

Why should I offer online bookings?

The Simple Answer:

Having the ability to book accommodation and tours online has become an expectation of most potential visitors.

Online booking makes it easy for your customers to book and pay for your product, and saves you valuable time in the process, as well as giving them what they expect to see.

Over 60% of travellers say they will book online when the product is available.

What is a 'real-time' online booking system?

A real-time online booking system is a simple piece of computer technology that allows your customers to instantly book and pay for your product over the internet, without any intervention on your part. Most online booking systems are very simple to install, and relatively cheap to run.

How will an online booking system benefit my business?

An online booking system will:

- Make it quick and easy for customers to view, book and pay for your product.
- Save you time and money in phone calls, emails, and manually managing all your bookings.
- If you sign up to a distribution network, it will allow you to make your product bookable on multiple websites, meaning more exposure and more sales.
- Many users go to online travel websites to comparison shop. They then look at your website to find the same or a cheaper price. **If they and can book directly, they will.** Online booking tools can get you more direct business.

Did you know?

Sixty per cent of travellers say they book online when the product is available.

How does it work?

If you've ever booked air tickets online, then you'll be familiar with the online booking process – it's pretty much the same for most other tourism businesses and just as simple.

Here are the basic steps:

1. You enter the details of your inventory (that's all the accommodation and/or tickets you have to sell) into the system.
2. Customers view this inventory via your own website, or your distributors' websites (**e.g. your local visitor information centre website**) and search for available product.
3. Customers make bookings by simply clicking on the desired rooms and/or dates, and following the instructions.
4. Payment by credit card is automatically processed via a secure online merchant facility that can communicate directly with your booking system – money is transferred straight into your bank account.
5. Once payment is made and the booking confirmed, your inventory can be automatically updated across all websites where your product is sold.



How do I choose an online booking system?

There are many online booking systems on the market, all with different capabilities.

Some are designed specifically for accommodation businesses, some for tours and events.

Systems such as Bookeasy are designed to cater for BOTH.

Connecting to your local Visitor Information Centre and getting set up Bookeasy is simple and cost-effective

When choosing an online booking system that's right for your business, you should:

Assess your needs:

Put together a checklist covering the kinds of things you'd like the system to do for you. A good example checklist can be found in Tutorial 34 on the Online Tourism e-kit.

If you simply Google "**Online Tourism e-kit**" you will find the link for your state's version

Ask for advice:

Ask your regional tourism organisation or local visitor information centre to recommend a system. Which system do they use? Are there any features you should absolutely get?

Review each system:

Once you've made a shortlist of suitable booking systems, compare each system in terms of cost, the level of support offered, and the reputation of the company. A good comparison of booking systems can be found in Tutorial 35 on the Online Tourism e-kit.

What equipment do I need?

If you already have a computer and internet connection, you don't need to buy any new hardware – all online booking systems can be run from your computer or directly online.

You will also need to set up an online merchant facility so that credit card payments can be securely transferred to your bank account.

If the system you are installing requires you to load any software onto your computer to use it, or it requires you to purchase additional equipment, then it is not worth considering.



FAQs

I like speaking directly to my customers. Won't an online booking system compromise my customer service?

No. Research conducted in 2011 shows that **60 % of travellers prefer to book online when product is available**. In Europe and North America, where online booking is more established, online bookings account for around 70% of consumer travel turnover.

Customers clearly want the ease and convenience of booking online.

However, if certain customers prefer to ring up and book in person, you can still make that option available to them. An online booking system is simply an alternative booking option that adds value to your business.

Will having online booking increase the risk of over-bookings?

If you're signed up to a system that offers a channel manager service, there is no risk of over-bookings. These channel managers automatically update your inventory across all your distributor websites – **simultaneously and in real time** – so customers only ever see accurate availability.

Don't I need expensive new equipment to set up an online booking system?

No. If you already have a computer and internet connection, you don't need to buy any new hardware – all online booking systems can be run from your computer or directly online.

What are "distribution commissions"?

Most tourism distributors charge a commission for bookings made through their websites. These can vary considerably from distributor to distributor. If you're signed up to Bookeasy you get to select who can on-sell your product, so if you're not happy with a particular distributor's commission, you can simply opt out of their website.

Some systems, such as ResOnline, include these costs in their Monthly fee. This means you know your running costs up front, and don't have to factor in varying commission fees for your business.