

Hotwire®

Transparent Opacity

September 2011

Mitchell Joe

What does Hotwire sell?

The fact that we sell opaque products should be transparent to our customers.

It's not.

Everyday, our potential customers say things like:

“Where is the hotel name please?!?! Dumb site!”



Transparency

Transparency is good. It's tied up with honesty and trust.

People who think that they're buying organic apples should be receiving organic apples.

A problem we face is that many people aren't even sure what's on our shelves. They don't know that we sell opaque products. That's kind of strange.



And it's hard to get excited about something when you don't know what it is.

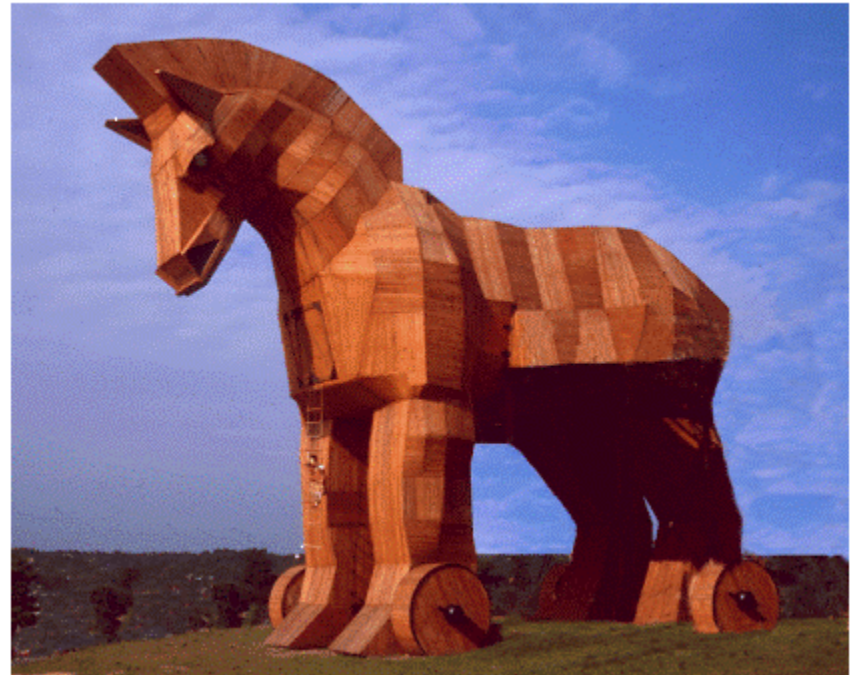
Unpleasant Surprises

Many people don't understand *why* our products are discounted.

If we fail to make it clear up front, then they will feel tricked when they find out.

People should be told *immediately* about the tradeoff between price and opacity.

People like knowing what they're buying.



Known Tradeoffs and Discounts

People expect to pay less for:

- muffins baked yesterday
because they taste worse
- goods from a going out of business sale
because the owner is desperate to sell them
- very ripe fruit
because it will spoil soon
- calendars in February
because part of the year is already over

Our main product is:

- hotel rooms that would otherwise go unsold, which are discounted
because the hotel prefers to make some money rather than no money



How well do we communicate that this is the nature of our discounted product?

How do others communicate that they're selling opaque products?

Product Name

Travelocity

Top Secret Hotels

positive, exclusive, you're being let in on a secret

Expedia

Unpublished Rate Hotels

positive, rare, you're discovering something that others don't know about

Priceline

Name Your Own Price

informative, positive, reinforces the fact that you're getting a discount, puts you in control of the discount, it's a game

Hotwire

Hot Rate

positive, not informative, matches our name

Placement

Priceline informs the user of its opaque product by giving it prominent placements throughout the site.



Homepage

- ad
- ad
- module/buttons



Search Results

- tab
- cross-sell ad in the margin
- result/speedbump

Action and Distraction

Priceline communicates the opacity of their hotels' acceptable price ranges by showing the median price and letting the user guess where the lower limit is.

This very interesting thing is that being preoccupied with the opacity of the acceptable price range distracts the user from thinking about the opacity of the hotel identity.

The user is asking herself: "What price should I bid?", not "Which hotels are these?"

An additional benefit of the bidding model is that the savings that user is receiving are very obvious.

The screenshot displays the Priceline.com interface for a "Name Your Own Price" search for hotels in Honolulu, HI. The page is structured into three main steps:

- Step 1: Choose where you want to stay** - Lists various areas in Honolulu with "detail map" links, such as Diamond Head Area, Executive Center, Honolulu Airport (HNL), Kalahele, Kalahele North Shore, Kalahele, Waikiki Beach Area, Waikiki City Center, and Waikiki Marina Area.
- Step 2: Choose the star level for your hotel** - Offers star level options from 3-Star Economy to 5-Star Luxury, each with a "detail map" link.
- Step 3: Name Your Own Price® (per room night)** - Features a "Name Your Own Price" section with a "Price Range" input field (set to \$0) and a "Median retail price for a 4 star hotel in the area selected is \$224." Below this is a "Reservation Name" field.

At the bottom, there are "prev" and "next" buttons, and a "BEST PRICE GUARANTEED" badge. A map of Honolulu is shown on the right side of the page. Three red arrows point to the "Name Your Own Price" section, the star level selection, and the price input field.

IM Chat

Links to chat appear throughout the booking path.

If you are inactive for long enough during the Review Details page, then a window prompting you to chat pops up.

This is a nice proactive way to answer any questions about the product that the user may have.

It's also more personal.

priceline.com Flights | Hotels | Cars | Vacation Packages | Cruises | Tours & Attractions | PriceBreakers | Groups
Sign-in | My Profile | My Trips | Check Your Request | First Time Users | Help

Please Review Your Request

4 Star Deluxe Hotel, Waikiki Beach Area ★★★★★

Check-In Date: **Friday, August 26, 2011**
Check-Out Date: **Sunday, August 28, 2011**
Region: Oahu, HI
City Area: Waikiki Beach Area
Check-In Time: Guaranteed late night arrival
Check-Out Time: Check-out times vary by hotel
Room 1: John Doe
Number of Rooms: 1
Number of Nights: 2

Offer Price Per Room, Per Night: \$150.00
Subtotal: \$300.00
Taxes and Service Fees: \$53.94
Total Charges*: **\$353.94**

Purchase Trip Cancellation/Interruption Insurance
Check here to cover yourself in the event of unforeseen illness, injury, and job loss for only \$5.00 per room per night. [Details](#)

*Prices are in US dollars.

Important Information

- All rooms will accommodate up to 2 adults. Requests for bed types (King, Queen, 2 Doubles, etc.) or other special needs (including preferences for smoking or non-smoking rooms) should be requested through your confirmed hotel and cannot be guaranteed.
- Reservations are guaranteed for arrival on the confirmed check-in date only. If you do not check-in on the first day of your reservation and you do not alert the hotel in advance, the remaining portion of your reservation will be canceled and you will not be entitled to a refund.
- If priceline accepts your price, priceline will book your reservation in a property with an equal or higher star level than you requested. Please note it is possible that the hotel you are booked in could be a Resort, which will meet or exceed the minimum qualifications of the star level you initially requested. The hotel that is selected may or may not be one that you have seen during a hotel search on priceline. Any sorting or filtering options previously used will not apply to this Name Your Own Price request. Priceline will immediately charge your credit card the total cost of your stay. Rooms purchased through priceline cannot be cancelled, changed or transferred and refunds are not allowed. If your offer is not accepted, your credit card will not be charged.
- The reservation holder must present a valid photo ID and credit card at check-in. The credit card is required for any additional hotel specific service fees or incidental charges or fees that may be charged by the hotel to the customer at checkout. These charges may be mandatory (e.g., resort fees) or optional (parking, phone calls or minibar charges) and are not included in your offer price.
- Hotel rooms purchased through priceline are not eligible for frequent traveler points, upgrades, vouchers, or other discounts and incentives.

Have questions about Name Your Own Price?
Chat live with a representative now!
[Chat Now](#)

TV

Priceline's website leads with retail but its TV ads are all about opaque education.



Placed Next to Retail Products

Expedia and Travelocity place their opaque result next to a retail result, which then leads to a page full of opaque results. Here's Expedia:

Expedia search results for Honolulu hotels. The page shows 88 matching hotels. A prominent banner for 'Honolulu Hotels up to 40% off' is highlighted with a red arrow. Below the banner, several hotel listings are visible, including Hilton Waikiki Beach, Maile Sky Court, Aqua Aloha Surf & Spa, Walkiki Resort Hotel, and Park Shore Waikiki an Aqua Hotel. Each listing includes a star rating, price per night, and a 'See Details' button.

Expedia 'Unpublished Rate hotels' page. The page displays a list of 18 hotels with 'Unpublished Rate' badges. A red arrow from the left screenshot points to the 'Honolulu Hotels up to 40% off' banner, which is now a filter or category selection. Other red arrows point to specific hotel listings on this page, such as '4.0-Star Waikiki Marina Area Hotel', '3.0-Star Downtown Honolulu Area Hotel', '4.0-Star Waikiki Beach Area Hotel', '2.5-Star Central Waikiki Area Hotel', '4.0-Star Waikiki Near Beach South - Diamond Head Area Hotel', '3.0-Star Central Waikiki Area Hotel', and '2.5-Star Waikiki Marina Area Hotel'. Each listing shows the hotel name, star rating, price per night, and a 'See Details' button.

Placed Next to Retail Products

Here's Travelocity:

The image displays two side-by-side screenshots of the Travelocity website, illustrating the placement of a 'Top Secret Hotels' banner next to retail products. The left screenshot shows a search for 'South Shore Hotels' with a 'Find Cheap Hotels!' button. A 'Top Secret Hotels' banner is prominently displayed, advertising a 55% discount on a Top Secret Hotel in Oahu Island. The right screenshot shows the same search results, but with a 'Travelocity Pick' badge and a 'Find Cheap Hotels!' button. The 'Top Secret Hotels' banner is now placed next to the 'Top Secret Hotels' results, demonstrating the placement of the banner next to the product.

Left Screenshot (Original View):

- Search: South Shore Hotels
- Results: 75 hotels starting at \$83
- Hotel Price Range: \$50 - \$602
- Star Rating: 3 to 5
- Review Rating: 3 to 5
- Area: Oahu Island, Lanai, Maui, Hawaii
- Hotel List:
 - 1. Top Secret Hotels (Oahu Island) - up to 55% off* (Travelocity Pick)
 - 2. Outfitter Reef on the Beach (South Shore, Waikiki vicinity, Honolulu, HI) - \$199 (was \$329)
 - 3. Aston Waikiki Beach Hotel (South Shore, Waikiki vicinity, Honolulu, HI) - \$209 (was \$299)
 - 4. Ocean Resort Hotel Waikiki (South Shore, Waikiki vicinity, Honolulu, HI) - \$101 (was \$252)
 - 5. Outfitter Luana Waikiki (South Shore, Waikiki vicinity, Honolulu, HI) - \$119
 - 6. Aqoo Palms and Spa (South Shore, Waikiki vicinity, Honolulu, HI) - \$119 (was \$170)

Right Screenshot (Travelocity Pick View):

- Search: South Shore Hotels
- Results: 4 hotels starting at \$78
- Hotel Price Range: \$78 - \$111
- Star Rating: 3 to 5
- Review Rating: 3 to 5
- Area: Oahu Island, Lanai, Maui, Hawaii
- Hotel List:
 - 1. Top Secret Hotels (Oahu Island) - \$78 (Travelocity Pick)
 - 2. Top Secret Hotels (South Shore, Waikiki vicinity) - \$90 (Travelocity Pick)
 - 3. Top Secret Hotels (Waikiki) - \$109 (Travelocity Pick)
 - 4. Top Secret Hotels (South Shore, Waikiki) - \$111 (Travelocity Pick)


Find Cheap Hotels! Section:

- 1. Enter Travel Information: From, To, Dates, Number of Travelers
- 2. Select websites to compare rates: priceline, Expedia, Orbitz
- Buttons: continue

Visual Communication

Opaque products should look similar to but different from retail products.

- Replace the retail photo with an opaque placeholder.
- Use drastically different words.




Aqua Waikiki Pearl ★★☆☆☆
Expedia Special Rate
Area: Waikiki | [View on map](#)
Hotel info: 1-866-264-5744

3.8 out of 5
84 reviews

24 Hour Sale - Don't miss this great deal!
~~\$264~~ **\$114**
avg/night

[SEE DETAILS](#)




Honolulu Hotels up to 40% off



- Deep discounts on quality hotels
- **Get the deal now** - and the hotel name after you book

Expedia Unpublished Rate Hotels

up to **40% off**¹
standard hotel rates

[SEE DEALS](#)




2 Aston Waikiki Beach Hotel
★★★★★  295 reviews
South Shore: Waikiki Vicinity, Honolulu, HI


\$209 ~~\$299~~
Special Offer - save 30%
lowest per night avg

[Select Hotel](#)

Compare up to 4



Top Secret Hotels
Oahu Island

up to **55% off***

[View Top Secret Hotels](#)

*Compared with Travelocity's regular prices for the same hotel on the same day

★ ★ 1/2
\$84
per room per night*

[Continue](#)

Aqua Waikiki Pearl hotel (1.8 mi from city center)
Honolulu, Oahu



[See details](#) [Area map](#)

  [Read reviews](#)

★★★★★
\$95
per room per night*

[Continue](#)

Waikiki Marina area hotel (1.2 - 2.0 mi from city center)



[See details](#) [Area map](#)

[Best Value](#) [Lowest Price Guaranteed](#)

Hotwire Hot Rate

You get the lowest prices.
We hide the hotel name.
[Learn why](#)


Photo Placeholder

Expedia's placeholder conveys opacity well with the question mark symbol.



Travelocity's placeholder conveys opacity using the words "Top Secret Hotels" and also through the gnome's eyes, which are covered by cucumbers so it is blind to the identity of the hotel, in a very relaxed "I'm at a spa" sort of way.






Honolulu Hotels up to 40% off

- **Deep discounts** on quality hotels
- **Get the deal now** - and the hotel name after you book

Expedia Unpublished Rate Hotels

up to **40% off**[†]
standard hotel rates

[SEE DEALS](#)



Top Secret Hotels

Oahu Island

up to **55% off***

[View Top Secret Hotels](#)

* Compared with Travelocity's regular prices for the same hotel on the same day

Help Links on User's Path

travelocity

Home Flights **Hotels** Cars/Rail Vacation Packages Cruises Deals Activities ExperienceFinder

Search Hotels Top Deals Trip Ideas Popular Cities Book On

search select review reserve confirm

Review and Continue

1 Review your selections

Hotel: 1 Room, 7 Nights

3 star - Top Secret Hotel in Honolulu
Honolulu, HI

Room 1: Top Secret Room (1 Adult)

Check in: **Fri, Sep 2, 2011**
Check out: **Fri, Sep 9, 2011**

The Top Secret Hotel™ name and address will be shown after you book [Learn More](#)

Top Secret Hotels - Mozilla Firefox

http://travel.travelocity.com/hotel/OpaquePopup.do?sessionId=...

travelocity

Top Secret Hotels

What's the big secret?
These rates are so low that our hotel partners don't want to put their names to them. In order for us to bring these exclusive deals to you, we've agreed to keep the name of the Top Secret Hotel until after your booking is complete.

What discount am I getting?
Any discount shown refers to the discount you will get by booking a Top Secret Hotel™ when compared to the amount you'd pay if you booked the same hotel (knowing its name) through Travelocity.

When do I find out where I'm staying?
Don't worry—we won't keep you guessing forever. As soon as you complete your booking, we'll send an email confirming all of your booking details including the name and address of the hotel you have reserved.

Am I compromising on quality?
Absolutely not—the room types on offer are no different than any of the others we sell on our site. Guests of Top Secret Hotels can expect the same great service as with any of our other hotel bookings.

Can I cancel my booking?
 Nope. Once the secret's out, it's yours to keep. All bookings are completely non-refundable.

3.0-Star Downtown Honolulu Area Hotel
Area map and details

- Near Beach
- Fitness Center
- Pool(s)
- Restaurant(s)
- Business Center
- Laundry Facilities
- High-speed Internet Access

★★★★☆

\$110
per night

Select & Continue

Where is the hotel name?

4.0-Star Waikiki Beach Area Hotel
Area map and details

- Near Beach
- Fitness Center
- Pool(s)
- Restaurant(s)
- Business Center
- Laundry Facilities
- High-speed Internet Access

★★★★☆

\$159
per night

Select & Continue

Where is the hotel name?

3.0-Star Downtown Honolulu Area Hotel
Area map and details

- Near Beach
- Fitness Center
- Pool(s)
- Restaurant(s)
- Business Center
- Laundry Facilities
- High-speed Internet Access

Where is the hotel name?

1 Where is the hotel name?

When our brand-name hotel partners have unsold rooms, we can offer them at incredible values in order to fill them. Since hotels prefer not to publicize these deeply discounted rates, we hide their names until after booking.

Close window

Where is the hotel name?

Education Modules Near User's Path

Welcome - Already a member? | [Sign In](#) | [My Itineraries](#) | [My Account](#) | [Customer Support](#) | [Feedback](#)

[Home](#) | [Vacation Packages](#) | [Hotels](#) | [Cars](#) | [Flights](#) | [Cruises](#) | [Activities](#) | [DEALS & OFFERS](#) | [Rewards](#) | Like us on Facebook 1M

Expedia Unpublished Rate hotels near Honolulu [Change your search](#)

Check-in: • Check-out: • Rooms: • Adults: • Children:

9 Expedia Unpublished Rate hotels

Show hotels in an area:
[See areas on a map](#)

Select minimum star rating:
[See star rating guide](#)

Sort by:

Expedia Unpublished Rate hotels offer the great savings

These brand-name hotels are provided at rates so low we can't reveal their names. You get the discounted rate up front and the hotel name after you book.

Powered by **Hotwire**

[Compare hotel locations:](#)

Page 1 of 1

YOU'RE CURRENTLY VIEWING EXPEDIA UNPUBLISHED RATE HOTELS

[Back to all Honolulu hotels](#)

3.0-Star Downtown Honolulu Area Hotel

Area map and details

★★★★☆

\$110
per night

- Near Beach
- Fitness Center
- Pool(s)
- Restaurant(s)
- Business Center
- Laundry Facilities
- High-speed Internet Access

Where is the hotel name?

4.0-Star Waikiki Beach Area Hotel

Area map and details

★★★★☆

\$159
per night

- Near Beach
- Fitness Center
- Pool(s)
- Restaurant(s)
- Business Center
- Laundry Facilities
- High-speed Internet Access

Where is the hotel name?

What are Expedia Unpublished Rate Hotels?

Brand-name hotels at incredibly low rates

When our brand-name hotel partners have unsold rooms, we can offer them at incredible values in order to fill them. You get rates so low – **up to 40% off** – that no other travel site can beat them, [guaranteed](#).

Hidden hotel names until after you book

Hotels prefer not to publicize rates this low, so we hide the name until after booking. Once you book the hotel, you learn the name and exact location.

Brand names you know and trust

Use our Expedia Unpublished Rate hotel [star rating guide](#) to help determine the quality you can expect from the hotel you select.

Here's how it works

- The hotel name and exact location are shown only after you book.
- ALL BOOKINGS ARE FINAL and cannot be canceled, refunded, changed, exchanged, or transferred.
- All rooms are guaranteed to sleep the number of guests you provided during your search, but we cannot guarantee the number of beds.

FAQs Off User's Path

priceline.com

flights | hotels | rental cars | vacation packages | cruises | tours & attractions | pricebreaker deals | hotel guides | groups

sign in | my profile | my trips | check your request | help

Customer Support

Quick Access

About Your Offer

- > [Check your offer status](#)
- > [Find your offer number](#)
- > [Try your offer again](#)

Profile Help

- > [I forgot my password](#)
- > [What is a profile?](#)
- > [Update your profile](#)

General Information

- > [How Priceline Works](#)
- > [Check-in Procedures](#)
- > [Contact an Airline](#)
- > [Travel Guides](#)

Welcome to Our Help Center

We pride ourselves on two things — getting you the best deal for the things you need and providing excellent service. Choose a tab below to get started.

Travel Alerts

Important!

*******Travel Advisory Information*******

> [Please click here for information on travel affected by severe weather](#)

Service Activities | **Frequently Asked Questions** | **Contact Us**

You can browse our library of Frequently Asked Questions, or if you have a specific question enter it below.

Browse Our Database

Product:

Category: go

Search by Topic

Product:

Your Search Topic: go

• [Continue with your request](#)

Top FAQ's

Product: go

- How can I get Bonus Cash?
- Can I request a specific hotel through priceline?
- How do I check the status of my request?
- Where can I find my itinerary and invoice?
- Can I change or cancel my hotel rooms?
- Can I add rooms to my hotel reservation?
- Can I add nights to my hotel reservation?

Words

Words may be colorless and unexciting to the eye but they are far more precise than a gnome with cucumbers on its eyes.

“If we accept your offer, we'll immediately charge the credit card you provide to us. Please note, you will not be provided with a list of hotel options.” (Priceline)

“When our brand-name hotel partners have unsold rooms, we can offer them at incredible values in order to fill them. Since hotels prefer not to publicize these deeply discounted rates, we hide their names until after booking.” (Expedia)

“Shhh, These rates are so low that our hotel partners don't want to put their names to them. In order for us to bring you these exclusive deals, the name of the hotel will be hidden from you until booking is complete.” (Travelocity)

“When brand-name hotels use us to fill rooms that would otherwise go unsold, their prices are deeply discounted. Hotels don't want to publicize rates this low, so we hide their name until after booking.” (Hotwire)

How do others communicate opacity in non-travel industries?

Cigars

“Factory seconds” are cigars from a reputable company that are discounted because they have some imperfection that is unrelated to the quality of the tobacco inside, such as an off-color wrapper.

- Uses the question mark symbol
- Product name is “Mystery Grab Bag”
- Explains the trade-off of a slight imperfection in the wrapper color that affects how it looks but doesn’t affect how the cigar smokes.

The screenshot shows the Fingk Cigar Company website. The header includes the company logo, "established in 1893", and contact information: "CALL US TODAY! 1-800-221-0638". Navigation links for Home, Products, Our History, Policies, and Contact are visible. A search bar and a shopping cart icon are also present. The main content area features a dark red banner with the word "PRODUCTS" in white. Below this, a breadcrumb trail reads "Products > Cigars > Machine Made > Mystery Grab Bag >". The product title "Mystery Grab Bag" is displayed in a bold, dark red font. A sub-heading "Unbelievably low price!" is followed by a paragraph of text explaining the product's value. To the right of the text is an image of an open box of cigars with a large question mark on the lid and the words "mystery seconds" on either side. On the right side of the page, there are two dark red buttons: "VIEW ALL PRODUCTS" and "ADVANCED SEARCH". Below these is a dark red box with white text that reads "Cigarette Tobacco, Chewing Tobacco and Snuff Shipments Banned by Federal Government. READ MORE".

FINGK CIGAR COMPANY
established in 1893

CALL US TODAY! 1-800-221-0638

My Cart (0) \$0.00 | My Account

Home Products Our History Policies Contact

search brand or stock # GO

PRODUCTS

Products > Cigars > Machine Made > Mystery Grab Bag >

Mystery Grab Bag

Unbelievably low price!

These cigars are slight-seconds of a nationally distributed brand. Made with natural tobacco wrapper, Nuway binder and a flavorful blend of Nicaraguan filler, they are super-tasty, enjoyable smokes. We don't own the brand and can't tell you what it is, but we can tell you that the first quality cigars sell for over \$80 per box. The seconds smoke every bit as good as the high-priced brand name does, but have off-color wrappers that keep them from going for over \$1.60 each. Take advantage of this special offer and get them for less than 1/2 that price!

mystery ? seconds

VIEW ALL PRODUCTS

ADVANCED SEARCH

Cigarette Tobacco, Chewing Tobacco and Snuff Shipments Banned by Federal Government.
READ MORE

Clothes

Old Navy offered \$100 of mystery merchandise for \$20.

- Product name is “Mystery Bag”
- Explains that all sales are final
- It’s clear that the tradeoff is that you don’t know what’s in the bag.

Score \$100 mystery bag for \$20 at Old Navy on Saturday

By Doreen Christensen
July 8, 2011 08:00 AM

If you love surprises, then this deal's for you!

Old Navy is offering "Mega Deal Bags" filled with merchandise valued at up to \$125 for \$20 on Saturday morning.

Pop into Old Navy early to get your grab bag filled with mystery merch. The limit is two per customer and all sales are final.

[Click here](#) for the deal.



Wine

In Australia, they sell “cleanskins”, which are bottles of wine with no label or a minimal label.

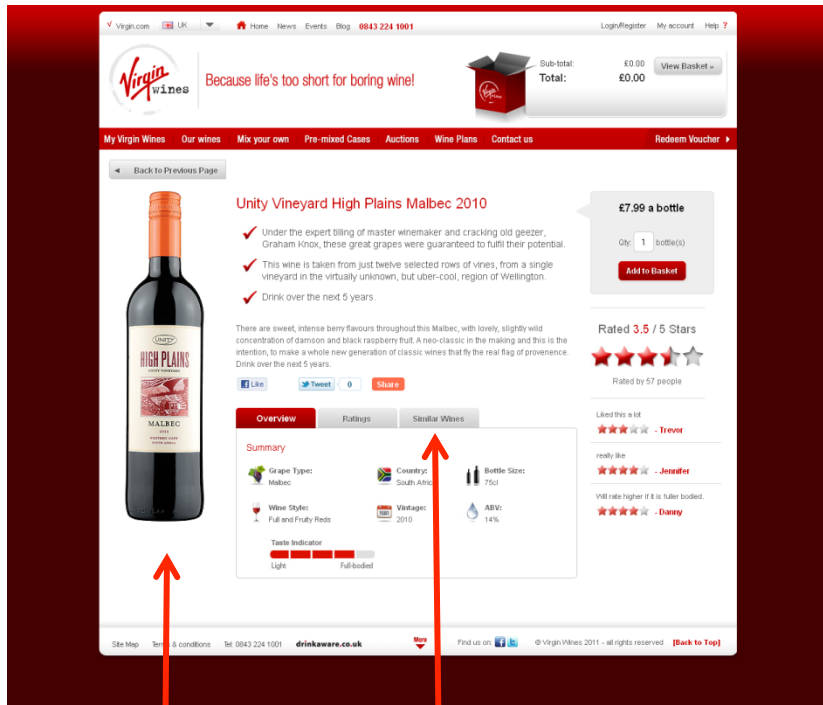
This presentation allows wineries to sell off excess inventory without damaging their brand.

- The lack of label or the no-frills black and white label communicates that it is a cleanskin.
- To preserve opacity, the consumer is told only basic information about the wine, such as the varietal, region, and alcohol content.
- The tradeoff is clear: a lower-than-normal price for less information about the source of the wine.



This is the front of the bottle. No brand.
No other label.

Wine

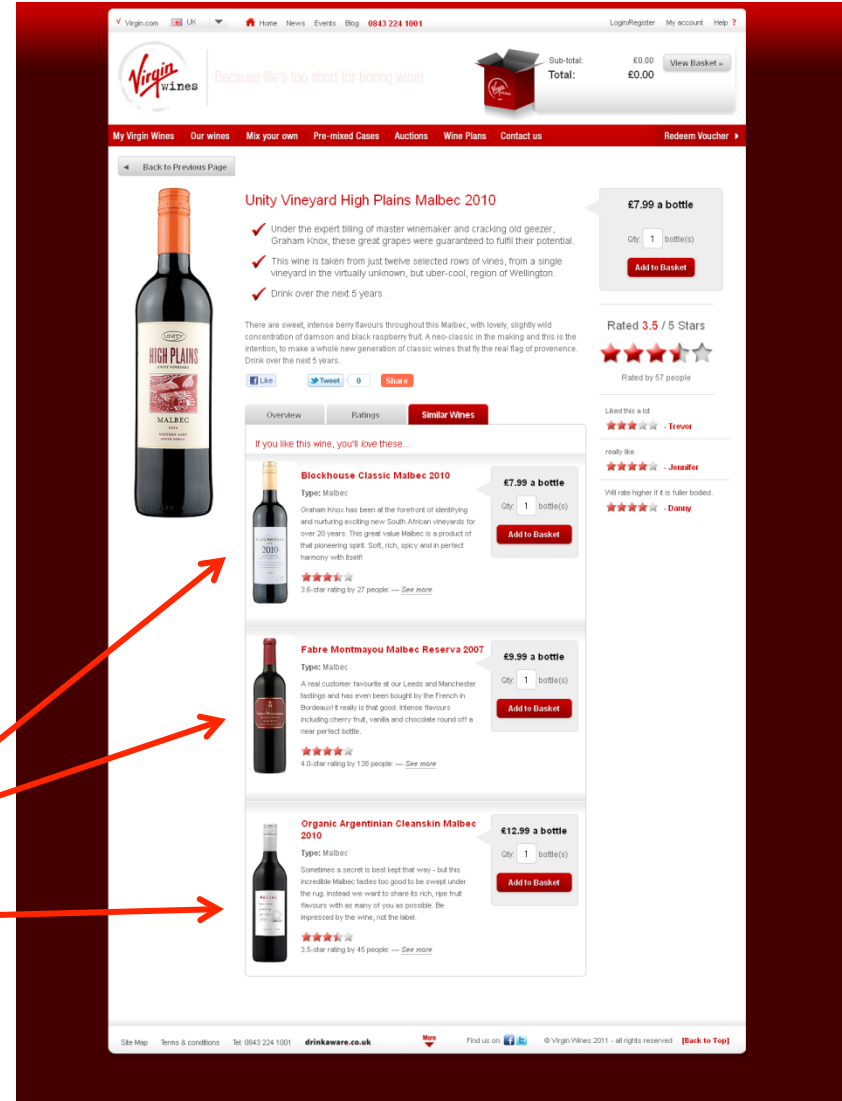


retail

retail

opaque

Virgin places cleanskins under a tab called "Similar Wines".



Wine

“Cleanskin” is in the product name.

“Be impressed by the wine, not the label.”

Where you expect to see the brand name, you see the varietal.

Virgin.com UK Home News Events Blog 0843 224 1001 Login/Register My account Help ?

Buy with confidence...
100% money back guarantee ✓

Sub-total: £0.00
Total: £0.00 View Basket »

My Virgin Wines Our wines Mix your own Pre-mixed Cases Auctions Wine Plans Contact us Redeem Voucher ▶

Back to Previous Page

Organic Argentinian Cleanskin Malbec 2010

£12.99 a bottle

Qty: 1 bottle(s)
Add to Basket

Rated 3.5 / 5 Stars
Rated by 45 people

really beautiful
★★★★★ - graham

A very pleasant red, not too heavy, so no food needed! Colin
★★★★★ - Colin

Seems to be a big variation in ratings and comments: Personally I really liked this wine, good depth and flavour. Got it in an auction, would not pay the full price.
★★★★★ - Ian

Overview Ratings Similar Wines

Awards

Summary

Grape Type: Malbec Country: Argentina Bottle Size: 75cl

Wine Style: Full and Fruity Reds Vintage: 2010 ABV: 13.5%

Taste Indicator
Light Full-bodied

Site Map Terms & conditions Tel: 0843 224 1001 drinkaware.co.uk Find us on: © Virgin Wines 2011 - all rights reserved [Back to Top]



**How do we communicate that we're
selling opaque products and
how can we improve?**

Not Alongside Retail

We currently lead with our opaque product and have a separate tab for retail hotels.

The screenshot shows the Hotwire website interface for searching hotels in San Diego, CA. The page includes a navigation menu, a search sidebar, and a main results area. A prominent banner at the top left highlights "Hotwire Hot Rates" with 35 discounted rates from \$42. The search results are sorted by "Best Value" and show three hotel listings, each with a star rating, price per room per night, and a "Hotwire Hot Rate" badge. The first listing is "Gaslamp Quarter South - Convention Center area hotel" with a price of \$71 and a 95% recommendation rate. The second listing is "Downtown - Harbor Island area hotel" with a price of \$104 and a 75% recommendation rate. The third listing is "Gaslamp Quarter North - Horton Plaza area hotel" with a price of \$112. The sidebar on the left allows for refining the search by star rating and area selection.

- This might cause people to miss the Retail tab. We saw this in the usability lab. No one navigated there without prompting. They didn't feel there was any reason to.

- We lose an opportunity to educate by not juxtaposing the retail and opaque result modules.

No Visual that Denotes “The Unknown”

Expedia has a placeholder that denotes the unknown.



Honolulu Hotels up to 40% off

- Deep discounts on quality hotels
- Get the deal now - and the hotel name after you book


Expedias Unpublished Rate Hotels

up to **40% off**¹
standard hotel rates

SEE DEALS



Travelocity has a placeholder that denotes the unknown.



Top Secret Hotels
Oahu Island


up to **55% off***

View Top Secret Hotels

* Compared with Travelocity's regular prices for the same hotel on the same day



I want a placeholder that denotes that unknown!



Waikiki Marina area hotel (1.2 - 2.0 mi from city center)

★★★★★
\$95
per room per night*

Continue

See details Area map

Recommended in **85%** of Hotwire customer reviews

Best Value Lowest Price Guaranteed

Hotwire Hot Rate

You get the lowest prices.
We hide the hotel name.
[Learn why](#)

Hotwire Hot Rate

You get the lowest prices.
We hide the hotel name.
[Learn why](#)

Hotwire doesn't really have a placeholder (something the same size and location of the retail photo), and it doesn't denote the unknown.

Individual Product Name

Our opaque product names are very similar to our retail product names. For example, “**Waikiki Marina**” sounds like it could be the name of a hotel, but we’re referring to an area. A phrase that doesn’t start with a proper noun, such as “**Hotel in the Waikiki marina area**”, would probably be better.

★★★ 1/2
\$84
per room per night*

Continue

Aqua Waikiki Pearl hotel (1.8 mi from city center)
Honolulu, Oahu

See details Area map

tripadvisor **○○○○○** Read reviews



★★★★★
\$95
per room per night*

Continue

Waikiki Marina area hotel (1.2 - 2.0 mi from city center)

See details Area map

Recommended in **85%** of Hotwire customer reviews

Best Value Lowest Price Guaranteed

Hotwire Hot Rate

You get the lowest prices.
We hide the hotel name.
[Learn why](#)

Expedia

Aqua Waikiki Pearl

Honolulu Hotels up to 40% off

Travelocity

Aqua Waikiki Pearl

Top Secret Hotels

General Product Name

Hotwire

Hot Rate

positive, not informative, matches our name

My gut feeling is that the guy on the street doesn't care about Hotwire or Hot Rates.

He cares about bargains.

We should come up with a name for our opaque products that better meets this need.

Answering Questions

Users are bound to have questions about our opaque products. We provide answers to their questions throughout the purchase flow but people still aren't finding the answers. This is an area where we can improve.

This answer is buried under "Hotwire Hot Rate", something the user might not care about.

Super savings* **Waikiki Marina area hotel** (5.6 - 6.1 mi from HIL)

★★★★★
\$85
per room per night*

[Continue](#)

[See details](#) [Area map](#)

Recommended in **85%** of Hotwire customer reviews

Hotwire Hot Rate +

You get the lowest prices.
We hide the hotel name.
[Learn why](#)

This answer might be glossed over and missed.

★★★★★ | [How do our star ratings work?](#)

Super savings*
\$85.00 per room, per night

[Book now](#)

[Back to search results](#)

Prices this low require us to hide the name until right after you book.

4.0-star hotel suppliers include:

- Westin
- Hyatt
- Hilton
- and other prestigious hotel brands

[See our star rating guide](#)

Hotel amenities | [See all](#)

Recommended in **85%** of Hotwire customer reviews

Lowest Price Guaranteed

Best value

Transparent Tradeoff

We need to make the tradeoff in our product more obvious.

Going out of business!

Everything 50% off. All sales final.

Yesterday's Muffins

Half price

30% off your hotel room

Hotel revealed after you book

If discounts are deep enough, people will just want to buy.
They won't ask why. We need to tell them why so they're not surprised.

If there is a tradeoff, we need to make it clear **immediately** so they don't find out later and then think that "there's a catch".

How does our tradeoff work?

We have a challenging tradeoff to explain. Even if people know what our tradeoff is, they might not understand how it works. They might be thinking:

Why does hiding the hotel name make it cheaper?

It's easy to understand why a bakery can't make yesterday's muffin's taste as fresh as today's, and that yesterday's muffins are not as fresh and are therefore discounted.

It's more difficult to understand that a hotel has excess inventory, is willing to sell those rooms at a discount as long as people don't know which hotel it is, but that those people will find out which hotel it is right after they buy it.

People probably think, “Why can't you just tell me the hotel name?” but nobody is thinking, “Why can't you just make yesterday's muffins taste as fresh as today's?”.

If we are perceived as holding back, making up strange rules, or generally trying to trick people, then it will be very hard for us to sell our product.



Distraction

In Priceline's model, the user is preoccupied with bidding and distracted from thinking about the hotel identity.

What can we distract the user with?

We can emphasize the good part of the tradeoff, the benefits of our product.

Is there anything else we can distract them with?

The screenshot shows the Priceline.com interface for a 'Name Your Own Price' search. The search is for hotels in or near Honolulu, HI, for a stay from Friday, August 19 to Sunday, August 21. The page is divided into three main steps:

- Step 1: Choose where you want to stay**: This step includes a map of Honolulu and a list of areas with checkboxes. The areas listed are: Diamond Head Area, Executive Center, Honolulu Airport (HNL), Kalahele, Kalahele North Shore, Kalahele South Shore, Kalahele West, Waialeale Beach Area, Waialeale City Center, and Waialeale Marina Area. A red arrow points to the 'Kalahele' area.
- Step 2: Choose the star level for your hotel**: This step includes a list of star levels with corresponding star ratings and prices. The options are: 5-Star Luxury (★★★★★), 4-Star Deluxe (★★★★), 3-Star Upscale Plus (★★★+), 3-Star Upscale (★★★), 2-Star Moderate Plus (★★+), 2-Star Moderate (★★), 1-Star Economy (★), and Results (4111413). A red arrow points to the '3-Star Upscale Plus' option.
- Step 3: Name Your Own Price (per room night)**: This step includes a price input field and a 'Name Your Own Price' button. The price input field is currently set to \$0.00. A red arrow points to the 'Name Your Own Price' button.

The page also includes a 'Best Deal' button, a 'Best Price Guaranteed' badge, and a 'Reservation Name' field. The page is titled 'Name Your Own Price® Hotels in or near Honolulu, HI' and includes a 'Save up to 66% on a hotel in or near Honolulu in three easy steps' banner.

A hot dog costs 30% of \$omething

It's easier for people to think in dollar amounts than in percentages.

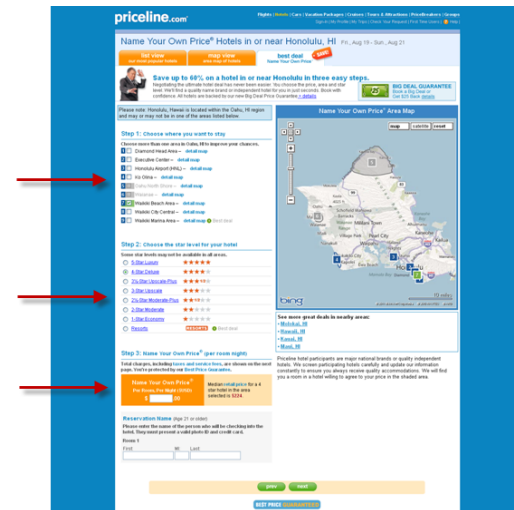
People know what dollars buy not what percentages of dollars buy.

When they hear of a discount, many people probably then have to convert percentages into dollar amounts.

People are more likely to say, "30% off, wow, that's \$20!" than "\$20 off, wow, that's 30%!" Dollars impress people.

In Priceline's model, the exact dollar amount that they are saving each night is very obvious.

How can we make the dollar amount of savings more obvious?



Summary of Recommendations

- Educate by placing opaque products alongside retail products.
- Educate by using an icon that denotes the unknown.
- Make the individual opaque product names drastically different from the individual retail product names.
- Choose a general product name that is more informative about opacity than “Hot Rate” is.
- Continue to be available to answer users’ questions about the product, and proactively approach those who may be confused and have questions.
- Inform users of the tradeoff involved in opaque products *immediately*.
- Explain how the tradeoff works, not just what it is.
- Distract people from the bad part of the tradeoff by emphasizing the good part, which is the dollar amount that people are saving.