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 An out of date website, or one with incorrect details, could put off potential customers.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](image)

- ✔ 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 on its blog.

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

Case Study
Google Analytics can tell you what’s driving people (traffic) to your website, which pages they land on and how long they stay there.

**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.