Digital Marketing Toolkit

Helping tourism businesses make the most of online channels
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Introduction

Digital marketing spans anything you do to advertise your business using digital technologies, including social media and search engine platforms.

Today’s consumers are now more likely to see online marketing messages than traditional adverts. As of 2018 OFCOM reported 80% of people are accessing the internet through fixed broadband and access through a mobile phone has risen from 66% in 2017 to 72% in 2018, with almost eight in ten UK adults (78%) using a smartphone.

The VisitEngland Digital Marketing Toolkit will help improve your understanding of digital marketing and how you can use it to promote your business.

How can digital marketing help my business?

Today, most people will research a place to stay and visit online before deciding to book or visit. If your business is visible when they make a search, they can discover all they need to know about what you can offer.

- Digital marketing is cost-effective. Although smaller businesses may struggle to compete with larger companies using traditional marketing methods, digital marketing can be more affordable, so you can make tighter budgets work harder for your business.

- Digital marketing allows you to target specific online audiences. Traditional marketing methods may not give you as much control over who sees your advert or messaging. By using digital methods, such as SEO (Search Engine Optimisation), pay-per-click (PPC) and social media advertising, you can tailor your content to reach your core customer base.

- Digital marketing is measurable. You can use free tools to measure your success over time. These real-time insights can help you to adjust your activity for greater success.

How much time do I need for digital marketing?

The time it takes you to conduct digital marketing will depend on numerous factors; some businesses will have staff dedicated to it, while others may have to add it to a list of other tasks. Although you may put the same information into an online advert as you would into traditional marketing such as print or radio, it may take you a little time to get used to using digital technology. You may also need more time to analyse the results, something that digital marketing allows you to do in a far more comprehensive fashion than traditional marketing. The processes will become quicker with practice, but to maximise return, the same level of planning and effort would be required as for your other marketing avenues. This type of marketing may in time replace the more traditional forms, which will save time.

It might be a good idea to decide early on how much time you can dedicate to digital marketing and stick to it so that it becomes a regular part of the running of your tourist business or attraction.
**Case Study**

**Salad Days & Holi Moli chalets, Somerset**

*Salad Days & Holi Moli* offer luxurious, award-winning accommodation at Dunster Beach. Designed for couples only, these self-catering boutique beach huts border Exmoor National Park and the Somerset coast.

“As a small business, digital marketing – especially social media – allows you to compete with the big players at very little or no cost. We are very active on Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, Pinterest and TripAdvisor, growing our following organically over the last three years. We believe, as with all forms of marketing, that it’s important to know your audience.

Our tips for other tourism businesses would be: use social media to its fullest potential by engaging with your followers, form partnerships with local businesses and join local business groups online for advice and to learn best practice from others.”

Digital marketing is becoming more popular and more frequently used, so the marketing plans for using it are constantly evolving. This toolkit will cover the basics and give you some next steps to take once you have mastered them. We will also provide examples of how tourism businesses can implement digital marketing to help them grow.

**Traditional marketing methods may not give you as much control over who sees your advert or messaging.**
Website

You should think of your website as a place where all the information is accessible to your customers 24/7, even when your office or attraction is closed.

Structure

The structure of your website is laid out in a site map, which can help you decide how many pages you need to communicate all the information about your business in a clear and effective way.

To help you begin to plan your website, consider:

- What does your business do or offer?
- Do you want to include the ability for customers to book online?
- How often will you have time to update information on your site?
- How much photography or imagery will you include?

Once you know exactly what you want to include on your website, you can begin to think about building it, structuring the information and getting it live on the world wide web. You can choose to build the website yourself, or hire someone to do this, but it’s important that it stays up-to-date either way. An out of date website, or one with incorrect details, could put off potential customers.

The easier it is for people to use your website and navigate around it, the more likely they are to book with you or buy your products and services. It will also help your website to rank higher in the list of search engine results. Read our SEO section for more detail.

Another important factor to consider when you design your site is responsive design. According to official Google statements, more than 50% of search queries globally now come from mobile devices. Responsive design means that your website can respond to the device that it is accessed on and provide a consistent user experience whether from a mobile, tablet, or desktop device. People should be able to use your site the same way on a mobile as they do on a computer.
The easier it is for people to use your website and navigate around it, the more likely they are to book with you or buy your products and services.

Checklist

✓ Decide how many pages your website needs, what each one is for and the information it will contain.

✓ Make sure any contact information is correct and updated if necessary.

✓ Decide how much imagery you will include on your site and make sure any images or photography are of good quality, optimised for use online, and do not breach any permissions or copyright laws. The Video and photography section covers the details.

✓ Don't duplicate content – having pages that are all very similar will confuse search engines when they are trying to decide which is the most important and could affect how high they rank you in a search.

✓ Follow a step-by-step guide to structuring if you are new to setting up a website.

✓ Ensure your site is fully accessible. Website Accessibility is the inclusive practice of removing barriers that prevent interaction with, or access to websites, by disabled people. All users should have equal access to information and functionality.

Resources

Yoast’s ‘Ultimate Guide to Site Structure’ explains in detail why it is so important.

Kissmetrics blog post ‘How to Create a Site Structure That Will Enhance SEO’ breaks down how to plan your site in six steps.

Google provides more information on responsive design in their post ‘Responsive Web Design Basics’.

visitengland.org/businessadvice
Managing content

Behind most websites is a Content Management System or CMS. You will most likely use a CMS instead of building a website from scratch using code (a language used and read by computers to build software and sites). There are different CMS platforms available, so choosing one that feels the most comfortable will help you. A CMS provides an editable layer behind your website, so you can update it with the information you want to share with your customers.

In most cases, you don’t have to have any technical training or be able to use complex code to use a CMS system. The most commonly used CMS platforms that you might have heard of are Wordpress, Umbraco, Kentico, Magento and Drupal, but there are many others.

Once you have decided on the structure of your site and what information it will hold on each page, the CMS you choose will give you the space to insert it and keep it up to date. It’s a good idea to think about who will be doing this, will it be just one person or a team? This could determine which CMS you decide to use.

Other things to consider when selecting a CMS are:

- What do you want it to do? Some CMS platforms will give you more control and options than others.

- What’s your budget? Decide how much you are willing to spend on a CMS with the features your business will most benefit from.

- Security – some CMS platforms are controlled by a limited number of people who code the different features you can use (known as proprietary CMS). Others are called open source, which means that anyone can add features, which may open up potential security issues.

When it comes to choosing the best CMS for you, the most important factor is probably time. How much time you are prepared to spend updating and maintaining it? You may be the only person available, or you may have a marketing team at your disposal who will be responsible for updating the website.

Once you’ve selected a CMS based on its cost, features and usability, you need to make sure you can access it from the web. Your domain name is the name you use to find your website on the internet, for example: mulberrycottage.co.uk.

Your website will be ‘hosted’ on a special type of computer, called a server. There are two main choices for accessing your CMS. Firstly, you can usually pay a third-party company to host and deliver the CMS for you based on a monthly fee, which is where your budget factor comes in. Alternatively, you could opt to buy your own server to display and host your CMS. This can be a physical or virtual server depending on your preferences. If you are a small business, the first option is more likely to be the right choice for you. You will pay a monthly fee to access your CMS and host the website, without the overhead of maintaining the web server yourself.
✓ Use a CMS that you understand and can easily use to save time – this is especially important if you are going to be the only person keeping the website up to date.

✓ Learn about which features the CMS has, making sure they are relevant for the kind of information you want to appear on your website.

✓ Keep a budget in mind to make sure your website is affordable.

Resources

Read the ‘How to Choose a Domain Name’ article from MOZ to help you decide on the best name possible.

If coding isn’t something you are comfortable with, ‘A Beginners Guide to Content Management Systems’ from BeginnerTuts.com is a great way to learn how to get started using a CMS that’s right for you.

The blog from Commonplaces Interactive has a post entitled ‘How to Choose the Right CMS for Your Organization’ which gives you three considerations to make when selecting a CMS.
York Gin, York

York Gin is an award-winning gin company in the city of York creating hand-made spirits in small batches in the only gin distillery in York. They won a Double Gold at the San Francisco World Spirits Competition in 2019.

“We take a mobile first approach to everything on the website. If it doesn't look right on the smallest screen, we go back to the drawing board. We then test on tablets and only then do we have a look on a laptop screen. This approach helps us to keep our copywriting tight and imagery to a reasonable size - and makes sense given the dominance of mobile devices.

We then test, test and test again the customer journeys on the website. It's important users can buy what they want and know what links to use, otherwise you will quickly lose customers. People will get frustrated by links that go to the wrong place or pop-ups appearing halfway through a transaction, so even though testing seems boring, it is our best friend. We encourage employees, family and friends to test the site whenever they can, welcoming their feedback.”

If you want to see a comparison of some of the most popular CMS platforms out there, TemplateMonster’s blog post ‘How to Choose the Right CMS for my Website’ is a good place to see a breakdown of what they do and provides a useful comparison chart comparing popular CMS platforms.

If you run a larger tourism business, you may have more people available to dedicate their time to running your website. They may want to expand their knowledge or have existing skills that allow them to explore more options when it comes to how you host and run your website and CMS. ‘Physical Sever vs Virtual Server: All you Need to Know’ from RoseHosting goes into greater detail on the types of server available.

Read RNIB’s advice page on website and app accessibility to ensure you are making your website as accessible as possible.
Taking bookings on your website

Adding online booking features to your site can make it easier for customers to choose your business over others, or book with you directly rather than through an Online Travel Agent. It’s important to keep customers on your website and enabling them to book through it could make the difference between them going to look elsewhere, or choosing you right there and then.

For the majority of accommodation providers, the ability to take online bookings is increasingly essential. There are three ways to take online bookings for your business:

- Booking software embedded within your website, which a customer can access if they come to you directly.
- Online Travel Agents.
- Internet Booking Engines, which provide booking functionality and update availability across multiple platforms.

Internet Booking Engines (IBEs) manage your bookings across many different platforms e.g. TripAdvisor. In doing so, they help to reduce the chances of double-bookings by automatically updating your availability across all of your online listings when a booking is made.

Popular IBEs include eviivo, MEWs, Guest Link, Little Hotelier, SiteMinder and SynXis. When choosing your IBE provider, it is advisable to select one that integrates with the major Online Travel Agents, including TripAdvisor.

Checklist

- Compare different IBEs and their associated costs. If you only receive a handful of bookings a month, you may be better off with an IBE that only charges you for each booking, whereas a monthly fee may be more cost effective for larger establishments.
- Check your chosen IBE provider integrates with major online booking platforms, such as TripAdvisor.
- Ensure visitors to your website can book from every page, ideally in three clicks or less.
Some IBEs offer a free booking engine and charge a commission for each booking. However, if the booking comes via an Online Travel Agent website (such as booking.com), you will still have to pay commission to them as well. Other IBEs will charge a flat monthly fee, regardless of how many bookings are taken. It is advisable to compare payment terms carefully, as some providers will only transfer the guest’s payment once their stay is completed.

**Resources**
IBEs often publish blog posts to inform accommodation providers, as well as sell their own services.

SiteMinder has a downloadable guide *‘How to choose the best online booking engine: A guide for independent hoteliers’*.

Mews has also published an article about [hotel channel managers](https://www.mews.com/blog/hotel-channel-management) on its blog.

For the majority of accommodation providers, the ability to take online bookings is increasingly essential.
Google Analytics

In basic terms, Google Analytics (GA) is a powerful application for tracking what’s happening when people visit and use your website. A lot of CMS systems are automatically integrated with GA, so you can start using it as soon as your website is published.

Google Analytics can tell you what’s driving people (traffic) to your website, which pages they land on and how long they stay there, plus you can see which city your visitors are from, which devices they use and much more. GA can also track traffic from where you have placed adverts, helping you to track the success of any online marketing activity.

Using GA can help you to make decisions on changes to drive more people to visit your website, make purchases, or choose your business over another.

Why use Google Analytics?

- It’s a free and easy-to-use tool for finding out how your website is performing. You can use the information it provides to make changes to what your website does and how it is structured.
- You can customise the data to focus in on specific points. For example, you may want to concentrate on how popular a particular page is, or the average time a person spends on your site.

Because GA is run by Google, it integrates well with other platforms such as Google Ads, which is covered later in the toolkit. It’s easy to use and you can set up various dashboards - these are customisable panels that you can set up to quickly access information that’s important or relevant to you and your business.

Case Study

GoApe, nationwide

Go Ape rely on Google Analytics to find out how successful their site is.

“We use different measurements of success depending on the original objective and marketing channels used. We analyse engagement metrics such as bounce rate (the percentage of visitors to a website who leave after viewing only one page) and the time spent on the page. It’s very much about the customer journey, which is where navigation reports and multi-channel funnel analytics become important. We use these to get a more detailed idea of how people finally convert on the Go Ape site, which then helps to identify how valuable content has been in relation to overall performance. For the most part, Google Analytics is the primary source of measurable data”.

There is also a feature that allows you to set up custom alerts, so if traffic to your website changes drastically and you don’t have time to check your reports, you can receive an automatic notification of changes.
**Resources**

Read Google’s Digital Garage guide ‘Get Started with Analytics’ to learn more about the topic. Google Digital Garage is also a fantastic resource for learning all about starting and growing a digital business.

Read MOZ’s ‘The Absolute Beginner’s Guide to Google Analytics’ for a full breakdown.

When you first begin to use GA it can seem like a lot of information to take in. ‘3 Metrics Google Analytics Beginners Should Watch’ from Search Engine Land focuses on the three metrics (measurements) a beginner should keep an eye on, so you can get started with understanding your site’s performance.

The ‘Seven Key Metrics Every Business Should Track’ article from HubSpot tackles the ‘information overload’ you might face when using GA, and suggests seven metrics that every business could focus on to get the most out of the tool.

**Checklist**

✓ Read guides on how to get setup and use Google Analytics. Don’t worry if it seems too much at first, you can customise the information you want to see at a later date.

✓ After you’ve seen what GA can do, decide which information is going to be the most relevant to your business and focus your attention there.

✓ Use the information to help you make decisions on what you could change or improve on your website.
Content

If you have a website, it needs content to make it interesting and attractive. This can come as a blog, picture gallery, contact information or FAQ page, but the aim is always to give your customer as much relevant information as possible and help them to choose your business over competitors.

Video and photography

Photos and videos are proven to help people remember information. A study entitled ‘Vision Trumps all Other Senses’ by developmental molecular biologist Dr John Medina revealed that when people hear information, they’re likely to remember only 10% of it three days later. But if a relevant image is paired with that same information, people retained 65% of the information in it three days later. Your site may be more likely to stick in customers’ minds if it has strong visual elements alongside written information.

Other reasons why photos and videos are important to your website include:

- Images will help tell a story about your brand, location and business.
- Featuring pictures on your website can help search engines like Google and Bing understand the context of your website and can have a positive effect on where your site ranks on search engine results pages (SERPs). Include details that help search engines recognise images by using alt-text. Alt-text also helps the visually impaired to understand the images you are using, as it is read by screen readers.
- Website images make it easier for people to share your content through social media channels, which could help to get your business seen by more potential customers.

Images and video content make your website more attractive and memorable. If your visual content is properly labelled using captions that are ‘search friendly’ (relevant terms that people might be using when they search for your kind of business), search engines will see your content as more relevant.

Adding alt-text (text that is usually added to an image within the CMS of a website to describe the contents of the image) helps search engines to understand what’s in an image and whether it’s relevant to a search too.

However, be aware that images can affect site speed. Users will become frustrated if images take a long time to load and poor-quality images can make your website look untrustworthy. Read ‘Image SEO: How Images Impact Search Engine Rankings’ from Emfluence to gain a better understanding.
Seaham Hall, Northumberland

Seaham Hall sits on Durham’s Heritage Coast amidst 37 acres of beautiful landscaped gardens. It offers luxury stays and has an on-site award-winning spa.

“Our video content tends to focus on the guest experience. We demonstrate the visual journey from the moment guests enter the hotel to check out, focussing on key features like our spa and dining. We recently launched a new hot tub suite and used video content to ‘tease’ the new room online, then used a professional video for the opening.

User-generated content is an effective tool we use across all our social channels. Customers that have visited and had a positive experience with us are very good at sharing this to their followers. By reposting customer imagery, we are expanding our customer base quickly in a cost-effective way and are seeing a rise in engagement. We use user-generated content most regularly on Instagram because it’s easier to share guest photos and we find users often share our posts featuring their content, helping us to reach their social network.”

When including visual content you could have professional photos taken, take them yourself or set up an account on Instagram and use the feed on your website to automatically update your site with images you add to the social media platform. Find out more about using Instagram in the Social media section of the toolkit.

When it comes to videos, a good place to get started would be on YouTube. This is a social media platform where you can upload video content onto your very own channel. You can then look to use your website CMS to make the video appear on your website. We look at YouTube in the Social media section too.

Images and video content make your website more attractive and memorable.
Checklist

✓ Make sure you use good quality photos and videos that show off the best of your business and its location.

✓ If you don’t feel confident taking the photos or filming yourself, it could be worth employing a professional to do it for you. Remember to factor this into your digital marketing budget.

✓ If you do choose to use any stock imagery, check that it isn’t copyrighted and that you aren’t using a frequently used image that your competitors also have on their site.

✓ Remember that video content will take up more of your time than a few well placed, good-quality photos. If you don’t have a lot of it, it might be best to focus on photography first, before branching out into videos.

✓ Tag images with Alt-text in your CMS to improve search-ability and site accessibility.

Resources

For more information on why images are important when you’re planning your website and deciding how it will look, read ‘Why Images Are an Important Part of Your Website Strategy’ from Yellow Pages for Business.

The ‘Make Your Property Stand out with Quality Photos’ article from Eviivo provides helpful tips on how to take excellent photography that you can use on your site, and why it is so important for your business.

The ‘42 Visual Content Marketing Statistics You Should Know in 2019’ article from Hubspot also highlights some priorities businesses should be making when it comes to using images in their content.

If you decide to take the pictures yourself, read ‘How to Take your own Business Photos for your Website’ by Web Ascender.
A blog is a regularly updated page on a website, usually written in a more informal style, that can be an incredibly powerful digital marketing tool. Every time you write a blog post, it becomes another indexed page on your website that a search engine can use to drive people to your site. A regularly updated blog will also signify to search engines that your website is active and encourage them to check back more frequently to review your content and rank it.

One of the most important factors with blogging is time. How regularly you post is something you should decide early on and try to stick to. Once a month may be a good starting point for publishing blog posts if your business is on the smaller side, while larger tourism businesses may have the resource to publish more. However, consistent updating, whether you decide on once a month, once a week, or somewhere in between, is an important factor.

Reasons to include a blog on your website:

- You may be able to convert the traffic coming to your website via the blog by including a call to action (CTA). This is essentially a button that will guide them to perform an action like making a booking, purchase, or enquiry.

- Blogs can help your website appear authoritative. You can write content that answers common questions, helps customers understand something, or solves problems (like things to do on a rainy day in your location).

- Blogs drive long-term results. Once you have posted a blog it begins to be ranked by search engines and it continues to do this for weeks, months and even years. This kind of content is called ‘evergreen’ content.

A regularly updated blog will also signify to search engines that your website is active.

Blogging can help you to update your website more regularly. You are unlikely to be changing the content on some of your pages (for example an ‘about us’ page or the location of your attraction), but a blog is something you can use to tell people about things that are happening seasonally or show a little behind the scenes to interest and inform customers. You can also answer questions or discuss issues that will help people to see your business as authoritative, helpful and one that they can trust.

Blog content is also often shared via social media platforms. If it is interesting, useful and attractive content, people will want to share it with others online, exposing your business to more people and a potentially larger audience.

Checklist

✓ Consider how much time it will take you to write a blog. If it’s not possible to write longer posts it might be better to try shorter ones, but in a more regular time-frame. If a commitment to regular posting isn’t feasible, blogging just may not be right for you and your business.

✓ Use other blogs as inspiration for topics you could cover or would help your customers know more about your business.
Case Study

York Gin, York

“We have found that trying to make our content fun, likely to engage people and get them involved can have a positive effect on our brand. We run the hashtag #yorkginontour, which encourages customers to take and share photos of their York Gin bottles or merchandise from their holidays. We also run #yorkgindogs by taking photos of the dogs who come to the shop. Dog owners are incredibly proud of seeing their pups on social media and who doesn’t like the odd cute dog post on their timeline?

We have around 6,000 followers on Twitter and Facebook and over 8,000 on Instagram. Reaction to our posts varies, but we get the most likes and shares when we have something positive to share — an award win or new gin. In a world of information overload we try to be entertaining and happy - our posts are designed to raise a smile when lots of other content they see does the opposite!”

Resources

For more detail on calls to action (CTAs) read The Balance's blog post ‘What is a Call To Action and How Do I Make One?’

As a tourism business, it is particularly important for you to be aware of the benefits of blogging. Tourism eSchool's post ‘Why Blogging is a ‘Must’ for all Tourism Destinations’ details the most important reasons and includes examples.

The Hubspot article ‘Why Blog? The Benefits of Blogging for Business and Marketing’ expands on all the reasons you should blog as a business.
Email

Although a lot of digital marketing is conducted through Search Engine Optimisation (SEO) and social media campaigns, email remains a popular way to reach your customers.

Using emails to market to customers allows you to include a variety of information in one space (whereas some social media platforms like Twitter have a character limit), plus the information you can gain from asking questions or sending surveys through email can be valuable and inform your digital marketing strategy over time.

Most people check their emails at least once a day and according to superoffice.com over 60% of people open emails on a mobile device, therefore it is important to ensure that your email templates are optimised for mobile. Similar to considering responsive design when building a website (see the Website Structure section), you need to take into consideration how easily customers can read your emails on their mobile devices as well as their computer.

A common way you might use email marketing is through a newsletter. A monthly newsletter that people can sign up to through your website reaches the people who are willing to receive news, offers and more information about your business; instead of people who may follow you on social media but do not wish to receive extra information they can’t see on your site or feeds.

When exploring email marketing consider:

• You may want to use an email marketing tool like Mailchimp to send reminders, invitations or newsletters to a list of subscribers. You will also have the capability of testing the performance of the emails. A tool like this can tell you how many people open the email, click on included links or make a purchase.

Using emails to market to customers allows you to include a variety of information in one space.

• When you use an email marketing service provider you are less likely to end up in potential customers’ spam folders.

• The General Data Protection Regulation (or GDPR) has an effect on email marketing, including the legal gathering of personal data and individuals’ right to privacy. Familiarise yourself with the regulation before getting started with email marketing.

From grabbing your reader’s attention, to honing your language to increase the likelihood of a customer clicking your well-placed call-to-action, email is something you can use to reach and connect with customers. Plus, by analysing the way people are responding, you can constantly grow and develop your approach to truly give them what they want from remaining in contact with your business.
✓ Ensure that you adhere to any relevant GDPR compliance when gaining and holding customer details (whether email, phone, address, etc).

✓ Make sure your emails are valuable to your customer and don't come across as spam or intrusive.

✓ Make sure your headline clearly describes the content of your email.

✓ Is your subject line brief, clear and to the point?

✓ Use bullet points to help the reader’s eye quickly scan what they will get from this contact with your business.

✓ Include images or other attractive visuals in your emails. This will help customers to remember your messaging.

✓ Avoid overly salesy language that may come across as disingenuous and discourage people from trusting your business to provide something useful.

Using an email marketing service provider will save you some time, but email is another aspect of digital marketing that takes time to get right and is constantly changing as customers’ needs develop and the way businesses engage with customers shifts. You need to make sure you can put in enough time to develop emails that will perform well and help you reach the goals you have set for this particular strand of your digital marketing strategy.

Resources
Read MOZ’s ‘6 Tips to Make Your Brand an Email Response Rockstar’ to practice sending more effective emails to customers.

We mentioned that using emails is part of a larger concept: marketing automation. The article ‘A Beginner’s Guide to Marketing Automation’ from MOZ will show you how extensive this aspect of digital marketing can be.
Crystal Hotels, London

Crystal Hotels is a group of hotels in the Bayswater and Kensington districts of London. These converted Victorian Town houses are full of history and character with great amenities.

“We send monthly newsletters, usually at the beginning of each month. We used to have an open rate of between 16-18% but have increased this rapidly to 48-51% since we started to regularly clean our recipient database.

We clean the database every couple of months using segmentation options in Mailchimp, which is quick and very straightforward. If subscribers have not opened our last two newsletters they will be unsubscribed, which keeps our email database relevant and ensures we only communicate with people who engage with us. This also has the added benefit of keeping our e-marketing costs down.”

From grabbing your reader’s attention, to honing your language to increase the likelihood of a customer clicking your well-placed call-to-action, email is something you can use to reach and connect with customers.
Google

Google is perhaps best known as a search engine, but the company also has tools that you can use to benefit your business. When people search for your business, or the products and services you offer, the results are ranked in what Google determines to be an order relevant to that search. The more relevant and authoritative you are digitally, the higher you will appear in the search results, and the more likely it will be that your business will be seen by potential customers.

To help you understand and expand your presence online, you can learn more about using Google’s tools and how they can benefit your digital marketing campaigns. In this section, we explore Google My Business, SEO and Google Ads.

Google My Business

Google My Business (also sometimes abbreviated as ‘GMB’) is a free tool that can help you manage the information that people see when they search Google for your business or the products and services that you offer. Registering your company and its location and verifying it with Google adds credibility in Google's eyes and helps people to find your business when they are searching Google. Customers can leave reviews and you are able to respond and interact with them.

Why you should use Google My Business:

- It gives your business a credible space where customers can see important business information like your opening hours, contact details and location, as well as images and a link to your website.

- You can read customer reviews to get insight and feedback on what they think of your business – and importantly, you can respond to these reviews and engage with customers.

- A well-optimised GMB listing can lead to a better presence in search results. GMB listings are displayed above the standard search results, which means the businesses shown there can gain more attention.

Google My Business serves two important purposes: to help business owners increase their online visibility and to help people find and review businesses in their local area. Whenever a person searches for something which Google determines to have local intent, for example: ‘hotel London’ or ‘theme park in Newcastle’, links to three Google My Business listings will be displayed below a map of the local area. When clicking on a business' Google My Business listing, people can see all the information you enter about your business.

Resources

Google has its own ‘guidelines for representing your business on Google’, to help you make the most of the platform.
Google My Business serves two important purposes: to help business owners increase their online visibility and to help people find and review businesses in their local area.

**Checklist**

- Complete all the information Google asks for - your listing will have valuable data that will make it easier for potential customers to find your company. And if you don’t fill that information in, someone else could. Anyone can suggest an edit to your business listing including your competitors; however, provided you created or claimed your listing, you will be able to review edits and revert back to previous correct information.

- Use GMB Posts – these are free and act like mini ads you can use to promote new products or seasonal offers.

- Use Google’s booking button – if you have online booking software, you can connect it to your GMB listing and allow customers to book directly this way too.

- Allow customers to ask you questions through the Questions&Answers tool available. Remember that you need to login to the GMB dashboard to see if you have any new questions that need answering. For more information read the ‘PushON’ blog post ‘Google My Business Questions and Answers Feature’.

- If customers leave reviews for you — good or bad — make sure you respond to them (see more on reviews in the TripAdvisor section).
SEO

Search Engine Optimisation (SEO) is the name given to the process of increasing the likelihood that your website will be seen and indexed well by search engines. When people search for something using a search engine, the results are ranked in order of how useful and relevant they are for that person’s question, or the terms they used to search. A well-structured site (see the Structure section), with content (see the Content section) that is useful to a customer, will appear higher up in the list of results than one that is poorly put together or has content that Google thinks won’t be useful or relevant to the person searching.

SEO is far more complicated than this and can take a while to get to grips with. Google is just one of the search engines that will rank your business website, but it currently is leading in terms of market share at over 90%.

Important things to consider when thinking about SEO:

• A well-structured website is essential, and a way to highlight this to search engines is to create a sitemap that search engines will use to understand your site as a whole.

• The content on your site should help demonstrate why a customer should choose you and be useful to them.

• Links to (and from) other well-constructed sites will help to give your website authority and make it considered more relevant.

• Reviews and testimonials also help with the credibility of your business’ online presence.

SEO essentially involves making sure that your website is visible to as many people as possible. If you keep it up to date, relevant and helpful to your customers, it is more likely to be ranked well by a search engine. Although people may find your website through social media, most traffic will come from one of the major search engines like Google, Bing and Yahoo! so it’s good to have a basic understanding of how they work and how they will view your site.

For example, the way that Google ranks your site depends on a lot of factors. In fact, Google’s complex ranking algorithm has over 200 ranking factors that it uses to decide how high up in the results your business might appear. Read Backlinko’s ‘200 Ranking Factors: The Complete List’ to see them all.
A well-structured site, with content that is useful to a customer, will appear higher up in the list of results than one that is poorly put together or has content that Google thinks won’t be useful or relevant to the person searching.

Use Google Trends to understand the types of tourism-related terms people are using to search in Google, their relative popularity and whether a term is rising or falling over time. To use the tool, simply enter a search term into the search box and see how search behaviour is changing over time. You can then refine this data by geographic locations or compare it against other terms. Google Trends is great for understanding seasonality and identifying trending topics in your niche. For example, if you find a certain search term is being used more often, such as ‘dog friendly accommodation Norfolk,’ you can tweak the wording on your website or write a blog post specific to that search term to target your SEO. If you are targeting day-trippers from certain cities you can also see what search terms people living in those areas are using.

Resources
A great place to start if you are new to SEO or simply want to refresh your knowledge is The Beginners Guide to SEO from Moz.
**Google Ads**

While organic SEO practices can be applied to your website to aid your search engine rankings, you can also pay to advertise on many of the search engines. Paid search advertising allows you to choose keywords you want to show ads for and bid on them on a cost-per-click basis.

Keywords that are searched for will result in paid adverts being shown alongside organic results, and you will only pay if someone clicks on your ad. These ads normally appear at the top of a search engine results page, or to the side, and have looked increasingly more like organic results over time. At the moment, Google places a small green ‘Ad’ label on them.

Google Ads is an online advertising service developed by Google and is just one of many tools used as part of paid search. You set a budget, bid on your chosen keywords and pay for any clicks on any of your ads that are shown.

Some of the benefits of using AdWords:

- You can target specific groups of people, define the keywords you want to appear for and decide the messaging that you want to display.

- Along with the main ad text, Google Ads offers a number of ‘extensions’ which you can use to increase the size of your ad, thus allowing you to capture more of the ad space in search results. Extensions include options such as sitelink extensions (these sit below your ad and link to specific pages on your site) and location extensions (by linking your AdWords account to your Google My Business account, you can pull through your location to ads).

- You have complete control over your daily budget and maximum cost-per-click.

- There are a variety of targeting adjustment options including region, time of day, day of the week and device – and you can set your account to automatically bid higher or lower for people in particular groups.

- You can target those who already have shown an interest in your business and are potentially more likely to convert into sales. You can also target those who have been shopping around for similar products and services or who are similar to your previous customers.

- Google regularly launch new features to automate aspects of your campaign, including keyword bidding, ad creatives and other targeting settings. These can reduce the workload required to manage your account.

The more you bid to pay-per-click (PPC), the more likely your ad will appear in the search results. However, this is not the only factor that determines where it is placed. It isn't as simple as the highest bidder wins the highest place. Google also checks to see whether your advert is relevant and useful, and reviews how many times the ad has previously been clicked on compared to the number of times it has displayed. It gives it a rating called a Quality Score and this has a large effect on where your ad appears in the results. The higher the Quality Score, the better.

Although a useful tool, Google Ads can be time consuming to set up and to monitor. However, you can link it to your GA account to make its success easier to track.
Checklist

✓ Consider more than one metric to make sure your advert reaches the most people possible. Look at how users are engaging with your ads as well as converting on your site.

✓ Align your Google Ads account structure to your website structure. You’ll already be familiar with the layout of your site and know where to find relevant products etc. so it will help you to create the ads that represent certain products or services on your site too.

✓ Remember to include a call to action to encourage someone to do something next, for example ‘order now’ or ‘search here for...’

✓ Make sure that if someone clicks on the ad it takes them to the most appropriate landing page that gives them all the relevant information that they need.

Resources

When getting started using Google's tools in your digital marketing, Google Digital Garage is a fantastic resource. Learn about the tools you might use for your business through their online courses and training or simply read more about how you can use Google for support in digital marketing.

Read the ‘What is Google AdWords and how does it work?’ article by eConsultancy that outlines how it works, plus potential drawbacks and alternatives.

While Google Ads can take a while to understand fully, before you start a campaign it is important to check that you are set up correctly. Use LunaMetric’s ‘Google AdWords Campaign Setup Checklist’ as a reference whenever you are using the tool.

If you’re already using Google Ads, but would be interested in learning more and making more of the service, read “PPC 101: A Complete Guide to PPC Marketing Basics” by Search Engine Journal which is filled with useful tips.
Social media

Social media is a phrase used to describe platforms like Facebook, Twitter and Instagram. While many people use social media for sharing personal information, it can also be a powerful tool for a business as it’s a great way to reach and engage with customers. There are a few different platforms, each with a different way of sharing information; for example, some are more visual, like Instagram, Snapchat and Pinterest, whereas Twitter and Facebook use text and links to webpages to put across messages.

Social platforms

Some of the most frequently used social media platforms are: Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, Pinterest, LinkedIn, Snapchat and YouTube. All of them encourage users to share information with others but each has a slightly different approach.

Facebook is a great place to start with digital marketing through a social media platform, especially if you already have a Facebook page that you use personally. You can set up a business page that links directly to your website. Not only can this be a place where you share news and company information, but you also have the ability to allow people to make a booking, leave reviews, and interact directly with you.

Twitter is a platform where people typically share breaking news and opinion pieces in the form of ‘Tweets’ which are posts that only contain up to 280 characters and can also include images or video. Most contain hashtags (#) as using these allows users to follow specific topics and conversations.

Instagram allows users to edit and share photos as well as videos. It’s primarily used on mobile devices because it requires you to have a camera phone. You create a profile, then upload pictures with captions underneath. The app allows you to put ‘filters’ on the images or change the lighting or focus etc. to make them more attractive, making it a great platform for creative industries. You don’t need Facebook to run an Instagram account; however, Facebook owns Instagram, which allows for some integration between the two platforms, especially when running advertising.

With over 700 million monthly active users, Instagram has launched IGTV, allowing users to upload long-form, vertical videos. A little like a YouTube channel, businesses can make short films about new products, services, or anything that promotes their work. This could also be a great way to share behind the scenes footage.

Like every aspect of digital marketing, social media takes time.

Pinterest allows you to create virtual pin boards with images that often link through to other websites or places that you can buy products. You can categorise the boards and name them however you like. People often go to Pinterest for inspiration, so this could be a great way to share pictures of your venue, hotel or attraction and make sure it links to your website to drive traffic.
Romney, Hythe & Dymchurch Railway, Kent

Romney, Hythe & Dymchurch Railway in Kent runs from the Cinque Port town of Hythe, terminating in Dungeness, a National Nature Reserve, with four stations in between. The railway provides an opportunity to explore this unique corner of Kent.

“It’s important to be selective with the channels we use as, like many tourist attractions, we have a small marketing team and time resources are limited. We use Facebook, Twitter, Instagram and YouTube. We began to use Snapchat but found that it wasn’t reaching the right audience. We decide what content to post on which channel by using checks such as length of text, whether it’s an image, video or live feed, what the content is about (an event, brand awareness, urgent information), the audience we want to reach and its relevance. Our audience love to engage with our live video feeds across all our social media channels.”

LinkedIn is possibly the least consumer-facing platform and probably isn’t the best way to connect with customers. However, it is a great way to talk with other businesses and share the more corporate aspects of your business.

YouTube is where users can upload video content to their own channel. This channel would be useful for showing off locations for tourist attractions, behind the scenes footage of new developments in your business and generally showcasing what your business has to offer. YouTube is a subsidiary of Google and using this platform can often contribute to your SEO ranking if Google sees your content as relevant to users. However, it can be time consuming as editing footage and uploading it may not be a quick process.
Case Study

Salad Days & Holi Moli chalets, Somerset

“Facebook is best for our business, as it reaches our target audience. Online platforms change regularly so we complete as much social media training as we can to keep up with current trends. We received free SEO training and guidance on social media use by joining Facebook groups, which also connect us to other small businesses. Our next most successful platform is Instagram, but Twitter has given us the widest reach, especially within the business community. We have received bookings as a direct result of posts on all these platforms.

We work closely with a great local blogger at SomersetCool who connects to the right type of audience for us, featuring us in articles. We found our social media ‘spiked’ after these blogs went live and they also helped us to reach a wider audience. This inspired us to write our own blog Where’s Maverick, a dog’s perspective on visiting Somerset, Devon & Exmoor. We link to the posts across our social media and it gives us great engagement with guests and local businesses.”

Like every aspect of digital marketing, social media takes time. It’s best to choose one or two platforms that best fit your business and focus on them.

Using any (or all) of these social media channels can potentially help you reach digital marketing goals in a lot of ways:

- The platforms are usually free to use and have simple setups, making them a cost-effective method of reaching customers.
- You can place ads within your social media feeds on platforms like Facebook and Twitter and include links to your site or calls to action to drive traffic and leads.
- Including links from your business account on social media to your website can help to boost traffic to it.
- Customers can interact with you by ‘tagging’ your company name or sending you a message to ask questions or give feedback.
- Using a visual platform like Instagram can help people understand more about your brand, see your location and tell a story about your business.
- Engaging social media content is often shared widely, exposing your business to new audiences and increasing brand awareness.
- The audience potential is huge: Statista reports that Facebook has over 2.4 billion users and that Twitter has 330 million users.
Like every aspect of digital marketing, social media takes time. It’s best to choose one or two platforms that best fit your business and focus on them, rather than attempting to use all of them, at least to start with. If you have limited time, it might be best to start with Facebook as it is simple to setup and use, especially as you might already be using it personally and have a grasp of its features.

Social media also allows highly customisable ads. Facebook ads, for example, allow you to target users by things like location, interests, industry and even purchase history.

Anyone can view your entire business Facebook page without having to ‘like’ it, as business pages are completely open. This means the page is indexed by search engines, meaning anything you post can appear in search results (this does not happen with personal profile pages). You can share videos and images on the platform too, making it a good all-round platform to begin with.

Social media also allows highly customisable ads. Facebook ads, for example, allow you to target users by things like location, interests, industry and even purchase history. You can target a suitable audience for your service.

Resources
If you want a full breakdown of social media, what it is and what it can do, read ‘What Is Social Media? Explaining the Big Trend’ by LifeWire for an extensive guide.

MOZ frequently update their social media blog on a wide range of related topics.

Checklist
✓ Choose the most suitable platform for your business and focus your attention there. Each platform has its own setup guide and help section to guide you through.
✓ Remember that some platforms are faster paced than others, for instance Twitter users expect answers from a company quickly, so be aware of your time constraints.
✓ Imagery and video makes posts stand out in newsfeeds and can be more engaging than text alone. Refer to your checklist for including visual content on your website.
✓ People often use the more visual platforms like Pinterest and Instagram for inspiration, so this could be a great way to share pictures of your venue, hotel or attraction and make sure it links to your website to drive traffic.
✓ LinkedIn might not be considered consumer friendly but could be useful if you were looking to hire more staff or gain information on what competitors are doing.
York Gin, York

“We always respond to people who have commented on our posts. If you have lots of responses, an emoji will suffice! This creates goodwill towards our brand.

There are many international and national days which can trigger marketing ideas and news events can be helpful to stay topical on social media. We try to do something different from everyone else to get noticed. Don’t just follow the crowd for the sake of it.

We also aren’t afraid to share other brands’ content if it’s appropriate and we love it. Chances are your followers will too and appreciate you telling them about it. Emotional responses to social posts are great and humour is a good tool - who doesn’t like a laugh or a smile?

As soon as you open a channel, your followers will assume they can contact you on it: to order products, ask questions, give feedback etc. We’ve been very clear that, however customers contact us, we will respond as quickly and positively as possible. As a result, we’ve made lots of sales and contacts through instant messaging.”

Facebook Business covers the basics with their ‘How to set up a Facebook Page for Your Company’ guide. If you are already set up, and want to know how to build an active and engaged audience for your business, read Facebook’s ‘Promote Your Page’ section.

Read ‘Getting Started on Social Media’ from HM Government to cover the basics, plus see links on most of the platform’s set up guides aimed at small business owners.

‘How to Start A Successful YouTube Channel for Your Business’ from Wix covers the basics of getting started on the platform from a business perspective.
Paid advertising

The social media platforms we have looked at so far are free to use if you want to use them to connect and engage with customers. But it is also possible to use paid social advertising as a digital marketing tactic to reach customers and get your message out there. This is similar to using paid search instead of organic as we explained in the Google AdWords section.

Paid social advertising uses sponsored content or advertising to boost your website presence, products or services in third party feeds and pages. You are paying to display adverts and a cost is incurred, depending on the type of ad you use. Many of them incur a cost-per-click (CPC). By choosing the specific audience you want to reach using a range of demographic tools, paid social can be a way to get your message to your customers or potential customers effectively, inexpensively, and efficiently.

Some important information about paid social advertising:

- Paid social advertising targeting options allow you to reach a highly targeted audience, so is a great option if you’re looking to market to a specific group of potential or previous customers.

- You can set a budget beforehand to ensure you manage the cost of your ads.

- Due to the way platforms like Facebook control the content users see when they log on (called an algorithm), using paid social is becoming more necessary to reach people with your brand’s message than by simply posting as normal.

Paid social advertising uses sponsored content or advertising to boost your website presence, products or services in third party feeds and pages.

It’s important to consider the type of ads that will do well on specific platforms. For example, the wide variety of Facebook ad formats make it perfect for business-to-consumer (B2C) campaigns, whereas highly visual content will do better on Instagram for increasing web traffic, sales and driving awareness.
Twitter ads help grow awareness and drive clicks to your website from consumers, but LinkedIn is more ideal for business-to-business (B2B) interactions than reaching your customers.

The ads on Pinterest are often used to generate immediate sales of your product or services. Your paid content blends with other pins, allowing your brand to work as another way for people to visit your site.

You can also drive traffic towards your business’ YouTube channel through paid YouTube advertising too. There are three types of ads available through Google TrueView video advertising. You can:

• Create an ad that is played at the beginning, middle or end of a partner YouTube video, known as an in-stream ad.

• Create ads that are displayed in the search results for particular queries, called an in-search ad.

• Create an ad that appears on the YouTube watch page. This is an in-display ad.

Resources
Read Facebook Business’s Facebook Ads guide for setting up and using paid ads. Most social media platforms will have a similar guide available through their site or app.

If you’re already using some paid ads on social media platforms, but want to expand your knowledge or try something new, read ‘Paid Social for Content Marketing Launches’ from MOZ that suggests four tactics to try.

For a look at YouTube advertising, see Brightedge’s post entitled ‘YouTube Advertising’ and consider ‘How to Succeed with YouTube SEO,’ also from Brightedge, as further reading.

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**Case Study**

**Romney, Hythe & Dymchurch Railway, Kent**

“The only social media advertising we pay for is via Facebook. We don’t promote general content or individual pages as we have found from experience and feedback from other attractions, that although ‘Likes’ and ‘Followers’ will increase, the engagement rate doesn’t increase by the same percentage. The new followers are not as high quality as those that follow you organically.

If we are promoting a new event at little notice or have an event that isn’t selling as well as we’d like, we do pay for Facebook Advertising for that event page. An event page allows consumers to respond, ask questions and invite other people and also sends out an automatic reminder to respondents too.

Facebook Ads Manager allows advertisers to select the location, age, gender, marital status and interests of users to your advert, thus targeting the most appropriate audience to your product. The analytic measurements allow you to monitor the effectiveness of the advert and respond accordingly, altering the message or the placement to achieve the desired results.”
Scheduling tools

If you have numerous social media accounts for your business, you might want to consider using a scheduling tool to help you manage them in a more efficient way. These are online tools that gather together your various accounts and put them into one dashboard, so you can see the separate feeds all in one place, plus you can schedule Tweets, posts and ads to go out at specific times that you choose. This way, you can plan your social campaigns when you have time in your schedule and take the time to ensure they reach the right audience at the right time.

There are a few different tools available, and some platforms have their own version - for example, Twitter has TweetDeck - but the most commonly known are Buffer, Hootsuite and Sprout Social. Each one has a different look and feel, so choose the one that feels the easiest to use for your business. They have various priced plans to choose from, so factor this into your digital marketing budget.

The benefits of scheduling your social media posts:

- It saves you time and can help social media from becoming a distraction. Once it's scheduled you can focus your attention elsewhere, knowing that it's covered.

- It keeps your business visible to your audience and potential customers at all times.

- It's useful for when you want to reach your customers outside of business hours (weekends and public holidays etc), but don’t want to have to log in yourself outside of business hours to set posts or ads live.

- Your posts can be more spread out as opposed to sporadic bursts that might be lost in your customers’ social feeds.

If you have numerous social media accounts for your business, consider using a scheduling tool to help you manage them in a more efficient way.

Checklist

- Social media is a more instantaneous way of connecting and invites conversation with customers, so be aware that some posts may not be suitable for scheduling.

- Make sure you use your scheduling tool’s full capabilities as many come with analytic components, so you can measure the performance of your posts.

- Avoid scheduling questions or posts that are likely to get a greater response from your customers at a time when you won’t be available to answer or respond.

- Analyse your post schedule to see if the timing can be better to achieve your set goals.
As time can be precious when running a business, it makes sense to explore your options with scheduling. If you know that you want to post a certain number of times a week across two or more platforms but that you might not have time during the week to do so in the moment, you could schedule all messages for the coming week on a Sunday night then shift your focus to another area of running your business.

Some posts will not be suited to a schedule. Posts that require you to engage with your audience in a timely manner are better if you are available to be on the platform at that time. However, you can use a schedule to build excitement around a certain occasion, or a deal that will be live on a set date. You can still post valuable and shareable content but have time to manage other aspects of your business while it gets seen by your audience.

Resources

Lifewire have an informational post ‘What is TweetDeck and Is It Only for Twitter?’ all about this specific tool.

For more on scheduling in general, try ‘A Reference Guide for Social Media Scheduling – Tools and Tactics’ from Razor Social. It covers the reasons it could benefit you, plus takes a look at the tools available.
Influencers and bloggers

An influencer is someone who has the power to affect the purchase decisions of others due to their authority, knowledge, position or relationship with an audience. This audience is usually their social media following – Media Agency UM found that 44% of Brits and 47% of global consumers said they were influenced by opinions shared online as part of their annual study. Influencers post about their experiences and review products and services, including the places they travel to and stay. A blogger writes frequent, long-form content or creates videos based on their experiences. Not all influencers blog, they may only share photos to a social feed or Instagram story.

It can be difficult as a business to know if an influencer or blogger is the right person to work with. They must have the right kind of followers, not simply a large amount. If only a small percentage of their audience is your business’ demographic, even if they share something positive online about your attraction or service, it may not have the desired effect. Look for people who don’t just have large followings, but who have followers that are engaged. That means lots of comments under their posts or frequent shares of their content. These influencers are more valuable to you than a celebrity who has thousands of followers but no real engagement.

Influencers can increase your business’ credibility, bring a fresh perspective to a service you offer or simply provide exposure online for your brand. Working with them can be a positive experience – but remember that it is a business transaction and the interaction with them has to be supportive of and aligned with your business goals.

Start your influencer search close to home
Go through your business’ social media channels and identify the people who follow you most actively – commenting regularly, watching your stories each day, or always liking your posts and content. If they’re already passionate about your business, these people may also be willing to act as brand advocates for you. You can also search for ‘influencer’ and the topic related to your business on Google. The top results might be too expensive to invest in working with, but this will give you an idea of who to look for and the types of content they create.

Journalists can also be great influencers, especially within local communities. Find your local news (papers and magazines as well as online) and journalists’ social channels and see if they are a good fit for posting about your business.

Keep your influencer search focused
Compile a list of potential influencers to approach but optimise your efforts by focusing on engagement and relevance. If an influencer creates content that doesn’t align with your brand values, they could do more harm than good.

How should I approach an influencer?
Establish a connection. Have they recently written a review that you enjoyed reading? “I enjoyed your review of xxx”; Is their video channel one you enjoy? “Here at xxx we always watch your videos because xxx”; Have they worked with a brand that aligns with or is connected to your own? “I loved your video/post about xxx, we do a similar thing here at xxx”.

Let them know why you’re a fan of their content. Give a clear and concrete example of how their work relates to your brand’s goals and what you’d like to achieve through working with them.
What’s in it for them? Influencers want to provide valuable content for their followers, so your brand must align with theirs. And in return for their posting, even if you’re on a tight budget, you need to give them an incentive. This could be:

- A link to their content or their website on your website
- Social shares from your own social media channels
- A link to their content or website in your next email newsletter
- A free product or service so they can test it out before anyone else (make sure their review gets linked directly back to your business)
- The opportunity to provide an interview or testimonial which links back to their website

During the campaign
Provide the influencer or blogger with resources. Send them your brand guidelines, photography, videos and anything else you think may help them get to know your business.

The Advertising Standards Authority (ASA) works to regulate influencer content on Instagram and other social media channels. It must be clear to followers that a product or service is being advertised to them. If an influencer is receiving payment, each post about your business must be marked as a ‘paid partnership’ at the top. If they are simply advertising your business or a service you offer, the posts must all include the hashtag #AD.
After the campaign
Don’t forget to say thank you! This is still a business partnership, so thank them for working with you. Keep communication lines open because an influencer campaign doesn’t have to be limited to a single post. By following up you may inspire them to post about you again in the future or link to you in a relevant post.

Resources
Have you been approached by an influencer, but not sure where to start? Read Post Planner’s guide ‘5 of the Most Useful Ways to Work with Social Media Influencers’.

Hubspot’s ‘The Ultimate Guide to Influencer Marketing in 2019’ takes a deep dive into the different types of influencer and shows the growth of this form of marketing across all industries, including tourism.

The ASA have official guidance for social influencers on the clarity of their promotions, but it won’t hurt for you to have a read through yourself too. ‘New guidance launched for social influencers’ is a comprehensive guide.
Digital channels

Earlier in this toolkit we discussed ways to make sure your business is digital ready and how different aspects of digital can help you grow your revenue. This section will discuss some channels that can be explored by businesses who are more comfortable with digital and looking to go further.

While a significant portion of potential customers can be reached through the channels previously described, there are also consumers who want to use alternative ways of planning their trip. Digitally-mature tourism businesses can consider these extra channels as potential additional sources of revenue and customers. Here we cover some of the most common avenues for tourism businesses looking to take the next step in their digital journey.

TripAdvisor

TripAdvisor has grown into the best-known provider of reviews in the travel and tourism sector, which can be both validation and a challenge for business owners.

In the last year, TripAdvisor has changed its design slightly to appear more like a social media channel. Forbes covered the changes in its article ‘TripAdvisor Wants to Become Your New Social Media Feed - At Least For Traveling’ explaining that “Businesses can now take advantage of the platform and use the travel feed to reach new customers and reach people in real time.” You could now use the platform to post offers or exciting news, as well as check reviews.

With reviews being posted, whether the business promotes itself on the site or not, it’s key that operators are aware of what is being said about their business and have a plan of response if required.

There’s no denying the power of reviews, with studies suggesting that up to 4 in 5 of all travellers check online reviews as part of their consideration when looking at a trip.

To begin with:

- Start actively monitoring your online reputation by putting “(your business name) reviews” into a search engine. You will likely have results returned from sites such as TripAdvisor, a Google My Business listing or perhaps Yelp for food and drink. You can also receive reviews on Facebook.

- It’s important to investigate these and note the frequency, average rating and common threads in the comments. This allows you to formulate the right strategy moving forward.

- If your business is only receiving a handful of reviews per month, but they are positive, these will be beneficial in pushing your business up in rankings on review sites. The more you can prompt your customers to leave reviews, especially if they are satisfied customers, the better. Make it easy for them to do so by putting direct links to your review profiles in multiple places such as a newsletter, your website or email communication.
There’s no denying the power of reviews, with studies suggesting that up to 4 in 5 of all travellers check online reviews as part of their consideration when looking at a trip.
While there may be negative reviews, it’s also important to monitor and acknowledge positive ones, even a simple “Thank you, that means a lot for the team to hear.” This approach humanises your business and encourages repeat visits.

TripAdvisor has several paid advertising options, such as Sponsored Placements which push your business to the top of the listings. These work in a similar way to Google Ads, with set budgets and opportunities to put in special offers. Here are ‘7 tips for making the most of placements’ from TripAdvisor if you decide to use them.

Resources
TripAdvisor have a significant TripAdvisor insights section which gives good background reading on the platform, from basic introductory guides through to how to respond to travellers leaving reviews, including negative ones.

The platform also publishes a more detailed official TripAdvisor Help and Support section which has a wealth of very practical advice and how you can use TripAdvisor as a business owner.

For some quick tips in optimising your listing and use of TripAdvisor, read ‘8 tips to get the most from your TripAdvisor listings’ from ReviewTrackers.

For more on Instant Booking through TripAdvisor read their FAQ piece.

Following this pattern gives responses such as “Thank you for your comment {username}. I’m sorry you didn’t have a positive experience on your visit to us and want to say we take any feedback on board and would like to resolve this for you. I can see that you visited us on {date} and we didn’t meet your expectations by {detail}. We faced some significant operational challenges that day, and despite our best efforts we’re very sorry that these affected your visit. That shouldn’t have happened. In order to make this better, we’d like to contact you directly to see how we could renew your confidence in us.”
Metasearch and Online Travel Agents (OTAs)

These two terms are often mistaken for being one and the same; however, they do differ in both technological detail, the user experience, and critically how your business interacts with them.

Online Travel Agents (OTAs) aggregate availability and pricing for thousands of hotels into one platform. The most common examples are the hotel booking websites such as Booking.com or Expedia. The OTA takes payment for the booking and collects customer details, then passes these on to the accommodation provider and charges a commission payment.

The term metasearch refers to websites that take other search results then aggregates them together. In travel this typically refers to sites such as Kayak or Trivago (and indeed Google itself via its Hotel Ads feature). The definition of a metasearch site is that for a single product (usually accommodation) it brings in information and pricing from other websites and displays them in a comparative list for that hotel. Commonly, once a user selects the product they want, the user is referred to the booking site (usually an OTA) to complete their purchase. The metasearch site charges the website which receives the traffic for the click.

While the usual dynamic is that the metasearch providers collect information across OTAs and then pass the customer on once the price has been selected, there is an increasing blurring of the lines, with some introducing ‘book now’ options directly. In addition, OTAs are becoming more like metasearch providers where they are offering price comparison to retain the customer.

When evaluating the potential of these websites as sources of revenue for your business you need to weigh up several factors:

- All bookings via a third party will attract a commission, so while they do represent extra revenue, there is a cost.
- If you had 100 bookings via an OTA, which cost a total of £2000, could you generate more profitable revenue with that cost by investing elsewhere?
- Consider the lifetime value of a customer. If they were to book again directly, you’ll potentially save subsequent commissions and gain a customer that might visit you several times in the future.
- Be aware that some OTAs offer loyalty schemes that could make it harder for you to get bookings directly through your own site.
Checklist

 ✓ Check the functionality of your existing booking systems to connect with OTAs and metasearch providers.
 ✓ Search for and claim your listings and ensure all details are accurate and fully featured.
 ✓ Create a financial model of the commissions paid when evaluating these channels.
 ✓ Check what commission is payable as different charges exist across different OTAs and platforms. This also applies to cancellation agreements. Read an ‘Analysis of Major Online Travel Agencies’ by Cloudbeds which is updated regularly and outlines changes and developments with OTAs.

The benefit of OTAs is that the cost is borne only on successful bookings. However, OTA listings are often very price sensitive, as your listing is being compared to hundreds of others in and around your location. Also, it’s hard to reflect special attractions of your property, such as painting workshops or being ideal for walkers and pet owners.

In some cases, you can log in and upload your information, pricing and availability manually. OTAs work best with an automatic feed, usually a channel manager. This connects to your property management system (PMS), which then controls the distribution across a variety of online channels. A channel management system might open these markets more easily; they are often based on a commission model.

Airbnb

Airbnb launched in 2008. Its original USP was that you stayed in someone’s spare room, but now hotels, bed & breakfasts and experiences are all available to book through the platform. Airbnb hosts, like any business, have a legal duty of care to their guests and must comply with relevant health & safety and fire regulations.

Creating an account on Airbnb is free and there is an onsite guide to becoming an Airbnb host. Airbnb operate a ‘shared host and guest fee’ as the standard fee structure for individuals. This fee is 3% for most hosts.

Hosts who offer experiences must pay a 20% service fee, calculated based on the price of the experience. If the experience you offer is through a not-for-profit partnership, this fee is waived.

After guests have stayed with you, they have 14 days to write a review. Neither host nor guest can see the review until either both have written a review, or one has written a review and 14 days have passed.

You can write a response that will show up directly below the review, which is visible to other guests and hosts. You’ll need to write your response within 30 days of when the review was written.

Resources

Some metasearch platforms offer help and advice for hotels around metasearch including Trivago’s Hotel Manager blog.

You can join and log in directly to metasearch providers such as Trivago or OTAs such as Booking.com or Expedia in order to edit and control the listing generated on their website.
TXGB

VisitEngland’s Tourism Exchange Great Britain (TXGB) is a business-to-business digital platform that allows B&Bs, hotels, visitor attractions and experiences to connect to a wide range of international distributors (including Booking.com, Ctrip and Expedia) all from one place.

It’s designed to help English tourism businesses grow in international markets and to give distributors access to a wide range of tourism products, services and experiences.

How does it work?
TXGB connects to your booking system and feeds relevant content, live availability and pricing into the distributor sites that you, as a supplier, opt into. It can also be used to identify trends across all channels, thanks to booking data and sales analytics.

If you don’t have a booking system, TXGB allows you to load this information in manually through a part of the system called TX Load. TXGB gives you your own personalised booking pages that link to your website or social media accounts, making sure you’re visible. You can add:

- Location maps
- Banners
- Background images
- Search rules
- Image galleries
- Booking restrictions
- Facebook and Google Analytics

TXGB gives you control of your product every step of the way. You can display your availability all year round, or select certain periods to advertise such as low season.

How do I sign up?
Signing up to TXGB is a simple process through the TXGB website. There are no upfront fees, as you work with the distributor commission rates that you have chosen. TXGB takes a booking fee of 2.5% to cover the ongoing development of the system. If no booking is made, there’s no fee.

Resources
The TXGB website has a FAQs section that can help you set up, explains terms and jargon and offers a way to get in touch for more support if necessary.

There is also a support team to help every step of the way at support@txgb.co.uk.