How to Optimize Your Website: A Complete Guide

Hey! Thanks for downloading on our complete guide about how to optimize your website.

You're about to get more than 50 pages about how to turn your website into a sales machine.

I know that getting visitors to your website is hard work, which means that each one needs to be treated as precious gold. I've divided this guide into four sections:

Section A – Getting Images Right
Section B – Writing to Sell
Section C – Designing to Sell
Section D – Converting the Sale

Hope you enjoy!

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THE WEBSITE SALES MACHINE

SECTION A: Getting Images Right

Great Photos Make a Huge Difference

Along with video and text, photography is one of the top 3 factors for crushing big sales through your site. That being said, if you just put a bunch of pretty photos up on your site what do you think will happen? Not much.

Photos need to serve the business goal, which is to convince more people to book. This means that photos should never get in the way of having a prominent headline on your site, for example.

Like video, which needs to be BIG and one of the most prominent things on your site (that is to say, not tucked away in the corner like a naughty dog), photography can make or break any website.

Photography doesn't cost much and will deliver you major returns. Here are nine tips that will immediately improve your site's photographs.

01. Avoid stock photography that feels like stock photography.

The key is for photos to feel real and genuine.
Ski companies make this mistake all the time, choosing to use random pro photos of some guy skiing down some hill.
For every photo, ask yourself: How does this help you sell YOUR tour? That's the key here.

02. The ideal photo has two heroes: The destination on a beautiful day and the tour in action.

It helps create the feeling of 'I want to do that!' that has people clicking on the 'book now' button. It comes down to the deep-seated 'fear of missing out' that all of us feel. Have you ever seen photos of friends enjoying themselves on a spectacular day and felt a sudden longing to be there? *That* is what you want in your photos.

03. Upload lots and lots of photos.

It's difficult to have too many photos but it *is* easy to have too few. You have effectively unlimited room at the bottom of your tour descriptions – add a few photos.

04. Encourage guests to send in their photos.

From there you can choose the best ones and display them on your site.

05. Get a social stream happening of your photos and be uploading constantly.

Make it a habit. It shows people that your company is active and popular, two of the biggest factors when it comes to successfully persuading people to take *your* tour and not one of the many others.

06. Take photos in the early morning or late afternoon. This is when sunlight has its magical golden quality. Some professional photographers are completely and weirdly unaware of this fact (or pretend to be unaware so they can schedule their day more easily), so make sure you insist.

07. Less posing, more fun.

Awkward poses are the way photos are done in society but you'll capture more attention with photos of people in the middle of having a blast.

08. No gray clouds.

It's surprising how big a difference clouds can make to a photo. I've totally changed the feel of a site *just* by removing a photo that had a lot of dark clouds! Try it - you can just *feel* the difference from photos taken on a beautiful day.

09. Use the rule of thirds.

This is a basic rule of photography which says that you shouldn't put anything in the center of a photo (unless you're doing a head-shot). When we have no photo experience we tend to put the horizon in the middle of a photo. Either put the horizon one third from the top or one third from the bottom of a photo. When photographing people, put them one third of the way in from the left or right side. Try it – you'll notice a big difference.

Hire A College Student Or Someone From A Local Directory Such As Craigslist To Take Your Photos

Photographers will scoff at this next statement, but getting great photos does tend to be much easier than video. Modern-day cameras are so good that they'll do most of the heavy lifting for you.

That being said, you do need someone who considers themselves to be a photographer – even if they're just part time – and has a portfolio. Portfolios matter because someone who has spent the last 10 years doing head shots is generally not in the right headspace (pardon the pun) to take photos for your business. The key is to get someone who understands that the photos are to showcase the product that you're trying to sell and not for the purposes of winning art competitions.

By hiring someone who is early in their career, you could help them build their portfolio and you might save a bit of money.

Get Past Guests To Send In Their Photos

Don't want to carry a camera around? Not sure how to take great photos?
You can take a different route and ask your guests for their permission to use *their* photos on your site. No doubt you'll have noticed that some of the people who come on your tours are lugging around state of the art cameras with gigantic lenses. Many of these people will be more than happy to pass across their photos.
There's a million ways you can ask them or arrange this, just be careful to make sure that everyone understands that there's no payment involved.
If they're someone who does photography professionally, however, you should expect to pay them.

THE WEBSITE SALES MACHINE
SECTION B: Writing to Sell

Surprising Fact: did you know that just by rearranging and changing the words on your site, it's possible for sales to go up by 25% overnight? If you want to sell people, they need to be convinced and words are the key foundation block for you to build towards this.

In this section, I've got a few basic tricks to help you nail the foundational details on your own. You'll see for yourself just how much impact words can have, implement some of it yourself and from there go and hire someone to help you extract the most sales possible.

We all know that a smooth talker can have a pretty girl enraptured or that a buffoon has the ability to turn off anyone they meet. There's no weapon mightier than the pen! It's about understanding what people are looking for and worrying about. Then all you have to do is tick their boxes!

Would A Samurai Choose Your Website As Their Sword?

Your website can be a shiny sword or a rusty dagger.

How many times have you heard someone justify a movie selection by saying 'it has great reviews'? As humans we look for ways to justify our decision to others in case things don't work out.

When people make their bookings, they don't do it alone. Someone will pick a tour as their favorite and then make the case to their friends or partner to choose your company for their trip.

Is your website going to help them make that case or get in their way? Is it full of great information and does it answer all the potential questions that someone might have?

Think about it – the winner in your market will often be the person who has the best weapon that helps people make the most convincing arguments to their peers. It's your job to make sure your website gives them the best evidence possible – great photos, video, testimonials, beautiful design, guarantee, and more.

Give your potential guest a nice, big list of arguments that they can use as their armor-piercing weapon. Your website can either be their Exhibit A to make their case or it can be the reason that the group chooses another operator.

Set Sales On Fire With These Basic Rules For Website Copy

Remember why you're writing. Forget everything you learned in school and get back to the PURPOSE of words. We write to communicate, not to impress our English teacher.
Perfect English is not the aim. Grammar matters right up to the point where it interferes with the effectiveness of your communication, and then it doesn't matter one bit. You may have noticed throughout this book that I throw out the rules of the English language where it suits me because I want to write just like I speak. This requires breaking the strait-jackets imposed on us all by our 5th-grade English teachers (who, with respect, have never had to test their words in the hot furnace of a competitive marketplace.)
Here's some basic copywriting tips before we get into the meaty stuff:

01. Have fun.

Be interesting. Show your personality.

02. Meaningless adjectives must die.

This is especially true where the adjective is bland and generic. Wonderful, amazing, beautiful, fantastic, and best are all words that lose their effect quickly. Of course your tour goes to a beautiful place. Of course you think you have great customer service or the best tour. Of course you're going to say that! Yawn. Give me something interesting!

03. Drop "we" "me" "I" "our" and "us" and change it to "you" and "your."

Talk directly to the person you are writing to. You'll notice that I use the word "you" incessantly here because I want to communicate with *you*. Write as if you're writing just to one person. Think of your typical favorite client even. If you were to write a message directly to them on Facebook or by email, how would you talk to them? Write like that.

04. Be direct.

Change "you will see the bridge with us" to "see the bridge with us." Get them to *feel* it.

05. Read it out loud.

Many writing mistakes can be picked up just by reading your words back to yourself.

06. Pass it to someone else to read.

What do they think is boring? Unconvincing? Pointless? Lacking in formation? Use their suggestions to improve it.

07. Put your most important information first.

People won't give you the time of day if you're wasting words at the top of a page. Too much work, they'll think.

08. Write for scanners.

Basically no one sits down and reads entire web pages any more, unless they are SUPER fascinating. That doesn't mean you need to write fewer words, however. It just means that you need to structure your content in a different way.

09. Remember that the home page is often not the first page someone will see.

A lot of visitors to your site will arrive at a different page, so each one needs to be written in such a way that a first time visitor gets what is going on.

10. Use the simple alternative for words.

A large percentage of visitors to your website are not highly educated or don't speak English as a first language.

This Trick Will Have People BEGGING To Book With You

There's a fantastic trick which you can use in writing to make people super keen to book with you. Curious to find out what it is?

Of course you would like to know, and that *is* the trick! I'm talking about **curiosity**.

Compare these two sentences:

"We will visit the Jordan Tower, which has 88 stories and offers wonderful views of the entire city." This is boring and generic.

"Come with us to the spectacular top of 88 story Jordan Tower - the tallest in Asia! Learn the ingenious methods used by its engineers to conquer its challenges and why they chose to keep heat out of the restaurant with 100% pure gold leaf paint." Not perfect, but much better.

It's not just about selling the destination, it's also about selling how your company has the exclusive knowledge to make it doubly interesting.

Think of the interesting facts that you share on your trip and then share *half* of it, leaving your website visitor to wonder what the rest is!

Give Them The Fear Of Missing Out

If you've ever been to Booking.com – the hotel booking website – you'll know what it's like to have fear of missing out. This fear is one of the prime human drivers – we just can't handle having an opportunity taken away from us.

Booking.com does this brilliantly. When you're looking at a hotel they might have a notice saying something like "hurry! Only 2 rooms left!" In that moment, you go from being a casual browser to someone who has to decide *right now.*

(For the cynics, Booking.com is telling the truth here – otherwise they'd get dragged into a world of pain by the FTC, who are tough on this stuff.)

Just by putting a notice such as "Hurry - most tours sell out" next to your booking button or pricing, you'll create urgency.

If you have a mechanism on your site which shows exactly how many spots are left for that day, even better. You don't need a $200/hr programmer to whip this up for you, either. Many of the tour booking software options available around the place allow you the option.

Another idea worth trying out is another trick from Booking.com where they say "2 people are looking at this hotel right now." It really moves you into action and forces you to decide (at least for me!).

Your About Page Will Be One Of The Top 3 Visited Pages – Make Use Of This Valuable Real Estate

When was the last time you looked at your about page? A while ago, I'd bet. It's perfectly natural to think that this page lacks importance but take a look at your statistics. You'll find that it's one of the most visited on your site. This means it COULD make the crucial difference in winning that booking.

The key here is to create a personal connection with the visitor to your site. If they like you, they will want to go with you!

Some tips:

1. Name the page “Our Guides” or anything less bland than “About.”

2. Share your personal story but in *first person.* Third person is impersonal by design. You should avoid it where possible.

3. Make the headline of the page interesting. It could a quote from your personal story but it needs to be a hook to get things going.

4. Showcase your team properly, if you have one.

5. Use photos of your team and yourself in the wild. Awkward smiles in front of a wall are for businesses that are having way less fun than you!

The B.E.T.T.E.R Method For Writing Tour Descriptions

How would you propose marriage to someone? Think for a second. I wouldn’t do it in my gym clothes, that’s for sure. I also wouldn’t do it while in the supermarket looking for vegetables.

If you want to propose marriage to someone, you will dress up nice, take your loved one to a beautiful location and do it there. The key here is that you take your time and do it *right.*

Your tour description is THE moment where you propose marriage to your potential customer – a marriage of their money and your wallet! It is when you set yourself apart and make them rush to choose you and no one else. I have talked about using keywords in your descriptions and writing rich copy. Let’s dive in a little deeper.

Writing out a basic description is not enough. Unless you are in the middle of nowhere, you have competition. Even if you are the only person offering your *specific* tour, they will always have other options. You need to write with detail and follow the principle of ‘more is more’. Less is more may apply to some things but it most definitely does not apply to tour descriptions. You need to almost overwhelm people with information.

Follow the ‘B.E.T.T.E.R’ Method to write a great description and you will be WAY ahead of the pack.

Basic Breakdown – Start out your summary with a basic breakdown and bullet points of the major attractions you are going to, including the price, starting point and other basic details.

Exhibit the Experience – Lay out in great detail the tour while keeping the curiosity factor. Use subheadings and short paragraphs to break up the information and include photos so people can see what they are getting.

Short and sweet will NOT help you sell. **It's a myth.** People are risking their holiday experience with you. Go into *detail.*

Tick Their Boxes – What do people need to know? Do you cater for disabled people? Children? Are meals included? What do they need to bring? Are admission fees included? Have you listed literally every single place you go to? Who knows what your potential guest has in mind! Get it all out on your site.

Testimonials – Include testimonials you have received for that specific tour. Make sure the testimonials reference specific highlights of your tour, rather than the generic 'we loved it!' type of testimonials that one sees around. Include photos (or videos) where possible.

Expertise – In your description, demonstrate your specific expertise that makes the tour magic. How your local knowledge gives you insider secrets and history that they could never tap into anywhere else.

Reservation – At the bottom of your description, have a call to action – a gigantic button, a contact form, a calendar of availability – to guide people to book. Whatever it is, the end of your description should flow into the exact action you want your website visitor to take.

The Mistake That Too Many Custom Tour Providers Make – Not Providing Sample Itineraries

A basic principle of marketing anything is that you shouldn't make people work to figure out what you're offering. This is a mistake that too many custom tour providers are making.

What I'm saying is this: if you do custom tours, there's no law against providing sample itineraries!

Sample itineraries help people understand what it is you actually *do.* Create different itineraries according to the different types of inquiries that you receive.

For example, winery tour operators might create a sample Boutique Winery Tour for those who love visiting tiny wineries and want to chat with the owner. Other visitors want to check out the wineries of the brands they already know and love – call it The Greatest Hits Winery Tour.

Forcing people to use their own imagination to create a tour of a place they most likely have never even visited before is a quick way to go out of business. You're putting the onus on your guest to do the work. This is crazy.

Show your expertise up front by showing your visitor the kind of experience they could have with you.

I'd recommend placing at least 4-5 sample itineraries, but don't call them 'sample' itineraries – make it look like a tour that they can easily book – emphasizing that the entire experience is customizable. Alongside your itineraries on the home page, have a specific section for custom tours so those people who are genuinely looking for customized experiences can have it.

Try it: you'll see that many of your inquiries and bookings will come in for your pre-created tours.

Show That You're The Boss

You need to exploit every potential advantage.

One way to do this is to show exactly why you (or your team) are the one to make someone's holiday dreams come true. This stuff needs to be right up the top so that even blind Freddy couldn't miss it.

How you can incorporate this information into your site? Think about answering these questions when you're writing your content.

1. How many years experience do you or your team have in delivering tours?
2. How long has your business been open?
3. How many successful tours have you run?
4. What is your industry experience? For example, you may not have been running tours for long but you could be a renowned expert in your field.
5. What qualifications do you have?
6. What is your environmental impact?
7. What are your industry association endorsements and memberships?
8. What kind of equipment do you use? How new is it? Does it have safety ratings?
9. What insurance do you have?
10. What safety certifications do you have? What's your safety record?
11. What social proof do you have?

Social Proof: What It Is And Why You Need To Exploit It To The Max

Have you ever walked past an empty restaurant and then straight into a full one despite not knowing anything about either restaurant... just because of safety in numbers?

Welcome to social proof – where people make a decision to buy something based on its popularity.

In Robert Cialdini's excellent book "Influence: The Psychology of Persuasion", the author explains just how powerful an influence it can be to see a crowd choose something. Take the example of canned laughter on TV shows – everyone *says* they hate it, but observation shows that people laugh more and show more satisfaction with television shows that use it.

You probably remember the extreme pressure to conform in high school. This instinct stays with us right to the grave even if it's a little less obvious at times.

Social proof shows that you are credible, popular and that other people are having great experiences with you. This has a powerful impact on how people perceive your business. This is the underlying principle as to why businesses with boatloads of great TripAdvisor reviews will generate more bookings.

A few examples of social proof:

1. Photos of people having fun on your tour
2. News-media or blog mentions
3. Industry association memberships (as mentioned before)
4. TripAdvisor excellence badges
5. To a lesser extent, embedding your Facebook widget if it has a lot of likes
6. Major awards
7. The most important: legitimate testimonials

How To Win At The Game Of Testimonials

Right now, you're aware of the importance of testimonials. It just so happens that there is more to it than just putting up a testimonials page and copy-pasting in the emails you receive.

Testimonials suffer from credibility issues. Too many websites have used fake testimonials. That means that anything you use needs to feel as real as possible to ward off cynicism.

How to win the game of testimonials:

01. Use reviews posted on other sites.

This is the quickest way to ensure that a review appears legitimate and not faked. Quote the review and link to the source of the review.

02. Video testimonials can open a world of difference.

You can whip out a camera during a trip with a happy guest and ask them what they think. (I must give credit to Tim Warren from Travel Business Success for that tip.)

03. Make sure any testimonials you receive are as specific as possible.

Be sure that they say what made the guest so happy to travel with you. A generic "I had fun" doesn't really do much as a testimonial.

04. Real names and real photos go a long way.

Quoting just the initials of someone looks fake. But won't people object to having their names on your site?

Some people are worried about having their name on the internet. That's fine – you don't HAVE to include their testimonial on your site. That simple.

05. Make the best part of the testimonial into a headline.

Put it at the top of the testimonial so people are drawn into reading the entire quote about how great your company is.

06. Make the testimonials PROMINENT.

Great testimonials will be one of your super-power sales weapons. Sadly, too many tour operators (or their silly web designers, let's be honest here) hide their testimonials away. Bring them into the light and let them shine.

07. If you get a great testimonial, share it on social media.

You don't need to spam your social media with testimonials but once or twice a month does the trick. If people like your business, they will be happy for you and you'll be reinforced as a great business in their mind.

08. Quote your testimonials in all printed materials.

Include them in your brochures, posters and other things you have printed to advertise or give customers.

09. Quote your testimonials in your profile description on TripAdvisor.

Quote one sentence each from two different testimonials and you'll be fine.

The Secret Gold Mine In The Questions You Get Asked

Every time someone sends you a question, do you see it as a hassle or as gold-plated FREE market research?

Do you have questions that are coming up repeatedly? If you're answering the same questions over and over, this is clearly an issue! Think about how you address it on your site and try to answer those questions there, before you get a call or email.

Put a frequently asked questions section at the bottom of every tour description, right at the end. This will help all of those people who are still scrolling and don't have all of their concerns addressed.

Copywriting guru Joanna Wiebe from CopyHackers.com has a favorite tactic for writing on clients' sites: talk to the actual customers and then only use those words in the copy.

It's a strategy that's so stupidly clever that few of us are smart enough to have even thought of it! We have our own way of explaining things or describing things but the way to really *connect* with our guests is to use the words *they* would use.

Given that you're a tour operator this is kind of simple. You spend all day long talking with your guests, so you know exactly how they talk.

Ask yourself: "have I ever heard a customer use these words? This terminology?" If the answer is no, then have a good hard think about how much you want to include those words or consider putting an explanation instead.

Address The FUDs (Fears, Uncertainties And Doubts) Of Your Prospects

Committing to spend money on your tour is a significant risk for customers. They've spent a lot time dreaming of their holiday and are now trusting it to you. Their holiday memories are in your hands.

You're going to need their trust. Showing your expertise and social proof contributes to this but we need to go further.

What do you find people are worried about before booking your tour? You'll often find that people begin to worry about factors that pop up in negative TripAdvisor reviews – both of your business and similar businesses. In positive reviews you'll see people saying things like "we were worried there'd be too many people to enjoy it, but it was perfect." Take note of these worries.

When you book a tour, you're not just thinking of you. You've also got to think about the people coming with you. This causes people to be especially cautious – if you book for yourself and it doesn't work, fine, but if you book for someone else and it doesn't work... then they'll blame *you.*

Take all the Fears, Uncertainties and Doubts people have and address them in the words on your website and you'll go a long way to winning more sales.

If your website deals perfectly with FUDs, it helps people justify their decision to book with you if something goes wrong. Don't underestimate the power of this. Some tour operators have implemented JUST this change to their site and gone from nearly broke to having a successful business.

The person advocating to book with you will make use of the FUD information you have on your site to help sell their friends.

What are people worried about when they get in touch with you? Are they worried about the weather? Are they worried that they might not see a dolphin? Do what you can to try and create that safety blanket in which they feel warm, cozy and safe with you.

Offer A Great Guarantee To Overcome Fears, Uncertainties And Doubts

One of the biggest jobs of selling on a website is to convince people to take the risk of giving you money without ever having met you.

Buying something without having ever seen it is a genuine, big risk. You may know your tour is fantastic but your potential guest won't be so sure. In fact, most of the points of this book are all about overcoming the sense of risk that someone feels – great photos, great testimonials... the whole kit and kaboodle is all about making people feel safe booking with *you*, a complete stranger.

One of the most powerful ways to enhance the risk-free nature of your service is to offer a convincing guarantee. 'Happiness guaranteed or your money back' is fairly standard but it's possible to go further.

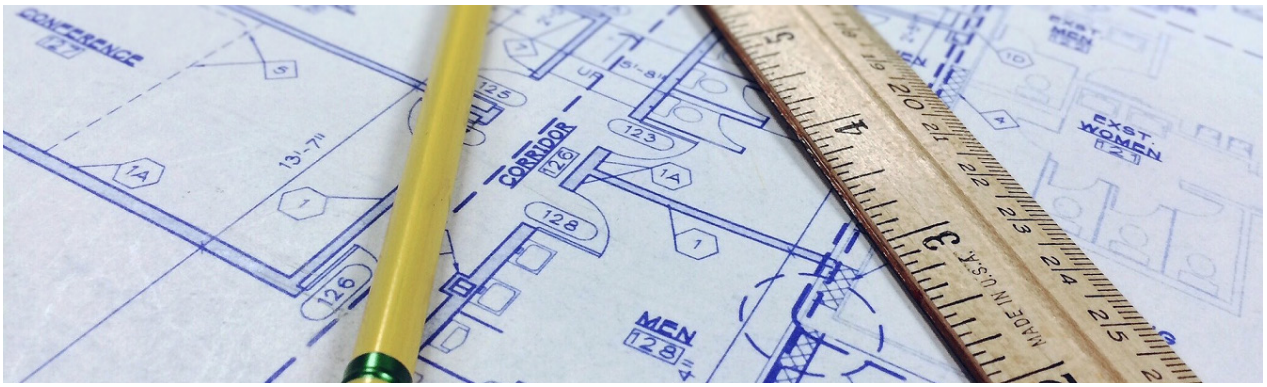
Tourism operators who take people to see animals often will say things like 'see 5 dolphins or receive a ticket to come back, free!' That kind of guarantee can be powerful – I should know because 10 years ago, I chose one dolphin tour company over another specifically because of that guarantee and *still* remember it.

What kind of guarantee could you offer?

Probably the biggest barrier for small businesses owners when they offer a guarantee is a feeling of risk – what would happen if people take advantage of it? The fact that you feel a fear of offering a guarantee should be the perfect demonstration of WHY you should be offering a guarantee – finally you're understanding how your potential customer feels. Do you want them to feel that small nagging doubt or do YOU want to feel it? Do you really want to saddle that emotion onto their shoulders?

People very rarely will take you up on your guarantee. If people are regularly asking for their money back, it's a clear sign that you have a genuinely terrible product and need to fix it. It is a harsh way to receive that message but better to receive the message rather than stick your head in the sand.

THE WEBSITE SALES MACHINE
SECTION C: Designing to Sell



Some websites convert 1.5% of their visitors into sales. Others convert 2.5%. Have you ever wondered what you can do to increase that percentage? Think about it: it could be THE most important percentage in your business.

Just by increasing your conversion rate from 2% to 2.2% you'll increase your revenues by 10%. All this just by converting a TINY 0.2% of extra visitors to sales. And who doesn't want to increase revenue?

Think about the power of this. Do you think there could possibly be some changes you can make to your site that might convert an extra 0.2% of visitors to sales?

You're just about to learn secrets that even most web designers aren't aware of.

Many of the following tips will seem almost obvious, but try to remember the last time you saw a tour operator website that nailed all these factors (or even half of them). It's a rare feat. And that's just going to make your site stand out even more.

You spend so much time looking at your own website that you can't be a good judge of it. People coming to it for the first time are having a completely different experience to you! They don't know your product offering and are lost when they arrive at the home page of your site.

The distracted nature of the majority of internet browsing means that your website needs to accommodate for this. You need to get their attention quickly and keep it. Our goal is to

remove even the tiniest obstacles which cause people to give up and look for another tour operator. Your site needs to be super easy to use. In fact, it needs to be even easier than you would think it does.

If your website was launched before 2011, it doesn't matter how nice it looks, you need a new one. That's just a simple fact. The majority of current web technology has been developed during or after 2011. If your site was built before that, you're missing out on a lot of new developments. In fact, most websites built in 2011 or later are also generally built incorrectly as web designers struggle to keep up with the times.

User experience is everything. Remember when we talked about SEO? I explained that having a good user experience has become a plank in your Google ranking. Neglect it to your peril.

According to a survey released by marketing software maker HubSpot, for 76% of users the most important factor in a website is that "the website makes it easy to find what I want." In the coming pages, I'll share with you the lessons I've learned in terms of making sure a website is easy to use for *anyone* who visits your website.

Before we start on this process though, there's one thing you need to understand: without the proper investment of time and money, you're drastically lowering your chances of real success – that's why we call it an investment!

As Obvious As A Brick In The Face

I call it the 'Drunk Old Guy Principle'. Here it is: When an 80 year old drunk Italian who has bad eyesight and struggles a little with English visits your site, does he understand what you do and what he needs to do next?

And I don't just refer to the home page. Every. Single. Page. needs to have a glaringly obvious purpose.

The headline of your site should be readable from several yards away from your computer. *That's* the kind of obvious I'm talking about.

Internet users in browsing mode more or less have their brains switched off. There's a good chance they're watching television at the same time or juggling some other activity such as managing children or five Facebook conversations. You need to catch their attention.

A huge, descriptive headline along with a great photo and an obvious place to click is what combats their lack of attention and grabs their focus. I've seen the proof of this countless times in the statistics of clients over the years. This needs to be the first change you make to your site.

Take your visitors by the hand and guide them. Every single page on the site needs to have an obvious next step that you want your guests to take. This is something very few tour operator websites do.

Most home pages have a photo or two, some awards, a bit of text and that's it – the guest is expected to take the initiative to figure out what to do next.

In addition, your tour listings and descriptions need to have a prominent call to action – don't just expect that people will automatically go looking for your bookings and inquiries page, because many simply won't.

Your Website Needs To Run Faster Than Usain Bolt And Marion Jones' Love Child Souped Up On Steroids!

Here's a totally unsurprising fact: people like using faster websites.

Here's the totally unsurprising consequence of that fact: faster websites make more sales.

Studies by companies such as Google, Yahoo and Amazon have all shown that website speed makes a non-trivial difference to their bottom line – in fact, many studies report that for every 1 second of delay in the first few seconds, a website will lose about 7% of sales.

7%. That's a LOT of sales to lose for a one second delay.

To test the performance of your own site, use Google Pagespeed Insights. If your site gets less than 80% across any of the categories, your website needs help! (In my own testing, I've never seen a website get more than 90% across all three.)

If a new website isn't a possibility, have a chat with your web designer about what they can do to clean that score up.

It's Google's very own tool, which means you're getting a sneak-peak insight into how they view your website. Google has publicly stated that website speed affects how much you pay per click on Adwords *and* your search engine rankings. Have a think about that.

Track Which Marketing Sources Are Performing Best With Google Analytics

Most tour operators in today's age have Google Analytics installed on their site. It's a great little piece of software but the information will often not help you all that much if you do not tell it what the goal of your website is. Google Analytics can not read your mind (yet), so we need to tell it what we want from our site. This way, it knows what we consider to be a success – and then it can report on these things and help you make adjustments to improve your results.

For example, when people book a tour with you they'll often be taken to a "Thank You For Your Booking" page. (And if they're not, they should be.) There's only one way for them to get to that

page – they've booked something with you. As such, the goal is to get people to that page.

Once Google Analytics knows that getting people to that page is your goal, it can then track all visitors who arrive to your booking confirmation page and then mark them as a success. From there, you'll be able to see exactly which visitor sources are delivering your customers. This is SUPER-DUPER-POWERFUL data.

From the time you set this up, you will be able to see which of your traffic sources are kicking butt and which are failing. A common complaint of those using Google Adwords is that they can't tell if it's working or not. No longer! Not only can you see what is working, you can fix what isn't.

Added to this, Google now offers something called Assisted Conversion Tracking. If someone comes in through one traffic source and then returns to buy from another, you'll be able to see this in Google Analytics. Now you can see the actual sources of your customers! It could be the case that Google Adwords is working a lot better for you than you thought it was. Google Analytics can show you the data to help you see what really is and isn't working. No more guesswork!

As to the actual process to set up Goals, it's hard to describe in a book but your web consultant should be able to help you set them up in a jiffy – we do it for all our customers when their websites go live and you'll find that many other companies do the same. Alternately, there's tutorials online including one at tourismeschool.com.

The Number One Goal Of Your Home Page Is Not What You Think It Is

Have you ever stopped to consider what the number one goal of your home page is?

All that design, all those photos, all that text: to what end? Most home pages have no obvious idea as to what they want the visitor to do next. If you have a page about a specific tour, for example, it's easy to write content for that and direct people towards that goal. But your home page? Hmm.

Well, here's your answer: **The goal of a home page is to convince a visitor to click somewhere.**

That's it. That's all you need to aim for. Give them at least one big shiny thing to click on, right in the center of the screen.

That first click is crucial. It's the first step to getting someone to *engage* with your website, the place from which we can send them down the rabbit hole. By doing this we decrease the bounce rate of your site and get people to hang around for longer, eventually increasing sales.

Put Your Phone Number And At Least One Credibility Statement In Your Site's Header

This is becoming less and less important unless your business relies on telephone inquiries.

Back in the day when people were much more suspicious of the internet, you could increase sales just by including a phone number on your site to show you had a legitimate business. While it's now *less* important, that doesn't mean it shouldn't be done.
Add some sort of credibility statement to your website's header in addition to your phone number, too.

"1,432 clients since 1996"
"#1 on TripAdvisor for 2013"

and so on and so forth.

Add A Live Chat Widget To Your Site

You've probably seen these around: live chat widgets where you can chat to a website operator (or at least, a customer service person) are becoming de rigeur on many sites. They make it easy for customers to get in contact. Well, they should.

Most of them are executed poorly as most live chat widgets sit passively in the background hoping.

It's better for a chat tool to automatically pop up and try to engage a chat – if you can get a guest involved in a chat, you astronomically increase your chances of getting a booking as you have a chance to create a memorable personal connection with them which is the key. People assume these are just robots – so if you say "I'm actually here" to your visitor, this helps.

Recommended Tools:

1. Tawk.to

I've had some rather uncomfortable live chat experiences where the operator keeps trying to push me into having a phone call instead of chatting. While the idea to engage is correct, the technique is not. Making your customers, or potential customers, feel frustrated is rarely a good business strategy.

Rather than just sit and answer their questions, you can ask questions of them and engage them in conversation. You can also do things during the chat session such as offer them a free ebook or even a discount code for the trip they are enquiring about. Have a think about what exact things you can do to create a human-level connection with the person you are talking to.

Additionally, make sure to include your name and photo in the chat widget so your website visitor can get a good idea of who they are talking to. Those go a long way toward making a human connection and helping people to want to book with you.

If you have office staff who man the phone and keep your operation humming, it's easy to get one of them to sit on live chat each day as well. You won't get a huge amount of people trying to engage with you but it's worth having it available. As a website visitor, I love using live chat

widgets to ask questions – it's much easier than sending an email. Just make sure that you or the staff member using it *uses* it. Many people forget to sign in each day which means your widget just sits there offline, looking silly.

How To Reduce Your Bounce Rate

In your Google Analytics account, you'll notice that your bounce rate is displayed prominently. The term bounce rate refers to those people who hit your website and leave without taking any further action.
It's important to note that Google does NOT use the bounce rate you see in Analytics as a way to determine rankings. For their own rankings, they use a different idea called the 'long click'. Google can see when someone clicks on a search engine result to go to your website. From there it's not difficult to then measure how many people come *back* to Google by clicking the back button. Google's measure of a quality outcome is for people to click on a website in their search results and never come back. They take it to mean that the person found what they were looking for on your site and didn't need to look any further.

The bounce rate measure you see in Google Analytics does include other things, such as people closing their browser when they hit your site. This exact statistic *doesn't* have an impact on your search results, but it does clearly impact your sales, so we need to work to reduce it.

To reduce our bounce rate, we have one singular goal: to get someone to click somewhere. Anywhere. This needs to be done on navigation pages (such as the home page) as this is where the majority of your visitors will arrive. It's a simple exercise: all you need to do is give people something to click on and a reason to do it. That's it! You can do that!

What tends to work well is either a gigantic button in the center of the screen, or tiles with photos of each tour that drive the click. I learned this when I worked for one of Australia's largest digital marketing agencies. My job was to manage the online marketing campaigns of around 60 websites, a large chunk of them in the tourism space.
One day I noticed that one of the websites in our care had an extraordinarily low bounce rate (it was around 20-25%). Being so low, I decided to take the time to figure out why and it turned out that the reason was the use of tiles in the navigation (tiles are basically clickable thumbnails with photos and some text description.)

Note: if you have a bounce rate of below 10% this most likely means you have the Google

Analytics code installed on your website twice, this tends to muck with the code. Every website I have ever seen with a bounce rate below 10% was suffering from this issue. So beware of numbers that seem too good to be true – they might be just that.

It Needs To Be Easier To Read Than You Think

Mobile devices. Small monitors. Low light. Bad eyesight. There are many reasons text can often be more difficult to read than you might think.

Speaking for myself, I have some difficulty reading websites with dark backgrounds and will generally do everything I can to avoid them. It's all about making your website a pleasurable place to be.

Some tips:

1. Body text should always be dark text on a light background.

2. Do you have any elderly relatives? Take a look at your website again. Could they read it without problems or would they be squinting up against the monitor? Asking yourself this question is a good basic rule to follow.

3. The text size should be larger than you think and with a decent amount of space between each line.

4. Break the text up into small chunks.

5. Bold anything that's important, such as your key points of difference or the important things in your tour.

Responsive Design For Mobile Devices: Without It, Your Website Is Most Definitely Obsolete

At the time of writing, most tour operators are getting 45-50% of their visitors from mobile devices and that number is growing. This means that your mobile website is now MORE important than your 'normal' website. You need to be designing your site so that it's mobile-friendly.

Responsive design makes your website shift size to fit whatever device it is being seen on. It will fit perfectly on an iPhone screen and on a normal desktop computer while being exactly the same website. You and your developer will get the benefit of your site looking great on multiple devices, but you won't have to worry about adjusting your design or code for each device.

You *must* be able to cater to mobile devices in a modern world. Catering to only one half of your visitors is website insanity. We know this because in a Google survey, "67% of users said they're more likely to purchase a product or service from a site that is mobile-friendly" and "48% of users become frustrated and annoyed when on sites that have been either been poorly optimized or not optimized at all (for mobile.)" Optimizing your site for only desktop or only mobile users won't work anymore.

I had the good fortune to interview Peep Laja of ConversionXL, one of the world's top experts on improving website conversions. He told me this:

"I've never seen an instance where a website has not increased its sales as a result of changing their design to responsive."

Without responsive design your website is living in the past and making fewer sales. As a technology, it has replaced mobile websites as the standard for dealing with mobile devices. The reason is simple – companies keep bringing out new devices of all shapes and sizes and mobile websites just cannot keep up. No one has the time or energy to even try. In today's world, there are thousands of different mobile devices and you need to be able to cater to *all* of them.

Sounds difficult? It doesn't have to be. As you now know, responsive design automatically adjusts itself to all devices. Problem solved!

If I could give one more piece of advice for taking care of customers using mobile devices, it would be this: **Add a Tap to Call Button on Mobiles**

If your business is the type that takes bookings over phone calls, you can add a tap-to-call button on your responsive website.

Whenever someone visits from a device below a certain screen size – basically, anything smaller than an iPad mini – they will automatically see a button that says 'Tap Here to Call'. This makes it easier – hence more likely – for them to call.

Attractive Design Helps Sales – Both Directly And Indirectly

Having an attractive website will help your sales. (There, I said it. Controversial stuff.) While any web designer will tell you that an attractive design will help sales as if it's the be-all end-all, this is just one component of a larger experience.

Attractive designs are like attractive people – for better or for worse, you tend to linger around them. Having said that, a beautiful website is the cherry on top and as such it must serve your business goals and not conflict with them. .

This is an indisputable fact: fairly or not, some people will judge you on the design of your website. These people use the quality of a design to measure the quality of a business. Maybe living in a world full of Apple products has taught people to make this association. Either way, it helps to take into account.

Here are the effects of an attractive site:

01. Increased time on site

When a site is attractive and pleasant to be around, your statistics will show that people linger for longer and as a consequence give you more of a chance to sell them.

02. Increased bookings

As mentioned, a major factor when people are booking on behalf of others is that they need to be able to defend their decision. An attractive site is a great weapon for this.

03. Improved SEO

This comes as people are more willing to link to you. When a website owner links to your site, it reflects on their own credibility so they tend to link to great looking businesses. Moz.com, which is the leading informational site about SEO, has called this the 'no one likes to link to a crummy site' phenomenon.

04. Increased social sharing

For the same reason as before, people feel more comfortable sharing things on social media which are likely to reflect well on them.

05. Improve your chances of industry partnerships

Once again, this comes back to the 'I may need to defend my choice' phenomenon. When larger companies are looking to select partners, their employees' main priority is to make a defensible decision. If you nail all the steps in this book AND have an attractive design, you'll go far.

THE WEBSITE SALES MACHINE
SECTION D: Converting the Sale

They've seen your photos. They've read the great tour descriptions. They've found your website a pleasure to use. Now for the final step: close the sale and get those who are on the fence to book with you *now.*

You can do this. You know what needs to be done. Let's get started.

Follow Up Fast

Did you know that the speed at which you reply to an inquiry is *more important* than what you say? In fact, multiple studies have shown that you can increase conversions of inquiries to sales by several *hundred* percent just by responding within the first 30 minutes.

On paper, this will seem crazy but when you think about it... it still seems crazy!

When you get a question or request, you're in the running as a potential candidate. There's a good chance you're even the #1 choice. But the longer you leave it, the more the person who contacted you cools off. They're going to keep browsing and might find a company who excites them even more, because of this rock-solid written-in-stone fact:

Emotions fade.

After sending you the message, the excitement begins to disappear. Just one day later they may not really care all that much. They've forgotten how looking at your photos made their heart race or how your testimonials made them feel secure.

There's a reason why the expression 'strike while the iron is hot' is so popular. Make use of this understanding and turn it to your advantage.

Not only this, but by replying quickly you'll establish yourself as someone who is available and dependable in the minds of your potential guest.

Have A Follow-Up System

Someone inquires with you. What happens next? While this is MOST important for businesses that handle larger sales, it's important for all businesses.

If you're selling tours of decent value, track inquiries in a spreadsheet or CRM. While this sounds like a drag (and is), you can automate the process in many ways using tools available online, which helps you link your pieces of software together.

People will get distracted by the hustle and bustle of daily life. If you have valuable leads, don't let them walk away without a few nudges!

If you sell lower-cost tours, you can still place them into an automated followup series which requires zero work from you besides the initial setup.

If you have a concrete follow-up system, you will increase the number of sales to these people. I guarantee it.

A Trick To Help You Follow Up Fast

Sitting around all day refreshing your email doesn't sound like much of a good time.

That's why you need to use either SMS notification or phone call notification for *all* new leads. We offer this to our customers and there's a good chance your current agency does, too.

Our system converts your email inquiry into an automatic SMS or phone call. The faster you

respond, the more likely you are to win the business. Implementing something like these notifications will help you achieve faster response times. And that leads to more sales.

Aim for a 5 Minute Response Time. Why not? You need to respond at some point so you might as well make it snappy. This is something I've struggled with in my own business but we're working on it. Start to grind that time down by measuring those stats and you're on the right path.

Setting up this sort of thing is super affordable – we charge peanuts for it. It's so affordable that I recommend it to literally all tourism businesses, no matter their size.

Track Your Response Time Easily Using Online Tools

You may not be able to aim for a 5 minute turnaround time on customer service emails, but you CAN track your overall response time and begin driving it down.

You can do this using an online help desk tool which – importantly – just looks like email to you client. They think that they're emailing you and you're responding to them, but the actual truth is that you're managing it all on the back-end with a system.

Previously, help desks had an elaborate process of registering yourself on their software, creating a ticket and then waiting for a response. No longer!

The three most popular examples of this new type of tool at time of writing are Groove HQ, HelpScout and SupportBee (I use HelpScout). It's like having an email inbox on steroids. Each service listed above has its own advantages but the key one we're looking for is being able to track response time. At any time, you can see your response time. You know what they say, you can't improve it if you're not measuring it.

One more thing: if you own a larger operation and have dedicated support staff, please don't walk over to their desk right now and dump the 5 minute response time expectation on their shoulders with no warning or preparation. It's unfair to them. Be deliberate about your processes and make sure you work along-side your staff to create and optimize them. The first step needs to be setting up a system where a new customer service email creates a notification so that you or your team know an email has arrived – as mentioned in the previous tip.

Answer The Bloody Phone

Some of the bits of advice in this book may seem obvious. “Answer your phone” is a case in point.

“Really? Answer the phone? Great advice, Sherlock,” is what you may be thinking. That being said, the only reason any of the points in this book are listed is because I’ve seen people consistently getting it wrong.

On a holiday in Malaysia in 2013, I decided I wanted to go diving the very next day after a previous plan was canceled by an operator. Looking to salvage my holiday, that afternoon I went to the website of a tour operator and they didn’t answer my phone call.

A key thing to remember here is that most international tourists don’t have working telephone lines so it won’t be easy for them to call you. If they do manage to call you it’s going to be on someone else’s phone and will most likely be expensive and a hassle for them.

In my desperation, I took a taxi down to their office but being 4pm it had closed for the evening. I tried to call again. No answer. Tried their mobile phone. No answer.

Then, I discovered on their website the cell number of their head dive instructor. She promised to get back to me. 5 hours later, silence. I called again and at 10pm at night I finally had my booking. How many customers has this business lost because of their inability to answer phones and be available?

If you’re going to have a phone number on your site, be ready for calls.

Dial Up Your Contact Methods

Not too long ago, I found a small business that had listed their WhatsApp details where they said “Contact Us.”

Being an avid WhatsApp user, I thought this was pretty cool and decided to contact them using that. Who knows if I would have bothered to get in touch otherwise?

Listing a multitude of contact methods is a great idea but only if you’re going to monitor the

methods. The business in the example mentioned is a case in point. I sent them a WhatsApp message and they took 2 days to respond.

While things such as Twitter or Facebook can send you email notifications (which can be converted into SMS/phone call notifications as mentioned earlier), services like WhatsApp, Viber and WeChat are just smartphone apps, meaning people will message you at any time of the day or night.

In many cases, having an unusual contact method will spark a smile in someone and help convert them into an inquiry.

Bonus Tip 1: If you're going to go down this path, make sure that you get the same user-name/handle on as many of these services as possible, otherwise you will confuse people.

Bonus Tip 2: If you're going to list contact details on a company site, make sure your profile there is consistent with what you have listed on the site. When you respond from a personal account with a photo of your children, you may confuse them.

Make Your Inquiry Form As Difficult To Use As Possible (or Not)

Let's just say I have a simple question for you:
"Do you operate on New Year's Day?"

That should be easy for me to ask, right? Why, then, do some operators present me with a booking form that asks me for all sorts of details?
I just want to ask a question! If someone calls you up do you force them to answer 10 questions before you get around to answering them? No, of course not.

If you take bookings via a form, make a booking form and a contact form and for *both* forms, chop down the form fields to the barest minimum the amount of information needed. For the love of everything good and right, don't make me work to give you money.

I recommend providing your email along with the form. Some people prefer to use forms, other people prefer to email directly. I'm in the latter camp because too many times I have submitted an inquiry to a form and... nothing. Why make me fill out a form if you're just going to ignore it? Make sure the email you provide is a clickable link so if they have a native email program, it will open straight away.

The Booking Button: Bigger Than Godzilla

Get yourself a big 'even blind drunk 80 year old Freddy couldn't miss it' booking button. You don't want to lose sales because of a too-small button.
Here are a few tips:

01. Make it obvious.

The booking button needs to be the most clearly identifiable part of the page. If someone were to take their glasses off, they should be able to still identify the booking button.

02. Use contrasting colors.

The color of the booking button needs to really stand out. It should be the one time you see that color on that page.

03. Use imperatives.

These are commands such as "Book Now" as opposed to "Bookings and inquiries." People need to be guided through the booking process – our lizard brain is looking for pointers as to what to do next.

04. Use personal pronouns.

For example: "Book My Tour " as opposed to "Book a Tour." Interestingly, we used to recommend using "Book Your Tour" but a few tests around the internet have shown that "My" generally beats "Your" as a best practise.

05. Create a sense of urgency.

Make them feel like they need to act immediately. For example "Book My Tour Now!"

06. Fear of Missing Out.

If possible, squeeze a bit of FOMO in there too. That's why my favorite booking button text is something like "Book My Spot Now", "Book My Place Now" or "Reserve My Place Now." For some reason, the word 'spot' makes it feel like there's just one seat for me and someone could snatch it away, which is why it's my favorite.

07. Make it pop out of the design.

It should stick out, or at least not fit into the neat symmetry of the site. Make it so that your brain cannot ignore it and surround it with empty space so it has no other visual distractions.

The Booking Button: Two Additional Tricks To Close People Who Are On The Fence

Trick One: Click Triggers Give Them The Final Nudge

Just near the booking button is an empty space and opportunity.

Click Triggers are little things you put near the booking button to get rid of last minute anxieties. They're reminders of why they should book with you. Joanna Wiebe from CopyHackers.com deserves all the credit for this one.

I'd put two things:

A "Fear of Missing Out" trigger. For example: "Hurry – Tours Book Fast," "Get Your Seat Before They're Gone" or "Numbers Strictly Limited."

A "Confidence" trigger such as a reference to the number of 5 star reviews you have on TripAdvisor, or your money back guarantee. "100% Satisfaction Guaranteed."

Trick Two: Booking Button Follows Your Guest Down The Screen

Staying with booking buttons for now, did you know it's possible to make it so that the booking button follows your guest down the screen as they scroll?

As an example of how this might be implemented, on the websites my company makes, the booking button stays 'sticky' in the top right of the screen. This means that it always sits there as a presence, impossible to ignore. On mobile devices, the booking button is designed to stay at the top of the screen and follow them down.

It won't double your sales or even close to it but it's worthwhile. Success online is all increasing things by 1% here or there to a big overall result.

“In God We Trust... Everyone Else Must Bring Data” - Why Your Website Needs Testing

Google hires some of the brightest, most intelligent people in the world. Yet even in their hallways, opinions are not allowed: if you think you’re right about something, you have to prove it.

Did you know that one time employees at Google couldn’t decide between two shades of blue so ended up testing 41 different shades? Yes, they tested 41 different shades of blue just to find out the exact color a link should have. That’s impressive because it shows a fantastic mentality – that they’re willing to test and test until they have the right answer.

Chances are you don’t have quite the same capabilities as Google when testing your website, but you DO have the opportunity to use some incredible tools to run what are known as ‘split-tests’.

Split-tests are a test of two different versions of the same page. For example, you might test having “Book Your Tour Now!” instead of “Book Now” on your booking buttons.

This is not difficult to implement in your own site. My favorite tool is called “Visual Website Optimizer’ and is located at www.vwo.com. It makes running tests simple and easy because you can test things visually instead of trying to muck around trying to edit code. It’s quite literally a case of ‘point and click’ and that’s all you need to do. Optimizely is another popular tool.

They’re best for making smaller tests – testing headlines, the words on your booking button, perhaps the order in which information is laid out. The most effective tests, however, tend to be those that make the biggest changes – for example, a complete redesign.

Make Booking With You Damn Easy – Take Instant, PAID, Bookings Using Online Booking Software

Booking with you shouldn't be easy as pie. It should be even *easier* than pie.

Taking booking inquiries via email actually could very well be the *least* ideal way to take bookings because of the time lapse as the visitor cools down and explores other potential options for their holiday. That's not even taking into account managing payment authorizations.

There are a million reasons why someone might want to book a tour with you at the last minute. I'm sure you've run into most of them if you've been in business for a while. Last minute customers are just as valuable as those who book in advance. If you don't take online bookings you're probably missing out on around 80% of these people.

So what I'm saying is this: **install an online booking system already.** Just do it. It doesn't even matter if you increase sales or not (and you most likely will): you'll dramatically reduce administrative overheads.

Whenever I'm on holiday, I will *always* use the companies that take instantaneous online bookings. Why? Fear of missing out! I'm scared that if I'm waiting for 3 days for Joe's Shark Tours to respond to my email that Frank's Shark Tours will have sold out already! I might end up without a shark tour on my holiday. So I skip that risk and book directly with Frank.

Options include Acteavo, Rezdy, Rezgo, Checkfront, Bookeo. Xola, TourCMS, Resmark and the list goes on.

Ecommerce is now over 20 years old. There's really no excuse in this day and age not to offer online booking capabilities.

Additional benefits of online booking systems:

01. Nearly all these systems allow for post tour follow-up.

This means that you can automatically invite people to like your Facebook page and, most importantly, leave a glowing review on TripAdvisor.

02. Save yourself administrative time.

All that back-and-forthing via email gets tiring, doesn't it? Let alone having to deal with booking inquiries that come in just as you're about to head out on a one week tour. You'll save yourself a lot of time and money just by investing a small amount of cash into a booking system.

03. Save on accounting costs.

Given that these transactions will generally be online and automated, you'll have less difficulty integrating them with cloud-based accounting software such as Xero or Freshbooks. This will save you over the long run. Even if you don't use online accounting systems, your bookkeeper will still love you.

04. Appear more professional to people who might look to partner with you or link to you.

There's no better way to appear like a small part-time company than by having a simple inquiry form. As I always say to people, imagine if you went to the website of an airline, tried to book a flight and they sent you to an inquiry form. You'd correctly think that the airline was a bit of a joke.

As websites modernize, more people expect you to take online bookings. I know I *always* choose operators that will take my online booking instantly. There's nothing more frustrating for me than bumping into an inquiry form and I doubt I'm alone.

05. Vouchers.

Being able to take discount vouchers and sell gift vouchers gets a whole lot easier when you're using online booking software with those capabilities.

06. Digital distribution to agents, ITOs and other companies.

Self-evidently there are major benefits in being able to take bookings instantly from resellers without them having to go through the rigmarole of calling you up or emailing you.

07. Automated manifest management.

Track your inventory automatically and with less administrative headache for you.

08. Automatically offer up-sells and cross-sells.

This one feature alone can deliver a *very* healthy revenue bump.

Offer Up-Sells And Cross-Sells

Q. Who is the person most likely to spend money with you?
A. The person who is *already* spending money with you.

For this reason, you need to offer up-sells and cross-sells. If you're a smart operator who already has implemented tour booking software, you'll probably find that you can do this without difficulty using the system that you have already chosen.
Up-sells are generally easier – and very common practice – amongst multi-day operators.

A few examples for multi-day operators:

1. Increased luxury accommodation.

2. Increased luxury transport.

3. Additional side-trips, dinners and shows.

4. Connecting tours – additional tours that you tack on before and after the tour which has already been reserved.

5. Airport transfers.

6. Insurance

None of the above should come as much of a shock and you should most likely be familiar with these ideas.

For single-day operators the most common example of up-sells are meals, airport pickups or additional activities. Have you ever tried taking someone off a group tour and selling them on a private tour instead? If it appears that they're scared of being uncomfortable – "Does the bus have air-con?" "How many people are there total?" – you can solve that problem by offering something more exclusive.

Cross-selling involves selling other tours to the same guest. Sandemans in Europe do a great

job at this on their website. A visitor to Berlin will book a tour with them and during the online booking process be nudged into booking one of the other day tours they have.

Now they have that rush that comes from making the purchase, that's when they're in the PERFECT position to be sold something extra. If you offer more than one tour option to your area, prepare yourself for a small bump in profits if you take the time to implement this.

Simplify Your Pricing

Not too long ago, I was looking at a New York tour operator's website.

She seemed like she had a great service but her pricing was all over the place. You basically needed a calculator and a lot of patience to figure out how much you'd have to pay if you had more than one or two people in your group.

This isn't clever by any means. A basic principle I have tried to push is that people shouldn't have to work to figure out how to use your service. It should be easy and intuitive – your website, your product, your booking system, and yes, your pricing too.

Because of this, use flat pricing as much as possible. Even if your prices are a bit higher as a result, that's fine. While you may think of your tiered pricing as fair, many people won't – especially if it's so excessive as to become confusing.

Custom walking tour operators often have fairly complex pricing for what is the same amount of time for them. If you must charge more for larger groups, consider charging per additional head on top of a base rate. This is much easier to calculate.

If You Run Specials, Have A Very Good Reason

One of the quickest ways to devalue the worth of your service is to run specials with no proper justification.

Try to tie specials to the season or to at least some kind of local event or recognized day, such as Valentines Day. You could easily offer regular discounts for a particular quiet day or time of the year and this would be understandable. Many day tour operators have special discounts for Tuesdays, for example. Just make sure that your discounting is explainable, not random.

This advice is based on a psychological phenomenon known as 'price anchoring'. If you show people a lower price for the same thing, they will suddenly no longer see the value in paying more – even if they were prepared to 5 minutes earlier.

The Quickest Way To Raise Your Profits Is To Literally Raise Your Profits

There's only one genuinely good reason to be the cheapest – if you're brand new and trying to build TripAdvisor or Yelp reviews and reputation.

If you feel like you have to be the cheapest, something is going wrong, somewhere. Every discount you provide on ongoing pricing comes straight off the top of your profits! Let's say your business sells tours for $80 and the current profit per tour is around $24. If you raise your prices to $95, your profit now goes up to $39 for a 62.5% *rise* in profits. How much would your bookings have to drop to offset that price increase? If your bookings dropped by 38.5%, you'd still make the same profit but with a lot less work! I know I'm simplifying things somewhat here but have a look at it for your business. Play around with the maths a little bit in a spreadsheet and see what you can figure out.

The biggest lie that small business owners tell themselves is that there's some special reason or circumstance in their business which prevents them from raising prices. Please be honest: is the only reason you're not upping your prices down to fear? Do the maths on a price rise and consider the difference in PROFIT that a 10% increase in PRICE will give you. Many businesses can double their profit just from a 20% price rise.

Ironically, being the cheapest will often impact your sales negatively in any case as people wonder what is wrong with your service. Not only that, it nearly always attracts all the worst clients – those who expect something for nothing. If you feel that you can't raise prices, it's likely because you're attracting price sensitive clients who give you that kind of feedback. Not everyone is price sensitive! I used to be extremely price sensitive when I was traveling the world trying to spend as little as possible every day.

Now I just want to enjoy myself and am happy to pay the price. I know I'm not in the minority on this.