



A TRAVEL INDUSTRY VISIONARY

BOB DIENER
 REVOLUTIONIZED
 THE HOTEL
 INDUSTRY TWO
 DECADES AGO
 BY CO-FOUNDING
 WHAT BECAME
 HOTELS.COM.
 NOW HE'S DONE
 IT AGAIN WITH
 GETAROOM.COM.

By John Buchanan

In the mid-1990s, Bob Diener and his partner, David Litman, created the so-called “merchant model” for hotels. It meant that hotel rooms could be booked online. It also revolutionized the travel industry. A Miami native who graduated from the University of Florida before earning a law degree at Cornell, Diener practiced corporate and securities law at the blue-chip firm Gibson, Dunn & Crutcher before sensing the new opportunities that were emerging in the travel industry. In 1995, he and Litman created one of the earliest hotel booking sites, now known as Hotels.com. They eventually sold a majority

interest in the company to Interactive Corporation. In 2000, the company went public and the stock price quickly soared from \$16 to over \$90 in one of the most successful IPOs in history. In 2009, the duo created GetARoom.com, which delivered further innovations that benefit consumers and in 2013 was named “Best Hotel Booking Site” by *Frommer's*.

For more information, call 800.HOTELS-8 (800.468.3578) or visit GetARoom.com.



Q&A with Bob Diener, president of GetARoom.com



Q1:

What makes GetARoom.com unique or different?

“Number one is what we call the ‘flash sale’ program. We have about 140,000 hotels that participate with the site. So we go to hotels and ask them for a better room rate that we can offer consumers on a short-term basis. That means sales that run from two hours to up to 72 hours. The customer booking the room gets a rate that is between 10 and 60 percent less than what they would pay at any other online travel agency (OTA). The hotels participate because it encourages bookings further in advance than they would normally get. And that means the hotels can use these bookings to increase their occupancy further in advance. So it’s a win-win situation for the customer and the hotel.”

Q2:

What’s the other innovation?

“The second innovation we created is called the ‘unpublished rate’ program, which we created about six years ago. It’s a unique and proprietary system and only we have it. The way it works is that we have thousands of hotels that will give us lower rates as long as we don’t publish them on the site. We guarantee the lowest rate you’ll find online. But the ‘unpublished rates’ are only available through a call center. On those deals, the typical saving is 10-20 percent below what you see as the lowest price published anywhere else online. And those savings are sometimes as high as 60 percent.”

Q3:

What are the advantages to the user of GetARoom.com?

“One of the other advantages is that we offer vacation rentals in addition to hotel rooms. We have more than 30,000 vacation rental properties on the site. Those include condominiums, condo-hotels, villas, lofts, private homes. And that’s a big advantage for people who have big families, which I do. When we travel as a family, that means seven or eight people. A hotel is not going to cut it. We prefer to rent a home. And that’s a growing trend in the travel industry. It’s a real clear benefit to those kinds of customers.”