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# ONLINE MARKETING

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TOURISM  
BUSINESS  
ESSENTIALS

# Online Marketing Guide

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# 1 Introduction

*It is no surprise that access to seemingly unlimited information, combined with the tools to stay permanently connected to others, has created a huge shift in the types of trips people take, where and when they go, how they book, and what activities they pursue while on vacation. Instead of doing what everybody else does, people can now create personal travel itineraries, customized to their individual preferences.*

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Technology and the Internet have created a revolution in tourism marketing. The Internet not only inspires and provides consumers with information on potential travel destinations, but enables them to take immediate action by booking online. And, this is only the beginning of their online engagement, as the Internet continues to play a role during the vacation as well as long after the visitor returns home.

Mobile devices are a primary source of influence on the decisions visitors make while they are exploring and enjoying their destination and allow frequent contact with friends and family. Travellers send immediate reports about their trip experiences through email, text messaging, and social networks. Once they return home, they leave ratings and reviews online to assist other people in their trip planning.

It is no surprise that access to seemingly unlimited information, combined with the tools to stay permanently connected to others, has created a huge shift in the types of trips people take, where and when they go, how they book, and what activities they pursue while on vacation. Instead of doing what everybody else does, people can now create personal travel itineraries, customized to their individual preferences. Consumers have powerful tools at their disposal and so do tourism operators. Through Internet technology, a small bed and breakfast in the Cariboo Chilcotin Coast has just as much access to reach a potential visitor as a four-star hotel in downtown Vancouver.

Not so long ago, building and maintaining a website was expensive and required technical expertise. Now, new tools have made publishing easier, and at a lower cost. Search engines and online advertising give all operators access to the right customers for their business, while social media and email marketing serve to build ongoing relationships.

Because online marketing is easily accessible and cost effective, it has opened up international competition. The Internet has made the world a lot smaller: competitors from across the world have access to the same tools as operators in British Columbia. No business these days can afford not to capitalize on the opportunities the Internet presents.

# 1

## Introduction to Online Marketing

### The Purpose of This Guide

Online marketing is no longer an “option”, it is essential in today’s fast-paced and competitive world. The future of your business could very well depend on it. While the online world may seem daunting to some, the opportunities are limitless and it is the marketing currency in today’s world.

This guide is intended to help you think strategically about online marketing, identify available opportunities, and create a plan for your business. This is not a how-to, step-by-step recipe for building a website, setting up a Twitter profile, or a search engine marketing program. Instead, the guide will outline the available options and assist you in strategically using online marketing to promote and grow your business.

The Online Marketing guide is written for small and medium tourism operators in British Columbia. It does not matter if you run a restaurant, a B&B, or a small kayaking tour operation. Based on your type of business, and the money and time you can invest in online marketing, this guide will help you maximize the return on your efforts.

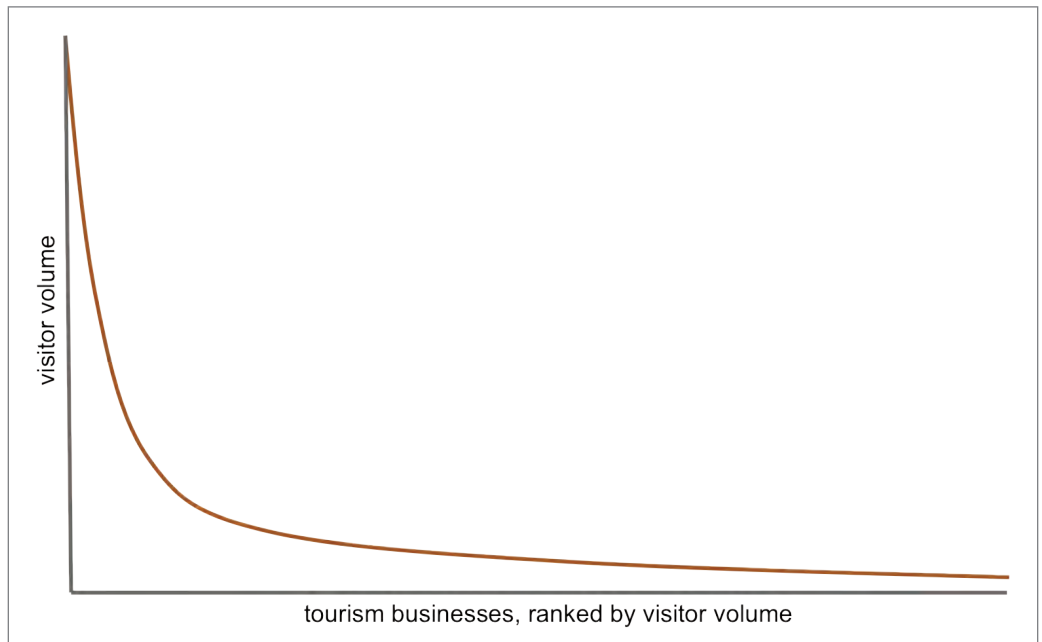
# 2 Marketing Context

## The Long Tail of Tourism

### Tourism Drivers

Every travel destination has its main tourism drivers: scenery and attractions that inspire the majority of annual visitors to an area. We all know that the BC tourism industry consists of thousands of tourism businesses; some are large, some medium, and some small. Some receive many visitors, some fewer. Some businesses need tens of thousands of visitors a year to make a profit, others, a few hundred.

When all the places and attractions people can visit are plotted in a graph, it would look something like this:





# 2 Marketing Context

## The Long Tail of Tourism

### **Traditional sources of information**

For decades, consumers relied on a few sources of information to plan and book their trips. They listened to the stories their friends and family told them. They watched television programs, and read newspapers and magazines. When it came to the details, guidebooks like *Lonely Planet* or travel agent packages were the primary sources of information.

Producing printed guides with detailed information is expensive. Each page costs money in production and distribution. Traditional guides have only limited space to publish information on tourism products and experiences.

In order to maximize sales, guides are produced to appeal to a wide range of audiences, focusing on what is popular for most people. Popularity is measured by where most people go, therefore only the “head” of the long tail of tourism makes it into these guides. Due to space and budget constraints, information about small businesses is extremely limited or left out.

### **New sources of information**

With the Internet, everybody can become a publisher. There are no physical constraints like paper and pages. Distribution is easy, and free: all you need is a server plugged into the Internet. Internet publishing tools have become cheaper and easier. Creating a blog only takes minutes and is practically free. Photos and videos can be uploaded on [Flickr](#), [YouTube](#), or [Facebook](#) for free as well.

With the barrier to entry being so low, many people have become online publishers. Andreas Weigend, former chief scientist at Amazon.com wrote in the *Harvard Business Review* in May 2009 that “in 2009, more data will be generated by individuals than in the entire history of mankind through 2008”. Think about that. That is a lot of information.

### **Niche opportunities**

All this information has made the long tail of tourism information available to consumers with an Internet connection anywhere in the world. Suddenly, operators and services that previously did not make it into guidebooks are accessible to consumers all over the world via a simply constructed website.

People find destinations and experiences that meet their specific interests. Instead of doing the things everybody else does, they do things suited to their individual lifestyle, interests and values.

Numerous websites dedicated to specific tourism experiences are not professionally published. For example, [vancouvertrails.com](#) is run by a local hiking enthusiast who provides detailed information about hiking trails in and around Vancouver, including photos, videos and GPS maps. Hikers have all the necessary information at their disposal to plan the perfect hike in the Vancouver area.

### **Passionate Communities**

Social media has made it easy to connect with like-minded people on the Internet. People with shared interests form online communities. These communities are centred around a passion. Therefore, we call these *passionate communities*.

The message board on [TripAdvisor.com](#) is an example of a passionate community. Here, people support each other in their trip planning. People post questions and others answer. There are many other types of passionate communities: [Flyertalk.com](#) is a community of frequent travellers, [Chow.com](#) a community of foodies, and [icanhascheezburger.com](#) a community of people who share funny pictures of cats.

## The Long Tail of Tourism

### **The number of communities is endless.**

People create websites to connect with each other or use existing social media websites like Facebook. And sometimes communities span across multiple websites and blogs. We are living in a networked world.

Communities have influencers. These people carry more authority than others. On the TripAdvisor message boards for example, these influencers are labeled “destination experts”. In other communities, such as bloggers and Twitter users, influencers are harder to identify.

### **The opportunity for operators**

Niche audiences and passionate communities provide tremendous opportunities, that are not usually featured in guidebooks, for smaller businesses to connect with people interested in specific products and services. From a product development perspective, businesses can potentially tailor their products to niche communities. Tweaking your product a little may open up a whole new market. For example, a lodge located near a bird sanctuary can tap into a birding community by offering guided tours or organizing a monthly photography hike. The Internet makes it possible to reach people who are interested in virtually anything.

## Creating a Business That Markets Itself

The Internet has opened up the opportunity for businesses around the world to connect directly with consumers expressing specific interests. Social media has given consumers the power to keep all businesses honest. This now means that following through on promises is essential, and customer service excellence and exceptional experiences are no longer the exception, they have become the benchmark for consideration, and subsequently positive reviews.

Businesses are now accountable to every customer. Treat one customer poorly and thousands will hear about it on TripAdvisor. On the flipside, if treat your customer right by providing remarkable products and customer service, you will create marketing advocates for your business.

Marketing, online or offline, succeeds or fails in accordance with experiences and customer service. Success online starts with satisfied

and happy customers. Word-of-mouth power, amplified in social media, is so significant that consumers now do most of the marketing – positive and negative – for businesses.

In cases where products or experiences fall short of expectations and resulting disappointments are shared online, businesses have the opportunity to express concern and make things right publicly. Feedback on social media websites is also valuable information for improving products. For example, if people keep complaining about your Wifi connection, maybe it is time to fix it.

By delivering a remarkable product, marketing it online to niche audiences and passionate communities, turning consumers into advocates who do the marketing for you through social media, and using their feedback to improve your product, you can build a business that almost markets itself.

# 3 Understanding Your Customer

## Target Audience

In order to create a good online marketing plan, it is essential to know the customers you currently cater to, and those you can potentially reach.

Knowledge is power; understanding your customers is the only way to create an effective online marketing plan. For example, a

B&B on Saltspring Island, receiving most of its business from nearby customers on a short trip from Victoria or Vancouver will need to deploy strategies different from those of a motel in Invermere, receiving a substantial number of European tourists travelling through the Rockies or Alberta residents.



# Target Audience

## Consumer profiles

Start by profiling your target audience. Where are the places your existing customers come from? Demographics is an important consideration. What age range is your customer base? What is their income? Do they travel alone, as a couple, or as a family?

Think about their travel interests and behaviours. What are their interests? What is the purpose of their trip? Was their trip motivated by a specific passion? How did they book their trip? What made them decide to visit your business? What websites did they consult?

Start recording this information so you can analyze your data over time. Create categories of customers. You might end up with something like this:

	Europeans	Alberta Getaways
<b>Markets</b>	Germany Great Britain The Netherlands	Calgary Edmonton
<b>Demographics</b>	Age: 30-45 Income: Medium-High Party size: Families	Age: 40-60 Income: Medium Party Size: Empty nesters, sometimes multiple couples.
<b>Travel Behaviour</b>	<p>Take a 2-4 week vacation through BC and Alberta.</p> <p>Most have had a dream to tour the Canadian Rockies for a long time.</p> <p>Plan their trip online extensively.</p> <p>Sometimes book their flight and RV through a travel agency.</p> <p>Half contact us online, the other half drives in.</p>	<p>Take a long weekend getaway to golf or hike.</p> <p>A lot of repeat and last minute travel, based on the weather.</p> <p>A lot of referrals from friends, most contact via email.</p> <p>My city is well known amongst avid golfers for the diversity in golf courses and its setting.</p>

# 3 Understanding Your Customer

## Target Audience

### **New opportunities**

It is also important to understand the opportunities beyond the people who currently visit your business. What types of travellers visit the surrounding area? Why do they visit this area? Are there certain niche experiences and passionate communities that are enticing them? What customers do your colleagues attract? Are there any differences?

For a small business, getting to know your customers is easy. You probably see and talk to many of your customers every day. Ask them why and how they chose your business? What sources of information did they use?

Conduct some research to learn about opportunities. Your local DMO probably has research available about the types of visitors that frequent your area. Are there any missed opportunities? If you think there are, add them as a new customer profile.

### **Planned vs Impulse Destinations**

There are those businesses which benefit from visitors planning ahead to visit them, and there are others which thrive because they are an impulse purchase. For example, people travel from all over the world to visit Butchart Gardens. Butchart Gardens is a *planned* destination. It is a primary reason for

travelling to Victoria. Hotels, museums, and other attractions that people research and book before their trip are also *planned* destinations.

Other tourism businesses are not the first reason for travel, but still form part of the decision to visit a destination. Restaurants, for example, are not necessarily the primary reason people visit a certain location, but nonetheless contribute to the visitor experience. These are *impulse* businesses. An *impulse* business is often decided at the moment; it is not necessarily part of the decision to travel to a destination in the first place.

Your business can be both a *planned* and an *impulse* business depending on the market that you are attempting to target. A restaurant can be a *planned* destination for avid culinary travellers and an *impulse* business for people who are just hungry.

It is important to determine whether your business is a *planned* or an *impulse* destination because it changes how you should position yourself to consumers online. The distinction between a *planned* and *impulse* business also affects how you position yourself in the purchase funnel.

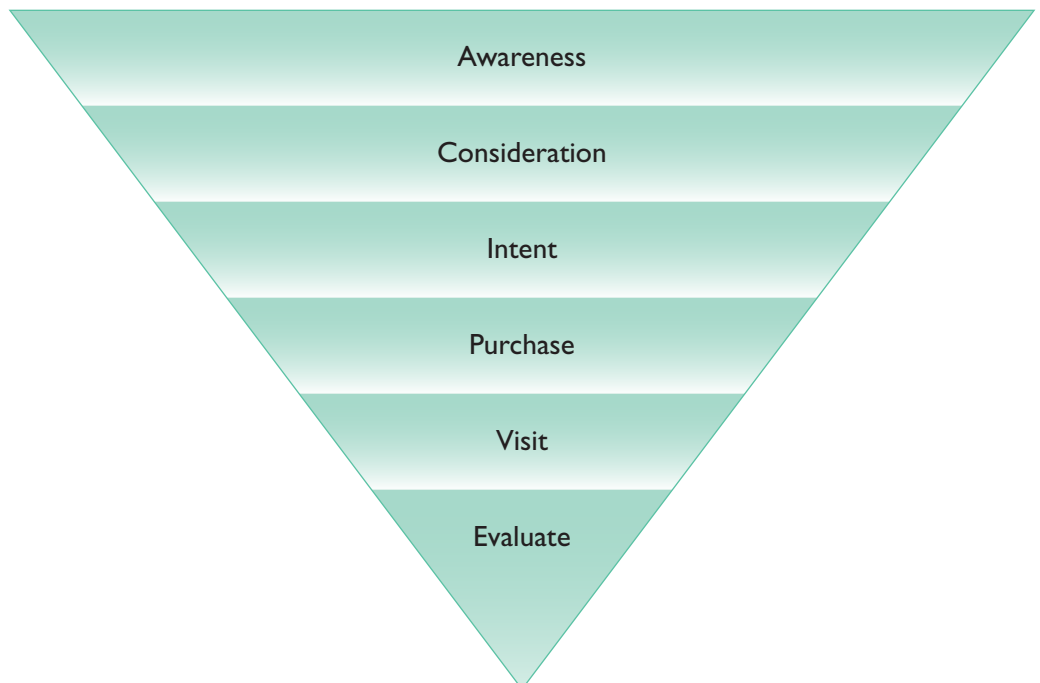
# The Vacation “Purchase Funnel”

## The Purchase Funnel

The **purchase funnel** is a tool marketers use to describe the process people go through when making a purchase decision. There are many variations of the process but this is the classic version.

Awareness	A person knows about a destination, tourism product, or experience.
Consideration	A person has shortlisted a destination, tourism product or experience amongst some other potential options.
Intent	A person is planning a visit within the foreseeable future.
Purchase	A person has made the purchase.
Visit	A person is visiting the destination, product or experience.
Evaluate	A person has completed his or her visit, has an opinion about the quality, and is evaluating if it met expectations, has the potential for repeat, and is worthy of recommendation to friends, family or websites like TripAdvisor.

The funnel metaphor is used because the number of people decreases every step in the funnel. As a marketer, it is your job to get people into the funnel and drive people through each step of the process.



# 3 Understanding Your Customer

## The Vacation “Purchase Funnel”

As a tourism operator building your online marketing plan, it is important to recognize how each of your target audiences becomes aware of your business, the process they go through to make the decision to visit your business, and what information and tools they use to make that decision.

For each target audience you identify, document what each audience needs in each step of the purchase cycle. What inspires people? What is the information they need? How to they take action? Building on the previous chart, you may get something like this.

	Europeans	Alberta Getaways
<b>Awareness</b>	My town is part of their planned trip. They research places to stay.	Usually through a friend or family member.  Visit my town for golfing and research places to stay.
<b>Consideration</b>	They conduct research online and find my business as an option. We offer good rates and have good amenities for families.	We come recommended and follow through with our rates.  Our location is close to the golf courses at a reasonable rate.
<b>Intent</b>	They contact us for availability, approximately one month ahead or occasionally they walk in.  They often ask about the speed and quality of our Wifi.	They contact us via email about rates and availability.  New customers ask about our location and proximity to golf courses and restaurants.
<b>Purchase</b>	We close the sale via email or in-person.	We close the sale over the phone.
<b>Visit</b>	A typical stay is one or two nights.	Average stay is three nights.
<b>Evaluate</b>	We do not get a lot of repeat. We also do not receive many reviews on TripAdvisor.	People tell their friends. They like the value we offer and our location, reasonable rates and proximity to golf courses and restaurants.

## The Vacation “Purchase Funnel”

The chart above is only a start but can contain much more detail. Gather as much information as you can. How far in advance do people plan? For Europeans in the example above, the planning process can take months, while it can take only a few days for the Albertans.

It is also important to understand where people get stuck in the funnel. Why do people who know about your business decide not to visit but go somewhere else instead? Is it

because of a bad TripAdvisor review? Or is it because some information is missing on your website? Many people will only stay at a hotel with Wifi, for example, and you would be surprised how often this information is not published on an accommodation website.





# 4 Building Your Online Marketing Plan

## Objectives and Measurements of Success

Once you have clearly outlined the *Who, What, Where* and *How* – who are your current and potential customers, what is bringing, or going to bring, them to your business, where are they coming from, and how do they make their travel decisions, When you identify the different audiences who currently visit your business, as well as potential visitors,,you have the basis for your online marketing plan.

It is important to set targets for your marketing activities and measure over time how your efforts are performing. Overall, you need to be able to measure if your overall online marketing efforts have an impact on your bottom line. For each specific activity, set diagnostic measures, such as monitoring the number of website visits for example.

If most of your customers book online through your website, measuring success is easy. But the effect of your activities might not be directly measurable. People might learn about your business at one website, and book at another, or they might simply walk in the door.

Poll a sample of your customers. Ask them where they learned about your business, what sources and tools they used to make the decision, and how they booked. Use this as a baseline and measure the impact of your activities over time.

## Online Marketing Strategies

When you understand where you can make the biggest impact in the funnel and have established a baseline to measure, you can now create your Online Marketing Plan. The chart below outlines each potential component of an online plan, followed by a brief description of each.

The remainder of this guide will explain in detail how each of these six key components can be strategically employed to be effective in each stage of the funnel. How you execute each strategy will be determined by your individual Online Marketing Plan and your budget and time allocation.



## Online Marketing Strategies

### Website

A website should be your main presence on the Internet, and typically sits at the heart of all online marketing activities. A website should inspire people early in the cycle, inform them in the middle, and close the purchase at the end of their decision-making process. A mobile version of a website can be important to target *impulse* options during a trip.

### Search Engine Optimization (SEO) and Search Engine Marketing (SEM)

These are effective for potential customers who are seeking specific information in Search Engines like Google. Both work well to drive traffic to your website for no cost (SEO) or low cost (SEM).

### Social Media

It is essential to listen to what people say about your product, enter in a dialogue with your potential customers, and use past customers to spread the word about your business to their friends and personal networks such as TripAdvisor, Facebook, and Twitter.

### Online Display Advertising

This includes banner advertising and other advertising on websites. It works well to generate awareness of your product or drive specific actions. Online Display Advertising typically works better earlier in the funnel for *planned* businesses and is more expensive compared to SEO and SEM.

### Email Marketing

A valuable tool to pro-actively manage consumers through the funnel and encourage repeat visitation.

### Third-party websites

Maintaining a presence on other websites such as Google Places and TripAdvisor, allows you to manage and market information about your business to a broader audience of potential customers.

## Setting Priorities

You have a business to run. Every day you have to deal with your customers, manage your finances, and maybe have some time left for your family as well. Your time is just as valuable as the dollars you spend on online marketing. It is important to identify what online marketing strategies make sense for your business and prioritize where to start.

The remainder of this guide is intended to assist in identifying what makes sense for you and how these strategies might fit with your marketing activities.

# 5 Website Analysis and Development

## Introduction

A website is usually the flagship of your online marketing activities. Your site needs to inspire, inform, and/or drive action (purchase). Generally speaking, your website needs to deliver inspiration in the early stages of the funnel, information in the middle stages and drive action (purchase) in the end. Sometimes that action happens online, but often it results in somebody walking through the door.

## Website Evaluation

These days, consumers will most often go to your website first to get an idea of what your business and product are like. A poor website is perceived as a reflection of your business and could instantly turn away a prospective customer. A bad website can seriously affect your bottom line. Many tourism operators have outstanding products, but are losing customers simply because their websites are not living up to their product potential.

If you already have a website and are not getting the results you would like, it may be time to re-evaluate your site. The steps below will enable you to develop, or re-develop, your website, ideally with the help of a professional website developer.

### **Focus on your consumer not yourself**

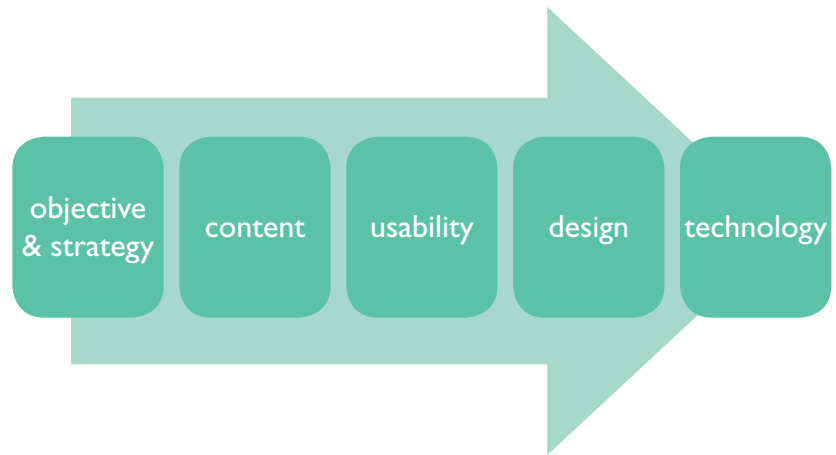
An important thing to keep in mind when building and maintaining your website is to stay focused on your customer. If your website does not deliver what your online visitors are looking for, you run the risk of not converting them from a website visitor to a real visitor. This could be as simple as lacking some basic planning or product information or a confusing piece of functionality.

It is essential that you stay focused on your end user, the customer, thereby avoiding the natural tendency to try to reflect *your* personality or personal opinions about what a website should look like. Listening to your web developer, and staying focused on your customers' needs will get you the best results for your investment.



# Website Development Process

While remaining objective is a common challenge for all marketers, another stumbling block in website development is starting at the wrong place. People are usually more concerned about the way a website looks or by what technology to use, than by focusing on the actual content and what the website needs to deliver. Following the process outlined below will help you to achieve the best results as you move forward in creating your website, ideally with the help of a professional website developer.



## Website Objectives and Strategies

Look back at your target audiences and your objectives in the funnel, and then define your objectives, as well as how you are strategically going to use your website within your overall marketing plan. Whether sales are generated directly on your website, or not, the website plays a crucial role at a specific place in the consumer’s decision making process.

## Content

Start with your content strategy. Content includes all the information your website contains. This includes words (*copy*), images, video, maps, etc. Because you understand when and why different consumers use your website in the planning process, you can start to map out what information your website visitor needs and the best way to deliver it.

Consumers, who are *early in the funnel*, need to be inspired and get a sense of how it would feel to visit your business. Your product needs to appeal on an emotional level with content that describes your product experience in a visual way. Use beautiful, large images and video where possible, but ensure that these accurately reflect your business and the experience your customer will have when he actually arrives. “Branding” your business or experience is essential and must be something you reflect in everything you do – from the images on the website, to other promotional or corporate materials right through to the product or experience itself. The goal is to entice the consumer at a virtual level to encourage them to go to the next step – either finding out more information, or adding your business to their list of “must visits”.

# 5 Website Analysis and Development

## Website Development Process

Consumers close to a purchase decision need details. Where is your business located? How do you get there? What are your opening hours? How much does it cost? Do you have Wifi? Is there a restaurant close by? The information consumers need depends on the type of business you run and the consumer you are targeting.

Ensure you incorporate social media into your content strategy. Before somebody commits to purchase your product, they likely will read reviews about your business first. Why not make it easy for them and include your ratings right in your website? It also shows that you are confident in the reviews people leave. Consider including other social media tools such as a blog or embedded YouTube videos in order to tell the story of your business.

And, if you target consumers looking for a quick getaway, a page with specials for the upcoming long weekend might pull that consumer over the line to book with you.

Make a list of all of the information people need before they decide to visit your business. Spend enough time on this because it is important. Research your competitors and other similar businesses. What information do they provide, and how do they present it?

When you have determined the content for your website, you need to create it. The people you hire to develop your site can assist with many things; but only you know your business and have all the information you need to provide on your website.

The actual writing usually does not happen until your website is built, and it is a good investment to let a writer create the content for you. A writer can take all of your

information and structure it in a way that makes sense to consumers. Content is also important from an SEO perspective (see our section about SEO below) and writers know how to produce SEO friendly copy.

### Usability

When you know what content you need on your website, you need to organize this information in a way that is easy for your website visitor to find. The way the pages in your website are organized is called the *information architecture*, and the way your pages are organized in a layout is called the *interaction design*.

Part of this process is also identifying the specific functionality your website needs. If you have identified an event calendar, photo gallery, videos, or a booking system as part of your content needs, you decide in this step of the process where and how this would fit within your website.

**Keep your website simple. Do not be clever and try to do something unique.** Consumers spend hours on other websites and have learned how things are typically labelled and where things are usually located. Structure your website the same way other operators structure theirs. Use the same labels, put information in the same location. People do not have the patience to figure out your unique way of organizing your website.

It is best to hire a web professional to do this. Although there are usability specialists, most web developers can perform this step. Good web professionals will first create an *information architecture* (and *wireframes* for larger websites). Wireframes are skeleton sketches of a website that show how each page of a website works, without being distracted by the way it looks (that is the next step).

# Website Development Process

## **Usability Testing**

For businesses that rely heavily on their websites as part of their business, it is recommended to use your wireframes to test if people can find the information they are looking for. This is called usability testing. By using wireframes, people are asked to browse your website and find the information they are looking for. It is easy to make changes to a wireframe when something does not make sense; it is expensive to do it after your website is built. It may seem like a lot of effort to test your website's concept, but finding a point of confusion that interrupts a purchase for 10% of your visitors adds up to a lot of lost revenue.

## **Design**

Now that you know the information you need to publish and how you are going to organize this information on your website, you can start creating the visual design of your website. A professional looking website is important for your business credibility. If your website looks amateurish, consumers will think your business runs the same way.

The design of a website is what entrepreneurs often care most about and often creates the most tension between a web designer and the business owner. This frustration can be avoided if the steps above have been followed and both you, and your designer, clearly understand, before the design process starts, how the information needs to flow and where it needs to reside in order to create a positive visitor experience. Respect the skills your designer brings to the table, and only step in when things are clearly off track. Trust their expertise and judgement. Your website will be better for it!

Designers will often create mock-ups for one or two pages for your website for you to comment on, and refine them based on your feedback. They will use this process to get to a point where you are happy with the design of

the website before they flesh out all other pages.

Put yourself in the shoes of your visitor, think about the purpose of your website, and focus your feedback on that. Is the focus on the information you understand your customer will be looking for first? **Hierarchy of information, and ease of navigation is critical.** Do the images clearly reflect your product or experience? Are they inspiring, or are the images getting in the way of delivering the practical information your audience needs? The flip side of that equation being: is the practical information taking over from the emotional or visual interest your audience needs to be inspired and get a sense of your brand. Finally, remember an increasing number of consumers are using mobile devices to access websites, so be sure to test the initial design on all sizes of screens.

## **Technology and Functionality**

Just like the design of the website, you need to trust your developer with choosing the right technology as well. The most important elements to confirm are that:

1. The technology is mainstream (used by many others).
2. You understand and agree with the annual costs for hosting and maintaining the technology that powers your website.
3. Your developer will train you and your staff how to use the CMS (details on this follow on the next page).

## **Hosting**

Website hosting is where your website is physically located on a web server. For the vast majority of tourism operators, your website will be hosted with a company that specializes in website hosting. You rent disk space on a web server and a connection to the Internet. By using a hosting company, you do not have to worry about upgrades, security and all the technological details. It just works.

# 5 Website Analysis and Development

## Website Development Process

*Website hosting has become very affordable and should not cost more than a few hundred dollars a year for a typical website for a small or medium-sized tourism business.*

### **Content Management System**

Your web developer should implement a Content Management System (CMS) to build your website. A CMS allows you to manage the content on your web pages without knowing a lot of website coding or having to ask (and pay) your developer every time you want to make a change. Your developer will create templates with placeholders for photos, videos and copy on all pages.

Maintaining the content of your website should more or less work like editing a Word document, although there are some specific things to learn about maintaining web pages. Make sure your web developer will train you and your staff how to use the CMS as part of their estimate.

What system is best for you depends on the specifics of your website. Your web developer will help you find the best one for your needs, but check and make sure they use a mainstream CMS and not a custom proprietary system.

There are many CMS systems available and a lot are free. Wordpress and Drupal are two examples of free and mainstream CMS systems. But sometimes it makes sense to pay a licence fee for specific CMS system which might better accommodate your needs.

### **Social Media**

Your online presence stretches far beyond your website. Your business will likely be listed on TripAdvisor, Yelp, and other rating websites. You might have a Facebook Page and a Twitter account.

Therefore, your website should ensure everything related to your business online is connected. All the big social media websites, including the ones listed above, allow you to easily integrate your ratings and status updates into your website.

Social Media websites also allow for easy sharing between consumers. By including the Tweet Button, Facebook Like button and Google +1 buttons, you provide your website visitors with an easy way to share information (and hopefully referrals) with their friends.

### **e-Commerce Technology**

Being able to take online reservations is something to consider. If your consumers are using your website in the purchase phase of the marketing funnel, it is a must. However, if your consumers are not using the Internet (or your website) to make a purchase, this investment may not be necessary and could cost you money and/or effort with little ROI.

There are many systems out there that will support online reservations. Most systems are specifically tailored to serve the accommodation sector, the touring and activities sector, and/or the restaurant sector.

If you have a system in place to manage bookings or tickets for walk-in customers, the system you are going to use for your website needs to work together with your existing system. Most systems will have the ability to add it on your website. Otherwise you need to select technology that either integrates with your existing technology or allows for importing/exporting of data. Minimize the need for custom development on the part of your web developer. Maintaining any custom piece of integration could be costly every time either system is changed.

## Website Development Process

If you do not have a system in place yet, or you are looking at replacing your current technology, consider using a reservation system that uses software as a service (SaaS). Examples of SaaS technology are Google mail, Hotmail, and Facebook. The benefit of a SaaS product is that you do not need to purchase, install, and maintain any software, but instead you can access the technology online. Most SaaS systems charge a monthly fee or a percentage of a booking.

### **Mobile**

Mobile phones are becoming more powerful every year and, increasingly consumers browse the Internet on mobile devices. Morgan Stanley predicts that by 2012 smartphones will outsell PCs ([www.morganstanley.com/institutional/techresearch](http://www.morganstanley.com/institutional/techresearch)). The future of Internet marketing could very well be mobile.

Those smartphones and other mobile devices are being served by a rapidly growing number of mobile sites and applications. The 2010 study of mobile web trends by dotMobi ([www.mtld.mobi](http://www.mtld.mobi)) reveals that the number of mobile sites grew from 150,000 in 2008 to more than three million in 2010 — an increase of 2,000%! In that same time period, the number of mobile applications for the

most popular mobile operating systems has grown steadily, going from 0 to about 300,000 for Apple's iPhone App Store and from 0 to approximately 130,000 for Google's Android Market, according to the 2010 Distimo Report ([www.report.distimo.com](http://www.report.distimo.com)).

If you have an *impulse* business, your mobile website could be very important, especially when consumers use their mobile devices during their trips for last-minute decisions.

Modern phones like the iPhone and Android will display your website just fine. The screen will be small but often this is not a problem for consumers. However, when your website involves complicated functionality, or if the needs of your target audience using a mobile device are different from the users of your regular website, you might want to consider creating a mobile version of your website that can serve specific content and functionality.

While the majority of tourism businesses do not need a mobile application, particularly for an impulse business, should you decide to create one, you will probably have to pay your web developer a little more to create the mobile specific pages, however, most content management systems will allow you to create and manage mobile versions of your website.





# 5 Website Analysis and Development

## Website Development Process

### *Metrics & Analytics*

There are a host of web analytics products out there. The most bang for your buck comes from Google Analytics. It is free, easy to install and provides 99% of websites with all the data they need.

The Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) that you measure for your website should be related to the objectives of your website.

- If the goal of your website is booking, then the number of bookings is what you measure.
- If the goal of your website is to inform, then number of page views and the time spent on your website is what you measure.
- If the goal of your website is to inspire, then the time spent on your website or videos viewed is what you measure.

Once you know the primary measures of success, use other data points for your analytics to diagnose what you can improve upon.

- Do people leave your website at a specific point in your booking process? This can be an indicator of a usability problem.
- How long do people spend on a page? This can be an indicator of the quality of the content.
- What is your bounce rate for a page? This could be an indicator of the first impression your website makes, as they “bounce” off the site after only viewing one page.

Web analytics is a very powerful tool to identify what works and does not work on your website, but be careful not to jump to conclusions too fast. There can be many potential reasons why somebody leaves your website at a certain page. A quick usability test with some people not familiar with your business can give you some valuable information.

Another great way to find out how well your website is performing is by using [usertesting.com](https://www.usertesting.com). This service is a cost effective way to run a usability test on your website with real people by giving them specific tasks. For example, a test could be to find a two-bedroom with a bath and book it using your site. The service will recruit a few people for you and send you a video of them using your website, including audio.

# 6 Search Engines

## Introduction

Search engines help consumers find the information they are looking for on the Internet. The big search engines are Google with 65% market share, Yahoo with 17%, and Microsoft's Bing with 14% (comScore, May 2011).

## Search Engines and Travel

Most online travel planning starts with a search engine. When choosing a destination, 76% of US travellers, 80% of French travellers, 84% of German travellers, and 81% of UK travellers use at least one search engine when deciding which destination to visit (PhoCusWright, 2010). When selecting a hotel or airline, 50% of Canadians start with a search engine (PhoCusWright, 2010).

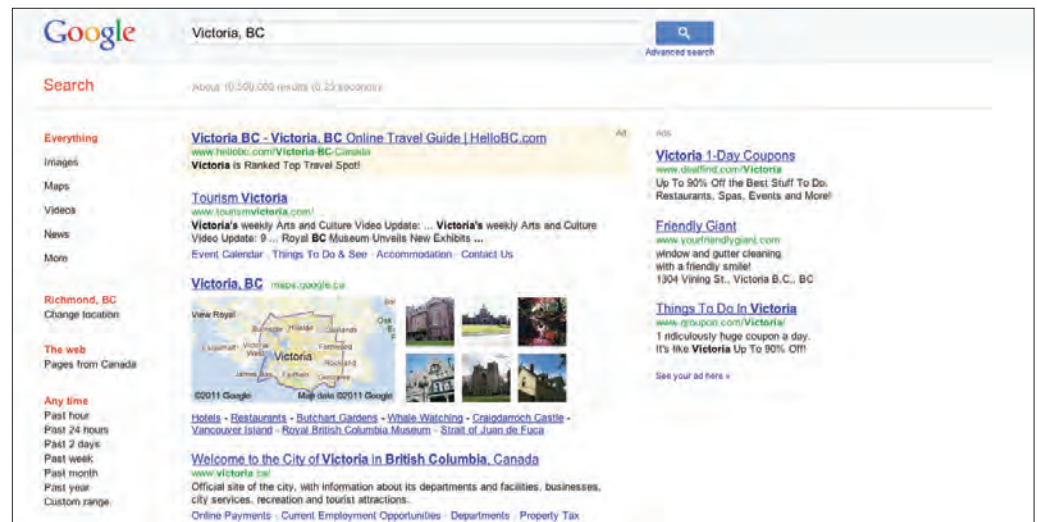
Over the years, search engines have become increasingly sophisticated and offer specialized searches and search results. Google, Yahoo, and Bing have distinct search engines to search for images, news, blogs and much more. Meta search engines like Kayak allow consumers to search for flights, hotels, and car rentals across multiple online travel agents.

Google Maps allows travellers to search for products directly on a map. Google also claims that 40% of all Google Maps usage is from mobile devices (Marissa Mayer, March 2010). This is perfect for travellers. For an

*impulse* business like a restaurant, Google Maps might be the most important way for consumers to find out about your business.

A standard online search brings up a page which is now an integrated place where regular results are blended with news, images, video, news, and map references. Search results are also becoming personalized. Search engines detect the location of the searcher and personalize the results based on this. They are also starting to use social network connections to find the most relevant results based on what your friends like. As a tourism operator, it is important to have a strategy in place for search engines. Depending on where you fit in the funnel, you need to implement the right tactics to connect with consumers through the variety of search engines.

There are two primary ways to use search engines for your online marketing purposes: search engine optimization (SEO) and search engine marketing (SEM).



# 6 Search Engines

## Search Engine Optimization (SEO)

### Introduction

Search engine optimization (SEO, or organic search) is the process of improving the ranking of a website or a web page in search engines via organic (non-paid) search results. Somebody enters keywords, hits enter, and the search engine presents the search results it deems most relevant. Search engines determine this relevancy based on sophisticated algorithms.

Traffic as a result of SEO is free and highly qualified. After all, your website visitor was actively looking for information by typing in specific keywords and the search engine deemed a page on your website relevant to rank it high.

Organic search engine visitors often account for more than 70% of an average tourism operators website. If you rely on your website anywhere in the purchase funnel, SEO is one of the most effective tools to drive visitors to your website and meet your objective.

Tip: Do a quick check of your business name in Google. Your own website should be #1 or near the top of Google. If it is not, your website is probably not SEO friendly.

### **Black-hat vs. white-hat**

SEO techniques are divided into two categories: techniques that search engines recommend as part of good design (white-hat), and those techniques that search engines do not approve of (black-hat).

It is important not to engage in any black-hat SEO techniques as it can have your website permanently banned from search engines. Examples of black-hat techniques include hidden text, link farms and serving a search engine a different version of your website. Do not try to game the search engines. The odds that you will succeed are very low.

Google's webmaster central is a great resource to ensure your website follows white-hat techniques ([www.google.com/support/webmasters/bin/answer.py?hl=en&answer=35769](http://www.google.com/support/webmasters/bin/answer.py?hl=en&answer=35769)).

### Important elements of good SEO

#### **Keywords**

Look at your target audience groups and where in the funnel they use your website. Now identify the keywords they will use to find the product or information they are looking for. Not sure what keywords people use? Google has a tool that will help you: <https://adwords.google.com/select/KeywordToolExternal>

#### **Content**

The good news is that when you create a website using the process above and especially focus on the right content that meets your consumer's needs, you are already well on your way to creating an "SEO friendly" website.

Create content your potential customers are looking for. If you run a B&B in Castlegar with a hot tub and you do not mention it on your website, a potential customer who searches for *Bed and Breakfast in Castlegar with a hot tub* will never find your website through a search engine.

When writing your content, use the language your customers would use. Some people might not use the word *hot tub* but will use *Jacuzzi* instead. Try to incorporate both words on your page so people who search for either word can find you.

Try not to use industry jargon and if you target international audiences, keep in mind how they would describe something. If you run a Guest Ranch in the Cariboo Chilcotin Coast and you target the Australian market,

# Search Engine Optimization (SEO)

you should use Farmstays instead of Guest Ranch, while in the UK, you should use Cowboy Ranches.

## ***Page titles***

Page titles are important. They carry a lot of weight in search engine algorithms. The title is also used in the list of search results. Your title needs to describe the content of the page in a descriptive way. If your hotel has a seafood restaurant, use “seafood restaurant” in your title. Do not use something clever such as “Indulge in the catch of the day” because people will not search for it.

## ***Make use of meta tags***

Meta tags are embedded in the HTML code of your website and are intended to describe the content of your page. Each page on your website has a set of meta tags and a website visitor will never see this content. It is only used by search engines. There is a lot of debate about the weight search engines assign to meta tags. Most experts feel it does not hurt to use them.

There are two meta tags: the description and the keywords. You should be able to manage both through your website CMS. For the description meta tag, your copy should accurately describe what your page is all about, using the keywords people will most likely use to find your page. Use the same keywords you use on the page itself to amplify the effect. The keywords meta tag is simply a list of words, separated by commas. List the most important keywords first because these are considered more important by search engines.

## ***Use proper HTML***

HTML is the code that structures your web pages. It uses specific tags that are intended to properly describe the elements of your

website. There is a hierarchy in HTML code for headlines, ranging from <h1> to <h5>. Other tags are used for links, words in bold, and much more.

Search engines give certain elements more relevancy. Keywords in the <h1> headline carry more weight than the <h5> headline for example, while a bolded word is deemed more important than a non-bolded word.

It is important your web developer uses the right tags in your CMS system. The primary headline should be structured with an <h1> tag for example. A good web developer knows and understands this.

## ***Pagerank***

Your pagerank is determined by the number, and ranking, of Google web pages linking to your web page. Pagerank is the concept Larry Page and Sergei Brin, the founders of Google, invented and what made Google a multi-billion dollar company.

In essence, the concept is that each link to a page on your website is a vote. The more votes your page gets, the more important your page is: this is your pagerank. When pages with a high pagerank vote for your page, your pagerank increases faster. Pages with a high pagerank will show higher in the search results for the keywords they represent. Therefore, it pays off to have a lot of links to your website and its individual pages.

## ***Further reading***

For more detailed information, Google’s Search Engine Optimization Starter Guide is a great resource for optimizing your web pages: [www.google.com/webmasters/docs/search-engine-optimization-starter-guide.pdf](http://www.google.com/webmasters/docs/search-engine-optimization-starter-guide.pdf)

# 6 Search Engines

## Search Engine Marketing (SEM)

### Introduction

Search engine marketing (SEM) is a form of advertising in search engines that promotes websites by increasing their visibility in search engine result pages [SERPs] through the use of paid placement. Companies use SEM to drive traffic to their websites.

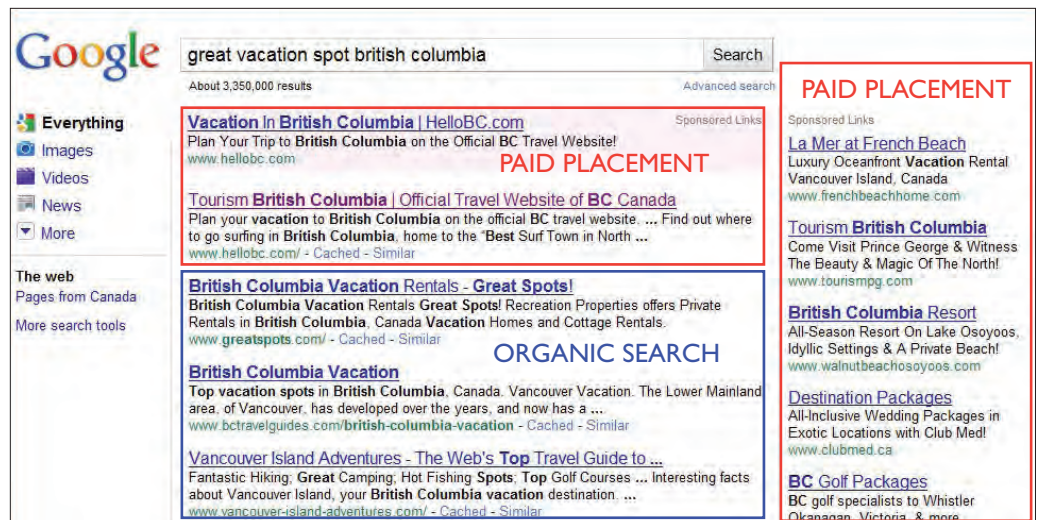
### How SEM works

Every major search engine has its own advertising platform and they all, more or less, work the same way. It is a self serve system and all you need is a credit card.

As an advertiser, you bid a maximum price for specific keywords and create ads for them. You can target your ads geographically, and can be as specific as the neighbourhood of a city. If you know when most people are searching for your product you can choose to run your ads on specific days and even specific hours of the day. Everything is measured and plenty of reports allow you to analyze your campaigns in detail.

When somebody searches for one of these keywords, your ad will be displayed in the search results. You only get charged when somebody clicks on your ad. This model is called pay-per-click [PPC] advertising. It is an attractive option because as an advertiser you pay only when somebody actually visits your website.

How often your ad is displayed, where it is displayed on the results page, and how much you pay is determined by yet another algorithm. Google especially wants ads to be relevant to the searcher to ensure people will continue to place a high value on their search engine. Many factors are taken into account including your maximum bid, bids by others, the performance of your ad and more. Even the loading time of your website is a factor.



# Search Engine Marketing (SEM)

## **SEM opportunities**

Search engine marketing provides tourism businesses with the opportunity to target and reach consumers who are active in the planning process by using specific keywords to direct them to your website.

SEM can be very cost effective to reach people lower in the funnel, especially if you stay away from popular keywords. For a relatively low cost, you can drive a highly qualified consumer to your website. And if your website delivers, it can easily convert that potential consumer into an actual customer.

## **Where to start**

Look back at your target audience, your objectives, and identify the right keywords for your SEM program. If you have a challenge getting the SEO right for certain keywords, SEM can help you fill that gap. If you have a specific offer for a certain time and market, you can create a SEM campaign to drive people from a specific city to a certain page on your website.

Be specific in your keywords if you work with a small budget. If you have a hotel in Nelson with a pool and a mini golf course, stay away from keywords such as “Nelson hotels”. These keywords are generic and conversion can be low and the cost high.

Target consumers looking for your special information instead with keywords such as “family friendly hotel Nelson” or “hotel with a pool in Nelson”. Your bid will be lower and your customers are more likely to convert.

## **Managing an SEM program**

You can sign up with any of the three search engines at any time. All you need is a credit card and you can have your ad up and running within minutes. And that is fine to start experimenting.

However, keep in mind that in order to be effective, there are many options, and things can get complicated fast - Google even offers certification for its Adwords platform. Seriously consider hiring an SEM professional to assist you in the implementation if your budget allows.

## **Meta search engines**

Meta search engines are search engines that aggregate travel products from multiple reservation systems in a single place. Kayak is the best-known meta search engine, but Bing Travel, Mombissimo and SideStep are examples of others. Google is preparing to enter this arena as well and has taken the first step with Google flight search in the United States.

If your product is available in a reservation system or service that connects with one or more of the meta search engines, it will automatically be available to consumers. When you select a reservation system for your website, or sign-up with any of the online travel agents, ask about integration with the meta search engines.

# 7 Social Media

*Social media has increased the quantity and reach of word-of-mouth communication like never before. As a result, businesses and marketers no longer control the message, their customers do.*

## Introduction

While there are many definitions of social media, we prefer to describe it as a process whereby people engage in conversations online. Conversations are the essence of human communication. The average consumer mentions specific brands over 90 times per week in conversations with friends, family, and co-workers<sup>1</sup>. The communication tools provided by the Internet have revolutionized how humans communicate.

In the past, one-to-one communication tools such as telegrams and letters allowed people to send a message beyond their immediate geographic proximity. One-to-many communication tools such as newspapers, radio, and television enabled a message to easily reach a very wide audience. The telephone allowed two people to quickly converse verbally without needing to be face-to-face.

Social media facilitates free and convenient many-to-many communication for the first time. As a result, social media has been very disruptive to the processes that businesses and marketers are comfortable with.

These word-of-mouth messages were once lost in the air waves of the classrooms, bars, sports fields and offices. But now more and more of these personal conversations are occurring online, often visible to anyone who wants to see them.

Social media has increased the quantity and reach of word-of-mouth communication like never before. As a result, businesses and marketers no longer control the message, their customers do. Individuals have embraced social media at an astounding rate. The good news is that businesses too have the opportunity to engage in the conversation.



<sup>1</sup> Keller Fay Group, World of WOMMA, 2010.

## Listening – An Essential Research Tool

The conversation between consumers has traditionally been difficult to monitor. Market research in the form of surveys and focus groups allows marketers to uncover a great deal about visitor behaviour. Tourism British Columbia, part of the Ministry of Jobs, Tourism and Innovation, provides a wealth of such research for the tourism industry.

Monitoring social media is another form of market research. Monitoring conversations in social media gives you incredible insight into consumers. This can allow for deeper understanding of motivations, attitudes, and possible frustrations towards your tourism

region and business. Often what you learn can be used to improve your product. It can be quick and cost effective but it requires a systematic approach.

The types of things that should be monitored are:

1. People talking about your business.
2. Conversations about other businesses and areas relevant to your business.
3. People planning to come to your destination.
4. Discussions in online communities relevant to your niche(s).
5. Influencers relevant to your business.

# facebook

**Facebook helps you connect and share  
with the people in your life.**





# 7 Social Media

## Google

Google is the best resource to begin research: [www.google.com](http://www.google.com)

### **Definition**

Google.com is a search engine that organizes the world's information and makes it universally accessible and useful.

### **Importance for tourism businesses**

Google offers amazing insights into consumer sentiment because you can use Google to find what people are saying about your business.

### **How to use Google for your business**

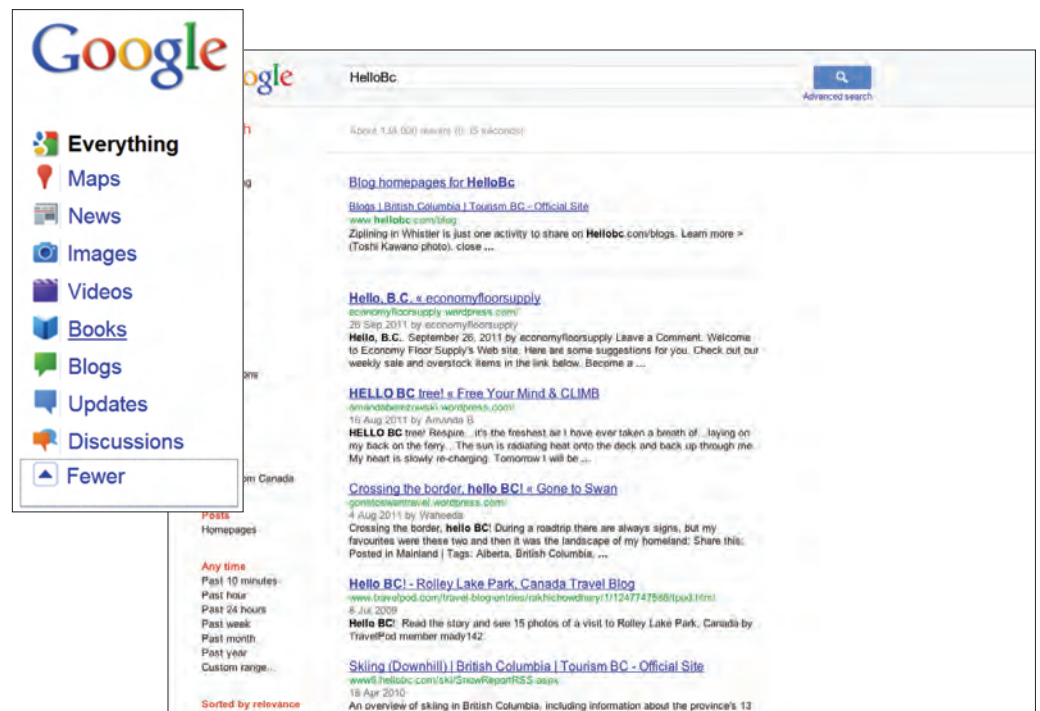
When using Google to search, most consumers do not venture further than the first few search results. People are often more likely to refine their search rather than dig into many pages of possible results. As marketers, we can use Google's search filters to refine results.

The two categories of particular interest during the research phase are **blogs** and **discussions**.

Filtering search results by blogs can quickly help you identify bloggers who are talking about the topics you are interested in. Similarly, limiting your search results to discussions shows conversations in forums.

It is important to spend time researching previous conversations and identifying influencers and people who have talked about your business. Also, try to identify communities that you may want to join.

Research of this nature can be time consuming. Once you have caught up on the conversation, Google Alerts can be used to configure automatic search results that are sent via email: [www.google.com/alerts](http://www.google.com/alerts). Google Alerts can result in a lot of information. It is important to refine your search criteria over time so that you only receive relevant information. See Google's Frequently Asked Questions for more information on Google Alerts: [www.google.com/alerts/faq.html](http://www.google.com/alerts/faq.html)



# Twitter

## Definition

Twitter is a real-time information network that connects you to the latest information about what you find interesting. You can receive instant updates from your friends, industry experts, new associations or favourite celebrities.

## Importance for tourism businesses

Twitter ([www.twitter.com](http://www.twitter.com)) allows people to communicate via Tweets, messages of up to 140 characters. There are more than 200-million users on Twitter.<sup>2</sup> Twitter allows businesses to connect with customers in real-time.

Twitter is proving itself vital to tourism businesses, particularly from an information gathering and customer service perspective. Businesses can use Twitter to quickly share information with people interested in their products and services, gather real-time market intelligence and feedback, and build relationships with customers, partners, and influential people through conversations.

For further information, see [Twitter 101 for Businesses](#) ([www.business.twitter.com](http://www.business.twitter.com)).

## How to use Twitter

Many new users have a challenge with Twitter because they feel obligated to continuously create content. It is difficult to regularly think of interesting things to say to the whole world. Instead of pushing messages, a great

way to begin is to focus on listening first. Once you are comfortable with the medium, you can then begin to Tweet by responding to people who are talking about your business or destination.

You can search conversations on Twitter at the following URL: [www.search.twitter.com](http://www.search.twitter.com). You do not need a Twitter account to search conversations on Twitter. Anyone can use the advanced search feature to find conversations from certain people, about particular places, or about specific topics. For example, you can search for your business name or keywords such as “Vancouver” to see what people are saying.

Similar to Google Alerts, you can set up your own Twitter Account or use third-party tools like Hootsuite. Paid monitoring tools are also available, such as Radian 6.

Once you have set up an account at [www.twitter.com](http://www.twitter.com), you can also engage in conversations in your immediate area and become part of the local Twitter community. Ask people questions and advice, and you will be amazed how much you learn. When you begin to create your own content, focus on sharing information that is relevant and useful to your audience.

Initially, do not aim to broadcast to a large audience. Instead, make a list of 10 or 20 people who are highly influential to your

<sup>2</sup> <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Twitter>

# 7 Social Media

## Twitter

business and already have their own networks. Most successful bloggers use Twitter to extend their own communities. Invest the time to listen to what they say and engage them in conversation where possible. Do not sell directly; always focus on building relationships and providing useful information.

For more information, see Twitter's FAQ: [www.support.twitter.com/entries/13920-frequently-asked-questions](http://www.support.twitter.com/entries/13920-frequently-asked-questions)

A great place to start is by looking at the Twitter accounts of the people and businesses you already work with, for example, Tourism British Columbia: [www.twitter.com/tourismbc](http://www.twitter.com/tourismbc).

As you start using Twitter, do not be surprised by who you may meet and what they may be doing. Conversations with consumers on Twitter can happen at any level of the funnel, giving you multiple opportunities to help and influence a traveller's decisions.

The following conversation is between a traveller named NerdNomad and RVNorthernBC, the Northern BC Tourism Region's Twitter channel that is aimed at RV and camping travellers. This conversation happened when NerdNomad was in the visit level of the funnel during a trip through Northern BC. When it occurred, RVNorthernBC did not know that NerdNomad was an influencer within a larger RV community. NerdNomad was chronicling a year on the road living in an RV and documenting his journey not only on Twitter, but also via his blog, Flickr, and Google Maps. RVNorthernBC's conversation on Twitter with NerdNomad was an effort to help one man make the most of his trip, but turned out to be an opportunity to spread more information about a trip to Northern BC to everyone following his story. This is a classic example of the core value of social media.

Dawson Creek is great. Laundry done (28 bucks!?!), dumped/refilled, got gas, and got WiFi at the information center. Now to find good food.  
4:19 PM Aug 10th via web

@RVNorthernBC I think I'm staying in Dawson Creek one more night to wrap up some work, so I'll try to catch it in the morning.  
8:26 PM Aug 10th via web in reply to RVNorthernBC

RT @nerdnomad: Work? Now that doesn't sound like a vacation! Keep us updated as you travel up the hwy and if you need any recommends pls ask  
11:29 AM Aug 11th via TweetDeck

OK, so, Dawson Creek is not exactly vegetarian-friendly. The Chinese "smorg" at Dragon Palace was a sad affair; three (maybe) veggie items.  
11:00 AM Aug 11th via web

@nerdnomad In Ft St John try Whole Wheat & Honey or the Veggie Burger at Tim & Tvr's both have good veg dishes. Woodlands Inn in FtNelson.  
11:54 AM Aug 11th via TweetDeck in reply to nernomad

@nerdnomad Should mention that if you are back in DC try Cafe Euphoria or you can get a good Shanghai noodle dish at Mr Mikes. Bon appetit!  
August 11, 2010 12:09:52 PM PDT (CA) via TweetDeck in reply to nernomad

# TripAdvisor (Managing Your Online Reputation)

## Definition

TripAdvisor ([www.tripadvisor.com](http://www.tripadvisor.com)) is a social network for travellers. It features reviews and advice on hotels, resorts, flights, vacation rentals, vacation packages, travel guides, and lots more.

## Importance for tourism businesses

TripAdvisor is the world's largest online travel community. TripAdvisor receives more than 50-million unique monthly visits, has 20-million members and over 50-million reviews and opinions.<sup>3</sup>

TripAdvisor offers an amazing opportunity in social media that is often overlooked by businesses. People who are using TripAdvisor are already in the center of the decision funnel; they are planning their trip and researching information. As such your efforts here will likely be very effective.

## How to use TripAdvisor

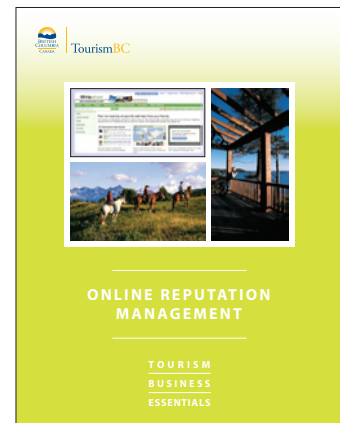
There are three ways that you can participate in the TripAdvisor community:

### 1. Reviews

Travellers can write reviews about any accommodation, attraction, activity, or restaurant. There are more than 10,000 reviews of lodgings, attractions, and restaurants. As a tourism business operator, you, or someone on your senior management team should be responding to most reviews about their business, both positive and negative.

Many businesses are fearful of reviews. However, this is the wrong approach because reviews offer an unprecedented opportunity to learn about your business. You may find things that are very easy to improve.

It is important to deal with reviews openly, as you would if the person were standing in front of you. If you have not delivered what you promised and have an unhappy customer, you have the opportunity to rectify the situation. **How a business responds to criticism often has more influence on booking decisions than the criticism itself.** Begin the process online by responding or offering your telephone number or direct email address. Remember that your response will be online for people to see indefinitely. See the Online Reputation Management guide in the [Tourism Business Essentials](#) series for more information on responding to reviews and managing your online reputation.



Businesses should actively encourage more of their customers to write reviews. TripAdvisor offers plugins that you can add to your website to encourage traffic to your TripAdvisor page. However, if you can convert sales directly on your website, the best practice is to embed TripAdvisor reviews on your own website so as not to divert web traffic.

<sup>3</sup> [http://www.tripadvisor.com/pages/about\\_us.html](http://www.tripadvisor.com/pages/about_us.html)

# 7 Social Media

## TripAdvisor (Managing Your Online Reputation)

### 2. Claim your business page

TripAdvisor automatically creates pages about tourism-related businesses. These pages rank highly in web search results. When travellers are searching for information they will likely find a TripAdvisor Page about your business.

**Tourism businesses should search for their business on TripAdvisor and claim their page.** Once you have located the page for your business, scroll down and click on “Manage your listing.” Once you claim your page, you can quickly add images and videos. You can update these as often as you like, according to seasonal activities, for example.

TripAdvisor also offers paid services such as listing your contact details and paid advertising.

### 3. Participate in forums

TripAdvisor’s forums are one of the most valuable tools relied upon by travellers in the planning process. It is against TripAdvisor policy to actively promote your business in the forums. But you can learn what people are saying about your business and destination.

TripAdvisor awards a special “Destination Expert” status to people who are extremely active and helpful in forums. Destination Experts are influencers in your region so try to build relationships with them and invite them to experience your business.

The screenshot shows the TripAdvisor website interface. At the top, there's a navigation bar with links for 'Home', 'British Columbia', 'Hotels', 'Flights', 'Holiday Rentals', 'Restaurants', 'Best of 2011', 'More', and 'Write a Review'. A search bar is located on the right side of the header. Below the navigation bar, there's a promotional banner for 'Flight Search' with a 'Search for flights' button. The main content area is titled 'British Columbia Travel Forum'. It features a 'Plan the Perfect Trip' section with a search form for hotels and flights, including fields for 'Town / City', 'Check-in', 'Check-out', and 'Adults'. Below this is a 'Search in' dropdown menu set to 'British Columbia forums'. A table of forum topics is displayed, with columns for 'Forum', 'Topic', and 'Last post'. The table lists several topics, including 'Trip Report Collection - Please Add Your TR Links Here' and 'Car Hire Confusion'. On the right side of the forum page, there's a 'Top questions about BRITISH COLUMBIA' section with a list of questions and a 'Destination Experts' section listing users like SamSalmon and traveller47.

Forum	Topic	Last post
British Columbia	<b>Trip Report Collection - Please Add Your TR Links Here</b> by MufiMixandmatch	12 October 2011 36 replies
Vancouver	<b>Car Hire Confusion</b> by wildflower25	15:54 10 replies

# TripAdvisor (Managing Your Online Reputation)

If you choose to participate in forums, remember that you should not recommend your own business. Instead, identify your business through your user name. Be helpful, offer assistance and build relationships. Build awareness and excitement for your destination. If you do this well, people will find your business.

There are many other travel forums such as Lonely Planet, Fodors, Frommers, and Cruise Critic, and a host of other travel communities. There are also many specialised niche forums beyond travel forums. You can find forums relevant to passions that your business caters to, or your staff share. In all forums, the same rules apply:

1. Assist with information, build trust and awareness
2. Identify your business with your username
3. Follow the forum rules (no soliciting business).

For further information on TripAdvisor, see the help center: [www.tripadvisor.com/help](http://www.tripadvisor.com/help).

As an example of collaboration, Oceanside Tourism Association (OTA) worked closely with local tourism businesses to embrace different aspects of TripAdvisor. They integrated TripAdvisor reviews into member profiles on their website to allow visitors to see each property's rating at a glance. OTA conducted an audit of each member that had a TripAdvisor presence and provided each business with the tools needed to excel. In 2010, OTA ran two further initiatives. The first was "Own the Podium" – a campaign focused first on the top five member businesses in their region on TripAdvisor. They provided one-on-one support to maximize the potential for an award from TripAdvisor and exposure for the entire region. The second initiative was participating in the TripAdvisor program for destinations. OTA found that web traffic from TripAdvisor stays on their site for an average of nine minutes.

The screenshot displays the website for Parkville and Qualicum Beach, Vancouver Island's Coastal Region. The page features a navigation menu with options like 'Visitors Home', 'Accommodation', 'See & Do', 'Info', 'Multi-Media', 'Blogs', 'Specials', and 'Browse Travel Directory'. A prominent banner for a 'FREE VISITORS GUIDE' is visible. Below the banner, there's a 'NEWSLETTER' sign-up section and a 'BLOGS' section with a 'Twitter' link. The main content area shows a blog post titled 'About Travel Tips Blogs' by Blain Sapos, with a 'Tweet' button and a 'Like' button. The footer includes a 'Site Map | Business Directory | About Us | Contact Us | Request a FREE Guide | Terms & Conditions' and copyright information for 2011 Oceanside Tourism Association.

# 7 Social Media

## Facebook

### Definition

Facebook ([www.facebook.com](http://www.facebook.com)) is a social network that “helps you connect and share with the people in your life”.<sup>4</sup>

### Importance for tourism businesses

Facebook represents a massive opportunity to connect with consumers. There are more than 750-million active monthly users on Facebook and more than half use the site every day.<sup>5</sup> A message can travel very rapidly within Facebook because each user has an average of 130 friends.

### How to use Facebook

Individuals can set up a profile and interact with their friends, sharing links, photos, and videos.

Businesses can set up a Fan Page to engage with users using their brand. Businesses may not set up a profile, as they are reserved specifically for real people. The objective is to build a community of advocates who can support each other through the decision funnel, and make referrals to their social networks.

There are a number of steps to building a successful fan page. Once you have 25 fans, you can claim a username and vanity URL for your Facebook page. To do this, go to [facebook.com/username](http://facebook.com/username) and select the correct fan page, then enter a username. Your username should be straightforward and easy to remember, and as close to your business or brand name as possible (for search and SEO reasons). Once you have



<sup>4</sup> [www.facebook.com](http://www.facebook.com)

<sup>5</sup> <http://www.facebook.com/press/info.php?statistics>

# Facebook

your username and vanity URL ([facebook.com/username](https://www.facebook.com/username)), you can send it out via email to past customers.

Next, you need to make people aware that your business has a Fan Page. You can do this via email to past customers, through highly-targeted Facebook ads to local residents or people interested in what you offer, or by offering some form of value to your customers. Think about what service you can offer to people through your page, for example photos of their trip, road conditions, etc. Once you have Fans, you need to give them a reason to engage with your page. The best way to do this is by asking questions and posting photos. To appear in news feeds you must engage with Fans through conversation. If your Fans do not click “Like” or comment on posts, your exposure in their news feeds will be reduced. The Page Admin can respond to people’s questions. Remember, every interaction generates a news feed so focus on trying to get people to engage with you.

Fans will give advise on improvements to your business and will likely have very valuable input. The long-term goal is to have people support each other and manage the community on your behalf.

It is unlikely that people will click “Like” on a business’ Fan Page without first having experienced the business. However, there are always exceptions and people may find your Facebook page as part of the travel planning process. In this regard, Facebook is ideal to engage people who are at the very bottom of the funnel. You can then leverage these relationships to have your fans create awareness on your behalf and draw their friends through the funnel.

Most people on Facebook spend time on the network to engage with their friends. Conversation tends to be brief and light-hearted. Broadcasting does not work on Facebook. On Facebook, engagement is everything. If fans do not engage, they will not see your posts for long.

## Facebook engagement strategies:<sup>6</sup>

- Do not use URL shorteners to share links. Proper URLs get 3x higher engagement
- Keep posts short; posts that are 80 characters or fewer get 27% higher engagement rate.
- Different audiences engage at different times; experiment to find the optimum time for your audience; post at different times to engage different fans; and consider that engagement rates are 20% higher outside of business hours.
- Some days are better than others to post. Travel and hospitality works well towards the end of the week; engagement rates on Thursdays and Fridays are 18% higher than other days of the week; the less people want to be at work, the more they are on Facebook.
- Fans follow instructions well; use action-oriented words to achieve your objectives:
  - Liking a post requires the least amount of effort
  - Ask for one word comments
  - For likes: like, take, submit, watch, post, check
  - For comments: post, comment, tell us, share, check, like, submit.
- For contests and sweepstakes, a softer sell works best:
  - Use “events” and “winning” rather than “contest” or “promotion”.
- Questions should be placed at the end of a post for a 15% higher engagement rate.
- Do not interrogate fans with words like “why”; instead, use “where”, “when”, “would” and “should” because they are less invasive.

<sup>6</sup> <http://www.buddymedia.com/newsroom/2011/04/introducing-our-latest-research-%E2%80%9Cstrategies-for-effective-facebook-wall-posts-a-statistical-review%E2%80%9D/>



# 7 Social Media

## Facebook

In the example below, you can see a conversation that started when one of Tourism Victoria's Facebook fans asked a question about whale watching. The Tourism Victoria moderator encouraged the conversation by inviting other fans to offer suggestions to answer the question. When one of the fans responded with a criticism of whale watching, a local operator joined the discussion to try to influence and educate. **This conversation captures the kind of authentic and helpful online interaction that any tourism organization can have with consumers. It also shows how consumers draw each other through the decision funnel and act as advocates for the industry by simply sharing their personal opinions.**



**Tourism Victoria**  
One of our wonderful fans is wondering if Whale Watching Tours are worth it? We say they are worth every penny! What do you think?  
5,645 Impressions · 0.37% Feedback  
March 4 at 9:05am · Like · Comment

JJ's ART Fiji and 10 others like this.

**Janet Auty-Carlisle** What an interesting question from the fan....even if they didn't see whales, which I am assuming is the thought process, it'd be a great day out on the water...  
March 4 at 9:10am · Like

**Cedra Smith** I say they are evil and harmful to the whales. Lets chase your cat or dog around the yard with a bunch of lawnmowers and see how they like it. Direct them to one of the sailing tours which doesn't destroy the welfare of these beautiful creatures.  
March 4 at 9:16am · Like · 1 person

**Mary Grace Logan** Yeah they are!! Even when you don't see whales.  
March 4 at 9:23am · Like · 1 person

**Mona Lucas** They're worth every penny and when done right, there's no real 'chasing' if you go with a good company. I've gone three times at different times of year and while we would get in to the vicinity of the whales, we didn't go too close, would...  
See More  
March 4 at 9:26am · Like

**Mona Lucas** P.S. to the above... the three trips I mentioned were all in Tofino. I have gone off the lower mainland to see killer whales and felt that chasing WAS involved there and won't do that again. Tofino, at least with the tours I went on, did it right.  
March 4 at 9:27am · Like

**Backpacker Bucks** The percentage of sightings are extremely high. Orcas are the most beautiful of all whales. The amazing scenery and excitement of cruising around in the speed boats is worth the price of admission.  
March 4 at 9:31am · Like

**Prince of Whales** Hello Cedra, It's unfortunate that you feel that way about Whale Watching. I encourage you to please read a letter that we recently sent to the Vancouver Sun and shared with MP Gary Lunn <http://www.princeofwhales.com/lettervancouver/sun/> It...  
See More  
March 4 at 9:45am · Like · 2 people

**Callie Langlois** definitely!!!! I would do it a couple of times a year if I could! An experience like no other!  
March 4 at 10:05am · Like

**Amanda Perri** it is TOTALLY worth it! The Whales are amazing creatures and just breath taking to watch!  
March 4 at 10:11am · Like

**Denise Riley-Spence** From our deck at Amore by the Sea B&B we can see the whales quite often - no boat needed:)  
March 4 at 1:29pm · Like

Write a comment...

# YouTube

## Definition

YouTube is “the largest worldwide video-sharing community”.

## Importance for tourism businesses

YouTube allows billions of people to discover, watch, and share originally-created videos.

YouTube provides a forum for people to connect, inform, and inspire others across the globe and acts as a distribution platform for original content creators and advertisers large and small.<sup>7</sup>

YouTube presents an amazing opportunity for tourism businesses to cost-effectively highlight their business. Producing videos about your business allows you to convey a lot of information very quickly and easily, much more so than you can be conveyed in words. This can help consumers who are in the travel-planning phase of the decision process. Videos are a resource that can last indefinitely and can be linked to other social media conversations.

## How to use YouTube

People and businesses can share videos of up to 15 minutes in length. It is free to upload content and very easy to share a link. Users can comment on videos and share them with their friends.

There are many different types of content that can be filmed. It is important to show people what they will experience when they come to your business. The “hard sell” tends to be less effective as YouTube is often seen as a source of entertainment. One example is to interview your staff to show what there is to do at your destination.

Video production does not always need to be sophisticated. It can be as simple as using an iPhone. Once you have created your video, you can upload the video [www.upload.youtube.com/my\\_videos\\_upload](http://www.upload.youtube.com/my_videos_upload). Videos can also be shared on Twitter, Facebook and TripAdvisor.

For further information, see YouTube’s FAQ: [www.google.com/support/youtube](http://www.google.com/support/youtube).



<sup>7</sup> [http://www.youtube.com/t/about\\_youtube](http://www.youtube.com/t/about_youtube)

## Blogging

### Definition

According to Wikipedia, A **blog** (a blend of the term *web log*) is a type of website or part of a website. Blogs are usually maintained by an individual with regular entries of commentary, descriptions of events, or other material such as graphics or video. Entries are commonly displayed in reverse-chronological order.<sup>8</sup>

### Importance for tourism businesses

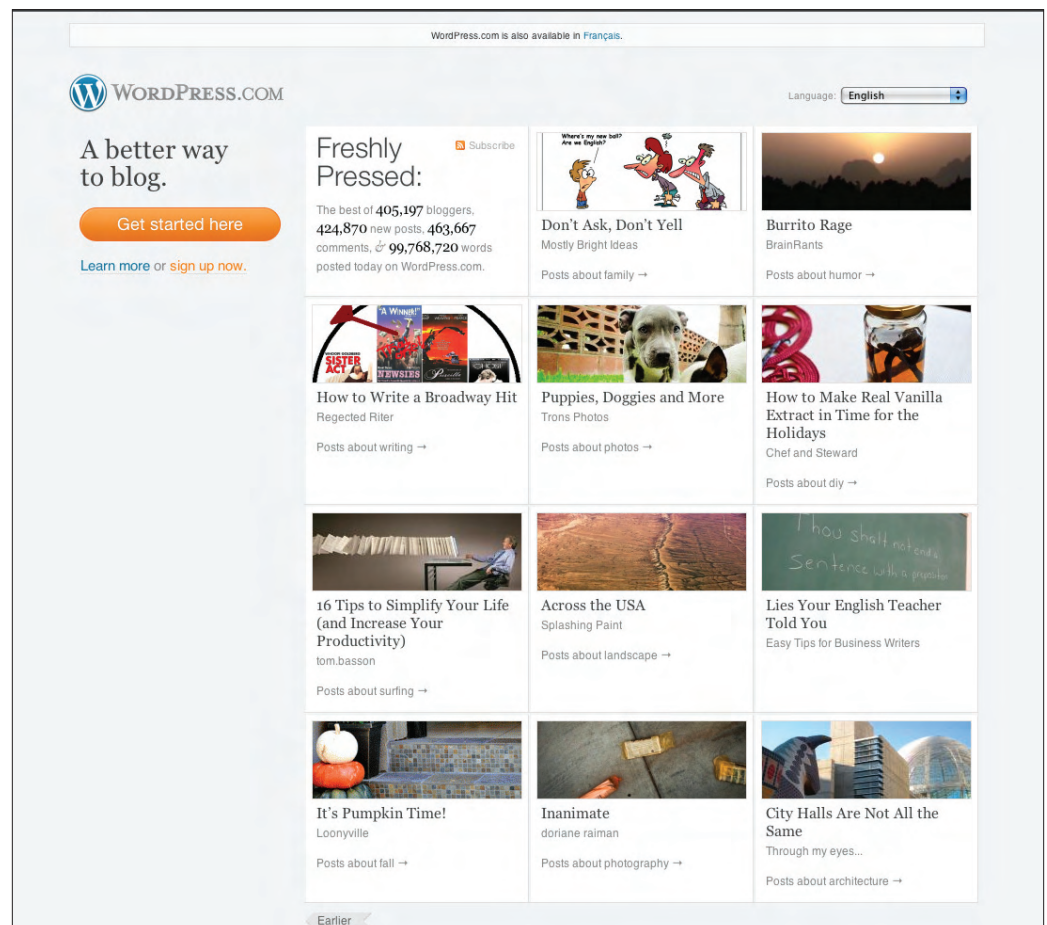
Blogs are an excellent tool to help consumers find you when searching online. The content can be positioned to assist travellers at every level of the purchase funnel. Blogs can also be used to humanize your business and staff in an effort to create deeper relationships with consumers.

### How to use a blog

Wordpress is the most popular blogging platform: [www.wordpress.com](http://www.wordpress.com). Blogs are another tool for sharing using a combination of text, images, links and videos to tell stories and talk about topics of interest.

Before embarking on a blog for your business, it is important to note that up to 80% of blogs are abandoned within the first month. As a result, it is very important that the person writing the blog is passionate about the business and/or related topics. Learning to blog requires practice and is an evolutionary process.

Only 20% of bloggers update their blog daily. It is best to write when you have something to say, rather than feeling like you have to




<sup>8</sup> <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Blog>

## Blogging

produce content at regular intervals. Quality content is essential for blogs, otherwise you will lose readership. Write about things that people visiting your website would be looking for in their planning process. You can also use blogs to drive new traffic to your website. Blogs are also a terrific tool to humanize your business and expose the personalities of your staff.

An excellent example of a blog in the BC tourism industry is 604pulse.com, maintained by Vancouver, Coast & Mountains Tourism Association. This blog showcases tourism experiences in the near-in market. Content is targeted at the middle of the funnel to people who are already visiting or living in the region.

The success of 604pulse.com is its ability to fill a void. Most destinations have limited or incomplete information about events that are happening now and could motivate travel for people near the region. A blog about local events and activities that gains credibility from contributions by local experts fills the void and takes on a life of its own. More than one part of a short-lived campaign, this kind of blog can become a long-term resource for the community of travellers who like the destination and just need a fresh reason to make their next visit.



The screenshot shows the 604PULSE website interface. At the top left is the logo, a green stylized mountain peak next to the text "604 PULSE". To the right is a search bar with the placeholder text "Search 604Pulse" and a magnifying glass icon. Below the header is a large featured article with a background image of a mountain range and a lake. The article title is "Outdoor Activities: Best Summer Alpine Hikes". Below the title is a short paragraph: "From Chilliwack's Mount Cheam to Garibaldi's Black Tusk, our guest blogger Mike Chang picks 6 of the best alpine hikes in the Vancouver, Coast & Mountains region." At the bottom of the article are social media icons for Facebook and Twitter, followed by the text "3 Comments | Read More". To the right of the main article is a "Featured" sidebar with a white arrow pointing left. It contains four entries, each with a title, date, and comment count:

- Hidden Secrets: 10 Events for August 12, 1...**  
August 10, 2011 | 1 Comment
- Weekday Activities: Berry Picking in August...**  
August 8, 2011 | Be the first to comment
- Best Beaches for Swimming in Vancouver, Co...**  
August 5, 2011 | 2 Comments
- Hidden Secrets: Events for the Weekend of ...**  
August 3, 2011 | 2 Comments
- 99 Days of Summer in Surrey**  
July 29, 2011 | Be the first to comment

# 7 Social Media

## Blogger Outreach

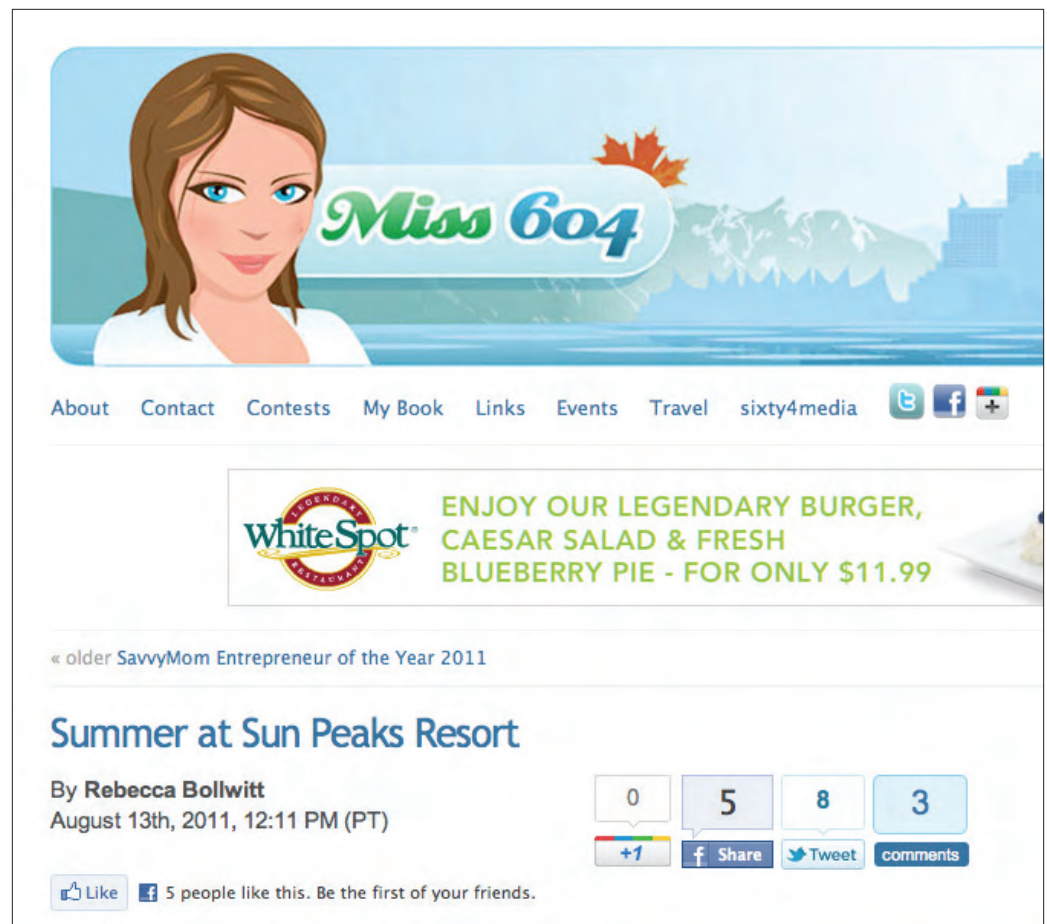
### Definition

**Blogger outreach** is when someone from a company (often someone with experience talking to the media) identifies and builds relationships with bloggers whose audiences match the company's target market. Through these relationships, the company representative encourages the selected bloggers to discuss, review or simply mention the company's brand, products or services. Having the company included in the bloggers' posts allows their readers to be introduced to the company by someone they trust. Much like traditional media relations, blogger outreach should be conducted without blatant incentives or attempts to hide or misrepresent any resulting activity. The relationships should be authentic and allow bloggers to respond based on the real merit of a company's products or actions.

### Importance for tourism businesses

There are over 200,000,000 blogs on the Internet. With this much content, you can find people writing about almost anything, often quite specifically. This is called the long tail of media. Many of these blogs will have built their own audience. That audience could be in a particular geographic location or spread across the globe, either of which could be valuable to your business. If you can get the right blogger to write about your business, you can often pinpoint a niche community that is interested in what you offer.

Third-party referrals are extremely credible. You can get excellent and trusted exposure for your business if you can build relationships with key bloggers who talk favourably about your business.



The screenshot shows a Facebook profile for 'Miss 604'. The profile picture is a cartoon illustration of a woman with brown hair and blue eyes. The cover photo features a scenic view of a lake and mountains with the text 'Miss 604' in a green, stylized font. Below the profile picture, there are navigation links: About, Contact, Contests, My Book, Links, Events, Travel, sixty4media, and social media icons for Twitter, Facebook, and a plus sign. A sponsored advertisement for White Spot restaurant is displayed, with the text: 'ENJOY OUR LEGENDARY BURGER, CAESAR SALAD & FRESH BLUEBERRY PIE - FOR ONLY \$11.99'. Below the ad, there is a link: '« older SavvyMom Entrepreneur of the Year 2011'. The main post is titled 'Summer at Sun Peaks Resort' and is by 'Rebecca Bollwitt', dated 'August 13th, 2011, 12:11 PM (PT)'. The post has 0 likes, 5 shares, 8 tweets, and 3 comments. At the bottom, there is a 'Like' button and a notification that '5 people like this. Be the first of your friends.'

## How to conduct blogger outreach

Blogging is, by its nature, an unpaid activity, so people tend to write about what they are interested in. It takes a great deal of time to become successful at blogging, and as a result, you will find that most bloggers are extremely passionate about the topics that they write about. If you can find people with shared passions, these are your influencers.

You can work with bloggers in a similar way to how you would work with travel media. (For more information on how to use travel media to promote your business, see the Travel Media Relations Guide in the [Tourism Business Essentials series](#)). The important thing to remember is to focus on building relationships through shared interest. Traditional press releases will not necessarily work. Take the time to read peoples' past blogs and learn what is important to them. Engage them in conversation

before inviting them to experience your business. Some bloggers are pitched frequently and offer advice on their blogs on how they like to be approached. Hummingbird604.com, for example, has very particular requirements: [www.hummingbird604.com/pitch-me](http://www.hummingbird604.com/pitch-me). While bloggers are visiting your business, you have the opportunity to create a lasting relationship that can generate many new customers.

Bloggers need to protect their audience by sharing only credible and relevant information. If they do not, people will stop reading their blogs. For this reason, bloggers usually disclose any interest they have and will rarely accept payment. A key aspect of social media is credibility through transparency.

Many BC tourism businesses and destinations have worked with Miss604.com, one of the most popular blogs in Vancouver

Hummingbird604.com

Home About Book Contact Me Giveaways Pitch Me Press Speaking RSS Subscribe

### Pitch Me

**NOISE TO SIGNAL**  
Rob Cottingham.ca/cartoon

Nearly all of my media contacts accept pitches by email or Twitter. But this one guy...

Credit: Rob Cottingham (Noise to Signal)

I am **NOT** "a professional blogger". My main (income-generating) activity is academia (research, consulting and teaching). I write Hummingbird604.com because I love showcasing my city and the province I live in ([read what I write about](#)). For one reason or another, my blog is fairly well-read (and I'm very grateful for that!). Despite being incredibly busy with my teaching, research and consulting, I do try to write about stuff I'm pitched on my personal blog. I've written this document to help you shape your pitch to me (PR professionals, this is for you).

- **Read my blog.** At least a few entries (5-8). I write about a VERY broad variety of things (restaurants, local businesses, environment, theatre, dance, my personal life, my travels within the province and in Canada, as well as product reviews).

- **Don't pitch me with a generic "Hello" or "Dear Hummingbird604"**. My name is Raul. It's clearly written on every entry. Try to personalize it as much as you can. You may even want to use the first paragraph of your pitching email to

The personal blog of a Vancouver-based educator in environmental issues

### Partnerships

**THE NETWORK HUB**  
startup launch pad

I have an **exclusive discount code** for **The Network Hub New Westminster** new Passes. Check out the terms and conditions here.

### Featured:

**Sunshine Coast Culture Crawl 2011**

### Giveaways

- Win a pair of tickets to the **Parade of Lost Souls Dance Party** (Ends October 26th, 5pm)
- Win a pair of tickets to **Supernatural Noir** (Ends October 28th, 2pm)
- Win a pair of tickets to **Vimy** (Ends October 28th, 2pm)

### Media Sponsor of:

**Taste to the YALETOWN**  
presented by **KIBC**  
October 19 - 30, 2011

# 7 Social Media

## Growth Opportunities for Social Media

The social media space is evolving at an astounding rate. New social networks are changing almost every day, and the environment is being heavily shaped by the advent of mobile technology.

There are many social networks that are leveraging mobile applications to allow businesses to interact with consumers on a more real-time basis. Facebook Places, Yelp, Foursquare, Gowalla and SCVNGR are all worth investigating. Through using services like these, businesses can encourage people to “check-in” to a physical location and create consumer loyalty. This evolving integration of the mobile and social web networks is likely to continue for some time.

Google+ is Google’s long anticipated entry into social media. After a few false starts, the first reviews are positive and user adoption has been exponential. The initial release was a first phase in a long-term strategy where

Google will tie its products together based around the Google+ platform. Blogger and Picasa are already slated for a re-brand under Google+ and others will follow.

Google’s key point of differentiation is its treatment of privacy - Facebook’s biggest weakness. With Google’s “circles,” users can organize their friends into groups and can publish content only to people in certain circles.

At the time of writing, it is too early to tell what the impact Google+ will be on the social media landscape, or specifically to business and the travel and tourism industry. Google has not rolled out their version of business accounts, for example. What is clear is that Google is serious and they are investing heavily in this new application. Watch its evolution carefully to see what opportunities it presents for your business.

# 8 Online Display Advertising

## Introduction

Online display advertising is one of the oldest forms of Internet marketing. It is often referred to as banner advertising. Online display allows you to create and publish an ad on one or more websites. When somebody clicks on the banner, it will link to your website.

Online display is an interruptive type of advertising. It puts a commercial message on a web page with the purpose of interrupting the reader and grabbing their attention. This is often not an easy feat. Your ad and creative message must be compelling enough for people to stop what they are doing and click on your ad.

## Types of Online Display Ads

Online display ads come in many shapes and sizes. They can consist of a single image, rotating images, sophisticated animation, and even video. The size of these ads are standardized by the Interactive Advertising Bureau ([www.iab.net](http://www.iab.net)).

## Online Display and the Purchase Funnel

Online display can be effective in the early stages of the purchase funnel for DMOs and *destination* businesses. With inspiring creative, a consumer can become aware of your product and visit your website to learn more about it.

Further down the funnel, an online display ad with a strong call-to-action, like a special offer, might compel someone to click to learn more about it. Make sure the page you send people to when they click corresponds to the offer on your ad.

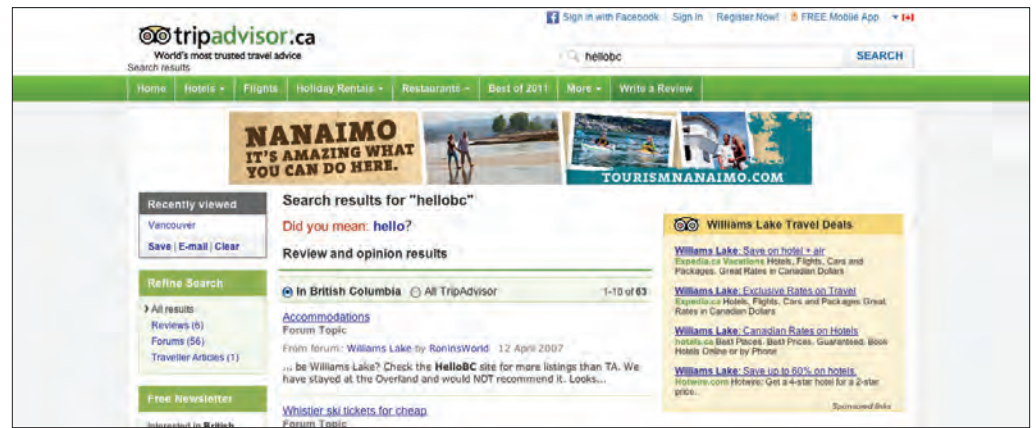


# 8 Online Display Advertising

## Selecting the Right Places to Advertise

You will get the best results when your ad is placed on a website that is visited by your target audience, on a page specifically related to your business. An ad promoting your whale watching tour in Prince Rupert will have more effect on TripAdvisor's pages for Prince Rupert than an article about the stock market on Canada.com for example.

Look back at your target audience and your research. It might make sense to put an ad on some of the websites your consumers frequently use for trip planning.



## Buying Ad Space

Some websites allow you to buy advertising directly through their internal sales department. Rates are typically charged by 1000 impressions (cost per thousand or CPM). That means you pay every time your ad is served, unlike SEM where you only pay for each click (cost per click or CPC). Rates and minimum investment depends on the website.

Other websites are part of ad networks. In that case you buy from a broker who sells ads for a number of websites. Sometimes this process is automated through a self-serve interface. For smaller websites or blogs you can try to contact the owner directly to work something out directly.

## Google Content Network

One of the ad networks is Google. As part of Google Adwords (see SEM), you can buy text ads and banner advertising on websites which are part of Google's program.

You can buy adspace on specific websites, but also based on keywords. You can choose to pay by CPC or CPM. Google will index the content on all web pages that are part of the program, determine what keywords

are relevant to the content, and display the corresponding ads. As a result, ads are often more relevant to the content on the page.

For operators with smaller investments, Google's Adwords program can be an attractive way to place Online Display ads on relevant web pages, managed through the same website as your SEM activities.

# 9 Email Marketing

## Introduction

Email marketing is a form of direct marketing where a marketer sends commercial email messages to consumers. It can be a cost-effective way to keep your tourism product top of mind or encourage repeat visitation from past customers.

Unlike SEO, SEM, or online display advertising, email marketing offers you the opportunity to pro-actively remind people to come and visit your business for the first time or to visit again. You do not have to wait for consumers to think of you.

## Email Marketing in the Funnel

Email marketing is a great strategy for businesses who connect with consumers at the top of the funnel. If you manage to encourage a consumer to consider visiting, collecting an email address provides you with the opportunity to keep your business top of mind and move consumers down the funnel.

For businesses who rely on their online marketing lower down the funnel, email

marketing provides the opportunity to close the sale. By sending product updates, offers and seasonal promotions, email marketing can pull your consumers over the line.

And from a loyalty perspective, email marketing gives you the opportunity to reconnect with past customers, ask them about their experience, encourage them to leave reviews on social networking sites, or visit again.

## Collecting Email Addresses

Building your email database is a crucial step in your online marketing plan. One of the best ways to do this is to include an eNewsletter sign-up on your website. And if your customers can book online through your website, you can ask them to join your mailing list. You can also ask your customers in person during their visit to sign up.

It is important to provide value to your customers. People are overwhelmed with the amount of emails they receive and have become very selective about signing up for commercial email messages. Tell people about the benefits of signing up and give them a sample of what they could expect to receive.

# 9 Email Marketing

## Email Marketing and Privacy

Because of the quantity of spam infiltrating inboxes daily, email marketing can have a bad reputation. Canada has laws in place to protect consumers from unsolicited emails. Privacy laws prohibit companies from sending mass distribution emails without permission.

When you collect email addresses, it is important consumers explicitly opt in to your program. After someone signs up for your email program, send a follow-up email to confirm that sign-up (double opt-in). Also, make sure you give people a clear option to unsubscribe in each email that you send (opt-out), and always store personal information in a secure database.

## Technology

The easiest way to implement an email marketing program is to use an SaaS solution. All you need to do is import your email database. Then you create email-marketing campaigns through an online interface.

There are a number of solutions available, each with different features and prices. Your web developer should be able to assist you in finding the best solution for you.

## Content and Creative

An email is a bit like a webpage. Instead of a consumer finding your page, you send it to your consumer. In order to create a good email message, a lot of the same rules apply from the website section earlier in this guide.

In email marketing, the subject line for your email message is very important. How many emails do you delete without even opening them because the subject line did not look like it was worth opening the message?

## eNewsletters and Ad Hoc Emails

An eNewsletter is a common form of communication in the tourism industry. An email is sent at regular intervals to subscribers. An eNewsletter is a great tool to keep your customers informed about the latest happenings in and around your business.

Another option for your email marketing program is sending ad hoc emails when there is something important to share. Ad hoc messages are a great way to inform your customers about new products, improvements or the latest special offer you have. Be sure to keep these targeted and meaningful to your audience so they are seen as a benefit, and not an irritation.

## Segmentation and Personalization

For businesses that want to take email marketing to the next level, segmentation and personalization are valuable approaches.

By segmenting your mailing list, you can send specific emails to specific audiences. Do you have a last-minute special for Valentine's Day for a nearby market? Segment your database and send that email only to specific cities. Do you want to send a coupon to customers who have not visited in more than a year? Segment your database by last purchase date.

By personalizing your emails, certain items in your email message are tailored to the

recipient based on the information stored in a customer's profile. Air Canada, for example, will personalize their emails based on your typical departure city and your frequent destination cities.

Relevant content is key to online marketing success. People do not pay attention to messages that are not applicable to them. That is why segmentation and personalization are powerful tools that deliver results. In order to get these results, however, there is a cost. There is significant technical set-up required and it involves more work to develop content and analyze results.

# 10 Third-party Websites

## Introduction

There are a many tourism websites that will list your business, or provide you with the opportunity to list your business on specific websites. The [HelloBC® Listings Program](#), for example, gives you the ability to have a business listing on Tourism BC's official website, [HelloBC.com](#) giving you instant access to over 9 million visitors around the world, and the benefits of all of their highly targeted marketing programs.

There are many more. Your local DMO, industry sector, travel portals, and social media websites may provide the opportunity to include information about your business. Some listings are free, some will charge you a fee. It is important to verify this information and maximize the opportunities available.

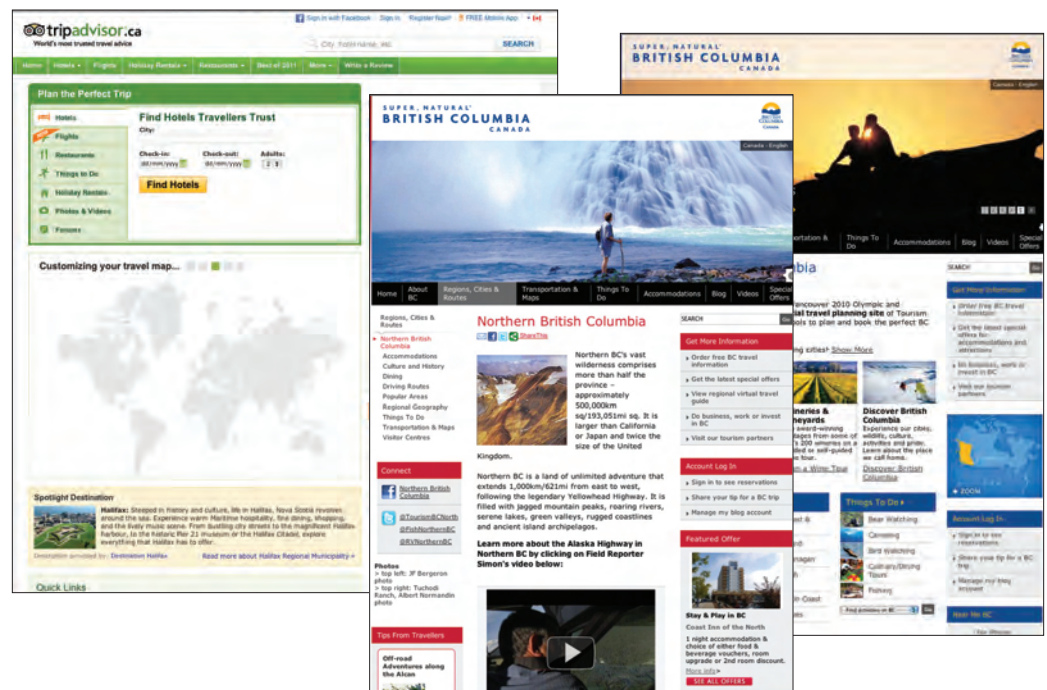
## Priority Websites

All tourism businesses in BC should work with the following websites, at a minimum:

**HelloBC** – HelloBC.com receives millions of visitors each year who are interested in travelling to British Columbia. For a minimal fee, your business can be listed on this site, and you have the opportunity to promote your special offers for free, amongst other benefits. To enroll in the HelloBC Listings Program, visit [www.TourismBC.net](#).

**DMOs and sectors** – Your local DMO and sector organization will likely have a listings program. This is another place where consumers will look for your business.

**TripAdvisor** – This site is the leader of all social media travel websites. Besides actively managing your reviews, you should also review the helpful information TripAdvisor provides for businesses. TripAdvisor offers many options for business operators, some free, others at a fee.



## Priority Websites

*Yelp* – Second behind TripAdvisor, but more important if you have a restaurant, Yelp allows you to claim your listing and manage your information much like TripAdvisor.

*Google Places* – This is your business listing on Google Maps. Find your business on Google Maps and claim your listing. Once you are verified, Google offers options to manage your listing and provides statistics about how, and how often, your listing is used.

*Facebook Places* – This is your business listing on Facebook. Search for your business and claim it, much like Google Places. Facebook does not offer a lot of the options Google provides, but this will likely change over time.

*Foursquare and Gowalla* – These location-based social networks are a blend between a review website and a social game. People check in using their smartphones and receive points and badges at businesses around the world. You have the opportunity to claim your business listing and provide customers with specials. Foursquare will provide useful insights into your customers.

## Additional Websites for Managing and Marketing Your Business Information

There are thousands of potential places, much like the websites above, where you can publish information. These places depend on your business type and target audience. Investigate what websites are used by your target audience and find out if you have the opportunity to manage your business listing.

# 11

## Summary

Online Marketing may seem to be a little daunting at first, however, the more you learn and experiment, the easier it becomes, and the greater the benefits to you and your business. As outlined in this guide, the greatest investment you can make is in the creation of an Online Marketing Plan to ensure a solid return on your online marketing investments. As you start to execute your plan, you may come back and refine it, just so long as it continues to provide the rationale for everything you do.

Once your plan is in place, focus on achieving your easiest objective – perhaps you only have time to develop or improve your website right now. Once this is in place, you can then focus on SEO and SEM, and gradually extend your reach to include social media and online advertising or emails. Invest in the one or two areas that you feel will give

you the greatest returns for your business, but don't be afraid to experiment. With limited investment, you can continually experiment, learn from the results and then refine your plan or tactics to improve your results next time; the opportunities are only limited by the amount of time you have to invest in this online world.

Technology is affecting the form, flow, speed, delivery channels and credibility of information in everything we do. Consumers are now able to make better-informed judgements than ever before about travel destinations and purchases, and are now the “go to” authorities for each other about the value and reliability of products. As stated at the beginning of this guide: online marketing is no longer an “option” for tourism businesses, it is essential in today's world.

# Appendix **1** Glossary

**CMS**  
Content Management System

**CPC**  
Cost per click

**CPM**  
Cost per thousand

**KPIs**  
Key Performance Indicators

**PPC**  
pay-per-click advertising

**SEM**  
Search Engine Marketing

**SEO**  
Search Engine Optimization

**SERPs**  
Search Engine Results Pages



# Appendix **2** Resources

Facebook  
[www.facebook.com](http://www.facebook.com)

Flickr  
[www.flickr.com](http://www.flickr.com)

Google  
[www.google.com](http://www.google.com)

Google's Search Engine Optimization  
Starter Guide  
[www.google.com/webmasters/docs/search-engine-optimization-starter-guide.pdf](http://www.google.com/webmasters/docs/search-engine-optimization-starter-guide.pdf)

HelloBC Listings Program  
[www.TourismBC.net](http://www.TourismBC.net)

Interactive Advertising Bureau  
[www.iab.net](http://www.iab.net)

PhoCusWright Travel Research  
and Travel Industry Events  
[www.phocuswright.com](http://www.phocuswright.com)

Tourism BC's Consumer Website  
[www.HelloBC.com](http://www.HelloBC.com)

TripAdvisor  
[www.tripadvisor.com](http://www.tripadvisor.com)

Twitter  
[www.twitter.com](http://www.twitter.com)

Twitter 101 for Businesses  
[www.business.twitter.com](http://www.business.twitter.com)

Tourism Business Essentials Guides  
<http://www.jti.gov.bc.ca/industryprograms/TBE/index.htm>

WordPress – free blogging platform  
and CMS system  
[www.wordpress.com](http://www.wordpress.com)

YouTube  
[www.YouTube.com](http://www.YouTube.com)



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and Innovation

