A PRACTICAL GUIDE FOR TOURISM IN
EMERGING MARKETS
HOW TO GET ONLINE, SELL ONLINE AND SUCCEED ONLINE

DAMIAN COOK E-TOURISM FRONTIERS
In partnership with
E-Tourism Frontiers

E-Tourism Frontiers is a global initiative to develop a sustainable and equitable online tourism sector in new markets in Africa, Asia, the Middle East, Latin America, and Central and Eastern Europe via travel technology conferences and training seminars.

We provide training and interactive presentations on online tourism sales, marketing and management, and the use of social media in marketing. These presentations are in simple formats that are easy to understand. Our practical, affordable events feature some of the world’s leading online tourism experts. They include sessions on e-marketing, travel distribution and sales, social networking, and new media.

We work with destinations to create tailor-made online tourism events that combine presentations by leading professionals with training seminars. We partner with destination managers to identify local areas of capacity building and design the perfect programmes for their sectors.

Since 2007 we have trained thousands of people. Our delegates have included leading hotel chains, tour operators, travel agents, guest houses, specialist activity providers, destination managers, tourist boards and tourism ministries.

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About the Author

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Damian Cook is the founder and CEO of E-Tourism Frontiers, a major global initiative to develop online tourism in developing markets.

Damian has worked in tourism, travel media, marketing and communications in emerging markets for over 10 years. This experience led him to see that the failure of many destinations to access the online sector presents a major threat to the sustainable future of tourism.

Through E-Tourism Frontiers, he has successfully trained over 3,000 tourism professionals, small to medium businesses and tourism students. He has brought leading international experts and major travel firms and intermediaries to new markets to do business for the first time. He has worked in partnership with Expedia, Visa, Trip Advisor, Google, Microsoft and many other leading travel and technology firms.

He is a highly regarded trainer and speaker, known for demystifying social media and online business. He makes these topics accessible, easy to understand and enjoyable. His presentations and training are not conventional classroom presentations, but fully interactive presentations using multimedia and interactive content.
Acknowledgements

This book was developed progressively through our work in emerging markets. We would like to thank all of the people, projects, destinations and organisations that have supported our work in opening up global online tourism.
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Tools for the Travel Trade

South African Tourism (SAT) is always looking for ways to help the South African travel trade. Below are some of the resources available.

Social media channels

We are active on Twitter and Facebook and have dedicated travel trade platforms where we love to hear from you. Tell us about trends you’ve noticed in the industry or let us know if you’re looking for something more specific.

Facebook: SA Travel Trade page (https://www.facebook.com/SATravelTrade)
Twitter: @SATravelTrade (https://twitter.com/SATravelTrade)

We’re also active on Flickr. You are welcome to add your own pictures and descriptions so we can showcase our country even better. Visit the Love South Africa group to add your pictures. (http://www.flickr.com/groups/lovesouthafrica/)

Monthly newsletter

We send out a monthly newsletter that includes links to news updates, reporting on events and a calendar of important trade and consumer events. To sign up for the newsletter, register on the SAT Trade website. (http://www.southafrica.net/sat/content/en/za/trade-register)

We are building a comprehensive directory of all tourism products available in the country. Potential visitors to South Africa can view it on our website. Make sure that you are signed up and active to improve your chances of receiving queries through this channel. Add your product or claim an existing profile here: (http://www.southafrica.net/sat/content/en/za/product-homepage)

FUNDI

The FUNDI programme will not only give you basic information on the country that could help you market the destination better; it will also list you as a South African FUNDI. We can then recommend you to visitors as a member of trade who can assist them with bookings. Register and start the course here: (http://www.southafrica.net/sat/content/en/za/fundi-home-public)

Need to know more about who we talk to?

We have a dedicated strategic research unit that provides detailed insights into each market that we talk to around the globe. These insights are available to anyone who would like them. Visit the Research section of our website and search for arrivals statistics, strategic market research and other documents that you may find useful. (http://www.southafrica.net/sat/content/en/za/research-home)
Introduction

This book has been written to accompany the training courses we run in digital marketing, social media and e-business for tourism.

All of the key areas covered are included here in detail.

This material is designed for tourism businesses in any market, but with a particular focus on emerging markets. It’s designed to provide guidance in shifting away from traditional sales and marketing techniques and gradually increasing the use of technology and the Internet to manage and market a business.

It will not provide all the answers your business needs, but it will help you understand the fundamental changes that technology is bringing to the tourism world and give you ideas to begin your own process of discovery and change.

Emerging markets have been slow to keep pace with the rate of change in the developed world and this has threatened the sustainability of their tourism. Technology offers us a chance to quickly catch up and close this gap. It can help ensure participation in a more equitable playing field where we can compete in an environment unrestrained by borders and barriers, with access to new and lucrative global markets.

Online tourism is driven by choice and best marketed by the experiences of our visitors being communicated with via social media. This is our greatest strength. Emerging destinations are home to the world’s most vibrant cultures, new and little known attractions, and unforgettable experiences.

All of which can now be powerfully communicated through these new and far-reaching channels. For travellers and those of us in the travel business it is an exciting new world...
Chapter One:
The Digital Traveller
The Internet - Part of Everyday Life

The growth of the Internet has been one of the most significant and dramatic social, economic and cultural changes in history. In just over 5 000 days of existence, it has grown to include well over a billion connected users and reached almost every corner of the planet. It has become a vital part of the way we work, communicate and do business.

The Internet has had an immense impact on the rest of our lives too. On the way we shop, entertain ourselves, and meet people and interact with them. For the coming generation that has never known life without it, Internet use will be a constant part of everyday life, unlike any previous form of media.

Just think for a moment of the changes brought about by technology in your own lifetime. Think of how much impact this has had on your everyday life.

Think of the speed of email and the effect it has had on your daily work and personal life, and the other ways in which you now communicate and stay in touch with people.

Consider how you use the Internet to research information, check facts or find business contacts - and how quickly you can do this. Think of how reliant you are on the Internet for news and entertainment, or how much time you may spend downloading music or watching videos online.

If you have a Facebook profile, or use Twitter or another social network, you will have become used to creating content, posting it and managing your online presence.

Each of these elements of our online lifestyle has caused major changes to business around the world, causing some methods to become obsolete and others to prosper as technology plays an ever increasing role in everyday life.

With such a vast audience accessing, sharing and communicating content from all over the world, it is no surprise that tourism and travel have become increasingly and inextricably connected to the Internet.
Tourism and the Internet - A Perfect Match

The past decade has seen the Internet grow rapidly as a marketplace for travel as more and more people go online to look for destinations, air travel, tours and accommodation.

One of the main reasons that online travel bookings are so popular is that travel shopping and the Internet make a perfect match. This is due to a combination of the vast array of choice available online and the technological tools that make exercising choice so easy.

The ability to browse, research and compare destinations and attractions online ideally suits today’s travellers. They want as much choice as possible, and to be able to compare and research where they will travel. They want to be able to customise their trips as much as possible.

With a search engine at their fingertips, tourists can quickly research where and how they would like to travel. They can compare prices, standards and services and make much more informed choices. Once these choices are made, the ability to effect immediate, direct bookings and payments cuts out the hassle of email communication, sending and receiving confirmations, arranging payments and so on. Immediate bookings in real time have become the norm for tourists. So much so that being faced with waiting periods encourages potential visitors to look elsewhere.

This environment of choice - not just in where people travel, but also in how they travel - is why online travel agencies such as Expedia and Travelocity have become so popular. They allow ‘dynamic packaging’ that lets the customer choose which airline to fly with, where to stay and what to do. People do not have to fit into packaged itineraries. The entire customised travel programme can be booked and bought in a single click. It has become that simple.
Travelling Digital

Don Tapscott, in his book *Grown Up Digital*, described a new digital generation, now aged between 11 and 31, who are completely different to all generations before them. They have grown up with computers in their homes and classrooms and have spent most of their lives connected to the Internet.

This has made them think and behave differently to past generations of consumers. These are what he says are critical factors when the new ‘digital generation’ shops: freedom, customisation, scrutiny, integrity, collaboration, entertainment, innovation and speed.

They are all things we need to consider when we sell travel online.

Freedom

With access to the world at their fingertips, your clients have become used to having almost unlimited choice. They now expect to be given choices; the more the better. Forcing clients to have limited choices or expecting them to accept a standardised, ‘one-size-fits-all’ itinerary is a surefire way to lose their business.

Customisation

These modern customers respond very well to products and services that they can customise. The ability to tailor their holidays and travel experiences is vital to them.

Scrutiny

With so much information available to them, modern customers will spend a long time researching and comparing you to your competitors. Recent research shows that people spend an average of one month researching a travel destination. In many cases they will not be visiting your website or ‘official’ information sources. Instead they will be reading reviews or looking at content about you that has been produced by other travellers. You need to be ready for this and ensure that the information you put online is accurate, informative and supported by content from your customers.

Integrity

Research has also shown that modern travellers are very concerned about the impact their travel may have on the environment or communities of the places they visit. In fact they will make travel decisions based on this. Once again, they will not make these judgments based on information you give them, but will seek out objective opinions, reviews and the experiences of other travellers. Equally, if they have bad experiences with you, they will express this online.
Collaboration

As clients are now able to easily create and post content and talk about you online, they are now playing an active role in the marketing of your product. This makes happy customers your most valuable resource and it is vital that you leverage the positive content they produce and help them to spread it far and wide. Research has also shown that clients appreciate companies who respond to negative content and reviews, and enjoy feeling that they are part of the process of improving your business.

Innovation

Technology is always about the latest and greatest, and today’s gadget-loving market is no different. People will seize on the latest trend, so succeeding means taking advantage of these opportunities. This applies not only to social media trends, but also to new mobile devices, tablets and whatever is to follow.

Speed

Online is all about the ‘here and now’ and ‘the faster the better’. The rapid accessibility of online information means that Internet attention spans are getting shorter. Whether it is finding up-to-the-minute content about you, making contact with you or making a booking, no one is going to wait around to hear back from you. The age of immediacy is upon us and we need to be ready to work in this environment.

All of these factors are vital to your success and will form the cornerstones of the content of this book as we plan how to market your tourism business online.

Start off by asking yourself how ready you are to deal with clients who think like this and if you meet all of these criteria.

If you are happy that your business meets them all and is already perfectly suited to these kinds of clients, stop reading and carry on as you are.

If not, let’s plunge ahead and make some plans...
Global Online Tourism: Facts and Figures

The Internet is now the primary source of information for 95% of travellers.

It has also become the predominant means of booking and buying travel, with over 54% of all travel being purchased online (on average, as of 2012). The connection between research and direct sales is being strengthened as consumers increasingly turn to transactional travel sites.

The online travel industry felt the least impact of the recent economic recession (a 2% decline) and it was quickest to recover. The sector is continuing to grow strongly, with 7% growth in 2011-12. The industry is expected to double its earnings in the next year, topping US$300-billion in sales.

Yet in emerging markets less than 5% of tourism on average is distributed online and the general lack of updated information and inventory in these markets will continue to present issues in terms of visibility and sustainability for tourism in these countries.
A World of Choice

It is also important when we talk about choice and research to realise that price is not always the determining factor in choosing a destination. Some people believe the Internet is all about price. However, while clients do want to get good deals, they are looking for products that suit their individual needs, interests and tastes. The online environment is a great place to find the ideal product; the best and not always the cheapest.

As we have already seen, the Internet is driven by choice. When it comes to travelling the level of choice means that there is a much more diverse range of products available to an equally diverse range of potential consumers. Unlike a travel brochure listing with a limited set of options, the Internet offers virtually unlimited choice.

This translates into visibility and access to the right customers for all manner of niche products, like active and adventure travel, eco-travel, community tourism, voluntourism, scuba diving, mountain climbing, bird watching, walking and trekking, historical and cultural tourism, specialist travel for women and disabled travellers, and much more.

The business opportunities are as endless as the list. The Internet is not just growing tourism businesses but spreading the revenue further than ever before. This revenue is flowing into areas (and the communities and habitats they support) that have never had access to a market before.

This is very good news indeed for emerging destinations.
Chapter Two: Challenges in Emerging Markets
While the Internet has rapidly revolutionised the tourism business across the world this has not been the case in many emerging destinations, particularly those in the developing world.

Accessing accurate, high quality content and information about destinations - and particularly, finding direct access to tourism companies in these destinations - can be extremely challenging.

This presents a very real and significant threat to the sustainability of tourism in these countries. When we consider the modern generation of connected travellers, the way they use the Internet and their buying habits it is clear that if **you are not visible online, then you are invisible to them.**

If they cannot find you online, are forced to search at length for information about your services once they do reach you or cannot make a booking or payment online, you will **lose their business.**

**There is a whole world of competitors out there ready to take your business away from you and the vast majority of them are operating online.**

So if we, as an emerging market, want to survive and sustain our businesses we need to start making some serious changes. There are some important issues we need to address:
Traditional Travel Marketing and Sales

Many tourism businesses are accustomed to conducting their marketing and sales via traditional channels:

- They advertise in magazines or newspapers, on TV or radio
- They produce glossy brochures and distribute them via ‘snail mail’
- They attend trade shows and hand out promotional material
- They sign contracts with tour operators to feature in their itineraries
- They appoint agents to market them and make commissioned sales

We need to ask ourselves some serious questions about these sales and marketing models and how they relate to the modern, connected traveller.

Consider these approaches in light of the following:

67% of people in the key travelling demographic never read newspapers.

More people now use the Internet than watch TV.

There has been a recorded 90% reduction in requests for paper travel brochures in recent years. Travel agents and tour operators all over the world have been threatened by the Internet and are increasingly changing their business models to work online.

Think about how modern people use the Internet and the amount of information they have at their fingertips.
What will they find at a travel agency, in a brochure or at a trade show or ‘holiday fair’ that they cannot find online?

All of this considered, it is of great concern that many developing destinations and tourism businesses spend more on traditional marketing media and sales than they do on their websites, online marketing or social media.

Sometimes it is all too easy to fall back on the old marketing and management techniques that have served us well in the past, but as we start to see business declining we have to accept that there is an inevitable tipping point at which we need to change to survive.
Inventory and Access to Distribution Channels

Online marketing will raise the profile of your business and ideally drive clients directly to your website or to contact you via social networks. However, if they cannot then actually see availability and make a real-time reservation then you are likely to lose their business.

Your market expects this and you need to deliver it. So don't just create sales opportunities - close the sale. If this process is automated then you become capable of making sales 24 hours a day, 7 days a week.

E-commerce

Being an online business means not only booking online but also selling online. This means you have to be able to accept payments online, directly from clients.

In some emerging destinations, this is not possible, as local laws and banking infrastructure have not been changed to allow it. This urgently needs to change as it represents a complete block to business in the modern world. As these changes are being awaited there are some payment solutions that can be used to process payments externally.

In emerging destinations that do have e-commerce facilities, or are in the process of introducing them, it is important that tourism businesses set up payment solutions and access to secured and trusted payment gateways to allow their clients to pay them directly.

Access to Digital Marketing Tools

Many people working in the tourism industry, particularly business owners or those in senior management positions, may lead busy working lives and not be active on social networks. Equally, stakeholders working in remote areas or in places with limited connectivity or Internet access are unable to experience the web or engage in social media the way their clients do.

These situations can lead to us being disconnected from the way our potential customers live, think and shop. It means we will make uninformed decisions in our marketing strategies.

Therefore it is extremely important that we not just learn about this new form of media, but make every effort to use it in our everyday working lives. We need to start creating, promoting and sharing content. We need to make connections and build relationships online.

The best way to learn about the digital world and the tools you will need to market and manage your business is to learn as you go. The first step is get online and start using the tools available.

As you begin to learn what does and does not work for you and your clients online, you will also create a digital marketing strategy for your business.
Chapter Three: E-Marketing Strategies for Tourism Businesses
The Fundamentals of Digital Marketing

One of the first mistakes that many people make when they decide to start marketing their businesses online is to attempt to use all forms of social media, create all types of content and roll out multiple campaigns across multiple channels.

This approach will mean investing large amounts of time and effort, making it very difficult to target your marketing and even harder to measure the results.

There are so many possible channels, networks and media online that trying to use or access them all is virtually impossible.

The best approach is to carefully decide which digital strategies are most likely to reach the clients you have now and those you would like to have, and what channels are best to access these clients.

You need to map out how you are going to access your target audience, what you are going to tell them and how you want them to respond.
Online Tourism in Six ‘Cs’

Here is a simple overview of the key elements of a digital marketing strategy in 6 simple ‘Cs’:

Communication

Marketing is all about communicating messages and the Internet is an excellent tool for spreading your message far and wide.

Content

The web is all about content and to really sell yourself you need a high volume and variety of excellent content about what you are selling. Not just your own content but also content generated by your clients.

Channels

The Internet is not just about websites and email. There are many ways to get your content to your clients: social networks, multimedia, mobile content and much more.

Clients

Technology will not only help you reach clients, but also identify the high-value prospects - those with the highest likelihood of converting to profitable sales.

Conversion

As you start engaging with clients online, your focus must be on how you can convert their initial interest into sales as easily as possible without losing them along the way.

Coming Back

Once clients have converted to sales, your relationship with them is not over. You can use the Internet to stay in touch with them and persuade them to come back, and to encourage their friends, families and members of their social networks become your clients as well.

So as you plan your digital marketing strategy, think about how you need to change and the resources you need to achieve the following cycle:

**Communicating** the best possible **content** through a variety of **channels** directly to the best value **clients** and **converting** their interest into sales, then keeping them **coming back**.
It’s All About Formulas

While we may describe the process of online marketing in terms of customers, interests, budgets and niches, the fact remains that what drives both search engine and social media success are simple mathematical formulas.

Simply put, there are contextual matches made between the content you publish or the ads you create and the things that consumers are either searching for or talking about online.

Reaching and engaging with customers means matching the two together.

Creating Key Messages

Deciding how best to approach your digital marketing strategy means having a clear understanding of what you are selling and who you are selling to.

As you move into digital communication you will need to be able to quickly and concisely sum up what it is that you do or sell. Defining what you do will help you decide what kind of content you will need to communicate.

When search engines and social media are used to research travel, it is vital that we consider what our potential clients are searching for or talking about.

This means coming up with areas of interest that your clients have and how they describe them.

As a hotel for example:

We are a luxury, beachfront boutique hotel, offering a range of both active and relaxing excursions.

As a tour operator:

We offer tailor-made adventure trips, hiking and trekking into remote areas, camping in the wilderness, and local culture experiences.

You must be able to clearly define exactly what you have to offer.

These suggestions will help you:

• Structure your content
• Create messages to communicate
• Identify terms your potential customers will be searching for online
• Identify conversations about similar content in social media groups that you can join and engage with

However, your definitions cannot be too generic or you are going to be lost in the vast amount of content online.
What Makes You Different?

Tourism is a big business and a highly competitive one. There are lots of other businesses out there trying to sell to the same people that you are. They are increasingly doing so online.

It is very easy to find yourself competing with a large number of businesses, offering the same or similar products to the same market.

For this reason it is critical that you identify what it is that makes you different to all of your competitors. You need to identify the key Points of Difference about your business.

What is it about you that your clients consistently praise or compliment?

Were you the first to offer what you do?

Are you the best? Do you have credentials to show that?

What are your unique products and services?

Are you the best value in the market? Not cheapest, but offering the best possible product for what you charge?

This is also a good way to analyse your own strengths and weaknesses and those of your competitors.

What do you offer that they do not?

How do you do things differently to them?

What are your real strengths?

What weaknesses do they have that you do not have?

By identifying these points of difference you will start to develop key messages about your business. You can use these again and again in the content you create, the search terms you target and the social media you engage in.
Thinking About Your Market

Now you need to match your key messages, definitions and differentiating terms to the right people who are likely to be searching for them or using them socially.

As you start to build key messages about yourself and your business and decide what makes you different, you also need to think about your clients and what makes them different.

Identify who your best value current clients are and what you know about them.

Are they individuals or groups or families?

Where are they from?

What do they do for a living?

How much do they earn?

Then think about other kinds of clients who are likely to be attracted to and interested in your key points of difference.

If you are selling tourism to an emerging destination, keep in mind that there are particular groups of travellers that are your most likely customers.
Common Travellers to the Emerging Markets: The ‘Es’

Experiencers

Social travellers looking to see a destination and have several different experiences (either individually or on a tour) with plenty of variety and sightseeing. They are heavily influenced by advertising and search for popular destinations and products, but will choose carefully and research before buying.

Explorers

Independent travellers are looking to get off the beaten path, often with niche interests or activities in mind. They quite often use specialist operators and are reliant on referrals from similar-minded travellers or specialist communities.

Entertainers

Travellers looking for a single destination that can provide them with everything they need - a resort, spa or all-inclusive hotel. In many cases they travel as couples or families and will search for providers who can give them what they want, or destinations that their friends and families have enjoyed and recommended.

Engagers

Those who are coming for a specific purpose, such as business travel or research, or to visit friends or relatives. Once they have reason to come, they will often research possible short breaks and excursions they can add on and will take referrals from the hotels or travel agents they are working with. They may also be ‘voluntourists’ looking to do voluntary work on projects they can offer their services to, based on their interests or skills.
Common Travellers to the Emerging Markets: The ‘Es’

Eventers

Those travelling to attend a specific event - a conference, festival or sporting event. They rely on referrals from affiliates of the event, or may organise group travel together with others attending the same event, or independently research travel options before or after the event.

These are basic and very general groupings of the most common types of travellers - there are of course many different types of travellers within these groups.

As you start considering your key points of difference and the audiences to which they will appeal, you can start planning tactics to target your communication to the right clients via the right channels.

Start identifying the most likely websites they visit, social networks they join and how they use the Internet. Fortunately web habits and usage are very easy to measure and analyse, so there is lots of rich data available about how members of key market demographics behave online.

You can use the Internet to research your potential audience demographics (what kind of people they are), psychographics (how they think) and web trends (how they use the Internet).

The following organisations produce and publicise excellent information about the online habits of travellers and consumers:

www.phocuswright.com

www.travelmole.com

www.newmediatrendwatch.com

www.emarketer.com

www.tnooz.com

www.mashable.com

As you begin to market and engage with individuals, communities and networks online, and measure the results of your marketing, you will start to identify the content, channels and targeted media that are working for you.
The Bragging Factor

At a psychological level, social media is a platform for self expression; thus our online profile online is an extension of ourselves.

People who build and maintain social profiles online, particularly Facebook pages, use them as tools to tell their own life stories. In many ways all of us are now writing our own autobiographies, by means of text, images, video and links to our interests. To our audiences (our friends and families) this is often how they see our lives and - most significantly - this is how we want to be seen.

In marketing terms this is very interesting. People are creating their ideal versions of themselves and their lives online. Whether we like it or not, we have to accept that the motivation for creating a great deal of social media is, simply put, showing off.

Why do we post photographs of places we've been, people we've met, our families, pets and things we've done? Because we want to show them to other people. And it's inevitable that we succumb to a little bragging. In fact, many social media platforms have been deliberately designed to take advantage of our desire to do so.

This is great news for travel marketing.

People like to talk about the special and unusual moments in their lives - the 'once in a lifetime' moments and experiences when they do something out of the ordinary. There is no better opportunity to do so than when travelling. The more unusual and interesting the place or experience, the more likely they are to talk about it and the more likely that their friends will respond to it.

In many ways, social media is the ultimate dinner party and everyone loves the guest with great travel stories. So you have to consider what you have that your clients can brag about. What are the unusual and interesting experiences you can give them that they will want to talk about online? As we move on to discuss social media and user-generated content, you will see how important this is.
Creating a Strategy

With your key messages and target audiences in mind, you can start to develop an outline for your digital marketing strategy.

This should identify:

**Targets**
Who are you trying to reach and why?

**Brand and Position**
What are your key messages about your points of difference as a brand?

**Profile**
How you will make sure that people will find you and become aware of your brand through search engines and social media?

**Hooks**
The interesting stories, news and offers that will create interest and attract traffic to your website or social media profile.

**Content**
The content you will use to engage and deliver on the interest you’ll attract.

**Channels and Tactics**
The channels, media and networks you will focus on.

**Conversion and Measurement**
What facilities you will have to convert interest into sales and how you will measure the levels of interest raised and the percentage of sales conversions.

**A single campaign strategy like this could be summed up as easily as:**

We are the best value family holiday resort in our area and we will target families from Europe before their school vacation period by promoting a special family offer that includes free kids activities and spa package. We will promote this through a video testimonial from a family who recently stayed with us. This will be posted on our YouTube channel and embedded on affiliate websites and Facebook, combined with Facebook ads and some keyword ads for family breaks in our region. All of this will drive traffic to a special landing page we have created for bookings.
Chapter Four: Your Website
As you implement your digital marketing strategy the most important online resource you will have at your disposal is your website. While it is true to say that a website alone is no longer enough for a company, it will remain the hub for all of your online activity: a repository for your content, a tool for doing direct business and sales, and an asset for interaction with clients.

**Websites in a Changing Web**

In the past a business's website was its sole representation online; a simple source of information to which customers could be referred.

With the arrival of simple tools to create and share content online, platforms like Facebook pages and blogs are becoming equally, if not more, important points of contact for companies.

However, while it may be possible to run and market a business via a blog or through social media alone, a website is still far more effective as a central information point. It can provide greater depth of information, interaction and potential for selling and transacting online.

Your website should therefore be the centre of all of your online activity and the home of your brand. It's the place where all the interest you attract will be driven towards and the place that all your social media tools and applications will be linked to (and vice versa).
Seven Questions to a Better Site

If you already have a website and are wondering if you need to upgrade or improve it, ask yourself the following questions. Unless you can answer ‘Yes’ to every single one, you should reinvest in your site.

Has Your website grown substantially in the past year?

Your site should not be the same as it was a year ago. You should be continually updating and growing your site.

Is at least 25% of your site devoted to content that relates to current events?

Your site needs to highlight special offers, seasonal promotions, recent reviews or user-generated content.

Is your content shared elsewhere online?

You need to integrate your social media content with your site and have clear links to your Facebook page, video channels, blogs etc.

Does every page of your site have a specific purpose and drive or direct the user towards a sale or contact?

Each page needs a predefined purpose. It should have a point of exit leading to a booking, a contact request or some other form of ‘conversion’. Pages should not simply contain content without any calls to action.

Do you have different content for different users?

Your site should not be just ‘one size fits all’. You should create content to meet the needs of a variety of potential users.

Is all the content easy to find and use, and is it accurate and up to date?

You should make high-quality, accurate content your main priority, and ensure that it is frequently updated.

Do you know how many people are actually using your site, rather than just visiting it?

You should receive and respond to detailed statistics and user data for your site and be aware how people use your site. You should know where they are from, how they enter your site, what they do on it and where they leave it.
Owning and Hosting Your Website

In order to run a website you need a domain (a website address eg: www.yourname.com) that you own and a hosting service to keep it online and visible to the world.

It is essential that your website belongs to you. This means that the domain must be registered in the name of your business. No one else should ever own your website, even if they manage or work on it for you.

So when you create a website with a designer or developer be sure that the website is registered in the name of your business. You can check the registration details of your website by contacting the hosting company or by searching via websites like www.whois.net.

Registering a domain costs on average around US$10 - 12.

A hosting package for your website should cost on average US$120 - 150 per year for a small to medium site, including email hosting.

Check with your site developer to find out what kind of hosting your website will require, based on its size and the services you are offering. Select the best hosting package accordingly. If you will be using your website for e-commerce you will need a payment gateway to enable secure payments.

You should discuss all of this with potential hosting providers to ensure that your hosting service matches your website and business needs.
Naming Your Website

Think carefully about the name you choose for your website, as it will become your online identity and the name by which you will be known and found online.

Keep it as short as possible. Try to avoid anything that will make it difficult to remember or easy to misspell, like underscores, hypens or too many numbers.

If you are using a local name that may seem unusual to foreign clients, think about the spelling mistakes they may make. Register alternate domains with those errors in them and have them redirected to your main domain.

Generally speaking a .com domain suffix is best when it comes to search, rather than .net or .biz. However, you may want to register those domains as well to prevent your competitors from buying them.

A country-specific domain can be useful if you are selling domestic or regional tourism and want to be found on local search engines.

Some destinations and businesses are starting to use the .travel domain suffix. This is a tourism-specific domain that requires you to be accredited as the owner or manager of a business in order to own it. The market has been slow to accept and begin using this suffix, and there are administrative and legal issues when it comes to companies or destinations with the same name.
For more information see: www.travel.travel.
Building Your Website

It is now possible to build a website using WordPress, free online web building and hosting services (like Yola.com) or free blogging services (see the Blogging section in Chapter Eight).

However, a professional tourism business should have its own domain and a complete custom-built, interactive website. This is best done in conjunction with a skilled web developer.

First you need to understand the difference between a web designer and a web developer.

A designer will create the front end of the site: the ‘look and feel’, including the layout, graphics, menus, banners etc.

A developer will implement this design and actually construct the website. This includes the technical structure and functionality, and can also include a ‘back-end’ that will allow you to manage and update it.

It is very rare to find one person who can do both development and design, as they require very different skill sets. A good web development company will have both technical developers and graphic designers to work together to create complete websites.

Choose carefully when selecting a developer. Having a skilled and competent developer who understands your business is essential. Ask to see their full portfolios of websites for other clients. Get the links to these sites so that you can look at them from the perspective of a potential client. Contact the business owners and ask them how they found the service and support they received.

Once you have appointed a developer you need to draw up a plan for the site.

Your first agreement should be that you will not create a static website using templates that require recreating and uploading pages every time you make a change.

You need a dynamic website that allows you to easily update pages and publish them immediately. These work off a content database that is managed by a user-friendly content management system that you work in. See the Content Management section later in this chapter.

With this in mind you can start planning your site.

Establish clear objectives for what you want included in the site and what functionality you would like it to have. Be sure to agree on what the site can and cannot do.
Once you know exactly what kind of site you want to build, you need to pause for a moment for some very important considerations...

A common mistake that many people make is to immediately focus on the front end design of the website.

Your priorities in order of importance must be:

1) User-friendliness

The structure and usability of your website and its content, and how it is laid out and navigated by your users.

2) Search Engine Friendliness

Make sure that each page and its content can be easily indexed by search engines. Optimise your website to make sure that people can find you (including via links from your social media profiles).

3) Appeal and Attractiveness

The front end graphic design, branding, colours and design of menus, buttons and links.
Creating Information Architecture

As you lay out the structure of your site and content do not think of it as simply an electronic version of your brochure - websites are very different to print media.

Your visitors are unlikely to select items from the menu and read them in isolation. Once they select and open a page they need options to access related or further information from that page.

Starting from your Home page, think about what visitors will be looking for when they arrive at your site or on a particular page within your site and be sure that there are clear options to help them find more information.

It helps to create two kinds of menus:

**Global menus** that will appear on every page.

**Contextual menus** that will appear as sub-menus on pages within the different sections of your website and relate to the content of that section.

Don’t forget that not everyone will enter your site, through the Home page. They might open a link to a specific page on your site that has been sent to them or posted online, or they may be directed to a specific landing page you have created for a campaign.

No matter where they enter the site, the menus should be clear enough for them to navigate their way through.

You should follow a strategy of leading all visitors to your site to a point of contact or interaction. This should ideally be a booking form, a contact form, or a quick registration form that will allow you to send them information. At the very least it could be a page where they can watch a video or download informational content.

Try and make this path as short (in terms of number of clicks) and as simple as possible without compromising the quality and accuracy of the information.

Based on your menus you can now create individual pages. Decide in advance what the purpose of each page is and what the user will have come to the page for. Make sure that you give them what they want, but also give them additional options in the contextual menu on each page.
Don’t forget that you can educate your potential clients as they move through your site. They may have arrived at a page about the spa at your hotel, without having seen the page about your fitness centre or tennis courts. Show them related features and options at each step of the way.

As you build up pages and the connections between them, you will create what is known as Information Architecture for your site.

Your developer will help you in this process and should create a site map showing all of the pages of the site and how they are linked.

This should be a simple diagram that will enable you to map paths through the site from entry through to point of interaction.

Once the site map has been prepared, ask the developer to build what are called a wireframes.

These are simulations of your website pages without the content, but with the layouts that they will have and active menus that allow you to click from one to the other. The wireframes will allow you to test drive and click through your website in its early stages. It will also allow you to finalise exactly where each element will be placed on each page.

Once you have agreed on your website structure and the wireframes, your content management system can be built and you can begin creating content for each page.
Graphic Design

Make sure your site is attractive and appealing and reflects your business, with your corporate colours and logo prominently displayed.

Do not use full-page ‘splash pages’ as an introduction to your website as they can take too long to download and can hinder your site from being accessed and indexed by search engines.

Be wary of graphics overloading your page and overshadowing the content. Be careful that important text and ‘call to action’ items (like booking or contact buttons) are not pushed so far down the page that they are below the bottom of the users’ screens (called ‘the fold’), forcing them to scroll to look for it.

Avoid overuse of animation on your page. It can make the page cluttered, slow to download and distract the user from the text and other information on the page.

Many designers encourage the use of Flash animation on websites. This is a popular form of animation. Keep in mind though that some of your users may not have Flash players installed or updated and will be prompted to download these before they can view your site. Also, due to a current conflict between Adobe and Apple, iPhones and iPads cannot display Flash content. It also has to be carefully coded, otherwise search engines will be unable to read it.

If you do decide to use Flash, do so sparingly and not for any essential features of your site, such as menus.
Your Content

Each page on your site should have different content.

The content on each page should reflect the **aim and purpose** you have set for that page and also the **key messages and points of difference** about your company that you identified in your marketing strategy.

For search engine optimisation it is important that you have these messages mentioned within the text of each page. See the Search section in this chapter for details.

**Inspirational vs. Practical**

Content on your site should be blend of:

**Inspirational**

Content that inspires visitors and makes them want to visit your destination, stay at your hotel or join your tour. This could include well-written, appealing and descriptive text; high-quality pictures and video; or positive user reviews.

This content should be designed to produce a **response from the user**.

**Practical**

Content that responds to what the users need to know once they have been inspired. This could be room information, itineraries, seasonal information or rates.

This content should be designed to **respond to what the user wants from you**.

Ideally the user’s experience of your website should move from **the inspirational to the practical**.
Copy

Copy means the text content in your site.

When writing for a web audience, remember that people read online in a very different way than they do offline. It is very difficult to read long passages online and the reader is more easily distracted. Readers also tend to skim read online.

So keep your content brief, clear and concise, and well spaced. Use bullet points to make individual points:

- clear and legible
- easy to digest
- in logical order

Use bold text to emphasise key messages and points.

Be sure that content is grammatically correct, spelled correctly and accurate. If you are writing copy that is not in your native language be sure to have a native speaker read through and check it for errors.

Include clear directions and instructions with links to guide your users, such as:

- Contact us for information
- Click here to read more
- Register to receive updates

Images

Use appealing, good quality images on your website. Be sure that they are optimised for the web so that they do not take too long to download. You can optimise images for the web using a programme like Photoshop.

Make sure your images are correctly named and tagged so they can be found by search engines (see Search section in this chapter).

Video

Video is a great way of presenting messages about your product and recreating the experience of a tour with your company or a stay at your hotel. It is free from language barriers and presents in a highly appealing way. It is very easy to embed video in your website (see YouTube section in Chapter Eight).

Third-Party Services and Content

Content and functions from third-party providers can be embedded in your website. You can embed features such as booking and e-commerce services, and you may also include widgets that provide weather, local time or currency exchange information for your area. Online maps are also simple to add to your website.

User-Generated Content

Some of the most effective, compelling and trusted content to market your destination or product is content produced by your satisfied clients. Reviews, photos, videos and blogs from your users are powerful marketing resources. Include them, either as directly embedded content or as links, and feature them prominently on your website.
Content Management Systems

Keeping a website growing, active and representative of your business means having the ability to manage the site and the content yourself.

Outsourced content management can disconnect your content from your business, make constant live updating problematic and make it difficult for you to truly ‘own’ your website.

Ideally your website should be fully managed and updated from within your company.

This means having a content management system (CMS) and making sure it is used by the right people - ideally everyone involved in the daily activity of your company, and particularly, marketing staff. These people do not need to have any technical or programming ability to do this.

A good CMS will have a user-friendly interface and a simple WYSIWYG (What You See Is What You Get) editor that can be used by anyone familiar with using MS Office applications.

This means you can add and change text, images, video and other content easily by using basic toolbars; and then preview content before making it live online. You can easily add new pages, features and media to the site, automatically updating the site navigation in the process.

A typical CMS interface:

Often a CMS will have an editorial control system that allows a single main editor to oversee management of the site and to delegate particular pages, sections and content responsibility to different individuals, departments or projects within the company. Uploaded content can then be screened by the overall web editor before being published online.

This allows a much greater volume of content to be quickly generated and published. It also allows each department to feel it is accurately and appropriately represented online and encourage greater use and understanding of online resources by all your staff.

A CMS can also allow you to enter and manage meta data and tags about each page, which are useful to search engines (see Search section in this chapter)

To see a detailed list of all popular and widely available content management systems please visit:

Analytics

In order to understand what is working and what is not you should always keep track of how your website is being used.

Pay attention to:

- How many unique visitors you are receiving
- What countries they come from
- How they are reaching your website (via search engines, referrals or links)
- How many social media referrals you are receiving
- How many pages each visitor visits
- Which pages are most visited
- Which pages are least visited
- How much time people spend on your website
- Where people leave your site
- How many people convert to enquiries or sales
- Whether any of your online ads and campaigns are driving traffic

Where can you find all of this information? Fortunately it is all freely available - provided to you by Google Analytics. This excellent service gives you highly detailed analytic information and data about your site. This is sent to you in easy to understand reports, as often as you like.

You can sign up for it at: http://www.google.com/analytics/

Use your analytics data to make informed decisions about how to change and grow your website and to measure the value of your social media outputs and online campaigns.
Social Media-Friendly Websites

Be sure that your website includes clear and prominent links to all of your social media channels: your Facebook page, blog, Twitter account, Flickr galleries and YouTube channel.

Also include options for users to share the content of any page of your website via their own social networks accounts, eg: to 'Like' your content on Facebook or post it on Twitter.

By the same token, when you are updating your Facebook page, writing your blog, commenting on another blog, or tweeting, remember to always include links back to your site, as this can have a significant positive impact on your for search engine rankings.
Additional Features

The following are other important features to include in your website:

- **About Us** – a brief history of your company and a summary of your core business.
- **Galleries** – organises and categorised galleries of images and videos
- **Frequently Asked Questions (FAQ)** – a list of commonly asked questions about your company, products or services
- **Feedback** – a guest book, survey, feedback form or email link to invite feedback
- **What’s New** – a summary of latest news and developments on the Home page
- **Free Stuff** – for downloads such as postcards, screen savers or a destination information pack
- **Promotions and Special Offers** – prominently displayed current special offers or packages
- **Forward This Page to a Friend** – makes it easy for users to forward pages of your website to their spouses, friends or family they may be considering travelling with
- **Maps** – your own map or a link to a map showing the location of your destination.
- **Currency Converter** – a useful tool if you are quoting any costs in local currency
- **Today’s Weather** – reports and forecasts using icons (e.g., sun or clouds) and indicating temperatures
- **Contact Us** – a page with all your contact details (such as telephone and fax numbers, email address, and postal and physical addresses), plus an enquiry form that allows you to collect information and users email addresses in order to contact them if they wish.
- **Media Room** – all your past press releases, links to mentions you have received in the media and contact options for media enquiries
- **Bookmark This Page** – to encourage repeat visits
- **Site Map** – this will not only help users who become lost in your site, but is also important for search engines that use site maps to index websites

And most importantly…

**Enquire Now or Book Here** – on every page of the website – as a call to action – there should be a clickable button leading the user to a booking or enquiry form. This process should be quick, uncomplicated and secure.
Keep Going: Essential Management of your Website

Some important rules to keep in mind as you manage your website:

**Keep Updating**: keep your site constantly and freshly updated.

**Keep Growing**: your site should grow constantly and substantially as you add new content, pages, features and links. You should aim for your site to always be 50% larger than it was one year ago.

**Keep It Fresh**: make sure that you always have fresh content. At least 25% of the content of your site should be about things happening now - current news, special offers, recent client reviews and so on.

**Keep It On Target**: always be sure that all new content and features emphasise your key messages and drive the user towards a contact or sale.

**Keep It Appropriate**: don’t just use one-size-fits-all. Think about who is visiting each page and why they are visiting that page. Create specific content to meet these needs.

**Keep It Social**: provide clear links to all of your recent social media posts, updates and activity.

**Keep Informed**: Track and analyse user data and other analytics generated by your website and make informed decisions about its growth and future development based on this.

**Keep In Touch**: encourage your users to register and contact you, and give them options to receive updates or ask questions.

Gamewatchers Safaris

A working website that shows how it’s done.

Gamewatchers Safaris in Kenya has created an excellent site with all the right features, built and optimised to be easily found. It has worked very well for them as a promotional and business tool.
Chapter Five: Search Engines: Being Found
While an increasing amount of traffic is being delivered to websites via links, ads and referrals from social networks and other media, the role of search is still paramount.

With well over 400 million searches daily on Google alone, search remains the driving influence on the web. Over 80% of all online sales originated from a search engine enquiry. Even shoppers who book offline will still use the Internet to help them make their decisions.

Furthermore, 95% of all international travellers now regard the Internet as their primary source of information. So it is vital that you think about the search profile of our business and consider search engine optimisation (SEO) as a way of improving your visibility.

**How it works**

The way that search engines work is extremely complex, but in basic terms:

To index the Internet, a robot programme or ‘spider’ scans the entire web, following links between web pages. As it progresses it caches page text, content and other information from these pages.

This process happens constantly and it is this index that is used to produce results for an individual search.

Because of this process the results are ranked based on a large number of factors, but the most influence on a high ranking result, in order of influence, comes from:

- The number of links to your website from other websites - especially high-ranking sites
- The age of the domain and website
- Recently and frequently updated content
- Frequency of search terms on pages
- URLs (the names of pages)
- Volume of traffic to the site

The formulas and processes are constantly changing and results are increasingly being influenced by real-time results (especially from social media) and user data from sites.

For the time being, however, it is important to focus on having a search optimised site and encouraging inbound links from other websites to yours.
Search Engine Optimisation

You should make sure that your website structure and coding is search engine friendly.

Quite often very complex sites have barriers to search engine spiders, which means their content is not fully indexed.

These barriers can include:

- Flash introduction pages and/or Flash navigation that spiders cannot read.
- Complicated or animated menus.
- Pages that have coded URLs or names as opposed to simple words.
- Redirects and linking multiple domain names to one website. Redirects can be useful in certain circumstances, but may harm rankings if over-used.

Naming your Pages

The URL or address of each website page is important and should contain target search terms for that page.

If a site is database-driven, the pages will have code-generated URLs, but a good CMS will allow you to replace these with conventional page URLs.

For example:

**Bad:** www.yourhotel.com/57429/22.bb.html/?profile=NDpMTOSbRGt+ty=234

**Good:** www.yourhotel.com/accommodation.html

Using Keywords

Think about the keywords that your potential customers are most likely to use when searching for you. (For more information about how to identify these words see the Online Advertising Section in Chapter Six.)

Use these words in your page 4 or 5 times in the first 250 words of text.

Always stick to text and don't use graphics to represent your text, as spiders cannot read or index the words - they can only see an image. Your logo for example, cannot be indexed as your name.

Make sure that the photographs on your page are named to state exactly what they are (eg. Acme_Hotel_room.jpg or pyramid.jpg) and not the names given to them by your photo software (such as IMG3537.jpg). This will mean that they too can be accurately indexed.
Additionally, when loading photos into your CMS you will be able to assign alternative text titles or ‘alt tags’
to each image. This is the text that you see when you move your mouse over an image. These should also
be keyword named.

You should also make sure there are plenty of text links between pages and that the linked anchor text
contains the target search terms of the page it leads to.

For example:

Bad: “Click here to book a hire car from the airport”

Good: “Book a Hire Car from the airport now”

Update the site frequently

There is definite value in frequently updating your website content.

Most websites are indexed by search engines once a month. Constantly changing news sites, like the major
news sites, are indexed every few minutes. Sites that are rarely updated are indexed less often and this has a
direct impact on their search rankings.
Using the Right Content Management System

A professional CMS will allow you to do all of the above and to add meta data and keyword tags to each page. Ask your developer if your CMS allows you to:

• Update the HTML Title tag, Meta Description tag and Meta Keywords tag for each page individually.

• Use the HTML header and subheader code <h1>,<h2> tags to signify important headings.

• Add alternate tag text to images and edit these.

• Insert key search term-rich links between pages and to other sites.

• Ensure changed URLs are properly covered with so-called ‘301 redirects’ – a search engine-friendly method for web page redirection that should preserve the search engine rankings for that particular page.

• Create a 404 (‘page not found’) reception page when a page cannot be served to a user, which can include a link to contact information or to a site map to assist the user.

• Generate a site map that can be indexed by search engines.
Get Links from Other High-Ranking Sites

Links from other websites remain one of the strongest influences on natural search results.

It is therefore vital to develop relevant links from other high-ranking sites. If these are from clickable anchor text that includes the keywords being searched for, then the links are even more valuable.

The question of course is how do you get these sites to link to you?

**Be Worth Linking To:** have rich, accurate and frequently updated information or news about your destination or products that larger affiliates and reference sites will want to link to.

**Provide Media:** have interesting videos or content embedded in your site that others will want to use or view.

**Give Away Stuff:** produce an e-book guide to local attractions, recipes from your kitchen, a wildlife guide or a bird list, and provide a download link and share it.

**Get Listed:** have your business listed on high profile directories or listing sites.

**Go Social:** social media is great way to publish and share links to your site. Engaging with bloggers and encouraging them to link to your site is another way of cultivating links (see Social Media in Chapter Eight).
Chapter Six: Online Advertising
While natural search results are clearly the best results for you there is only room for so many companies to appear in the top ten results for any search term. You will often face insurmountable competition for popular search terms.

Ultimately if keywords are of sufficient value to you in a competitive market then you might consider paying for them.

This is not a decision to be made lightly. It effectively means that you will be paying for each person who comes to your website from your ads. So you need to be sure that these people are extremely likely to convert to sales.

If not managed properly it is very easy to waste money with paid search.

But if managed properly, with a focus on conversion, it can lead to increased business and excellent return on investment.

How it Works

Paid-for search (also called search engine marketing (SEM) or pay per click (PPC) marketing) is one of the most popular resources used in online marketing campaigns. In the UK market, for instance, it accounts for nearly 60% of online media spend across all sectors.

PPC is a simple commercial exchange:

- The advertiser bids for a specific keyword.
- Based on the price it is willing to pay for a single click on that ad, a text ad or sponsored link is displayed and ranked accordingly.
- The advertiser pays the cost per click (CPC) fee each time a user clicks on its text ad.

Google sells keywords to advertisers through its Adwords programme.

This allow you to buy keywords and have your ad with a link to your website listed in Google search results when the keywords you have chosen are searched for by users. These results are shown as 'Sponsored links' or similar wording, and appear either at the top of the main search results or on one side.

It's that simple.

The difficult part is choosing the right keywords for your business.
Choosing Keywords

You need to consider carefully which words are most likely to be used by someone that you would like to reach your site and the propensity for someone using these words to convert to a sale.

Consider the exact type of words that your ideal clients are likely to use and take into account who they are and where they are from. This can be of great significance.

For example, if you are targeting travellers from the UK market, the word vacation would be of no value, while holiday would be of great value.

Fortunately there tools available online to help you choose and value keywords:

- **KW Discovery**: [http://www.keyworddiscovery.com](http://www.keyworddiscovery.com)
- **Overture**: [http://inventory.overture.com/d/searchinventory/suggestion](http://inventory.overture.com/d/searchinventory/suggestion)
- **Adwords Keyword Tool**: [https://adwords.google.com/select/KeywordToolExternal](https://adwords.google.com/select/KeywordToolExternal)

As you select words, it is usually best to avoid trying to invest in broad terms and to be as specific as possible to be sure that you are targeting the highest value clicks from the people most likely to convert to a sale.

If, for example, you are an Adventure Travel Company...

55 331 searches for ‘holiday’
897 for ‘adventure holiday’
2 for ‘adventure holiday’ in your destination

Even though ‘holiday’ is a very popular search term your investment in the more specific terms will bear you two more likely conversions and much better return on minimal spend.

Adwords provides users with analytical data and reporting that shows the conversion rates from ads, and tools to measure the return on investment of each campaign.

For more info on Google Adwords visit: [adwords.google.com](http://adwords.google.com)
Landing Pages

Because you are now paying for every person who clicks on your ad, you want to be sure that you increase the likelihood of them converting to sales and reduce the likelihood of them visiting your site without booking or buying.

For this reason it is not a good idea to send the click-through clients from the ad to the Home page of your website. This would mean that they have to start navigating and exploring your site, making them less likely to reach your ‘Book’ or ‘Buy’ button.

Therefore your ads should relate to a very specific product, special offer or content and should be linked to specific landing pages created for these promotions that include a call to action to book or buy on the same page.
Ad Campaigns

Many businesses now employ an e-marketing agency to plan and manage their campaigns. These services include campaign structure; creation of landing pages; management of all keywords, listings and bids across multiple outlets; and monitoring that allows optimisation of conversions.

The agency will advise on:

- keyword insights and selection:
- brainstorming the keywords relevant to your business from the customer’s perspective
- building a matrix of search terms
- ad/sponsored link copywriting
- setting up different ad versions to represent different keyword themes
- creating landing pages
- testing landing pages
- campaign management and optimisation
Other Types of Online Advertising

Google also offer an affiliate-based advertising program known as Adsense. This system places text, images or video ads on agreed partner sites contextually so that the ad relates to the content on the page. In this case the revenue from the ad is shared with the owner of the site the ads appear on.

For more information visit: www.google.com/adsense/

Some websites offer banner advertising at a set monthly fee for ads placed on their pages. While this type of advertising is considered decreasingly effective, if the sites are highly trafficked or extremely relevant to the ad content, it can be an effective form of advertising.

One of the fastest growing areas of advertising online is social media advertising, which is discussed in the Social Media section in Chapter Eight.
Chapter Seven: E-Business for Tourism
E-Commerce Systems & Real-Time Payments

E-commerce is vital to online travel distribution as it enables the ability to select, book and pay in real time, when used in conjunction with a real-time inventory management system.

As e-commerce becomes legal and accessible in emerging markets, more and more companies are adopting real-time inventory management systems that allow their rooms, tickets or packages to be booked in real time, without human involvement. These are combined with e-commerce solutions.

This allows them to become a fully-fledged online businesses, meeting market demand and increasing their sales volume by doing business with the world around the clock.

These solutions are usually targeted towards smaller businesses, which do not have their own in-house e-commerce system. They typically work like this:

- The customer makes a booking on the website and the inventory is automatically updated so that there can be no double bookings.
- The customer enters credit card details on a page of the merchant’s website.
- The website encrypts the information before it is sent from the customer's browser to the merchants website server, usually using Secure Sockets Layer (SSL) encryption.
- The merchant’s web server forwards the transaction to the payment gateway service.
- The gateway forwards the transaction information to the merchant’s bank (the acquiring bank).
- The acquiring bank then forwards the information to the bank that issued the credit card to the customer (the issuing bank) for authorisation.
- The issuing bank sends a response back to the payment gateway (via the acquiring bank) with a response code to approve or decline the transaction.
- The payment gateway forwards it to the website, where it is interpreted and a response is shown to the customer on the web page, and usually also sent via email.

This entire process usually takes only a few seconds.

An alternative payment system is PayPal. Customers sign up with PayPal to send or receive money online, and payments can be made directly to registered merchants. A PayPal account can be linked to a credit card or bank account. It can be in a number of currencies. PayPal does not currently allow users from many emerging destinations, but this is changing fast.
Travel Distribution

The rise of e-commerce solutions now means that tourism businesses can decide whether they want to sell directly or via commissioned sales through online intermediaries or online travel agencies (OTAs), or both.

In many ways the situation is not unlike it was in the pre-Internet days, when tourism was sold both directly or via agents. While direct sales are clearly more profitable, the OTAs have much larger marketing budgets and higher online profiles and can deliver much higher sales volumes.

Many businesses elect to sell both directly and via intermediaries, but to do so requires a reliable real-time inventory management system to allow access to reservations systems for both direct booking consumers and intermediaries.

It also requires strategic revenue management to be sure that rates are equally advertised and managed to provide consistency to customers and to maximise profitability.

Direct Sales

The simplest form of online distribution is when the merchant (a hotel or tour operator) acts as its own e-commerce direct seller. Most large businesses and an increasing number of small businesses do this.

This requires a real-time inventory management system with an e-commerce solution to access a payment gateway. Payments may be handled directly by the company with its own e-commerce solution, or by a third-party e-commerce provider whose forms are embedded within the site and handle payments on behalf of the company.

These systems allow visitors to the business's own website to search for availability and see when rooms, tickets or packages are available and then book and pay for them online in real time.
20 Important Rules for Offering Direct Online Bookings

1. Offer entirely secured payments via a trusted and globally recognised e-commerce provider. Ensure that your website hosting, server and connectivity is 100% in order and that your clients never have a mid-booking disconnection that can cause them extreme concern.

2. Let them pay as they please and accommodate as many payment types as possible, including all credit cards and other payment solutions. Adding alternate payment types, including offline ones, has been proven to increase conversion by upwards of 10%.

   At a minimum, you should be able to accept all major credit cards and EFTs, and provide deposit options. Remember to still let them book and pay offline and place orders via phone or fax. Make sure all of these payment options are clearly visible on your site.

3. Take a careful look at your website page structure. Do not overload your booking page with text and graphics and make it a long scrolling process to reach the 'Book' button. Don't be afraid to repeat your booking button or booking hyperlink on a single page.

4. When creating a booking form try, and reduce the number of steps in your order process. Use a timeline on each page showing the progress of the booking and to tell users how long it will take to complete their bookings.

   For most travel booking sites, the order process should be simple enough that the average order takes less than five minutes.

5. Minimise the number of required fields to be filled in by clients. The order form should be short and easy.

   Make sure only really necessary information is 'required' (eg: not everyone has a street address). Mark these fields clearly as compulsory, using red asterisks.

6. Do not ask customers to provide or re-enter information that can be automatically collected. Use an auto-fill system, particularly for returning clients.

   This includes dates and other data that can be automatically copied from other fields.

7. Collect the most essential contact information (email address and phone number) in the very first step of your booking process, and ensure it is recorded even if the booking is not completed. This will allow you to (within reason) follow up with users who abandon their bookings.

8. Add an 'Are You Sure?' request to anyone backing out or cancelling a booking, to avoid accidental loss of a client.

9. Modern consumers have become accustomed to online shopping and there are now certain elements to the online sales process that they expect and will automatically look for. These include:

   - Shopping carts and account access links are usually in the upper right-hand side of the screen.
   - Booking forms have clear 'Submit' buttons.
   - Confirmation pages are provided at the end of a booking.

10. Remember that customers make mistakes. Enable them to go back and change the details as they book. Make certain that the shopping cart or form automatically recalculates tax, charges, add-ons etc.

11. Remember your customers - particularly if they are going to need to modify their bookings or add guests, or are likely to be frequent guests.

   Make sure that subsequent updates or bookings require less manual entry. Build customer satisfaction, ease and loyalty.
12. Optimise page weight. Reducing the loading time of pages and graphics can significantly boost conversion rates, especially if your booking process is long.

Don't have elaborate graphics and photographs on your booking pages.

13. Optimise your pricing. Test a variety of price points to maximise conversion rates and profit. Start high and gradually reduce your price in subsequent testing to find the level that maximises profit. Conversely, sometimes increasing price can increase conversion by changing the perceived value of the product.

14. Be aware of how seasonality will affect your conversion rate. Manage your bookings and make special promotions and discounted packages available accordingly.

15. State any booking limitations early in the process. If you are unable to process certain credit cards, take Diners Club, take offline payments or take payments from certain countries, state this clearly and visibly in advance.

Don't frustrate them with pointless booking processes. Do give them other options.

16. Be sure your customers can easily see and anticipate total booked cost. Do not surprise them with hidden or excessive charges, which are leading contributors to booking abandonment, cancellations and client rage.

17. To avoid input mistakes by clients, provide drop-down boxes for pre-set information such as:
   • Credit card types
   • Expiry dates
   • Country of origin

18. Remember to include:
   • Privacy policy statement
   • Terms and conditions checkbox
   • Secure payment symbols and details

19. Support your customers where possible with:
   • Toll-free numbers
   • Live chat
   • Skype details

20. Always provide a confirmation page with their confirmed booking details and reference numbers.
   • Send them emails with the same details.
   • Let them download and print receipts and confirmations.
   • Send an SMS if possible.
   • And remember to say THANK YOU!!
Intermediary Sales

Intermediaries or online travel agencies (OTAs) have gained significant market share by offering ‘dynamic packaging solutions’. This means that they can access databases of available live inventory - including air tickets, hotel rooms and tour packages. They can allow customers to build and customise their own trips, and book and buy a complete package in a single payment.

This kind of freedom of choice and customisation appeals to the modern shopper and companies who offer it have become major global travel entities. Market leaders include Expedia, Booking.com, Travelocity, Hotels.com, lastminute.com, Opodo and Wotif.

With their high profiles and serious market share, selling through intermediaries can be extremely profitable. Selling through an OTA requires reservations software that can provide the OTA with real-time access to your inventory and a clearly defined agreement of your allocations of inventory for intermediary sale.

You will also need to carefully consider the commissions that they charge and undertake careful revenue and rate management to be sure that you have consistent price offerings. You must also manage rates and special offers based on seasonality, availability and demand.

Each intermediary has its own fee structure and revenue management policy and offers its partners advice on the same.

Global Distribution Systems

The global distribution systems (GDS) were pre-Internet computer networks for distribution of air tickets, hotel rooms and car hire. They are Amadeus, Sabre, Galileo and Worldspan. They are still active and sell air travel through agents and book major chain hotels. They remain very strong for business travel and air and hotel packages. They are still relatively strong for medium-size hotels and for commercial associations of smaller hotels that have a common reservation system.

In general, costs for a travel supplier in maintaining an ICT link to a GDS are high, and so is commission on bookings to the GDS and the agent.
Business Platforms and Destination Portals

A portal is a high-profile website that attracts large volumes of traffic interested in a particular destination and then passes this on to the trade to make bookings, either directly or through an intermediary appointed by the supplier.

The most logical platform for such a portal is the official destination website for a country. Many more of these are now taking advantage of the high volume of traffic and delivering conversions through to the trade. This means having a database of trade suppliers and tools to equitably distribute the traffic to trade, usually through an advanced search tool or trip planner.

Online Payment Securities

When setting up your office infrastructure to begin handling and processing online payments be sure that you work closely with your e-commerce provider so that you are compliant and meet all requirements to ensure absolute security for yourself, your booking partners and especially your clientele.

Ensure that your booking process is via a secure link to your provider and to a certified secure site.

Also be sure that your own office environment is secured inside and out with an Internet security suite of the kind offered by Symantec or McAfee.

Be aware of the following common threats to an online business:

Data Integrity

You must always be sure that any time a payment is processed this is done via a secure form where credit card information is entered and encrypted. If you do make a ‘card not present’ transaction, be aware that you are responsible for this data and can be held accountable for the credit card details you take from a client. Always follow the guidelines provided by your bank.

Fraud

Incidents of online fraud are becoming increasingly common as Internet security increases, but merchants should still be aware of the potential risks. Be very wary of clients who contact you to cancel bookings and request refunds via their credit cards, or who request your bank account details or bank contacts to arrange payments. Refer these cases to your bank or e-commerce provider.

Also check when you receive official emails that they are in fact from the company or person that they claim to be from. Check not just their email titles but their actual email addresses. Be particularly wary of emails that do not address you personally, but start with a generic ‘Hello’ or ‘Dear Sir/Madam’.

Never feel pressured by the need for an immediate response and always check with the company head offices if you suspect someone may not be genuine.

Again, always refer suspicious cases to your bank or e-commerce provider.
Phishing and Spyware

**Phishing** refers to the creation of fraudulent versions of websites or booking and payment forms to capture confidential data from users. Always check the URL (website address) of any site you deal with to be sure that it is actually the official site.

To avoid phishing of your own site you have to avoid **spyware** (virus-based programs that report back activity from your site) infiltrating your system. This means having secured hosting of your website and a secure e-commerce solution, as well as running regular anti-virus scans on your office computers and using anti-spam filters on your email system. A good Internet security suite is your best line of defence.

**Malicious Attacks**

Many viruses and **malware** such as **mailworms** are simply designed to damage and destroy your website or networks by taking your site offline or exposing your email systems to the public. At other times you can be exposed to **service delivery attacks** - meaning your booking and contact forms are repeatedly attacked by robots (automated programmes that fill in forms) until your system cannot cope with the volume of traffic and it crashes.

These are obviously harmful to your business and can also create risks for the integrity and security of your site. Once again mail screening filters and Internet security suites are the best defence against these attacks. If you do have forms on your site, using a ‘**captcha code**’ (a series of letters or numbers to be entered into the site from a provided image) will prevent attacks by robots.

**Offline Risks**

Be sure that you make all of your office staff aware of the risks of compromising security of your network and have strict policies in place for handling booking, payment and technical enquiries. Ensure that any unusual or suspicious enquiries are referred to senior management. Use Internet security systems to track online activity and data transfer from your networks.

Ensure your staff does not have open access to download applications from the Internet and be sure that they are not using office computers for file sharing software for music or media, as these can expose your network to the public.

Also discourage them from sharing or forwarding emails with jokes or pictures that have been forwarded repeatedly - many of them carry viruses or email capturing codes.

Finally, be sure that your staff cannot use USB devices to remove large files or databases from your network. Disgruntled or departing employees have been known to use these devices to steal data that can be sold to competitors or used for malicious attacks.

As with all of the above, Internet security suites and constant vigilance are the best tools to keep your business safe.
Chapter Eight: Social Media And Tourism
What is Social Media?

The Internet has changed radically in recent years due to the rise of what has become known as social media.

This was brought about by changes to the way content could be published, shared and managed online. In recent years the Internet, which started out as a personal communications platform, had become dominated by websites created by professional programmers to present information from corporations, media houses and institutions, which was then available for consumption by the general public.

However, with the development of simple tools that allowed people with no technical knowledge to create their own basic websites (known as ‘weblogs’ or blogs), the general public became able to contribute content to the web once more.

Soon even simpler tools such as Facebook allowed individuals to create their own online profiles and make connections with wider groups of other individuals - sharing content, commentary and opinions. This became known as social networking.

The incredible growth of these networks saw a revolutionary change in control of the Internet. Suddenly the majority of popular and active content online is being created not by corporations and the traditional media, but by individuals, online communities and connected networks.

As technology has continued to make creating and publishing online content easier via video, multimedia and now mobile platforms, the growth of this new form of media has continued unabated.
How Social Media Has Changed the Way We Live

The rise of social media is changing the way we live. The biggest change is simply this: we are now more in control of the information we receive, how we consume it and how we respond to it.

Our access to information has become part of our social lives. We are now constantly connected to networks of friends and communities with whom we can engage, discuss, debate and challenge the information we receive.

Access to this kind of media is changing the way we receive and interpret news; the ways we are entertained, engage and interact socially; the way we shop and buy goods; and the way we travel.

Viral Media

Viral media is a popular term for describing the way in which content posted online spreads from user to user by being emailed or shared on social networks like Facebook, Twitter or YouTube. Like a virus, the content spreads rapidly from user to user.

Everyone is probably familiar with content that has 'gone viral' - from the ‘Charlie Bit My Finger’ or ‘Where in the World is Matt?’ videos to the news stories that have broken and spread online faster than broadcast TV news (such as the death of Michael Jackson).

Viral media can be used strategically to sell your business, and clever marketers have designed viral campaigns that spread far and fast at a fraction of the cost of using conventional media.

In 2009 in Australia a girl posted a video on YouTube entitled 'Are You My Man in the Jacket?' in which she explained that she had met and fallen in love with a man in a café who had left without giving her his contact details. He had left behind his jacket, which she showed in great detail in the hope that he would recognise it and contact her.

This video had massive appeal as people found the story romantic and reminiscent of the Cinderella story. It quickly spread and received thousands of views within just a few days.
What the public did not realise is that as they watched and sent this video they were actually taking part in a marketing campaign by a clothing company advertising a new design of men’s jacket - which was being shown, discussed and complimented in the video, and watched by thousands of potential customers.

There have been countless other examples of successful viral campaigns. Probably the best-known travel and tourism campaign was Queensland Tourism’s ‘Best Job in The World’ promotion. This took a simple job ad to be a caretaker at an island resort and turned it into a global competition to win the job by requesting that people create online video applications. This created a viral spread as the application videos became talking points, which built interest in the destination and anticipation of the competition results. The promotion received global media coverage for the destination and has been regarded as one of the most successful high-profile tourism PR campaigns.

However, viral media can also work against a company - and once again the travel sector has provided the best-known example of this. When Canadian country and western singer Dave Carroll was badly treated by United Airlines, whose baggage handlers broke his guitar and refused to compensate him, he turned to social media for revenge.

He wrote a song about the incident titled United Breaks Guitars and published the music video on YouTube. The video quickly became popular (it currently has over 10 million views) and the media soon picked up the story, resulting in public relations disaster for United. The power of viral media turned a single unhappy customer into a global campaign against the company.

Social media can be an incredible influencer on your company for both good and bad - and it cannot be controlled or contained.

Managing your social media profile and presence is up to you. If you get it right, it can transform your marketing ability and reach.
How Social Media has Changed the Way We Travel

The implications of social media for travel are vast but are best summarised as follows:

In media terms nobody really cares anymore what you have to say about your product, your tours, your hotel or your destination.

The travelling public has access to a wealth of content about you that has been created by your past customers and it is this honest and unbiased content that they will look at before they come to you to do business – or not.

User reviews, travel blogs, videos, photos by other travellers, referrals from Facebook or a Twitter post about you - these are all considered far more valuable and credible to the connected traveller.

Increasingly, travellers are accessing and using social media as they travel. They are taking their smartphones with them and using hotel Wi-Fi to post and update while on the road. Last year over 70% of Americans updated their social networks at least once a day as they travelled. Travelling gives them something to talk about, and they are sharing text posts, photos and videos directly from their phones as they travel.

This is revolutionising travel marketing by creating vicarious travel experiences, with each traveller communicating on a daily basis to an engaged and interested audience, of an average of 200 people each.

This creates tremendous opportunities for marketing, so it is essential that we enable our clients to talk about us online and ensure that when they mention us the audience for the content can access and reach us. So what if there isn’t any user-generated content out there about you? Well, the bad news is that to many of the new generation of travellers, you are effectively invisible.

You need to encourage and leverage user-generated content, and join the conversation about yourself, your business and your destination.

It’s called social media, so you have to be socially active to make the media work for you.
Social Media Toolbox

As a tourism business your essential social media tools are:

**Facebook** - an official page for your business to publicise all that you do through connected networks, and allow a community to be built around your brand.

**Blog** - a regularly updated journal about your business to spread content and engage with the travel 'blogosphere'.

**Twitter** - a simple mobile tool to publicise new developments, special offers and products and to 'crowdsource' opinions and ideas.

**Multimedia channels** - your photos on a website like Flickr and your own YouTube channel for broadcasting video about your business.

**User generated content** - reviews, travel stories, photos and videos from your clients.
Facebook

The Facebook Community

Facebook is a real social media success story.

This simple social networking platform, which lets users create profiles and connect with other people to stay in touch, and share updates and content about their everyday lives, has become a global phenomenon.

For anyone who isn’t on Facebook (there are a few left) it is basically a website where anyone can post updates about what they are doing, thinking and feeling, along with photos, videos and links to websites, news stories and other content. They can allow friends access to this information and can have access to theirs in return.

It really is ‘social media’ in its most simple terms.

There are now almost one billion people on Facebook.

Each person has 200 connected friends, on average.

They share billions of pieces of content every week.

Imagine a country with a population of one billion people, each with 200 friends they are in contact with on an almost daily basis, talking about where they travel and sharing their experiences, pictures and stories. You would definitely want to market yourself to that country - so you need to get active on Facebook.
Your Company on Facebook

You probably already have a personal Facebook page.

Do not use your personal Facebook page to promote your business. Mixing your personal and professional lives is always a risky thing. You probably don't want your clientele and business partners to know about your social and personal life. Conversely you don't want to be continually promoting your business to your friends.

Create a separate Fan Page for your business (you can administer it from your personal page). This page should be handled very differently to a personal page. In many ways you should treat it like a combination of a website and a hub for social activity.

The new Facebook Timeline design makes this much easier, as you can add a large impactful banner image (called your cover picture) that portrays an immediate message about you, along with a branded logo (profile picture) that will identify your posts.

Make sure you include clear profiles of your business and links to your website, including links to your contact and booking buttons.

Timeline allows you to use icons and boxed text and make your page look more professional and more like an official company page.
Using Facebook

Use your Wall to keep people updated about current happenings in your business, such as new itineraries or new rooms, facilities and cuisine.

Try and post as often as possible, although not so much that you turn your fans’ Newsfeeds into nothing but your posts and become a source of irritation - which will quickly get you unliked. Once a day is an acceptable level of posting.

Don’t just talk about yourself. Post links to news stories, videos and content that relates to your destination or business in order to promote discussion and activity on your Wall. Adding a link is easy: just copy and paste it into your post, or else share a link from another Facebook user.

Try and use all of the posting tools and don’t just post status updates. Make sure that your posts are a good mix of text, photos, videos and links.

Anytime you are featured on someone else’s Wall or in a travel blog, YouTube holiday video or photo published online, share it on your Wall. If you are lucky enough to have been featured in the press be sure to post a link to that as well.

Let your customers be your fans and post their experiences and comments too.

Engage and interact with them all because, as we will see, engagement is critical to success on Facebook.

The Timeline

Facebook’s Timeline feature changed the way Facebook pages appeared, by creating two columns of content and improving the visibility of images and media. It was not popular when it was first introduced, mainly with users who had become accustomed to the look and feel of their walls and newsfeeds.

By encouraging individual users to treat their Facebook page as a linear timeline of their lives from birth onwards, adding in dates, milestones and announcements, the user data was greatly enriched enabling much more accurate targeting of Facebook advertising.

However, the real advantage of the new layout was for fan pages for businesses, as their Facebook profile became more like a website, with a distinct banner (or cover image), icons for image galleries, maps and booking links and the ability to highlight and feature content within the timeline.

Most importantly, by improving the quality and prominence of images and providing two columns of posts it meant that users could see more content and were therefore more likely to engage with the posts.

This was great news for businesses and within the first few months of use the levels of engagement (likes, comments and shares) on fan pages had risen by almost 30%.

The new timeline interface also enables users to see how effective their content is and measure their levels of engagement via the ‘Insights’ feature.
All About Engagement

Many businesses make a wrong assumption about their Facebook presences, by believing that everything they post is seen by all of their fans. This is most definitely not the case.

Many of your posts will be seen by only a limited number of your fans. This is due to an ‘edge ranking’ system that gives the more popular posts higher profiles and thus makes them visible in more of your fans’ Newsfeeds.

The most vital element to increasing the profile and popularity of a post is ENGAGEMENT.

This means someone, has LIKED, COMMENTED on or SHARED your post.

Once they have done this, they are more likely to see your future posts.

Equally, your posts with the most engagement (Likes, Comments, Shares) will be much more likely to be seen by more people.

Luckily, Facebook makes it easy to see how well you are engaging with your audience. In addition to your total number of fans, you will be told how many people are “Talking About This” which means engaging with your posts. This total, as opposed to your total fan base, should be the number you aim to grow.

When you access your page as an administrator, you will see an INSIGHTS panel at the top of your page. This will show your level of engagement relative to posts that you make, easily graphed for you to follow.

Further, under each post you can see how many people engaged with it, as Likes and Shares are totaled and comments listed - but you can also the total number of people who Saw This Post.

By this means you can see which are your most popular - and therefore successful - posts.
Facebook Media

Post photos and videos taken on your trips and tours or from your hotel and encourage past visitors to do the same.

Create Galleries about each part of your hotel, or one for each of your tours, to allow users to browse and search content.

Don’t just have masses of uncategorised images. Create Galleries and store them by topic, area or content, ensuring that each image has a caption. Tag your staff or guests where appropriate (tagging means identifying the person in the photo if they are your friends on Facebook).

Any photos or video you take with a digital camera and store on your computer can easily be loaded directly onto Facebook, either into a post or into your galleries.

If you have a smartphone it is extremely easy to upload photos direct from the phone camera to your Facebook page. Apps like the popular iLoader for iPhone allow photos and videos to be loaded directly and quickly to Facebook, in multiple batches with captions and tagging. Android phones come with similar software already built in.

Facebook Events

The Event feature on Facebook allows you to create an event and then publicise it by inviting your friends to attend it and to refer it to other people. People attending the event can RSVP. They will be listed as attendees and can also discuss the event.

This is a great way to promote an upcoming event at your hotel and invite people to attend.

For a tour company this can also be a good way to market set itineraries and sign up interested clients, particularly for small specialised programmes that are likely to appeal to an online community.
Facebook Places

If you have a physical location that your clients visit - a hotel, attraction, restaurant, club etc., one of the most important resources available to you are Facebook Checkins.

This means that when clients arrive they can check in on Facebook by finding you on their smartphones via the Checkin button that lists business and other locations closest to them. This announces to their friends and families that they are there and, most importantly, allows those people to access you via your Fan Page.

This is an excellent way of ensuring that you receive direct referrals from your clients. It is also yet another tool you can use on your page to show how many people have visited you.

You can create your place when at your location with a smartphone by using the Checkin button, adding a new place and adding your details. You can then merge this with your official Fan Page.

You may find that other versions of your location have already been created by clients or other members of the public. By contacting Facebook and proving you are the official owner or manager, and providing proof of address, you can have these duplicate pages removed.

For other uses of Checkins see the Mobile section.
Facebook Advertising

Facebook offers advertising programs that allow you to reach users who are not your fans, taking you beyond your fan base and potentially appearing on thousands of users pages.

As with SEO, once again knowing what your key messages are and who you are trying to target is essential to making Facebook ads work for you.

The ads are extremely targeted, as you can set them for very specific demographics via a simple selection tool that will show you how many members’ pages on average your ads will appear on.

The ads are very cost-effective, and while there has been a recent marked increase in their cost due to their popularity, they are still generally much cheaper than many other online advertising programmes.

Setting up the ads is very easy. Simply follow the Create An Ad link above the ads on your Facebook page. You can choose between conventional text ads and sponsored posts.

You can direct the link in the ad either to your own Fan Page or to an external web address. This depends on what you want from your ad. If you are looking to increase the number of Likes on your Fan Page, then direct the ad there.

If you are using the ad to drive actual conversions and sales, then you should link your ad to a specific landing page on your website created for this campaign, with more information and a booking link. By having a specific page accessible only from your ad it is easy to measure your conversion rates.

You can design your ad by adding text to be included in the ad and an image or logo.

You then simply have to make a series of selections with regard to what countries you are targeting and what interests you’d like to target. As you do this, you will be informed how many Facebook users meet these criteria.

You then set a daily budget limit and a time period. Based on these, when people click on your ad you will be charged up until you reach your set limit.

You are provided with constant stats and graphs showing the success and click-through rates from your ad.

You can pay securely via credit card or Paypal.
Facebook Groups

The Groups feature is excellent if you attract specialised tourists with particular shared interests, such as scuba-divers, birdwatchers or yoga students, who can be used to form a community around your brand.

It’s also a great way to form and build business-to-business groups and support networks in your region or destination.

Growing Facebook

Keep your Facebook presence as part of your brand identity and be sure to include a clear Facebook link from your website. Put your Facebook address on all promotional material, business cards and email signatures.

Include a Facebook Like button all your web content or content that you publish online. Encourage your friends, business associates and all of your past customers to become your fans in follow-up emails.
Blogging

Understanding and Using Blogs

A blog is essentially a simplified website that allows a user to make regular posts, which can be read by anyone who knows the blog address. Readers can comment and debate the content below each post. They are similar to journals or newspaper columns and are very often based around specific opinions, or a particular interest or focus.

Blogs are often used for expressing vehement opinions, complaining or raising awareness about poor or failed service. This, combined with the free and unrestricted nature of 'citizen journalism', makes some people wary of engaging with bloggers.

While it is certainly true that you should always be aware of what bloggers are saying about you, you should also consider engaging more actively with bloggers.

Travel is a very popular blogging topic and rarely attracts as much negative blogging as consumer or political issues do. A positive blog about you, or even a reference to you in a travel-related blog discussion, can provide you with good exposure. If links to your website are included, they can help your search engine rankings.

Search for travel blogs about the area in which you are based or specialise in and subscribe to the ones that seem popular and positive, and choose the bloggers you will engage with.

Become an active part of comments and discussions and offer your input and advice, including links to your own site and content.

Of course you should also start writing your own blog.
Tourism Blogs - Blogging Your Business

Many bloggers struggle to find new and interesting topics to write about on a regular basis. This is rarely a problem for those of us in the tourism business. The very nature of our business and our lives is dynamic, unpredictable. We deal with places, people and situations that many people consider exciting, interesting or exotic. That's what travel is all about.

So produce a regular blog about your business.

This could be about events and sightings on your tour programmes or interesting events and developments at your destination.

Use a diary format, but remember opinion is what makes blogs interesting. Include your opinions and observations: be candid (but also diplomatic) and humorous. If you are concerned about things that may threaten your business or sustainability, express them in a serious and measured way.

Mix articles with photos and short video clips to create variety and interest.

As people start to follow your blog regularly, engage with them and encourage discussion. As with Facebook, build a community around your brand.

Blogging Tools

Probably the most popular blogging platforms are WordPress and Blogger.

http://wordpress.com/ and www.blogger.com/

These sites allow you to create your own blog with a unique URL. Both are extremely easy to use with a simple writing interface using standard MS Word toolbars. There is a selection of widgets that you can use to add calendars, search functions, social media updates and more to your blog.

Once you have created a blog entry you can add photos or videos, and then publish it.

Blogs provide a simple dashboard that lets you manage your blog posts, review and accept comments, and track statistics about your audience:

You can also select from a library of skins to create your own look and feel for your blog. Both of these sites provide user-friendly tutorials to guide you through the set-up and publishing process.
Blogging on the Go

As mobile devices become more powerful and more integrated with Internet functionality, it has become easier to create content as you travel, without needing a computer. There are smartphone apps for many of the popular blogging platforms.

There are also mobile-specific blogging platforms that allow you to create content and incorporate it into a blog logically and intuitively, as you travel. These are perfect for travel bloggers.

Take a look at:

Tumblr
www.tumblr.com

and

Zapd
www.zapd.com
Twitter

Understanding Twitter

Twitter is largely misunderstood and is often dismissed by people as being silly or pointless.

At its most basic level, it is ‘microblogging’ in which users answer the question ‘what’s happening?’ in 140 characters or less.

In many ways it is an informative, online chat room, as posts lead to real-time discussions and a mixture of banter, socialising and practical advice. People can choose to follow others and see their posts in a timeline and their own posts are then followed by others.

Twitter has created an online community of over 500 million people actively tweeting: talking and sharing opinions and content with each other. Twitter’s real-time and immediate nature and ready accessibility from a phone have made it very popular. Numerous news stories have been broken on Twitter, long before the conventional media have published them. Stories such as Michael Jackson’s death and the Hudson River plane crash in New York, which was tweeted by a passenger on the plane, were first seen on Twitter.

This real-time nature has made Twitter a real market influencer, with people reviewing movies and concerts as they see them and restaurants as they eat at them, and discussing TV, sports and other events as they watch them at the same time as their followers.

Many businesses now use Twitter to monitor their brand reputations and to ‘crowdsource’ by asking for their followers’ opinions and getting immediate feedback.

Tourism is a popular topic on Twitter, with people tweeting as they travel, posting comments, reviews, media and links. It is so popular that Tuesday is now designated as ‘Travel Tuesday’, when people engage in open travel discussions.

So it’s time you started Tweeting.
How it Works

If you aren't using Twitter, it's simple. Just go to www.twitter.com and sign up. You can create your own Twitter name (with an @ symbol in front of it) and you can add your own avatar or photo.

Start posting Tweets and following people. The more you engage, the more people will follow you... and join the conversation.
**Twitter Tools and Terms**

To **follow** somebody is to subscribe to their messages.

A **tweet** is an individual message of 140 characters or less.

A **DM** or direct message is a private message on Twitter – only visible to the person to whom it is addressed.

**RT** or retweet is to repost a message from somebody else on Twitter that you found interesting or useful and give them credit for it.

**Trending topics** are the most-discussed terms on Twitter at any given moment.

[@username] is a public message to or about an individual on Twitter.

A **hashtag** - the # symbol followed by a term and included in tweets, is a way of categorising all the posts on a specific topic.

**Shortened URLs** are used to fit links into the short messages so that they don't take up too many of the 140 characters. You can use a URL shortener by pasting the link into [http://bit.ly/](http://bit.ly/)

**Twitpic** or **Twitvid** - media posted to Twitter.

#FAIL is criticism of a business or person when used after their names eg: #BrandnameFail

**Designated days** are themed days of discussions and referral of people to follow, such as Monday which is #MusicMonday and Tuesday which is #TravelTuesday.
Twitter Technique

When you use Twitter, keep it light, conversational and informative. Post links and photos or videos from your business and website - but don't overdo it and don't hard-sell yourself – you may alienate your followers.

Mix business with personal chat, banter and constantly engage with others.

Feel free to ask, do some crowdsourcing and ask for the opinions of your followers about new ideas you have, or changes you are thinking of making within your business.

Retweet the posts of others and they will do the same for you. This is great if you are announcing new products or special offers.

Once you have too many followers to manage, you can use Twitter management software such as Tweetdeck to better manage your followers, only see the tweets of favourites, track tweets and trends, and merge your Facebook and Twitter updates.

It’s free to download from www.tweetdeck.com.

As with all social media use Twitter to engage, interact and build relationships.
Multi-Media

Online Media

The web is increasingly becoming a more visual medium. Photos and videos can often convey both information and emotion in a more immediate and powerful way.

Having a good library of quality images and videos provides you with excellent marketing resources that you can publish, share and distribute through social media.

Also try as much as you can to incorporate media generated by your users.

Managing your Images

Use a photo management tool on your computer to sort, manage and categorise all of your photos and name them appropriately.

Photoshop is easy-to-use software with the perfect tools to edit and alter images, crop out unwanted elements, resize them and optimise them for the Internet.

Don't load huge high-resolution photos into the pages of your website - they will slow down the loading time or cause the page to time out before it finishes opening. This is one of the quickest ways to get people to leave your website.

The optimal size for a regular photo on your website should be 180 pixels on its longest side and no larger than 25KB in file size.

You can also load your images into galleries into www.Flickr.com and tag them. This will make them easier to search for, and having popular Flickr galleries is advantageous in SEO terms.
Creating and Editing Video

Video is no longer the domain of professional producers and editors. There are plenty of tools available that allow anyone to produce and broadcast video.

**Digital video** cameras can now shoot HD-quality video that can be loaded directly onto your computer and imported into **video editing software**. Affordable FLIP cameras that cost around US$200 can shoot 2 hours of HD video and come complete with a simple one-button control and an extendable USB drive that can load video files into the correct format for either editing or direct upload to the web.

There are very simple, intuitive video editing systems available that allow you to edit video, cut and re-order scenes, add titles and transitions between scenes, and add voice-over and audio tracks to your video.

Commonly used software includes:

**For PCs**
- Adobe Premiere
- Movie Maker

**For Macs**
- iMovie
- Final Cut Pro

Video can then be exported into a suitable file for the web.

Acceptable formats include: .mpg, .mov, .wmv, .flv and .mp4.

These can then be posted online. Your best resource for online video is of course **YouTube**.
You on YouTube

YouTube can be used to upload your videos, make them searchable and accessible, and to share and embed in other websites.

For a typical travel promotional video, running time should be no longer than 10 minutes. An ideal web video for an online audience should be 2-3 minutes long.

To make best use of YouTube, you should create your own channel.

This is easily done: simply sign up for an account and then choose a channel.
Customise your channel with your logo, colours of your choice and your web links.
Choose some other videos from YouTube that relate to your business and add them to your channel playlist.
Now **upload** your video using the single upload button. Add information about the video in the **Settings** tabs, including tags for it to be search indexed and the point on the map where it was filmed.

If you don’t have copyright-free music to use on your video, YouTube has a whole library of music you can choose from to add to your video if you wish to.

Now your video is **live** and you are broadcasting, keep uploading videos and keep your channel dynamic and popular.

To embed a video into your own website, simply select the **EMBED** option on the video page, select the size and colour scheme you want for the player and then copy the **HTML code** it provides.

On your website, go to the page where you want the video to appear and open your **HTML editor** (if you don’t know where that option is, ask your developer or consult your CMS manual) and then paste the embed code into the page code.

When you save it, the video should be embedded and playable on the page.

Be sure to continue **publicising** your channel. Have clear links to it from your site and include the address in all of your promotional material.
User-Generated Content

The Battle at Kruger

Interestingly, one of the greatest examples of a travel video going viral was some user-generated content that originated in Africa.

In September 2004 two American tourists were on a game drive at the Transport Dam in Kruger National Park, South Africa. They were filming a pride of lions with a small cheap camcorder when they recorded a remarkable animal interaction.

As they filmed the lions, a herd of buffalo approached the dam. The lions began to stalk the buffalo and finally made a rush charge at the herd. The lions managed to pick off a buffalo calf and as they tried to kill it they lost their grip on the calf, which rolled into the water. The lions joined forces to try and pull the calf out from the water, but as they did so it was grabbed by a crocodile which tried to pull it back into the dam. A tug of war resulted during which the lions managed to pull both the calf and the crocodile out of the water. The crocodile gave up and returned to the water. The lions had won - or so they thought.

Just as they pulled the calf out again, the buffalo herd returned and surrounded the lions. The buffaloes charged and attacked the lions, driving them away from the calf one by one and flinging some lions high into the air.

Incredibly, the buffalo calf got up, unharmed, and returned to its mother.

The video was extremely amateurish, with the camera shaking throughout and the sound obscured by the excited tourists talking constantly. Regardless, they posted the 8 minutes of footage onto YouTube and called it ‘The Battle at Kruger’.

The power of viral social media quickly took over as people referred the video to their friends, emailed the link to each other and posted it on their Facebook pages.

As of September 2012 this video has been viewed over 67 000 000 times.
It fast became one of YouTube’s most popular videos, with more than 84 000 comments. It won the ‘Best Eyewitness Video’ in the 2nd Annual YouTube Video Awards. The video was also the subject of an article in the 25 June 2007 issue of Time magazine, was featured in the first episode of ABC News i-Caught and a National Geographic documentary on the video debuted on the National Geographic Channel in 2008.

This is a remarkable story – and it’s even more remarkable in marketing terms. Imagine the total media and marketing value of having 67 million people watch an 8-minute video about your wildlife safari. Not simply watch it passively as they would a TV commercial, but actively watch it, comment on it and pass it on to their friends.

In order to reach and engage with an audience of that size, South Africa, the Kruger National Park or a tour operator would have needed a major (and most likely multi-million dollar) marketing campaign.

Yet this was achieved without any budget or input from any of these people.

Content generated by a user.

Content published by a user.

Marketing done by users.

This is the power of user-generated content in social media.
Using Your Users

User-generated content (as we have already seen) means content produced by your clients. It might be a travel blog, a TripAdvisor review, photos or videos posted online, or a social network update.

The power of user-generated content is that it can be an incredibly powerful marketing tool as other users consider it credible and more real than content from businesses with vested interests in selling to them.

In some cases, user-generated content can be a better tool than a major marketing campaign. An example is the Battle at Kruger video cited above.

But as much as you may appreciate the value of user-generated content, what happens if your clients simply aren’t generating any?

Encouraging User-Generated Content

There are subtle ways to encourage and receive user-generated content from your clients. Stay in touch with them via Facebook or other social media and look out for interesting photos or videos they post.

Let them use a computer while they are staying at your destination. This provides them with a chance to download photos or videos to free up storage space on their cameras, and you can then ask them if they wouldn’t mind sharing any great shots they managed to capture.

Send them a welcome home email when they return home and ask them for feedback, or if they would care to write a review about your destination on TripAdvisor. Include a link to your TripAdvisor page.

Also keep in mind that many travellers now post reviews as they travel. Charging them for Internet access while they are staying at your destination may possibly prevent them from getting online, so this is not a good idea. Bear in mind that overseas visitors are often accustomed to not having to pay for Internet access in public places or at destinations, which is another reason not to charge for it.
Creating Content for your Clients

You can also create content for your clients. Give your guides and staff FLIP cameras and ask them to shoot video and include (with permission) short interviews with guests to get their opinions. This can create great video testimonials.

Take photos of guests (with their permission) and send them emails when they get home with links to view and download them from your website. There is a good chance they will forward these links to friends and family for them to see their photos. If these other people are impressed and open the link, they will be on your website and can easily make enquiries.

Managing User-Generated Content

When you do have positive user-generated content published online, make sure you leverage it by linking to it. If photos or videos have been published on public platforms like YouTube, you can embed them in your own website.

Travel Reviews and TripAdvisor

User reviews carry tremendous weight and they are now a major part of many travellers’ decision-making process when selecting tourism suppliers, particularly hotels. TripAdvisor is the most popular source of independent reviews. It was bought by Expedia in order to streamline the process of reviews and referrals directly to bookings.

It is very important that you are aware of your profile and your reviews on TripAdvisor.
**Good Reviews**

A 5-star review on TripAdvisor is **marketing gold**. Make sure it is not wasted. Work with TripAdvisor to ensure that your profile on the site is complete with **accurate information**, **links**, **photos** and **other media**, so that clients impressed with the review can be referred directly to you to book.

**Bad Reviews**

TripAdvisor research shows that the majority of reviews posted on its site are positive. However there may be occasions when you receive **bad reviews** from clients.

If you suspect that a review may be **fraudulent**, you can follow up with TripAdvisor. It has facilities to monitor and identify suspicious reviews.

It is most likely that a review is **genuine** and, while it may not be pleasant to learn that you have unhappy clients in a public space, at least you know that they are unhappy and why.

Use the ‘**Right to reply**’ facility that TripAdvisor provides to **engage** with the reviewer. Apologise and explain how you will **rectify the problem**, and provide an update when you have made the changes.

If the following reviews confirm that the problem no longer exists, it will show many other potential clients that you are **responsive** and **committed to guest satisfaction**.
Driving Conversion via Social Media

When you are running a campaign or have a direct offer on your own website - with a specific landing page or product page that has a clear call to action, it is best if direct links to this page are referred and promoted socially by your users.

It is therefore important to create concise social media updates about new events and promotions that provide short descriptions and links to the landing or conversion pages.

These should then be released as:

- Facebook status updates
- Tweets (use a URL shortener)
- Brief email announcements to past client databases

This will encourage easy single-click Facebook ‘Likes’ or Twitter Retweets, which will begin a natural viral process of link publication through friend networks.

You can also create a blog post - **not about the promotion** (this is seen as hard-sell and doesn’t make for appealing reading) - but about a related element of the product you are offering. It could be a description or pictures of new rooms, a video of the tour area or activity, or an interview with a recent client. At the end of the post mention the current promotion and include a brief summary and link.

Announce this new post via Facebook and Twitter (with a link to it), so that it can be circulated and shared, carrying the embedded promotional link.
Other Online Tools

Email Marketing

Email marketing is no longer the highly effective marketing tool that it once was. The volumes of spam that many people have to deal with have made them wary of receiving email newsletters and promotions. Furthermore, social media is increasingly taking over the role that email marketing once held by providing frequent information updates that are arguably more accessible.

However, if you have built up a large database and have permission from your subscribers or requests to receive promotions, then this kind of promotion can be effective.

Email Marketing Tips

Avoid Email Marketing During the Holidays and First Thing After a Weekend

Holidays are often holidays from email too. That's why email marketing during the holidays is often not very effective. It also pays not to send your email newsletter in the first few hours of the first day of the working week. Wait until mid-week when people have had time to clear their inboxes.

Create a Clear Call to Action in Email Marketing Campaigns

Make sure recipients of your email marketing message know what you expect them to do (and what they can expect in return).

Don't Forget the Preview Pane in Your Campaign

Always be aware of how much of your email will show in the recipients' email preview panes. Ideally, your call to action should be uppermost so that it is the first thing they see. Move the graphics and longer text down the page, and greet recipients with your call to action.

Email Marketing Needs to Reflect Your Corporate Design

If it's your email marketing, make sure it is correctly branded.

Personalise

Even if one-to-one marketing is beyond your abilities, personalisation is a must. Greet recipients by name. If someone receives a bulk email, it feels much less 'bulky' if it uses a personal name. People are then more likely to read the message and perhaps risk clicking on your call to action. Often you'll use the first name only, but for some campaigns the last name will be more appropriate.

Of course, one of the most crucial aspects of personalised marketing is responding to individual requests. If people send you email it means they have investigated and are interested in your offers. By failing to reply promptly you will not only miss opportunities but you will probably lose these potential customers for life.

Getting the Subject Line Right

Avoid anything commonly found in the subject lines of spam, including exclamation marks, dollar signs, upper case text and the words “free” and “you”. Many email users have set up filters, either in their email programmes or in their minds, that move anything containing references to promotions into the trash immediately.
LinkedIn

LinkedIn is an online professional networking site and is great for business-to-business marketing and for making connections within the travel sector. It can be a valuable resource for increasing your company’s visibility and it also improves your Google Page Rank.

Ensure that you update your company’s profile on LinkedIn as your organisation develops. You can look for good connections to invite to LinkedIn and you can also request references from connections you have worked well with.

Mobile Applications

There is no doubt that the future of online tourism is in our hands - literally - as we see the marked growth in the use of mobiles and devices during travel and the range of travel-specific applications being developed for them.

Many travellers now use their phones, iPads and other new tablet devices to research travel options while they are on the move. This is having a tremendous impact on online marketing as travelling individuals are now directly sharing their experiences, photos and videos daily with friends and families who value and trust their opinions.

Many of these devices are GPS-enabled and can use location-based services to tag locations so that travellers can find reviews and other information about businesses in their locations. These devices also act as excellent directional tools and can lead travellers directly to attractions, hotels or public transport.

Mobile access also allows travellers to check in to locations and post relevant content (such as Facebook Checkins), which allow their friends and families to easily reach the Fan Pages of the places they stay at and attractions they visit.

The creation of augmented reality applications that can overlay dynamic content over real-time images seen through a camera, linking content to location, will further evolve the role of these devices as real-time travel guides. The introduction of credit chipped payment-enabled devices will close the cycle of research, location and purchase.

For the time being it is essential that you adapt your website to be viewed on mobile phones and other devices. It is also now vital that you create a Facebook Checkin place for your business and merge this with your Fan Page, allowing your clients to Checkin and talk about you on their own pages.
Managing Your Social Profile

What's being said about you?

Controlling what you say about your tourism business on your website and social media channels is easy: you control the information flow and you can dictate what is written. Controlling what others say about your organisation online is very difficult. A reputation can be managed and can be influenced by the things we do but it can never be designed or decided upon by its holder.

All companies should set up a Google Alert account. It's free and it will search for any mention of keywords you specify and then send you a daily alert any time these keywords are mentioned. You can enter your company’s name in the keyword search and monitor the web for mentions of your company and brand. Google Alerts will monitor blogs, online news articles and social media:

www.google.com/alerts

You can also monitor Twitter for any recent mention of your company or brand by simply typing in the name of your company in the search field.

What you post about yourself or your company online tells a story. It's important to have clear divisions between your social and personal online profile and your company profile. Complaining about a guest on your personal Facebook page can become public, depending on your privacy settings, so think carefully about what you say and post online. Check that your privacy settings are locked down. Also ensure that you have an online policy with your employees to make them aware of the risks of posting comments about the business online.

If you do find inaccurate information about your business online, you can write to the webmaster of that particular site and ask for the information to be updated or removed. However in the majority of cases the best course is to make sure that you are the first and best source of information about your business appearing on Google and other major search engines.

“Crowding out,” or pushing that embarrassing review down in the search rank can be achieved over time if there is an ongoing stream of new information consistently posted online about your business.

Public relations, in both online and traditional media, is all about managing and shaping reputations of companies, brands and individuals. You can easily use PR tools to help create a stronger online presence for your business as well ensure that search engines are ranking the latest stories and updates about your business.
Know Your Sector – Create an Online Media List

Identify websites and blogs that your potential customers are likely to view. Analyse these sites and decide if it is possible to send them updates or press releases with news of your tourism business.

Invite the right tourism bloggers to stay at your property or join a tour. Bloggers are becoming citizen journalists and they have dedicated followers who will take their advice and heed their opinions, so it pays to keep them updated on your business. They will also appreciate the time you are investing in them.

Send Regular Updates and Press Releases

Each time your business changes, whether it’s building new rooms or opening up a new tour route, you have the opportunity to share that news. Take a step back and look at the important events that are associated with your business over the year. Would your customers or potential customers like to hear about these events and news? Design a simple PR plan that will identify the key news events for the year and then ensure that you send information in the form of a press release to your media list.

By having a basic PR system in place, you will have the opportunity to send fresh news about your company. This way more of the information appearing about your business online will be generated by you and picked up by travel news websites, bloggers etc. The trick is to ensure that it is interesting and newsworthy so that other people feel it’s important enough to write about and include on their sites and blogs.
Chapter Nine:
Growing Digitally
Becoming a digital business is about more than just updating your website, joining some social networks and running an occasional search campaign.

It must be a cultural change within your organisation that stems from the recognition of a need to change and then an implementation of a strategy to change steadily and progressively.

Here are ten steps towards making these essential changes and reinventing your business for the future.

1. Strategise for Change

Agree on realistic timelines and budgets towards making these changes and increasing your use of digital channels. Allocate 25% of your current marketing budget to implementing an initial digital marketing strategy - with measurable goals.

Decide what changes you will have made as an organisation within one year, two years and five years.

2. Build Your Internal Resources to Manage Change

Educate, train and empower your staff to begin using technology to implement your strategy. Bring in some new interns or staff members who are well-versed in technology and social media and let them work alongside your team to develop new ideas and help your existing team members become accustomed to using online tools and resources.

3. Redesign Your Website

Upgrade or renew your site to introduce the features and tools you will need. Acquire a robust content management system that can be used by the entire organisation. Integrate reservations and an e-commerce facility where possible.

4. Go Social

Develop and expand your social media profile and change the corporate culture to be sure that everything you do promotionally is immediately updated and reflected across all social media.

5. Be Content Driven

Strive to increase and improve your available content - the content you generate yourself, that your partners generate, and that your users generate - and use it promotionally. Practice good content management and be sure that you are constantly updating and expanding your website and social media content.
6. Engage

Begin the conversation with your users. Interact, engage and learn from them, but never argue, deny or challenge them. Form collaborative relationships with future, current and past clients and let them help shape the way you do business.

7. Have Some Fun

Remember that social media, like travel, is still about being sociable. So be yourself. Be personable, interesting and engaging in the way you present your business.

8. Don’t Forget to Make Money

Don’t have so much fun that you forget that you are in business. Make sure that conversion to sale is the objective in all you do and invest in conversion optimisation and campaigns when needed.

9. Keep Changing

Stay aware of new technologies, media and developments in the sector and be ready to take up new opportunities. Measure and analyse everything you do and react and change accordingly.

10. Keep an Open Mind

Keep training, studying and continually engaging in social networks and media, and keep learning from all of your interactions. The future may not be what you or anyone else thinks, but you still will need to be ready for it.
Glossary of Terms

Tech Terms

**Aggregation** is the process of gathering and remixing content from blogs and other websites that provide RSS feeds. The results may be displayed in an aggregator website or directly on your desktop using software often also called a newsreader.

**Alerts** - search engines allow you to specify words, phrases or tags that you want checked periodically, with results of those searches returned to you by email. You may also be able to read the searches by RSS feed. This form of search allows you to check whether you, your organisation, your blog or blog item, has been mentioned elsewhere and enables you to respond if you wish.

An **archive** may refer to topics from an online discussion that has been closed but saved for later reference. On blogs, archives are collections of earlier items usually organised by week or month. You may still be able to comment on archived items.

**Avatars** are graphical images representing people. They are what you are in virtual worlds. You can build a visual character with the body, clothes, behaviours, gender and name of your choice. This may or may not be an authentic representation of you.

**Blogs** are websites with dated items of content in reverse chronological order, self-published by bloggers. Items, sometimes called posts, may have keyword tags associated with them, are usually available as feeds, and often allow commenting.

**Blogosphere** is the term used to describe the totality of blogs on the Internet and the conversations taking place within that sphere.

A **blogroll** is a list of sites displayed in the sidebar of a blog, showing who the blogger reads regularly.

**Bookmarking** is saving the address of a website or item of content, either in your browser, or on a social bookmarking site. If you add tags, others can easily use your research too and the social bookmarking site becomes an enormous public library. If groups agree the tags they’ll use, it makes collaborative research much easier.

A **browser** is the tool used to view websites and access all the content available there onscreen or by downloading. Browsers may also have features including the ability to read feeds, write blog items, view and upload photos to photo sharing sites. Browsers have become the central tool for using social media as more and more tools previously used on our desktops are becoming free online.

**Bulletin boards** were the early vehicles for online collaboration, where users connected with a central computer to post and read email-like messages. They were the electronic equivalent of public notice boards. The term is still used for forums.
Categories are pre-specified ways to organise content, for example, a set of keywords that you can use but not add to when posting on a site. They form part of a taxonomy.

Chat is interaction on a web site, with a number of people adding text items one after the other into the same space at (almost) the same time. A place for chat, chat room, differs from a forum because conversations happen in ‘real time’, rather like they do face to face.

Collaboration - social media tools from email lists to virtual worlds offer enormous scope for collaboration. Low-risk activities like commenting, social bookmarking, chatting and blogging help develop the trust necessary for collaboration.

At greater length, collaboration is one of the higher goals of social networking - being able to discuss and work with online collaborators. The tools to achieve this extend from email with attachments through web-based workspaces with messaging, file storage, calendars and other tools. With the right equipment and connections you can talk to and see each other, text, sketch and transfer files almost instantly. You can set up a workspace in a virtual world and collaborate with other avatars. However, the conditions for successful collaboration are more human and cultural than technical, with the bottom line being trust. Bloggers maintain that the conversational and authentic tone of the medium helps create conditions for collaboration. Sharing, commenting, chatting, co-authoring allow low-risk explorations of who you would feel comfortable working with.

Comments - blogs may allow readers to add comments under items and may also provide a feed for comments as well as for main items. This means that you can keep up with conversations without having to revisit the site to check whether anything has been added.

Online communities are groups of people communicating mainly through the Internet.

Community building is the process of recruiting potential community or network participants, helping them to find shared interests and goals, use the technology; and develop useful conversations. A number of different roles may be involved.

An online conference is what happens in a forum, it is the conversations of those involved, organised around topics, threads and a theme or subject.

Connections - as high-speed, always-on, broadband connections become more widely available, it is easy to forget that the speed and nature of Internet connection available to people on a network will determine what tools they can use. If people are still using slow telephone dial-up they may have problems with video and voice over IP. If they don't have an always-on connection, web-based tools will be less appealing because work on them can only be done when connected.

Content is used here to describe text, pictures, video and any other meaningful material that is on the Internet.

Content Management Systems (CMS) are software suites offering the ability to create static web pages, document stores, blog, wikis and other tools. CMSs have the advantage of offering comprehensive solutions but, can be challenging to configure and each of the different tools may not be quite as good as a standalone version. Unless you have some technical skills, they are best suited for situations where you can employ a web developer to work with you and provide some continuing support.
Conversation through blogging, commenting or contributing to forums is the currency of social networking.

Crowdsourcing refers to harnessing the skills and enthusiasm of those outside of an organisation who are prepared to volunteer their time contributing content and solving problems.

Cyberspace has been widely used as a general term for the Internet or World Wide Web. More recently blogosphere has emerged as a term for interconnected blogs.

To download is to retrieve a file or other content from an Internet site to your computer or other device. See Upload.

Email - Electronic mail are messages transmitted over the Internet. These may be simply text, or accompanied by attachments like documents, images or other content.

Email lists, or groups, are important networking tools offering the facility to “starburst” a message from a central postbox to any number of subscribers and for them to respond. Lists usually offer a facility for reading and replying through a web page so they can also operate like forums. This web page may offer an RSS feed, so joining up old and new tools. However, there is something of a divide between blog-based conversations and those on lists and forums because the former are dispersed across a network and the latter don't usually allow tagging or such easy linking.

Face-to-face (f2f) is used to describe people meeting offline. While social media may reduce the need to meet, direct contact gives far more clues, more quickly, about a person than you can get online. Online interaction is likely to be richer after f2f meetings.

A facilitator is someone who helps people in an online group or forum to manage their conversations. They may help agree a set of rules, draw out topics for discussion, gently keep people on topic and summarise.

Feeds are the means by which you can read, view or listen to items from blogs and other RSS-enabled sites without visiting the site, by subscribing and using an aggregator or newsreader. Feeds contain the content of an item and any associated tags without the design or structure of a web page.

Forums are discussion areas on websites, where people can post messages or comment on existing messages asynchronously – that is, independently of time or place. Chat is the synchronous equivalent. Before blogs developed, email lists and forums were the main means of conversing online. Forum discussions happen in one place and so can be managed and facilitated in ways that blog conversations can’t because these are happening in many different places controlled by their authors.

Friends, on social networking sites, are contacts whose profile you link to in your profile. On some sites people have to accept the link, in others, not.

Groups are collections of individuals with some sense of unity through their activities, interests or values. They are bounded, you are in a group, or not. They differ in this from networks, which are dispersed, and defined by nodes and connections. Email lists and forums sit easily with bounded groups, blogs with networks – although the match with tools is not entirely clear-cut. A group may use a blog and an email list may serve a network.

Instant messaging: (IM) is a chat with one other person, using an IM tool like AOL Instant Messenger, Microsoft Live Messenger or Yahoo Messenger. The tools allow you to indicate whether or not you are available for a chat and can be a good alternative to emails for a rapid exchange. Problems arise when people in a group are using different IM tools that don't connect. One way around this is to use a common Voice over IP tool like Skype that also provides IM.
**Links** are the highlighted text or images that, when clicked, jump you from one web page or item of content to another. Bloggers use links a lot when writing, to reference their own or other content. Linking is another aspect of sharing, by which you offer content that may be linked and acknowledge the value of other’s people’s contributions by linking to them. It is part of being open and generous.

**Logging in** is the process to gaining access to a website that restricts access to content and requires registration. This usually involves typing in a username and password. The username may be your “real” name, or a combination of letters and/or numbers chosen for the purpose.

**Lurkers** are people who read but don’t contribute or add comments to forums. The one per cent rule-of-thumb suggests about one percent of people contribute new content to an online community, another nine percent comment, and the rest lurk. However, this may not be a passive role because content read on forums may spark interaction elsewhere.

**Mashups** is blend of online media - such as a photo gallery linked to a map to show where the pictures were taken.

**Membership** involves belonging to a group. Networking can offer some of the benefits of group membership, without the need for as much central co-ordination. A rise in networking may present challenges for organisations that depend on membership for funds or to demonstrate their credibility.

**Networks** are structures defined by nodes and the connections between them. In social networks the nodes are people and the connections are the relationships that they have. Networking is the process by which you develop and strengthen those relationships.

A **newsreader** is a website or desktop tool that acts as an aggregator, gathering content from blogs and similar sites using RSS feeds, so you can read the content in one place, instead of having to visit different sites.

**Online** means being connected to the Internet and also being there in the sense of reading or producing content.

**Offline** means not online, that is, not connected to the Internet. It may refer to an unconnected computer, or activities taking place without the benefit (or perhaps distraction) of a connection.

**Open-source software.** Wikipedia offers this definition - Open-source software “refers to any computer software whose source code is available under a license that permits users to study, change, and improve the software, and to redistribute it in modified or unmodified form. It is often developed in a public, collaborative manner”.

**Peer-to-peer** refers to direct interaction between two people in a network. In that network, each peer will be connected to other peers, opening the opportunity for further sharing and learning.

A **permalink** is the address (URL) of an item of content, for example a blog post, rather than the address of a web page with lots of different items. You will often find it at the end of a blog post.

**Photosharing** is uploading your images to a website like Flickr. You can add tags and offer people the opportunity to comment or even re-use your photos if you add an appropriate copyright license.
A **platform** is the framework or system within which tools work. That platform may be as broad as mobile telephony, or as narrow as a piece of software that has different modules like blogs, forums, and wikis in a suite of tools. As more and more tools operate “out there” on the web, rather than on your desktop, people refer to “the Internet as the platform”. That has advantages but, presents challenges in learning lots of different tools and getting them to join up.

A **podcast** is audio or video content that can be downloaded automatically through a subscription to a website so you can view or listen while offline.

A **post** is an item on a blog or forum.

**Profiles** are the information that you provide about yourself when signing up for a social networking site. As well as a picture and basic information, this may include your personal and business interests, a “blurb” about yourself, and tags to help people search for like-minded people.

**Proprietary** software, unlike Open-source software, is owned by someone - whether Microsoft or an individual developer. Some proprietary software may be free and some open-source software may be sold. The issue is the terms under which the underlying code is available.

**Registration** is the process of providing a username, password and other details when seeking to access a website that has restricted access. See logging in.

**RSS** is short for Really Simple Syndication. This allows you to subscribe to content on blogs and other social media and have it delivered to you through a feed.

**Searching** for information on the Net is done using a search engine, of which Google is the best known. Specialist search engines like Technorati concentrate on blogs. As well as searching by word or phrase you can search on tags and so find content others have keyworded.

**Sharing** is offering other people the use of your text, images, video, bookmarks or other content by adding tags and applying copyright licenses that encourage use of content.

**Social media** is a term for the tools and platforms people use to publish, converse and share content online. The tools include blogs, wikis, podcasts and sites to share photos and bookmarks.

**Social networking** sites are online places where users can create a profile for themselves and then socialise with others using a range of social media tools including blogs, video, images, tagging, lists of friends, forums and messaging.

**Subscribing** is the process of adding an RSS feed to your aggregator or newsreader. It’s the online equivalent of signing up for a magazine but, usually free.

**Tags** are keywords attached to a blog post, bookmark, photo or other item of content so that you and others can find them easily through searches and aggregation. Tags can usually be freely chosen and so form part of a folksonomy - while categories are predetermined and are part of a taxonomy.
Taxonomy is an organised way of classifying content, as in a library. Providing contributors to a site with a set of categories under which they can add content is offering a taxonomy.

Teleconferencing is holding a meeting without being in the same location, using a network connection and tools like Voice over IP, Instant Messaging, Video, and Whiteboards.

Terms of services are the basis on which you agree to use a forum or other web-based place for creating or sharing content. Check before agreeing what rights the site owners may claim over your content.

Threads are strands of conversation. On an email list or web forum they will be defined by messages that use the use the same subject. On blogs they are less clearly defined but, emerge through comments and trackbacks.

Tool is used here as shorthand for a software applications on your computer and also for applications that are web-based.

A topic in an online discussion is an idea, issue or talking point in a conversation that is made up of threads.

Trackback - some blogs provide a facility for other bloggers to leave a calling card automatically, instead of commenting. Blogger A may write on blog A about an item on blogger B’s site, and through the trackback facility leave a link on B’s site back to A. In other words, the comments and discussions on a blog can be tracked as a coherent conversation between bloggers.

To upload is to transfer a file or other content from your computer to an Internet site.

URL - Unique Resource Locator is the technical term for a web address.

User generated content is text, photos and other material produced by people who previously just consumed. See Content.

Video Many digital cameras and mobile phones take videos good enough to view on the Net. Sites like YouTube and blip.tv now make it easy to open an account, upload and share your videos. These sites will also provide some unique code for each video so you can, if you wish, embed the video in a blog post. Short interviews that “capture the moment” work well, particularly if you provide a text summary so people can easily decide whether or not to view. However, check whether the audience you are aiming at is likely to have a fast enough connection and an up to date browser, to view your video easily.

Voice over Internet Protocol (VOIP) enables you to use a computer or other Internet device for phone calls without additional charge, including conference calls. By using headphones and a microphone you can also free your hands to use instant messaging to keep a shared note of conversations, or use other virtual presence tools. You can use Voice over IP to do interviews for Podcasts. The best-known VOIP tool is Skype.
Web 2.0 is a term coined by O’Reilly Media in 2004 to describe blogs, wikis, social networking sites and other Internet-based services that emphasise collaboration and sharing, rather than less interactive publishing (Web 1.0). It is associated with the idea of the Internet as platform.

Web-based tools - Google, Yahoo and a host of other commercial organisations provide an increasing range of free or low-cost tools including email, calendars, word processing, and spreadsheets that can be used on the web rather than on your desktop. Provided you are happy to entrust your data to these organisations - and are always online when working - you can reduce your software costs significantly and forget about upgrades.

Widgets are stand-alone applications you can embed in other applications, like a website or a desktop, or view on its own on a PDA. These may help you to do things like subscribe to a feed, do a specialist search, or even make a donation.

A wiki is a web page, or set of pages, that can be edited collaboratively. The best-known example is Wikipedia, an encyclopedia created by thousands of contributors across the world. Once people have appropriate permissions, set by the wiki owner, they can create pages and/or add to and alter existing pages. Wikis are a good way for people to write a document together, instead of emailing files to and fro. You don’t have to use wikis for collaborative working; they can just be a quick and easy way of creating a web site. Although wikis are easy to use, that doesn’t mean everyone in a group will commit to their use with similar enthusiasm.

(Adapted from A-Z of Social Media by Wikispaces)
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