

TOURISTS AT A CLICK

Attracting tourists is a hard task at best, so it is crucial that your website is up to scratch and answers all the most important questions.

WHEN creating a website for the tourism industry, it's important to keep a strong focus on the needs of travellers. The guidelines for a travel website also apply to a broad number of websites selling single products online.

It is much easier to maintain this focus if you have a clear idea of your target demographic. Many businesses fall into the trap of believing anyone can stay in their hotel or take their tour, but the reality is, each product will only appeal to a subset of the travellers visiting any region.

Tourism providers who've been in the industry for some time will tell you that the internet dramatically changed the booking habits of travellers and it's important to realise why.

The primary reason a traveller will visit your website is to gather information about a tourism product. They are frequently disappointed when a website contains scant information or fails to answer their most basic questions.

The most important page is the home page. Research suggests most people will visit at least 10 different product websites before making a purchasing decision, and much of the decision to delve further into a website is based on the professionalism and information on the home page.

A home page should be a three or four paragraph summary of your product which addresses questions about location and rates and sells your product's major benefits over competitors. Ensure your home page loads quickly and avoid flash animations.

Rates should be clearly displayed in a neat table with the fine print or pricing conditions close by. A visitor needs to be able to quickly figure out how much your product costs. A strong call to action leading your visitor to book, inquire or phone should be near the rates data. This is nearly always forgotten by less savvy website owners. Be clear about what your potential customer should do next.

Most often, a visitor will contact you before booking if your website does not have

an automated availability and booking form. You can make this process easy for them by having separate booking and inquiry forms.

Hire a professional photographer and include the most spectacular shots on your home page, then scatter the rest generously through the site. Include images of your target demographic.

As the web becomes increasingly automated, the time it takes to gather information will determine which provider makes the sale. For this reason, consider investing in a web-based reservation system. Customers will get frustrated if they need to wait for responses to their reservations and may book a competitive product.



IN WEB

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Ensure your inquiry form is short and sweet and only asks for the absolute necessities. Long inquiry forms will be off-putting.

Think about the online resources travellers use to find products and ensure you have strong representation. The first and most important is the search engines, especially Google. If you don't have a good ranking, consider advertising with Google AdWords.

Travellers often look at prominent, high ranking information sites that have general information about the area. Look into advertising on these sites for more

exposure to travellers who have not yet decided their precise itineraries.

Industry websites like Trip Advisor (www.tripadvisor.com) are popular with travellers. These sites give customers an unbiased overview of products in an area and rates them by popularity. Customers trust the reviews on Trip Advisor so encourage your customers to write something about your product.

Similarly, travel forums like Lonely Planet's The Thorn Tree allow travellers to explore destinations and products through discussion with other travellers. Seek

out localised travel forums and ensure you follow the accepted etiquette for product promotion.

The prominence of travel blogs has seen an increase in product providers being featured in personal stories from customers who have experienced that product. These are powerful recommendations, and travel providers should encourage their product's favourable inclusion.

Nicky Jurd

Director – cityofcairns.com

nicky@cityofcairns.com

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