

## TUTORIAL 34 ONLINE BOOKING SYSTEMS 101



This tutorial has been produced by The Australian Tourism Data Warehouse as part of the complete online education program, Tourism e-kit

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This tutorial will help you understand online booking systems and review a number of tourism specific systems against certain criteria.

## 1) WHAT IS AN ONLINE BOOKING SYSTEM?

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Latest research suggests that 60% of travellers book online when it is available. As a tourism operator, you may therefore wish to enable your website to be booked online.

An online booking system is a technology that will:

- Display your availability in real time on your website and on the selected distributors' websites
- Accept payments from consumers on your own website without requiring human interaction.
- Give you the opportunity to also make your product bookable on a variety of the selected distributors' websites (by joining the TXA)
- Update your inventory on your website and on the selected distributors' websites (optional) when a purchase is made.

There are many online booking systems available to Australian tourism operators. They are very simple to install and can be much cheaper than custom-built systems.

### a) What are the benefits to my business?

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The online booking system offers convenience as well as opportunities for exposure to new customers. It also means the booking system will automatically update your records without the need for emails and manually entering in guest details. Payment via credit card is processed online and the booking is confirmed with the guest. Online booking systems will save you a lot of time.

ONLINE BOOKING SYSTEMS PROVIDE BIG TIME SAVINGS IN HANDLING BOOKINGS, DATA-ENTRY, AVOIDING DOUBLE HANDLING OF DATA, AND STREAMLINING PAYMENTS.

They also allow you to display your availability on your website and offer reporting tools.

### b) How much does it cost?

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Online booking systems vary in cost. There are generally three types of costs associated with an online booking system:

- |                                   |  |
|-----------------------------------|--|
| <b>Licensing cost:</b>            | Cost to use the system. It could either be a fixed monthly or annual licensing fee, a percentage of the value of the transaction (commission) or a combination of both. Usually includes support and upgrades to the system. |
| <b>Installation and training:</b> | Cost to install the system and to be initially trained on how to use it.   |
| <b>Support:</b>                   | Cost for support once the system is installed. May be charged as "pay as you use".   |

We recommend you do the maths and take into account the different types of costs and contact the system vendor to verify the information.

### c) Will it bring me any extra business?

Online booking systems can be compared to an online credit card machine: they are services that encourage and simplify a monetary transaction.

- If your existing website is search engine friendly and its content is up-to-date, installing an online booking system will increase the chances for conversions (bookings) since you have made it easier for the consumer to book. They won't require an extra step (e.g. making contact with you by phone or email) in order to purchase and they can transact with you any time of the day or night.
- If your website's content is not up to the standards of today's consumer and your site isn't search engine friendly, you may not see a significant increase in bookings. We recommend you first work on your website and search engine strategy to ensure your website is visible to the web searcher.

By installing an online booking system on your site and joining Tourism Exchange Australia (TXA) you will enhance the visibility of your product or service, as it will be bookable on a growing number of distributor's websites.

Installing an online booking system on your website may not provide you many extra bookings if your site's content and functionally does not respond to the needs of your online visitor. However, an online booking button and the TXA will increase the visibility of your product and therefore could increase your bookings.

### d) Which system is best for me?

As the business owner and operator, you are best suited to answer this question. We have prepared this document to help you compare the system's features and functionality against your checklist of requirements. Whilst we can't guarantee its accuracy we will endeavour to maintain its currency through regular updates of information provided by the system vendors.

### e) How do I manage over-bookings?

If you are currently selling inventory on third party sites (such as Wotif.com, lastminute.com.au) you will need to:

- Assess if the online booking system you choose offers a feature that automatically distributes and updates your inventory to third party websites. This feature is commonly known as "channel manager".
- If a channel manager is supported, you will need to check which third party system the channel manager talks to. Every online booking system is different and may not partner with the third party sites you use.
- If your chosen online booking system doesn't offer a channel management feature or doesn't talk to your desired third party website, you may need to manage over-bookings manually.

### f) What equipment and support will I need?

To manage an online booking system you should not need to invest in any additional hardware. The system is either manageable from your computer or online directly. However, you will need to organise an online

merchant account which will allow you to transfer the money securely from the online booking system into your bank account. Discuss the different types of online merchant accounts with your bank.

### g) Will the online payments be secure?

If the system is hosted on the vendor's server there should not be a need for you to purchase an SSL certificate. An SSL certificate is an electronic key that will ensure the online transaction is secure.

If the system is hosted on your server (and not on the vendor's server) you may require an SSL certificate to secure the transaction between the customer's computer and your server.

We strongly recommend you discuss SSL and security with your vendor.

## 2) HOW DO I CHOOSE AN APPROPRIATE ONLINE BOOKING SYSTEM?

Please follow the steps below that have been designed to help you choose a booking system.

- 1) Assess your business needs. Every tourism operator is different and different systems offer different options. To do so, refer to paragraph a) below which will help you put together a checklist of what you would like the system to be able to do for you.
- 2) Then talk to your peers, regional tourism organisation, and local visitor information centre. Find out what system they are using and which ones they recommend. Ask for their opinion on different systems. What challenges they are facing? Are there any features that you should absolutely get?
- 3) Read section 3) which compares some of the systems in the Australian market, as it will help you focus on a smaller number that you can investigate further.

Use this as a guide only and make your own enquiries with the vendors to make an informed decision. The information in this tutorial is based on the online booking system vendor's website and the vendor's responses to our questionnaire so it might not answer all the questions on your checklist.

Please be aware that the list of systems is not exhaustive and there may be other systems you might want to consider. Not all systems in the list offer online booking from your own website.

- 4) If you review other systems, assess them against the criteria presented in section 3) below. Also check:
  - o How long has the software been on the market and the company been operating for.
  - o What type of support is offered.
  - o The company's reputation: enquire with trusted industry and Google the company name and system name.
- 5) If you are planning on joining the TXA, talk to the system vendor or the ATDW ([txa@atdw.com.au](mailto:txa@atdw.com.au)) to assess if the booking system is, or will soon be, integrated to the TXA.
- 6) Don't forget to compare the functionality of the system against your original checklist.
- 7) Understand the charging model. Some solutions offer a lower upfront cost and charge ongoing commissions based on transaction values, others provide for flat ongoing fees but may charge more to set the system up. Pick the solution which best matches your business and cash flow.

### a) Checklist of my requirements

Assessing your business needs first is crucial. To help you, we have put together a few points that should be on your checklist:

What functions do you want the system to perform (e.g. do you want it to pass information to your financial or property management system without having to re-key it)?

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What information do you need from the system?

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What will you need to change and add (e.g. changing specials, putting on specials, putting on add-on products)?

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Which channels do you need the system to support (lastminute.com.au, about-australia.com)?

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Which business type and size is the system designed for?

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Do you need the system to support packages?

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Do you need the system to be able to liaise with my website analytics program? (Strongly recommended)

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### 3) COMPARISON OF BOOKING SYSTEMS

We commissioned an independent review of a number of online booking, property management, and other systems suited to small and medium tourism businesses. This list is not exhaustive.

The results are displayed in tables below to help you compare each system.

#### a) Which system could suit my business type?

	BookEasy	Charts	FrontDesk	Globeres	Globekey	HiRUM	iHotelier	Levart	Maxial	NetBookings	Netroomz	Procharter	Reservations6
Small operators (up to 10 rooms)	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		✓
Medium operators (10 to 100 rooms)	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		✓
Large operators (more than 100 rooms)	✓	✓		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		✓		
Booking Agents	✓		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓				✓	
Motel / motel	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		✓
B&B / hostel / guesthouse	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		✓		✓	✓		✓
Lodge / apartment / resort	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		✓
Day Spa										✓			
Holiday & caravan park / marina	✓	✓			✓	✓	✓	✓		✓	✓		✓
Condominium	✓				✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		
Multiple properties	✓	✓		✓	✓	✓	✓		✓	✓	✓		
Tour / event / attraction operator	✓		✓			✓	✓			✓	✓	✓	
Year of release	2002	1998	2005	2002	2000	1996	2003	2003	1998	1998	2004	2000	1998

	ResPax	Rezgo	RMS	Roomrez	Satin Front Office	Seekom iBex	STAAH	tourstogo.com	TryBooking	Web Reservations	WebVantage
Small operators (up to 10 rooms)	✓		✓	✓		✓	✓			✓	✓
Medium operators (10 to 100 rooms)	✓		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓			✓	✓
Large operators (more than 100 rooms)	✓		✓	✓	✓						✓
Booking Agents		✓	✓	✓					✓		✓
B&B / hotel / motel			✓	✓	✓	✓	✓			✓	✓
Backpacker / hostel			✓	✓		✓	✓			✓	
Guesthouse / lodge / apartments/ resort			✓	✓		✓	✓			✓	
Day Spa			✓								
Holiday & caravan park / marina			✓	✓		✓	✓				
Condominium			✓	✓		✓	✓				
Multiple properties			✓	✓		✓	✓				
Tour / event / attraction operator	✓	✓		✓		✓		✓	✓		✓
Year of release	1999	2006	1998	2000	1996	2002	2006	2005	2008	1998	2006

b) Which system meets my requirements? (for accommodation businesses)

	BookEasy	Charts	frontdesk	Globekey	Globeres	HIRUM	iHotelier	Levart	Maxial	NetBookings	Netroomz	Reservations6	RMS
Web-based real time booking and payment from operator's website	*	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	**	✓	✓	***	✓
List and search on room facilities	✓	✓		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		✓	✓	✓	✓
List properties by location or by type	✓			✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		✓	✓	✓	✓
Rescheduling	✓	✓	✓					✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Add on sales	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Group check-in, POS, ...		✓	✓			✓			✓			✓	✓
Waiting list management		✓	✓	✓		✓			✓			✓	✓
Integration with back office system (PMS, accounting, finance)			✓			✓	✓	✓	✓				✓
Real-time sales reporting	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		✓	✓	✓	✓
Data import / export to MSExcel, Crystal Reports etc		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		✓	✓	✓	✓
Links to website analytics package	✓	✓		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		✓
Integrated to the TXA			✓										✓
Property management system		✓	✓			✓	✓		✓			✓	✓

All systems offer management and operational reports.

\* Online bookings are only possible for tours.

\*\* Online bookings are only possible through third party websites.

\*\*\* Booking details are entered online via a website, the operator is notified by email and must then confirm reservation and payment details and click a button to upload inventory. Payment is processed securely online to the operator's account.

	Roomrez	Satin Front Office	Seekom iBex	STAAH	Web Reservations	WebVantage
Web-based real time booking and payment from operator's website	✓	****	✓	✓	✓	✓
List and search on room facilities	✓		✓	✓	✓	
List properties by location or by type	✓		✓		✓	✓
Rescheduling	✓	✓	✓		✓	✓
Add on sales	✓	✓	✓		✓	✓
Group check-in, POS, ...		✓	✓	✓	✓	
Waiting list management		✓	✓		✓	✓
Integration with back office system (PMS, accounting, finance)	✓		✓	✓		
Real-time sales reporting	✓		✓		✓	✓
Data import / export	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Links to website analytics package	✓		✓	✓	✓	✓
Integrated to the TXA						
Property management system		✓	✓		✓	

All systems offer management and operational reports.

\*\*\*\* Provides bookings and secure payments via an interface to SiteMinder (a website which manages last minute and other third party booking sites). Updates of the Satin room inventory are notified via email, and are not online.

c) Which system meets my requirements? (for tour and attraction businesses)

	BookEasy	frontdesk	iHotelier	NetBookings	Procharter	ResPax	Rezgo	Roomrez	Seekom iBex	tourstogo.com	TryBooking	WebVantage
Web-based real time booking and payment from your website	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Manages multiple tour sectors	✓	✓				✓	✓				✓	✓
Control over seating allocation					✓		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Control over fare/price structuring	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Re-scheduling of tour/event	✓	✓		✓		✓	✓	✓	✓		✓	✓
Waiting list management		✓				✓			✓		✓	✓
Real-time sales reporting	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Data import / export	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Links to website analytics package	✓		✓	✓	✓	✓			✓		✓	✓
Integrated to the TXA		✓				✓						
Box office (group tickets, POS, ...)					✓		✓				✓	

All systems handle add on sales, and offer management and operational reports.

#### d) Distribution to third party websites through channel manager

The table below assesses if the systems support the management of last minute booking sites and links to affiliated booking networks through a channel manager.

	BookEasy	Charts	Frontdesk	Globekey	Globeres	HIRUM	iHotelier	Levart	Maxial	NetBookings	Netroomz	Reservations6	ResPax	Rezgo	RMS
Last minute booking site management	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓			✓				✓
Links to affiliated online booking networks	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		✓	✓		✓	✓	✓

	Roomrez	STAAH	Satin Front Office	Seekom iBex	tourstogo.com	TryBooking	Web Reservations	WebVantage
Last minute booking site management	✓		✓	✓		✓	✓	
Links to affiliated online booking networks	✓		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	

## 4) INDEPENDENT RANKING OF ONLINE BOOKING SYSTEMS

We have also ranked the various online booking systems according to different criteria to help with your research and selection:

- The degree to which the booking system supports channel management.
- The range and richness of functions offered by the booking system.
- The range of reference sites or case studies offered by the vendor.
- The degree to which the vendor's website clearly summarises all the functions the booking system performs.

Cost has not been taken in consideration.

a) Systems suited to accommodation businesses

Online Booking System	Rating (Accommodation)	Comment
BookEasy	👍👍👍	For booking agents; good channel management
Charts	👍👍👍	Good references and function range
FrontDesk	👍👍👍👍	Strong on channel management and function range
Globekey	👍👍👍👍	Good channel management, client base and website
Globeres	👍👍👍	Good references; website not accurate for Australia
HiRUM	👍👍👍👍	Good references and channel management
iHotelier	👍👍👍👍	Strong functions, client base and website
Levart Booking Engine	👍👍👍👍	Very good channel management and references
Maxial	👍	Web bookings are not possible through the operator's website
NetBookings	👍👍👍	Good references, website and function range
Netroomz	👍👍👍👍	Good channel management, client base and range of functions
Reservations6	👍	Bookings are via web form (not real-time online booking)
RMS	👍👍👍👍👍	Excellent channel management, function range and website
Roomrez	👍👍👍	Good distribution & range of functions; poor website
Satin Front Office	👍👍👍	Web bookings and payments are not online; good channel management
Seekom iBex	👍👍👍👍	Strong on website, references and function range
STAAH	👍👍👍	Good channel management; reference range limited
Web Reservations	👍👍👍	Good channel management, function range, and references
WebVantage	👍👍👍	Good functions, website and references

## a) Systems suited to tours and attraction businesses

Online Booking System	Rating (Tours and Attractions)	Comment
<i>Systems specialising in functions for tours and attraction only</i>		
Procharter	👍👍	Specialise in adventure tours; website poor & out of date
ResPax	👍👍👍👍	Specialise in tours/attractions. Good functions, references, and website
Rezgo	👍👍👍👍	Specialise in tours/attractions. Good range of functions, good website and wide client base.
tourstogo.com	👍👍👍	Specialise in tours/attractions. Good website, limited range of functions
Trybooking	👍👍👍👍	Specialise in event ticketing, tours/attractions and registrations. Very good function range and website.
<i>Systems offering functions for tours and attractions as well as accommodation</i>		
BookEasy	👍👍👍	Designed for tour operators own website as well as booking agents.
FrontDesk	👍👍👍	Strong on functions and channel management
iHotelier	👍👍👍	Good channel management and website
NetBookings	👍👍👍	Good function range, good website
Roomrez	👍👍👍	Good range of functions; website short on useful detail
Seekom	👍👍👍	Strong on website and function range
WebVantage	👍👍👍	Good functions and website

If you are a vendor and would like to get your system evaluated and included on this list, please contact [txa@atdw.com.au](mailto:txa@atdw.com.au). The ATDW reserves the right to evaluate systems at its discretion.

## 5) RELATED MATERIAL

### a) Related tutorials

- Online booking systems: advanced
- Tourism Exchange Australia