



As the industry becomes more collaborative, technology is helping to break down traditional barriers between hotels, attractions and third-party agencies.

BUSINESS GUIDE

Tourism and Leisure

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“Thanks to technology, the visitor or guest experience starts long before their arrival, so if you cannot meet their expectations with interactive online services and the promise of high-speed connectivity, they might not come at all!”

Introduction

Tourism and leisure is an umbrella term for an industry that encompasses hotels and hospitality, dining and drinking, entertainment and attractions such as museums and theme parks, sports facilities and gaming.

It generates 9% of the UK economy – more than £115 billion, according to the most recent government figures (*source: Department for Culture, Media and Sport*) – and employs more than 2.6 million people.

The importance of technology

In this constantly expanding sector, Information and Communication Technology (ICT) is rapidly becoming the foundation for growth, enabling the delivery of improved customer service and the streamlined management of data and business processes.

This means that superfast broadband is now a staple requirement across the industry. At the very least, even the smallest independent bar or attraction needs a website, a presence on social media platforms where their customers share reviews, recommendations and criticisms, any appropriate online booking facilities, and the ability to provide guests with reliable Wi-Fi services.

In the back-office, an increasingly sophisticated range of cloud-based applications and services is giving players in the tourism and leisure sector the chance to break down traditional barriers in the supply chain, get closer to their customers and use technology as a management tool to improve the performance and competitive edge of their business.



Essential technologies

HIGH-SPEED BROADBAND

Without adequate broadband capacity, SMEs in tourism and leisure face an uphill battle to engage potential guests and visitors by sharing multimedia content and interacting with them on social media platforms. Aside from the provision of reliable connectivity services for guests at their venue, there is also a growing need to work with technology partners to develop services and applications – particularly mobile apps – for online trading (bookings, for example), special offers and marketing incentives. And as the industry becomes more collaborative, technology is helping to break down traditional barriers between hotels, attractions and third-party agencies. None of this is easy without the availability of high-speed broadband services.



CLOUD SERVICES

The cloud provides businesses with a cost-effective way to scale computing power up or down, according to seasonal demand or a successful promotional campaign, without investing in expensive on-premises infrastructure. It also enables innovative collaboration between industry partners, helping to break down transaction barriers between direct sales and agency sales, booking engines and online travel portals.

WI-FI

Even at the lower end of the tourism and leisure market, reliable Wi-Fi connectivity for guests and visitors is a necessity rather than a luxury. With smartphones and tablets now ubiquitous, people expect to be able to access personal and business applications easily, wherever they are – in the bar, the restaurant, the foyer or even in the grounds or car park.

CUSTOMER RELATIONSHIP MANAGEMENT

Consumer information is the lifeblood of the industry. Only by knowing their customers well and reacting to their needs and requests in real time can businesses generate competitive edge, loyalty and repeat visits. Customer Relationship Management (CRM) technology is no longer the preserve of large organisations, and there are many cloud-based tools and systems that can be used to tap into consumer intelligence on social media platforms.



Essential technologies



MANAGEMENT INFORMATION SYSTEMS

Hospitality management information systems (MIS) use technology to collect, process and analyse data and information to increase efficiency and improve business decisions across a range of functions, including online ordering, menu planning, delivery, accounting, stock control and sales records. Traditionally, MIS technology has been accessed via desktop PCs, but increasingly, it is available online via tablets, smartphones and PDAs.

HR AND E-LEARNING

SMEs in the tourism and leisure industry have previously found the cost of heavy-duty HR and e-learning technology prohibitive. Here again, the cloud is helping to give wider access to systems and applications that will help businesses meet legislative requirements and regulations, as well as manage content and streamline processes. Safeguarding employee data, managing leave and sickness, salary administration, training records, payroll, implementing minimum wage and TUPE regulations, can all be achieved on integrated platforms provided as a service. On the training front, in an industry where businesses are operating at a fast pace and employees need the skills to access information quickly, e-learning is ideal. Tutorials and podcasts can be accessed as and when they are needed, to meet immediate and specific requirements.



SOCIAL MEDIA

Consumers use social media to plan holidays, breaks and activities, and user-generated reviews are more powerful than traditional advertising. There is a great opportunity for SMEs to engage with their customers on these platforms, as well as monitoring them for comments about the visitor's experience – and responding to them. Booking apps that run in Facebook, deals, promotions and offers that can be 'favourited' and re-tweeted on Twitter, and post-visit feedback forms that can easily be completed and returned from mobile phones are just a few examples of how businesses can use these platforms to develop their markets.



Business benefits explained

Even a small investment in some of the technologies mentioned, or the reappraisal of existing infrastructure, can deliver a host of benefits for SMEs in the tourism and leisure industry.

INCREASED PRODUCTIVITY

More meals can be produced with more efficiently sourced ingredients, for example. More bookings can be processed, more customers reached and more enquiries handled in less time. And if staff are supported by more automated processes, they are free to concentrate on visitor/guest services, and can be more responsive to requests and comments.

IMPROVED SERVICES

Customers like a streamlined experience: Wi-Fi everywhere, cashless transactions, automated check-in and check-out facilities, mobile apps with destination, event and venue information – the possibilities are endless, and they all have the potential to generate repeat and referred business.

GREATER CUSTOMER KNOWLEDGE

Businesses can develop instant, personalised and bookable services that reflect what they know about their customers – and anticipate demand. These services and applications also help to address the challenge of brand-agnostic customers who rate value and service quality above mere reputation.

Business benefits explained

IMPROVED PROCESSES

Technology helps businesses to run more efficiently, saving time and resources in the back-office – automating order and booking processes, for example, integrating processes that previously existed as mini silos, and enabling multi-channel communications.

GETTING SERVICES RIGHT

In the 21st century, guests and visitors expect services such as Wi-Fi to be available as a matter of course. This might be enough for a modest pub or bed-and-breakfast. But beyond that, depending on the nature and market of the venue or attraction, there might be a host of expectations that can only be met with the help of technology.

FRONT OF HOUSE EXPECTATIONS

At the higher end of the market, consumers want to have access to the same range of digital and internet services at the gym, in the hotel or even at the restaurant table that they enjoy in their homes. This means that top-range hotels are having to implement IPTV, Unified Communications and personalised apps on a much bigger scale.

MOBILE ENGAGEMENT

Technology is giving consumers in the tourism and leisure market much more control over how they spend their money. They will naturally gravitate towards attractions, experiences and venues that offer good value and service from the first point of interaction online. Applications such as e-booking and e-ticketing, which make it easy and seamless to plan and confirm an itinerary from a mobile device will be increasingly important.

Key back-office considerations

SYSTEMS AND NETWORK AVAILABILITY

If you want to maximise your investment in technology, however modest it might be, you will need to ensure the availability of adequate processing power and network bandwidth. For smaller businesses, this could mean upgrading your server(s) or making sure you have a good-quality Ethernet connection with the broadband service. Larger businesses might need to think in terms of redundant network lines to ensure availability in the event of an outage.

SOFTWARE AS A SERVICE

Buying software as a service is making previously high-cost applications and systems affordable to smaller businesses. In the tourism and leisure industry, this means that CRM systems, in particular, can be used by SMEs to develop a more interactive relationship with consumers. And because they are sourced from the cloud rather than occupying expensive server space, they help to reduce infrastructure costs. Upgrades are automatic, and licences can be scaled up or down according to seasonal variations in need and demand.

STAFF MOBILITY

Wi-Fi connectivity is as important for staff as it is for guests and visitors in an industry where employees are mobile, and have to take services to the customer. Whether this involves mobile terminals for financial transactions, the ability to answer specific questions, or fulfilling requests that require communication with another department – housekeeping, restaurant bookings or concierge services, for example – any interruption in wireless availability is potentially damaging to the business.

SYSTEMS INTEGRATION

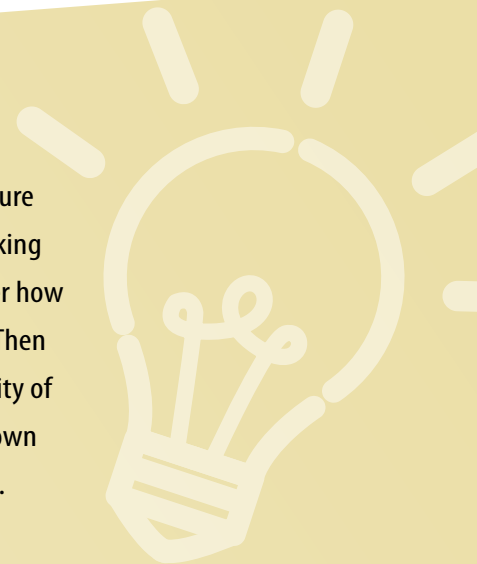
Many tourism and leisure businesses are using the cloud to source new applications and integrate them with legacy systems. For example, social media platforms like Force.com provide toolsets for integrating with enterprise applications and middleware solutions, as well as other cloud services. This is making it easier for businesses to extend legacy environments while introducing new services.

How do I get started?

1

Assess your resources

Superfast broadband gives you the chance to reassess your resources and make sure they are optimised to take advantage of higher connectivity speeds. Start by looking at the entire cost of your telecoms bill – and ask your prospective service provider how superfast broadband can save you money by delivering a complete UC package. Then look at your existing infrastructure. For example, you will need to check the quality of your Ethernet connection to make sure the benefits will be realised within your own network. This is something your service provider should be able to help you with.



2

Technology for innovation, collaboration, development and engagement

Superfast broadband will give you access to a range of cloud-based applications and services, many of which will complement or even replace your existing software investment. The benefits of cloud computing – reduced licence costs, simpler management, 24-hour availability, remote access – will depend on your service provider's ability to guarantee security, which should be a primary consideration.

Security and mobility

Prepare your team to get the most out of an IT environment which they effectively carry around with them on their laptops, smartphones and tablets. Consider implementing a BYOD strategy in which employees are encouraged to access business tools and systems via the interfaces that they feel most comfortable with, wherever they happen to be. This should be integrated with your security policy – and properly managed.

3

4

Choose the right provider

High-speed connectivity is essential to the tourism and leisure sector's ability to innovate and develop new content and products. So it is vital to find a service provider who understands the dynamics of your industry and can provide the kind of service levels, availability and security that you require to conduct your business, enable collaboration and meet customers' expectations.

FOLLOW THESE

TOP
TIPS

1

Research the broadband market

Suppliers and service providers vary in their own skills and specialisms, and you need one who will work in partnership with you and take the time to understand the specific needs of your business.

2

Check out those case studies

Speak to other tourism and leisure business owners and take up references before you commit to a new service provider.

3

Pin down your Service Level Agreements

Don't leave it to the marketing blurb – be specific about your expectations and needs, so that you can be sure any problems will be fixed in a recognised timescale, and downtime kept to a minimum.

4

Ask about bundles

Service bundles are a great way of keeping costs down, so find out if your service provider has other services and hosted technologies which could reduce your infrastructure.

5

Join the campaign

The tourism and leisure sector has been identified as a key influence on the development of high-speed broadband services, so make your voice heard and your supplier aware of your evolving bandwidth needs.

6

Switch provider

Don't sign up to a long-term contract, and be prepared to switch to get access to the latest technology if your provider lags behind.



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