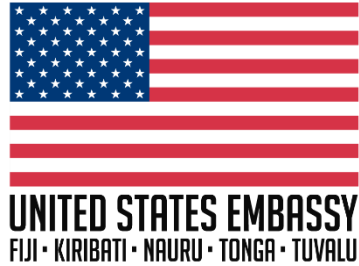




PACIFIC TOURISM
ORGANISATION



SPTO SME Recovery Toolkit

Chapter 7: Online sales and marketing

Contents

Chapter 7: Online sales and marketing.....	2
The rise in online travel bookings.....	3
Advance Bookings.....	3
Online sales and marketing platforms	5
Search engines	6
Customer review websites	7
Online Travel Agents (OTAs)	8
Social Media.....	8
Creating your own website.....	10
Branding and marketing content.....	11
Creating a marketing pack	12
Search Engine Optimisation.....	13
Online customer journey scenarios.....	14
Top Tips for using your social media channels	17
Instagram	18
Facebook.....	18
Twitter.....	19
Using others' social media channels	20
Selecting social media channels	21
Harness the power of reviews	22
More reasons to prioritise reviews!	23
Chapter 7: Key takeaways	24

Tools used for this chapter:

7.0	Template: Search engine optimisation
-----	--------------------------------------

Chapter 7: Online sales and marketing



In the last chapter of the handbook you gained an insight into how to provide quality service to customers through staff and tour guides, and how important it can be to build reputation and trust with your customers.



In this final chapter you will gain **a better understanding of the digital marketing options** that are most relevant for your business. This includes **an introduction to the different types of online sales and marketing platforms** that can help to promote your business, generate sales and build relationships with a global audience.

There is guidance on creating a compelling brand and considerations for website development including search engine optimisation. Later in this chapter you will find top tips for social media marketing and harnessing the power of reviews,

The rise in online travel bookings

For several years now, online platforms have been changing the way that travel is **researched, bought, sold, experienced and shared**. The stats below from Google highlight the extent to which online bookings dominate the market share, particularly via smartphones.

Nearly half of travellers in the US and UK are comfortable researching, booking, and planning their trip using only a mobile device

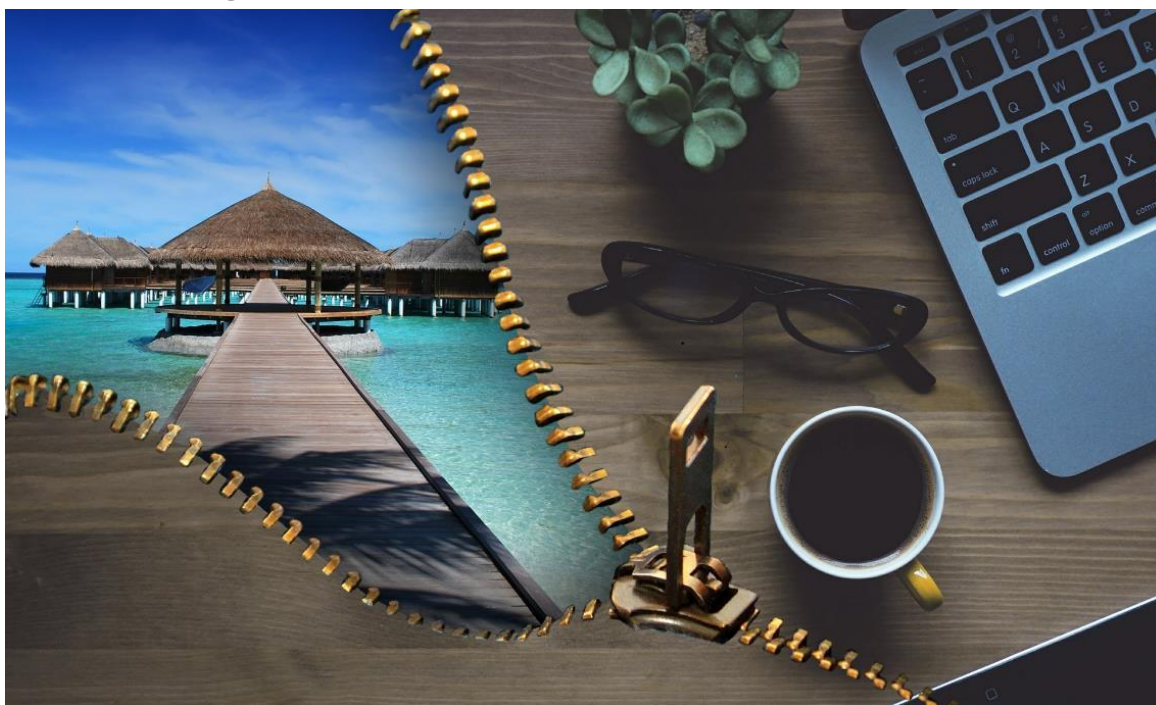
82% of all travel bookings in 2018 were made online via a mobile app or website, without human interaction

Source: Google Trends

The pandemic has accelerated this boom in digital bookings so ensuring that your business has an **active and well-managed online presence** will be even more vital in the post-pandemic era. People are spending more time online than ever before and tourists are continuing to favour online channels for booking holidays and experiences rather than the traditional tour operator model.

Managing your online reputation is now vital to running a thriving tourism business.

Advance Bookings



COVID-19 has required many tourism businesses to put capacity limits in place and eliminate paper documentation to reduce transmission touch points. This has called for many businesses to implement online pre-booking systems. Indeed, 'more than two in five of the top 700+ attractions around the world now require advance booking online' (TrekSoft, 2021).

These requirements are resulting in lasting change in how tourists buy products and services. Online - booking options also provide clear benefits to travellers who can avoid crowds and queues and pre-select exactly the activities and experiences they want and when they want to experience them.

"Operators must seize this downturn as the opportunity it is to improve their online experience, booking flow and digital marketing practices. Their very business could depend on it."

Source: TrekSoft Travel Trend Report 2020/2021



Tourism businesses that are not investing in digital marketing are likely to lose out on an increasing number of bookings and risk getting left behind by competitors.



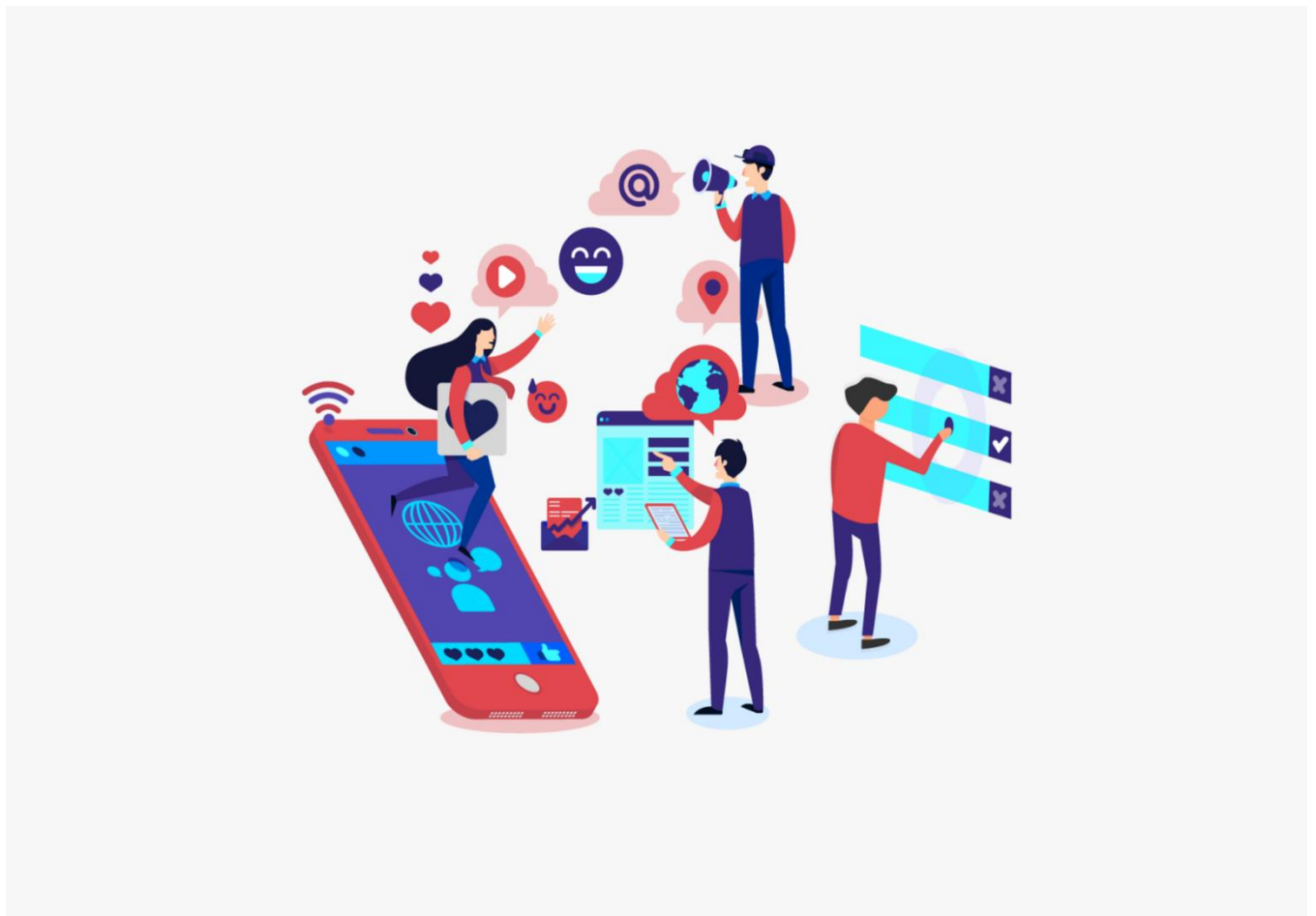
Online sales and marketing platforms

There are different types of platforms that customers can use to research and book accommodation and experiences.

- Metasearch engines e.g. Google and TripAdvisor
- Online Travel Agents or 'OTAs' e.g. booking.com, Expedia.com
- Social networking sites e.g. Facebook, Instagram, twitter

They are all used interchangeably by customers, a customer could start their 'holiday journey' using any of them. **They can all lead to a sale!**

This chapter introduces these different types of platforms, their benefits and how you can use them to attract more customers.



Search engines

When a tourist searches something like '*guesthouse in Fiji*,' the search engine will provide a list of relevant results. These results can direct a customer to:

- your own website
- an OTA / or an OTA price comparison website e.g. Trivago
- a tourism board website e.g. Tourism Fiji
- a product review website e.g. TripAdvisor

These results can lead to a booking being made. Pages 14-16 illustrate different online booking journeys that a tourist may take to find and book with your business.

Make sure that your business is listed on sites such as Trip Advisor and **local tourism boards/tourism agency websites**. These listings will also appear in search engine results and will maximize the likelihood of your business appearing on the first page of the search results.

It is usually free to do and can easily help your business reach thousands of potential customers. **If it is already listed, ensure that all your details are correct and up to date.**



Technically YouTube is also a search engine that provides videos that fit the search criteria. Uploading videos to YouTube is also a great way to showcase your product. You can then direct customers directly to your booking channels. Additionally, customers may upload videos of their experience which will also feature in the results.



Customer review websites

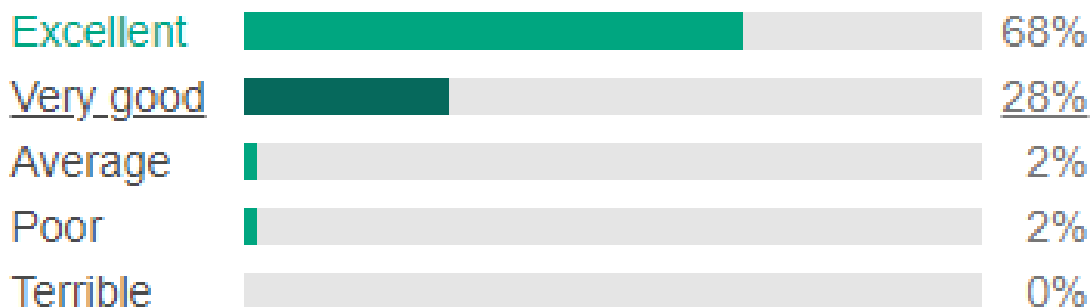
- Review platforms can play a vital role in increasing the reach and appeal of your business, if you have mostly positive reviews and you take the time to respond to and manage any negative reviews.
- The more reviews you have, the more likely that your business will feature higher in the listings.
- Some review sites such as Trip Advisor now also function as online travel agents and booking platforms. This means that customers could book your product directly via the review site. The sites will take a commission but this may be worth it if it means that you are able to access more customers and guaranteed bookings.



Traveller Overview

4.5 

49 reviews



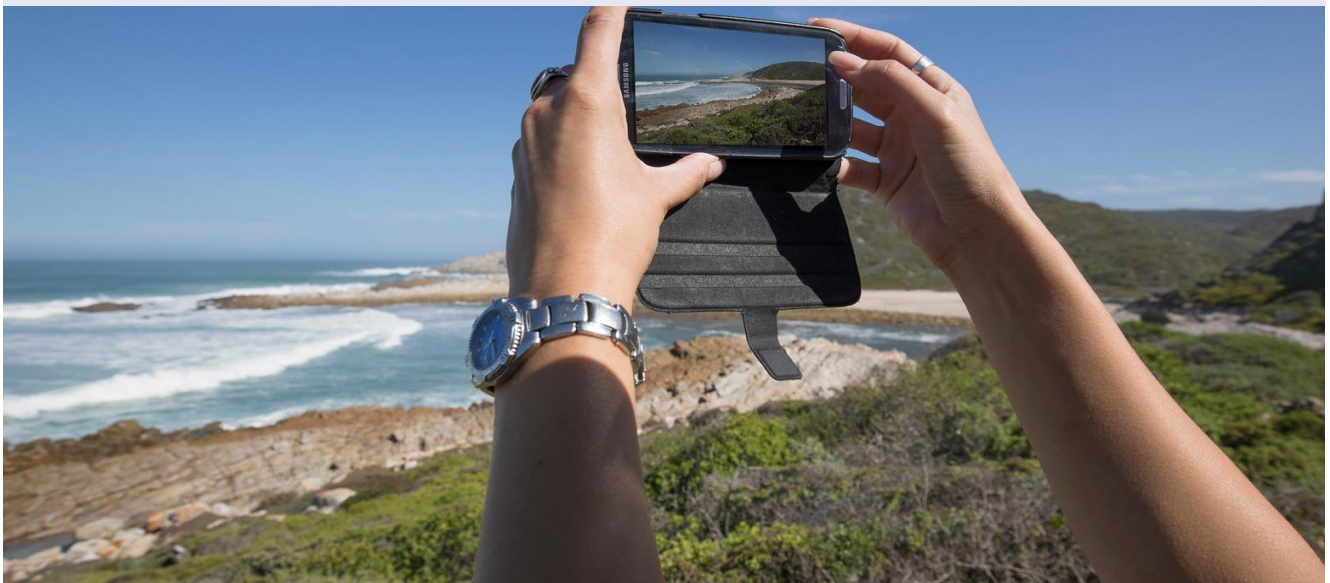
Online Travel Agents (OTAs)

- An OTA website allows customers to search for particular products.
- They enable a customer to filter results so that they can narrow down their search to suit their requirements e.g.
 - by price,
 - by facilities such as swimming pool, en-suite bathroom,
 - by location e.g. near a beach.
- Make sure that you provide as much detail about your product as possible – you don't want to risk not being included in search results because you haven't provided this information.
- Like product review websites, OTAs also allow users to give feedback on the product so it's important you encourage your customers to leave reviews. Potential customers can also filter their results according to the review ratings so it's vital that you closely monitor customer reviews on these platforms.
- Customers can book through the OTA and they will take a commission.

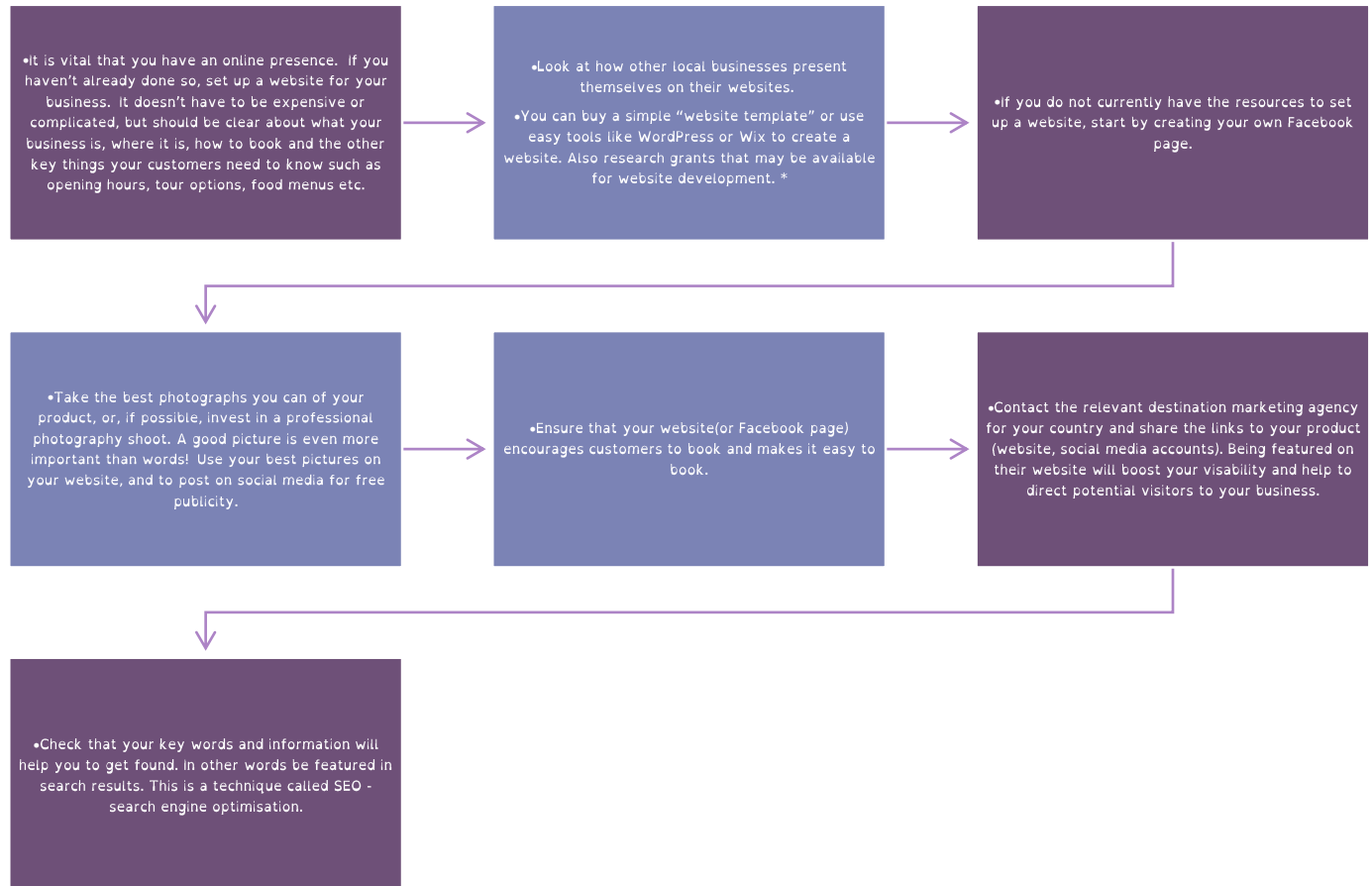


Social Media

- These platforms provide multiple opportunities:
 - they act as 'electronic word of mouth' as users share their own, genuine content that you **do not pay for** through 'mentions, shares, reposts, reviews, recommendations',
 - they provide a 'shop window' for a global audience.
- Businesses can upload fresh, up-to-date content to inspire potential customers and maintain relationships with previous customers.
- Social media platforms provide an excellent way to network with other businesses, organisations, individuals and their followers.
- Businesses can use these platforms to complement their own websites and drive direct bookings.
- They also provide **messaging services** enabling you to have direct, easy contact with customers and respond to any questions.



Creating your own website



*Conduct research to find out if there are grants, subsidies and support available for your country that can assist with website development. For example:

Business Link Pacific www.businesslinkpacific.com

Pacific Trade Invest www.pacifictradeinvest.com

Property management systems provider (PMS)

A "Property Management System" (PMS) technology provider (e.g. Inn Road, Little Hotelier, Preno, RMS Cloud, Lodgify, Guesty) can enable you to **take bookings online**. This allows you to get bookings from overseas, both from direct clients and potentially through online travel agents (OTAs) like Booking.com or Expedia. Ensuring you have the capacity for tourists to make direct bookings on your website is a useful way of boosting sales without losing any money in fees or commission to third party agents.

It is not essential to use a PMS and simply having a 'contact us' email form will enable customers to get in touch without needing to leave your website.

Branding and marketing content

Create a strong brand identity

In order to build a strong online profile, it is essential to have a strong brand identity.

- **Make it clear what makes your business unique** and different from your competitors. Why should they choose you over them? What are your unique selling points (USPs)? Make sure that these are highlighted on your website and on third-party listings.
- **Use language** which is appropriate and gives your brand a personality. If you are a warm and welcoming family-run B&B, make this come across in the product description.
- **Optimise your profile** on TripAdvisor and OTA sites by adding information, photos, videos and map location to help travellers find your business and learn about you and the experience you offer.
- **Ensure that the information and style you use across different platforms and on your own site is consistent.**

Create a marketing pack

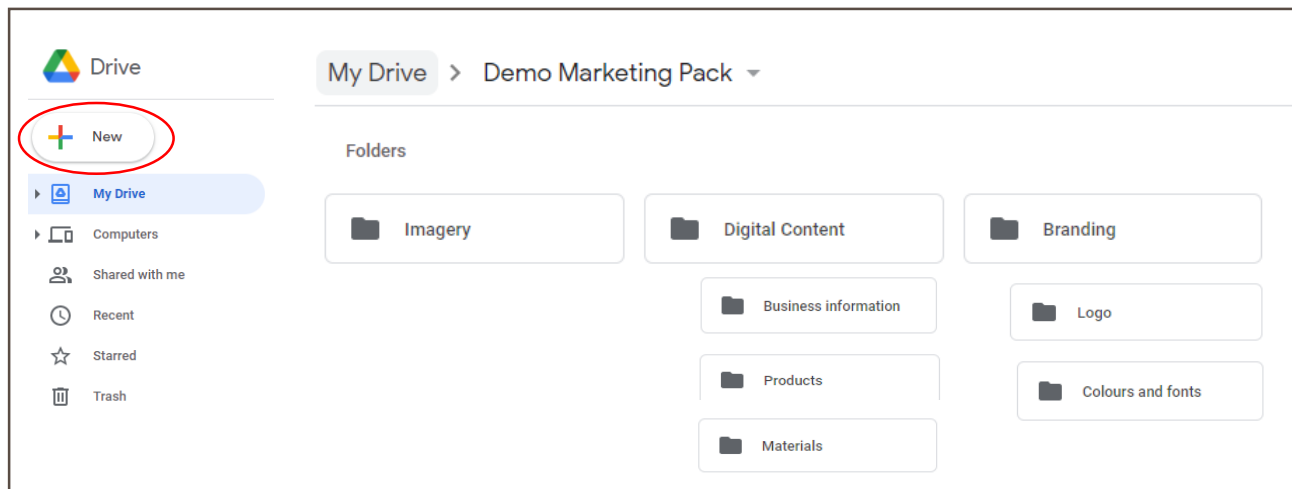
You will save yourself time and ensure consistency if you create a marketing folder where you keep all of your media content in one place. This can be stored either on a computer drive or using an online drive such as a google drive. This is illustrated on the next page.



Creating a marketing pack

This guidance illustrates how to create a marketing pack for storing all of your digital content. This will make it much easier and quicker for you to generate new or repurpose existing content.

Create and save a folder either on your computer or on a cloud based drive such as Google drive or dropbox. (Both allow free accounts). Cloud based drives allow you to share links and access it from any computer. The following image is a screenshot of a google drive. Step-by-step instructions are found at support.google.com on how to create an account and set up a G-drive.



This is just one example of the folders that you could create to store your content. Here is an explanation of each folder and sub-folders.

Imagery	Store all of your images in one place and label them clearly so that they are easy to identify.
Branding kit	
Logo	Save your logo as a jpeg or png. Canva is a great free tool for logo design.
Colour Palette	Select a combination of colours for your branding and use them consistently in your communications. This will enable people to easily recognise your brand. Save the colour codes in a document. This free colour scheme generator is very quick and simple to use and will provide you with codes. https://coolors.co/
Fonts	Select one or two fonts that you like and save them in a document. Choose standard fonts e.g. available in google / Microsoft to make it easier.
Digital content	
Business information	• Store key information about your business to save you time so that you can copy and paste. • Location (pin on google maps) and street address, contact details • Description of your business, your story etc
Products	Save product descriptions e.g. facilities, tour itineraries, experiences
Materials	Save all promotional materials such as advertisements, press releases, special offer communications etc so that they can be repurposed.

Search Engine Optimisation

When someone searches for something using a search engine, **it generates a list of results that it considers are the best match for the search.** This list of results is known as an organic or unpaid list (sometimes paid for results are also shown at the top of the list and these will be labelled as 'sponsored' results).

Getting to the top of the list

The primary function of a search engine is to help people find what they are searching for and so the more you can do to optimise the content of your website to help the **search engine locate it, the more likely it will be to appear high-up in a search list.**

These tweaks and improvements that you could make to your website to facilitate this process are what is known as '**search engine optimization**'.

Tips for effective SEO

Make sure the content on your website is updated regularly and is as relevant as it can be for the people searching. To do this, it is useful to put yourself in the shoes of your customers. How would they search to find you online? Try searching and see how you rank.

Another useful tip is to make a list of keywords and phrases to use in your website content. When customers are searching for you, think about the types of words and phrases they are likely to use and incorporate these into the wording on your website and social media channels.

How to include keywords and phrases

Google and other search engines scan the content on your website to understand what your site is about and when to include it in search results. By following a strategy of including **relevant keywords and phrases in your website content you will increase your chances of appearing higher up** relevant searches for the product or services you offer.

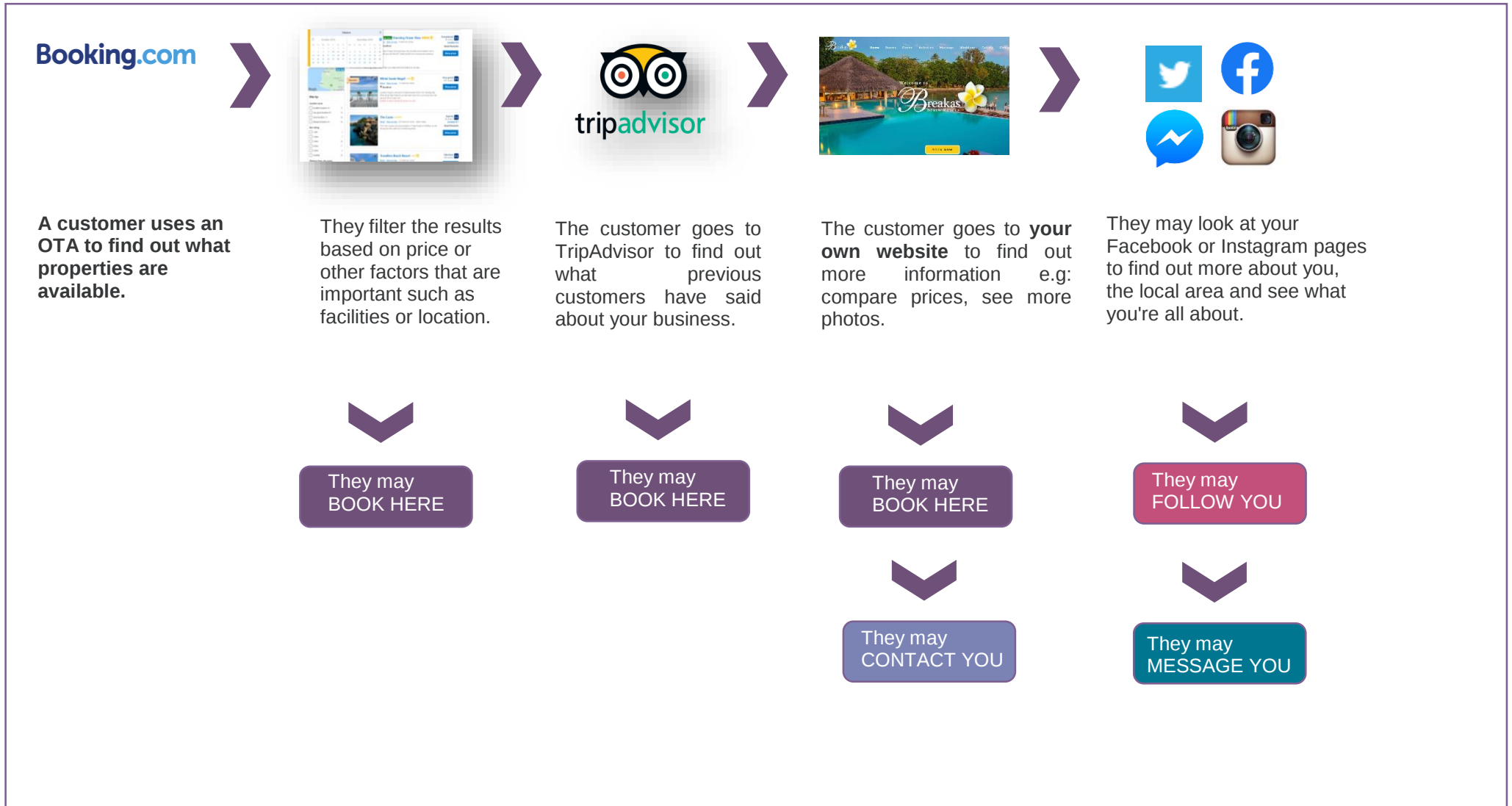
Refer to [Tool 7.0](#) for a guide on how to do this.

Once you have completed the keyword activity save them in your marketing pack.



Online customer journey scenarios

The illustrations on the following 3 pages are sample scenarios to show the different ways in which a tourist may conduct an online search and find their way to making a reservation with your business.





Instagram

An Instagram user sees a post from a friend who's on holiday in the Pacific and who has **tagged their location at your business.**



They start to **research** holidays in the Pacific Islands.

They visit several tour operators to look at holiday options.



They may
FOLLOW YOU

They may
BOOK HERE



They may
MESSAGE YOU



A twitter follower interested in diving shipwrecks reads a blog about the Pacific Islands.

They start to research diving experiences in the Pacific.

They search for "diving holidays in the Pacific" and find **reviews of your business.**

They **contact you directly** to enquire through messenger, they ask you for advice on the local area and where to stay.

You build a relationship and they decide to follow your recommendations and make a reservation.



They may
BOOK HERE



They search for
“holidays in the Pacific
islands”



The SPTO website or
destination marketing
agency for your country
is displayed in the
results.



A link to your
website is featured



They may
BOOK HERE



They search for
“snorkelling in the
Pacific islands”



Your video / or a
customer video is
found in the results.
The customer learns
about your business
and goes to your
website.



They may
BOOK HERE

Top Tips for using your social media channels

When used correctly, social media can drive brand awareness, generate direct bookings and become a key revenue channel for your business.

General tips for posting content on all social media platforms.

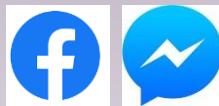
- Keep text short, fun and creative.
- Use good quality images that align to your brand identity.
- Engagement: interact with your followers.
- Relevance: ensure content is helpful and interesting.
- Authenticity: add real personality and stories behind what you are selling.
- Using the same content across all channels isn't advisable as audiences can be quite different. Think about how you use social media and tailor it to your audience.
- Add location information and relevant hashtags.
- Tag other people and organisations, where relevant.
- Share positive customer feedback and thank the customer.



Facebook

Facebook is a great platform for **channelling visitors** to your website to purchase or get in touch. Posts on Facebook should be informative and present your latest offers, products, information and have a strong call to action (CTA) i.e. encouraging customers to book with you. You should aim to post regularly: at least 3-4 posts per month of original content. You can also use content from other sources such as sharing articles, local stories and other posts that are relevant to your business.

- **Mobile friendly** content works best on this platform. 96% of users access the platform via their phones (according to Sprout Social*). Short posts along with photos or video work best.
- **85% of all Facebook video** is watched without sound so if you make videos ensure that you add captions and keep length under 30 seconds.
- **The messenger** function is particularly useful for connecting in real time with your customers – prior to their visit, during and after.
- **A great option if you don't have a website** as you can build up your profile information, create photo albums and pin important posts to remain visible.



Instagram

Instagram is generally a better platform for **engagement and building awareness** of your brand. Post regularly, at least every few days and keep the content light, fun and not so sales focussed. Instagram is all about **imagery**. Images of customers enjoying your product or services is ideal. Think of Instagram as a coffee table book showcasing your business.

Encourage engagement by asking questions or inviting comments as part of your posts.

- **Keep photography consistent** in style and captions informative.
- **Use hashtags** to help expand the reach of your posts e.g. #Nauru #paradise #pacificisland
- **Add your location** information to posts.
- **Use stories to show behind the scenes** of your business if you want to inject some personality.
- **Instagram is the fastest growing platform** with over 1 billion active monthly users!



Twitter

The **average lifespan of a tweet is roughly 8 minutes** (before it is pushed along by new tweets) so it is important to be mindful of this and spending lots of time thinking about content could waste your time.

- It is not recommended to use this channel as a forum for interacting with customers, it can become a complaints forum which could lead to small issues escalating and damaging your reputation.
- It is worth having a particular focus or strategy for twitter e.g. sharing destination information such as events, weather, news etc like an online noticeboard to differentiate from your other channels.



Using others' social media channels

User generated content (UGC)

User generated content is any content created by another person that features your brand. It is 'trusted content' as it shows another customer enjoying your product and therefore very compelling! You can encourage customers to tag your business in any pictures or images they post online and this will then also feature in your social media feed.

Travel influencers

Influencers are people that share their experiences of travelling, tourism and culture via a blog and social media. They are different to traditional journalists in that they are less formal and will write with passion about their interests and discoveries. Influencers do not necessarily have to be celebrities they just need lots of followers.

Influencers are identified by the number of followers they have and to what extent they can influence them.

Businesses often choose to partner with travel influencers by inviting them to experience their product in return for being featured in their online content or the influencer may approach you directly to enquire about your business and if you would like to host them. An influencer doesn't have to be a 'celebrity' in the traditional sense but could be someone who has a very large social media following with sufficient appeal and sway to 'influence' the behaviour and choices of their followers.

They can give you a new audience and are experienced at creating high-quality, experiential content.

- Always review content from their previous experiences and ask how this has led to sales for other businesses.
- Always 'test-run' what you are offering before inviting an influencer to make sure that everything is running smoothly.



Selecting social media channels

It is important to ask yourself if you really need to be on all of them? Consider your audience, resources and each platform's suitability before you embark on setting up/maintaining lots of channels.

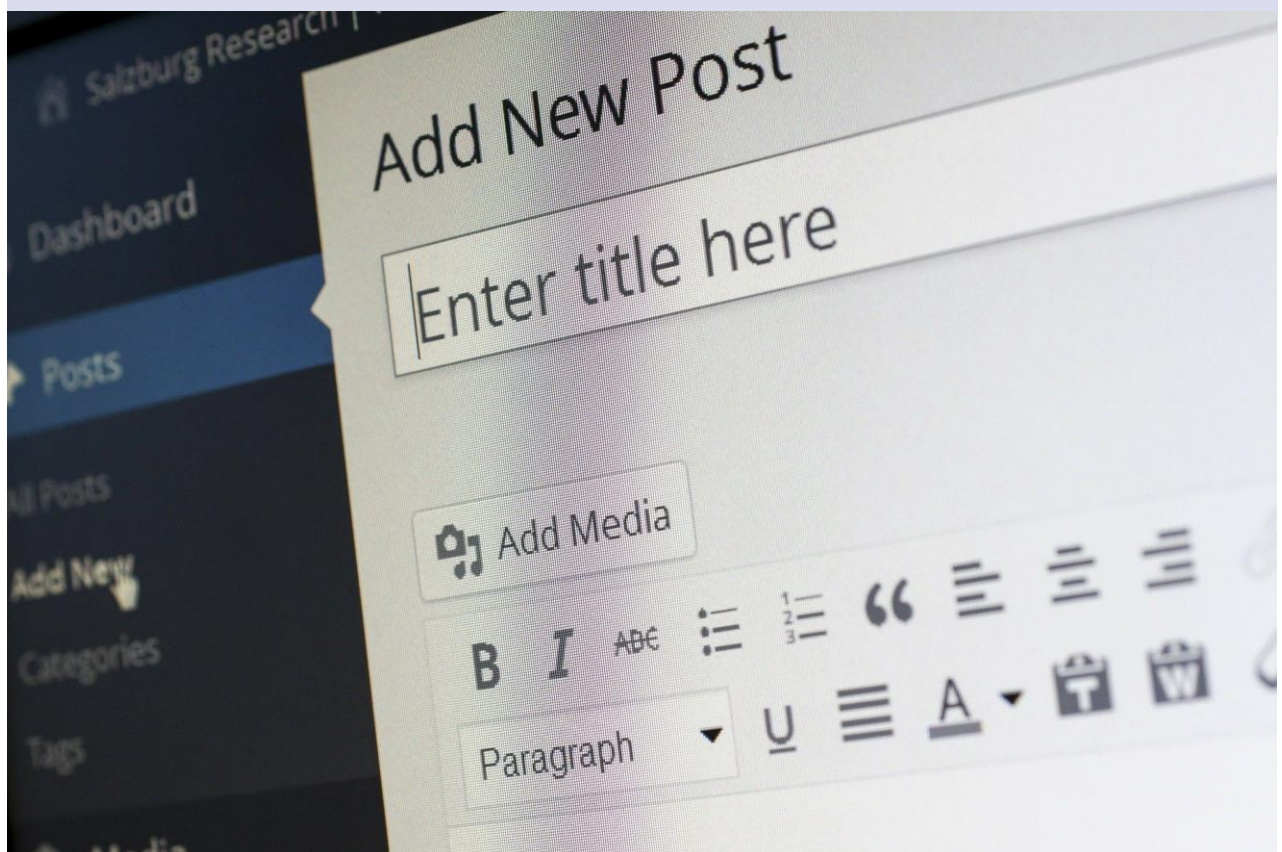
Focus on a few and do them really well rather than spreading yourself thinly and duplicating content. Consider your customer profiles and demographics, i.e. if 75% are over 65 years old then Instagram may not be the channel to reach them!

Activity: Adapting content for different online platforms

Think about an aspect of your business that you want to promote or advertise e.g. a new tour package, a Mother's Day meal offer, a discounted long weekend stay at your hotel.

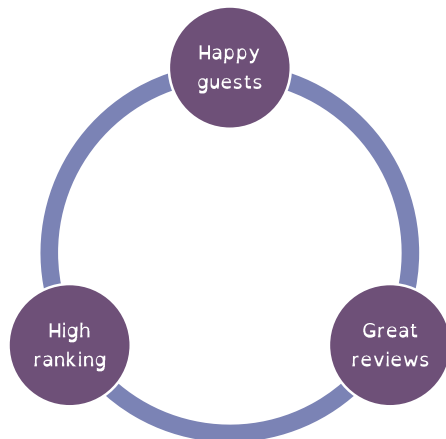
Create a post to advertise this on each online channel including your own website, and the social media platforms you use, for example Facebook and Instagram.

- How would you tweak the post to make it relevant for each platform? Do you need to change the wording/content?
- What would you focus on for each channel? E.g. images, customer testimonials, practical info etc.
- Can you include a video post for one of the online platforms?

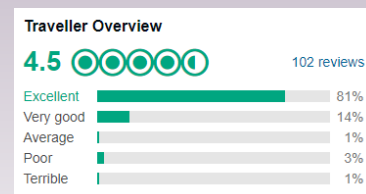


Harness the power of reviews

- Customer reviews are extremely important to marketing your business successfully online
- They allow guests to leave honest feedback to which you can act upon and respond.
- The more positive reviews you have will increase your visibility on search engines and on OTA websites. This is shown in the diagram below:



The better your reviews, the higher your rating and ranking, and the more visibility and booking queries you will generate.



- Encourage all customers to leave a review. 80% of customers who get asked to leave a review will do so. There are many ways to do this: ask at departure, or display a sign, make it easy for them by sending an email or message with a link.
- Minimise negative reviews by checking with customers during their stay / their experience that everything is going well and as expected. This gives you the opportunity to rectify any problems and improve their experience before they leave which will reduce the likelihood of negative reviews.
- Always respond to customer reviews to thank them, show that you care and how you intend to address any issues.
- Keep track of your number of reviews, scores and rankings. Set targets and reward your team for hitting them.
- Monitor your key competitors' reviews to learn what customers appreciate about them and where you can tweak your own offering to win more business.
- Hold regular meetings with staff / other suppliers to discuss reviews and how to improve.

More reasons to prioritise reviews!

Feedback will help
you to improve

You can praise and
reward staff

Good reviews
encourage other
customers to book

Positive reviews lead
to a 'higher ranking'
in search engines

They are a free
business tool!

72% of new customers won't book until they have spent time reading other traveller reviews.

15% of customers don't trust businesses without reviews.

Don't worry too much about a small number of negative reviews

Whilst it is likely that some customers will at some point leave a negative review it shouldn't be too much of an issue if **overall you have positive reviews**. Respond professionally, explore the issue and keep an eye on trends.

If there is an increase in negative reviews or a pattern of events causing a problem then you should take action to address the issue.

Whilst TripAdvisor is known as 'THE' site for reviews, most booking platforms also include this function. Viator.com is an important search engine for tours and attractions that is linked with TripAdvisor so if a customer books through Viator they will see the TripAdvisor reviews for that experience.

Chapter 7: Key takeaways

Invest in online marketing

In this age, it is vital that tourism businesses engage in online marketing. An increasing proportion of travellers were already choosing to research trips and make travel bookings online and the COVID-19 pandemic has accelerated this trend even further. It is worth investing the time to set up a website for your business. Including a booking mechanism so that tourists can book directly, will enable you to cut out any middlemen and maximize your revenue.

Select social media channels to support your marketing.

You can complement your website with some dedicated social media channels but focus on quality over quantity; choose one or two platforms and do them well, rather than setting up accounts on multiple platforms that are difficult to maintain.

Take the time to create an appealing brand.

Develop engaging and original content that is relevant to your product, identify and promote your unique selling points, use your best images, create a relevant tone of voice and be consistent across your different channels. Create a marketing pack to save your content in one place.

Make sure that the information on your website and social media is **kept up-to-date**. This is especially important in the current climate so that prospective customers are aware of any changes to your services, opening hours, health and safety procedures etc. as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic.

We hope that this guide assists you in becoming a successful tourism business and we wish you all the best of luck with your journey.