

## Topic | Online Booking

### Tutorial 34

# Online Booking Systems 101

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

*Reading time: 25 minutes*

*Prerequisite: None*



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## 1. What is an online booking system?

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 securely and 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?

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?

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".

**c) 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?***

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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 functionality 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?***

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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) Channel Management - How do I manage over-bookings?***

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If you are currently selling inventory on third party sites (such as Wotif.com, lastminute.com.au) or via booking agents 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 your chosen online booking system doesn't offer a channel management feature or doesn't link to your desired third party website, you may need to manage over-bookings manually.
- If a channel manager is supported, you will need to check which third party websites the channel manager links to. Every online booking system is different and may not partner with the third party sites you use. Ask if the channel manager system can add your third party sites to its list of linked sites. The channel manager may already link to a range of additional sites you don't use - this will extend your reach into the market.

You may also require the channel manager to distribute individual rate plans (e.g. add-ons and specials to your preferred customers or wholesaler). If the channel manager does support individual rate plans:

- Find out how flexible the channel manager is by asking:  
Does it handle multiple rates for each room type (e.g. 7 day rate, 3 day rate, 1day rate), or  
must room type inventory be split and a specific number of rooms allocated to each rate (this will be more time consuming to administer).
- Find out whether the channel manager updates each linked site with an individual rate plan, or whether it updates all linked sites with the same rate plan.

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

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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?**

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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.
4. 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.
5. 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.

6. If you review other systems, assess them against the criteria presented in section 3) below. Also check:
  - How long has the software been on the market and the company been operating for.
  - What type of support is offered.
  - The company's reputation: enquire with trusted industry and Google the company name and system name.
7. 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.
8. Don't forget to compare the functionality of the system against your original checklist.
9. 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**

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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 the following tables to help you compare each system.

The first table reviews the online booking systems based on sub industry types. The second table assesses the online booking systems on different functionalities.

	Small operators (up to 10 rooms)	Medium operators (10 to 100 rooms)	Large operators (more than 100 rooms)	Booking Agents / Tour Desks / Visitor Centres	Hotel / motel	B&B / hostel / guesthouse	Lodge / apartment / resort	Day Spa	Holiday & caravan park / marina	Condominium	Multiple properties	Tour / event / attraction operator	Year of release
BookConfirm	✓	✓			✓		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	2002
BookEasy	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	2002
Book & Pay button	✓	✓			✓	✓	✓		✓		✓		2007
Charts	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		✓		1998
eTourism online	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓			✓	✓		2001
EZYield		✓	✓		✓		✓			✓	✓		2000
frontdesk	✓	✓		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		✓	2005
Genkan	✓	✓	✓	✓							✓		2010
Globeres	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓				✓		2002
Globekey	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		✓	✓	✓		2000
GuestCentric	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		✓	✓	✓		2007
Guest Connect		✓	✓		✓		✓				✓		2004
GuestPoint	✓	✓		✓	✓	✓	✓				✓		2011
HiRUM	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		✓	✓	✓	✓	1996
iStay (iHotelier)	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	2003
Jewel Reservation System				✓			✓				✓	✓	2000
Levart Booking Engine	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		✓	✓			2003
Maxial	✓	✓	✓		✓	✓	✓			✓	✓		2011
NetBookings	✓	✓		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	1998
Netroomz	✓	✓	✓		✓	✓	✓		✓	✓	✓		2004
PatronBase				✓								✓	1997
Procharter				✓								✓	2000
ResOnline	✓	✓	✓		✓	✓	✓		✓	✓	✓		2004
ResPax												✓	1999
Rezdy				✓				✓	✓			✓	2011
Rezgo				✓								✓	2006
RMS online	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		1998
Room Manager	✓	✓	✓		✓	✓	✓		✓	✓	✓		2004
ROS2006	✓	✓	✓		✓	✓	✓		✓		✓		2001
Satin Front Office		✓	✓		✓								1996
Seekom iBex	✓	✓	✓		✓	✓	✓		✓	✓	✓		2002
Siriusware				✓								✓	1990
The Booking Button (SiteMinder)	✓	✓	✓		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		2007
STAAH	✓	✓			✓	✓	✓		✓	✓	✓		2006
Touring To Australia	✓	✓		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓			✓	2012
tourstogo.com				✓								✓	2005
TravelRez		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	2009
TryBooking				✓								✓	2008
Web Reservations	✓	✓	✓		✓	✓	✓		✓		✓		1998
WebVantage	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓							✓	2006
YesBookit	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		✓	✓	✓		2000

	Web-based real time booking and payment from operator's website	Add on sales	Group check-in/ticketing	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	List and search on room facilities	List properties by location or by type	Waiting list management	Property management system	Manages multiple tour sectors	Control over seating allocation	Control over fare/price structuring	Re-scheduling of tour/event	Waiting list management	Distribution to 3rd party site	Auto management of over booking	Distribution of rate plans	Individual rate plan for each site	Integrated with TXA
								Accommodation specific	Tour/attractions/events/ticketing specific							Channel Management					
BookConfirm	✓	✓			✓		✓		✓					✓	✓						
BookEasy	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
ChannelManager	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓						✓	✓	✓	✓	
Charts	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓						✓	✓	✓	✓	
eTourism	✓	✓		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓											
EZYield	✓	✓		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓							✓		✓	✓	
FrontDesk	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		✓	✓	✓
Genkan	✓	✓		✓	✓		✓	✓	✓	✓							✓				
Globeres	✓	✓			✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓							✓	✓	✓		
Globekey	✓							✓	✓												
GuestCentric	✓	✓		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓							✓	✓			
Guest Connect	✓			✓	✓		✓	✓	✓								✓	✓	✓	✓	
GuestPoint	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓							✓	✓	✓	✓	
HiRUM	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓							✓	✓	✓	✓	
iHotelier	✓	✓		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓			✓	✓			✓	✓	✓	✓	
Jewel Reservation System	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓			✓
Levart	✓	✓		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓							✓	✓	✓	✓	
Maxial	✓			✓		✓		✓	✓	✓							✓	✓	✓	✓	
NetBookings	✓	✓		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		✓	✓	✓		✓	✓	✓	✓	
Netroomz	✓	✓		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓							✓	✓	✓	✓	
PatronBase	✓	✓	✓		✓	✓							✓	✓	✓	✓					
Procharter	✓		✓		✓	✓	✓						✓	✓							
ResOnline	✓	✓		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓								✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
ResPax	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓							✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Rezdy	✓	✓	✓		✓	✓	✓					✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓			✓
Rezgo	✓	✓	✓		✓	✓	✓					✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	
RMS	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓							✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
RoomManager	✓			✓	✓		✓	✓	✓	✓							✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
ROS2006	✓			✓	✓		✓	✓		✓											
Satin Front Office	✓	✓	✓			✓				✓	✓										
Seekom iBex	✓		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓			✓	✓			✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	
Siriusware	✓	✓		✓	✓	✓	✓						✓	✓	✓	✓					
SiteMinder	✓	✓		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓												
STAAH	✓		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓												
Touring To Australia	✓	✓					✓					✓		✓							
tourstogo.com	✓	✓	✓		✓	✓	✓						✓	✓			✓	✓	✓	✓	
TravelRez	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		
TryBooking	✓	✓	✓		✓	✓	✓					✓	✓	✓	✓	✓					
Web Reservations	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓						✓		✓	✓	
WebVantage	✓	✓		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓					
YesBookit	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	




## 4. Independent ranking of online booking systems

We have ranked the various online booking systems according to different criteria to help with your research and selection. The criteria used in this exercise was limited to:




- The range of functions offered by the booking system.
- The range of functions offered by the channel manager (if any).
- The degree to which the vendor's website clearly outlines all the functions the booking system performs.

Cost has not been taken into consideration.




### a) *Systems suited to accommodation businesses*

Highest rating 	High rating 	Intermediate rating 
BookEasy	Book & Pay button	BookConfirm
Charts	eTourism online	Globekey
Frontdesk	EZYield	ROS2006
GuestCentric	Genkan	Satin Front Office
GuestPoint	Globeres	STAAH
HiRUM	iStay	Touring to Australia
Jewel Reservation System	Levart Booking Engine	
Netroomz	Maxial	
ResOnline	NetBookings	
RMS online	WebVantage	
Room Manager		
Seekom ibex		
The Booking Button		
TravelRez		
Web Reservations		
YesBookit		

**b) Systems suited to tour businesses**

Highest rating 	High rating 	Intermediate rating 
BookEasy Frontdesk Jewel Reservation System Rezgo Seekom ibex TravelRez	iStay NetBookings ResPax Rezdy Tourstogo.com WebVantage	BookConfirm PatronBase Procharter Touring to Australia

**c) Systems suited to events**

Highest rating 	High rating 	Intermediate rating 
Rezgo	TryBooking WebVantage	PatronBase Siriusware Touring to Australia

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**

Tutorial 35 - Online booking systems: advanced