to our owners on a regular basis. Recently we hit a major milestone, our one-millionth owner login. We recognized and celebrated the accomplishment by giving that lucky person a prize and publishing their story in our owner magazine and newsletters. When we spoke with the winners, Teresa and Mark Neil of West Virginia, we learned that not only are these owners using the site to interact with our company and their account, they are using it to sell Bluegreen to their friends and family. A fortunate though unplanned side effect of the robust new site.

We found that our owners also use the site to educate themselves, which ultimately means a better experience when booking vacations.

"The first time we logged on was right after we became owners. The Web site is a good place for education," said Teresa Neil. "Every time we go for an update, we learn something we didn't know. Once you know how it works, it just gets easier."

The site features photos, virtual tours, area information, floor plans, property maps, weather, and more, and now it's become a tool for owners to brag about their ownership and essentially create interest for potential owners.

In addition to the original company site, Bluegreen offered Bluegreen Traveler Plus[™], a travel program offering discounts to owners for dining and entertainment, cruises, hotels, flights, rental cars, and more. This site required a different login. In September 2005, the Traveler Plus functionality was integrated with the new BluegreenOnline.com Web site, so it had the Bluegreen brand look and feel and could be accessed by owners with their BluegreenOnline.com login name and password.

The introduction of on-line Bonus Time reservations in March 2006 was the first time Bluegreen owners were able to book inventory online; it is an immensely popular feature. The owner feedback we've received proves their overall experience with Bluegreen has been enhanced through this application:

"I went online and checked availability, and within minutes I had exactly what I needed. It was so simple and it made for some very happy vacationers! Bonus Time allowed us to go for a great price and with just a click of a button..."

—Lee Ann W., Atlanta, GA

"You pick the room type, location, and number of guests, and in seconds, you're done planning a weekend getaway. Bonus Time rocks."

—Charles and Rene B., Columbia, SC

"I love the fact that you can book Bonus Time online. It is so fast and convenient and best of all, it lets you see what resort is available. I'm always checking to see which resort has rooms, so I can plan my family's next vacation. We are now able to take more trips than we have in the past."

—Wendy G., Augusta, GA

Growth: What's Next?

Bluegreen's technological renaissance incorporates more than Internet advancements. We now also use hand-held, wireless sales systems at some of our new OPC locations at certain amusement parks across the country. Park guests can purchase getaways quickly and simply, without a lot of cumbersome paperwork. They simply receive an automatically generated e-mail and confirmation number that they use on a specialized Web site to book their getaway.

Providing customers with an interactive experience has revolutionized face-to-face package sales for Bluegreen. It has not only impacted the bottom line but it also makes booking a getaway easier for the customer, which greatly enhances their experience and ultimately elevates their first impression of our company and the product.

Our new interactive sales kiosks were developed last year to (1) engage prospective owners in an interactive experience that illustrates the value of timeshare ownership based on their vacation habits, and (2) introduce touring guests to Bluegreen's resorts with resort descriptions, photos, floor plans, and virtual tours. They are Web-based and interface with BluegreenOnline.com to provide all resort information, owner testimonials, and more. The main advantage of this integrated approach is that the information presented through the kiosk is instantly updated as changes are made to BluegreenOnline.com, and new features can be added quickly and easily. This kiosk is much more robust and compelling than what was previously used, as it includes access to all the resort detail found on BluegreenOnline.com. By interfacing with the BluegreenOnline.com database, updates are instantaneous, ultimately saving thousands of dollars in software programming costs previously required to revise the older kiosks.

Consumers continue to push for up-to-the-minute information, 24/7 company access and automated services—so our industry is constantly challenged to respond to that market demand. Today's consumers and owners have been trained

to expect travel and service in just one click. The good news is that their "need for speed" translates into tangible business benefits. Bluegreen's aggressive efforts to provide a central hub for information and to simplify some of our lead collecting processes are tangible proof that advanced technology impacts our industry across the board in many of our companies.

What has this technological push meant for us? More owners, happier owners, significant cost savings, and a stronger brand. That's a win all around. **D**

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