



tourism  
northernireland

# Guide to being online

Dream  
Plan  
Book  
Experience  
Share



Google



Share



You  
Tube



YAHOO!



G+



Book Now



Bing

## Contents

<b>What is the importance of being online? .....</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>What is the importance of appearing in Google? ....</b>	<b>4</b>
How do I appear in Google? .....	4
<b>How else can I advertise my site/ my offers? .....</b>	<b>5</b>
Online display advertising. ....	5
Social media .....	5
Get involved with Tourism NI's social media channels .....	6
E-mail marketing .....	7
<b>What about mobile? .....</b>	<b>8</b>
<b>Is your website performing? .....</b>	<b>9</b>
<b>What is a booking engine? .....</b>	<b>11</b>
<b>Keeping up to date on Tourism NI's consumer website .....</b>	<b>12</b>
<b>Glossary of terms .....</b>	<b>13</b>

---

## What is the importance of being online?

According to Google there are 5 stages to travel when it comes to online:  
**Dreaming > Planning > Booking > Experiencing > Sharing**

Google splits these down as follows:

- 85% of travel planners consider the internet their main source for planning travel.
- Planning: Statistics tell us, they'll be visiting around 20 different websites in order to find the 'perfect' hotel and according to Google 66% of people spend time shopping around before booking travel.
- Booking: In 2014, 81% of leisure travellers used desktop when booking with 14% using smartphones to complete the travel process.
- Experiencing: In 2014, over 53% of travellers have used a mobile device to find travel-related information, making it more important than ever to have a mobile responsive website.
- Sharing: Travellers are sharing more about their own trips leading to more online content that will inspire others to dream.

The above figures demonstrate that a large number of people, and in the case of business travellers, the majority of people, use the internet extensively to research, plan and book their trips and stays.

Therefore if you do not have your property online you are losing out on even being considered as a possibility for the customer's choice of lodgings.

## What is the importance of appearing in Google?

With **86.75% of the UK population using Google to search the internet** (according to Statista.com June 2016), **it goes without saying that in order for your business to be found, you need to be appearing in Google.** This doesn't just mean that you need to appear if someone searches for your business name. You must also appear under keywords for those who don't yet know who you are, type in. For example if you are a B&B called Fab BnB, located in Belfast, you are already likely to appear in Google if someone searches for Fab BnB Belfast- and for a person to be typing this in, they will already know / have heard of you. What about those people who type in 'B&B Belfast' or 'B&B near Stranmillis'? Does your website appear then? If not, you are actively losing business.

### How do I appear in Google?

To ensure that your website appears in search results when people search you have two options. The first is search engine optimisation which is the process of optimising your website pages so that they are structured correctly, with good content, where that content is relevant to what people are actually searching for. You can find more details about the steps you need to take to optimise your site in our SEO basics for beginners toolkit.

The other option you have to appear in Google is Google Adwords – a Google advertising option which allows you to show ads when people type in specified keywords or terms, and where you pay only for the times that people click on these ads.

Google Adwords is a great marketing tool and it can ensure that you have ads visible very quickly. However it can also be expensive as you are charged varying amounts (dependent on the term) for every click. With search engine optimisation, when you do the work on your own site correctly, your organic rankings will increase without you having to pay for each click.

---

## How else can I advertise my site/my offers?

As well as Google, there are many other ways of raising awareness of your website and your property. Google Adwords allows you to advertise your property not only on Google search engine but also on other websites which 'host' or sell ad space- for example: many people who have their own websites will monetize them by selling advertising space via advertising platforms such as Google.

### Online display advertising

Display advertising is a type of advertising typically made up of text, image, banner or video ads which appear on website pages alongside similar editorial content.

Online display is often used in a similar way as offline billboard advertising and can result in a widespread 'branding' effect.

### Social media

Social media in the form of social networks including the likes of Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn, Instagram etc has, for the past few years been making headlines, not only because of its uptake by the general public but also because of its impact on businesses.

Social media however has also been 'sold' with many misconceptions and inaccuracies, therefore it is important to note that you should not rely on social media as your only online marketing effort – it should always be used as one toolset in an arsenal of many to ensure that you get results.

Social media is also deemed as being a 'free' source of marketing- but it should be noted that it costs you in terms of resource. It is extremely time consuming to manage, and whilst it is good to increase 'likes' (in the case of Facebook) – what is much more important is the number of people talking about and engaging with your page rather than those who simply like it. Above all your goal should be consumer

engagement and conversation. Over commercial sales messaging should be discouraged as this is not what achieves the best results via social channels.

Facebook and Twitter are the two social networks which most tourism business providers are more comfortable with and they can be good tools for improving communications with your past and future guests, sharing offers, increasing awareness etc. But in order to make these channels work for you, it requires an ongoing strategy, out of the box thinking and a substantial resource. Whilst social media is a marketing channel that you can avail of, it is very important that you understand these channels in advance of using them in order to get the best response.

In order to assist you with using social media to market your business, see our Tourism NI Twitter Toolkit and our Tourism NI Facebook Toolkit which break down marketing across both of these channels in more depth.

### Get involved with Tourism NI's social media channels

Tourism NI make use of many of the above mentioned social media channels and in support of all local tourism providers, we would encourage you to get involved too.

Tourism NI have developed a strong social media presence to promote the region and to communicate with local people and businesses. It makes sense that you make use of the captive audience we have grown on these channels by getting involved, or even just use these channels to talk to us.

### Our social media channels :

**Twitter:** @discoverni @NITouristBoard

Use #discoverni when you Tweet & on Instagram

**Instagram:** [instagram.com/discoverni](https://www.instagram.com/discoverni)

**Facebook:** [facebook.com/discovernorthernireland](https://www.facebook.com/discovernorthernireland)

**YouTube:** [Youtube.com/discoverni](https://www.youtube.com/discoverni)

**Email Us:** Send us your local stories / traveller tips / photos and recommendations to [digital@tourismni.com](mailto:digital@tourismni.com)

---

## E-Mail Marketing

E-mail marketing is the process of directly communicating via e-mail information, offers and other marketing messages to interested and opted-in people.

Before you send e-mail marketing messages to people, you must have their authorisation to do so- this is what is known as 'opting in'. In order for e-mail marketing to be productive for you, you must have a process of collecting e-mail addresses from people- those who are interested in finding out more about your accommodation, location etc whether they be existing, past or potential clients.

It is therefore important that you collect e-mail addresses from these audiences as often as possible to build up your lists.

E-mail marketing results do vary- and the more specific you can make your marketing messages to the recipients the better your results tend to be. It is therefore a good idea to split up or 'segment' your lists of addresses dependent on the marketing message/ offer you are wishing to promote. For example, corporate customers should receive e-mail marketing related to your corporate packages, but the general public will respond better to offers directed at them.

In order to send e-mail marketing out in a professional manner, and in a manner which will not result in your personal or business e-mail address being marked for spamming, you must use an e-mail marketing tool to send your e-mails. There are a range of e-mail marketing tools available to use at varying costs, such as:

- Mailchimp
- Campaign Monitor
- Dotmailer
- Vertical Response

E-mail marketing can be particularly useful in getting your past customers to come back and give you their custom again. This method is therefore, by default, a much cheaper form of marketing since it is predominantly about retaining existing customers rather than getting new ones.

## What about mobile?

**People are more connected than ever, with increased access across many devices, especially smartphones, using them to browse the web, communicate with others, send e-mail, use social media etc.**

- 71% of the UK population own a smartphone.
- The number of active mobile users has increased by 3% since Jan 2015.
- On mobile, the starting point for 48% of users are search engines.
- Smartphones are an important resource throughout many phases of product research with 46% of users searching for inspiration via their mobile device.

You must ensure that your website is viewable by those people accessing the web via their mobile smart phones. But rather than just ensuring that your site is visible on mobile phones, you should ensure that it is also mobile friendly and easy to use without people having to constantly pinch and zoom pages.

One way to check your website and learn more about getting your website mobile friendly is by going to [www.gomolearning.com](http://www.gomolearning.com) - Google's mobile site tester tool.



---

## Is your website performing?

Once you have a website, it is essential to ensure that it is performing its role in 'selling' your property to potential guests and not just present to provide a telephone number for those who already know of you.

So for new potential customers, how do you ensure that your website is encouraging a booking? What is it that encourages people to book?

There is some evidence on which factors can have the biggest impact:

- Make sure your website design is top notch: Your website makes a very important first impression on your guests. Make sure that the website is eye catching, interesting, attractive and easy to navigate.
- Good imagery: Make sure that you include plenty of high quality photos of your property to make the website more visually appealing.
- Reviews: 80% of consumers trust reviews as much as personal recommendations.
- Room rates visible on site.
- Web users like to be given information right up front- don't make them think about having to go hunting for information.
- Make it easy for customers to book online.
- Offer multiple payment methods: It is important to offer a range of different payment methods for your guests, including credit cards, debit cards and even Paypal. The more options guests have when they are booking, the more likely they will choose your product.

Another keyway of determining if your website is working or not is by constantly reviewing the statistics or traffic that comes to your site. Everything on the web is trackable and measurable which allows us to build up a much greater indication of how people are finding, navigating through and using your website. This allows you to identify what is working and also what isn't.

You can gather all of this information free of charge using an analytics tool called Google Analytics. Google Analytics allows you to understand how people are finding your site, what keywords they are searching for on Google to locate you, what they do when they get to your site, if they are booking on your site (if you have an on-site booking system) or where they might be 'dropping off' or not completing.

All of this information allows you to see what you might need to change on your site in order to encourage greater numbers of bookings. For example you might notice that a lot of people who are accessing your website are going to the 'Room Rates' page (which just contains a message for them to call you) and then exiting your site with no obvious uplift in telephone enquiries. It could therefore be assumed that because customers are looking for room rates and instead are being asked to take another action that this is negatively impacting on their experience.

For more information on Google Analytics, the reporting that it provides and how to understand them, see Tourism NI's Google Analytics basics guide.

---

# What is a booking engine?

**A booking engine is software which can be added onto your site to allow people to book rooms. There are also external booking engines which allow you to list your rooms on their sites and facilitate all of the booking through their booking engines if your website hasn't yet got one.**

Some examples of external booking engines are:

- Booking.com
- Hotels.com
- Expedia.com
- Trivago.com
- AirBnB.com

Some examples of booking engines that you can incorporate onto your website with the help of web developers include:

- iBooking.com
- FreeToBook.com
- BookAssist.com
- Avvio

Which option is best is fully dependent on your circumstances, the time and effort you are willing to put into your site, your desire to reduce commission payments to third parties etc.

In addition third party booking engines such as booking.com can also be useful even when you do have a booking engine on your own site because of the audience numbers and traffic that these sites attract as this can help drive awareness of your property.

When making a decision on which option or options to go with it is important that you consider your own personal circumstances.

## Keeping up to date on Tourism NI's consumer website

Local tourism providers can use Tourism NI's consumer website [www.discovernorthernireland.com](http://www.discovernorthernireland.com) to promote their offering. In 2015\* the consumer website received over 3.7 million visits from tourists seeking information on events, attractions, accommodation and things to see and do in Northern Ireland.

For more information on promoting your tourism business on [discovernorthernireland.com](http://discovernorthernireland.com) please download and read our Contributor Agreement (for events please download the Events Contributor Agreement). These can be downloaded at [tourismni.com/marketing](http://tourismni.com/marketing).

If your offering (eg attraction, certified tourist accommodation premises or event etc) meets the criteria, please contact a member of the Visitor Information team at [tidi@tourismni.com](mailto:tidi@tourismni.com) or telephone 028 9044 1551.

Once your tourism business is included on Tourism NI's consumer website [discovernorthernireland.com](http://discovernorthernireland.com) it will be automatically included on Tourism Ireland's consumer website [ireland.com](http://ireland.com) within 48-hours.

---

# Glossary of Terms

## **Incoming or back links**

Other websites that link into your website.

---

## **Meta tags**

Pieces of code on your web pages which indicate to Google what the pages are about.

---

## **Meta title tag**

Code on a webpage which provides Google with the Title of the page as it should show within Google.

---

## **Meta description tag**

Code on a webpage which provides Google with the description of the page as it should show within Google.

---

## **SERPs**

SERPs stands for Search Engine Results Pages - what you get when you search for something in Google.

---

## **Alt attributes**

These are alternative written descriptions, placed on images (because Google can't see images but it can read descriptions of the images).

---

## **Organic listings**

These are the free results that the you see when you search Google or other search engines. This doesn't include the 'sponsored ads' - these cost money.

---

## **Rank**

This is your website's position in the search results pages when you do a search.

---

## **Web Browser**

The program you use to view websites. There are many web browsers for example, Internet Explorer, Firefox and Safari.

---

## **Mobile web**

Going on to the internet through a browser on a mobile phone.

---

## **Search Engine**

Software that helps you find what you are looking for on the web. Google, Yahoo, Bing.

---

## **Hyperlink**

Clickable links on web pages that link you to other web pages. Also known as anchor text links.

---

## **Google Adwords or PPC**

Google Adwords (AKA PPC or Pay per Click) is Google's advertising platform. This allows you to place ads along the side of Google search results on terms that you specify.

---

## **Google Analytics**

A software package which reports on visits to your website telling you where these visits originated from, what pages are viewed on your site and more.

---







**tourism  
northernireland**

**Tourism Northern Ireland,**  
Floors 10-12,  
Linum Chambers, Bedford Square,  
Bedford Street,  
Belfast BT2 7ES

**Tel:** +44 (0) 28 9023 1221

**Fax:** +44 (0) 28 9024 0960

**Email:** [info@tourismni.com](mailto:info@tourismni.com)