



## [How to be a successful tourism company online?](#)

The place to find European customers for your tourism company is online. For this, you need a good website and be active on social media. European travellers prefer to book online and expect quick replies. They especially value the opinions of other travellers. So it's important that your satisfied customers speak for you on channels like social media and review websites. If you manage your online presence well, you will attract new business and keep existing customers happy!

## Why present your tourism company online?

The social internet and mobile devices have changed how European travellers research and book their holidays. Nowadays, you find your customers online, rather than at a trade fair.

The internet is very important for the tourism industry. It shows European travellers the amazing long-haul destinations that await them. Social media inspire them and allow them to share their experiences. The tourism sector is an early adopter of digital technologies. Consumer purchase behaviour is changing, as quick and easy online booking becomes a main sales channel for tourism products.

You should not wait for your customer to find you. Instead, actively use the opportunities that the internet offers your tourism business.

How can you attract tourists online? Here are our top 10 tips for online success with your tourism company.

## Top 10 tips to be a successful tourism company online

1. Have a good website
2. Offer online booking and payment
3. Consider selling your product through an online travel agency
4. Be present and active on social media
5. Let your satisfied customers speak for you
6. Respond quickly to online customer contact
7. Advertise
8. Build relationships
9. Collaborate with bloggers, news and/or travel writers and stakeholders in your region
10. Keep learning

### Tip 1: Have a good website

European travellers are experienced internet users. If you want to successfully target online tourists, you need a good website. You should invest in this, as your website is the centrepiece of your online business success. It is where you can present complete information about your tourism product, at a low cost. To keep your website up to date and interesting, you should update the contents regularly.

A good website should:

- have a good and attractive design
- have informative, complete and attractive content
- be [search engine optimised](#) (SEO)
- be easy to update and maintain

- be mobile-friendly
- have good quality photos and videos
- have tools to measure its performance (e.g. the number of unique and returning visitors, page views and countries of origin).

You can build your own website or hire a professional do to it for you, depending on your skills. To get you on track, Tourism Tribe explores your options for [developing a tourism website](#).

For tips, see for instance the Tourism Company's [How to improve the effectiveness of tourism destination websites](#).

## Tip 2: Offer online booking and payment

### Online booking

In Europe, online booking is a major sales channel for tourism. Travellers like how quick and easy online booking can be. [Digital bookings now account for more than half of all European travel purchases](#), more than in any other market. This share is [highest in northern and western Europe](#), where online channels already accounted for up to three quarters of outbound accommodation bookings in 2014.

In the coming years, the online travel market is expected to continue growing. This means you need to provide online booking options for your tourism product. If you do not, you will exclude the majority of the European market.

### Online payment

A key element of your online booking system is online payment. This is time-efficient for both you and your guests. If you only accept cash or cheque payments, you are restricting your client base.

There are several types of online payment methods, including:

- card payment
- bank transfer
- mobile payment
- international alternatives, such as PayPal
- national alternatives.

For more information on online payment methods for customers in Europe, see our study about [online payment methods in Europe](#).

You can install a booking and payment tool on your website, or use a third-party provider like an online travel agency.

## Tip 3: Consider selling your product through an online travel agency

You make the greatest profits from customers who book directly, rather than through a third-party distributor. Nevertheless, collaborating with online travel agencies (OTAs) can be very lucrative. These OTAs are online marketplaces that resell tourism products such as accommodation, transport, tours and activities, as well as packages. [Around half of European online bookings are made through OTAs](#), making them a key sales channel.

Examples of OTAs are:

- [Booking](#) (formerly Priceline)
- [Expedia](#)
- [GetYourGuide](#)
- [Viator](#).

Treksoft discusses some of the main OTAs for tours and activities in [The Large Marketplace Comparison Guide](#).

## Advantages of online travel agencies

The main advantages of using OTAs are:

- massive exposure for your tourism product, leading to more bookings and revenue
- relatively low costs, as you do not have to invest in your own booking system
- European travellers like to compare offerings, so your quality product stands out
- good customer reviews on OTA websites may convince tourists to book your tourism product.

## Disadvantages of online travel agencies

However, the main disadvantages of using OTAs are the following.

- They usually charge a commission of 10–30% of the gross cost per sale.
- There may be restrictive terms and conditions, for example regarding cancellations.
- You need a way to prevent your OTA from overbooking, such as a real-time booking system.

For tips on how to get the most out of working with OTAs, see Trekkssoft's [10 tips to make more money with OTAs](#).

### Tip 4: Be present and active on social media

Social media allows you to communicate, connect and build a relationship with your (potential) customers. Travellers also use social media as a key source of travel information before, during and after their trip.

### Which social media channel to use

The most important social media channels for you to use are:

- Instagram - to share photos and videos of your destination
- Facebook - to create, promote and share content and interact with (potential) customers
- Twitter - for real-time interaction, ranging from customer service to updates on events
- YouTube - to showcase your destination in video format.

For more information, see Expedia's eBook on [Social Media and the Travel Sector](#). This gives you insights, as well as tips and best practices for each social media channel. Sprout Social's [Guide to Social Media for Travel](#) is also a good place to start your social media journey. In addition, Hubspot has some useful guidelines for [writing content for various social media channels](#).

Watch this [webinar series on visual communication in adventure travel](#) by ATTA and Libris for more information on using photos and videos. Crowdriff focuses on the use of videos in [The Modern Tourism Marketers Guide to Video](#), including best practices and cheat sheets per social media channel.

### Locating potential customers on social media

Find your potential customer on social media, for example by:

- searching for related [hashtags](#)
- using the "search" tools in your social media accounts
- joining online groups that your potential customers are in.

### Interacting with potential customers on social media

Keep track of your customers on social media, as well as mentions of your destination, company and/or product. Answer questions and/or post helpful tips.

You can also answer questions that are not aimed directly at you, for example if a potential customer asks for tips on what to do in your area or wants to know the best destination for a particular activity. This way you can bring your product offering to their attention. However, do not spam people with deals for your destination, because this can quickly become annoying.

## User Generated Content

You can reuse the User Generated Content (UGC) of your customers. This means you publish content from others on your social media accounts, with their permission.

For example, you could post:

- photos
- videos
- reviews
- comments.

Using a customer's content can make them feel proud and appreciated. In addition, European [travellers consider content from others to be especially trustworthy](#). This makes UGC a very effective way to connect with (potential) customers.

For more information on how to use UGC, see bizzez communications' [do's and don'ts for user generated content in tourism and hospitality](#).

### Tip 5: Let your satisfied customers speak for you

As we just discussed, what others say about you is your most powerful marketing message. You need to create positive word of mouth. For this, of course you have to give your customers a great experience during their holiday. In addition, you have to encourage them to share their great experience online, for example via:

- review sites - reviews and ratings
- social media - updates, photos and videos
- your website - comments and feedback.

The Tourism eSchool gives you [three steps to encourage customer advocacy of your tourism experience on social media](#).

### Review sites

Use review sites like [TripAdvisor](#), where customers can rate and review their experience with your business. These websites provide you with free word-of-mouth marketing and direct traffic to your own website. If you have a good [TripAdvisor](#) ranking, highlight this on your website with a graphic or a [widget](#).

The Tourism eSchool has some tips on [how to set up and manage your TripAdvisor business listing](#), while Treksoft provides you with [20 steps to increase your TripAdvisor ranking and reach](#).

### Tip 6: Respond quickly to online customer contact

If a (potential) customer contacts you via your website or social media, you should respond quickly. With existing customers, slow replies may lead to annoyance, bad reviews or problems if they need assistance. With potential new customers, slow replies may cost you their business.

There is a strong correlation between response time and consumer buying behaviour. The faster you respond, the bigger the chance your lead will become a sale. When people post a general inquiry on social media, [sales usually go to the first company that responds adequately](#).

[If customers contact you directly on social media, they generally expect a reply within a day](#). One out of five customers even expect you to reply within the hour. Do not make them wait, but strive to reply within 12 hours at most. If you are not at the office all the time, invest in a smartphone. This allows you to respond quickly to phone calls, email and social media.

### Tip 7: Advertise

#### Google Adwords and Facebook Ads

Online advertising can be very rewarding. Some good ways to reach your potential customers are:

- [Google Adwords](#) - a pay-per-click advertising service, based on search engine keywords
- [Facebook Ads](#) - various types of advertisements on Facebook platforms.

To get started with Google Adwords, TrekkSoft gives you [10 tips for tour and activity companies to create a successful AdWords strategy](#).

Facebook now has a guide to [Facebook for Travel](#), with useful advertisement tools for the travel industry.

## Selecting your target audience

Before you advertise, you have to understand who your customers are and what influences them. You need to specify the demographics that you are looking for, especially for Facebook Ads. These [10 Ways To Target Travellers With Facebook Ads](#) give you an idea on this.

Only pay for advertising when it is specifically targeted at your ideal customer. Be smart, use [long tail keywords](#) that your target audience is searching for.

For more information on how to define your message, see our [top 10 tips for determining your Unique Value Proposition](#).

## Tip 8: Build relationships

It is easier to sell to an existing customer than to acquire a new one. This means you should cherish your guests and make them into return customers.

Good online ways to build and maintain a relationship with your guests are:

- staying in touch after the trip is done - travellers appreciate a personal touch
- asking for feedback and using it to improve your product - let your guest know how you used their feedback
- building an e-mail database - use your website or blog to add to your subscriber list and create effective and exclusive information for this group.

The Adventure Travel Trade Association (ATTA) has a great report on how to develop relationships with your guests: [Email Lead Nurturing for Adventure Travel Companies](#). Make sure to comply with the European [General Data Protection Regulation](#) and ask consent before storing and using people's contact details. To get started with your newsletter, see for example BookingCounts' [Travel Email Newsletter Marketing](#).

## Tip 9: Collaborate with bloggers, news and/or travel writers and stakeholders in your region

Another way to use what others say about you in your marketing is to collaborate with relevant parties.

### Travel bloggers and writers

Travel blogging has become a key way to generate sales for your tourism products. However, you should not write all the blog posts yourself. To create trustworthy content, collaborate with travel bloggers. This can increase your sales in your existing target market, as well as create new opportunities. If you use various types of bloggers, your blogs may appeal to new groups of potential customers.

For more information, see our [top 10 tips for managing your travel blog](#).

### Stakeholders

Also team up with stakeholders in your region. Build relationships with, for example:

- influencers
- your local visitor information centre
- your destination marketing organisation

- relevant trade and media organisations.

Look for a way to target the online market together, for example by setting up a destination portal or shared advertising campaign.

## Tip 10: Keep learning

Online marketing strategies and tools are evolving and changing rapidly. Take the time to keep yourself and your staff up to date with relevant marketing information, for example by attending online marketing courses at training centres or online.

A good online presence is a lot of work. You have to make it an integrated part of your company procedures. If you feel like you cannot keep up with maintaining content and online visibility, you can decide to outsource some of your online tasks, because it is important to do it right.

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