

How to be a successful tourism company online?

Having a website with beautiful, engaging images and inspirational video along with informative, well-written content has become the norm for tour operators across the globe to engage with their customers and generate sales. Local tour operators in developing countries must work on online success to reach new customers. Today, online website builders offer relatively low-cost design options and with the use of social media platforms, online travel agents (OTAs), bloggers and influencers as well, there are many opportunities to improve online effectiveness.

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1. Why do you need to have an online presence?

The Internet has become the most important tool for travel research among European travellers today, and it is estimated that 90% of travellers go online to research their trips. It is how your European customers will find your company, whether they are European tour operators you are looking to supply, or individual travellers seeking to make their own travel arrangements.

There are many good reasons to have your own website, all of which will help generate more sales in the short or long term:

- Fostering trust amongst potential customers is the most important function of a website. An online presence and good design will lend credibility and engender trust amongst potential customers.
- A well-planned and marketed website will help European tour operators decide whether they want to do business with your company.
- For fully independent travellers (FITs), a strong social media presence supported by an informative website will help them make decisions as they research their travel plans online.
- A website enables you to create your own brand and personalise your business in the way that you'd like to be seen. Having a strong brand is another way to generate trust and confidence amongst your target audience.
- Through the information you promote on your website, you have the opportunity to present yourself or your company as an 'expert'. This could be detailed information about places of interest in your area, the local culture and traditions and travel tips pertinent to your destination. The more you can present yourself as a specialised 'one-stop shop', the more useful your website will be.
- A website gives you the opportunity to showcase the best images and videos about your destination, your trips and your experiences. Inspirational photos and stimulating videos attract attention and can be more convincing than text.

- A 'call to action' such as an enquiry for more information or request to book gives you the opportunity to build a relationship with a potential customer. Have a look at this blog about [20 Example Travel Websites](#) that profiles some effective travel websites and explains why.

However, before you start creating a website you must perform a thorough analysis of your current business and research your target market. A good place to start is to understand how today's major consumer groups use the Internet to research and book their holidays and trips.

2. How different consumer groups use the Internet

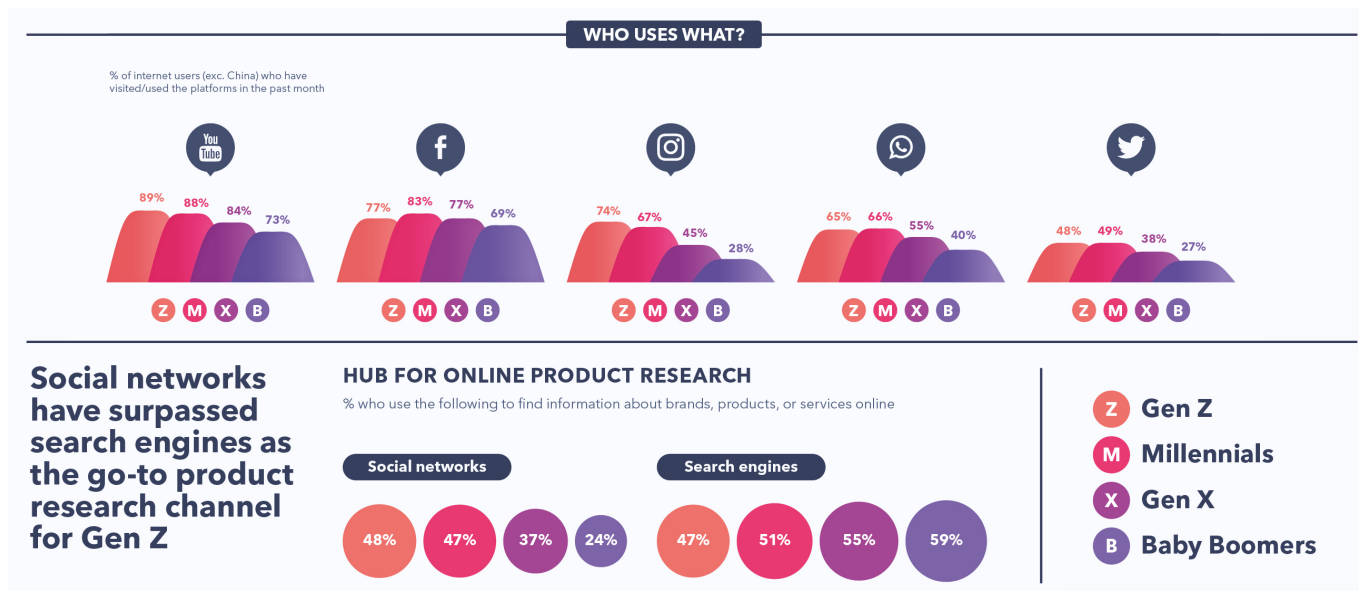
The behavioural traits of the major consumer groups are well-researched these days and it is important that you understand how they tend to use the internet to research their travel plans before you start planning your website. This is key so that your website and social media presence targets the right groups.

- Baby Boomers (born between 1946 and 1964) – aged between 56 and 74 in 2020, Baby Boomers are increasingly enjoying more free time and looking for exciting travel experiences. As the world's wealthiest consumer group, they have more time to travel and typically take longer, but fewer trips than other consumer groups. Although they are less technologically savvy than younger generations, their Internet use is increasing and research has found that 50% of them own and use a smartphone and 4 out of 5 have a social media account. Facebook is their preferred platform.
- Generation X (born between 1965 and 1980) – aged between 40 and 55 in 2020, Gen X'ers spend the least time on travel owing to family commitments and often travel around the school holiday periods. However, they have considerable spending power and are the most likely groups to plan multi-generational trips and/or group travel with friends. For travel inspiration, Gen X'ers often use Pinterest and Facebook which are good for sharing ideas. 55% of Gen X'ers use OTAs (online travel agents) to research what packages, experiences and deals are available.
- Millennials/Generation Y (born between 1981 and 1996) – aged between 24 and 39 in 2020, Millennials are the [world's most frequent travellers](#), and seek authentic, fulfilling personal travel experiences over shorter time periods. They are at the start of their careers, and looking for good deals for their 'dream destinations' that they can show off to their friends and peers. Millennials are highly influenced by social content, influencers and bloggers – 89% report they plan their travel activities based on content posted online. Facebook, YouTube and Instagram are key social media platforms for Millennials, and two thirds of Millennials use TripAdvisor to assist with travel decisions.
- Generation Z/Zoomers (born from 1997) – aged up to 23 in 2020, Zoomers are the first generation to have grown up fully online. They have never known life without the Internet as their main source of information and use a wide variety of social media apps. Being young, budget is their major consideration and many still travel with their parents, although they wield considerable influence over the choice of destination/experience. Instagram, Snapchat and YouTube are the most popular social media platforms for Zoomers, with Instagram highlighted as the number one platform for travel inspiration.

For more information about travel trends amongst the major consumer groups, you can read more in this blog entitled [Generational Marketing in Travel](#).

The infographic below gives an indication of social media platforms and the levels of usage by each consumer group. You can see, for instance, that Instagram is heavily used by Zoomers (74%) and Millennials (67%) compared to just 28% of Baby Boomers. It also shows that Zoomers are increasingly turning to social media networks for their research needs online over traditional search engines, which is a clear trend for the future.

Chart 1: Social Media and Internet Research – Who Uses What?



Source: GlobalWebIndex Q3 2018/Visual Capitalist

There is lots of social media research that you can explore online. Take a deeper look at the full infographic, see [Visualizing Social Media Use by Generation](#), published by Visual Capitalist and GlobalWebIndex. GlobalWebIndex also has a number of useful reports online including, [The latest social media trends to know for 2020](#).

3. First steps: Be sure you know your business

Before you begin putting together a plan to build a website, it is important that you conduct a thorough business analysis. Even a simple business and marketing plan will help you identify your organisation's SWOT (Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Threats) and will help clarify who you are trying to target and the skills and financial resources that you may need to start a new website. Keeping your business plan up-to-date and current will help you generate more bookings and increase revenue into the long term.

These are the business planning steps you should take:

Identify your niche and analyse all the tours, trips and holidays that you sell.

Recognise your USP (unique selling point)

identify your key customers.

Asses your current brand, marketing and messaging.

Define which sales channels work best for you.

Conduct a competitive analysis of other sellers in your region.

Review your organisations financial situation and allocate resources for creating a new website.

Check if liability insurance policies and risk management plans are in place.

Each of these objectives require specific tasks to achieve, outlined in table 2 below.

Table 2: Understanding your business: Steps to take

Objective	Tasks Required to Deliver
Identify your niche and analyse all trips, tours and holidays	Which is/are the most popular? You must not underestimate the importance of knowing what niche your travel products align with as understanding this will enable you to target your online messages to the most appropriate market.
Recognise your USP (Unique Selling Point)	Identify what makes your trips special or different to your local or regional competitors (if you offer specialist adventure activities, ecotourism or unusual local community-based experiences, for instance) as this will give you a competitive edge.
Identify your key customers	If you're selling to a European tour operator, understand the profile of their customers. If you're selling direct to FITs, establish a profile for them, such as their typical age, demographic, make-up of the group such as family, solo or couples, what interests them and what type of services and facilities they will expect.
Assess your current brand	Objectively consider whether your logo, strapline and other corporate messages accurately reflect your USP and meet the expectations of your niche market.
Study each channel	How are you currently marketing and selling your products? Assess which works best and which needs improvement.

Conduct a competitive analysis	Review what other operators in your region/country are promoting. Find out what are they selling, where they go and how much they charge. You can also use this exercise to analyse their websites and pick up any tips that you think work well.
Review your organisation's financial situation	Make sure you take into account your operating costs and ensure that you have priced your travel products appropriately.
Allocate resources for creating a new website	Assess what in-house resources you already have and the expertise you'll need to commission.
Check you have relevant liability insurance policies in place	European tour operators are required by law to ensure their customers are adequately protected when they travel abroad and they will want to be sure that their suppliers comply with these requirements. Make sure you include details on your website. For more information, download the CBI study What requirements must tourism services comply with to be allowed on the European market .
Have a Risk Management Plan in place	As the world adjusts to the current COVID-19 global pandemic, there has never been a better time to make sure you are prepared for future crises. The CBI study How to manage risks in tourism outlines all the necessary steps.

Source: Acorn Tourism Consulting

Undertaking a thorough business planning exercise like this will put your business in a good place to start building a website.

Tips:

To help you start your business planning, Trekkssoft's [How to create a business plan for a tour or activity company](#) is a good place to start.

The CBI study [How to get started developing your tourism product](#) will help you to develop and use travel personas which supports a greater understanding of your customers.

For tips on pricing your travel products, consult this practical guide issued by the Government of Western Australia: [Pricing your Tourism Business](#).

4. Draw up a simple website development strategy

Your website strategy should be simple, easy to implement and follow. A two to three-page document will suffice. The strategy should outline all the steps from planning, to the website going live, and onwards through monitoring:

Establish clear objectives for the website. These should include both sales and marketing goals. The objectives you set should be based on the business planning you conducted to understand your business, establish your specialist niche and USP and who your customers are. A key feature is knowing what actions you want your customers to take on your website.

Decide what content you want to include on your website. Your website should do more than just feature your tours. Content is extremely important and is the way your buyers will find you. You can find out more in the section [Plan good content for your website](#) below.

Create a site map for your website, starting with the Homepage and branching out logically into further pages and sections. The structure should allow users to move quickly and easily to the pages they want to get to in as few clicks as possible.

Establish a small team to manage the project, generate the content and monitor the website once it is live. A project manager should be your 'go-to' person who manages the implementation of project from its inception and brief, to the website build and finally the website's launch. Other team members could include content creators (who generate the copy and sources images and videos), a financial controller (who manages the budget) and a website administrator (who looks after the website on a day to day basis, keeping it up to date).

Draw up a clear timetable. Your end goal is the 'go-live date'. If you are creating a website from scratch, do not be over-ambitious about your go-live date. Create a realistic time schedule for each step and accept that this project may take a few months to complete.

Tip:

Look at other tour operator websites to see how different site maps work which will help you decide how best to create yours.

5. How to build a website

There are two routes that you can choose in order to build your website. You can commission a website designer to create a bespoke website for you, or you can use a website builder. A website builder is an online programme that enables users to make their own website from existing templates without having to use complex coding or be a technological professional. Website builders are usually a cheaper option than employing a website designer and offer SMEs a cost-effective and easy route to creating their own website. Pricing is often based on monthly or annual charges with a one-off set-up fee.

There are numerous website builders on the market including specialist builders aimed at tour operators. Some examples of site builders including those that specialise in tourism include:

- [Tourism Tiger](#) specialises in website design for tour and activity operators and offers a template-based option as well as custom design.
- [Weebly](#) is easy to use and there are several packages to choose from including a free website if you include a small Weebly advertisement on the footer of your site.
- [Springnest](#) is based in South Africa and targets travel and tourism businesses, particularly accommodation providers. It offers affordable access to website building with two plans, the Essential Setup suitable for smaller B&Bs, SMEs and guest houses.
- [VacationLabs](#) offers a comprehensive website building service for tour operators with a selection of plans. Its online booking system can be added to existing websites.
- [Wix](#) and [Squarespace](#) are popular website builders and cater for a wide range of businesses, not just tourism.

Whatever package you choose, it is crucial that you maintain your website regularly. It is very frustrating for users to be unable to reach your website or to find that page links are broken or that an online booking fails to complete. These [Steps in Website Maintenance – A Quick Checklist](#) helpfully breaks down tasks by week, month, quarter and annually.

Some website builders provide in-house support, with examples including Tourism Tiger's [TigerCare](#), which offers a range of support services to clients that include technical support and maintenance to ensure that new versions of software are tested.

Tips:

Explore the suggested website builders and others to see if what they offer will suit your needs. Compare prices to see which are the best value, based on what they offer, but remember the cheapest might not always be the one that suits your needs the best.

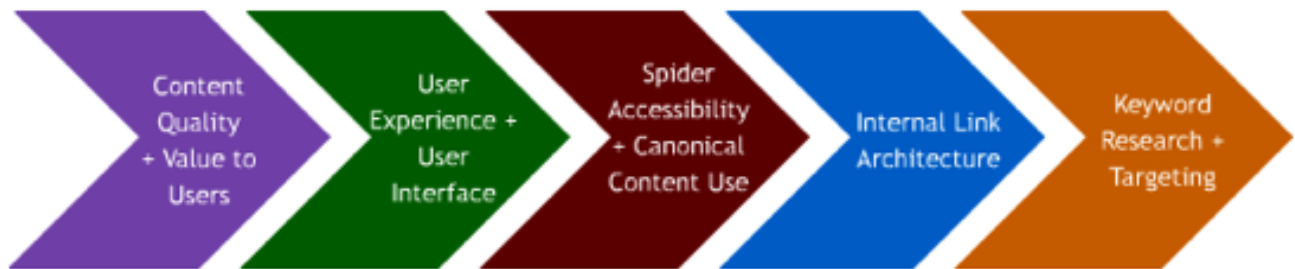
6. Make your website SEO-friendly

Good content is the most important aspect to consider when developing a website, and the quality of travel websites is increasing all the time. This means the web is a very crowded place and you will have to work hard to get your trips and experiences in front of your buyers. Not only is good content what inspires your potential customer, it is also crucial for SEO (Search Engine Optimisation).

SEO is the process of increasing the quantity and quality of traffic to your website through organic, or free, search engine results. Search engines like Google, Bing and Yahoo send out 'crawlers' (or 'spiders') over the web to identify the most relevant websites based on the user's search request. The websites that score highly are those that appear on the first search page. Most users won't progress to results beyond the first page. Well-written, relevant content with frequently used keywords, images and videos all contribute to SEO. The infographic below shows how the process of making to make a website SEO-friendly works.

Chart 3: Steps to Make a Website SEO-friendly

Order of Operations to Make a Site SEO-Friendly



#1 - Make content users desire and will want to share

#2 - Build usability and high quality design into your site

#3 - Ensure that spiders can parse all content and duplication isn't an issue

#4 - Make it easy to reach deep pages in as few clicks as possible

#5 - Choose keywords that will garner traffic; Employ judiciously in your content

Source: Quertime

7. Plan good content for your website

Good content has to be visually appealing, engaging, inspiring and informative. If it isn't all of these, the impact of the website will be severely diminished. When planning your content, these are the important considerations to factor in:

- Plan your site map carefully and logically and think about how the user is likely to move through all the pages. The Homepage and main Landing pages are the most important pages. They should feature strong headlines, use text that is easy to read and incorporates the major keywords and phrases without sounding stilted. Include a prominent 'call to action' (see section below, [Create a call to action](#)).
- Create a list of appropriate keywords and phrases based on what your buyers will use to search. Make sure you include the keywords as page titles and include within the page URL. Use relevant keywords throughout your content. To find out more about researching and using keywords, read this [Guide to Find the Best Keywords](#).
- You should have a range of pages that feature written content which must be well written, informative, inspirational and compelling. Make sure your text is descriptive and offer insights – you want the reader to believe that you know your destination better than anyone else. Share little-known unique details wherever you can. Aim for around 500 to 600 words per page.
- Use an editing tool to help you check your text for spelling and grammar, particularly if you are writing for an English-speaking audience. Consider using [Grammarly](#), a free online grammar tool.
- Blogs and News are good ways to keep content fresh and up to date. You should commit to publishing news items and blogs on a regular basis. (See section below, [Write blogs and work with influencers](#).)
- Links also contribute to SEO so ensure you include relevant links between pages within your site. For example, make a link from a blog or news item to a relevant tour, or include a link on every tour page to a packing list, or reading list.

- As well as internal links, include links to external sites, although you should be careful to ensure that external links open in a new window rather than take the user away from your website. Examples could include the national tourist board for your destination or any tourism associations that you belong to. If you can encourage a link from their site back to yours, that will contribute high SEO value.
- Have a comprehensive social media strategy so users can engage with your content. See the section [Put together a social media marketing campaign](#) below.
- Create an editorial calendar for all content that includes website content, social media activity and blogs.

8. Gather images and videos

The travel industry is one of the most visual in the world and all travel websites use images and videos liberally. It is estimated that 90% of information transmitted to the brain is visual and it processes images several thousand times faster than words. Therefore it is essential that you invest time, energy and funds, if necessary, into gathering the right imagery for your website. Your buyers will want to visualise the experience you are offering them, be inspired to make that booking, and feel confident they will ultimately enjoy the trip you are promising.

Before you start gathering images, do your research. You may already have a collection of photos that you can use. Analyse them thoroughly and ask yourself whether they are truly inspirational and representative of the experience you are offering your guests. Keep up to date with trends of travel images. Check out the images used by European tour operators such as [Explore](#) (UK) and [Abenteuer Wege](#) (Germany) to see the sorts of images they are publishing. Assess what your competitors are doing and look at social media sites like Instagram which is widely regarded as one of the leading platforms for inspirational travel images. Pinterest is another platform that features high quality images you could explore.

There are a number of ways to gather images and videos that you could consider. You should aim to build a large database of images that will last you for a few years.

Tips:

Reach out to a local community of photographers, or student photographers, that you could offer a free trip to in exchange for some photos and/or videos.

Invest time and money, if necessary, in securing the 'killer' images and videos for your Homepage. Your Homepage will dictate whether people will stay on your page so it will be worth the investment.

Make sure you issue a clear brief when investing in contracting a professional photographer. This blog, [How to write a photography brief](#), has some useful tips.

You can also source still images from online photo libraries such as [Stocksy](#) or [Shutterstock](#). Generally they offer a range of plans that may be suitable and affordable.

Have a look at [Travel on Instagram](#) and [Travel on Pinterest](#) so you can see the sorts of images that appeal to their millions of followers.

9. Write blogs and work with influencers

Blogs provide crucial content to a website. They afford the opportunity to showcase specialist expertise or provide detailed, specific information about a topic, or range of topics. The more blogs you can post, the better SEO you will be able to generate.

However, the ability to write good blogs is a learned technique and if the skill does not exist in your organisation, it may be worth investing in developing relationships with bloggers and/or travel influencers who

will be able to help raise brand awareness, increase traffic to your website and drive your message to your target market. There are many of them around and you must find one that is a good fit with what you offer, particularly as they will bring with them a following that is compatible with your business. For instance, if you sell adventure trips in remote destinations you don't want a blogger who usually writes about all-inclusive luxury holidays. Your blog strategy should be determined by what you want to achieve, for instance, specialist expertise, informative copy or inspirational text, so choose your writers appropriately.

You can easily find bloggers online and contact them directly if what they write meets your needs. Alternatively, look for directories of travel bloggers like [Word of Travel](#) or directories created by bloggers such as [Travelsauro](#). Bloggers almost always charge for their services and those with large followings can be very expensive. Bloggers who are just starting out on their blogging careers will be more inclined to write for you for free in return for travel expenses. A specialist Influencer agency such as [Blogilicious.com](#) can help you find and contract a blogger with a following that matches your target audience, and will contract them to deliver an agreed amount of copy or video content and social media coverage.

You could also consider approaching local agencies of freelance writers or contact local papers or journals who might have journalism interns who could undertake an assignment or two for a small fee, or free trip.

Tip:

Read the CBI study [How to start a travel blog](#) for more information on writing travel blogs.

10. Put together a social media marketing campaign

Social media marketing is an essential tool for the travel industry today as it enables you to reach customers that are unlikely to know about your trips in any other way, as well as offering a direct route to your website. The objectives of social media marketing are broadly:

1. To increase brand awareness
2. Boost SEO
3. Increase engagement with your website through a variety of calls to action
4. Drive sales, whether directly on your website or via another sales method such as OTAs.

It is important to choose the right social media platform, so need will to know the difference between them and use the one that you feel fits best with your target audience. You should research what social media platforms your competitors use successfully.

People have shared travel experiences with family and friends long before the advent of social media. Today, social media trends are widely considered to be driven by travel through the sharing of images and experiences, as is evidenced in this blog: [Curious where social media is going? The Travel Industry leads the way](#). All the major platforms are regularly used by tour operators. Click on each link to find out how to list your business and for best practice and marketing tips:

- [Instagram](#) – is best known for images and is an important tool for tour operators to build brand awareness. Because it is image-led, it is a very popular choice for the travel industry worldwide and deemed the most important platform for travel at the World Travel Market in 2019. It uses hashtags (#) to organise content and the use of multiple hashtags will improve the reach of your post. Make a list of hashtags that you think fit your business best. For inspiration, have a look at this list of [177 Instagram travel hashtags](#).
- [Facebook](#) – has a huge population with more than 2.3 billion monthly active users and it is estimated that 71% of them use the site multiple times every day. It is good for building a community of followers, share videos and stories, and encourage sharing through likes, comments and shares. You can also create links

back to your blogs and use paid advertising. Tour operators also use Facebook to post images and videos of their tours and in some cases, customers can book tours through the platform.

- [Pinterest](#) – is an online ‘pinboard’ for displaying images which users can pin (or save) for later use. Pinterest is often used to find ideas on activities and discover new interests. You will need to use keywords and very high-quality images and apply them on your boards and pins.
- [YouTube](#) is important for video marketing. Research shows that more than 80% of consumers want to see more video content when they research. You will need to set up an account before you can upload content such as videos of your tours or vlogs (video blogs).
- [Twitter](#) – success on Twitter relies on streams of posts which can be more difficult for smaller organisations to keep up with. However, it can be a useful business tool to follow others in the industry to keep abreast of trends through industry experts, influencers and other relevant companies.
- [LinkedIn](#) – is also good to develop business to business (B2B) relationships and expand your professional network.
- [TripAdvisor](#) – is the leading review site for all types of tourism business and provides millions of recommendations from travellers. It is the most widely used travel site and is one of the best ways to generate positive online reviews. However, it is important that you know how to deal effectively with any negative reviews and turn them into a positive. Read this blog, [Handle bad reviews like a boss](#), for some good tips.

Tips:

Do not try and use them all. Choose one or two, keep it simple and invest time and effort to do it really well. That way, you can add others when you are totally confident that you understand how it works. Instagram is currently the most important platform for travel.

Employ a specific staff member to be responsible for managing your social media accounts and campaigns. Ideally, they will be ‘experts’ in the use of social media themselves and familiar with the use of hashtags, emojis, memes, and so on.

Interact proactively with the travel industry via social media, whether they be competitors, tourist boards, accommodation providers or associations and of course, your customers. Like their posts, images and videos, and consider posting or responding to comments – someone might like your response in return and it will all help you become more visible in your community. Engage with online communities that are relevant to your niche, such as birder groups or extreme adventurers. See this [Birdwatching Community on Facebook](#) as an example.

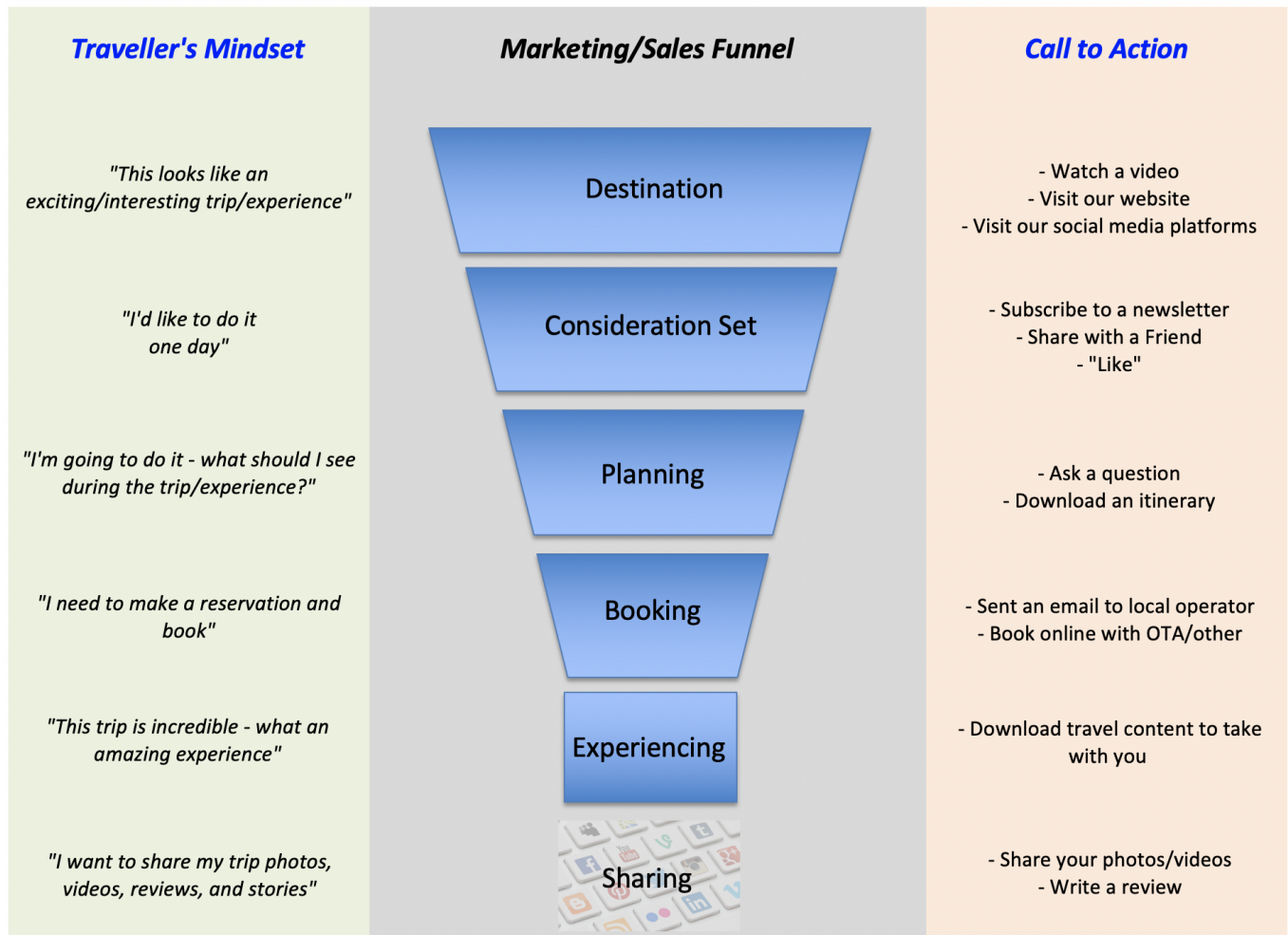
Regularly monitor your social media campaigns to see what works well and what could be improved.

Make sure you ask your customers to leave a review, whether through TripAdvisor or via your own website. You should always respond to a review, good or bad. Check how your competitors respond to reviews for ideas how to handle yours.

11. Create a ‘call to action’

A ‘call to action’ is what you want your potential customer to do when they visit your website. Your website might feature several different calls to action that range from liking a social media post, watching a video, sharing a blog, downloading a guidebook, making a booking, leaving a review, or signing up to a newsletter. Your content is key to how you create the most appropriate call to action at any particular stage of the traveller’s mindset. The diagram below shows how mindsets change throughout the process of choosing and buying a holiday (the sales funnel) and how different content generates the next call to action.

Chart 4: The Process through the Marketing/Sales Funnel



Source: Acorn Tourism Consulting

12. Take online bookings and payments

European travellers are increasingly keen on making travel bookings online. In 2019, more than half of all European travel booking were made online, driven by the two largest markets of the UK and Germany. At the time of writing, this was forecast to continue to rise and Europe was set to be the dominant global market for online travel bookings. COVID-19 has obviously had a major impact on the tourism industry, but once tourism resumes, it is likely that online bookings will continue to be popular amongst European travellers.

You must ensure that your payment system can handle the major online payment methods including credit/debit card payments and [PayPal](#). PayPal has become a widely used method of online payment that allows users to check out without having to enter their financial details every time. If you sell your tour through OTAs, many online booking systems can also be aligned with theirs.

There are many good reasons for enabling online booking and payment, as you can see in the chart below. However, implementing a system can be expensive and will require reliable internet access.

Table 5: The Pros and Cons of an Online Booking and Payment System

Pros	Cons
Saves your staff time	Can be costly to set up

No need to manually sync diaries	Requires internet access
No double-booking problems	
Enables you to align 'call to action' alongside relevant content	
Ability to upsell additional services/activities	
Can align with OTA booking systems	

Source: Acorn Tourism Consulting

Before making a decision, consider your need for establishing an online booking and payment system. Europeans are more likely to book a multi-day trip or holiday through a European tour operator and are less likely to book directly with local operators. However, FITs planning day trips or short experiences are more likely to make spontaneous bookings with local operators once they are present in the destination, or before they arrive.

Tips:

If you're building a website from scratch, consider choosing a website builder that can also add an online booking and payment system.

If you're planning to add booking and payment facilities, there are many to choose from on the market. Examples to consider include [Trekkssoft](#) which offers a booking solution for Day Tour Companies and [Redzy](#) which offers a range of plans including a 21 day free trial.

Conduct your own research to find the system that suits you best. There are online guides to help you such as [this one](#), compiled in 2020 by Software advice, which features a list of booking solutions for tour and activity operators. This type of resource will be continually revised and reviewed to feature the latest information.

For additional information on online payments, download the CBI study [How to implement online payment](#).

13. Work with OTAs

Many local tour operators choose to list their travel products with OTAs and those that specialise in trips, guided tours and experiences have become one of the fastest growing sales platforms for this type of travel product. The two major OTAs that offer travel experiences are [Airbnb Experiences](#) and [Viator](#), which is part of TripAdvisor Experiences. However, there are many more on the market including those that specialise in particular niches such as [Traveling Spoon](#) (food experiences) and [Lokal Travel](#) (Community-Based Tourism experiences). This useful guide, [95 Places to List your Tours](#), indicates the wide range of OTAs that exist today but be aware the market is dynamic and new OTAs will emerge as others discontinue.

The benefits of working with OTAs are:

- OTAs offer a quick and easy route to sell your travel products to a global audience that you might otherwise never be able to reach.
- OTAs manage all bookings and payments on your behalf.
- If you have your own online booking and payment system, this can be aligned with that of the OTA.
- OTAs take on all the marketing costs associated with your trips.
- Online reviews on OTA sites can generate additional bookings.
- Listing on an OTA can generate more direct bookings which are more lucrative to your business.
- Exposure through an OTA can help you build a professional reputation as a local tour operator.

The disadvantages of working with OTAs are:

- Cost: the commission percentage they will charge you is usually high, as much as 20%, and given their power in the market, this is expected to rise over the coming years. You can download this Arival guide, [Working with OTAs – How to drive more bookings, make more money and not lose your shirt](#), and read the section that covers Commissions and Pricing.
- If you don't have your own online booking and payment system, you will need to be organised to manage your direct bookings alongside those from OTAs.
- If you rely too much on OTAs and their rates increase punitively, this may be a problem.
- If you rely on one specialist OTA your business may be severely impacted if the OTA goes out of business.
- Limited information or connection with your customers.

The questions you should ask yourself before committing to working with an OTA are:

1. Will the OTA find you the right sort of customers for your trip/experience?
2. What commission will they charge and is that affordable? Do you have leverage to negotiate, such as providing an experience that is significantly different to anyone else on the market?
3. Can you make the relevant processes (checking availability, booking, payment) work between your business and those of the OTA?
4. Are the OTA's T&Cs (terms and conditions) acceptable to you? You must check their cancellation and refund policies to ensure they are not punitive. Negotiate better deals if you can.
5. How will you be paid and in which currency? Will there be conversion fees and, if so, is this acceptable to you?

Tips:

Research the different OTAs to decide which ones best suit your needs. If you work with more than one OTA, your pricing and availability must be the same, as it must be on your own website.

When you list your tour, make sure you invest in good images and great copy so that your trip stands out.

Remember that when you list a tour with an OTA, your competitors may be using the same platform. Do not be tempted to undercut them to increase sales. Instead, justify your price by adding value through perks or additional services.

Download this guide by Trekksoft on [How to work with OTAs – a guide for tour and activity companies](#) to find out more.

14. Consider paid-for advertising

Organic, or free, search engine marketing will take time to build up and relies on excellent content. It may not always get you the results that you want particularly as the search engines (e.g Google) and social media platforms (e.g Facebook) regularly change the way they rank websites and share your social media posts. You should consider some form of paid-for marketing to supplement the hard work you are doing to generate good

content. When you pay for advertising, it is important that you regularly monitor the performance metrics such as cost-per-acquisition and return on advertising spend so you can judge the success of the campaign.

Pay-per-click advertising (PPC) is one of the most common online advertising techniques. Over 50% of Internet users click on a sponsored result – these are the advertisements that appear above organic search engine results. PPC, like any other marketing tactic, costs money and with PPC, money is paid to the search engines when a sponsored ad is clicked. When utilised correctly it can effectively drive an influx of relevant traffic to the website. The benefits of PPC are that it is measurable and can be more cost effective than other paid advertising as the sponsor only pays when their ad is clicked on. All the major search engines including Google, Bing and Yahoo offer PPC advertising. You can read more about PPC on [Google Ads](#).


Digital advertising on social media platforms by travel professionals is reported to be growing, accounting for almost half of all advertising spend in 2018. You can pay to place advertisements on all the major social media platforms including [Facebook](#) and [Instagram](#). Click on the links to find out more about each option. This blog, [5 Best Travel Facebook Ad Examples \(And What Works\)](#), showcases some interesting examples of advertising campaigns along with the results they achieved and the advertising format used.


Conduct an online search to learn more about advertising online. [The Complete Guide to Online Advertising for Tour Operators](#), would be a good place to start.


This study has been carried out on behalf of CBI by [Acorn Tourism Consulting Limited](#).

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