

# LetSites Newsletter

Issue N°13 : Summer 2007



[www.letsites.com](http://www.letsites.com)

## The LetSites Newsletter - Summer 2007

Welcome to the Summer 2007 LetSites Newsletter! We start with some good news for gîte owners. The number of independent holidays being booked by British holidaymakers has been steadily increasing each year - the figures are set out for you below. We also take a good look at the myths and reality of search engine advertising. And on the back page, we've "cornered" Clare & Francis Hansom from the Tarn.

If you would like something featured or discussed in a future Newsletter, please do get in touch: [emma@letsites.com](mailto:emma@letsites.com)

### Noticeboard



Quite a few of you have already added your **2008 tariff**. You can add this at any time - please send us the prices and dates as soon as they are confirmed.

**Chez Nous:** the early booking discount deadline for the brochure is 12 July - the final deadline is 16 August. Loyalty discounts are again being offered.

**Owners in France:** the early booking offer deadline for the printed brochure is 1 July - the final deadline is 1 August.

The **LetSites Marketing Poll results** are currently on line and we'd like to say a huge "Thank you!" to all who participated. This year's results were highly informative and we hope they will help with your advertising and marketing decisions for the 2008 season.

### Holidays à la Carte

Recent research shows that the number of Brits booking package holidays abroad has fallen from 36% in 2002 to 31% in 2006 - the equivalent of a 14% decline and the lowest ratio in 30 years, apparently. In terms of numbers, more than 20 million package holidays were sold every year in the late 1990s but, in 2007, the number sold is expected to be fewer than 16 million. Changes in holiday destinations have also changed. Primarily, Spain and the Canary Islands have dropped out of favour, whereas demand for long-haul destinations has increased, including Malaysia, Singapore, Thailand, Australia and New Zealand.



Not surprisingly, the reason for this decline is the increase in the number of holidaymakers who now prefer to make their own holiday accommodation and travel arrangements on line. The figures show a 10% increase from 2002 to 2006, with 41% making their own arrangements in 2002, rising to 45% in 2006. The figures also show that greater numbers of older people are now willing to make their own holiday arrangements: 4.2 million holidaymakers aged 55+ in 2006, compared to 3.4 million in 2002 - a 24% increase. Of course, these figures are only to be expected as more and more people use the internet and confidence about booking on line increases. What is not known yet, however, is how much of an effect green taxes will have on the overall demand for holidays abroad.

The decline in the package holiday market has forced the four main holiday companies to merge (First Choice with Thomson and MyTravel with Thomas Cook) in order to cut costs. Over the last few years, the holiday companies have had to reduce holiday prices to sell them and prices are now incredibly low to the point that at some points in the year holidays are being sold at a loss. Since Thomson owns Chez Nous, it will be interesting to see how these changes in their business affect their investment in Chez Nous over the coming years...

### STOP PRESS! STOP PRESS! STOP PRESS! STOP PRESS! STOP PRESS!



Pippa & George Richmond-Brown ([www.masdesudre.com](http://www.masdesudre.com)) were featured in October's *French Property News*.

In addition, an article about setting up a business in France in the January 2007 issue featured several *LuzMedia* clients, including [www.lotlocations.co.uk](http://www.lotlocations.co.uk).

If you would like to read either article, go to [www.letsites.com](http://www.letsites.com) and click on "What the Press Say".

## Clicks for Sale



As explored in previous articles, getting your website to the top of a search engine list is a full-time job. If you advertise on a large, well-referenced holiday listings website, references to your property's advert may appear towards the top, but this is by no means guaranteed (see the December LetSites Newsletter). In order to get the maximum benefit from an online ad, it is essential for it include a clickable link to your own website. Some listings sites charge for these and others ban them altogether, so this is an important factor in choosing where to advertise.

To complement any online display advertising you're running (such as holiday listings adverts), you may like to consider two further online advertising strategies — search advertising and classified advertising. Online search advertising is where you pay for a Sponsored Link or Pay-Per-Click (PPC) advert. Online classified advertising is where you set up various (normally free) "classified" adverts online (this subject will be discussed in depth in the next Newsletter).

Google AdWords are perhaps the most common form of PPC advertising. Should you prefer not to use Google, Yahoo! Search Marketing and Microsoft adCenter work in the same way. If you go to a Google page of search results, the PPC adverts are the clickable text links on the right of your screen. They also sometimes appear at the top of the main list of results and are normally marked as advertising or sponsored links. The main reason for identifying adverts on a page of search engine results is so that the surfer can clearly see which of the websites listed have been generated "organically" and ranked in terms of their "relevance" by the search engine - and which websites are paying to be there.

Every time a surfer clicks on one of these links, the advertiser pays Google. The cost per click varies considerably depending not only on the words in question but also on the particular advertiser - larger businesses often employ specialist AdWords Consultants to run their campaigns.

To see whether you feel AdWords would be worth investing in for your own business, it is perhaps essential to know how it all works. The easy part of the process is creating your advert, which consists of one title line, two content lines and then your website address. The difficult part is working out your campaign budget and deciding on those specific keywords which will trigger your advert to appear...

In fact, the choice of keywords and the budget are dependent on each other. As an advertiser, you specify the keywords which you believe should trigger your advert appearing, along with the maximum amount you are willing to pay per click. When a surfer searches Google's search engine using one or more of your keywords, the AdWords advert should appear to the right of the main list. However, if the amount you are willing to pay per click does not correspond with the amount judged to be correct by Google, you may not appear at the top of the AdWords results - and you may even find yourself relegated to page two or three of the search results!

So how do you decide on your keywords? And how do you decide on your budget? Google recommend that you specify no more than 20 keywords and that you make your keywords as relevant as possible to your business. You can, however, change your keywords at any time during the campaign, which allows for some experimentation if you have both the time and the interest.

The process of choosing your keywords is also dependent on your budget. It may be more difficult to appear when more popular, general keywords are typed into Google because you will not be the only advertiser wanting to specify those words. Relevant but general words such as holiday, pool or France may be perfect for your website, but they are also perfect for all the other French holiday websites advertising, so Google makes its decision about placement by running an "auction", where advertisers effectively bid against other advertisers.

By setting a monthly maximum budget, you can be sure that the campaign is not becoming too expensive. There are also systems in place which guard against "click fraud", which is where your competitor or a robot clicks your advert many times. Statistics are also provided to show you how many clicks you've had and where your AdWords advert has been appearing.

The main advantage of using this strategy is that you remain firmly in control of your budget and your keywords and that you can stop at any time. But whether or not your advert will actually generate many genuine extra enquiries and bookings will depend on where your AdWords advert appears. This factor is obviously harder to control, but Google needs its surfers to click on your advert to use up your budget, so it's in their interest as well as yours to get your ad clicked.

If you think AdWords might be right for your business, Google guides you through the whole process from beginning to end. Your budget can be as little as £5 a month, so you may feel it's worth giving it a go. Good luck! **Next issue:** *Classing the classifieds*

# Clients Cornered

Clare Hansom ([www.tarntotalcalm.com](http://www.tarntotalcalm.com)) has been busy landscaping the gardens around her property in the Tarn and has some useful gardening tips for LetSites clients...

Francis and I moved to south-west France in 2005 after four long years of house hunting. We finally found our dream property deep in the wonderful countryside of the Tarn - a farmhouse with an independent cottage and 1½ acres of gardens, grounds and woodland.

An additional plus point for us was that the property and gardens had been only partly restored by the previous owner. This meant that although we were not starting from scratch, there was still enormous potential for us to refurbish the properties and landscape the gardens to suit our own tastes and style.

Francis and I decided that our first priority should be to furnish and equip the cottage to use as a holiday rental. Surrounded by shady trees, *La Petite Maison* is set away from our farmhouse and is perfect for individual couples seeking complete privacy and total calm.

As part of our preparations, we also had to landscape the grounds surrounding *La Petite Maison*. Since we don't accommodate children, we found we could be a little more experimental with our ideas. For example, our clients can explore the woodlands without the need for smooth paths or fences everywhere. It also means that we are not constrained in our choice of plants - when I ran a garden design business in the UK, the potential toxicity of plants was always an important consideration when planning a garden, and would have been here if we accommodated children.

Once *La Petite Maison* was completely ready to welcome guests, we turned our attention to the rest of the grounds. The previous owner of the property had started to create a series of "garden rooms", but had run out of steam (his words, not mine!) so everything was far from finished. Soon after we got to work, however, we came across a major problem - getting hold of the bulbs, plants, shrubs and trees we wanted to use.

Our local area has few good *pépinières* or garden centres, which has meant travelling long distances (even to the UK) to find exactly what we're looking for. And after hours of surfing on the internet, we've now found some reliable suppliers on line, but it's still not the same as being able to select the best specimens yourself.

On the other hand, local markets are a surprisingly good place to buy smaller plants - especially flowers, vegetables and herbs. If local people are buying, you can guarantee that the plants are ideal for the area's soil and climate simply because everyone is growing them! In fact, have a good look at your neighbours' gardens when you first start gardening in France - their gardens are often the best inspiration for choosing plants suitable for the area.

Our current design projects are creating both an ornamental kitchen garden and a Mediterranean-style garden. The kitchen garden will be designed as a medieval *potager*, all enclosed within ornamental box hedging. We plan to grow some unusual vegetables, including parsnips since they are almost impossible to find locally!

The Mediterranean garden will have a terrace of terracotta tiles shaded by climbing plants supported by overhanging wooden beams. The plan is to use fragrant drought-tolerant plants, especially aromatic herbs such as rosemary and thyme. Also, species with grey felted leaves (such as *Senecio* and *Phlomis*) or with sword-shaped leaves (such as *Yuccas* and *Phormiums*) are ideal for hot, dry conditions because they have low rates of transpiration. We shall be digging in plenty of grit when we first plant to ensure that the plant roots don't become waterlogged when it rains in the autumn and winter.

Now that our holiday cottage business is well established, I'm hoping to take on some garden design work locally, whether it is a total garden design or just perhaps a planting plan for a troublesome border. And my advice for budding fellow holiday property owners? Keep your garden designs simple. A swathe of gravel with a few architectural plants (such as a *Fatsia Japonica* or a Japanese maple) against a white painted wall makes a stunning impact - and nothing more is needed!



If you'd like to be "cornered" in a future issue, please contact [emma@letsites.com](mailto:emma@letsites.com)