Building and managing a best practice tourism website
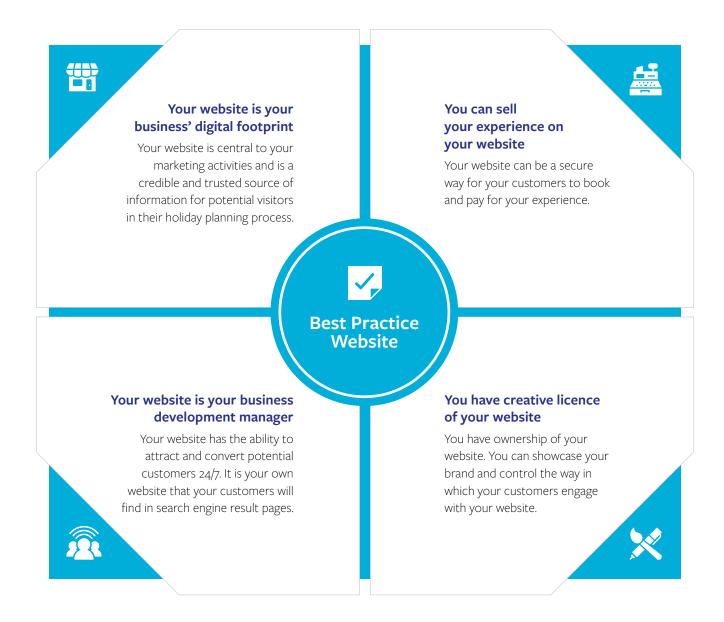
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Building and managing a tourism website is considered a foundational marketing tactic for tourism businesses, often seen as the most practical and cost-effective marketing investment.

Your website is your business' digital footprint

Your website is central to your marketing activities and is a credible and trusted source of information for potential visitors in their holiday planning process.

You can sell your experience on your website

Your website can be a secure way for your customers to book and pay for your experience.

Best Practice Website

Your website is your business development manager

Your website has the ability to attract and convert potential customers 24/7. It is your own website that your customers will find in search engine result pages.

You have creative licence of your website

You have ownership of your website. You can showcase your brand and control the way in which your customers engage with your website.

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Tourism website fundamentals

Below are four areas of development to consider when building a new tourism website.

1   **2**   **3**   **4**

STEP 1	STEP 2	STEP 3	STEP 4
Understanding your audience	Articulating your tourism experience	Addressing your Ideal Customer(s) travel motivations and needs	Showcasing customer advocacy

Step 1: Understanding your audience

Think about your website as a simple business development tool, to identify what your Ideal Customer(s) need to know to make a purchase decision.

Top Tip

Complete the '<u>Ideal customer template</u>' to map out your Ideal Customer(s) travel path to purchase. This will assist you to understand how to build a website that can help solve your Ideal Customer's challenges and support their motivations through content creation.

Step 2: Articulating your tourism experience

Optimise your 'About Us' page

Customers like to interact and engage with people, not brands. Therefore, the more personable your website content, the more likely you will be to connect with your potential customers.

- Share who you are, why you are in business and what you stand for. This may require some deep thinking.
- Share your commitment to your community. For example, commitment to sustainable practices.

Outline features and benefits of your experience

In addition to sharing the features of your experience or product (what it is you offer), articulating the benefits of your experience to your Ideal Customer(s) is an important inclusion. Remember, this could be what sets your offering apart from your competitors.

Example: Accommodation
Features: King size bed, pillow menu, Nespresso machine.
Benefits: The best night's sleep outside of your own bed without rushing out first thing in the morning to buy a coffee.

Example: Tour Operator
Features: Maximum six people, lunch included.
Benefits: Smaller numbers on each tour means we can customise the tour and linger longer at places that you love. A delicious, locally produced lunch will fill you up, ready to take on the second half of the day.

Include images and videos

High quality images and videos are influential for potential customers planning and booking holidays.

- Use full width images on your website where possible (minimum size 2048px wide at 72dpi).
- Create and embed responsive YouTube videos on your site.

Top Tip

Optimise your page load speed by ensuring that images and videos are sized and formatted correctly.

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Step 3: Addressing your Ideal Customer(s) travel motivations and needs

As a highly trusted resource for customers planning and booking holidays, your website is one of the best places to share inspiring and helpful content in the form of blog articles. Blog articles allow you to showcase the depth of your experience and provide an opportunity for customers to engage with your website.

Top Tip

Use your blog articles to address your Ideal Customer(s) challenges or motivations. Storytelling is a powerful content marketing opportunity. Experiment with a mix of seasonal topics (those that are bound by time) and evergreen topics (those that are relevant all year round), aligned to your Ideal Customer(s) motivations and needs.

Step 4: Showcasing customer advocacy

Customer reviews are often seen as a trusted form of marketing for tourism businesses. Therefore, it is recommended that you share customer advocacy on your website to show authentic, transparent social proof for your experience without website users having to leave and find those reviews elsewhere.

Consider embedding external reviews such as TripAdvisor reviews throughout your website for authenticity.

Learn more in the **Online listings and customer reviews** guide.

Website development and design tips

Below are some fundamental considerations when designing and managing a tourism website.

Mobile-first design

It is likely that the majority of visitors to your website will be browsing on a mobile device.

'Mobile-first', or responsive website design, refers to a development method which optimises the design and functionality of a site for mobile devices with smaller screens. Website page templates and content are both automatically adjusted as screen sizes increase, to make effective use of the available space.

A mobile-first design is considered best practice because:

- Google prioritises webpages that are optimised for smartphones.
- A poor mobile experience could impact your potential to generate bookings from your website.

Writing copy for web

When writing content for your Ideal Customer(s), keep in mind the following copywriting best practices for web:

- Write in plain language. This ensures your website is inclusive and accessible.
- Avoid using acronyms or similes. Use common words to describe your experience.

Great editorial content that really connects with readers is often written in second person. This means when you write, you are referring to the reader as 'You, Your, You're'. Also, try and write as you talk. Use your personal voice to express your business's personality.

Example: National Zoo & Aquarium

"You can even pat a cheetah, feed a bear or become acquainted with a meerkat during some of the most amazing hands-on animal experiences in Australia."

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Optimise your webpages for search engines

Optimising your website gives your webpages the best opportunity to rank highly in search engine results. A highly ranking search result attracts a higher percentage of qualified click-throughs, which increases the chance of bookings being made for your business.

Optimising your webpages does not need to be considered something 'extra' that you do when creating your webpages. The process should form part of your overall content writing and page development.

Top Tips

- Think about your Ideal Customer(s)' travel related questions and what they might be searching for when planning their travel e.g. 'Top things to do in Canberra'.
- Use the search query as your on-page heading.
- Craft website content which addresses and answers your Ideal Customer(s)' search query e.g. a blog post about the top things to do in Canberra.

Intuitive layout

- Keep the design of your website simple
- Keep your navigation language generic such as 'About', 'Book', 'Blog', 'Contact'
- Use a mobile navigation dropdown as a default (for desktop and smartphone templates)
- Ensure you have a dynamic phone number (which can be clicked on by users accessing the site on a mobile device).
- Ensure all hyperlinks and calls to action are easily distinguishable
- Use breadcrumbs on each of your webpages to allow users to retrace their steps

Consistent branding and design

Your brand is the foundation of your business, therefore it is important to ensure your brand is reflected consistently across your Ideal Customer(s) touchpoints, including your website.

- Your logo, colour scheme and iconography should remain consistent
- Lead with stunning, large format imagery
- Use 'white space' effectively as you lay out your content, images and other visual components – this makes the content easier to scan and digest
- Break up your content:
  - Use short, and uncomplicated paragraphs – one or two sentences
  - Create bulleted and numbered lists
  - Write single-line paragraphs
  - Vary sentence and paragraph length
- Use Heading structures (e.g. H1, H2, etc to support your website users to scan your content and assist search engines to identify the core themes of the content
- Avoid centering headings or text – people tend to read webpages from left to right, and in a F shape pattern

Optimise calls to action

It is recommended that each page of your website has a call to action. A call to action is something that you want the user to do after reading the content on that page. It may include navigating to another page on your website, signing up to your e-newsletter, calling you by phone or booking your experience. Hyperlinks, embedded sign-up forms, book now buttons and linked phone numbers are just some examples of ways in which to encourage the user to easily take the next step.

Remember, calls to action are your way of influencing the user journey on your website. Ensure your main sales call to action, such as a 'Book Now' or 'Call Us' button, is available and accessible from your main navigation. This means it will always be identifiable to the user, no matter what page they land on.

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Ensure your contact details are front and centre

It is recommended that you include your contact details in the main navigation of your website, as well as in your footer. You may even like to consider having your main contact method available in your header, such as a dynamic phone number (which can be clicked on for those accessing the site on a mobile device).

Integrate your booking system

There are numerous ways to integrate your booking system with your website. See the resource 'Selling your experience online' for more information.

It is a good idea to ensure your booking and payment process is streamlined and can be completed in three to four steps. The longer it takes to complete a purchase, the more opportunities you give your potential customers to abandon the sale. Test your shopping cart payment process, and ensure it is succinct and easy to complete.

Accessibility considerations

Building an accessible website means designing websites that can be used by people who have visual, motor, auditory, speech, or cognitive disabilities. Things to consider include:

- Ensure your images have captions to support low vision or impaired vision visitors – this helps those who use braille readers to read web content
- Allow users to increase font sizes and avoid using thin font styles
- Keep contrast sensitivities in mind, ensure clear contrast between fonts and background colours
- Support keyboard navigation – this can assist people with motor disabilities, visual impairment, and other disabilities to navigate content
- Offer scripts for video content

Tracking user engagement and conversions

With free and accessible tools such as Google Analytics you can track the movements of users on your website. This sort of information can help you to refine your marketing investments, including:

- Who your website users are (e.g. where they are located, what device they use)
- Where they have come from (e.g. search engines, social media, email marketing, paid advertising)
- What they do when they are on your site (e.g. the content they engage with most)
- Whether they convert into bookings

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Nurturing your website

Managing a website is not a 'set and forget' activity. Outlined below are some strategies on how to nurture your website to ensure it remains high performing and functional.

Write and publish content

Investing time in writing and sharing relevant content to support your Ideal Customer(s) travel related questions is an essential and ongoing activity for all tourism businesses.

- Aim to publish one new blog article each month - This helps to build relevant and refreshed content. Publishing new content also helps to cement your overall Domain Authority and improves your visibility in search engines.

Use data to inform improvements

Bi-monthly website 'health checks' are recommended to keep a close eye on website users' engagement and conversion data.

Use the data available in your Google Analytics dashboard to understand:

- Where your website users come from
  - □ This will help you determine which marketing activities are driving visitation to your website.
- What your website users do on your site
  - □ Understanding what your website users do, or what content they engage with provides clues as to the type of content you should publish in the future, remove or source from elsewhere.
- Do your website users convert?
  - □ Conversions are meaningful interactions that users have with your website, which help you to achieve your marketing objectives. If your website is not converting, then you need to identify the reasons why, and make changes to your content, call to actions and user experience to improve conversions.

Regular technical maintenance

- Engaging your website developer to manage the security, backups, software updates and other functions of your website will ensure peace of mind.