

# ONLINE MARKETING GUIDE



Pacific Islands  
Trade & Invest

**FOR ACCOMODATION PROVIDERS**





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Trade & Invest

## ABOUT PT&I

Pacific Trade Invest (PT&I) creates good jobs in the Pacific Islands. We do this by developing and promoting Pacific Islands exports, investments, tourism and creative arts across international markets. We are the lead agency in the region promoting and supporting emerging and established enterprises of the Pacific Islands with a particular focus on women owned or managed business.

### DIGITAL TOURISM PROGRAM

Digital Tourism program funded by Pacific Island Trade & Invest includes training and support needed to fully leverage online resources such as websites and booking systems. The program enables tourism and hotel operators the opportunity to work closely with professional agencies of the likes of Hotel Link Solutions and Digital Rhinos who provide both software and digital marketing solutions.

### CONTACT

#### Chad Morris

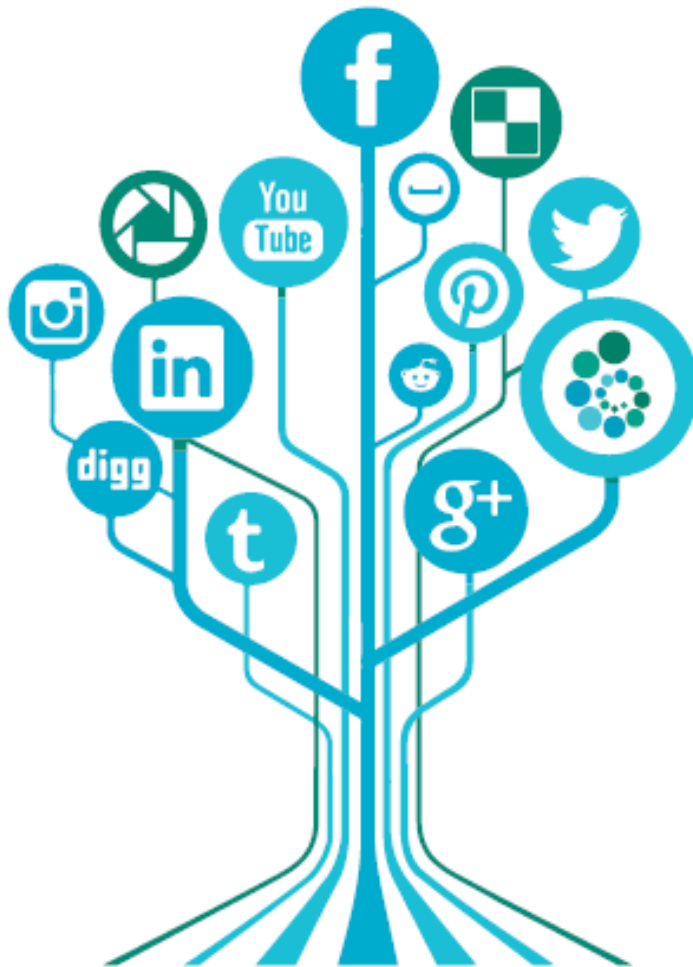
Investment and Tourism Manager

e: [Chad.morris@pacifictradeinvest.com](mailto:Chad.morris@pacifictradeinvest.com)

ph: (612) 9290 2133

*To learn how we can assist your business,  
visit our website at*

*[www.pacifictradeinvest.com](http://www.pacifictradeinvest.com)*



# Digital Tourism

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## Why This Guide?

Let's be honest with each other ...and still remain friends. The unfortunate truth is that most accommodations do a lousy job at online marketing. We estimate most could boost income and profits by at least 25% if they did it well ... some by a lot more.

When we press owners and managers on why they are not doing more in this area we're told;

- *I have no time to do more, nor can I afford to employ someone on my team to focus on this.*
- *It's too hard. I do what I can; I know I should probably do more.*
- *I thought I was doing okay, what other things should I be doing?*
- *It's too expensive. I outsourced this work and spent a fortune for very little return.*

We on the other hand work in this area every day. We have thousands of accommodation clients and have the benefit of seeing what works well and what doesn't. We also know that it doesn't need to be expensive (or hard to do) and, done well, will deliver a brilliant return on the investment made.

Seems crazy to us to spend millions on building and maintaining the property, and yet spend next to nothing on the online marketing.

So we put together this guide to *help accommodation owners help themselves, including figuring out what what bits they need to outsource to the experts.*

This guide is **focused on assisting independent accommodations grow both their sales and their profits** and is a joint effort from [Hotel Link Solutions](#) (who also offer the free digital [HealthCheck](#) service) and [Digital Rhinos](#) (with sister company [Prozely](#), a content marketplace).

One thing we want to make very clear at the outset: **there are no magic bullets in online marketing**. The best online marketing campaigns involve doing lots of things, most all of them running in parallel. The key to success lies in measuring everything you do, focusing on the activities that get results and constantly fine tuning as you go.

# Chapter 1

## Ticking all the boxes - having the right tools

Before we launch into a whole raft of online marketing activities it is important to understand the big picture ....all the elements which go into a successful marketing campaign. Understanding the accommodation buying cycle is key here.

### The Accommodation Buying Cycle

A convenient way to visualise your online presence is to use the accommodation buying cycle. What the cycle shows is a series of steps, a sort of virtuous circle, starting with how travellers find you all the way through to sharing their experience of staying with you with their friends and other travellers. The key thing to realise when planning your attack on the web is that ALL phases of the buying cycle need to be addressed.



### Discovery (getting found)

There are dozens of ways travellers might find you and the trick here is to pop up everywhere possible. This includes being found on search engines (Google, Bing etc.), on social media (TripAdvisor, Facebook, YouTube etc.), on OTA sites (like Booking.com, Expedia, HRS etc.), on blogs, on affiliate websites, on maps, on videos and via your website, mobile site and Facebook site. Discovery /Getting Found is the area where most investments are made in search engine optimisation (SEO) and paid search (also known as search engine marketing or SEM). You want travellers to find you both early in the planning cycle ...when they are dreaming about where they might go and what they might do, right through to the point where they are booking their travel.

### Planning and Selection

Once a potential customer has “discovered” you, the next step is deciding whether they are going to stay with you, versus others they have discovered which compete with you. An average traveller will visit 16 websites during the final week of planning / selection, so you need to make sure you have all the critical information available (competitive pricing, room and facilities information, maps, pictures, videos etc.) and that your site is mobile friendly, user friendly (easy to navigate) and loads quickly. Traveller feedback on sites like TripAdvisor plays a critical role in this selection process as well.

## Booking

Travellers expect room availability information to be displayed live and to then be able to secure a room instantly by booking on their desktop or mobile device using a credit card or other online payment service. They do not like to wait for an email response to confirm availability or to book and will instead move to other sites where they don't have this restriction.

They also expect the site they book on to be both trustworthy and secure (using industry standard payment interfaces and security systems), to have booking policies clearly displayed, and to have an intuitive user interface similar to what they see when they use sites like Expedia or Booking.com. It also helps convert more lookers to bookers if your booking engine has some calls to action such as letting travellers know how many rooms are left, or how many other travellers are looking at the website. Many websites lose the final booking to OTAs simply because the booking process was not familiar, too long, too hard or didn't prompt a decision to book now.

## Experiencing & Sharing

This is an area of growing importance and leads straight back to the discovery phase. It is all about travellers telling their friends and fellow travellers about you, and today this is HUGE. Traditional marketing was all about you telling others how good you are; social marketing is about getting your customers telling their networks how good you are. If you understand this you will understand how important social marketing is.

Facebook for example has 1.1 billion daily users, many of them travellers at some point, and most in constant contact with their network of friends. They post images of your rooms, your food, your pool ... just about everything, along with comments that can be good or bad depending on how well you do. In fact Facebook users post over 300 million images daily. In addition people are talking about you on sites like TripAdvisor, Google, Twitter and hundreds of other sites every day. What they are saying is building (or destroying) your brand and it is happening whether you engage or not. Successful accommodations proactively engage customers to encourage positive sharing, turning social media into an asset for their business.

So what does all this mean? It means that to participate effectively in online marketing you need 5 things: 3 of them essential, 2 highly recommended.

These are;

1. A good website -- mandatory
2. A good booking engine -- mandatory
3. A channel manager -- highly recommended
4. A front desk / property management system (PMS) -- highly recommended
5. A professional social media set-up -- mandatory

## The Website -- having a good website is mandatory

Not all websites are up to the job, so work your way down the list below to see if yours is. We have focussed on just the critical features below and if you are getting a new website built consider all elements mandatory and provide this feature list to the supplier / web designer.

- a. It must be responsive (mobile friendly). With over 60% of travellers now researching travel online using mobile devices like smartphones, you will miss out on a huge amount of business if your site is not mobile friendly. If you are not sure about your site you can check [here](#).
- b. It must load quickly. Some 40% of people will abandon a site if it takes more than 3 seconds to load. Not sure? Check [here](#).
- c. It must have all the core information readily available (room info, facilities information, wifi info, interactive map, contact details, photos / videos). There is a lot more you can add, but these are the minimum requirements.
- d. It must have a good (easy to use) CMS (content management system – the back end (extranet) where you can log in and change/add things yourself), Key here is the ability to add extra pages easily.
- e. It should have Google Analytics and Webmaster tools set up (so you can log in and see what guests to your website are doing, where they come from etc.)
- f. It should have links to social media, both outbound to your own social media sites, plus sharing links so travellers can share the page on their own social media sites.
- g. It should have a good booking engine (see below) where visitors can quickly check availability and book.
- h. It should have beautiful and professional photos, that capture the best features of your property. The website must support high resolution images that are fast to load
- i. It should be multilingual to cater clients from different parts of the world. It can have either native content translations or automated Google translations.

## The Booking Engine -- almost always mandatory

We do have a number of clients who only have a website, and no booking engine. There are sometimes valid reasons for this (e.g. niche operators for whom the accommodation is a secondary activity linked to their main business, like deep sea fishing, surfing, trekking, etc.). In these cases they prefer email inquiries so they can filter bookings and allocate their scarce accommodation resources to guests for the main business.

However in most cases the absence of instant booking capability, and most importantly the inability to check immediately for availability, will cost you bookings. The visitor will either go to an OTA site to make the booking or move to another accommodation site.

## So what features must a good booking engine have?

- a. It must be responsive. Just like your website. There is no point having a website which is mobile friendly if the booking engine is not.
- b. You need to be able to easily create room packages, specials (both discounted rates and pay-stay deals), and promo codes (more on this below).
- c. You must be able to book multiple rooms in the one booking. Families, small groups etc. hate having to make multiple bookings when they want more than one room.
- d. You need to be able to create "booking extras". These are things like airport transfers, breakfast, fruit basket on arrival etc. which guests can reserve at the same time they are making a room booking.
- e. You want a "high conversion" booking engine. OTAs like Booking.com and Expedia have spent a fortune working out the optimal number of steps and the look and feel of the booking page to make sure people don't leave the page until they have booked. Elements to look for here are;
  - The use of booking prompts. These are little call-outs like "there are 4 other people view this site currently", or "the last room was booked 10 minutes ago" or "just 2 rooms left". These create a sense of urgency to BOOK NOW
  - Having specials and discounts clearly flagged
  - Having room information (with pictures) and booking policies right at the spot where you make the booking (so you don't wander away and fail to come back to complete the booking).



- Having the availability calendar on the booking page as well in case the chosen date is showing as not available (allowing guests to make requests ...e.g. to go on a waiting list, is also useful)
  - Booking abandonment tools like pop-ups when people decide to exit the booking page, and email capture for those that abandon during the booking process. These provide an opportunity for a last minute try to get the booking.
- f. You want a best price guarantee feature, with a click through to the terms and conditions.
  - g. It must include a low number of steps to complete a booking. It should only ask the essential questions to not overwhelm the traveller and it must be presented in a logical order.
  - h. It must be secure, using the latest technology available to store the data of the traveller, and it must present visible evidence that it is secure to give confidence to the traveller that they can book safely.
  - i. If you are a small accommodation it is also good to have SMS messaging from the booking engine to let you know when guests have booked or made an inquiry. You don't want to miss inquiries or last minute bookings

### **The Channel Manager -- highly recommended**

A key part of your online sales strategy will involve third party distribution, i.e. selling via other channels such as the Online Travel Agents (OTAs like Booking.com and Expedia).meta-search sites (like TripAdvisor, Trivago and Kayak) etc.

Generally, the more channels the better, but to manage this efficiently you will need a channel manager. You can read more about how a channel manager works [here](#).

The key advantages of using a channel manager are:

- a. Single point of access (to the channels you want / need.)
- b. Automatic updating of room availability based on bookings
- c. Easy of use

### **The Front Desk / Property Management System (PMS) -- highly recommended**

From an online marketing perspective this is important for a few reasons.

- a. First, it allows you to pull together all of your client bookings into one place (online bookings from your website, OTAs, Facebook etc.; and offline bookings from emails, walk-ins etc.). Online marketing will generate bookings via all channels and it is critical this information is tracked. This is important whether you do all your online marketing yourself or if you are using an external agency.
- b. It should have some basic email functionality to allow you the send automated emails to guests (e.g. thank you emails)
- c. It should allow you to capture revenues of different types (room revenues plus other non-room revenues) so you can determine the total value of a guest stay, not just the room value. It's the total income that you need to track.

### **Professional Social Media Set-up -- mandatory**

At a minimum you need:

- a. A business Facebook Page, see [here](#) . Facebook is THE most popular social media website. It is a source of customer acquisition and interaction, and can assist you with reputation management, branding, driving web traffic and more.
- b. A Google My Business Listing, see [here](#). A listing with all your property information is essential since it will be used by Google for displaying on Search, Maps and Google+.
- c. A Complete TripAdvisor listing, see [here](#) . TripAdvisor is the largest travel website in the world. This is where you brand is built and hence it is extremely important for your property to rank well and have good reviews.

# Chapter 2

## Always On

Once you are set up with your website and other marketing solutions there are some things you should switch on / have set up from the get-go and have activated all the time, or almost always. The things we recommend are;

### Best Price Guarantee

Travellers, like most consumers, have become conditioned to looking for sales and deals and hence they want reassurance that the price they are about to pay is the best one out there. The way to do this most effectively is by displaying a best price guarantee on your website. Many hotels and even the big OTAs like [Booking.com](#) and [Expedia](#) do this regularly, so don't be afraid to do it yourself.



When you set this up make sure that you have a genuine guarantee in place, such as an offer to match (preferably beat) any price found elsewhere, otherwise travellers will not feel confident this is for real. The 'best price guarantee' can be prominently displayed on your homepage, booking page, and anywhere else you're asking them to book or enquire. Link the guarantee icon to the terms and conditions as well. You can see an example of a site with this set up [here](#). Travellers can easily click through to the terms and conditions.

Even if the potential guest were to find a cheaper rate on another site, the worst case here would be the hotel gives say 10% off the rate found--a discount that's generally less than the commission paid to your OTAs, and now you have the added advantage of owning the client.

### Loyalty Programs

The OTAs and large hotel chains spend a lot of money building out a global network of loyal customers. They keep these customers coming back by offering deals not available to the public. For most independent accommodations, this doesn't work except in cases where guests visit the specific destination regularly.



In the latter case, you can create your own loyalty programme by offering discounts or other benefits to guests to encourage them to think of you the next time they are thinking to travel to where you are located. Very effective here are promo codes linked to email campaigns

and (paid) Facebook updates to reach them. (see more detailed information below on each of these options).

More recently sites like [The Travel Revolution](#) have launched seeking to turn thousands of independent accommodations into a virtual accommodation chain. These accommodations are using booking systems compatible with The Travel Revolution platform, allowing accommodations to set discounts only visible to club members. It's great for travellers because they can now access loyalty club benefits wherever they travel in the world and for the accommodations, they spend less on commissions than with the OTAs and the travellers book directly with the accommodation, so the accommodation owns the guest.

### Last Minute Bookings

Nobody wants empty rooms, and a common practice is to have heavily discounted room rates available on demand for people who walk in or telephone the same day, or in some cases, the day before. This practice works well in high traffic areas, however it does require quite a bit of work for the traveller.



The Internet is changing this and now systems are emerging to allow accommodations to push last minute rates to private members platforms (e.g. loyalty clubs like [The Travel Revolution](#) or closed mobile app groups like [Hotel Tonight](#) and [Hotel Quickly](#)). You can have super discounts set up to only appear to the members of these channels at given times, helping clear that unsold inventory and at the same time avoid undermining your pricing strategy.

### Specials and Promo Codes

Most modern booking engines allow accommodations to create multiple specials to attract clients. The common types of specials are straight discounts (a % off the normal price) or pay-stay deals (e.g. pay for 4 nights and get the 5<sup>th</sup> night free). They appear on the website and are an important tool to build your direct bookings as they appeal to travellers looking for a deal. Additionally, many good booking engines allow you to create specials which can only be accessed by entering a code (promo code) into the booking page at the time the guest makes a booking. This ensures the specials are hidden from competitors and other distributors.



*Using promo codes is a great way to;*

- Keep past guests coming back with special offers
- Attract new B2B clients
- Create specific packages which are activated by promo codes
- Get your Facebook fans and others to book by posting promo code specials

## Upsells

It is common practice in the travel industry to try and upsell other products and services at the time the guest is making the room booking. Done well it is a chance to boost income, differentiate your offer from the one displayed on the OTAs, and add real value to the traveller by providing a solution to a guest need (even if they hadn't thought about it previously).

Examples of upsells which work well include airport pickups (paid as well as free), breakfast options, in-room extras (e.g. champagne on arrival) and selected tours and activities.

The caveat in recommending you always have booking extras displayed is that

- a) You do not add too many. Nobody likes scrolling down a whole page of extras the hotel is trying to sell when all you want to do is book the room. You can also create the impression of being too pushy, and;
- b) You regularly review what extras are working and delete the ones which don't and try others in their place.

## Live Chat Functionality

Turn on your chat functionality on your website to allow potential customers to make live inquiries. When you are offline the system becomes like a simple web inquiry form which pops up on every page of the website.

This is a great feature to maximise bookings. A potential guest with a query they want to get clear on before they book can instantly message you, get the answer and book. It's not something they can do when booking via an OTA site. You can see an example [here](#)



# Chapter 3

## Good Housekeeping – Your Daily, Weekly and Monthly To-Do List

In this chapter we have listed the activities which leverage what you now have set up (with your website, booking engine, channel manager and front desk / PMS). These tasks do not require specialist knowledge and should be able to be done in-house in most cases.

We've divided the tasks into those you should allocate time for every day, those you should try and get to once or twice a week and those which can be put on a monthly or twice monthly to-do list. A good idea is to set this up on a spreadsheet and tick off the tasks systematically.

There are a small number of jobs which will show fairly fast returns, however in general it will take 3 to 6 months before noticeable and sustained improvements in bookings and profits start to become obvious. So, be patient. Be sure to start with a clear understanding of where you started from (e.g. your current web traffic, bookings (by source), income etc.) and then each month make a note of the progress being made. Seasonal changes in bookings may mask the true extent of what you are achieving, however if you follow the below you should see substantial improvements in both occupancy levels and profits year on year.

### Daily Housekeeping Tasks

The tasks below are those we feel should go on your daily to-do list.

#### TripAdvisor Feedback

TripAdvisor is your brand / your reputation, and it is being shaped by your guests, so you need to be on top of this.

We recommend that 2-4 days after they check out you send a thank you email to the guest and ask them to assist you by leaving their feedback on TripAdvisor (make sure you insert the link to the TripAdvisor review page in your email). Some [front desk / PMS systems](#) allow you to set this up automatically. However you do it, this must be done every day.



**Important:** Your ranking on TripAdvisor is influenced not only by the individual scores left by travellers, but also by the total number of feedbacks posted by travellers and how recent the feedback is. Finally, if you have issues with your service or facilities which are resulting in poor feedback from guests, take action immediately to address the issue. If you have a poor TripAdvisor ranking, this alone will torpedo almost everything else you do to try and get

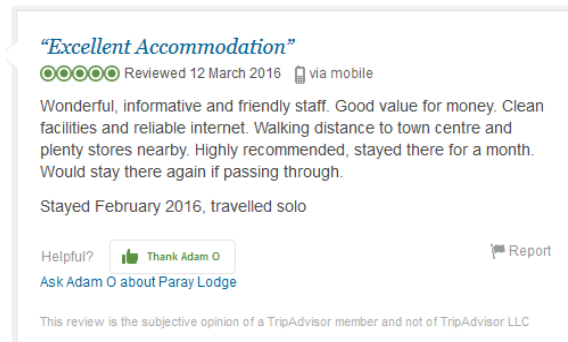
guests to book with you. Conversely, if you are a top 5 or top 10 property in a larger destination, you are almost guaranteed to get a lot of bookings. Today, many hotels live or die based on their review scores on TripAdvisor and the OTA's.

## TripAdvisor Feedback Responses.

Another very valuable daily activity is to check TripAdvisor and then respond to all feedback you receive as it arrives.

There are two reasons for this. First, is that it shows to travellers that you are paying attention and, by inference, that you are on top of any issues being raised (at least if your responses are action oriented and not purely defensive). This can help convert lookers to bookers.

Second, it encourages others to post their feedback too. TripAdvisor knows this and encourages your feedback.



A [TripAdvisor study](#) released in 2014 showed hotels where management responds to guests on TripAdvisor are 21% more likely to receive a booking inquiry than hotels where there are no management responses. Hotels that respond to more than 50% of their reviews have even higher chances of a booking, up to 24%.

Please **never** attack your guests or attempt to justify why an issue occurred if there is something specific they have mentioned. If someone is upset and leaving bad feedback, trying to quell the issue via public replies on reviews is a recipe for escalation. Take negative conversations offline and contact the guest directly to resolve the complaint if possible.

## Weekly Housekeeping Tasks

Below are tasks you should undertake at least once a week, and more often if you can. They include tasks related to keeping your website content fresh. When search engines crawl websites they look for new content as a signal that the site is active, that things are happening. Search engines crawl websites regularly looking for updates and when they don't find new content (text, photos and videos) will extend the time for the next visit. This will in turn lead to a drop in your page authority and a drop in your position in the search results. The assumption is that active websites are more likely to have up-to-date content which people searching will want. Quality content is a must however, so with any content changes make sure they are relevant and contain a good mix of the important keywords for the page.

As an example a page on your website about the restaurant at Mary's Hotel, would likely contain keywords/keyword phrases like restaurant, "Mary's Hotel restaurant", "dining at Mary's Hotel", etc.

## Website Check

Make a habit every week of going online and checking out your website to see what is happening and what travellers are seeing. You'd be surprised how often we find problems with websites which the owners aren't unaware of (e.g. the website has been blacklisted which can happen when the website is attacked by malware; it has broken links, outdated specials, pictures misaligned etc.)



If you think of your website like your shop or store (in this case it's your online store), this step is equivalent to taking a walk around to see that everything is in its right place, prices are correct etc. If you find anything which needs to be fixed or changed, do it immediately. We also suggest you do a quick search for your property and have a look at a) where you sit in Google and b) where you rank in TripAdvisor. If you have created any new content pages around a specific subject (e.g. The 27th Vanuatu Deep Sea Fishing Competition), type this term into Google and see where this ranks.

## Competitor Checks

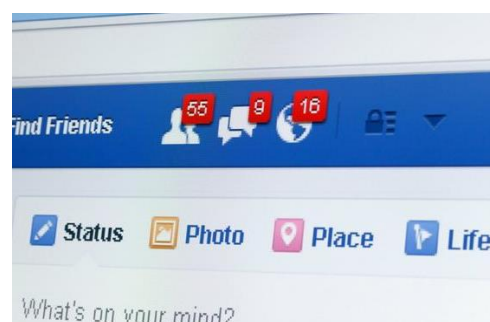
Make a list of your top 4-5 competitors and have a quick look at their websites each week to see what they are doing. Look for their pricing and any specials they are running. You should also have a look at which OTAs they are using, what deals / specials they are running on the OTAs and how they are tracking on TripAdvisor. Don't forget that just because someone else is doing it, doesn't mean it works. Consider their tactics in your business and make sure it suits and makes sense for you.



Chances are when a potential guest gets down to the final selection, these competitors will be in the mix, so make sure you don't lose the sale at this point.

## Facebook Posts

Facebook is one of the most popular social media platforms around with over 1 billion users every day. Travellers share information about your property with friends both during the planning phase as well as when they are staying with you.





TripAdvisor has also teamed up with Facebook to show Facebook friend's reviews at the top of their feedback.

There are a few reasons why you need to spend time your Facebook page. First, it acts like a second website for your business if the Facebook page is set up with fresh information and booking functionality (see [here](#) for an example). Second, an active Facebook page, just like an active website, will normally rank well and by linking to your website will lift the ranking of your website. Finally, you can build a loyalty program around leveraging your page and the people who "like" you, and post promo codes to encourage friends to book directly with you.

Key to building your 'likes' is regular posting and also thinking about using Facebook to run campaigns and offer promo codes.

### Run a rate check

When you are distributing via third parties (e.g. OTAs), it is a very good idea to make sure your publicly available rates are at least as competitive as all the external channels you are using to sell your rooms. If your website rates are higher than these other channels you will rarely get direct bookings. To check this select 2 or 3 future dates and then search for a room on your site and see how the rates on your site compare with what is being offered via the OTAs. Searching on meta search sites like Trivago, Kayak and TripAdvisor will give you a range of OTA prices, sometimes from OTAs you didn't know were distributing your rooms.



### Review Your Analytics

Every accommodation website must be set up to view the web metrics (visitor numbers, visitor origins, entry and exit pages, whether they are accessing via desktops or mobile devices etc.).

The most popular free service is Google Analytics. Importantly Google Analytics will show you information about client acquisition (how they found you), their behaviour once they landed on your site, and finally converting them to a sale. A warning: there is a huge amount of information which Google Analytics captures so we strongly recommend you have a look at this video Google has shared, "[Getting Started with Google Analytics](#)". There are dozens of other videos and guides on the web which you can access to learn more, however this video will be a good starting point for anyone new to analytics.



So how does looking at my analytics data help me grow sales? A few short examples;

- You have started adding some new pages to your website about local tourism information, or day tours your guests might want to do. How do you know if anyone is finding and reading these pages? Data in Google Analytics will tell you.
- You find from Google Analytics that you are getting a lot of traffic from another website, so you check this site out to see if any business partnerships are possible.
- You would like to run some Google Adwords campaigns to boost business, and need to know which markets to target. Your analytics data will tell you where most visitors to your website are coming from.

### Create Fresh Written Content

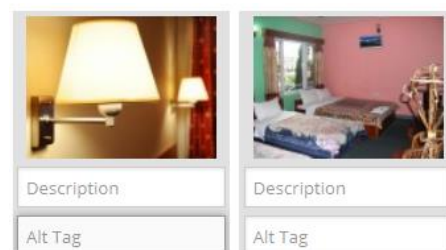
The simple rule of thumb for search engines is that the more fresh quality content you have the better. Writing lots of new content can be a chore however, so to keep the search engines happy, look to making a number of small changes every week. A few fresh sentences or a new paragraph elaborating a previously small point on the site is enough. If you don't know what to write, an easy way to get started is to take photos around the local area, post them and then write about the photos. Tell the reader where and when the photo was taken, what it depicts, why it's special and any other 'surrounding' info you can add.



To be able to do this work readily it is important your website has an easy-to-use content management system (CMS) where you can quickly enter new text (just as you would when working in a Word document), save and it publish it. Some web designers will insist that only they can do this work, however the truth is that today most modern website platforms allow owners to update content themselves with even the most basic knowledge and skills

### Fresh Photos / Videos

These are valuable content on your website, however search engines can't read pictures, so you need to insert some text along with the photos and videos so that the search engines know what the image or video is about. There are at least two fields where information is added, Descriptions and Alt Tags.



Alt Tags are used by search engines to describe images to the visually impaired. Text to speech software reads the alt tag on the image to the user. You also help search engines understand each of the images better. Descriptions provide additional information about the image and afford another opportunity to insert practical keywords into your pages.

## Monthly Housekeeping Tasks

*This is a long list, and an important one.*

### Research New Pages (blog articles) for your website

The final decision to book a room with you is generally a long way into the buying process. Travellers will start their holiday planning with seeing what there is to see and do (dreaming, imagining ...activities which are referred to in marketing jargon as “top of funnel” activities). The trick is to start interacting with travellers at this point and then nurture this lead right through to the bottom of the funnel (the point of purchase).



Consider this, at any given moment, the number of people thinking about and researching holidays is exponentially larger than the number of people booking. By marketing to people at the top of the funnel, you are targeting a far larger group of people. The bigger the group you reach at the top of the funnel, the bigger the % gains will be in bookings.

We recommend you make an hour or two available each month to doing some “top of funnel” research on information which can be added to your website. Try to focus in on 1-2 subject areas (e.g. local sights, local activities, foods, sporting or cultural events, festivals, government or business conferences etc. and collect as much information as you can (text, photos, videos). Put all this information in a folder you can come back to later to either update existing content on your website or to create a new page or blog article.

In the online world content is king, and continually adding rich and useful information to your website will help enormously in driving more traffic your way. If you are stuck for inspiration on areas to research try Googling “things to do in XXX destination” and see what comes up. Also check out upcoming sport events, festivals, etc.

## Create a new page (or blog article) for your website

Select one of the subject areas you have discovered in your research, log into the back end of your website (the CMS) and create a new page covering just this subject. Do this every month with the objective eventually of having 20-30 extra pages of content. In the alternative you can create a blog post if you have a blog set up. Some tips for your page:



- a) Make sure the URL extension for your page explains clearly what the page is about. For example if The Freestyle Hotel in Fiji were to create a page for deep sea fishing the URL might read [www.freestylehotel.com/deep-sea-fishing-in-fiji](http://www.freestylehotel.com/deep-sea-fishing-in-fiji)
- b) Make sure each page has at least 800 words of text and at least 3-4 high-quality photos. Take a look at the other pages that rank in the search engines for that topic - you want your page to be better than theirs if you want any chance of outranking them!
- c) Make sure that the text contains a number of relevant keywords and keyword phrases. Examples are "Fiji", "deep sea fishing", "marlin fishing Fiji", "tuna fishing Fiji", "deep sea fishing in Fiji" etc. Your research will tell you what people are looking for.
- d) Make sure the page title and meta tags are properly set up (see [here](#)).
- e) Make sure your page has a call to action. It is one thing to get people coming to your website as a result of your new content, however, what you are really after is a booking. One effective way to do this is to place a small banner on the page saying for example "Book your accommodation for your deep sea fishing trip now and save 10% by using this promo code when you book".
- f) Create a page for each major festival or event coming up. You should be able to deactivate these pages and store them for next year if necessary.

Review your analytics results regularly and delete any pages which are stale or get very low visits. You should be constantly seeking out information which is interesting for your guests and which brings you traffic.

## Contract a new OTA

Many accommodations we work with have a tendency to work with 2-3 OTAs only. The fact is, with channel managers now widely available; it is no more work to run with 10 OTAs than it is to run with 2. What's more, you might find that there are OTAs you haven't heard of that in fact are very important in their domestic market.



For example, the big one in China is not Booking.com or Expedia, it's Ctrip; in Japan it's Rakuten; in Germany it's HRS; in India it's sites like MakeMyTrip, Yatra, Cleartrip, Travelguru, etc. When you look at your Google analytics to see where people are searching from and past guest's countries of origin, you may find real benefit in contracting with other OTAs.

There are also OTAs like HRS you can access from your channel manager which push your availability to the GDS (Global Distribution System, accessed by over 300,000 travel agents), and still others like Hotelbeds and GTA which act as wholesalers distributing your product to thousands of other channels they have established.

We strongly recommend a multi-channel distribution strategy for every accommodation for a few good reasons;

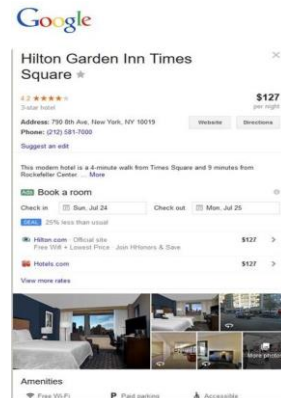
- **More bookings.** Even if these new channels only add an extra booking or two per month, this adds up.
- **More visibility and more traffic.** Even if these channels send you no bookings, you are getting free advertising. Cornell University did a study which estimated that up to 25% of people who find a hotel on an OTA will search for the hotel in Google. This is known as the Billboard Effect and the more channels you are on the more visibility and referral traffic you will get.
- **It Reduces Risk.** The more channels you sell on the less risk to your business if one or more channels closes, or drops your property. Also makes it easier for you if you choose to drop an OTA.

## Contract a Meta-search Site

Meta-search sites started life as a price comparison service, allowing travellers to see in one search what the various OTAs were charging for a given room on a given date. Examples of well-known meta-search sites are Kayak, Trivago, and HotelsCombined. More recently TripAdvisor has entered the field along with Google.

Originally meta-search sites only worked with OTAs, but increasingly they are able to work directly with hotels via a channel manager or booking engine, so now a hotel price can appear right alongside the OTA price. It was still very hard for small and medium sized hotels to use this service however, as expensive (you pay per click (CPC)) and often travellers would book via the OTA as they trust them and are familiar with them.

Now however some meta-search engines are moving to commission based sales with hotels (cost per acquisition or pricing) and this is now very interesting for all hotels. It is early for CPA based meta-search distribution, however we believe it grow quickly, particularly when Google expands the service outside the US market (expected in 2017).



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### Contact Potential B2B Clients

Many hotels work with wholesalers and tour operators domestically and abroad. Think about adding to this list by targeting 1-2 potential new clients every month, not only other wholesalers and tour operators, but with other companies (e.g. telecoms businesses, banks, airlines, etc.); not-for-profits (church groups, NGOs, etc.), event companies, embassies etc. Every month contact 1-2 such groups and offer them special pricing (using promo codes for example).



### Review your booking conditions (and minimise them)

One of the last things travellers do before they make a booking is to check your booking conditions. We constantly situations where the accommodation has more or overly restrictive booking conditions than are available on the OTA websites, or when compared to other accommodation options in the destination, and this will cost you bookings.

Booking.com in particular has been making a big effort to “no upfront payments” and in many cases “no cancellation fees”. As you can imagine if the traveller has a choice of booking with conditions like this on the OTA site, versus the hotel website which is asking for 50% upfront and onerous cancellation fees, then the OTA wins the booking.



find

sell

Generally speaking, the trend is to lower or remove upfront payments (deposits) as this is what travellers like. They do not like paying upfront for a trip they will make in a month or two, so offering guests more favourable booking terms may make the difference in whether you get the booking or not.

So every month do a tour of the OTA sites selling your property, PLUS your local competitors to make sure your booking conditions are competitive. Booking conditions, like room rates, can change from month to month

**Pro Tip:** If your accommodation is doing very well and is full most of the year, then charging deposits makes sense, as no-shows and cancellations mean rooms that could have been filled are not. On the other hand if you run most all of the year with occupancy levels of say 80% or below, then a guest who doesn't show is not such a worry, as the room would otherwise have been unsold anyway.

### Create a New Promo Code

Promo codes are great as they allow you to offer competitive prices to a targeted audience, without posting the deal in public (unless you choose to). Get into the habit of creating new promo codes each month. You can use promo codes in so many ways, for example:

- To build loyalty with past guests, send an email to all your past guests when there is something special happening in your destination (e.g. a festival, sporting event etc.) and put a promo code in the email offering a special discount or pay-stay deal they can use for accommodation.
- On your Facebook page
- In an approach to a potential new business partner. Send them a code they can use to activate an exclusive deal.

Promo codes can be set up to apply for future dates and defined periods so it is good to slowly create a list of deals which you can activate or deactivate at any time.



### Create New Specials

The whole idea with specials and promo codes is to be constantly encouraging travellers to book now to take advantage of what is on offer. They will also help get more direct bookings if you are seen to be offering something they can't get elsewhere (e.g. on the OTA sites). The thing with specials is that they are designed to be displayed on your website in the public domain, so you need to be careful you don't upset your other distribution channels by undercutting prices they are selling at. There are ways to do this.



Your booking engine will (should) allow you to create a whole range of specials which can be switched on and off according to criteria you set up. You can of course offer straight % discounts on published room rates, however other options include pay-stay deals and non-monetary add-ons which you can offer. Promo codes, covered above, can be used to make specials available to a specific targeted audience (i.e. are not viewable by the public, your competitors or distributors), a good way to operate % discount offers. So every month we recommend you review the specials you have been running, drop the ones which didn't get any traction, and add new ones, perhaps leveraging from the ones which seem to be working best.

### Check Availability

You would be amazed how many times accommodations lose bookings simply because room availability has not been updated. Good booking engines will alert you automatically when forward availability is low, however, it is still good practice to log into the booking engine back end once a month (or every couple of months) and see how far out availability is showing.



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### Load Videos

Think with Google recently reported that 63% of travellers watch online videos when deciding on an accommodation within a destination they plan to visit.

This makes YouTube an excellent platform for hoteliers

to showcase their properties. Consider the following tips when using YouTube in your hotel



#### **Video marketing:**

Use an alluring title and description for your videos. The title will attract viewers to your video and a detailed description will entice them to book your hotel. Using keywords in your description and utilizing tags will help people to find you and learn what is important about the property they are viewing.

Once uploaded, post your YouTube videos to social media. Additionally, you may want to include your videos in your next e-newsletter. Doing these things will increase the chances of consumers seeing your videos and sharing them for others to see, which then results in better hotel online visibility.



# Chapter 4

## Advanced Digital Marketing

In Chapter 3 we covered off good housekeeping tasks—activities you can do yourself if you choose to. These are largely activities which do not require specialist training, nor do they require licensing other external services or tools beyond what you should have available already with your website, booking engine, channel manager and front desk / PMS.

This chapter looks at work which requires specialist skills and access to a number of tools and external systems you won't normally have at your disposal. You would almost always be better off outsourcing this work unless you have a dedicated and trained internal resource available.

There are five main areas we cover here:

1. Adwords - Paid Search
2. Email Marketing
3. Advanced Content Marketing
4. Social Marketing
5. Optimisation

### Adwords - Paid Search

#### What is it?

Google Adwords are used extensively by groups like Booking.com and Expedia. If you do a search for “hotels in hanoi” for example, you will see the top positions on the search page taken by the OTAs and occasionally the large chains. These positions are actually paid advertisements called Adwords and next to them is normally a small green with “Ad” in it signifying an advertisement. With so many people starting their search using search engines like Google, these positions at the top of the page are valuable.



hotel  
box

#### Why would you use it?

You can get instant results and you can target markets very precisely.

#### How do you run Adwords Campaigns?

With some difficulty ....it's complex. It's easy to do this work badly, but very difficult to do it well (and cost effectively). Google has a useful guide (see [here](#)) and if you Google ...“getting started with Adwords” , you will find a lot more tips. We'd highly recommend as well that you download our e-Book "[How-we-used-adwords-to-generate-over-1-million-revenue-12-months](#)".

You will also need to set up some e-commerce tracking code on your website so you can track results, and a few new landing pages to direct the traffic to.

### **What would we recommend?**

That you outsource this activity unless you want to make digital marketing a career. Regardless of whether you run the Adwords campaigns yourself or outsource the work;

1. Avoid competing directly with Booking.com Expedia etc. This will mean generally avoiding broad search terms to do with accommodation in your destination (such as “Hanoi hotels”). The exception to this might be when you launch a new accommodation and do some short term targeted Adwords campaigns to build initial traction, even though you will likely lose money in the short term..
2. Know exactly what good looks like. Generally you will want to get hard numbers on bookings or booking inquiries, not just a jump in web traffic.
3. Focus on non-accommodation activities / facilities which are part of what you do (e.g. weddings, fishing, surfing, events, conferences etc.). There is less competition for these terms which means the cost for the Adwords will be lower.

## **Email Marketing**

### **What is it?**

Basically sending emails to audiences like past guests and the trade to encourage them to book with you.

### **Why would you use it?**

Travel & Tourism related email promotions get opened more than any other type of offer so email is a great tool to use. Engaging with previous visitors is the most targeted way of reaching more potential visitors. It is easier and cheaper to keep an existing guest coming back than it is to find a new one. Also with the trade, if you develop a good mailing list it is one of the most effective ways to sell.



### **How do you run an effective email marketing campaign?**

There are several steps here.

1. Build out some great email marketing lists. Start with your past guests, and build a list with names, email addresses and their origin (country/city). Next start to build a list of wholesalers, outbound and inbound tour operators who service your market. Same thing—you want names (in this case decision makers where possible), email addresses and country / city they are located in.
2. Start creating some email templates (with nice headers, photos etc.). You should develop several, for each target audience. Once you select an email marketing

service (see 4 below) you will see how to set these up within their system. The types of emails will include

- After Stay thank you & follow up emails.
  - Win Back email sequence with offers and specials for repeat bookings.
  - Buzz Generator: offers special rates and options for referrals.
3. Start creating some dedicated landing pages for recipients to click through to. You are sending emails to create leads, and you want to convert these leads in some way, either by making bookings or downloading pricing tables etc. All this needs to be set up along with tracking code. Check out some useful tips for [creating effective landing pages here](#).
  4. Select and set up an email marketing service. There are simple ones like Mailchimp and Sendinblue, although for longer campaigns with several mailers we would recommend you look at subscribing to services like Autopilot or iContact.

### **What would we recommend?**

That you look to outsourcing this. It is very important you have accurate tracking and optimisation tools setup to measure results and to provide the information needed to refine the campaigns. This includes fine tuning any landing pages that readers are directed to. This is complex work.

## **Content Marketing**

### **What is it?**

Content marketing works by creating the information your target market is searching for; so when they find the answers, they also find you. By providing insightful content that's useful to potential visitors, hotels can become known to visitors during the 'dreaming and planning' stages as well as at the time of booking. In the monthly activities covered earlier we recommended the creation of extra pages on your website targeting specific activities, services, events etc. These are the first steps in a content marketing effort. An advanced content marketing program simply takes this approach and expands it with much bigger pieces of written content, adds a lot of specialist tracking tools and optimisation tools to the mix so that visitors to your website are slowly nurtured from being lookers to becoming bookers.



### **Why would you use it?**

Content is king in online marketing. An investment in this area, whilst not producing overnight results, will lead to a significant increase in travellers finding you during their dreaming and planning stages.

## How do you run an effective content marketing campaign?

There are a number of steps to this.

1. Research. It is important to know what travellers are searching for at the various stages of their online journey ...from dreaming to booking. There are some things which are probably obvious for your destination, and there will be others you can uncover by doing some detailed analysis of past searches (a keyword analysis). There are several tools to do this research including Moz, SEMrush and Google Keyword Planner. You may want to check out this in-depth guide to generating content ideas.
2. Content Development. Once you have your list of popular things travellers are looking for the next step is to create the pages or blog articles they will be directed to when they search for these terms. The pages/blog articles will need to be set up with quality content and the right mix of keywords and keyword phrases to ensure good search engine rankings. If the content answers common questions it may also be featured by Google as a search snippet. Most importantly, analytics tracking code is inserted in the back of each new page to track visits and actions taken on the page (ranging from click-throughs to other pages to downloads). Returning customers are identified immediately and can be served up content directly related to their specific interest.
3. Constant Refreshing. Most pages/blog articles developed as part of the content marketing strategy will need to be updated or even replaced over time. Tracking visitor levels over time will start to identify the pages needing work.
4. Measuring ROI. You need to measure the impact of this work over time, and the whole program needs to be set up to try and track the traveller journey right through to the point where they book. Only at this point can you start to tie back the returns on the investment you are making in the content marketing.
5. Optimisation. The next step is to start optimising each page, i.e. tweaking it to see if new design features result in more actions being taken. More on this below.

## What would we recommend?

1. Start with the content marketing steps outlined in Chapter 3 above “Monthly (or Twice Monthly) Housekeeping Tasks” and see what progress you make in terms of web traffic growth over say 3-4 months.
2. If progress is mediocre and/or you are not able to accurately measure the outcomes, try outsourcing the work to a professional digital marketing agency.

## Social Media Advertising

### What is it?

Social media advertising works by advertising your offers and content in a hyper-targeted way. It's extremely important to set up your social media advertising in a strategic manner. This includes determining who your target audience is, when to target them, what kinds of offers and content to target them with, testing your ads and ensuring you have a clear idea of business-related outcomes.

### Why would you use it?

Social media advertising allows you to focus on your highest performing customer segment, as well as reach a huge potential audience much more cheaply than avenues such as paid search.

### How do you run an effective social media advertising campaign?

There are a number of steps to this:

1. Determining your target audience. You should have a reasonably good idea already as to who your target audience are, but it's always good to write these down and create simple customer personas. An example of a traveller persona can be found here. Important things to consider are the typical age range, the types of holidays they're after (family, romantic, active, relaxing), budgets and geographical source markets. Facebook allows you to be extremely specific in your targeting criteria, so it's essential that you have a very clear idea of who you are targeting with your ads.
2. When to target. Understand when your target audience is likely to start the booking journey. If you know that your core audience generally books 4 months out from the start of your high season, then you want to make sure that you've got all your ad copy in place in time. Additionally, you may wish to promote different types of activities or offers based on the season and what is upcoming in your destination. This is discussed in more detail in the next point.
3. Types of offers/content. Social media advertising can be very powerful when used in conjunction with a content marketing campaign. For example, if there is a popular deep-sea fishing tournament held every July in your destination, mainly attended by males in their 40s from Australia & New Zealand, you could create a useful guide to the event and then promote it to that target audience via social media. You could also offer specific fishing packages to the same audience.
4. Testing your ads. One of the main beauties of online marketing is the ability to test different elements of a campaign to see what works best. Social media advertising is no different. You should always be testing different audiences, different calls to action, different offers and so on to see what works best for your audience.

5. Clear business objectives. Way too many people run social media advertising campaigns and measure the success or failure on such vanity metrics as likes, clicks and shares. These are the “fast food” of metrics - whilst they may make you feel good at the time, ultimately they’re empty metrics and only focusing on these will hurt you in the long run. You want to be focusing on things like subscriber numbers, booking enquiries, revenue generated, return on advertising spend - all of these have a direct correlation to the success of your business. These can all be measured via your Google Analytics setup when implemented correctly.

## Remarketing

### What is it?

Remarketing is where a cookie is placed on the browser of your website visitors, which allows you to target those same visitors in future. Remarketing is mostly done through the Google Display Network and Facebook.

### Why would you use it?

Only a small percentage (often around 2%) of first time visitors to your site are likely to convert into bookers, enquirers or subscribers. Remarketing allows you to continue marketing to the remaining 98% in a cost-effective way.

### How do you run an effective remarketing campaign?

Setting up a remarketing campaign is reasonably simple using the following steps:

1. Setup. To set up remarketing via Google, you’ll need to log into your Google Analytics and turn on remarketing audiences. Then you’ll need to create an audience based on the conditions you determine (if you have a big enough audience, you can target visitors just to specific pages, or visitors who came to your site but didn’t complete a booking, for example). Setting up Facebook remarketing requires adding a pixel (piece of code) to your website, which is generated through the Facebook advertising back-end.
2. Develop ads. The most common type of remarketing is display advertising. For this, you will need to create ads that conform to the Google Display Network and Facebook network advertising specifications.
3. Measure & optimise. As with everything, you should be constantly measuring, testing and optimising the performance of your ads.

## Optimisation

### What is it?

Optimisation is the concept of making improvements to your digital marketing in an ongoing, process and data-driven way.

### Why would you use it?

If you currently receive 1,000 visitors to your site per month and have a 1% conversion rate, this will result in 10 bookings per month. In order to double your website bookings, often it can be easier, cheaper and quicker to improve that 1% to 2%, than it can be to increase your visitors from 1,000 to 2,000. Plus, if you've improved your website conversions to 2%, any subsequent increases in website visitors will be even more effective. The same principle applies to your off-site advertising.

### How do you run an effective optimisation experiment?

Optimisation can get extremely complex, but it is possible to run simple optimisation experiments. The key steps are as follows:

1. Determine what to optimise. Consider where the biggest return on investment, and biggest improvement to your website is likely to be. In most small accommodation websites, this will relate to your website booking conversion rate.
2. Outline your assumptions. You should view optimisation experiments as similar to science experiments. So what you want to do is consider an assumption and then test it. For example, you might consider running a Facebook test against your target audience assumptions - you may wish to see who is more likely to book, men vs women. So you could run campaigns using the exact same target criteria (geo location, age range, interests, etc.) with the only variable being their gender, to see which one gets better results and what the return on investment each one delivers. You may also wish to try AB testing, whereby the same audience is split 50/50, and half of them see one offer (offer A) and the other half see another offer (offer B) to determine which one is more successful.
3. Implement improvements and keep testing. To get the best results out of optimisation, it should be an ongoing, continual process. A key thing to note is that your first tests should be vastly different so that you are able to see big differences in conversion rates, rather than making minor changes which will only result in small differences.

# Chapter 5

## Sales & Follow-up Process to Convert Enquiries to Bookings

Any successful salesperson or sales organisation will tell you that the real money is not in the leads, but in the follow-up of those leads. When someone takes the time to call or email you, they are very close to purchase. What they're really saying when they make the effort to engage you is...

*"I'm probably booking my holiday with you, please convince me you're the right choice and confirm I'm making a good decision."*

This is how you *should* think about enquires because at this point, the sale is yours to lose. Research shows that today's consumers are over 65% of their way to a purchase decision before they ever engage a business directly. This is why you have to have a system in place that captures their information, discovers their motivations and hot buttons and then follows them up with information and offers designed to make booking with you irresistible.



You put hours or time and effort into generating leads, you spend thousands of dollars a year to be found through various channels, this whole book is about how to get more leads! It only makes sense that when they enquire, we do everything in our power to close the deal and win the booking, otherwise all that time and money is wasted.

The good news is you don't need to become a sleazy sales person to be good at follow up. **Good follow up is about being insanely helpful to the person enquiring.** To do this, you need to explore their needs so you can then anticipate them and proactively provide assistance to them during their trip planning stages.

### Great Exploring questions to ask a lead:

- What's the main reason you're coming to X location?
- What are the things you really want to do on your trip?
- Who's coming? Family, couple, friends, work colleagues?
- What sort of accommodation do you like/usually book or wish for?

The above questions will arm you with everything you need to know to follow up and help this person with their planning. When you go above and beyond, educate consumers, and guide them towards the things they need to know, you win their trust. You'll probably build a



relationship with the lead during these interactions and we all like to buy from people we know, like and trust.

### Example: Follow Up Process

1. Get the callers contact info,
2. Enter into database
3. Send them email brochure
4. Put them in a follow up sequence
5. Add their email to your [Facebook targeting](#)
6. Schedule a follow up call
7. Schedule a follow-up offer for non-bookers
8. Discover activities they are interested in and supply help and info

### Follow Up Process -Explained

#### Get the callers contact information:

Whenever someone calls you, get their phone number straight away. You can say something like, “to save you calling back internationally if we get cut off, what’s your contact number?” Later in the call you can offer to send them some information and collect their email address. You’re actually helping them AND getting what you need at the same time.

#### Enter into database:

Knowing who called, their contact info, what was said and what the outcome was, is the bare minimum you need to implement for good follow up. This can be as simple as a spreadsheet where you enter all this information or a software tool. Be sure to record their answers to your exploring questions above, this is how you’ll win them over later.

#### Send them email brochure:

Straight after the call you want to send them some information via email. It shows you’re good at following up, organised, and interested in helping them. If you help and provide good information to people they will naturally gravitate towards you and their desire to book with you increases.

#### Put them in a follow up sequence:

Many successful businesses these days use automated follow up systems to follow up and nurture leads towards buying. Having a series of 3-5 emails that can be sent over a 2 week period will serve to remind the customer about you, and if done well will bring them back to your site over and over again as they click links and learn more on your site.



**Add their email to your [Facebook targeting](#):**

If you run Facebook advertising you may already know that you can target people by their email address. New leads should always be added to the list of emails being targeted in your Facebook ad campaigns. Imagine enquiring about a hotel and then 2 days later seeing a special offer for that hotel in your Facebook feed, Powerful!

**Schedule a follow up call**

Once a lead has called you, received your emails and clicked on a few links you've sent, they are primed for a friendly follow up call. The best approach is to call and offer assistance and insight. Saying something like the following will open a nice conversation

*"Hi, I'm just calling to see how you went on your search for accommodation and to see if you had any luck finding a place to (thing they said in your exploring questions)"*

Once again, you're not being a salesperson, you're helping them choose you by making it too easy. Everyday people pay more than they need to, wait longer, or use an inferior service simply because they like or have a relationship with the business or staff. Take advantage of this human oddity by being the person they WANT to book with because 'you're so darn helpful and nice'.

**Schedule a follow-up offer for non-bookers**

If you've done everything above and they're still not ready to book then it might be one of the leads you need to miss out on, in order to get the one that converts, but don't give up just yet. There are opportunities to try some different angles to see if you can still win them over. To change someone's mind there needs to be a compelling reason for them to do so. Offers that work well at this stage include discounts, free nights or other value adds such as massages or a bottle of wine on arrival.

Urgency and scarcity are also powerful sales tools to motivate leads to buy, emailing or calling them to let them know the dates and rooms they want are expected to be gone soon can be the nudge they need to go ahead and book. Alternatively, a last minute cancellation that means a specific feature, room or amenity will now be available is worth announcing to your leads to see if it changes their minds.

**Discover activities they are interested in and supply help and info**

Perhaps one of the most powerful ways for you to assist them is with your boots on the ground knowledge of the location. If they wanted to do scuba, share the best local operators with them. If they wanted to hike, find the best trails or guides for them to check out. You could even do deals with local operators to be the people they include on the lists and get commission. This is super helpful for your guests and doing it before they even book with you can often mean they decide to in fact book with you.