Digital Tourism – How to Guide

Visit
Wales

Keeping up with all the latest technological ideas isnít always easy, especially when you have a tourism business to run. This Digital Tourism – How To Guide will help you to understand how technology can improve your business for the future.

This is a legacy publication from the ERDF funded and Visit Wales supported, Digital Tourism Framework programme. The programme has been helping to raise the digital bar across our tourism industry, moving it from relative E business immaturity a few years ago, firmly into the digital age today.

Whether an absolute beginner or a self confessed geek, we hope you'll find this collection of How to Guides helpful in your efforts to meet and hopefully exceed your customers expectations. It's by no means comprehensive, and it could never be in this fast changing world, but we hope it will give you a starting point and help you on your way.

We wish you well in that exciting and rewarding challenge.

This factsheet is one of a series developed under the DTBF project – see http://wales.gov.uk/topics/tourism/dtbfl1 and www.sharewales.com for further information on the project, using technology in your tourism business and the help available.

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Some Other Opportunities

Creating Your Website Brief

> Are you thinking about having a new website or maybe refreshing your old one? Yes, then you may need a website brief.
>
> A website brief is a document that you can complete and give to potential suppliers, it should contain a full description of all the features and functionality that you want from your website.
>
> Here is a template and a few pointers to help you on your way.

What is a Website Brief?

A website brief is a detailed document that's given to potential suppliers, it contains a full description of the work required to build or refresh a website. Creating your website brief will help you to decide on the essential elements and functionality of your website and will also provide prospective suppliers with a clear understanding of your requirements.

Giving your suppliers a comprehensive web brief is vital to the success of your project!

The following template website brief has been designed to help you to gather the information needed by suppliers to quote accurately and provide you with a website that stands out, meets your visitors' expectations and your business needs, whilst keeping within your budget and time schedule.

Completing your Website Brief

This brief is in the form of a questionnaire that you can use to either:

- Complete and send to your chosen suppliers
- Complete with your supplier during a meeting

- Refer to the template for guidance – then draft your own document

Prior to completing this brief you may find it useful to read the **"Choosing a Web Professional to Build or Refresh your Website"** Fact Sheet.

Here's the template – which has been designed for you to adapt to suit your needs:

Introduction

- What is the closing date for receipt of responses to this brief?
- When will you advise the potential suppliers of your decision?
- When will you have all the information ready to be put on your website?
- When do you want the work completed?
- Do you require references?
- How often do you expect to meet the supplier during the project?
- Your contact details – telephone number and email address.

About Your Tourism Business

Give a concise description of your business and how it operates.

- What geographic area do you cover? What products or services do you offer?
- Who are your main competitors?
- What are your competitive strengths?
- What are your USPs?

Include other useful information about your business and the market you operate in.

Your Existing Website

- When was your existing website built?
- What is the web address and where is it hosted?
- Do you have email accounts?
- What is good about it and what are its weak points/what would you like to change?
- Who is responsible for updating the site?
- What levels of traffic is it currently receiving?
- Do you have a content management system (CMS) – can you update your website yourself?
- How often do you get a genuine sales or leads through the web site?
- Do you currently monitor traffic to the site?
- What features would you like to carry forward to a new site?

Your Customers and Your Strategy

- Who are your customers? Describe them as fully as possible ie age, gender etc.
- How, when and where do they buy your products and services?

- If they were searching for your product/service, what key words/phrases would they use?
- What actions do you want them to take when they visit the site?
- How will they pay you? Do you want them to contact you?
- How will you convert them to clients?
- Do you currently use social media?

Who are your main competitors?

List three or four competitor websites, describe what you like/dislike about them.

What do You Expect Your Site to Achieve?

- What is the main objective of the site?
- Number of visitors? Increased awareness?
- Generate sales?
- Improved customer support?
- Address new markets?
- How will you measure success?
- Other benefits?

Your Budget

- What is the maximum you plan to spend on your website?
- How much will you spend on hosting, maintaining and promoting the website?

Secure Content Management System (CMS)

- What level of computing skills do you have? Will you need training in the new CMS?
- Which elements of the website do you want to be able to update yourself? Text? Graphics? Add pages or menus? Meta Data (the hidden indexing that helps search engines)?

- Which elements of your website are you prepared to pay a web developer to update?
- Will you be able to write your own copy for the website or will you need help with this?

Navigation Plan

Complete a navigation plan showing the main linked pages and how you intend to divide up your content this will help you plan your website. Prepare this in advance or with the help of your chosen supplier. Decide how you will divide information into the top-level pages, and then decide if deeper pages linked to your main pages are needed for more information. Here's a brief sample:

- Home – right hand panel for Trip Advisor reviews
- Accommodation
    - o   Photo gallery
    - o   Tariff
    - o   Book now
- Booking system
- Things to do
- Contact us – fill in form – collects into a database and we receive an email
- How to find us

What Advanced Functionality Do You Require?

Give detailed descriptions here to ensure the supplier understands your requirements:

- Contact form
- Interactive gallery, photo and video sharing
- Social media or Blog integration
- Search function to allow online visitors to navigate the site

- E-commerce (online shopping with credit card processing)
- Online bookings and reservations or Events calendar
- Multi-lingual pages
- Any additional online forms or other functions

Search Engine Optimising (SEO)

Do you require:

- All your website pages indexed so that they're visible on the search engines
- Search Engine Optimisation (SEO) services (these may be necessary to make sure your site is visible, especially in a competitive market like tourism)?
- Development of relevant inbound links from directories and other websites that will help your search engine ranking
- What search words or phrases do you want to target?
- Statistical information and reports

Web Accessibility

It's your responsibility to ensure that your site allows everyone access without compromise. There are web accessibility standards in place such as www.w3c.org/wai therefore it's highly advisable to include this in your brief to ensure your website complies.

Deliverables

Include a checklist of deliverables that form part of the brief such as:

- Website
- Domain registration
- Email account(s) @ your domain
- Hosting and technical assistance

- E-commerce – shopping cart
- Web copywriting
- Photography
- Search engine optimisation
- Directory submissions/
- Website statistics
- Other

Ownership and Copyright

As with any design project always protect your ownership and copyright by including the following terms:

Make sure that your contract states that you own the copyright to the entire website ie: all content, including graphics – that you paid someone to custom-create for you, should be owned by you. If there are exceptions (like photographs or maps that are available to you but not your copyright) please list these – here's some sample text for you to consider:

'It is a condition of this brief that all ownership and copyright for the entire website is to be vested in (your name or the name of your business). Any domains registered should be owned by (your name or the name of your business) and have the administrative contact details and email address as: (insert your full name, the name of your business, address, email, telephone and fax).'

Login information for the site hosting and domain management will need to be provided to you upon completion of the project.

Payment

Web designers will have their own requirements for their payment schedule and this varies from supplier to supplier. In general NEVER pay more than 50% before the website is completed and 'vet' your designer as you would any supplier requiring upfront payment before work is delivered.

Maintenance

Your website will need to be maintained on a regular basis and this needs to be considered when budgeting and developing your website.

Finally

Once you have prepared your brief, you should send it to your selected suppliers for quotations.

Choosing a Web Professional to Build or Refresh Your Website

Everybody wants a professional looking website that will help generate more business – but how do you find someone who can create the perfect site for you?

Do you need a new website or maybe just a refresh for your old one? Do you need someone to help you? Read on…

Finding a Good Web Professional

Choosing someone to build a website for your tourism business is not an easy job, especially if you don't have much experience in this field.

> **Finding the right web professional for you is a real challenge – but when you do – you'll reap the rewards.**

It's important to find a reputable company who'll work effectively with you to develop a future proof website that meets all of your business needs plus your visitors' needs. You will need a company experienced in producing websites for tourism businesses – hopefully within Wales – and also with access to the following web specialists, all experts in their own fields but who'll work as a team on your project. Smaller suppliers will usually offer the same services but may farm out certain aspects of the work.

Who Does What?

This is a relatively a new and fast moving industry, so the various roles are still evolving – therefore the following job titles are flexible and many of these may fit into more than one category:

Graphic designers – may offer a number of design services including print and graphic design, prepare mock website designs. More technical projects may be outsourced.

Web designers – manage the visual aspect of a website, page layouts, colours, fonts and images, many also have the skills to build websites.

Web developers – have the knowledge of programming languages and will code and construct website processes. Some web developers will manage the construction of a website from its concept, others may outsource aspects of this work.

Web programmers – are able to build bespoke business solutions eg dynamic websites, web shops and e-commerce systems etc using a variety of programming languages.

Search Engine Optimisation (SEO) Companies/Consultants – deal with all aspects of SEO, ie, website structure and content analysis, keyword research, SEO copywriting, HTML and page layout structure, internal and inbound links, monitoring and reporting.

Network/hosting engineers – look after the infrastructure and networks that host the sites/email etc.

Accounts/Payment Gateways Services – e-commerce services authorise payments for e-businesses and online retailers.

Security Managers – manage and maintain network security and risk assessment.

Copywriters – provide content, you are the best person to write your online content as you're the expert on your business and your potential market – but they have the skills to ensure your ideas are expressed in the most effective terms/format.

A combination of the above skills are needed to create a successful website.

A standard website with a content management system can often be developed by any of the above suppliers, to a similar standard and price. If you have a particular need – such as a customised e-commerce online store, or a specific programming need then suppliers who specialise in this will need to be chosen.

Website professionals offer a number of services, for most web development projects the necessary services are:

- Website hosting (sometimes via a third party)
- Domain name registration
- Web site design
- Content management system or e-commerce system
- Database development and programming
- Content development such as editorial, graphics, logos, videos, integration of social media etc
- Project management and advice on your project
- Search engine optimisation (SEO)

Creating your Website Brief

A website brief is a detailed document which is given to potential suppliers, which contains full descriptions of the work required to build or refresh websites.

The completed brief will allow you to identify and communicate the essential elements of the work, features and functionality that you need – of course, once you've appointed a supplier they may give you lots more ideas!

The brief should also provide enough information for potential suppliers to give you an accurate quote and make it easier for you to choose the supplier – who will create a website that will stand out from other tourism websites, meet your online visitors' needs, and keep within your budget and timescale.

Giving suppliers a good brief is vital to a successful project – it's important to be absolutely clear about what you want to achieve. Here's a link to the page where you'll find the 'Creating your Website Brief' (http://www.sharewales.com/index. php/resources/maximising-your-web-presence/) fact sheet, which you may find useful.

Creating a Shortlist of Suppliers

Before selecting which web professionals you'll send your website brief to, you should research the suppliers – here's a few things to consider:

- Personal recommendations from other businesses with websites
- Look on the internet – good suppliers will have a website with their portfolio to showcase their work and current commissions
- Check if their website is well designed with a good style and format
- Does their website meet best practice such as good navigation?
- Is the content fresh and inspirational?
- Does it provide the information that you need and expect?
- Does it have live reviews and include their social media stream?

- Does it appear on the first two pages search engine results pages?

Do you like their portfolio of work? Is their client list up to date and does it contain similar businesses to yours in the tourism sector? Do all the websites look very similar? This could show a lack of design flair. Have they created a website similar to the one that you require i.e. if an e-commerce website is required, have they previously created such websites?

Most of this research can be carried out by visiting their website but you may wish to contact them to ask some questions – this also gives you the opportunity to have an informal chat. Did you feel you could communicate easily with them?

This research should reduce your list of possible suppliers – you should now be ready send your website brief to the suppliers you have shortlisted.

When you have received the suppliers' proposals you can compare them with your website brief – can the supplier provide all that you want? Are the functionality, style proposals etc what you expected? Ask for references from the supplier's previous customers. Good questions to ask include:

- Were they happy with the end result?
- Did it meet the business objectives?
- Was it delivered within budget?
- Is the website a success and why?
- Is the supplier good at working to timescales?
- What is their customer service like?

The above process should be used to reduce the number of suppliers you will invite for interview to around three to four. Notes containing information about the shortlisted suppliers should be

drafted, as this these will be useful when you make your final decision.

Interviewing Potential Suppliers

All shortlisted candidates should be interviewed, this should be informal and include two-way questioning, the supplier should be showing a keen interest and asking relevant questions regarding your business needs and objectives – this should demonstrate that they understand your needs and how business/marketing focussed they are. It's also important to consider if you can work with them, if they communicate well and whether you think you could have a good working relationship with them and that they demonstrate an understanding of the tourism sector in Wales. To make sure you capture the information you need to select your supplier, it is a good idea to take notes during the interviews.

Making your Final Selection

When the interviews are finished, you should be able to select your supplier. You need to draw up a written agreement – this should consist of a 'technical specification' provided by the supplier, based on the website brief and any other requirements that have been agreed.

When you're happy with the technical specification, both you and supplier should sign a contract before any work begins. The contract should include all the areas discussed above plus details of payment, delivery and timescales.

Why Do I Need a Website Content Management System?

A Content Management System (CMS) will make it easy for you to quickly and easily add and update the content on your website. Take control of your web shop window!

Fresh interesting, up-to-date content will help you to get your site ranked higher in the major engine listings, improving your chances of getting more site visitors. It will also make your potential customers' experience better, thus improving your chances of turning site traffic into customers at the door. All without the need for any programming or coding knowledge!

What is a Content Management System?

Content Management Systems (CMS's) are computer programs that let you edit the contents of your website quickly and easily. Today CMS's are an important part of any tourism businesses website and you'll be pleased to learn you usually do not need any knowledge of HTML programming at all to use them.

No one knows your tourism business better than you do and nobody knows what you want to say – a CMS puts YOU in control of the contents of your website!

Do I Need a Content Management System?

Some tourism businesses still have static websites, which don't allow any changes to be made to them. When you need to update, add content or new pages to a static site, this usually has to be done by your web developer, who will probably charge you for this service. Your website is facing tough competition in the Welsh tourism sector and if you want to be competitive in today's global market, this is just not good enough. Only content which is interesting and frequently updated will attract and engage your visitors.

These days, to get ahead of your competitors, you really do need to be able to update your own website, so that you can:

- Add seasonal pictures, videos, tariffs etc

- Include new helpful information about our history, heritage, food etc

- Add your special offers and react quickly to any changes made by your competitors to their marketing efforts

- Incorporate your valuable social media channels

- Update key local attractions, activities and events

- Amend product descriptions, price changes, varying rates in line with your occupancy levels etc, on e-commerce systems

- Check your analytics. You can then tweak your key words and phrases, for both your visitors and the search engines.

Your visitors are looking for fresh, vibrant content that is relevant to their needs. Search engines are also

constantly 'crawling' through all the websites on the internet looking to find new, or updated, pages for their users. Such websites rank higher in the search engine results pages as they are more likely to contain relevant timely information. You need to be able to keep your site updated for your visitors and your search engine ranking.

If you do not have a search engine friendly Content Management System (where you can create and edit your own web pages) or, if one cannot be incorporated into your existing site, you really do need to consider commissioning a new website.

How Does a CMS Work?

A Content Management System is not unlike a word processor. Most of today's CMS's are simple and intuitive to use and after a little training you, or your staff, will be able to update the content on your website easily. The screen shot below shows the text editor in WordPress.
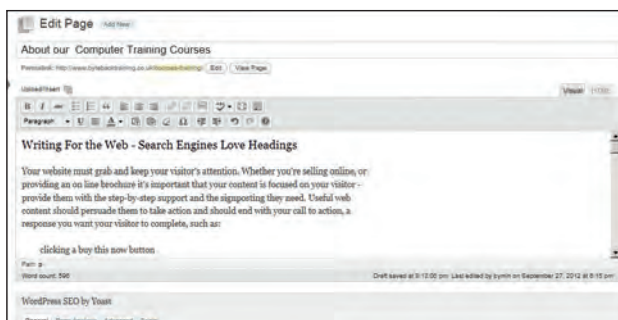
The features of a CMS can vary dramatically – when you are evaluating a CMS for your tourism business, the following points should be considered.

Basic systems will only allow you to edit text on existing pages, while the more advanced systems will allow pages to be created in different styles with a variety of content added, i.e. text, images, flash files and videos. You may require additional features such as being able to

set access control for different members of staff.

Most Content Management Systems give web developers' flexibility in the design of their websites, thus allowing them to create unique sites for their clients. However, some CMS's only provide limited design options. It's therefore useful to see a portfolio of designs that have been created using the system, to ensure that the CMS offered is flexible enough to provide a design that will meet your tourism business's needs.

In today's mobile world the majority of CMS systems can be adapted to create responsive websites. (A responsive website automatically changes to fit the device you're reading it on eg: mobile phones and tablets). You may find it useful to read the "Is your Website mobile Friendly?" fact sheet.

It's also important that the CMS you choose is able to create a tourism website that is search engine friendly and creates pages and links that search engines can crawl. It should also include the ability to update Page Titles, Meta Description and Tags, etc.

Some of the main benefits of a CMS are that they:

- Give you flexibility and control over your own website

- Ensure you're not reliant on others to keep your website relevant and up-to-date

- Allow you to easily integrate your social media content

- Enable you to meet your online visitors' needs and relevancy (through review of site analytics and customer feedback)

- Make it easy for you to add or delete pages with links to your site's main navigation structure

- Allow existing content including text, images and other multimedia to be added, edited, deleted and published

- Are usually web based, so you do not need to install software on your computer(s)

- Do not usually require extensive training

- Allow different levels of access. This can limit security issues and the possibility of damage to the website by inexperienced users.

How Can I Get a Website Content Management System?

A CMS is usually requested in the design brief for a new website and provided by your web professional. If you already have a website it might be possible to have a content management system added – you may need to check with your web professional to see if this is possible.

What Types of CMS Are Available?

Depending upon your knowledge and skills, you may be able to set up a content management system yourself. Otherwise, select a good web professional who can guide you and provide a system to suit your requirements.

There are 3 main types of CMS which are usually appropriate for small businesses. These are:

- **The website developer's proprietary system** – many web professionals develop their own system that can be tailored to your requirements.

- **Commercial/branded off the shelf systems** – website developers may create your website around a commercially available content management system and customise this to meet your business needs.

- **Open source systems** – are also used by many developers, they are provided free of charge. Popular open source platforms include Joomla, WordPress etc

Choosing Your Content Management System

Which CMS is best for you? They all have different features with their own advantages and disadvantages. You'll need to decide which one is the most appropriate for you and your tourism business. The best way to make your decision is to:

- Speak with your web professional

- Try out different systems if possible

- Research and read online reviews from other users

When you are approaching a web developer for your CMS, you'll need to understand which types of systems are available and how they will be licensed to you.

You may find it useful to read the fact sheets "Choosing a Web Professional", "Creating Your Website Brief" and "Is your Website mobile Friendly?"

Choosing Your Domain Name

Are you considering creating a new website or a redesign? If so, your choice of domain name is really important – it could quite literally win or lose you business.

Your domain name is the first point of contact to your website and where you will create your first impression. Here are a few important points you need to consider before making your final choice!

What is a Domain Name and How does it Work?

Every device that's connected to the internet has an IP (Internet Protocol) address, which is a unique number, e.g. 2.111.195.145, these are stored in huge databases. An IP address is needed to send and receive information on the internet, it is similar to how your postal address is needed for you to receive your mail. It would be really hard for us to remember these strange strings of numbers – so our domain name acts as a friendly and memorable nickname for our website.

> **Your domain name plays an important part in establishing the identity of your website.**

The DNS (Domain Name System), allows us to assign a domain name to the unique IP address for our website which points to where the website is stored. So for example when you type in www.visitwales.com the domain name visitwales.com, is automatically looked up and translated into to the IP address for the Visit Wales website.

What elements make up a web address?

Yourbusinessesname.com – this is the domain name that you buy – all domain names have a suffix (that's the end bit).

The domain suffix – co.uk, com, org etc – is the last part of a domain name and is often called the top level domain – it's used to identify the type of website, for example:

- **.co.uk** – used by businesses that operate in the UK
- **.com** – used by businesses that operate globally
- **.edu** – educational

The protocols – http://, https://, ftp:// – are sets of rules and standards that allow computers to exchange information. When you enter a web address in your browser, it sends an http or appropriate command to the web server telling it to load the web page you have requested.

The www (world wide web) prefix – is not necessary and some sites don't use it – your site should respond to both: www.yourbusinessesname.com and yourbusinessesname.com

The path name – is anything after a forward slash after the domain name, e.g.: **uk-family-holidays/days-out** that tells the computer which page you're looking for and where to find it.

A web address is sometimes called an URL which stands for Uniform/Universal Resource Locator. It is the sum of the parts and the unique address

of any web page e.g. **http://www. Yourbusinessesname.com/uk-family- holidays/days-out/**

Choosing your Domain Name

It's important that your business name and domain name are the same – if you want to drive traffic to your website. When people think of looking for your website they'll first of all think of it by your name so if it matches your domain name they will find you straight away; for example you would expect to find the website for Visit Wales at www. visitwales.com. If this domain name was not owned by Visit Wales they would have lost the potential visitor to whoever owned it.

Generic domain names such as hotels. com, would improve some search engines' ability to find you and rank you higher; but domain names like these have been bought long ago and now command very high prices from private sellers.

It is worth taking your time choosing your domain name – you need it to last for the life of your business. Search engines use the actual age and reputation of the website in their ranking.

What Makes a Good Domain Name

Keep it short and simple – short web addresses are easier to remember and reduce the possibility of any typing errors, which can trip up potential visitors or cause them to forget you. Short abbreviations of a very long business name are usually considered best but only if they make sense. Domain names should have at least three characters and a maximum of sixty three characters not including the suffix.

Descriptive

Your web address should aim to preview the content your visitors will see when they visit your site and should provide enough of a clue to your website's contents to entice visitors.

Memorable

The very best domain names combine simplicity and description with a unique element (often a play on words) that help potential visitors remember your web site address hours, days, or even months after they first encounter it.

A few considerations:

Hyphens

Should you use a hyphen in your domain name? There are advantages and disadvantages to this.

Advantages – hyphens can enable you to secure your business name for your domain name if the non-hyphenated version has already been taken. Search engines can probably define your search words more easily and return your site more prominently in the search result pages.

Disadvantages – they are easy to forget leading to typing errors. Word of mouth becomes difficult and business can be easily lost to competitors, when people recommend your site to their friends verbally, having hyphens in your domain name leads to more potential errors than when the name does not contain hyphens. Plus it's a nuisance to type!

Capitalisation

Browsers are not case sensitive so you can use capitalisation in your domain name to define the separate words making it easier to read i.e. www. VisitWales.co.uk. This works very well if it's quite long or if they contain initials.

Common Misspells

You are probably already aware of any common misspells of your business name so do take this in to account when choosing your domain name. If a user misspells it they will not find you. If you also purchase the misspelled version of the domain name you can then redirect traffic to the correct domain name – this is called an alias, e.g.: **www.LingaLonga.com** you might want to consider also purchasing **www.LingerLonger.com** so that visitors do not miss the site due to incorrect spelling.

Choosing the Correct Suffix

.co.uk and .com are still the most prominent suffixes in the UK but which one is the best for you? For those businesses dealing solely within the UK, a .co.uk suffix would be the best choice as this makes it clear to browsers that they would be dealing with a UK service. However, if you operate globally then the .com suffix would be better.

It is a good idea, if possible to get both the .co.uk and .com suffixes for your domain name, as this can help protect your brand and prevent confusion. You can have them both linked to your website.

Suffixes such as .ltd.uk and plc.uk are less popular and require certification that you are the limited company for which you are buying the domain, they are therefore more exclusive and more likely to be available but beware they are not as memorable. Other suffixes include .net, .eu, .org, .org.uk, .biz and many more.

Sub Domains

A sub domain is 'a domain that is part of a larger domain'. You can create sub domains to focus on separate products or services that you wish to promote. A sub domain creates a separate URL and in turn a separate web presence, all within your main hosting account e.g.: your website **www.shop.co.uk** could have sub domains called **www.myflower.shop.co.uk** or **www.mygift.shop.co.uk**. Some hosts may set a limit on the number of sub domains you can create. They can help you save money and also boost your search engine ranking:

- you only have pay for one domain name – so if your host allows you to have multiple sub-domains, you will only have to make one payment

- Sub-domains also give you more opportunity to include keywords within your domain name.

Checking the Availability and Registering your Domain Name

You can check the availability and buy (lease) domain names from many suppliers on the web. Most domain registrars allow their customers to register a domain name for up to 10 years at a time – most people only register their domains names for between 1-3 years and renew them as required.

If you completed a website brief for the web professional, who is working on your site you may have specified that they would organise the registration of your domain name. It's **important** that your domain name is registered in your name, not theirs.

If you are registering the domain name yourself, it's very easy to check if it's still available, type into a search engine 'buying a domain name' and you will be spoilt for choice with sites offering this service, such as http://www.123-reg.co.uk/ or http://www.net2.co.uk/. You then type the domain name that you want in the search box provided – a list

appears telling you whether the domain name and suffix is taken, e.g.: **mybandb. co.uk** may be taken but **mybandb.com** may be available. When you have made your choice you can then select the duration you require the registration for and click the 'add to basket' or 'buy it now' button.

Nominet – manage the UK domain space and maintain a list of all registrars to help you to choose your registrar (http://www.nominet.org.uk/uk-domain-names/registering-uk-domain/choosing-registrar).

Your registrar will usually contact you before the expiry date of your domain name to ask if you wish to renew it. Make a note of the renewal date in your diary and always renew your domain name promptly – you don't want it to be snatched up by a new owner! When the renewal period finishes, the domain name becomes available for others to purchase.

Web Hosting

In order for your website to be found on the internet, it needs to be hosted on a web server.

Setting up Your Email Address

It's good practice to use your domain name for your business email – it looks so much more professional than using one of the free email providers e.g.: **huw@ myownbusiness.co.uk** as opposed to **huw679@freemail.com**

Is Your Website Mobile Friendly?

When a potential visitor looks at your website on their mobile device – how does it look? Can they find the key information fast and take the actions they need, and you want them to?

With mobile devices ever gaining in popularity, and with our visitors increasingly looking to fulfil their transactions through these devices, can you afford to miss out on this valuable market?

Many businesses don't give their mobile visitors a good online experience. So, if you have a mobile friendly website you will be better placed to get more visitors to your website, and get ahead of your competition!

Why Do You Need a Mobile Friendly Site?

More and more people are now using their mobile devices, smartphones, iPads etc to access the internet, shop, plan their holidays or short breaks and share their ideas with friends. Indeed, it's predicted that more people are going to access the internet from mobile devices than from their desktop PC's within the next year or so. This means that more and more people will be searching for and looking to book your tourism business on their smartphone, whilst out and about, instead of from their home PC or laptop.

Mobile devices with internet access are very useful and this is having a huge impact on the way our visitors use the web. They are ideal for holidaymakers, who are looking for instant information, be that to: plan where to go or what to do next; check opening hours, location, availability; book accommodation, attractions, restaurants, compare prices and check out reviews, and even to share their photos and stories on social media sites.

If you are receiving a lot of visits to your website from mobile users and your bounce rate is high – it's time you considered making some changes!

Historically websites were not designed for mobile devices and so don't necessarily display in a user friendly way on their small screens – so it's important to make sure that your website is accessible to your mobile visitors. If your website is not mobile friendly and it's difficult for your mobile visitors to find the information they need, it will annoy and frustrate them – they may well leave your site and move on to another (possibly one of your competitors) that offers an easier and more enjoyable mobile experience.

How Does Your Website Look On Mobile Devices?

Have you checked how your website looks on a smart phone or other mobile device that the majority of your online visitors are using yet?

There are lots of tools available that let you see how your website looks to

your mobile visitors, they often provide a report to tell you what's working and what you can improve – you can try the mobile website testing tools How to GoMo – the GoMoMeter (http://www.howtogomo.com/en-gb/d/), or W3C Mobile OK Checker (http://validator.w3.org/mobile/), or use your favourite search engine to find others.

And while you are at it, it is probably worth checking how your site views on the leading browsers using http://www.browsershots.org or similar.

Check Your Analytics

Check your analytics package. You will be able to access reports that will show useful information about how your mobile visitors are using your tourism website. This information will help you to make better informed decisions about your online presence, including whether the traffic you receive from mobile devices warrants changes to your site or justifies you creating a mobile website for your business.

These reports should include:

- The amount of mobile traffic your site receives
- Which mobile device your visitors are using
- Which service provider your mobile visitors use
- Which pages and the number of pages they viewed
- The average time spent on your site
- The *bounce rate of your mobile visitors.

*The percentage of visitors to your site who bounce – that is, leave your site without viewing other pages.

What Are Your Options?

Whatever you decide to do, you need to make it as easy as possible for your mobile visitors to carry out essential tasks, such as using your online booking system, completing your data entry forms, viewing a menu or checking your events or availability calendar. Use drop down menus, check boxes, and pre-populated fields whenever possible, so that your mobile visitors can navigate and input information quickly and easily. Make sure your contact information can be easily found on each page and is in text format, rather than a graphic so it can be extracted by the mobile device user. If your site is already mobile friendly – happy days! Just keep using your analytics to help you to monitor developments and minimise your bounce rate and maximise your business.

If your site proves not to be mobile friendly you may decide to take one of the following approaches.

Tweak your existing website – the good news is you may not need a new website, mobile visitors are quite used to pinching, zooming and scrolling in to read a standard webpage and its text at a size that is comfortable for them. You may just need to make a few simple changes to your existing site, here are some ideas for you to consider:

- Make sure the layout is clear and easy to use
- Do your web pages load quickly on a smartphone?
- Are all links and buttons large enough to be clicked on easily?
- Can your phone number and contact details be found and extracted easily?
- Add a search box – mobile users don't like to scrolling through info

- Minimize or avoid the use of flash animations (alternative technologies do exist if you want to run slide shows etc) – many smartphones and mobile devices (in particular Apple) don't use flash

- Optimize your images so that they load as quickly as possible

- Have easy to navigate pages

But if you go down this road, do keep an eye on your bounce rate, as mobile users may become less tolerant as time goes by and other sites become more responsive to their needs.

Explore if your site can be turned into an adaptive website – Your site may be suitable to take the adaptive approach. If you are unable to rebuild your website from scratch it's possible to add special code to a pre-existing fixed width site that can be recognized by mobile devices. This will narrow the column widths, reduce image sizes etc when a mobile device is detected.

Do check development costs however, as this approach can sometimes be as time consuming as building a new responsive website. Much will depend on the current layout of your site and the recommendations of your web developer.

Create a new mobile version of your website – Mobile websites are specially designed for smaller touch screens. They are very similar to normal websites and are made up of web pages which are linked together, opened in a web browser and accessed via the internet.

They have many of the same features as normal websites, although they can look very different. Some closely resemble mobile applications (apps). You are able to view data, pictures, videos and access information stored on databases. Additionally, they often include specific

mobile features, such as click-to-call and click-for-directions. These features will make it easy for your visitors to call or find you. Mobile websites can easily be updated and are accessible to most mobile devices.

However, if you choose to have a separate version of your website specially built for mobile devices – this means that you will have two different sites to manage and update, so the cost of the extra time you will spend on it needs to be considered.

Also, there are now so many different smartphones, tablets etc on the market that web content is probably best presented in a way that will adapt to fit just about any dimensions. With this approach it could result in several mobile sites being required to cover all these devices!

There are lots of online services available that will allow you to quickly create a mobile friendly version of your existing website. Look for search engine terms such as 'mobile website builder' and take recommendations from others.

If you opt for a mobile website it's important to include a link to your full website, as you will always have mobile visitors who want to access all the features and information to be found on your full site.

Build a New Responsive Website – If you are thinking of building a new site, this is probably the way to go, so if your web developer cannot deliver, you might want to look for one that can.

A responsive website will adjust in size to adapt to different screen sizes e.g. mobile phones and tablets.

The following screenshot shows how the ShareWales website would appear, on a range of different screen sizes. You can

visit http://mattkersley.com/responsive/ to test if your website is responsive.
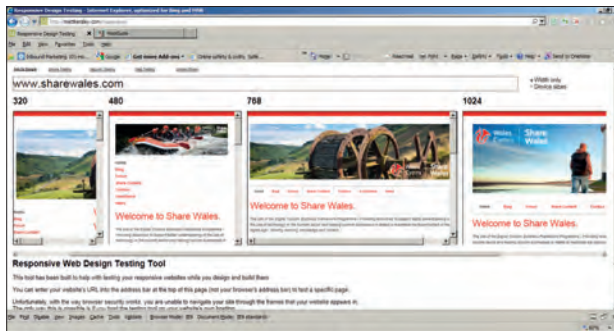
Widths are set in percentages as a rule so as the screen resizes so does the website. You can test whether a website is responsive or not, by resizing the browser and seeing if the website adjusts to fit the browser.

In addition to the screen size changing, buttons, text and images will also resize to suit the screen size.

While certain features can be hidden when the site is viewed in a mobile device, it's best not to go too far as, ideally mobile users should be able to access the same content as they do on a PC.

Writing Great Content for your Website

Effective search engine friendly copy writing will help you to get your site ranked higher in the major search engines.

This factsheet explains how to improve the quality, content and layout of your website. Which in turn should improve your position on the results pages – bringing more visitors to your website and an increase in enquiries and sales. If your online visitors enjoy using your website – they'll be more inclined to direct others to your web pages via social media, blogs, personal recommendation etc. It's a win, win situation!

Why is the Content of Your Website Important?

Having optimised, quality content on your website is vital because it will persuade your visitors to stay on your website. Bring your website to life – your content can include text, videos, animations, graphics, photos, blogs, user generated reviews and your social media feed. Good web content will instantly engage your online visitors and convince them to interact with your online tourism business.

> **Effective search engine friendly copy writing will help you to get your site ranked higher in the major search engines. Attracting more visitors to your website will bring more leads and sales to your business.**

Your content is also important to the search engines as it tells them what keywords and phrases are the most relevant to your website. For example if your business is a Bed and Breakfast near Milford Haven, Pembrokeshire you would gear your keywords around Bed and Breakfast in Pembrokeshire. This fact sheet will help you to write engaging content for both your visitors and the search engines.

Writing for the Web

Your website must grab and keep your visitor's attention. Whether you're selling online, or providing an on line brochure it's important that your content is focused on your visitor – provide them with the step-by-step support and the signposting they need. Useful web content should persuade them to take action and should end with your call to action, a response you want your visitor to complete, such as:

- Clicking a buy this now button
- Calling a phone number or completing a contact or booking form
- Visiting a web page with additional information
- Signing up for a newsletter
- Link to your Contact Details should be available on all pages

Every page of your site should have some form of call to action that leads your visitor on – this does not need to be the same for every page. Tell them everything you can about your product and its benefits – highlight your unique selling points. The more they know about you, the more likely they are to buy from you!

Keywords

Think about Search Engines – they analyse the contents of your web pages, so it's a good idea to think of search words visitors would use to find sites like yours. Using two or three of these keywords in the body text and the headings on each page will improve your visibility in search engine results.

Writing Web Friendly Content

If your content is dull, out of date or incomplete, your customers will vote with their fingers! Your website will not give you optimal results. Good interesting copy can help you get your customers to do what you want them to, helping you to increase your conversion rates. So what can you do to write content which is as web friendly as possible?

You need to:

- Identify your target audience
- Remember to write with their needs in mind
- Use the appropriate language and terminology
- What are you trying to say? Use a friendly tone & provide information
- Aim to answer all of your customer's questions
- Think about the best way to structure and present your information
- Inspire confidence in your visitor – this will help to turn a search into an enquiry
- Check your text carefully to avoid spelling and grammatical errors.

How People Read on the Web

Writing effectively for the web is different to writing printed matter – people tend to scan the content of a webpage – searching for the information that they need, as opposed to reading the copy word for word. If they can't find the relevant information they need within a few seconds, they will click the back button. Reading text on a computer screen is about 25% slower and more tiring for the eyes than reading from printed text.

Writing Concise, Scannable Copy

By keeping your web copy concise scannable and neutral you'll make the maximum impact on your online visitors:

- Keep it short, simple and direct
- Simple punchy sentences
- Avoid slang or jargon
- Use shorter words – where possible

Use Headings Effectively

Use well thought out headings and sub-headings to structure your webpage, they allow your visitors to scan your pages quickly, they can see at a glance what each section of the page is about and easily find the information that they need. The style and format of your headings is defined in the style sheet when your website is initially set up.

When the search engine crawlers read your content, they understand the importance of your heading tags. A Heading 1 carries more weight with the search engines than a heading 2 (you can have up to six Headings H6). It's good practice to use the headings in the appropriate order.

Your headings should always start with a Heading 1 – you need to make sure that it represents your page content and contains your unique selling points for your online visitor and keywords for the search engines.
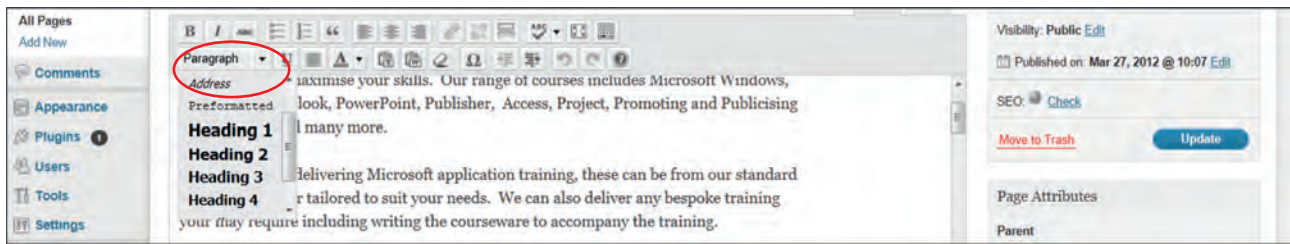
Headings are similar to using headings in a word processor (this document for example) and if you are using a content management system, as you can see in the above screen shot you can apply them just as easily, from the drop down list provided.

Heading tags are part of the HTML coding of a webpage and if you are using HTML they are entered using the following tags:

<h1>This is a heading one</h1>

<h2>This is a heading two</h2>

<h3>This is a heading three</h3>

You may find it helpful to read the fact sheet **Understanding Meta Data**.

The Body of your Website

The opening paragraph on every page should contain a brief summary of that page. This way, your visitors can instantly gain an understanding of what the page is about and decide whether they want to read on or not.

When writing your web page – keep the most important content and key words at the top of the screen so that it is seen first, without your visitor having to scroll down the screen – this is sometimes referred to as 'above the fold'.

Stick to one idea or concept per paragraph – your visitors can then easily scan through each paragraph and get an understanding of what the paragraph is about. The first line of each paragraph should contain a brief summary of

that paragraph, which will enable your visitors to scan quickly through the opening sentence and instantly understand what the paragraph is about.

Left align your text; this makes it easier to read and **embolden** two or three words that describe the main point of the paragraph this allows your visitors to find information quickly and easily.

Bulleted Lists

Use bullet points to provide a visual break for your reader, they are easier to scan, usually more concise and less intimidating. The information in your bulleted lists can be linked to your relevant internal pages giving more information about your products or services, your link text should be descriptive and contain key words – which will please both your online visitors and the search engines.

Regular updating

Keep your site updated for both your visitors and your search engine ranking. What would your visitors like to know or see? What's on locally – key local attractions and events? Seasonal photographs or videos? Your special offers etc. Emphasise a Welsh sense of place include information about our history, heritage, language, outdoor activities, food and drink. Only content which is interesting and frequently updated will engage your visitors.

Crawlers constantly look for updated pages; they rank these higher as they are more likely to have timely and relevant

information. If you get a good ranking, the only way to keep it is to make sure you are regularly updating the site.

Analytics

By examining your website statistics and encouraging feedback from your visitors you can measure the success of your website. It may be that some pages are attracting more visitors than others. This may have nothing to do with your products – some pages may have dull headings, ineffective copy, confusing navigation links, etc – regular analysis combined with the appropriate amendments will bring their rewards.

Some Ideas – Things to Think About

Do you have the skills, time and knowledge to write your own copy?

Or should you employ a copy writer to help you?

Search Engine Optimisation

> How many of your potential customers will know of your business and your exact web address? Did you know that more than 90% of travel products are researched online, using search engines?
>
> If your site cannot be found easily, you will be losing business. This guide explains how search engines work and how optimising your website for the search engines will improve your ranking allowing you to reach your future customers.

What Are Search Engines?

Search engines are web based computer programs – you'll be familiar with Google, Yahoo, Bing, and Ask which are popular search engines – each one acts as a huge, searchable online database. Your prospective visitors type their key words into the 'search box', the search engine then trawls through its database to find the most relevant pages for the visitor – up they come ten a page!

Everyone, including your competitors, want to appear on the first page of the Search Engines Results Pages (SERP's) – have you checked where your web page appears recently?

You can have the best website in the world but if your website is not optimised for the search engines you won't be appearing on that magical first page of the search engine search results!

More than 90% of travel products are now researched online, using search engines!

What Is Search Engine Optimisation?

Search Engine Optimisation (SEO) simply means improving the contents and structure of your website so that it'll be ranked in the top results of a search engine, when a relevant search is undertaken. SEO is all about driving traffic to your site so that you can then convert these visits into sales.

When a search engine displays its search results, it gives you two types of results:

* **Paid results** – website owners pay the search engine to display the web page when specific key words are used. Paid results appear at the top and/or on the right-hand side of the search results

* **Organic or natural results** – are the web pages that most closely match the online visitors criteria

Paid results may get your website to rank higher for a specific keyword or phrase but most online visitors feel that these results are not as relevant as the organic search results – as they have paid for their position, they will often be ignored.

Organic or natural search produces the result pages based on the popularity and relevancy of the webpages to the key words entered by the online visitor.

Paid Results — **Organic Results** — **Paid Results** (labels on the screenshot)
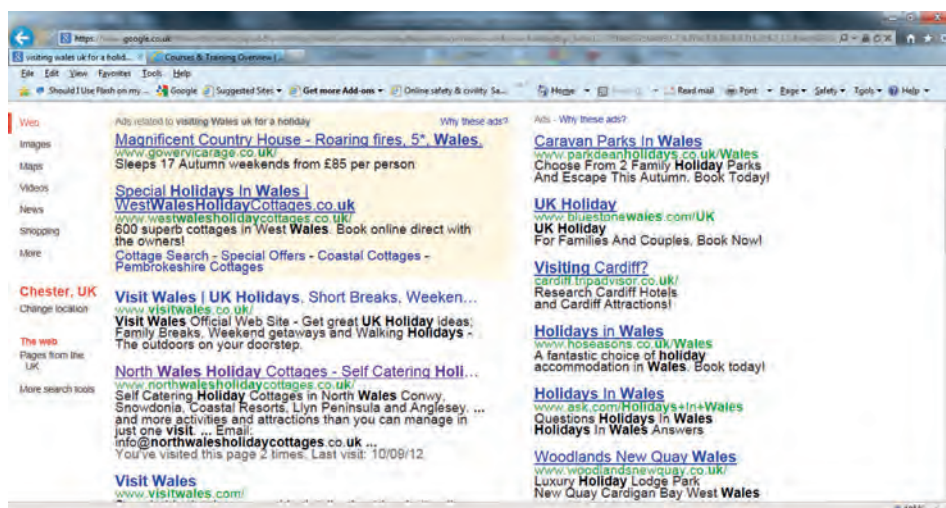
This search was carried out at 19:12 on the 17 September 2012 using the search term visiting Wales UK for a holiday.

How Do Search Engines Work?

Search engines use indexing software known as crawlers (sometimes referred to as robots or spiders).

The crawlers 'crawl' constantly through all the websites on the internet – including yours. They are always looking to:

- Find new or updated pages
- Analyse all the pages of your website, this shows the search engines what your website is all about
- Index and re-index the information and record it to its database
- Lists the most relevant web pages – when a prospective visitor enters their key words

A search engine's main aim is to provide the most relevant pages for their users' search terms in the results pages. They want to provide the visitor with the most relevant information possible from trusted websites.

Your aim should be to help the search engine identify your web pages as the most relevant to your online visitors for a particular search term – the words you use on your webpage tell the search engine whether or not your page is relevant.

Think about how your target audience is searching for you – what key words or phrases will they enter into a search box if they are trying to find a business similar to yours? These are your keyword phrases!

Your existing visitors are very likely to search for your business by name – your prospective visitors will most likely search by topic and town or region.

For example, if your product is a fabulous self-catering cottage called "Linga Longa" located near Tywyn in Mid Wales you would optimise your website for keyword phrases like "luxury self-catering cottage near Tywyn" rather than the actual name of your cottage.

Search engines love social media and review sites so join in the conversation and connect with your target market on sites, such as Share Wales, Facebook, Twitter, Flickr or YouTube add relevant comments, share interesting articles, photographs, or videos about unique events or activities in your area add a link to your website if it is relevant to do so.

Is Your Current Website Search Engine Friendly?

Before you begin optimising your website you should assess the current state of it, is it:

- Up-to-date – or will it be easy to update?

- Easy to navigate? Good navigation is good for your visitors and the search engines, it allows the crawlers to crawl the site and index it correctly.

- Compatible with all or most browsers? Test how your site looks in as many browsers as possible

- Mobile friendly – how does your site view on mobile devices?

- Easy to add fresh content, integrate your social media streams and blogs, customer reviews or new pages?

- Is it clear what the site wants your visitors to do? Are your calls to action clear?

Some website features can damage your search engine ranking and frustrate your online visitors – you can learn more about these in the **Barriers to Search Engine Optimisation** Fact Sheet.

Look at the websites of some of your competitors, who provide similar products or services to your own. Who would you prefer to buy from?

Rebuilding a website from scratch can be a better option and more cost effective than updating your old one. If you do not have a search engine friendly Content Management System, where you can create and edit your own web pages and one cannot be incorporated into your existing site – you should consider commissioning a new website.

Analytics

When your website is published, you will want to monitor its effectiveness and tweak your SEO techniques. There are many analytics packages available; some may be provided free with your hosting package or you can find others on the internet. You can use web analytics software to monitor, how many people visited your site, how they arrived at your site what keywords they used etc. Analytics packages enable you to determine which pages of your site are popular and those that need attention.

Some Ideas – Things to Think About

Search engine optimisation takes time and effort and only through, regular assessment and on-going online marketing can you achieve and retain high rankings with the search engines.

How will you manage your SEO? Will it be done in-house or will it be outsourced?

- In-house, using the skills of your existing staff or up skilling staff to take ownership of your SEO

- Outsourcing SEO to a carefully vetted professional such as an e-marketing consultant or website supplier

What do I do Next?

By applying a few key SEO techniques, which can be found in the **Associated Reading** section below, you will guarantee that your website is well indexed, improve its chances of being found at the top of a the SERP's, increase your site traffic and the overall success of your website.

Whether you are planning a new website or updating an existing site, you should always consider if the methods you use will lend themselves to SEO.

Barriers to Search Engine Optimisation

Many features of a websites design can create inadequate functionality and frustration for your online visitor, they can also act as barriers to search engines and their ability to crawl and search your site efficiently. This in turn can impact your Search Engine ranking and also the likelihood of potential customers finding your site.

The ability to review your website yourself, looking for any key mistakes is very important. It will allow you to correct any common design faults, which will improve your search engine rankings and also enhance your online visitors' experience. Here we cover some of the most common design faults to look out for.

Common Website Design Faults

There are a number of features in a website's design which can create inadequate functionality and frustration for your online visitor, who is only ever one click away from leaving your site. If your site is difficult to use or has too many problems – they will go to a competitor!

Some of these mistakes also act as barriers to search engines and can impair the search engines ability to crawl and search your site efficiently.

> **Identifying and removing any barriers to search engines on your website, will make a huge impact on your search engine ranking.**

Listed below are just a few of the more common website design faults which are still found in websites today.

Too Many Clicks – Unclear Navigation

Why do visitors want to look at your website? What are they looking for? How will they find it?

We have all visited websites where we've had to navigate through endless pages and inconsistent layout, ending up in total confusion and still not having found what we were looking for. A website that has a clear navigation system which is simple to use will entice visitors to return.

Are:

- Your links clearly defined and easy to see?
- Your links in the same place on every page?
- Your links logically named?
- Your calls to action and information easy to find?
- New visitors to your site are able to find everything they need easily?

Good navigation is vital for your online visitors and also for the search engines, if you want to appear at the top of Search Engine Results Pages (SERPS). This will also allow the search engine crawlers to go though your website and index your pages correctly.

Flash

Flash is vector animation software, designed to create animations for display on web pages. It's often used for

banners, splash pages, advertisements, slideshows etc – it has been a very popular developer's tool.

Flash applications and websites can be large and slow to load. To be able to view a Flash file, your online visitor will need to download a Flash plug-in, and these need regular updating which is inconvenient for your visitors and could prompt a leap to one of your competitors.

This is not the only problem with Flash, it results in significant issues with accessibility, it doesn't display on all mobile devices. As search engines struggle to crawl through Flash driven pages, you should look to limit the use of Flash on your website.

Splash Pages

These are those annoying welcome or cover pages that can still be found on some websites. Splash pages are intended to entice the visitor into a website and often feature Flash animations and sound. Not only does this result in a pointless click for your online visitors but they also create problems for search engines, making it difficult for them to access your site to index it successfully.

There is no need for Splash pages, any welcome text or graphics intended to welcome visitors can be placed on the sites home page which can then be correctly indexed and linked to through the site. This method gives your visitors instant access to your website without any need for further clicks.

Frames

Using frames allows the division of a web page into separate scrolling areas – using multiple, independent sections to create a single webpage. The three main problems with the use of frames are – they:

- Make it difficult for your online visitors to navigate and interact with your website especially if there are multiple frames that have to be scrolled through

- Cause ranking problems with the search engines who are often only able to index the first part of the page, they can't crawl any deeper. So, any additional pages that use frames will not be included in the SERPS since they will not be indexed

- Are a direct block to accessibility, reading devices are unable to determine the content.

Frames are no longer popular – if your site still uses frames, it may be time to consider having a rebuild.

Excessive or Insufficient Content

Our online visitors tend to scan the content of a webpage, looking for the information that they need. They will not read a vast amount of copy, word for word. If they can't find the relevant information they need within a few seconds, they will click the back button and leave (bounce from) your site.

Well thought out headings and sub-headings will structure your web-pages. Your visitors can scan your pages quickly and see at a glance what each section of the page is about, easily finding the information that they need. When search engine crawlers read your content, they understand the importance of your headings which will help your search engine rankings.

Search engines love content. The number of pages and the quality of your content is one of the main factors that search engines use to determine your ranking. Your content is important to the search engines as it tells them what keywords and phrases are the most relevant to your site.

Out of Date Poor Content

The search engine crawlers are constantly looking for updated pages. They rank these higher as they are more likely to be timely and relevant. If you get a good ranking the best way to keep it is to ensure you carry out regular updates.

Duplicate Content

Search engines don't like duplicate content – they don't want to give their visitors the same old results. They will choose one of the pages to list in their search results pages, and will disregard any other pages with the duplicate content.

Can You Have Too Many Key Words or Phrases?

Using keywords too often on a webpage is known as 'keyword stuffing'. Keyword stuffing' is considered to be unethical search engine optimisation. Use too many Keywords and your website will be either ignored or penalised by the search engines. Also, the text on your pages will read very strangely to your human visitors. Your webpages should be written for and read well for your online visitors.

The Absence of Inbound Links

The absence of inbound links coming in to your website, from other quality websites, could have an impact on your search engine rankings, as link popularity is calculated on the number of links from other quality websites to yours.

What is Unethical SEO? (Black Hat SEO)

Using the wrong search engine optimisation methods, could get your web site banned by the search engines. Some search engine optimisation companies and software developers use unethical techniques and measures to artificially boost the search engine

rankings of a website. Search engines continue to change their algorithms to prevent the flooding of results pages with irrelevant or low quality content.

Listed below are some of the main unethical optimisation techniques:

- Doorway pages – are not designed for real people, they are designed to trick the search engines into indexing the website in to a higher position

- Cloaking and false redirects – these present different versions of webpage contents for both search engines and human visitors

- Keyword stuffing – is filling a page with keywords within both the content and meta data of a page

- Hidden text or hidden links. This is putting lists of keywords in the same colour text as the background. Search engines can read this but humans cannot

- Duplicated content on multiple pages

- Link farms – sites that features links in no particular order which are totally unrelated to each other. Links on pages like these offer no inbound link popularity and many search engines will penalise sites that link to them

- Any other method designed to trick search engines.

Website Analytics

It is important for you understand if any elements of your website need changing, as well as knowing which are working well and should be left as they are. You will find it useful to check your website analytics. If your bounce rate is high, it's time to work out why! You may want to read our "Understanding Website Analytics" fact sheet.

Using Meta Data & Tags Effectively On Your Website

> If you go to a library, museum gallery or visitor attraction, you probably find guides or listings helpful – in the same way search engines need help when searching the web.
>
> Meta Data and Tags help search engines to understand what your website is all about and also help search engine users to choose which web page they wish to view.
>
> Enticing Meta Description Tags could result in more visits for your website and possibly more sales!

What is Meta Data?

Metadata is often described as data about data – this simply means structured information that describes, explains or provides information that helps find a resource, this could be:

- A web page – name of the page, what it's about, key words in the page

- Image or photos – when it was created, size, tagging and organising

- A document – when it was created, who wrote it, how many words it contains

- Videos – the type of equipment used, date created, descriptive information

One of the main purposes of metadata is to help you find resources using keywords.

Web pages often include Metadata in the form of Meta Tags – special Hyper Text Markup Language (HTML) tags that are used to provide information about the web page. They help search engines to understand what your website is about and they also help search engine users to select which page they wish to view. Some search engines use the information stored in Meta Tags when they index their Web pages.

Meta data, despite its technical sounding name, is actually very easy to use.

Your Meta Tags can be found at the top of your web page in the header section of your source code – you should be able to edit your Meta Tags yourself either using your content management system or in the HTML page itself. You can usually view the Meta Tags on any web page by clicking the right mouse and selecting 'view source'.

Sample Tags

<title>This is where you write the title of your webpage – between the HTML title tags</title>

<meta name="description" content="This is where you type a description of your web page"/>

Although the Title Tag appears in the header section of the page, it isn't a Meta Tag – the Title Tag is a required page element – whilst Meta Tags are optional.

Attention Grabbing Titles

The Title Tag is one of the most important features in achieving high search engine rankings, crawler based search engines use the Title Tag to gather information about your web site, this information is then used in their ranking process – they analyse the relevance of your web page with the keywords that are on that page. The title name should be an accurate description of the page – important keywords should be included in the title as this will help the search engine determine what the page is about.

The Title Tag appears on the title bar at the top of the browser window and also on the browser's tabs when the web page is being viewed. They also give the search engine user a good awareness of what your website is about as it shows as a clickable link on the search engine result pages – so an attention grabbing title may result in more clicks!

<title>Linga Longa Luxury Self Catering Cottage in Llandudno, NorthWales</title>

The Title Tag is what will persuade your online visitor to click on the page – so it must immediately grab their attention and also include relevant keywords which will reassure them that your website will have the content that they are looking for.

<title>Visit Wales | UK Holidays, Short Breaks Weekend</title>

This is where the Title Tag appears in the results pages.

Your page titles should:

- Be unique and relevant to each page

- Use important keywords to help the search engine determine what the page is about

- Use the pipe symbol (they look like this |) to separate the brand name of your website from the content of the page and also keywords or phrases. If you struggle to find this on your keyboard you can hold down the ALT key and type 0124, using the numerical key pad. You will see it used on the above screen shot.

- Be written for the visitor and tweaked for the search engines

- Be interesting, descriptive and concise

- Have 65 characters or less – they will be truncated if they are longer

The Meta Title (<META NAME="The same title as you put in the Title tag">

The Meta Title tag normally has the same title as contained in the title tag.

Create a Good Meta Description

Meta Description Tags are very useful because they allow you to write a short meaningful description which defines exactly what the visitors can expect to find on your web page. This description is often but not always, displayed beneath the title on the search engine results page – this is sometimes called a snippet.

This snippet of information is important – any keywords typed into the 'search box' that also appear in your snippet will be highlighted in bold – which will confirm for the user that your page is relevant to their search. You can use it as a taster to tempt the visitor to click onto your listing – an enticing description may result in more visits and possibly more sales.

```
<meta name="description"
content="this is where you add your
description"/>
```

Your Meta Description Tag should:

- Be unique and relevant to each page

- Use important keywords that are relevant to the page

- Be interesting, descriptive and concise

- Have 155 characters or less – they will be shortened if they are longer

This is where your Meta Description can appear in the results pages. Key words used in the search will be shown in bold.

Your Meta Description will only show in the search results if the description contains exactly the same phrase that the visitor used as their key phrase in the search engine. If a visitor searches for a phrase that isn't used in your Meta Description the search engine will select a relevant snippet of information from the web page.

Have a look at your web analytics for the top search terms which drive traffic to the page and then make sure to use these in the pages Meta Description.

If you don't complete your Meta Description Tag, search engines will again often display a snippet of relevant information from within your page.

The Meta Description Tag does not affect the ranking position of your page in the search engine results pages.

Meta Keyword Tag

Meta keywords were originally used to let search engines know what keywords you wanted your web page to be found with, when an online visitor searched using those key words.

Many website owners used these to spam the search engines with popular search terms that were totally irrelevant to the page – because of this misuse, search engines have now stopped using meta keywords – making them redundant.

Tagging News Articles

One of major search engines has recently decided that they will be using the news_keywords metatag to help them to understand and catalogue news articles so that they can be found in the search results. Therefore, if you have an interesting news article you might like to include the "news_keywords" tag with the aim of improving the article's ranking in the search engines.

The news_keywords metatag is very similar to the original keywords meta tag, it allows publishers to specify key words or phrases that are relevant to a particular news item.

The key words or phrases don't need to appear anywhere within the published news article.

```
<meta name="news_keywords"
content="key words or phrases here
separated using a comma">
```

What Are Inbound Links & Why Do I need Them?

Promoting traffic to your tourism website is becoming more and more important due to the ever increasing competition. Using quality inbound links is one of the ways to help your search engine optimisation – and bring more visitors to your website.

The best way to get relevant inbound links to your site is to create web pages which contain fresh, engaging and informative content, if people like your content they'll share it by linking to it – bringing you more visitors!

What Are Inbound Links & Why Do I need Them?

Inbound links (sometimes called back links) are links from pages on other websites that link back to your site. Relevant, quality links coming to your website from other high ranking websites are very important – each link acts as a vote of confidence in your website! If you want to have high search engine rankings – the more quality links you can get – the better your search results will be.

> **Search engines count links to your site as 'votes of confidence'. They assume that if lots of quality websites link to your site, it must be trustworthy, popular and exciting!**

Search engines now place more importance on the reputation and quality of the site that's linking to your webpage rather than the actual number of links. If you get an inbound link from a website with lots of inbound links, like the BBC for example, you would get more authority transferred to your website, than if you had a link from a poor quality website. Your aim should be to get links from high authority sites.

Benefits of Inbound Links

• Search engine crawlers follow links between websites – the more quality inbound links you have – then the more often crawlers will visit your site

• Search engines count links to your site as "votes of confidence" in your website – they assume that if lots of quality websites link to your site it must be a trustworthy, popular and exciting!

• Inbound links will also bring traffic to your web site from other web sites

The Best ways to Get Inbound Links

There are many ways you can get links to your website some of these are acceptable and others are not. If you use an improper way of sourcing inbound links the search engines may detect this and penalise you. The main aim of targeted link building is to improve your ranking for a keyword phrase and/or to improve the rank of a specific page on your website.

The best way to get relevant inbound links to your site is to create web pages which contain fresh, engaging and informative content, if people like your content they'll share it by linking to

it. These links are known as natural or organic links and are created to share and promote quality information on the internet.

You will get natural inbound links by writing good content that people will want to share, using social media, blogging, joining forums and professional associations.

Most website owners will also need to make an effort to obtain more inbound links and you must think very carefully about the type of pages you want linked to yours!

The advantages of natural organic links:

- The linking pages will be similar and relevant to your own pages

- They are free and you don't have to return the link

- The links will be varied and contain different keyword focused *Anchor Text

*__Anchor text__, is the visible, clickable text in a hyperlink, it should help your online visitor by giving them a useful description about the content of the page you are linking to. Here's an example of Anchor Text from the Visit Wales website:

You can find things to do (http://www.visitwales.com/things-to-do), somewhere to stay (http://www.visitwales.com/holiday-accommodation) and start planning your perfect short break in Wales (http://www.visitwales.com/holidays-breaks/short-breaks). This is much more descriptive than the words Click Here (http://www.visitwales.com/) which is so often used.

The words included in the anchor text will also help to tell the search engines what the page is about, which helps them to determine the ranking that the page will be given.

The Best Way to Get Inbound Links is to:

- Write creative content that is worth sharing

- Submit your website to relevant online directories – many of these are free and easy to set up

- Use your URL when you post on relevant discussion forums or newsgroups

- Write guest posts for popular blogs – sharing and showcasing your expertise

- Promote your website on social networks

- Ask those tourism operators who provide complementary products or services – and other relevant website owners if they will link to your website

Search engines look at your inbound links and they also look at who you're linking to – many website owners will check to see who is linking to them – so you may get a good relevant link back!

Reciprocal Links

It's not all about who you get a link from – it's also about who you have links to!

When you have the chance to exchange links with a trusted business that provides a relevant product or service to yours, it makes sense to link to them and also for them to link back to you. For example, if you offer accommodation, your visitors will be very interested to read about local events, attractions and restaurants – this will help you both by bringing new visitors to your websites and may help your search engine ranking a little.

How Many Inbound Links do You Have?

You can easily check your link popularity and discover who is linking to your website, using one of the following ways:

- If you use an analytics tool to monitor the performance of your website, you should be able to view a Referring Sites report – this shows if someone clicked on a link from another website pointing to your site

- You can use the search engines to find out how many inbound links they have for you! Visit any of the search engines and go to the Advanced Search Options, you will see text saying something like 'find pages that are similar to or link to' and then follow the onscreen instructions

- Type into the search box **Links:sharewales.com (use your domain name)** this will provide a list of sites that have links to your site – very interesting!

You can also find lots of free tools on the internet (usually they give you the option of taking out a subscription for a more advanced version). These will give you more detailed information about your inbound links – you could type into the search box "tools to find inbound links".

Then why don't you check who links to your competitors' website – you could ask them if they would also add links to your site – don't forget to send them the HTML code, ready to cut and paste into their page, complete with anchor text.

Unacceptable Ways of Getting Inbound Links

There are a several unacceptable ways of getting inbound links and the search engines can detect when you have bad/unnatural links and as mentioned you can be penalised for this There is no official list about improper linking, but the following methods are recognised as being unacceptable and would be likely to damage your rankings:

- Buying links – some websites sell links from pages with a high ranking.

These can be effective but they are frowned upon and search engines have been known to identify and blacklist websites involved

- Link farms – a website that features links that are in no particular order and totally unrelated to each other. Links on these pages give no inbound link popularity and you may be banned by certain search engines

- Too many reciprocal links – you link to me and then I'll link to you, unrelated websites, or low ranking sites

- Web spammers or "bad neighbourhoods" or any method designed to trick the search engines

An old saying springs to mind here "Show me the company that you keep and I'll tell you what you are"!

Getting Rid of Bad Links

A major search engine has recently been sending warnings out to owners of websites warning them that they have "artificial or unnatural links" to their website. If you have received one of these messages or if you just want to make sure you don't get one! Read the section above **How Many Inbound Links do You Have** and check who is linking to your website.

Getting rid of your bad links can help your rankings and how you go about removing them will depend on how you originally got a link.

- If you originally bought the link – you can just stop paying for it

- Email the owner of the website tell them who you are, and the link you want removing – some may want paying for this

If you did receive a warning message from a search engine do let them know when you have removed the offending links.

Understanding Web Analytics

Do you know who's visiting your website – when and how they found or reached your site? What search terms did they use? Is it their first visit or are they repeat visitors? Where do they come from and what device are they using?

Understanding your website traffic statistics is very important for every tourism business today.

All can be revealed by using analytics to track your online visitors and their behaviour. This can help you improve your website and related marketing, enhance your chances of attracting more visitors and of converting these to customers.

What Are Web Analytics?

Web analytics monitor traffic on your website and allow you to collect information about visitors to your website. They're used to understand where your visitors come from, what they do whilst they're on your site and very importantly why and how they leave your site. Understanding the behaviour of your visitors can help you to improve the effectiveness and performance of your online marketing – making it more attractive and relevant for your visitors and hopefully more profitable for you too!

Do you know who your visitors are, which pages are the most popular, and which are not attracting visitors – what works best for you and your business?

Web analytics allow you to capture information about the visitors to your website. You can then use this vital information to help you to meet their needs.

Why Use Web Analytics?

By measuring and tracking your visitors' interactions with your website, you can learn more about them and gain an insight into their needs. You can find out what's working effectively and what is not doing so well and needs attention.

What do you need to measure? First of all you need to identify your business goals and objectives, to do this you need to think about what you are trying to achieve with your website.

This may be to increase:

- Accommodation/reservations/ bookings from your website

- Business from a certain geographical area

- Time spent by your visitors on certain pages

- Opt-ins for your newsletter

It's always interesting to see how well you are performing, but if you don't put into practice what you've learned – it will be of little use to you.

At a more advanced level you can accurately track and measure your online marketing campaigns.

Advantages of Using Analytics

There are many advantages to be gained from using web analytics. They can help you to:

- Carry out business and market research which will help you to improve your tourism products and services

- Provide key business statistics (metrics) i.e.: did your web visitor take a desired action on a web page

- Analyse changes you've made to your website

- Monitor search engine optimization strategies that you make

- Using the referral page information you may be able to identify new partnership opportunities with other tourism related businesses in Wales

- Regulate what resources you will need at certain times of the year

- Most web analytics now include social media reporting tools which let you know which social platforms are sending the most visitors to your website and what they are doing when they get there. Are you measuring the success of your social media programs?

- If you have an e-commerce website it will probably provide you with basic transaction statistics, but by using web analytics you can track how many visits a visitor has made to your website before they buy anything, their page views etc

- Monitor email marketing campaigns

What Are the Disadvantages?

There are few disadvantages to using web analysis tools to analyse performance, but you should be aware that:

- Some page tagging analytics packages can slow the loading time of the webpage, or require the user's web browser to perform additional functions. This can be alleviated by placing the JavaScript at the base of the page and other techniques which can be implemented by a good website developer

- Page tagging systems typically use 'cookies' which track users when they are using the website. Some visitors will not like the privacy implications of this and some users disable cookies, therefore not all information is available for analysis

- Page tagging systems require JavaScript to be installed on every webpage, there is always a possibility that some visitors' browsers will not allow the script to run

- Many businesses can be bombarded by the information that is provided by many of these tools. It's a good idea to start using them slowly and concentrate on only a small number of statistics/metrics to begin with.

How Do You Get Web Analytics?

Nearly all websites which are supplied or hosted by a web developer will be provided with some form of statistics or analytics tool. This tool will usually be one of the following:

- Log file analysis based tools – this type of statistics package analyses log files from the server that is hosting the website – nearly all hosting providers will be able to provide this type of tool

- Page tagging based tools – these tools require a small piece of JavaScript (programming code) to be added to the code of a webpage. Usually this type of analytics is more accurate and can provide more information than log file analysis.

Normally the log file analysis tools are called 'website statistics' and the page tagging tools are called 'website

analytics' but some people treat them as interchangeable.

Getting Started

There are lots of web analytic tools available on the internet and many of these are free of charge – you need to make sure that the one you choose meets your business needs.

If you feel happy to select and setup your analytics yourself, then you can select from many popular analytics tools such as Yahoo Analytics, Clicky or Google analytics or you can spend time assessing other analytical tools, some of which are freely available on the internet and simply follow the setup instructions.

If you don't feel confident enough to set up web analytics yourself, contact your current web developer or hosting company as this service is probably already available and you may just need to be given access rights.

You may also need support from your web developer or marketing consultant to help you to monitor and analyse the results. By interpreting and using the information gained correctly, you can enhance your website's success, increase traffic, and hopefully your profits too!

If you are developing a new website or having a refresh, web analytics should be requested as a deliverable in your website brief.

How to Use Web Analytics

Once your web analytics system is set-up, it's important that it is regularly and effectively checked to analyse the impact of your website, social media and your marketing efforts. A good place to start is the dashboard – most of the analytic tools available have a dashboard feature as standard and they will give you access to the following or very similar reports:

- **Visitor numbers** – the total number of visitors to your website, whether the numbers are increasing or decreasing and whether they just visit once, or come back for repeat visits

- **Page views** – number of pages viewed in total

- **Pages/visit** – the average number of pages viewed per visit

- **Bounce rate** – this is the percentage of visitors who visit only one page before leaving the site. It's important to analyse this – you'll need to consider the site design, quality, relevancy and content of the pages causing concern. Your visitors may also leave the site after viewing just one page if they've found all the information they need on that page

- **Average time on site** – how long the average visitor spends on your site

- **Content overview** – what pages visitors are viewing, which were most visited and how many visitors viewed these pages

- **Visitor overview** – this usually provides statistics based on the number of visitors over a time period – in a graphical form

- **Traffic sources overview** – this will provide information on where traffic to the website came from. Usually it will be a mixture of referring websites, direct visits, search engines, advertising as well as other sources

- **Location** – you can see which geographical area your visitors are from – this can be useful if you are targeting a specific region. Viewing the geographical location in your statistics/metrics can help you assess if your marketing campaigns are working

- **Technology** – you can see the type of technology your visitors are using to access your website – this allows you to ensure that your website gives all visitors a good web experience so that they come back for more

- **Mobile users** – how many of your visitors use their smartphones or similar devices to access your website – are your webpages mobile friendly? Understanding mobile traffic to your site can give you an indication as to whether the traffic you receive from mobile devices justifies you creating a mobile website for your business

- **Keywords and keyword phrases** – which brought them to your website? Are these keywords relevant to your web content – do you need to update your web content or adjust your meta data? (you may want to read the Fact Sheet Using Meta Data and Tags Effectively on your Website)

- **Analyse traffic spikes** – keep track of your marketing activities, social media efforts or calls to action – see which are generating the most interest and interactions.

Data Protection and its Legalities

Are you keeping information on your customers and those you deal with in a compliant way?

This factsheet summarises the main elements of the Data Protection Act 1998, to help raise awareness of the principles and practicalities of this complex and lengthy Act.

Read on to find out how to check your position relating to this legislation, and for useful contact details and further reference points for any outstanding specific queries you may have.

What is the Data Protection Act?

The Data Protection Act 1998, is an Act of Parliament relating to the legality of processing and storage of information about people within the UK, in order to safeguard their personal details. This legislation applies to living people only. Personal details/data in this context include any information you process or store on your business's computer system e.g. your customers' names and addresses, debit/credit card details, staff records etc.

Data Protection is a legal requirement – You are strongly encouraged to contact the Information Commissioner's Office if you have any specific queries.

There are 8 fundamental principles on information handling relating to this legislation, they state that personal information or data must be:

- **Processed fairly and lawfully** – this is a key element of this Act

- **Processed for specified purposes**

- **Adequate, relevant and not excessive** – self-explanatory maybe – but increasingly some organisations are requesting (then storing) inappropriate/excessive/irrelevant information eg: asking for date of birth when making enquiries or payments

- **Accurate and where necessary, kept up to date** – you may need to develop systems to allow your customers/ staff to amend or update their details easily

- **Not retained for longer than necessary** – not only is this a legal requirement but for example it could help to avoid sending a mailing from out of date information which wastes your time and money and could annoy your customers

- **Processed and stored in line with individuals' rights** – the law requires data holders to store and process information accordingly

- **Retained and stored securely** – not only is this good business practice but could protect your business information and that of your customers e.g. protection against credit card fraud

- **Not transferred to countries outside the European Economic Area (EEA) unless it is sufficiently secure**.

Hopefully – having read the previous bullet points – you'll be encouraged to learn that the Information Commissioner's Office (ICO), the UK Government Department dealing with this area, advises on its website that *"if you make sure you handle personal data in line with the spirit of those principles, then you will go a long way towards ensuring that you comply with the letter of the law."*

What Do You Need to Do?

Basically, if you process data electronically about people such as names, addresses, e-mail addresses, telephone numbers, etc – if you haven't already done so, you need to check whether you are required to notify the ICO. If you store CCTV footage within your business for the purposes of crime prevention and prosecution the law requires you to notify the ICO.

However, the Act provides exemption from notification for:

- organisations that process personal data only for:
  - o staff administration (including payroll)
  - o advertising, marketing and public relations (in connection with their own business activity)
  - o accounts and records
- some not-for-profit organisations
- organisations that process personal data only for maintaining a public register
- organisations that do not process personal information on computer.

As each business is unique we strongly recommend that you check for yourself whether you are required to notify the ICO.

To help you to decide, the ICO has provided a straightforward self-assessment checklist on their website.

If you're satisfied that your business is exempt from the Act – you may wish to continue reading for useful tips and guidance on how to manage personal information – if not thank you for reading this far!

How Do I Keep Information Secure?

Because all businesses handle and process information differently it's not possible to give definitive guidance on how to design a secure system for all readers of this Factsheet – so let's look at what the Data Protection Act has to say on this subject:

"Appropriate technical and organisational measures shall be taken against unauthorised or unlawful processing of personal data and against accidental loss or destruction of, or damage to, personal data."

This is the 7th principle of the Act, which sets out the necessary security requirements you need to have in place to store personal information. The following bullet points provide ICO advice on security measures:

- Design and organise your security to fit the nature of the personal data you hold and the harm that may result from a security breach
- Be clear about who in your organisation is responsible for ensuring information security
- Make sure you have the right physical and technical security, backed up by robust policies and procedures and reliable, well-trained staff
- Be ready to respond to any breach of security swiftly and effectively.

Clearly we cannot provide specific guidance on security measures, which would be appropriate for all businesses. But we would recommend that, you carry out a risk assessment on the personal data held within your business.

The ICO recognises that not every business will require a formal information security policy, but the ICO website suggests that the following factors are considered when planning information security systems. These may not all be appropriate to your situation, and you may have other issues to add to your list:

- **The nature and extent of your organisation's premises and computer systems** – The ICO recommends that a person, or department, in your business should be tasked with the day to day responsibility for information security measures. As with all delegations those responsible should have the necessary authority and resources to fulfil this responsibility effectively.

- Physical security includes alarms, security lighting, CCTV, all computerised equipment – and access to that equipment – ensuring that computer screens cannot be viewed by unauthorised people, encryption i.e.: the translation of data into a secret code) where necessary, alarms, quality doors, locks, computerised equipment and disposal of sensitive paper waste. You may need to consider other areas within your own tourism business.

- **The number of staff you have and the extent of their access to the personal data** – It's obviously important that all staff handling personal information understand the systems you have in place (including measures for any staff working from another site or at

their home) and their responsibilities with regard to the Act.

- Appropriate training is essential to ensure that information handling, procedures and security; co-ordination between staff and departments; business continuity arrangements, procedures to identify callers, the dangers of people trying to obtain personal data by deception.

- The Act requires businesses to take reasonable steps to ensure the reliability of staff who have access to personal data – therefore your recruitment procedures need to take this into account e.g: obtain appropriate references; by asking to see passports or driving licences before they start work; your contract of employment should set out what staff can and cannot do with the personal data they have access to.

- **Personal data held or used by a third party on your behalf** – Under the Data Protection Act you're responsible for ensuring that any data processor you employ also has appropriate security measures in place.

What If I Receive a Request For Information?

One of the key elements of the Act is that, it gives everyone the right to ask for access to their personal information held by any organisation. If you receive a request for such information, you're required to provide that information, usually within 40 days. Briefly individuals can request:

- To view the data for a small fee

- That incorrect information be corrected – if the business ignores the request, compensation can be awarded

- That their data is not used in any way that may potentially cause damage or distress

- That their data is not used for direct marketing.

Where can I go for Further Guidance?

It's been said before, but it's worth saying again…if you'd like further detailed information about any aspect of this Act, or to speak to someone regarding notification or any other related issue, you are strongly encouraged to contact the ICO www.ico. gov.uk.

During the writing of this factsheet the author referred to the ICO's user friendly website and found it to be clear and informative. The author also contacted their staff who were helpful and friendly and they also answered the phone promptly!

This subject is complex and whilst we believe that the information provided is accurate and up to date – laws are sometimes amended and updated – which is why we direct readers to the ICO website directly, rather than provide web links which may change at a later date.

Social Media Marketing – Getting Started

Using social media networks can help you to stand out from your competitors and allow you to engage with your online visitors. It can raise your awareness and help you to build your valuable online reputation.

Social media marketing works brilliantly in the tourism industry. There are lots of exciting and fun things happening on a daily basis and you can share these, by posting videos and photos of your visitors enjoying activities, visiting your attraction or relaxing at your accommodation.

Don't forget to encourage your visitors to share their videos, photos, experiences or reviews on their social media sites too!

What Is Social Media?

Social media is a phrase used to include the many different online platforms which host and encourage various social interactions. These include the sharing of information through words, photos, video content, reviews, social networking, blogging, internet forums, joining events and many other online activities.

Social Media Marketing is a gift for tourism businesses – adding another exciting dimension to your marketing efforts. You're only limited by your imagination!

Social media marketing is simply the process of getting more customers, increasing traffic to your website and creating a 'buzz' for your products or services through social media sites such as Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn etc. Using social media, you are able to connect and interact on a more personal and active level with your potential visitors, rather than through traditional marketing methods. It's thought that around 1.5 billion people are currently actively using some form of social media networking.

Why Use Social Media Marketing?

Because an ever growing number of your customers and potential customers do!

Most of your visitors will now research and get advice on their holiday choices from the internet and some kind of social media or dedicated review sites. Social media marketing is not the same as advertising, where you simply tell people how good you are and then sit back and wait for them to come to you. You have to join in the conversation, offer your help and advice – share your excitement and passion. Your message will spread from person to person – you're building a valuable reputation, creating lasting relationships and gaining trust – that in turn will create an interest in your tourism business.

Social networking is all about engagement and gives us new and slightly different ways of communicating with our visitors – helping us to carry out the word of mouth marketing that we have always done.

As always, people are still far more likely to buy, book or visit somewhere if it's been personally recommended to them

by someone they trust. They'll become your faithful customers and will endorse your tourism business, to thousands and thousands of people around the world.

Advantages Of Social Media Marketing

As we mentioned social media marketing works really well for tourism businesses and these are a few of the advantages, they:

- Are free, easy to set up and use – at any time anywhere

- Let you tell people who you are and create a buzz around your tourism services or products

- Make it easy for you to communicate and engage with your visitors, clients or colleagues – on a global basis

- Allow you to share stories, information, videos and photos of the best that Wales has to offer – instantly!

- Receive feedback and comments from your visitors

- Give you the opportunity to manage your online reputation

- Drive high quality traffic to your website from around the world

- Build your Welsh tourism brand and location awareness

- Promote events/special offers/your blog etc

- Improve your position in the search engine ranking and give you important inbound links to your website

- Enable you to see what your competitors are doing

- Offer opportunities for you to listen and learn from others

- Enable you to carry out market research

- Give you an understanding of your visitors – allowing you to tailor your product or service to their needs

- Social networking gives your tourism business an opportunity to gain new contacts from the comfort of your own office.

Which Social Networking Site Will Suit You?

When choosing which social media platform to use, it's important to understand where your customers are. You should target your efforts towards the channels they use. In some cases, you will find your best choice is obvious – for example, you may already know of a tourism related group (particularly if it's in Wales) that complements your business and is used by your visitors. You may find you need a combination of social media channels to cover all your needs.

You can visit social media sites that don't require registration to view (most except Facebook) and look at the sorts of conversations online – if you're not already you may want to follow Visit Wales' visitor facing www.facebook.com/visitwales and/or on www.twitter.com/visitwales and trade facing https://twitter.com/visitwalesbiz

Here's a very brief overview of some of the most popular sites:

Facebook (http://www.facebook.com/) – a Facebook Page can be an excellent way for your tourism business to reach potential and existing visitors. Pages are for businesses, organisations and brands to share their stories and connect with people. You can share tourism related stories, create photo albums, organise events and connect with potential and your existing visitors.

Twitter (http://www.twitter.com) – is a popular website that offers a social networking and a micro-blogging platform, which allows you to post short text messages to other users, they are called Tweets and can contain up to140 characters. Twitter provides an informal way to communicate, share information, join in conversations, highlight special offers, promotions, brand building etc.

LinkedIn (http://www.linkedin.com) – is the world's largest professional network with over 225 million members and growing rapidly. LinkedIn connects you to your contacts and helps you exchange knowledge, ideas, and opportunities with a network of professionals. It's like a corporate Facebook, which is useful if you are targeting business people for overnight stays, bookings etc.

TripAdvisor (http://www.tripadvisor. co.uk) – tourism businesses can benefit from TripAdvisor as it's a platform where visitors can review the business and rate its services, share photos, videos etc. Any businesses that have signed up to TripAdvisor can comment on their reviews and address any issues raised – these reviews can also be featured on you your own website.

YouTube (http://www.youtube.com/) – is the No. 1 video sharing website in the world and also one of the most powerful branding tools on the web. Everyday millions of users upload and view videos on YouTube, it's also the second biggest search engine (Google is the first), and its videos rank highly. By posting your videos, you can connect with those most likely to buy your products and services. You can link YouTube videos to social networks and links are provided which enable users to share videos with friends via email, Facebook, Twitter and other networks.

Pinterest (http://pinterest.com/) – allows you to pin images and videos to a virtual bulletin board which you create – these can be photos taken and uploaded, images or videos found on other websites. These are then shared with your visitors and customers (known as 'friends' on Pinterest) they can then like or re-pin them to their own boards. The main purpose is to share your interests with friends through the use of images and video.

Blogs – are short for weB LOG (a shared on-line journal, where people can post diary entries about their personal experiences). Blogging involves posting interesting, regular articles or other content to your own or third party website – such as Blogger or WordPress, these can then be read by your prospective and existing visitors to Wales. Most blogs are interactive and allow your visitors to leave comments and post messages to each other. Blogging also provides another method for potential visitors to find your website.

Wikipedia provides an expanded list of social media sites (http://en.wikipedia. org/wiki/List_of_social_networking_ websites).

Disadvantages of Social Media Marketing
I struggled to think of any disadvantages, these are what I came up with.

- The interface and jargon can be a little confusing at first but you'll soon get familiar with terminology etc – many people get hooked quite quickly

- You do have to be very careful what you post – you don't want to offend or upset any of your visitors

- If you can't keep up with the conversations and meet your online visitors' needs, they will soon lose interest

- Social media is very addictive and can become time consuming – it's easy to get distracted as you join in conversations or receive posts, tweets etc

- Risks of negative comments – if you receive *negative feedback it's visible to everyone! You will need to learn how to manage such positively.

- Watch out for any typos or punctuation mistakes, your posts give an impression of you and your company

- Anything posted on the internet could appear in the search engine results and could remain on the internet for years.

*If you are seen to handle any negative feedback quickly, fairly and honestly you will preserve (or even enhance) your online reputation, keep the trust and loyalty of your visitors and hopefully appease your critics.

Getting Started

Like any form of marketing, a strategy should be developed with clear aims of your target market, proposed actions and the social networking site/s that best suit/s you and your tourism audience.

Before You Start:

You'll need to think about the following points.

- Why am I considering using social media?

- Am I looking to find new customers?

- Do I want to connect with colleagues and create a professional network?

- Do I want to receive information, or do I want to send out information?

- What do I plan to talk about?

- What geographical area am I aiming for?

- Decide which networks to sign up to.

Once You've Decided

Once you have decided you are ready to create an account on your chosen network/s. Here are a few tips to get you started.

- Your online profiles should make people want to know more about you and your business

- Make sure your user name is relevant and attractive to your existing and potential online visitors

- Search for and join relevant groups and respond to posts

- Find out if any of your contacts are already involved – ask for their advice or help

- Invite your existing visitors to connect with you

- Set clear aims and time limits

- Regularly review what your presence on the network is achieving

When you first join a social network, you may want to sit quietly on the sidelines to watch and listen for a while. When you feel comfortable you can begin to respond to other users' posts, tweets, and join conversations that interest you – very soon you will be feeling more confident and ready to start new conversations and raise your own topics.

You might introduce the hens that are laying the free range eggs for breakfast, or share an idea, something you've learned, a local insight…it's up to you!

You must also vary your message on different social media sites – if you post the same message to all your social media platforms you will dilute the impact and value of them all.

Monitor Your Social Media Efforts

How will you know how effective your social media campaigns are if you're not measuring any metrics – what's the return on your investment? You can use your analytics program to monitor:

- The number of visitors you're getting to your social media sites.

- How many people are reading and sharing your posts?

- Where they're coming from?

- How long are they staying?

- What is popular with your visitors?

- Is your business website receiving visitors from your social media sites?

- What makes them leave your site?

Legal Consequences

We cannot ignore the legal consequences of publishing content on the internet – you could be liable for content which is hosted on your site, even if you didn't write it. Always make sure your visitors have an easy and visible way to contact you regarding any content published on your site.

Perhaps you'll need to consider writing a Social Media Policy Statement giving corporate guidelines to your staff on using social media and ensure they receive adequate training prior to their first post or Tweet! (You could browse the internet for examples of Social Media Policy Statements and adapt as required to meet your needs).

Make sure you don't get into trouble! To join most social media sites you have to agree to their terms and conditions. These are usually long and complex and most people don't bother to read them! Make sure you DO read them as you can be blocked, removed or even taken to court if you break them.

Using Facebook to Promote Your Tourism Business

Today, marketing your tourism business is all about publishing and sharing enthralling information that will help to inform and enhance the lives not only of your visitors but your prospective visitors too! Your target market is already on Facebook and they're waiting to receive, read and share your posts with their friends.

Having a Facebook Page is an excellent way for your tourism business to reach potential and existing visitors. Pages are for businesses, organisations and brands, they allow you to share your tourism related stories and news, create photo albums, organise events.

What is Facebook?

Facebook was launched in the USA in February 2004 – created by Mark Zuckerberg and some of his classmates. It began life as a simple online community, to allow university students to keep in touch during their holidays. The name originally came from a publication called Facebook (which provided a photograph and basic information about each student) some universities gave this to their students at the beginning of each year, to help them settle in and get to know each other.

Facebook continued to develop and in 2006 became available for anyone aged thirteen or over, who had a valid email address. In 2007, Facebook introduced Business Pages, for companies, organisations and celebrities. Facebook Pages look very similar to personal pages but have many additional features.

Facebook is now one of the largest social networking sites in the world having around 1.25 billion monthly users.

There are more than 25 million active small business pages, out there – all taking advantage of this amazing marketing tool… are you?

Why Use Facebook to Promote Your Tourism Business?

A Facebook Page can be a brilliant way for your tourism business to reach existing and potential visitors. You can customise your business page by adding apps, posting stories, photo's upcoming events and much more. You will engage with and grow your audience by posting regularly and engaging with your fans. When someone clicks Like on your Facebook page, they are making a connection with you and giving you positive feedback – this will then be displayed on their Timeline, for all their friends to see, and it may also appear in your news feed, thereby widening your audience and appeal. This is very similar to the good old fashioned word of mouth marketing.

Other advantages include:

- Little or no cost is involved

- Both you and your visitors will promote your business by sharing news, photos, videos, offers and links

- Your Facebook network will be made up of your current and prospective visitors. You'll be able to ask for feedback on your services, products, features etc

- Every time you interact with your fans you are increasing your chances of this interaction showing up in their friends' newsfeeds

- Facebook Pages are indexed in search engines and may appear in the Search Engine Results Pages

- Your enquiries and sales are very likely to increase – as you are presenting your tourism business to newfound markets

- Reduce your marketing costs by making your advertising more efficient

- Listen! You'll be able to find out what your, existing / prospective visitors and the general public are saying about your business

- What's being said about your competitors? Research your competition and see what's working for them

- A picture paints a thousand words! Videos and images are a powerful medium – they can sell your product/ business in as little as 2 seconds

- Getting people to sign up for your newsletter etc

Facebook Profile, Page or Group?

There appears to be to be some confusion about what Facebook Profiles, Pages and Groups are! How can you tell which is which? Simple – if you can Like it – it's a Business Page, if you can be a Friend it's a personal Profile and if you can Join it – it's a Group.

Personal Facebook Profiles – also known as a Timeline, are for you to use as an individual not as a Business Page. Facebook states that "It's a violation of Facebook's terms to use a personal account to represent something other than yourself (ie: your business)". If you are using a Personal Profile as your Business Page – this link will take you to Facebook's Help Topic Converting Your Timeline Into a Facebook Page (https://www.facebook.com/ help/116067818477568).

Facebook's Groups – provide a closed place for small groups of people to communicate about shared interests. (Groups can be either open to the public or private). It's not possible at the moment to convert Facebook Groups into Pages. Facebook recommend that you create your new Page and then notify your group members about it.

Facebook Business Pages – offer different features for businesses, public figures, brands and organisations. They are used by businesses to engage and grow their audience by regularly sharing information, news, events and much more with people. When your customers like your Page, your posts may appear in their newsfeeds. You can increase the chance that your audience will see your posts, by paying Facebook to boost your post.

What Do You Want From Facebook

It's a good idea before you sign up for Facebook – to take a little time to think about your Facebook aims and objectives – what are your goals? You'll then be in a much better position to use Facebook more effectively.

- Are you new to Facebook? Then you'll be looking to raise awareness of your brand and gain new likes

- Are you looking to entice new visitors, maintain contact with existing visitors, or both?
- Do you have an upcoming event or a special offer to promote?

## Signing Up For a Facebook Business Page is Easy

If you haven't already got a personal profile on Facebook, you'll need to set one up before you create your Business Page. Don't worry! Although your new Business Page will be connected to your personal profile, it's kept completely separate and no one will be able to see your personal information from your Business Page or even know that they are connected.

Go to www.facebook.com and either login to your personal account, or create a new personal account by completing the simple form below.

To Create Your Facebook Business Page:

When you are logged into your personal Facebook account, go to www.facebook.com/pages/create – the following screen will appear, follow these simple steps and you will soon be up and running!
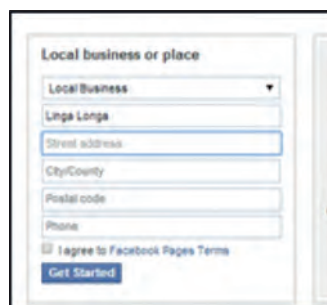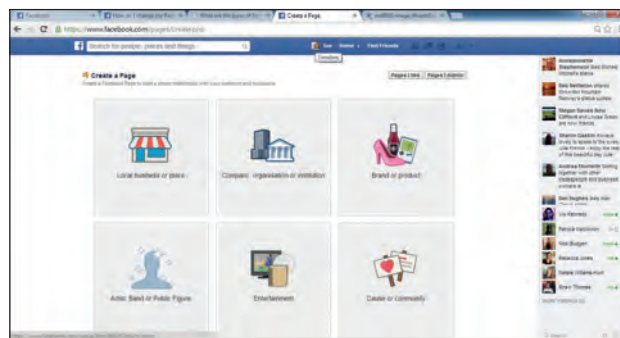
This is where you select the type of business you have – the options are:

- Local Business or Place
- Company Organisation or Institution
- Brand or Product
- Artist, Band or Public Figure
- Entertainment
- Cause or Community

You'll most likely select from the Company, Local Business or Place, or Organisation or Institution categories. You can always change the category of your Page at a later stage if you want to experiment with the different categories.

If people can actually visit your business premises eg: hotel, restaurant, attraction etc – it's best for you to choose Local Business or Place, make sure you add your business address and then you'll be able to take advantage of the Check-in feature. This allows visitors with GPS enabled mobile devices to check-in (people Check-in to let their friends know where they are and what they are doing) when they arrive at your tourism business – this will appear on their

Timeline, their friends' News Feed and your Business Page – this will help you to promote your business.

The Company, Organisation or Institution category is probably the better choice if people are not actually visiting your premises, or if you hold events at alternative locations.

Choose your Page category and then select a more specific classification from the dropdown menu, as shown below and complete the necessary information.
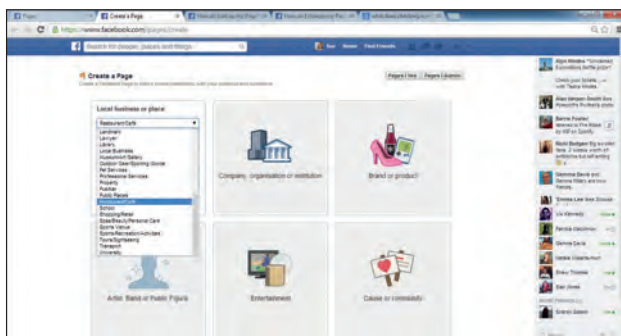

Select the check box to agree to Facebook Pages Terms, then click Get Started.

Think carefully when naming your Business Page, you are limited to seventy characters – if you have a business name, that would be ideal or perhaps you could incorporate key words in your Page title, this would help you appear in the Facebook search results. (Note: You can change the name until you have 200 or more likes).

You'll then be presented with the following screen inviting you to complete the **About Section – Tab One**, which comprises of three fields: sub categories (choose up to 3), a brief description, and your web address and confirmation that you are a real business – when you've done this Click Save. You'll be asked to confirm that you are the Authorised and Official representation of this business – Click Save Info to continue to Tab Two.
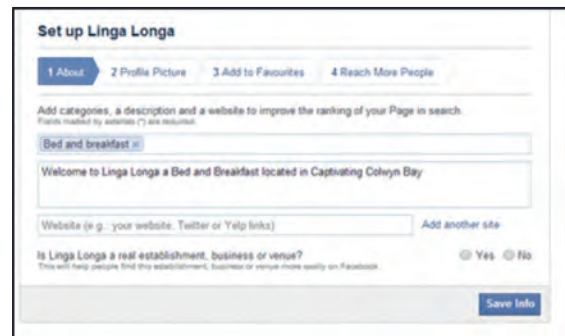
Adding Your Profile Picture – Your Page's profile picture is important, it should represent your tourism business! It appears next to your Page's name and also as a thumbnail next to the posts you make.

Facebook recommend that you upload a square image that is at least 180 x 180 pixels. To find out the size of an image, right-click on it and choose properties, you should see something like properties 160 x 160 pixels. If the photo you are uploading is not the correct size you may receive an error message.

To add your Profile picture from the Set up Dialog box – **Tab Two**, choose Upload from computer or Import from website. Click Next to Move to **Tab Three**

Visit Wales' Timeline

Add to Favorites – choosing this option will make your new Business Page easily accessible from your Personal Profile, Click Add to favourites and then Next

You may want to Click **Skip** for the **Fourth Tab**, **Reach More People** for now, as this is selling Facebook Advertising!

You will be asked to Like your new Page and then then asked to Invite your Email Contacts, you may wish to skip this option for now – you can then prepare your Page for the public by adding your Cover picture and filling your page up with lots of interesting posts. You will be taken to your new blank Business Page, which should look similar to the screen shot shown on the next page.

A Brief Overview of Your Page

The Menu Bar at the top of your page

Edit page ▼   Build Audience ▼   See Insights   Help ▼   Hide

You will need to go into **Edit Page** to Update your Page Info and Edit your setting.

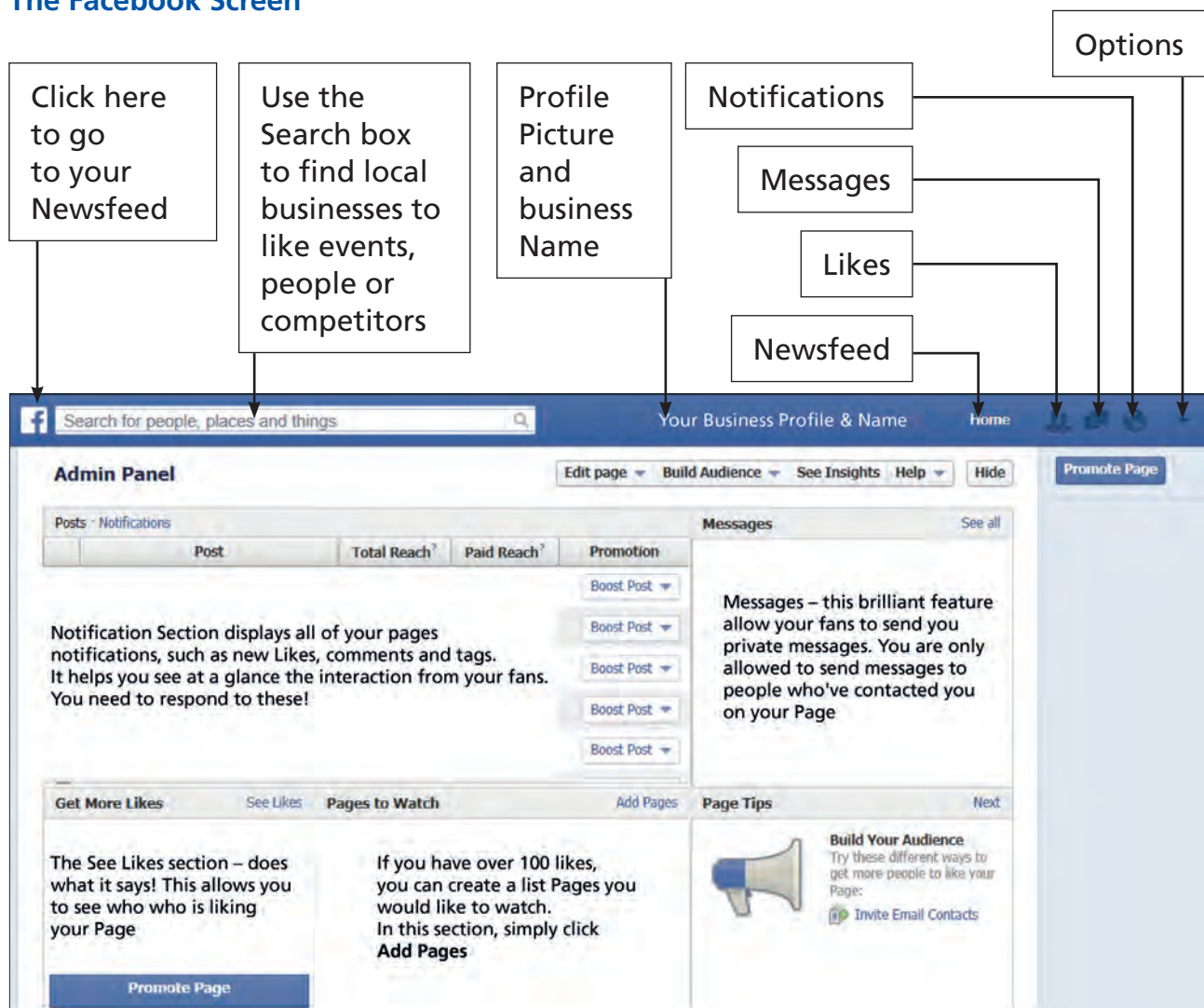You may also need to Manage Admin Roles, if you wish to appoint administrators.

When using Facebook as Your Business always Select Use FaceBook as Your Business Name – that way when you are posting, sharing etc – you will be doing so as your business.

Build Audience – allows you to invite your friends and contacts to Like your Page

See Insights – provides information on your Page's performance

Help – takes you into the Facebook Help system

The Facebook Screen

Options

Click here to go to your Newsfeed

Use the Search box to find local businesses to like events, people or competitors

Profile Picture and business Name

Notifications

Messages

Likes

Newsfeed

Admin Panel

Posts · Notifications

	Post	Total Reach?	Paid Reach?	Promotion

Notification Section displays all of your pages notifications, such as new Likes, comments and tags. It helps you see at a glance the interaction from your fans. You need to respond to these!

Messages – this brilliant feature allow your fans to send you private messages. You are only allowed to send messages to people who've contacted you on your Page

Get More Likes   See Likes   **Pages to Watch**   Add Pages   **Page Tips**   Next

The See Likes section – does what it says! This allows you to see who who is liking your Page

If you have over 100 likes, you can create a list Pages you would like to watch. In this section, simply click **Add Pages**

Build Your Audience Try these different ways to get more people to like your Page:
Invite Email Contacts

Promote Page

Creating a Facebook Page That Isn't Linked to a Personal Profile – as we mentioned earlier you can create a Facebook page that isn't linked to your personal profile by creating a Facebook business account at https://www.facebook.com/business. Remember though that Pages that aren't connected to a personal profile do not have the same functionality. They will not allow you to share, like or search for other pages – this will make it difficult for you to build and grow your fan base!

Add or Change Your Cover Photo

Your cover picture is the large photo at the top of your Timeline – it gives you the chance to make an instant visual impression on visitors to your page. Choose a unique image that accurately represents your tourism Business – this could be a photo of a group of people dining in your restaurant or hotel, having fun at your attraction or simply lazing on a beautiful nearby beach. You can experiment with the images you use to find out what your visitors like best.

Facebook recommends: that Cover photos are 851 pixels wide and 315 pixels tall. If you upload an image that's smaller than these dimensions, it will be stretched to fit. The image you upload must be at least 399 pixels wide and 150 pixels tall.

To add or change your cover photo:
* Go to your Timeline
* Click Add a Cover, or hover over your current cover photo and click Change Cover
* Choose whether you want to upload a new photo or pick a photo from one of your existing photo albums
* You can reposition the image by clicking on it and dragging it around
* Click Save

What Can I Post?

You've completed your profile, added your pictures – now it's time to fill your page with interesting engaging posts. Post regularly, one or two interesting posts a day (you don't want annoy people or even be blocked for filling their timeline with your posts). Don't forget to include keywords, in your posts, so that you can be found not only by Facebooks' search but also by the search engines. You may even choose to unpublish your Page for a couple of weeks – until you have an interesting range of posts on your Page, so that anyone visiting it will see a lively, vibrant page, that will tempt them to Click the all-important Like Button.

* announce upcoming offers and promotions
* local news, events or quirky little known facts
* create: libraries of photos, and videos of your products or services
* offer a prize to the best contributor weekly or monthly
* they say a picture paints a thousand words – include photos and videos
* keep your posts short & Sweet
* engage with your fans, ask them questions and comment on their posts
* tell your fans about interesting new content on your website, which will drive traffic to your site

Posting to Your Page

Make sure you are posting as your Page, you can add a story to your Page's Timeline by clicking in the Status box, shown below, and typing! Your Posts may appear in the News Feed of the people who like your Page, this will help you to connect and engage with them. When people like or share your posts,

their friends may see them in their News Feed too!
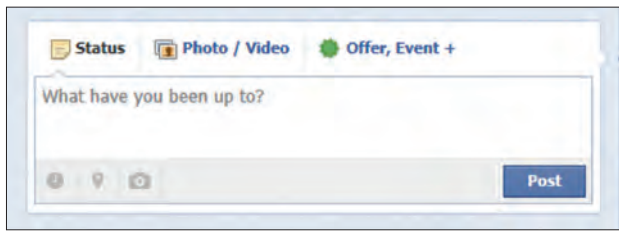
You can schedule your Posts by Clicking the Clock in in the bottom left of the Status Box, add a location by Clicking the Pin Head or include a Photo or video's in your post by Clicking the camera.

Getting Likes

What you post on Facebook is crucial to getting new Likes – content is certainly King! People love to share Interesting, engaging content with their friends and their friends may share and like your content with their friends too! Every time you engage with your Fans you are increasing the chances of your posts showing up in more newsfeeds and widening your social network.

There is no quick fix for getting Likes, it will take time and effort. How can you encourage people to Like your Facebook page?

- You can start by inviting your friends and family who are already on Facebook to Like your new page

- Upload and invite your email contacts to Like your Page

- Post interesting, engaging posts regularly (one or two a day)

- Like other peoples' Pages

- Include your Facebook Stream and Like button on your website

- Create: libraries of photos, and videos of your products or services

- Keep your posts short & sweet

- They say a picture paints a thousand words – include photo's and videos

- Engage with your network

- Offline – promotion – make sure your FaceBook URL is on everything you send out!

Check if You already Have a Facebook Page!

This may sound silly but you may find a Facebook Page already exists for your business! This could happen if someone checks-in to a place that doesn't already have a Page, a new Page is automatically created to represent the location. If you do find a duplicate page (or pages) you may be able to claim (https://www.facebook.com/help/168172433243582) and merge (https://www.facebook.com/help/www/249601088403018?rdrhc) these pages.

Facebook Insights

When you have reached 30 likes on your Page you'll automatically gain access to Insights – which provide information on your Page's performance. You'll be able to see how people are Liking, finding and responding to your posts. You will also receive a weekly email with this information.

To Access Your Page Insights:

- Click See Insights on the toolbar at the top of your screen, charts will display your Page Likes, Post Reach, Engagement etc.

To Be Aware Of

It's just worth noting:

- the interface and jargon can be confusing at first, but you'll soon get used to it!

- a lot of people who Like your Page may not be very interested in what you have to say

- social media can be very addictive and time consuming – it's easy to get distracted as you join in various conversations

- watch out for any typos or punctuation mistakes, your Posts and Comments give an impression of you and your business

- you need to make sure that no spam or unanswered critical comments appear

- if you receive any negative comments they are visible to everyone – do be careful what you say!

Facebook states that "You are responsible for ensuring that your Page complies with all applicable laws, statutes, and regulations". You can read the Facebook Pages Terms here https://www.facebook.com/page_guidelines.php.

Things to Think About

Perhaps you'll need to consider writing a Social Media Policy Statement giving corporate guidelines to your staff on using Social Media and ensure they receive adequate training prior to their first post! (You could browse the internet for examples of Social Media Policy Statements and adapt as required to meet your needs).

Instead of spending your time signing in and out of several social media accounts you can consolidate your efforts with a social media management platform such as Hootsuite or TweetDeck these will help you manage and consolidate several accounts all in one place. You can see who is Liking you on Facebook, keep up date with your groups on LinkedIn and keep up-to-date with your Twitter conversations all in one place.

Using Twitter to Promote Your Tourism Business

Twitter is a fantastic social media platform – you can use it to help you promote your tourism business. It will connect you immediately with a growing network of around 200 million users!

Tweets are quick to write, easy to read and provide an immediate and powerful way for you to promote your tourism business. The major search engines love Twitter – it has a very high ranking with them. This provides your business with more opportunities of being found, as your tweets and profile could show up in the search engine results pages. Better still it's all free!

You may find it useful to read our "Social Media Marketing – Getting Started" fact sheet.

What is Twitter

Twitter is a free social networking and a micro-blogging site, which allows you to post short text messages, called Tweets which can contain up to140 characters (letters, numbers, symbols, punctuation and spaces all count as characters) to other users. You can also include links to webpages, photos and videos in your Tweets.

> **Use Twitter to promote your tourism business, find followers and expand your network. Remember "if you are not telling you are not selling!"**

The above pull quote contains exactly 140 characters!

You can access Twitter from an app on your mobile device (smartphone, ipad etc) or web browsers. Anyone can read, write and share their tweets. Tweets are public and available to anyone who is interested in them (by default). Twitter users will subscribe to your Tweets by "Following" you. Your Tweets will appear on your own profile and your Followers will receive your Tweets in their timeline. They can be viewed by the whole world.

You will find Twitter, like other technologies, has its own jargon. There's a full list at the Twitter Glossary (http://support.twitter.com/articles/166337-the-twitter-glossary), but we will cover many of the key ones here, as we go along.

Why Use Twitter?

Twitter is a valuable tool for your tourism business – it's free and it enables you to reach a lot of people instantly. Millions of people including your competitors, your existing and potential visitors are already using Twitter. You will be able to:

- Build relationships and engage with your existing and prospective visitors

- Announce upcoming offers, local events and promotions

- tell your followers about interesting new content on your website, which will drive traffic to your site

- Approach your target market and increase your potential visitor base

- Research and expand your visitor base by tracking your target markets interests and following them on Twitter

- Track and respond to what people are saying about your tourism business

- Receive and give valuable feedback

- Follow other local tourism businesses, to discover and share information

It's thought that Twitter has more than 200 million active users who generate more than 400 million tweets a day and this figure is still rising.

What Do You Want From Twitter

It is a good idea before you sign up and start Tweeting to define your Twitter goals and objectives. Once you have these in mind, you will be in a much better position to use Twitter effectively. Consider:

- Why you are considering using Twitter – is it right for you and your business?

- Are you going to use Twitter mostly to send out information, or do you want to receive information too?

- What topics you want to tweet about – what do you plan to talk about on Twitter?

- Who will your target audience be – what geographical area / demographic are you aiming for? Are you looking to entice new visitors, maintain contact with existing visitors, or both?

- How often you will Tweet?

- The tone you will adopt to deliver your tweets

Signing Up For Twitter is Easy

Before you can use Twitter you'll need to sign up for your account – if you go to www.twitter.com, add your information in the New to Twitter Box and then Click the Sign up for Twitter button. This is a little like a wizard and it will guide you through the basics of setting up your Twitter Account and using Twitter, you can follow this through or choose skip if you prefer.

If you would like more detailed information, visit Signing up with Twitter (https://support.twitter.com/entries/100990-how-tosign-up-on-twitter) at the Twitter Help Centre.

Completing and Updating Your Profile and Settings

You need to complete and update your profile and settings before you start following people as the people you are following will use this information to decide if they want to follow you back. You can update your profile and settings at any time, from the gear icon drop down menu, which you'll find in the black navigation bar, select Settings – you can then complete the following tabs.

The Account Tab – here you can change your basic account info, language settings, your privacy and location settings.

Your user name is important, use your business name or domain name if possible – this will make it easier for people to find you. It's also the name your Followers will use when sending @Replies, @Direct Messages, or Retweets, for example @VisitWales. Usernames must contain less than 15 characters. You can change your user name at any time and this will not affect your existing followers.

The Password Tab – your password has to be between 6 and 15 characters and not a word you would find in a dictionary. It's a good idea to change your password regularly.

The Mobile Tab – you can receive text message updates when your account receives Tweets and if someone has signed up to be notified of your Tweets, whenever you Tweet them, they will

receive it as a text message on their phone. Tweeting on the go will also help you stay connected to with your Followers.

Email Notifications Tab – these settings let you control when and how often Twitter communicates with you.

The Profile Tab – a good profile is essential, your profile represents you on Twitter. You'll need to think carefully about the key words people would use when searching for your product or service and include these in your Profile. This will help people to find you on Twitter and you'll be more likely to turn up in the Twitter search results. This information will be displayed when people view your profile and also when you Follow people, so it will influence whether they choose to Follow you or not.

Profile Picture – Your Twitter profile logo or picture helps people to instantly identify you. Your Profile picture must be square, JPG, GIF, or PNG format, with a maximum size of 700k, Twitter will automatically scale your image to the correct size on screen. If you do not select one, the default picture (avatar) on Twitter is an egg.

Header Image – the header image is similar to the cover photo that is used on Facebook, your profile picture will be embedded in the middle of the header. The image should be 1252×626 pixels, with a maximum size of 5MB.

Adding Your URL – when you add the link to your website remember it does not have to be to your home page, it may be more relevant to add a page featuring an upcoming event you are promoting or even a dedicated Twitter landing page.

Your Twitter Bio – allows you 160 characters to give people a taste of your personality and your business. The main point of your Twitter Bio is so that others may decide if they want to Follow you. If you want to be found and Followed, think carefully about how you present yourself in your bio.

- Make your profile interesting and unique
- Explain who you are and what you do
- Explain how you can help and benefit your Followers
- Keep your bio personal and friendly
- Use key words it's important that you have relevant keywords in your profile

You are aiming to grab the users attention and keep it.

Using Twitter with Facebook – here you can connect your Twitter and Facebook accounts so that your Tweets will automatically post to your Facebook Page.

The Design Tab – when you customise your profile design everything will be displayed in the theme you have chosen. To change your design, select a template by clicking on it or you can upload your own background image.

An Introduction to Twitter's Navigation Bar

The black horizontal navigation bar is situated at the top of the Twitter screen and gives you access to the following Pages:

The Home page – is where you go when you sign in to your Twitter account. A stream of Tweets posted by all the people you "follow" on Twitter is shown on the right side of the screen. It shows how many followers you have, how many Tweets you've Tweeted, invites you to compose a Tweet, view suggestions for who to follow and a list of Trending topics.

The @ Connect page – displays your Interactions timeline, which shows you how others have been interacting with you on Twitter.

The # Discover Page – comprises of five tabs these are the:

Tweets tab – which shows the most popular tweets from the people you follow.

Activity tab – shows the latest Favorites, Retweets, and Follows made by the people who you follow on Twitter.

Who to Follow tab – recommends new accounts that may be of interest to you, these are based on the accounts you're already following.

Find Friends tab – allows you to import and follow your friends and colleagues from your email address book.

Popular Accounts tab – invites you to select topics you're interested in and search for people to follow.

The Me Page – gives a general overview of your account, it displays your Tweets, photos, stats, and your profile.

The Search box – can be used to find users or keywords.

The Gear Icon – click the drop down arrow to send direct messages, create or access your lists, the help menu, handy keyboard shortcuts, edit your Settings and Sign out.

The Compose New Tweet Box – click in to compose your Tweets (looks like a feather quill).

Find Your Followers

When you sign up Twitter offers to help you to find existing colleagues or friends who have already joined by searching your email contacts – you can miss this step if you'd rather not share this information. It is also possible to find people you know by:

- Typing a name into the search box on your homepage

- Typing a Twitter username directly into your browser (http://twitter.com/VisitWales)

- Using the Hashtag to find Followers related to your interests

- Import existing contacts from your email address book to see who's on Twitter

- Browse the suggestions Twitter generated for you – you'll find this on the left hand side of your screen under the heading "Who to follow"

Some people will follow you in the hope that you will follow them back and then unFollow you straight away! (Free tools are available on the internet to help you suss these out).

What Can I Tweet About

Twitter is all about sharing things that your Followers might find useful, interesting, exciting or strange!

What you Tweet about and how often is a very personal choice. You may introduce the hens that are laying the free range eggs for breakfast, share local events or something you've learned…it's up to you! Here are some suggestions for tourism businesses and hints and tips on what you could Tweet:

- Special deals (especially if only for your Twitter followers)

- Attractions and events in your area

- Seasonal photos – changing seasons, rare birds you have seen etc

- Offers directing people to your website or blog

- Retweets that are interesting to your Followers (Your Tweets may then be Retweeted!)

- Links to resources, other bloggers content, articles, photo's or videos

- #FollowFriday or #FF, recommend other related tourism businesses to Follow

- Share your views and links to web tools that you use

- Comment about interesting things you're doing in business, or personal life

- Commenting on what people are saying

- Give help, feedback and compliments.

You should vary your message on your different social media sites – if you post the same message to all your social media platforms you can dilute the impact and value of them all.

Your First Tweets

When you first log into Twitter, sit back – watch and listen. It may take a while for you to feel comfortable with the whole Twitter experience. Spend time, look at other users Tweets and keep your Twitter goals in mind.

At first you won't have any followers – so it's a good idea to have a few interesting Tweets showing in your profile so that people can read them this will help them decide whether to follow you – or not!

Types Of Tweets

Normal Tweets – a public tweet, is seen by everyone who Follows you, it will appear on their Home timeline, your profile page and your home timeline. A normal Tweets starts with any character except for the @ symbol. It will never appear on anyone else's profile page unless they have ReTweeted it.

1,312	1,017	875
TWEETS	FOLLOWING	FOLLOWERS

Compose new Tweet…

To send a normal Tweet, go to your home tab and type your Tweet into the box on the top left of the screen that says 'Compose new Tweet' – you can also add a photograph by clicking the camera. Tweets are best kept to 120 characters in case they are ReTweeted.

Compose new Tweet

or click on the compose Tweet icon (looks like a feather quill) on the top right of the screen.

@Replies – a public tweet that begins with another user's username, it's a reply to one of their Tweets. It appears on the sender's Profile page, in the recipient's Mentions and Interactions tabs, and if the Recipient is following the Sender it will appear in their Home Timeline. Anyone following the Sender and the Recipient of an @reply will see it in their Home Timeline.

North Wales Tourism @GoNorthWales   5h
Discover Snowdonia Taster Day - Monday 27th May, Betws y Coed. Try your hand at an amazing range of outdoor… fb.me/KDFOC4xy
Expand   ← Reply   ⇄ Retweet   ★ Favorite   ••• More

Direct message (DM) – a private tweet, you can only send a DM to one of your Followers and you can only receive direct messages from users who you follow. You can send these by starting your Tweet **DM** or **D@VisitWales**, or click on **Direct Messages** from the **gear icon** drop down menu in your navigation bar and **Select New message** – this is also where you will find any Direct Messages sent to you.

Retweet – if someone likes your Tweet they may forward it to their followers by Retweeting it. If your Tweets add value, people will be more likely to Retweet them to their Followers, which will give you a wider audience. If someone Tweets a good link Retweet it, if someone Retweets your Tweets, thank them. Retweet and reply to interesting tweets posted by your Followers. This interaction will help you to build a relationship with your Followers and you will learn what they want and how you can help them.

Use HashTags # – they are a way of categorising your updates for Twitter search engines. You place **#** before a relevant keyword or phrase, for example #NorthWales to categorise those Tweets and help them show more easily in Twitter Search results.

You can increase the chances of your tweets being found by people who are not following you by including a relevant # HashTags in your tweets. Use relevant HashTags to find conversations you may want to join – you may find someone searching for #Holidays in #Wales. Limit HashTags to 2 per tweet.

Let Everyone Know You're On Twitter

When you first create your account, your username @VisitWales becomes part of your Twitter URL (http://twitter.com/VisitWales).

- Your Twitter URL links directly to your profile page and is the easiest and quickest way for others to find you on Twitter.

- Make sure you email this URL out to your contacts, and share it whenever you talk about Twitter, on your stationery, emails, webpage **EVERYWHERE!**

If you want to attract more people to your twitter network you'll need to integrate your social media marketing, with your online and offline marketing. You can easily display your Twitter stream and linkable icons on your own website.

Monitor Your Social Media Efforts

How will you know how effective your social media campaigns are if you're not measuring any metrics – what is the return on your investment? You can use your analytics program to monitor:

- The number of visitors you're getting to your social media sites

- How many people are reading and sharing your posts

- Where they're coming from and how long are they staying

- What's popular with your visitors

- Is your business website receiving visitors from your social media sites

- What makes them leave your site

Tools such as HootSuite can give you an overview of your Twitter account, by tracking the number of followers, lists, mentions, keywords etc (See – Things To Think About).

Use the Twitter Search tool to learn what people are tweeting about your business, products or competitors.

To Be Aware Of

It's just worth noting:

- The interface and jargon can be confusing at first, but you will soon get used to it

- A lot of people who may Follow you may not be very interested in what you have to say

- Twitter is very addictive and can become time consuming – it's easy to get distracted as you join in various conversations

- Not everything can be adequately expressed in 140 characters

- If you receive harmful feedback it's visible to everyone – be careful what you Tweet or Re-tweet, you don't want to offend or upset any of your Followers

- If you make a slanderous post about someone on any social media site you can be sued for libel. It's the same as publishing false or damaging information

- Watch out for any typos or punctuation mistakes, your tweets give an impression of you and your business

- Anything good, or bad, that you post on the internet, could appear in the search engine results, and it could remain on the internet for years

Things to Think About

Perhaps you'll need to consider writing a Social Media Policy Statement giving corporate guidelines to your staff on using Social Media and ensure they receive adequate training prior to their first post or tweet! (You could browse the internet for examples of Social Media Policy Statements and adapt as required to meet your needs).

Instead of spending your time signing in and out of several social media accounts you can consolidate your efforts with a social media management platform such as Hootsuite or TweetDeck that will help you manage and consolidate several accounts all in one place. You can see who is Liking you on Facebook, keep up date with your groups on LinkedIn and keep up-to-date with your Twitter conversations all in one place.

Using Pinterest to Promote Your Tourism Business

> Are you using Pinterest to promote your tourism business yet? Using Pinterest can help you to stand out from your competitors and help you to connect with your online visitors. It can raise your awareness and help you to build your valuable online reputation.
>
> Pinterest is very popular with holiday makers. It is an image rich site and has a growing audience who are happy to spend hours exploring. Currently around 70% of Pinterest users are female, with half of them reporting that they have gone on to make a purchase based on something they saw on Pinterest.
>
> Who are your target audience? And, who are the decision makers when it comes to travel within the household and businesses that you are seeking to reach? Maybe Pinterest is the channel for you?

What is Pinterest?

Pinterest is essentially a virtual pin board, which can be used to share and display things that you find interesting, whether they are on the Internet or in real life. Pinterest's mission is to "connect everyone in the world through the 'things' they find interesting".

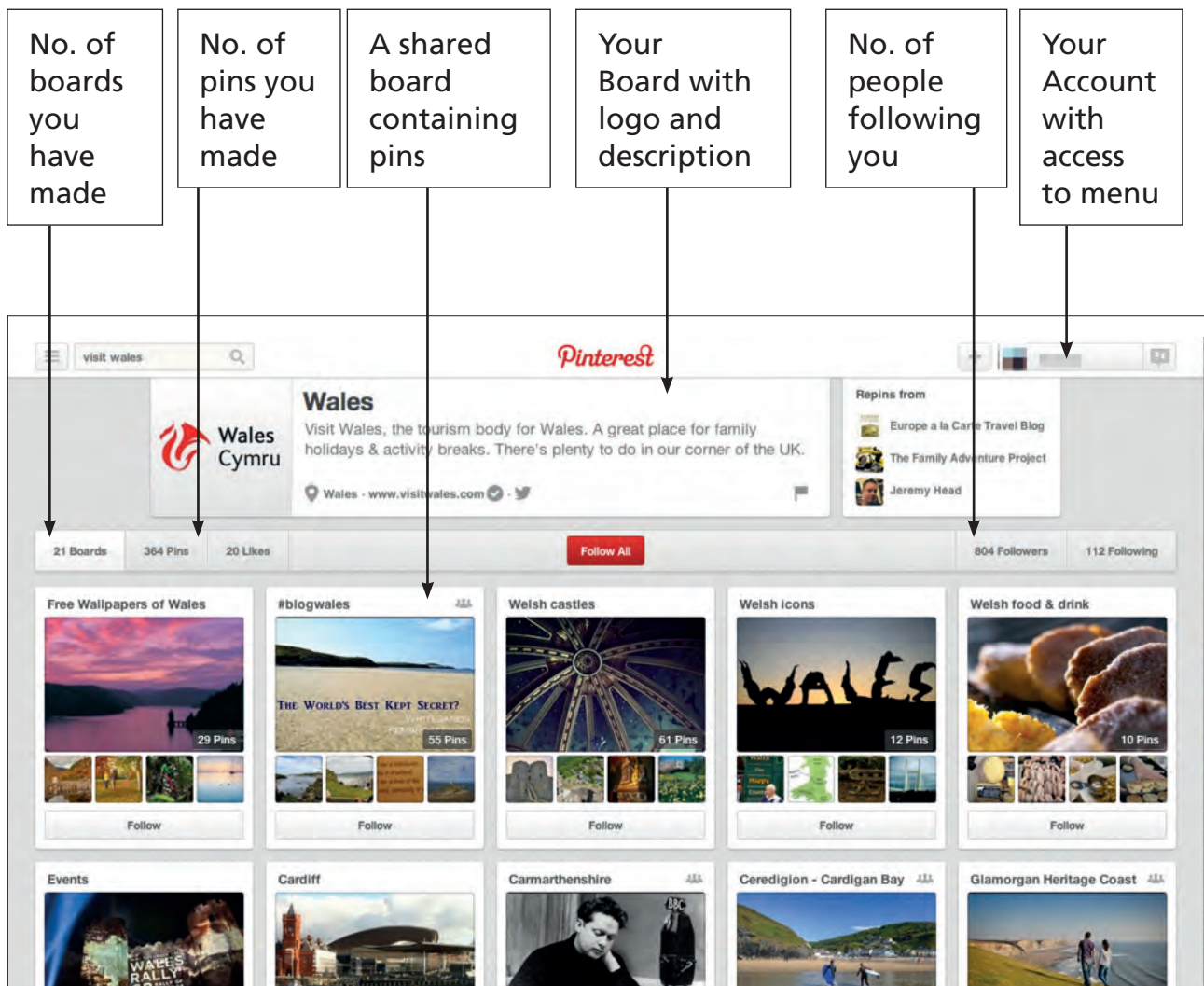**Pinterest has been found to account for around 23% of all online sales from social media sites.**

Pinterest can also be used as a social bookmarking tool, to store your favourite websites, images, or videos, so you can easily access them at a later date or a more convenient time. Bookmarking is typically handled by the Internet browser, available from a dropdown menu, which can make sharing of the bookmarks limiting, as they are stored on your device. With Pinterest, your bookmarks (Pins) are available via a website and available on any device, and things you find interesting can be Pinned (Pinning It). Your Pins can be organised into categories of related items via Boards.

These boards and pins are then shared with your visitors and customers (known as 'Friends' or 'Pinners' on Pinterest) they can then like or re-pin them to their own boards.

The pins are generally images, pulled in from the web page that is pinned, but these can also be videos, which are shared with other Pinterest users and across the Internet. The images are clickable and will take your visitors to the source of the Pin, this is a great way to steer your visitors to your website – make sure your website is up to scratch, you'll need to create an excellent first impression.

Unlike other social media platforms, which have generated their income from advertising, Pinterest receives a percentage of sales that come from pins on their site. The links on the site are scanned and if they link to a retail site with an affiliate program a code is added to monitor sales that derive from that link.

The following image shows the Pinterest profile for Visit Wales.

No. of boards you have made

No. of pins you have made

A shared board containing pins

Your Board with logo and description

No. of people following you

Your Account with access to menu

Getting Started – Understanding Pinterest Jargon

A Pin – is an image or video that you add to Pinterest. You can add a pin from a website or upload it from your computer. All pins can be re-pinned and they all link back to the website they originally came from.

There are a few ways you can add pins, you can:

- Click **Pin it** Pin it on any pin you see on Pinterest
- Add the Pin It button to your web browser so that you can pin from websites
- Clicking the + at the top of the Pinterest screen will allow you to upload an image fr om your computer
- Use a mobile app and pin from your mobile device

A board – is where you collect and organise your pins by topic. For example, you could create a board that shows all the local attractions in your area, one of your self-catering cottages or the great local food your restaurant creates.

Visit Wales videos

When you **Follow** a person or business – you'll see their pins in your home feed. If they create a new board, you will automatically follow it. When you follow a board you see new pins that are added to the board in your home feed. You can of course unfollow people or boards at any time – they won't be notified that you have unfollowed them.

When you **Like** a pin – it's added to your profile's like section, rather than a specific board and you are endorsing this pin. If you are not sure which board to Pin it to, you could save it. To like a pin, hover over the pin and click on the heart icon in the top right corner.

Why Use Pinterest to Promote Your Tourism Business?

Pinterest is the latest social media technology to generate interest from the business world. It is considered the fastest growing social media website at the moment. Even though Facebook and Twitter still lead the way in the number of active users, Pinterest has been found to account for around 23% of all online sales from social media sites.

It has also been shown to increase offline purchasing too.

Tourism boards represent about 2.5% of all Pinterest boards and tourism pins account for around 2.7% of all pins. Considering all the topics covered on Pinterest, this is a sizable percentage for a single topic area. Typically these will cover boards named 'Bucket List', 'Holidays' or specific destinations.

Pinterest provides many benefits for tourism businesses, such as hotels, guesthouses, self-catering and B&Bs. Your accommodation and facilities can be highlighted, along with the various activities, heritage sites, architecture and everything else of interest to your target market, within your own area. It also allows you to connect with potential visitors and with other tourism operators.
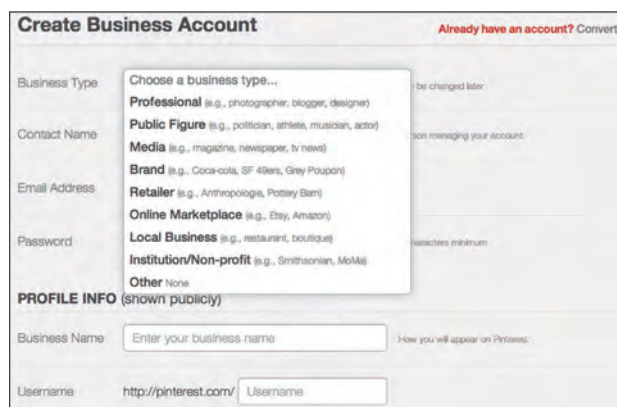
Pinterest boards provide an effective way to collect ideas for customers when planning their travel. Your tourism business would undoubtedly benefit from a presence on Pinterest, whether it's to inspire through evocative imagery, or to generate interest for a destination.

The fact that people often post links to retail sites means Pinterest can provide excellent commercial opportunities.

Pinterest is used by many businesses to showcase their brand to an audience of over 70 million Pinterest users. The success of Pinterest for business is to focus on lifestyle, not just the product – your brand can be seen as attractive by positive association.

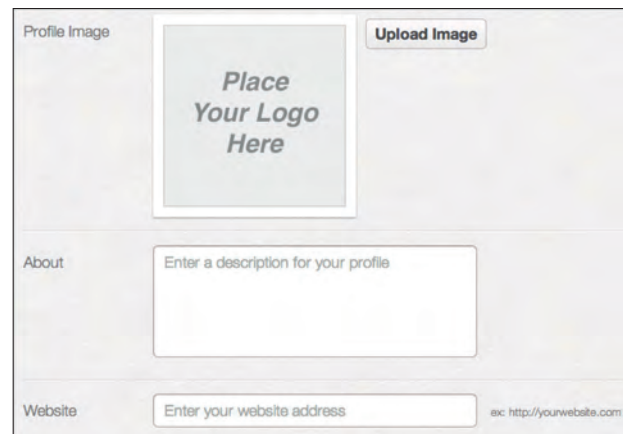## Setting Up Your Business on Pinterest

To setup your business on Pinterest you must first create a business account by visiting http://business.pinterest.com/en. You will need to enter your business details and create a Pinterest username, which will form the basis of your Pinterest profile URL (e.g. **www.pinterest.com/yourcompanyname**). Keep it short, simple and memorable. There's a 15-character limit so if your business name doesn't fit use a relevant keyword or slogan that relates well to your business.

Completing Your Business Profile

Use the 'About' section to best describe your business and what you do, include a few of your business' most relevant keywords. This will appear at the top of your profile page, and more crucially under your Pinterest URL in Google search results.

Share with your other social media sites to promote your Pinterest site.

If you have accounts with other social networking sites, Facebook, Twitter, etc., do try to include links to them, this will help to promote your Pinterest site. It's always useful to create a specific board for your contact details and social media links with pins connecting to them.

Verify your business website from within your profile settings. When you enter your company's website address, there is a button to verify website. This will allow you to download an html file, which needs to be uploaded to your website. If this is not possible, you can add a snippet of code which can be added to your website page. This will place a verification badge on your profile. By doing this it helps to identify you as a legitimate source of content that can be trusted. It also increases the ability for your business to be found in Pinterest's search results.

Once you're signed up as a business, you'll have access to the Pinterest business resources, such as Analytics tools, case studies, Pin buttons that can be used on your website to promote your Pinterest activity.

Install the 'Pin It' bookmarklet to your browser, so that you can grab images

and videos from visited websites and pin them to your boards. You can download the 'Pin It' bookmarklet from the Pinterest Goodies page, http://about.pinterest.com/goodies/. Like Facebook and Twitter, Pinterest has buttons that can be included on your own website so that visitors can Pin your website to their boards and make it easy to share. These are also available on the Pinterest Goodies page.

A profile image is placed on your profile page and represents your business across the Pinterest website. This could be your company logo or a photo of someone in your business. The company is commonly used but a photo of a person can promote trust, as it is believed we prefer to do business with those we know, like and trust.

## Making Pinterest Work For Your Tourism Business

Photos and videos are central to Pinterest, so try to use good quality ones, and ensure they can be pinned and are tagged. You may find content on the Share Wales Flickr Group, or the Visit Wales YouTube channel, that you could utilise for pins.

You can create a variety of boards to represent your tourism business. Boards covering your products or services, company history and meet-the-team can be useful to showcase your company and what your offer. A customer/VIP board could allow visitors to pin their own images from a visit to your business. Using a product or service board would help to promote your business to a much wider audience than your website can attract.

Consider what visitors to your business are likely to search for, and then create pins/boards that will attract them. You should aim to give your boards meaningful descriptions, keeping them unique and specific. This will give them a better chance of being found and viewed in search results.

Example boards from the Visit Wales' Pinterest page

You can actively engage with other Pinners (that you follow) by Re-pinning their content and tagging them in a Pin description or comment. This is similar to tagging in Facebook or mentioning someone on Twitter. Simply use the @ symbol in front of their username, ie @
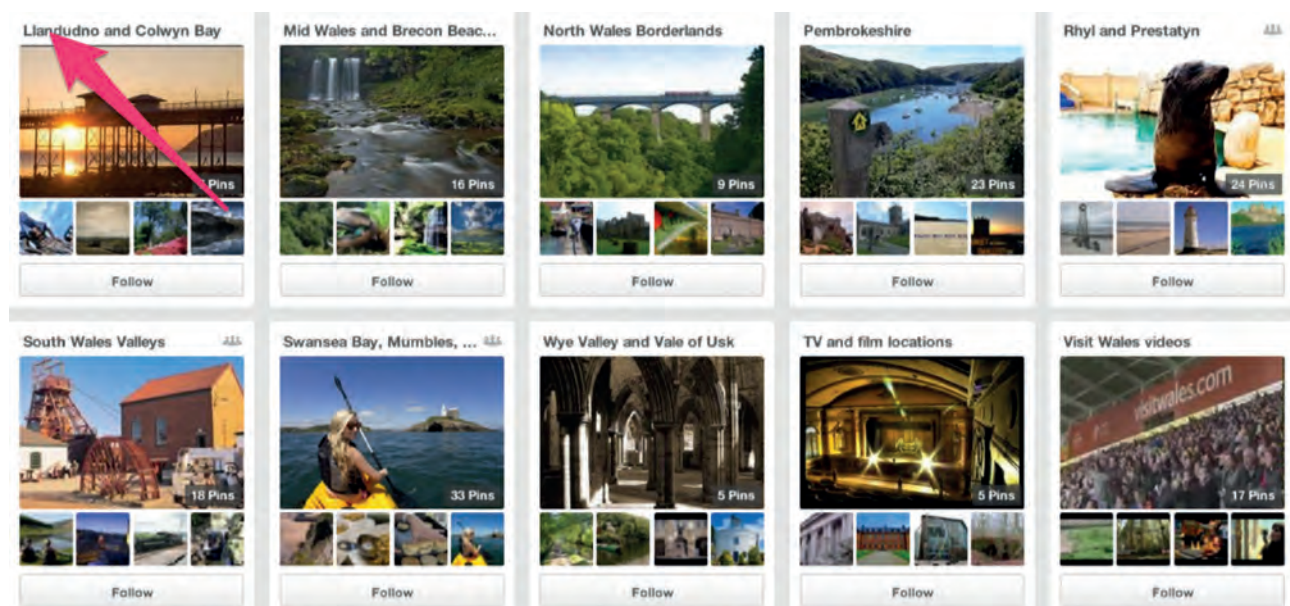
visitwales when you start typing their name. Pinterest will automatically create a drop-down list of suggested names for you to choose from. The Pinner will receive notification that you have tagged them and you will get brownie points for drawing attention to their Pin.


If you are selling a product or service, include a value in the description, preceded with a £ symbol, e.g. 2 night stay, only £100. By doing this, your pin will have the price labelled to it and will feature in the Pinterest Gift section.

Some of your boards will be more popular than others and generate more followers. Post to these more regularly so that you can reach the largest number of people. This will increase the number of re-pins and, in turn, the number of followers.

Take time to view your followers' boards, to see what their interests are, so you can tailor your boards and encourage their interaction. It's worth monitoring what's popular with Pinterest users and how these trends can be applied to your Pins.

Pinterest is a great way to hold competitions to increase engagement and interaction. Follow the Pinterest guidelines for contests by viewing https://business.pinterest.com/en/get-pinterest-business-guide

If you feature videos within your website and marketing material, create a board to showcase them. It will increase the engagement and interaction with your visitors. If you annotate your videos with "pin this video to Pinterest", the video will be added to Pinterest Video, http://www.pinterest.com/videos/.
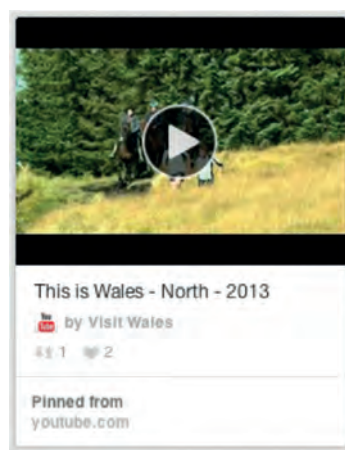
Pinterest Web Analytics

Pinterest for business provides some excellent analytical tools to evaluate your performance on Pinterest. Your website must be verified with Pinterest before you can have access to these tools, so don't forget to complete that stage.

To analyse your account and to see who is sharing your content visit https://business.pinterest.com/en/pinterest-analytics. You can also Click on Analytics in the menu under your name – from here you can view the interactions on your site, e.g. Pins, Repins, Impressions, and Clicks. These are displayed as graphs, and display the actions and the number of people that did those actions. You can set start and end dates to view a particular timeframe and follow trends. Also you can view which pins get shared the most, who interacts with them, and what else they are pinning. This will help to give you an understanding how best to tailor and develop your own site and boards. More importantly, it shows what people love about your site and business.

What Is TripAdvisor and How Can It Help My Tourism Business?

TripAdvisor is the world's largest and most popular travel review website and at the time of writing, the site states that more than 2,700,000+ businesses are listed and over 100 million reviews and opinions from around the world. These statistics alone suggest that every Welsh tourism business should at least investigate and consider signing up!

Online customer review is everywhere. Whether you decide to engage or not, many of your customers will be checking out what others are saying about your business before they book, and posting comments about their visit later. If you do not own your spaces on review sites and are not following and engaging with your customers that are using them in a constructive way – your businesses reputation could be at risk.

What Is TripAdvisor?

TripAdvisor is a global travel website which was created in the year 2000 by the TripAdvisor Media Group. It's branded as the most popular global site driven by user-generated content. Holidaymakers and travellers post their comments and score their experiences of accommodation, restaurants, attractions etc.

The first thing to remember is that listing your Welsh tourism business on TripAdvisor is quick, easy and FREE!

TripAdvisor has devised a '*Popularity Index*' by using an algorithm to calculate how travellers rank/rate their experience based on quantity, quality and recency of the associated TripAdvisor reviews. The site also contains interactive forums and other information relating to tourism/travel experiences.

The site is easy to use with no fees for travellers or businesses, unless any of the latter decide to upgrade to a paid business listing (more information on this option later). The company connected to Facebook in 2012, which considerably increased its audience and brought in many of the benefits of social media.

Take a look around the site at www.TripAdvisor.co.uk to get a feel for what visitors are saying and how the businesses manage their reviews etc – you might find that a visitor has created a listing for your business.

How Can My Tourism Business Benefit from TripAdvisor?

When you check out the site, you'll spot several business advantages to signing up to TripAdvisor. To whet your appetite – here are some of the benefits:

- You can showcase your business to millions of viewers worldwide

- As reviews are independent – readers are more likely to believe them

- It's quick and easy to sign up for a free business account

- The site's simple to use/manage your account

- Uploading photos can help to 'sell' your business

- You'll be able to compare your business's popularity with competitors

- You can promote your business with TripAdvisor branding

- You'll receive e-mail notification of new visitors' reviews

- Your responses to comments will show how much you value your customers – even to those who've complained if your response is carefully worded

- You'll also be listed on other major travel/tourism website sites

- You can upgrade to a paid business listing for further business benefits

Are There Any Disadvantages in Using TripAdvisor?

This is a difficult question to answer comprehensively and to satisfy the wide audience of tourism businesses across Wales, each one is unique and TripAdvisor seems to attract both positive and negative comments – consider discovering more about the site via your favourite search engine to gain further information.

Obviously each business will need to weigh up the pros and cons and make a decision based on their findings. During our research in writing this factsheet we discovered two potential disadvantages (provided below). You'll see we've included suggestions to turn these disadvantages to your commercial advantage:

- **Businesses can't control the content of the reviews** – but do bear in mind that many readers of the reviews will realise that if most of your reviews are positive they'll go with the majority of opinion – appreciating that you can't satisfy all the people all of the time! However, if businesses don't respond to negative reviews this could leave a question mark in your potential visitors' minds and may be just enough to place their business elsewhere.

- **Businesses can't manage people's perceptions of reviews** – you'll be well aware that customers can be fickle at times and understand that even the best businesses will receive occasional negative feedback. But customers will be able to spot 'picky' or unreasonable reviews especially if the business has provided polite, factual responses. As TripAdvisor states "if the reviews generally didn't match the reality and experience, people wouldn't keep returning to our website"

How Do I List My Business On TripAdvisor?

If you have already listed your business skip to the next section.

See if you are listed

If you've not listed your business, you should check if it has been listed by someone else e.g. one of your visitors. Go to http://www.TripAdvisor.co.uk/, then

enter the name and location of your business in the search box. If it's there you then need to 'claim' your business. To do so:

- Go to the TripAdvisor for Business page (http://www.tripadvisor.com/Owners) and select the type of business that you are claiming i.e. hotel accommodation, restaurant, or attraction etc.

- Enter your business name and location in the search box. Then select your business from the results that appear.
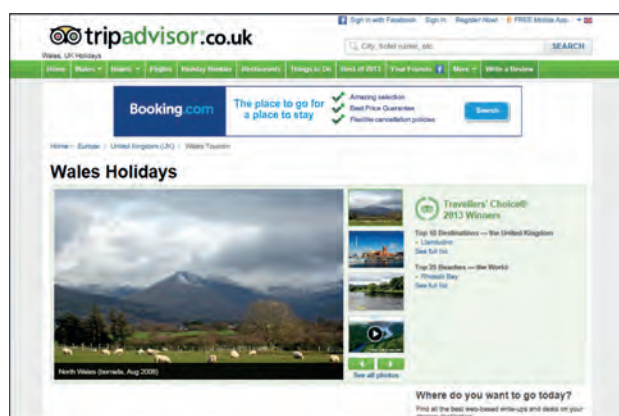
When you have selected your official business page click the 'Register now' button. Having registered you'll now be able to read and respond to your reviews. You also need to check that you're happy with the content of your entry eg: if whoever set up your listing has entered inaccurate information about your business – you can now amend the content in order to present your business accurately. If you would like further information go to the Help Centre by clicking on this link – www.TripAdvisor.co.uk/help or if you'd like to discuss your enquiry or wish to report any inaccurate information listed by a third party you can contact the Customer Support Team on 0203 318 5019 or 0800 098 8460.

If you aren't listed

Go to http://www.TripAdvisor.co.uk/GetListedNew/ and follow the straightforward instructions to list your business.

Having listed your Welsh tourism business, you may find it worthwhile to browse around the site to check how other businesses present themselves – you'll soon decide on your preferences and how you'd like to showcase your business.

You will now also have access to useful information on the site including the Owners' Section. Look for the 'Quick Links' sited towards the bottom of the 'Home' page, or by clicking this link – www.TripAdvisor.co.uk/owners. Here you will find guidance including best practice on setting up and managing your TripAdvisor listing and the 'How To' guides for proprietors. There is also an 'Owners' Blog' and you will have the opportunity to join in the online discussions etc.

How Do I Make the Most of My Listing?

As with all marketing opportunities, businesses usually strive to maximise their promotional efforts, to raise their profile and increase their sales/bookings. You will though see some rather disappointing business listings, which include out of date information, appear unattractive, have no photos or poor quality videos etc. Here are a few tips to help you to improve your listing.

Your Content

Long, flowery, wishy washy descriptions aren't what your potential visitors are looking for. They want short, snappy, factual descriptions with points of interest about your business and its locality, with lots of good quality photos

– as these are said to be the site's most popular feature.

It's well known that online photos and videos hold the viewers' attention more effectively than text alone. Try to include at least 20 photos in your listing. As the saying goes '*a picture paints a thousand words …*'. A poor quality listing will not convey the image you intend potential visitors to see!

Nor will visuals of scenes which could have been taken in many tourism business settings across the world – a floral arrangement, a couple holding hands at dinner, children playing etc. Potential visitors are looking for something specific that's unique/special about your business, which will entice them to visit.

Your primary photo on the site is particularly important – so, choose it carefully. When businesses don't submit photos, TripAdvisor will automatically place one, taking it from the internet, if there's one available. So, do select your own to ensure it is the most suitable. Your photos will be tagged as '*provided by management*' and as more photos are added they will be tagged 'new'. Also members of TripAdvisor can vote on images – another reason to choose them carefully!

Check your reviews regularly. You (or the most appropriate person in your business) will have the option to sign up to be notified each time a review for your business is posted.

Management Responses

Checking reviews is important, but your responses are what differentiate you from your competitors. How you respond shows everyone reading it (not just the person that wrote the review) that you value customer feedback.

It is good practice to respond to all reviews both the positive and the not so positive. This is true of any review site. The vast majority of reviewers report on their positive experiences and want to share them with others, but obviously negative reviews are posted at times.

Thank all reviewers for their comments – even if it may be through gritted teeth when reading complaints! Add a brief personal note to those who've had a good experience – try not to use standard phrases to everyone!

Respond to complaints in a neutral fashion. By keeping it factual and explaining what you did at the time, or have done since to address the problem/s, you will demonstrate to the reviewer and potential customers that you take complaints seriously, provide good customer care and manage the business efficiently.

You can also be proactive. Encourage those that have enjoyed their time with you to put up a review. You might even provide them with the facilities to do so before they leave. Think of it as an online guestbook.

Use TripAdvisor's free resources

The site provides advice on increasing your reviews, best practice, links and badges to enable you to promote your TripAdvisor membership. There are also tips on creating content etc. Here's a link to the Owners' section – www.TripAdvisor.co.uk/owners

Adding Direct Contact Links

Paid business listings – As the name suggests there is a charge for this feature. The fee allows you to list your business's direct contact links (landline, mobile, web etc) on TripAdvisor, which may result in more direct bookings. It also enables owners to add special offers

etc on the high traffic pages on the site. To find out the current fee, go to the Owners' section via this link – www.TripAdvisor.co.uk/owners.

TripAdvisor emphatically states that this listing will not improve your ranking, explaining that:

"…the TripAdvisor Popularity Index is based completely on Traveller Ratings to determine traveller satisfaction. Greater emphasis is placed on the most recent information. We calculate the Popularity Index using a proprietary algorithm. Advertising does not influence the TripAdvisor Popularity Index ranking in any way. We maintain a strict "separation of church and state" on this issue."

Why Should I Include Social Media in My Website?

Including social media on your website makes it easier to reach your website's visitors, provides an automatic stream of interesting up-to-date content and improves your ranking on the search engine results pages.

In order to outperform, or even keep up with your tourism business competitors, the inclusion of social media on your website has become essential. Reaching out to potential new customers via social media is more cost effective than traditional marketing methods.

Please note – You may find it useful to read the 'Why Use Social Media Marketing' Fact Sheet in this series before continuing.

Why Include Media and Social Content in Your Website

If you're a tourism operator in Wales – you simply cannot ignore the importance of integrating your social media channels into your business website – they will work well together, helping you to maximise your online presence.

If your online visitors find the content of your website interesting and engaging, they will want to share this with their social media networks – it's a win, win situation!

Showcase your Twitter feed, or Facebook posts, directly on your website.

Incorporating your social media profile is obviously advantageous as it enables you to further engage with your online visitors, and gives them another opportunity to share your content within their own social networking sites – that's a big plus! Also the massive increase in the use of mobile technology makes your social media presence readily available to your potential and existing customers, whilst they are out and about using the internet – booking their accommodation,

trips and other activities – hugely increasing your online audience.

You will need to decide which social media sites you should use and how you will incorporate their relevant profiles into your website. Here are some that you may consider including on your website:

* FaceBook timeline
* Your Twitter stream
* Like, Share Buttons or Comments
* TripAdvisor reviews
* Google+
* Flickr slideshows
* Pinterest boards
* LinkedIn posts
* Social bookmarking links

Tools are available on the internet that will allow you to combine and embed all of your favourite social network profiles and feeds into one page on your website.

What Can I Add to My Website?

There are many useful social media elements/features that you should be

able to easily add (embed) into your website. Here are some examples of social media elements that you could include in your website:

A Blog – Short for web log, a Blog is a shared on-line journal, where you can post diary entries about your hobbies, interests or experiences. Your readers can then add their comments which will add exciting, original new content to your website.

Social Media Share or Like Buttons – If you install a Share Button plugin on to a webpage that contains interesting shareable information, you will encourage your online visitors to share that link or content – this could be text, video, image, product details etc., with their favorite social network. For example, when you click the Twitter share button you are not taken to a Twitter Page but prompted to share the content of the page with your Twitter followers.

Social Media Profile Page Buttons – These are just Icons with links, so that when they are clicked they will direct your online visitor to your social media page or profile. These buttons link directly to a social media page. For example, if you have a business Facebook page, the Facebook button would link to your business Facebook page.

The Google +1 Button – This allows your visitors to recommend your content on to the Google Search results and also with their Google+ audience.

Share Buttons – There are online services available, often free of charge that will give you an easy way of adding a row of similar like or share buttons to your pages such as AddThis, ShareThis or AddToAny – a couple of examples are shown below.
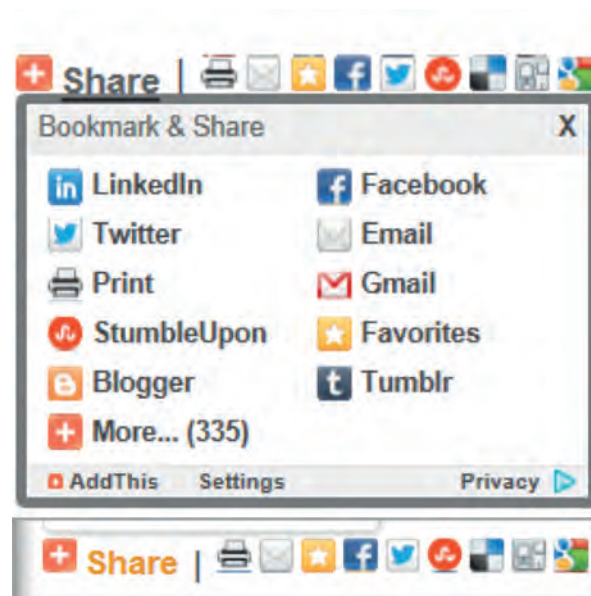
If you're worried about your prospective customer leaving your website, when they click a link – make sure you have the social media site open in a new tab or window, and then they will be able to easily return to your own website when they are ready.

Social Bookmarking – This is a way for people to store, organise, search, and manage "bookmarks" of interesting or important web pages (a bit like favourites).

Adding social bookmarking links (such as Del.icio.us, StumbleUpon, Digg etc) to your website or blog will encourage your visitors to (Bookmark) save and share your content, this will make it easier for others to find it too.

The bookmarked links are saved on the social bookmarking site and they are usually organised with keywords, tags, comments or votes. These bookmarks are public, and can be found and listed by search engines and viewed by others, sending more new visitors to your website or blog.

What Are the Benefits?
Integrating your social media content is obviously advantageous as it keeps

your website fresh and interesting, other benefits also include:

- Little or no cost involved

- Enables your online visitors to re-tweet, share, like etc to their social media contacts

- Enquiries and sales are very likely to increase – by presenting your tourism business to newfound markets in innovative ways – limited only by your imagination

- Your position on search engines will improve because you're adding fresh content – text, video footage, graphics, inbound links etc

- Customer preferences – find out what they like and don't like!

- Your social media network will no doubt be made up of your current and prospective visitors. You'll be able to actively seek and collect a wide range of feedback on new services, products, features etc

- Listen to the social media conversation around you. This is important for every business – It's vital that you know what your, existing and prospective visitors, competitors and the general public are saying about your business

- You'll gain further insight into Welsh tourism and related sector stats, trends etc by gaining this info in real time, directly from your customers, like minded businesses, suppliers competitors etc

- Can save you time and money by reducing the methods in your marketing mix

- As they say a picture paints a thousand words – videos are a powerful medium – they grab attention – they can sell your product/business in as little as 2 seconds

- Demonstrates that yours is a modern dynamic tourism business – maximising the benefits for your website visitors

- You can have a count button on any page of your site to show how many times the page has been shared or liked – each like or share is like a compliment

- If you have an ecommerce site you can add share buttons to your product pages

- May help to save you or your staff time updating your website

- It's versatile – look what others are doing – try different angles – see what works best for your tourism business

- It's a win, win situation for your tourism business, your visitors, your locality and in fact everyone involved in Welsh tourism!

Are There Any Disadvantages?

- Adding social content to your website may slow down your pages load time, which could affect your SEO efforts. It's possible to add HTML coding and other programming techniques that will optimise its performance

- Having visitor counters on shares/likes etc., will not be advantageous if the visitors numbers are low

- If your social media content is not interesting, relevant and up-to-date it will be of little or no interest to your online visitors and may do you more harm than good

- Negative comments about your business can remain on the internet for a long time but this also presents you with an opportunity to defend your reputation or explain the circumstances – be innovative – offer a refund/free return visit, show

undisputable video footage – invite feedback from other customers etc

How Do I Do It?

Depending on the type of website you have and your knowledge, you may be able to add your social content yourself. If you need help you can use the help system in your social media site, e.g.: Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn etc., or your content management system. You can also search on your favourite search engine for the help you need, or you may wish to select a good web professional to do this for you.

Some Content Management Systems make it easy for you to add social media to your website. They may have widgets or plugins that easily let you add your Twitter feed or Facebook timeline posts etc. Or, they may have icons you can easily add to link to your various social communities.

If you are not able update your website yourself you will have to ask your web professional to add your social content into your website, or consider commissioning a new website with a content management system (CMS) that allows you to update your own website. You may find it useful to read the **'Why do I need a Website Content Management System?'** Fact Sheet.

Check Your Stats

Check how your online visitors are using your social media buttons. There are lots of web analytical tools available on the internet, and many of them are free of charge. You may find the **'Understanding Website Analytics'** fact sheet helpful.

Securing your Public Wi-fi

Wi-Fi availability or wireless access is listed as the number one amenity expected by travellers today. In this extremely competitive market, it's no surprise then that 90 per cent of hotels and bed and breakfasts (B&B) today have a wireless network installed so guests can connect to the Internet.

Suddenly it's possible for anyone to go out and buy a cheap Wi-Fi kit in their lunch break and install it themselves. This is great news for B&B or Self Catering Accommodation providers who are looking to add value to their business quickly with limited disruptions, however, it also illustrates the threat wireless connections could pose to the tourism industry if more and more people are in control of a technology they don't have the first idea about securing, let alone managing.

One of the first high profile cases of hotel security being compromised was back in 2007 when a London branch of the Novotel chain was found to have effectively no security on its wireless network. The website claimed that their hotels feature "top-speed, high security wireless internet access in all our hotels" but it was found to be running a security-free wireless network including VoIP, which meant that the hotel's entire booking and customer information system was effectively open to access by all those with internet connections.

The fact that such a major security breach was allowed to happen with an international hotel chain suggests that many hotels are attempting to employ internet-based communication systems, primarily for cost reasons, while failing to understand the security implications that are associated with such an approach.

Wi-Fi threats

As the world becomes dependant upon wireless and VoIP communication systems, so the risk and dangers of such an approach continue to rise. Wi-Fi technology now has the potential to bypass almost all existing IT security systems and open the door to hackers, unauthorised entry and just about every other security nightmare you can think.

If your B&B or hotel has an alarm system in place to deter burglars, then the same measures need to be put in place with your wireless network. According to researchers, the weakest link in any hotel's network is its wireless network, as signals between the access point and a computer can be compromised easily. Even though a router does offer advanced security features, it still does not mean the guests or hotel's personal/confidential information is being protected.

This guide is designed to help owners of hotels and B&Bs to understand the security risks, and to provide practical advice on tightening up security measures to minimise the risk of breaches that can carry high costs to the business, both financially and in reputation terms.

"it won't happen to me"

If you own a B&B and you have the attitude "it won't happen to me because

I'm out in the sticks and only have two to three guests at a time", then think again, as breaches of wireless networks can happen anywhere and to anyone.

Our research shows 90 per cent of B&Bs in Wales that offer Wi-Fi as a value added service leave their networks wide open i.e. without a password for guests to use. This potentially leaves the systems wide open to hackers, with potential embarrassing consequences for the guests and the B&Bs concerned.

Gaining unauthorised access to a wireless network is a simple process for a hacker if the correct methods to negate these risks are not taken by the hotel or B&B manager/owner. The risks could include accessing your business network and data, using your network to commit a crime, stealing copyright material via file sharing, or something as severe as downloading child abuse images.

The Digital Economy Act 2010 requires OFCOM to implement regulations placing the reasponsibility of illegal activity such as copyright theft squarely at the feet of the network owners. If you don't take reasonable steps to protect your network, identify who has access to your network at any given time and warn against illegal activity, at any given time, you could be liable for your visitors' crimes.

What makes a good password?

- Needn't be a word at all. It can be a combination of letters, numbers and keyboard symbols.

- Is at least eight characters long. Longer passwords are harder to guess or break.

- Does not contain your user name, real name, or company name.

- Contains a mix of upper and lower case letters, numbers and keyboard symbols (i.e. ` ~ ! @ # $, % ^ & * ( ) _ + - = { } | [ ] : " ; ' < > ? , . /).

- Is changed regularly.

Minimum Equipment Recommendations

Ensure you use the following equipment and settings on your public wireless access:

- Ensure your Wi-Fi access point is a wireless router with VLAN (virtual local area network) capabilities. This will enable you to separate your business's network and data from your visitors'. Examples of suitable routers to use are available at http://www.ecrimewales.com/en/protect-yourself/protect-your-it-network. If you use a standard domestic Wi-Fi router your entire private business network will be accessible to all of your visitors.

- Use WPA2 (Wi-Fi Protected Access 2) with AES (Advanced Encryption Standard) encryption on your access point. WPA2 is the latest security standard introduced by the global, non-profit industry association, the Wi-Fi Alliance. Some older equipment may not work with WPA2; however do not use encryption standards less than WPA. Older WEP (Wired Equivalent Privacy) encryption is simply not secure enough; our experts have been able to hack WEP encryption in less than 3 minutes!

- Keep a log of when visitors request access to your wireless connection. Ensure they sign a terms and conditions document before you give them the wireless access key (password) to allow them to access your connection.

- Make sure your wireless access key is an alphanumeric password of at least 8 characters using both upper and lower case letters. We suggest you change your wireless access key monthly.

- Consider filtering access to P2P (peer to peer) data on your network. This will offer you some protection against illegal file sharing of copyrighted material. S ome routers will allow you to set filters to block all types of data transmission and file types, thus allowing you to choose what activity visitors can undertake on your connection.

- Disable VPN (virtual private network) access on the router settings if you don't require it. If you don't know if you need it or not, you probably don't!

- Some routers will also let you restrict access at certain times of day. You may want to consider this.

- Data logging provides evidence of all data traffic and activity on your network. If the worst happens, this may prove crucial in proving your innocence.

You may consider implementing a separate telephone line and broadband connection to completely separate your business network from your guests. If you go down this route we still recommend you implement all of the above advice to offer yourself and your business the maximum level of protection.

If you are ensure about any of the above we suggest you use your IT support provider to help you install the equipment. For a list of suppliers in Wales, visit http://www.ecrimewales.com/en/protect-yourself/it-security-supplier-directory.

Terms and Conditions

Technology alone can never give you 100 per cent protection, and the roaming nature of Wi-Fi means user education in this area is of particular importance. It is absolutely essential that hotels or B&Bs implement a rigorously enforced set of terms and conditions so everyone is educated about the requirements for security. By getting your guests to sign and agree to the terms and conditions you will also go a long way to ensuring that your business is covered for any inappropriate or illegal activity that your guests may carry out when roaming on your wireless network. It will also in most cases deter any criminals trying to compromise the network if they know their personal details are on record.

With this factsheet we have included a template Terms and Conditions document for your Wi-Fi service[1]. This template policy is also available to download and personalise at http://www.ecrimewales.com/en/downloads/factsheets/securing-your-public-wi-fi/template-public-wi-fi-access-terms-and-conditions

The implementation of the Digital Economy Act is likely to alter further the requirements on those who provide wireless internet access. You should periodically check the e-Crime Wales website to ensure that your policy is up to date.

1   This policy is prepared to provide general advice on the issues which a business will need to include in considering a wi-fi policy. The policy should not be considered as an alternative to taking advice on the structure and content of a policy (or on specific situations where the policy may have been breached) suitable to the specific needs of your organisation. As a result neither the Welsh Government nor Morgan Cole accept any liability arising from the use of this policy and should the user choose to use the policy for implementation in their own business without specific legal advice they do so entirely at their own risk.

Be Safe

If you want to run a safe and successful Wi-Fi service within your hotel/B&B, think of every possible 'door' a hacker can enter because if given half a chance, they will take it. As you have seen above, implementing Wi-Fi security isn't rocket science – if you have taken the time to weigh up the benefits, purchase the kit and install it, then you have time to secure it.

For further information on wireless security, please visit www.ecrimewales.com

Public Wi-Fi Template Access Terms and Conditions

This agreement sets out the terms and conditions on which wireless internet access ("the Service") is provided [*free of charge*][2] to you, a [*customer/guest*] of [*insert name of institution*] ("us") in consideration for your custom, your agreement to these terms and conditions and your agreement to allow us to send to you by e-mail our promotional and marketing material;

1. Extent of the Service

1.1 We do not recommend in particular the use of any websites (or other internet related services) ("Internet Services") and your use of Internet Services is carried out entirely at your own risk.

1.2 We have no responsibility for, or control over, the Internet Services you access and do not guarantee that any services are error or virus free.

1.3 We have no responsibility for, or control over, the information you transmit or receive via the Service.

1.4 Save for the purposes of network diagnostics we do not examine the use to which you put the Service or the nature of the information you send or receive[3].

1.5 We do not guarantee:

1.5.1 the availability of the Service;

1.5.2 the speed at which information may be transmitted or received via the Service; or

1.5.3 that the Service will be compatible with your equipment or any software which you use.

1.6 [Whilst we take reasonable steps to ensure the security of the Service and to prevent unlawful access to information transmitted or received using the Service] we do not guarantee the security of the information which you may transmit or receive using the Service or located on any equipment utilising the Service and you accept that it is your responsibility to protect your information and have adequate security (in terms of equipment and procedures) to ensure the security, integrity and confidentiality of your information and data.

1.7 We reserve the right at all times to withdraw the Service, change the specifications or manner of use of the Service, to change access codes, usernames, passwords or other security information necessary to access the service.

2. Your Use of the Service

2.1 You must not use the Service to access Internet Services, or send or receive e-mails, which:

2.1.1 are defamatory, threatening, intimidatory or which could be classed as harassment;

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2   If separate charges are being levied other considerations may apply.
3   Civil and criminal liability can arise from monitoring content or interception of e-mails and extreme care should be taken to ensure that this does not happen.

2.1.2   contain obscene, profane or abusive language or material;

2.1.3   contain pornographic material (that is text, pictures, films, video clips of a sexually explicit or arousing nature);

2.1.4   contain offensive or derogatory images regarding sex, race, religion, colour, origin, age, physical or mental disability, medical condition or sexual orientation;

2.1.5   contain material which infringe third party's rights (including intellectual property rights);

2.1.6   in our reasonable opinion may adversely affect the manner in which we carry out our business; or

2.1.7   are otherwise unlawful or inappropriate;

2.2   Music, video, pictures, text and other content on the internet are copyright works and you should not download, alter, e-mail or otherwise use such content unless certain that the owner of such works has authorised its use by you.

2.3   We may terminate or temporarily suspend the Service if we reasonably believe that you are in breach of any provisions of this agreement including but not limited to clauses 2.1 to 2.3 above.

2.4   We recommend that you do not use the service to transmit or receive any confidential information or data and should you choose to do so you do so at your own risk.

2.5   The Service is intended for consumer use only. In the event that you use the Service for commercial purposes we would specifically refer you to clause 5.2 below.

3.   Criminal Activity

3.1   You must not use the Service to engage in any activity which constitutes or is capable of constituting a criminal offence, either in the United Kingdom or in any state throughout the world.

3.2   You agree and acknowledge that we may be required to provide assistance and information to law enforcement, governmental agencies and other authorities.

3.3   You agree and acknowledge that we may keep a log of the Internet Protocol ("IP") addresses of any devices which access the Service, the times when they have accessed the Service and the activity associated with that IP address.

3.4   You further agree we are entitled to co-operate with law enforcement authorities and rights-holders in the investigation of any suspected or alleged illegal activity by you which may include, but is not limited to, disclosure of such information as we have (whether pursuant to clause 3.3 or otherwise), and are entitled to provide by law, to law enforcement authorities or rights-holders.

4.   Our Use of your Information

4.1   Subject to clauses 3.3 and 3.4 above we confirm that we shall use the contact details you provide to us solely for the purposes of contacting you with marketing

information, updates, promotions and special offers relating to our business[4].

5. Other Terms

5.1 You agree to compensate us fully for any claims or legal action made or threatened against us by someone else because you have used the service in breach of these terms and conditions, and in particular clause 2.1 to 2.3 and 3.1 above.

5.2 Whilst we do not seek to limit our responsibility for fraudulent misrepresentation or if you are injured or die as a result of our negligence we have no responsibility (to the extent permitted by law) to compensate you (whether or not we are negligent) for any direct financial loss, loss of profit, revenue, time, anticipated savings or profit or revenue, opportunity, data, use, business, wasted expenditure, business interruption, loss arising from disclosure of confidential information, loss arising from or in connection with use of the service or inability to use or access the service or a failure, suspension or withdrawal of all or part of the service at any time or damage to physical property or for any other similar direct loss that may arise in relation to this agreement whether or not we were advised in advance of the possibility of such loss or damage.

5.3 We agree that neither this agreement does not allow either party to act as, or hold themselves out as, acting as an agent of the other party and that that the terms of this agreement are not enforceable by a third party under the Contracts (Rights of Third Parties) Act 1999.

5.4 This agreement is governed by the law of England and Wales and is subject to the non-exclusive jurisdiction of the English courts.

I confirm that I accept these terms and conditions as the basis of my use of the wireless internet access provided.

Signed: ....

Name: ....

E-mail: ....

Dated: ....

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4   It is important to ensure that this clause is complied with (or amended depending on how the data is used) and Data you collect is processed in accordance with the Data Protection Act and any mailings comply with the the Privacy and Electronic Communications (EC Directive) Regulations 2003

E-commerce Systems

Whatever the size of your business it's possible to trade online – and the process is fairly straightforward to set up.

Many tourism businesses have taken the opportunity to offer this service 24/7 for the convenience of their existing customers and to reach new markets worldwide – thereby increasing their sales.

This factsheet gives examples of simple upselling opportunities for tourism sectors such as dining reservations, entrance tickets, gift vouchers and more…

What is an E-commerce System?

E-commerce is the term used for websites that sell goods or services by electronic means. You may also hear it called e-comm, web commerce, online commerce, e-catalogue or shopping cart systems.

It's very similar to selling through your physical building's shop front – but there are differences eg: the cost is much lower for an e-commerce store, and local specialist or unique items may have a broader appeal worldwide than in your local market – for example, cultural or activity holidays, escorted tours, Welsh love spoons, local speciality foods, slate goods etc.

You can showcase your business 24/7 globally – a gift for tourism businesses!

E-commerce systems list products and services on a website – this section is known as a 'catalogue' which allows customers to browse through the products on sale – they can then select their purchases by adding them to an electronic 'shopping cart' then finalise the transaction by making an online payment via the virtual 'check out'.

E-commerce systems are designed by web professionals and then integrated into businesses' websites.

The basic components required for setting up a successful e-commerce system are:

- a domain name eg: **www.mywelshtourismbusiness.com** (or co.uk)

- a website or webshop listing your goods/services

- a means of taking payment/s and a method of fulfilling the orders

What Are the Advantages For My Business?

Here are some advantages of an e-commerce system:

- Existing and new customers can shop with you 24/7

- They provide a platform to promote your goods/services globally

- Data can be easily updated eg: price changes, varying rates in line with occupancy levels etc

- There is a huge opportunity to increase your sales

- Opportunities to upsell when booking serviced/self-catering accommodation or caravan and camping parks by offering spa treatments, dining reservations, ready meals, champagne and chocolates etc

- Visitor attractions/activity centres could offer entrance/season tickets, gift vouchers, equipment etc at the time of booking or browsing

- It's a cost effective and efficient way to manage bookings/orders/stock

- They provide an additional method of communicating with your customers via discussion groups, visitor books and message boards

- Special offers, events and other information can be promoted and analysed

Whatever the size of your business it's possible to trade online – and it is fairly simple to set up. Many tourism businesses have taken the opportunity to offer this service for the convenience of their existing customers and to reach new markets worldwide – thereby increasing their sales. Why don't you carry out some online research?

What Systems Are Involved?

There are several systems available – the features vary depending on the provider, here are some examples:

The product catalogue – displays the products on web pages usually, information will include a product title, description, photographs and an 'add to shopping cart' button. Other information such as product videos etc may also be available. It may be possible to list products in categories by filtering criteria such as price or by searching for the product name, room type etc.

The shopping cart and checkout system – enable customers to place their selected items in the shopping cart (or basket), view the contents of the shopping cart at the 'checkout'. This part of the system will calculate the total cost of the purchases, the customer's details and transaction will then be sent to the payment processing system.

The management of the catalogue and products – all good e-commerce systems will give you the ability to add, amend and delete products and categories. The system will also allow you to add seasonal promotions, menus, new product lines etc.

Content management facilities – an e-commerce website will have brochure pages eg:'home', 'about us', 'contact us' pages etc that are not part of the catalogue. Many systems allow the creation and editing of these pages, using a content management system enables you to showcase your bedrooms, trails, exhibitions, menus or any other feature within your tourism business. Some systems do not provide this option and a separate system will be needed to edit the brochure pages.

Back office order systems – most e-commerce systems will have ability to assist in the processing of orders ie: product 'pick-lists', receipts, label printing as well as 'tracking order progress' and communication with the customer via email.

Other advanced features – include – stock control, statistics, marketing tools, voucher codes, customer accounts' management and integration with other software eg: accounts and Customer Relationship Management (CRM).

It's also possible to sell individual items or set-up an online shop on marketplace websites such as www.

ebay.co.uk or www.amazon.co.uk. These websites provide a good platform and a readymade market for your goods. They do not have the flexibility and control over costs like an e-commerce website but they're good for testing the market.

Who Uses E-commerce Systems?

There are two main users of e-commerce systems:

The customers – the e-commerce system has to provide the functionality that the customer expects from the website – such as the ability to find products easily and quickly.

Usually, customers are presented with a catalogue divided up into categories. For a small business e-commerce website, there should be no more than 7-8 main categories, these could be split into further sub-categories depending on the amount of products available.

Research has shown that the longer a website visitor is exposed to the products, the more they will buy. Therefore, the website should feature products on the home page and the category pages; also reducing the number of clicks required to view or purchase products makes it easier for customers to buy goods and may increase sales.

Before choosing or specifying a shopping cart system – you should try it out – to ensure that it provides an easy and effective way for customers to browse the site and purchase products. Larger retailers usually have good layouts, navigation and features in their designs – these businesses invest a large amount of resources to maximise their sales and profits. On a small budget it might not be possible to recreate all of these features but the main ones can usually be easily transferred and adapted for

all types of tourism businesses. Why not carry out your own research and look at the layouts, formatting and upselling techniques that the brand leaders use in their websites in retail, tourism and other sectors related to your business.

The business (sometimes known as the administrator)

The 'back-end' ie: the non-customer facing part of the website system is used by the business to administer the website eg: to make changes to the catalogue, process orders etc. Before deciding on an e-commerce system, the "back-end" system supplied should be tested to assess its suitability and usability.

You'll need to consider your current and future e-commerce requirements, particularly how the website will be marketed and fit into your business's processes. The system should then be assessed to evaluate whether it meets these needs and how user-friendly the system is. Some very basic e-commerce systems do not have a 'back-end' system – instead bookings/orders are sent to the business via email (or the electronic payment provider) and updates have to be made by a developer. Unless you aim to sell a limited number of items, it's unlikely that these types of basic systems will be suitable.

How can You Get an E-commerce System?

An e-commerce system can be obtained from a good web professional who'll provide a system to suit your requirements – they can provide the technical expertise, design elements and some of the marketing aspects needed. This allows you to focus on the other elements of selling into this new market.

Website developer's proprietary system – many website professionals develop their

own systems and will provide the client with an indefinite royalty-free licence to use their e-commerce system. They will work closely with their clients to provide a bespoke system tailored to their clients' individual requirements.

Off the Shelf Systems – you can purchase ready-made e-commerce systems, which can be customised to meet your business needs – these are widely available. This type of system allows the user to set-up their catalogue, add products, business information such as postage costs etc and links to an electronic payment system. It can also be customised by changing the colour schemes, adding logos, content and the use of various style formats. Larger retailers usually have good layouts, navigation and features in their designs – these businesses invest a large amount of resources to maximise their sales and profits. On a small budget it might not be possible to recreate all of these features but the main ones can usually be easily transferred and adapted for all types of tourism businesses.

If you have a reasonable understanding of IT systems you may wish to consider this but for some businesses, this would not be a viable option because of the amount of work and time involved.

Open source systems – are widely available on the internet at no cost – therefore it is very unlikely that a bespoke e-commerce system will need to be commissioned by a business. Web developers will be able to advise on these systems and will charge for their services to integrate the system onto your website. Other things to consider include the development of your brochure, pages, graphics, electronic payments system and marketing etc.

You might find it useful to search the web – in order to find out more about the systems available to help you select the most appropriate solution for your business.

What Is Cloud Computing & How Can You Use It?

The word cloud is often used to describe something vague, confused or hidden – but cloud computing is not as fluffy as the name would suggest and it's not located in the sky!

Cloud Computing relates to technologies based on similar characteristics, i.e. storing, accessing and sharing data from internet-connected devices.

With the wide variety of devices we now use to connect to the Internet, Cloud Computing is an excellent way to share and communicate with our visitors and colleagues. From a business perspective, it is a flexible way to lower your IT costs, manage your information, and reduce your risk.

What is Cloud Computing?

Cloud Computing refers to applications and services offered over the Internet. These services are offered from data centres all over the world. The 'Cloud' involves software applications, data processing and storage being accessible online. It encompasses any subscription-based or pay-per-use service that, in real time over the Internet, increases your IT's existing capabilities.

> **If you bank or shop online, use social networking site such as Facebook or Twitter, store photos, music or videos online, then you are likely to already be using cloud-based services.**

Cloud-shaped diagrams are often used to depict a cluster of services that could be delivered over the Internet, hence the use of the term in Cloud Computing.

Why Use Cloud Computing?

Here are a few reasons why more and more businesses are choosing to use cloud computing today:

- Removes the need to install and maintain local resources, eg Converting to Office 365 rather than using the Microsoft Office desk top software

- Provides a way to increase your IT capacity or add capabilities on the fly without investing in new infrastructure, training new personnel, or licensing new software

- **Device independent** – provides the ability to access data from any computer and device at any time with Internet connectivity

- **Task centric** – businesses can focus on what they want to achieve, rather than the software or hardware they need to use

- **Lower capital expenditure** – traditionally businesses have had to pay for the IT costs whether they are used or not. Cloud Computing tends to work on a per-use cost and based on the number of people using the software each month, or number of projects being run

- **Dynamically scalable** – businesses only ever need to consume the amount they want to use. As your business grows so do your technology needs.

'The Cloud' is designed for this so you do not need to change your technology. In some cases you can add an extra service as and when you need it, for instance developing a Web Marketing campaign

- **Data redundancy** – cloud systems are designed to always be available and tolerant to fault. This is achieved by replicating copies of the data in a number of different locations, so if one fails at least another will be available

- **Energy efficient** – a study by Global Action Plan found that IT infrastructure is responsible for 10% of the UK's annual energy consumption. This is equal to the CO_2 emissions given off by aeroplanes. By using Cloud Computing, fewer computers are used to serve more users, reducing power consumption and your CO_2 carbon footprint. It also saves on the environmental cost of building more computers.

Considerations/Problems Arising From Cloud Computing

Security – the biggest concern, for most businesses when considering Cloud Computing, is the potential for their security to be compromised. Internet security tends to be more about perception than reality. Most businesses use email as a key part of their communication means, but do they consider the confidentiality of their material with an Internet provider, or the infrastructure over which their message will be sent. A document written in Microsoft Word and sent via email is no more secure than a document created in Google Docs.

From the perspective of a hacker, it's far easier to gain access to a personal computer than it is to take on a major cloud services server. However, the gains could be greater for a hacker if they were able to access multiple businesses data by breaking into one of these. Therefore it's in Cloud Services' interest to maintain secure systems to promote their trust and reputation.

Privacy and Data Protection – all organisations that handle personal information need to be mindful of privacy and data protection issues. Most countries have data protection laws in place which anybody holding personal data must comply. When considering using cloud computing, it's important to check whether the supplier is compliant with the relevant legislation. In the UK, the Data Protection Act (1998), requires the registration of all databases that contain personal information. The registrants are required to ensure the accuracy and security of the data held. Additionally, public sector organisations must comply with the Freedom of Information Act (2005). This requires them to supply all forms of information that they hold in response to any formal request from a member of the public.

These concerns may influence you when deciding on a service or supplier. Can the supplier guarantee the location of the data centre, so that the information is stored in an area governed by the legislation?

A cloud computing service can be requested to release customer information to police and government authorities. This can happen without their customer's knowledge.

Dependence on a Reliable Internet Connection – most areas in the UK can now benefit from a reliable Internet connection. However, this can be variable when in mobile situations or connecting with overseas businesses.

Pay as you use – for smaller businesses paying for services as you use can provide low cost entry for IT services, and an effective way to budget for services. For larger businesses that require a number of employees to access to applications, this means of payment can be prohibitive. Most services and suppliers tend to have a different business model for larger organisations and enterprises to meet this challenge.

How is Cloud Computing Used?

Cloud Computing is available in a variety of forms, from full-blown applications, to storage services, to spam filtering. You are probably already using Cloud Computing if you're using webmail, such as Gmail, Hotmail, Social Media sites or online business applications – such as Google Docs or Microsoft Office 365.

There are essentially three ways in which you can use Cloud Computing to replace your traditional in-house IT systems. These are:

Software as a Service (SaaS)

Customers use a service on a pay-per-use basis, some of these are free to use. This tends to be focused on the consumer end of the market. Examples of this are:

- Webmail, such as Hotmail, Gmail, etc.
- Online applications, such as Google Docs, Microsoft Office 365, Adobe Creative Cloud, etc.
- Online Storage of documents, photos, music, such as Dropbox, Box.net, BT Cloud, etc.
- Online Collaboration, such as Facebook, Web Ex, SalesForce.com, Basecamp, etc.

Platform as a Service (PaaS)

Customers use the tools and infrastructure determined by the service provider to create and run their own applications. This tends to be focused on developers deploying and maintaining applications. Examples of this are:

- Google API, Zoho Creator, Amazon AWS Elastic Beanstalk, etc.

Infrastructure as a Service (IaaS)

Customers directly access the service providers cloud infrastructure to run applications of their own choosing. This tends to be focused on research and high computing needs. Examples of this are:

- Amazon AWS, Microsoft Azure, Rackspace, etc.

When a business chooses SaaS they can run the applications that are provided by their Cloud supplier. With PaaS, the business can run their own applications, but only how the supplier determines. IaaS allows a business to run any application gives them full control in what and how they run on the cloud hardware.

How Could I Use Cloud Computing?

You may find some of the reasons for using Cloud Computing valuable to your tourism business but how can you make the most of them?

Software in the Cloud – most businesses use some form of software package, whether it be word processors, spreadsheets, databases, presentation software, photo and video editors, project management, or others. Many software companies are moving to a different distribution method and business model – from product to service. Now many popular software applications can be accessed via a web browser, and the competition is increasing with new cloud applications entering the market.

This approach allows the application to be available from any device. You can access the most recent version of a document from your home, work, mobile, etc. With some applications, it will allow 2 or more users to work on the same document at the same time, so you can now collaborate. Using the Cloud, office applications remove the licencing issues as your business expands and also the update requirements as the software develops.

Email – online email clients have been available for many years and free accounts, such as Hotmail, Gmail, Yahoo! Mail, popular amongst personal users. In business, email tended to remain internal and accessible via desktop clients such as Outlook or Pegasus mail. As most email is intended for external distribution, it is becoming a more common setup to use email services in the cloud.

Office Applications – the most popular business software belong to office applications, word processing, spreadsheets, presentations, etc. Microsoft Office applications have dominated the Desktop Office market, therefore most online office services tend to be compatible with Microsoft Word, Excel, PowerPoint etc. The online Office applications, Google Docs, Zoho, Microsoft Office 365, allow documents to be uploaded and created, saved to desktop and online, and printed. The formatting can change depending on the application being used. Files can be shared and collaboratively worked on. These applications are integrated with email and calendaring systems, providing a complete office solution.

Photo and Video Editing – editing has put high demands on the processing and storage of desktop computers. The software, particularly the professional suites, has been too costly for customers unless the business demanded it. There are some interesting options available, such as Adobe Photoshop, Pixlr, and FotoFlexer. Video Editing can be provided by Adobe Premiere, WeVideo, and JayCut.

Visit Wales have their own Share Wales Flickr (http://www.flickr.com/groups/sharewales) group, where Photos across Wales can be uploaded and shared with a wider community. It's a publicly accessible community, which you can become a member of.

Business Applications – accounting, payroll and CRM software has been successfully transferred into Cloud services. Customer Relationship Management (CRM) have been available in 'the Cloud' for over a decade. Managing sales data and processes online, giving sales staff access to contacts and customer records, as required. As it's collaborative, the data is updated real-time.

Increased Internet bandwidths and online processing via 'the Cloud' have provided new capabilities to conduct business online that were not previous available. Most notable is the use of virtual meetings across remote locations to conduct business via phone conferencing, document and desktop sharing. Webinars and online conferencing have significantly reduced the cost to business by increasing the opportunities to share knowledge and experience without the need to travel.

Specialised services – the tourism industry requires specialised applications that are not covered by the more generic business applications. This has allowed opportunities for specialised services to set up within 'the Cloud' and be accessible for your business. If you need a solution there is likely to be one out

there for you. Here are a few examples, relevant to the tourism industry:

- Online booking systems, such as Web Ticket Manager, Checkfront, or Planyo, provide an online booking service that you can add to your website. This removes the requirement to maintain more complex eCommerce websites or Point of Sale systems. They usually come with a built in CRM system so you can maintain accurate customer records and reports. They may charge on monthly basis or add a commission charge per sale.

Hotel reservation systems, such as Sirvoy, WebRezPro, or Hotelogix, offer booking systems that can be added to your website and Facebook pages so that you can manage your reservations. In some cases they can be complete property management applications, including housekeeping and accounting systems. They connect into Global Distribution Systems to link with travel agents' software and online travel agency channels, such as Booking.com, Expedia, and Priceline, etc.

- A very specific example that's available for your outdoor business is Kit Log. It's a safety management system that provides an inventory of equipment. Regular kit inspections are vital within the outdoor industry and this application records process and outcomes. It aims to help outdoor businesses improve efficiency, safety, and save money.

Online Storage – provides the facility to store, share and back up files to the internet. There are many providers, with varying amounts of storage capacity that you can access freely. Box.net, DropBox, SkyDrive are popular services in this market. There's much debate on

how long this specialised area will last, as more office applications enter the market providing a complete service.

Hardware in the Cloud – when businesses choose 'software-as-a-service' they make use of existing, off-the-shelf web applications. If off-the-shelf applications are not sufficient another solution is required. There are two ways in which this can be achieved, either by Platform or Infrastructure. Both these solutions allow a business to run their own applications within the cloud, PaaS allows you to run an application according to the requirements on the Cloud Service, whereas IaaS allows the business complete control.

If you already have custom software that's used within your business, or are looking to develop it to gain the benefits of the Cloud then hardware in the Cloud should be considered.

There are limits to the mix of Cloud Services we can discuss here. If you would like to discover more click on the following link. Visit http://www.serchen. co.uk to discover Cloud services.

Getting Started with Cloud Computing

It can be daunting when making the decision to start cloud computing. Follow the cloud computing checklist when choosing your cloud supplier.

Cloud Computing checklist:
- Check out the reputation of the service provider – how long have they been offering cloud services?

- Security is paramount – how secure does your data have to be? Ask the vendor how they can meet your security needs.

- Does the cloud supplier backup your data? Can you move your data to

another provider? What happens if the provider goes out of business?

- Check out the service level agreement. Are there financial penalties in place to ensure a good service?

- Do your own research on how the supplier is performing?

- Try the service first. Cloud computing allows switch on and off. Don't start with confidential data or mission-critical systems. If the service works for you, you can expand.

Things to Think About

What does the future hold for Cloud Computing? The digital landscape has vastly changed in the last 5 years, let alone the 20 years that the World Wide Web has been in existence. The sales of music, movies and books have moved to become electronic transactions. In some cases, we can have access to the material without owning it, i.e. movies via Netflix, music via Spotify. This will only expand across other consumables that can fit the model and become a pay-as-you-use service.

The last 7 years has seen a boom in the number of devices we can purchase to connect us to the Internet, from phones, iPads and tablet devices, TVs, Games consoles, household appliances. This is expanding into wearable devices, such Google Glass, iWatch, etc.

Working habits are changing. No longer do we require a workplace to conduct our business. We can connect via the cloud with our colleagues, collaborate and access our work materials as required.

Possible Solutions for Poor Indoor Mobile Phone Coverage

> It can be a real nightmare if you live in a mobile black spot or you struggle to get a signal in either your home or office. It's not much fun if you have to hang out of the front bedroom window or stand outside in the freezing cold to make or receive your calls.
>
> This Factsheet will look at possible solutions for this frustrating problem.

Potential Solutions for Indoor Mobile Phone Coverage

It doesn't matter which network you're using, mobile signals/receptions can be unreliable and many factors can have a detrimental effect on indoor mobile phone signals – for example:

- if you're miles from your networks mobile phone mast

- if you are in a stone cottage with thick walls, have cavity insulation, surrounded by hills or mountains or are in a basement flat etc

- And of course… some phones just pick up signals better than others!

Hope at last for frustrated tourism operators who struggle with little or no signal on their mobile phone!

If you're mobile signal is poor at home or in your workplace you may have rights under the Supply of Goods and Services Act 1982, which aims to protect consumers against bad workmanship or the poor provision of services. You can find help and practical advice on the Which Consumer Rights (http://www.which.co.uk/consumer-rights/problem/i-keep-losing-mobile-phone-signal-in-my-home-what-can-i-do/) website.

Most mobile networks operate independently of each other and you may find that if the reception is non-existent or consistently poor with one provider you may be able to improve it by switching to a different one without having to pay a contract termination fee.

Femtocells

Femtocells are designed to provide a mobile phone signal in (small areas) your business premises or home.

These devices require an existing broadband connection in order to work, and are provided by the mobile phone operators, either free of charge, or for a small fee.

These are licensed and legal to use devices, they connect directly and securely to the operators network over broadband, and essentially are very low powered mobile phone transmitters designed for indoor use, with a limited range of typically 200m.

Femtocells will only offer the respective providers signal, and, (with the exception of some of EE's offerings) will require a one off pre-registration with details of the mobile handsets that intend using them, i.e. these devices are not suitable for a hotel environment with new visitors.

Here are the web-links to each of the respective operators offering:

Vodafone Sure Signal https://www.vodafone.co.uk/our-network-and-coverage/uk-coverage-map/index.htm?=network

O2 Boostbox http://www.o2.co.uk/enterprise/products-and-services/managed-networks/internet

Three Home Signal http://support.three.co.uk/SRVS/CGI-BIN/WEBISAPI.DLL/,/?New,Kb=Mobile,Ts=Mobile,T=CaseDoc,Case=obj(5440)

EE http://business.ee.co.uk/public-sector/products/coverage-solutions

UMA – Universal Mobile Access Enabled Handsets

Some mobile handsets support UMA. UMA allows an internet connected WiFi signal to be used as a mobile signal.

At the time of writing, only EE offer this service, which is free of charge for UMA handset owners, as referred to as "Signal Boost".

You will find further information on the link below:

http://www2.orange.co.uk/servlet/Satellite?pagename=OUKPersonal&c=OUKService&t=Service&cid=1306843176798&tab=1

Other Software Solutions – O2 TuGo

O2 offer pay monthly customers an App which allows access to the O2 network from a tablet, smartphone or PC (iOS, Android or Win7).

The App enables O2 customers to make and receive calls, as well as sending and receiving text messages in mobile not spots.

In order for the software to work, a WiFi connection is required.

Typical Benefits
• Provides indoor coverage
• Cheaper than fixed line to call other mobiles
Potential Disadvantages
• Requires a registration process
• Requires bandwidth (150kbps per mobile call)

Getting Started with QR Codes

Have you heard of QR Codes, or perhaps you've seen the crossword type boxes around and wondered what they are? They act like 'keys' and can be used by visitors to unlock the door to any digital content you wish to point them to – webpages, soundtracks, image and much more.

They are free to create and how you use them is up to you!

Read on and find out how you could use them…

What are QR Codes?

A Quick Response (QR) Code

A QR Code is a type of barcode that is readable by mobile devices such as smartphones, iPads or tablets, it is simply a visual offline hyperlink that can store website URLs, email addresses, plain text, phone numbers and much more – but here we're going to focus primarily on web URL's.

Originally developed in 1994 by Denso, a subsidiary of Toyota, to track car parts for stock taking purposes, QR Codes have gained popularity and are now used by businesses all over the world.

QR Codes are free to create – how you use them is only limited by your imagination!

QR Codes provide new, exciting and mobile friendly ways of sharing information and directing people to all kinds of worldwide resources and can be used to enhance and market a wide range of tourism products and services in Wales – including yours of course!

Why use them?

More and more visitors to Wales own a smartphone or mobile device and many of them are using these to obtain information whilst on holiday here. The popularity of mobile technology is creating new opportunities for us to enhance our visitors' travel experience with a wealth of information – and this mobile friendly content is just one scan away.

Our visitors are out and about and ever more dependent on their mobile devices to access the internet. Most of us have trouble typing on small keyboards and it's much easier to scan a QR Code than it is to type in a long web address. As soon as a QR reader has been installed onto a smartphone – QR Codes can be scanned – the browser will then display the related web page or offline content. You can get your offline marketing messages online quickly by adding QR Codes to your leaflets, magazines, menus, business cards, doors/windows, posters etc enabling the user to see your online message instantly.

| QR Code | Smartphone | Specific Web Page or Offline content |

QR Codes:

- are free to create – and how you use and place them is only limited by your imagination

- offer a convenient, sustainable, flexible and cost effective transfer of information and can make more efficient use of printed materials

- provide a useful way for directing visitors to a specific landing page and other valuable updateable sources information

- enable you to segment and give appropriate information to a particular audience and lets you tell different stories to those you may have on your main website

- offer an ideal way to promote short term activities, competitions or promotions etc

- can deliver information if staff/guides aren't around – out of hours/season or situated in remote locations, they also let you to monitor who's using your QR Codes

- can be developed into trails in your own business, or working with others to tell a bigger story and give visitors a richer experience.

Viewing a QR Code

To scan a QR Code all you need is a smartphone or other mobile device that is equipped with a camera, internet access and a QR Code Reader App. Some mobile devices come with a QR Code Reader pre-installed.

If you haven't got a QR Code Reader on your device, you can download one free of charge from the internet. To install the QR Code Reader software on to your mobile device, simply follow the instructions below:

a) From your mobile phone/device Click on the **App Store Icon**, or go online to your devices App store

b) Search for "**QR readers**". Read the reviews to help you to decide which one is best for you and your device. Click **Install**

c) You will be asked for your **password** – your QR Reader downloads and is ready for use

The above screen shots are taken from an iPhone – yours may be slightly different.

Alternatively using your favourite search engine type in to the search box 'download QR Code Reader' and the make of your device' – after reading through the results you can make your choice and then follow the on screen instructions to install your App.

A
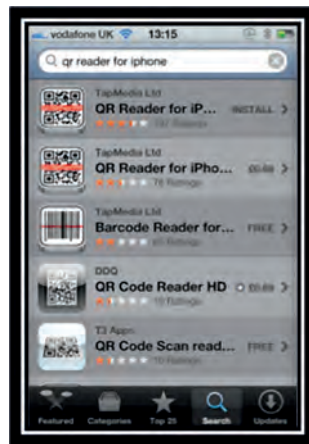
B

C

Scanning QR Codes

In the example below the QR Code for the Share Wales website is being scanned. You may find that scanning QR Codes takes a little practice, you need a steady hand to keep the smartphone still!

1) open the QR Reader

2) point your smartphone at the code

3) wait for it to read the code
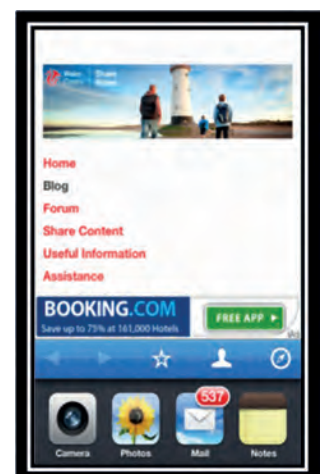
4) the webpage or offline content is opened

1

Open QR Reader

2 + 3

Hover over the QR Code, wait while the code is scanned

4

The Website opens

The above screen shots are taken from an iPhone – yours may be slightly different.

Generating your QR Codes

Think about the web page URL you intend directing your visitors to – the most effective QR Codes link to web pages that are mobile friendly – is yours?

You can use your PC, laptop or hand held device to generate your QR Codes. Enter 'QR Code Generator' into the search box of your favourite search engine and the search results pages will be displayed, giving you a wide choice of websites that will give you the ability to create your own QR Codes. Look for those that offer options such as colour, data types, format, output options, in-built URL shorteners etc.

Make your selection from the search results and simply follow the onscreen instructions.

Creating a QR Code to Open a Landing page is Easy

When you have chosen your QR Code Generator

- Check that the Data Type option is set to 'Website URL'

- Simply type or copy and paste the web address you want the QR Code to direct to, into the box provided this will usually say 'Website URL' and click the 'Download QR Code' button

- When you download or save any file you should give it a meaningful name and save it in a relevant folder – so you can find it the next time you need it. Your QR Code is now ready to use

The longer the web address you use, the more complex the QR Code will be and therefore the greater the risk that the code will not scan. Using an URL shortener will simplify your QR Code, making it easier to scan, another benefit is that shortened URLs usually have tracking abilities, which allow you to see

how many people have clicked on that link. Some QR Code Generators offer this service free of charge. You can also use your web analytics tool to monitor the traffic generated by your QR Code.

Below you can see a full URL and also a shortened version of the same URL which is trackable.

http://www.sharewales.com/index.php/more-on-qr-codes/

http://bit.ly/MGt4JF

Size does matter! If your QR Code is too small it simply won't scan.

- It is usually recommended that the code measures at least 3cm x 3cm for an A4 document and around 30cm x 30cm for reading from an A3 poster

- The quiet zone is the area surrounding the QR Code, which makes the QR Code more readable, the size of this is calculated by the generator

Always, always test your QR Codes with a variety of smartphones and scanning Apps before publishing them – perhaps family and friends can help here!

How will You use Yours?

QR Codes are extremely useful, follow these guidelines to maximise their benefits:

QR Codes can be used to help to promote your tourism business in a variety of ways. To be effective, QR Codes should offer your visitors something of value, special or unique, such as a special offer, enhanced visitor experience or mobile friendly content. It is not generally good practice to direct your mobile visitors to your normal home or business information page – unless of course you have specifically designed your site and content around their use.

- Don't use QR Codes just for the sake of using them – think about the webpage you're going to use and give a brief description about what the code is and what it'll do

- Make sure that the information you're directing your visitors to is attractive, relevant and up-to-date, out of date information will give your visitors a poor impression

- Make QR Codes part of your marketing plan – link them to other marketing methods eg: special offers on social media sites

- If your QR Code requires an internet connection, offer a simple informative text alternative for areas with poor or intermittent connections

- Place QR Codes prominently, safely and make sure they're accessible – you may need planning permission or consent from a third party

- Maintain your QR Codes to avoid broken links – it's very easy to do

Some Ideas – Things to Think About

You might:

- Develop a digital QR trail for your own visitors to follow using their smartphone and QR Code Reader or consider working with other local businesses on a mutual theme

- Use pictures, film, music, poetry or similar to create an augmented reality

- Link a food menu to a video of a chef preparing local food/explaining its source

- Present information for different groups by age, languages, interests etc depending on who will access and read your QR Codes

- Add value to a short term event/activity/location, by giving its history or quirky facts

- Use on your entrance, doors or windows, so passers by can access a bit of a quirky taster

The scope for using QR Codes to promote your tourism business is enormous. We hope you enjoy using them. If you do something novel please do let us know how you are using yours on the forum on www.sharewales.com.

What are Apps and How Can I Use Them in My Tourism Business?

As we already know mobile devices are being used by more and more of our visitors. The majority of time spent on their device is used on a wide variety of interactive Apps that can do just about anything!

If you are new to mobile apps this fact sheet will help you to understand how they are being used by our visitors to Wales and perhaps inspire you to think "How could I use an App in my tourism business?" That will of course depend on what your tourism business does, or what fantastic ideas you may have.

What On Earth Are Apps?

App is short for application – a software program that is designed to help you perform a specific task, service or often just for entertainment. The good news is that we and most of your potential customers have been using Apps for years.

If you've used document, accounting packages, web browsers, graphics, games, photo editing, interactive maps etc., on your PC or via the web, then you have technically already used an App.

When we use the term App today though, it applies mainly to mobile Apps, which are downloaded onto our mobile devices. Mobile Apps – are software applications that are specially designed to run on smartphones, tablet computers and other mobile devices. An App can retrieve content from the Internet, similar to a website, or it can download the rich content so that it can be accessed without an Internet connection which is useful for tourism businesses that are based in areas with poor or no internet connection.

New Mobile Apps are being launched every single day – they keep our visitors informed, engaged and entertained. Don't miss out! Stay ahead of the competition!

The mobile market is growing at an ever increasing rate and changing the way the world plays and does business. Today more and more of our visitors and potential visitors are using smartphones and tablets. They're downloading and using countless numbers of travel related mobile Apps to help them plan, book and enjoy their visits to Wales.

Perhaps it's a good time for you to start thinking about whether you could, or should, use them in your tourism business, as another new way you can engage with your visitors.

How Are Your Visitors Using Mobile Apps?

We are all downloading more Apps than ever before. Most of the time we spend using our mobile devices, is spent using Apps from the simple brochure type Apps to fully interactive all singing and dancing Apps.

Here are some examples of how our visitors are already using Apps in the tourism sector:

Mobile Booking Apps – are being used by visitors to book and confirm accommodation, attractions, activities, events etc.

Virtual Tour Guides – are helping visitors to plan and organise their trips, they can book tickets, local restaurants, attractions, and enhance walks, events etc.

Wi-Fi Finder Apps – are useful as they let our visitors know exactly where free and paid wireless connections can be found.

Augmented Reality Apps – layer digital content over the real world, they can provide historical details, games and trails to engage the interest of our visitors.

Geo Caching Apps – allow visitors to take part in outdoor treasure hunts – there are quite a few of these already in Wales.

QR Code Apps – provide an exciting and mobile friendly ways of sharing information and directing people to all kinds of resources.

Walking Tour Apps – provide details of walks, show points of interest, images and history along the way that will improve the visitors' experience.

Current Events Apps – provide visitors with up to date details of events and activities in the area.

News and Weather Apps – enable visitors to keep up-to-date with the latest news and weather – this can be delivered to them in real time.

Mobile Games Apps – are fun and our visitors will be able to entertain themselves. If you combine puzzles, games or quizzes in your tourism App they will be able to keep their children amused too.

Photo Apps – are used to take, edit and share photographs on social networking sites.

Social Networking Apps – like TripAdvisor, FaceBook etc are used by visitors to share photos, reviews, check and update their social networking sites.

Regional Apps – provide information about the various regions of Wales and include interactive maps, general information, information about hotels, attractions, walks, restaurants and much more. Apps can be fully bilingual if required. These Apps will prove to be useful guides for both residents and visitors. Make sure you're included in any appropriate regional Apps in your area.

Your Tourism Businesses Branded App – could enable your visitors to buy their tickets, use the GPS interactive map to show where you are and what is nearby, plan their visit, view facts and useful information, images, videos and much more.

Your App is only limited by your creativity, skills or the skills of your chosen developer.

What Are the Benefits of Mobile Apps for Your Business

Everyone's talking about how good Apps are for the tourism sector. Let's have a look at some of the potential benefits of developing a mobile App for your tourism business. These are just a few ideas – there are probably many more. They could help you to:

- **Enhance your visitors' experience** – your visitors can benefit by having the information about your tourism business, products or services – literally at their finger tips

- **Attract new customers** – use to advertise products and service to

the growing and important mobile audience

- **Provide fresh ways of attracting new visitors** – engage with your growing mobile audience and demonstrate energy and forward thinking in your business

- **Increase your revenue** – help you make more money and increase your profit, giving you new and exciting ways to sell/cross-sell/up-sell your products and services

- **Offer a booking service** – always available, portable and easy for your visitors to use

- **Reinforce your brand awareness** – your logo is on the main screen of the visitors' mobile device and every time the App is updated, it will reinforce the strength of your brand

- **Find your business or event** – make your business easily accessible through the interactive maps

- **Meet your visitor expectations** – would your visitors expect you to have a mobile App? Would it improve their user experience?

- **Do your competitors have an App for their products or services?** – you may need one, to keep up with the competition.

What are the Disadvantages of Apps?

- Developing an App can be time consuming and costly

- Having to download and install most Apps before they can be used

- Not all Apps work on all mobile devices

- It can be expensive for foreign visitors if they have to pay high charges for accessing the internet when they are in Wales

Types of Mobile App

There are three different types of mobile Apps:

Native Apps – have to be installed directly onto the specific mobile device and are able to access all the mobile devices features, such as the camera and address book. These Apps don't always need access to the internet to operate. They are often the most expensive type of App to build and keep updated as they have to be programmed in the language that is appropriate to a particular device and have to be recompiled every time the App is updated or amended by the developer.

Mobile Web Apps – are compatible across all platforms and devices as they run in the mobile devices browser, so they do not need downloading or installing. These are most commonly mobile websites where the layout has been specially developed to be 'responsive' to the size of the screen on the user's device. Using techniques such as HTML5 and CSS the user experience can be made to be 'App like' and if well done the mobile web site will feel like it was made for the device. Web Apps are easier and cheaper to develop.

Hybrid Apps – combine the best of both native Apps and web Apps. They are able to access the phone's hardware functions like a native App and they also work on various web platforms. Hybrid Apps are developed using existing frameworks and can be thought of as a web App 'wrapped inside' a native App. These Apps can be cost effective to produce especially as you avoid the expense of completely recoding your App for the various types of device.

Which is most suited to your needs will depend upon a number of factors, including your target audiences,

available budget, intended purpose and required features.

Ask Yourself – Do I Really Need an App?

Apps are a useful way for you to spread your content to more people, your content being your tourist resort, event, location or business. We have set out in this fact sheet the different types of App, but event 'mobile web Apps' cost money and when looking to invest in an App, you need to ask yourself "What is the business case?"

You should have already invested in a website for your business, and this website should be 'responsive'. By responsive, we mean the ability for your website to display efficiently and effectively based on many different devices and screen sizes. A quick check of your website's user experience can show how your customers are seeing your website.

Try putting your web address into this webpage http://ami.responsivedesign. is/ and you will see your website across a desktop, laptop, tablet and smartphone screen. This will show you how many people including your customers are experiencing your website now. From a commercial perspective, your first priority should be to improve this experience of your business.

An App is an investment, in both time and money. You'll need to maintain this investment and keep the content within the App fresh and appealing, to existing and new users of the App. The information on your App should reflect, complement and even enhance the experience and information held on your website. It's important your App and website do not become separate 'silos'.

The Signal

One important thing to remember, most people using an App will be using it 'in the field' when they are actually on holiday. In many parts of Wales, a mobile data signal is not guaranteed or can be very poor. If your App is a mobile web App and has lots of images and videos etc, these will take a long time to load on the phone and leave your customer with a negative experience – App users are typically impatient, particularly on holiday and when looking for something quick to do, ie eat or plan a visit. Here, a native App can be an advantage where the information is 'coded' into the App and doesn't need to be first 'collected' from an external server (essentially, how a website works).

The design of your App, should take into consideration that a mobile data connection of a reasonable speed is not guaranteed. Consider looking at an App that 'batch transfers' data and information when the user has wifi access (so typically in the hotel or a restaurant / cafe at the start or end of the day).

Where Do I Start?

You may not yet be ready to develop your own App, but you can still make a start:

- Let your visitors know about the great local Apps they can download, which will help them plan and also enhance their holiday experience in your region of Wales

- Look for ways of interacting with and creating content for Apps in your own area for example, uploading trails to e-footpath Apps. You can also use QR codes to enhance and provide additional information for your visitors

- Make sure your tourism business is included in any appropriate regional Apps that are available and also that you are listed on any relevant travel App sites. You'll be able to use your favourite search engine to find these for your region

- Spend a little time researching how other similar tourism operators are benefitting and maximising from use of Apps – you will find lots of information on the Internet

- Perhaps you could develop an App in partnership with other complementary tourism businesses in your area – you may even be able to secure funding for this.

Building Your App – What Are Your Options

You have an amazing idea for your new App where are you going start?

You will need to carefully consider the following questions (or similar) and prepare a detailed document called a Development Brief that contains a full description of your requirements:

- Why you're building it?
- What features will your App include?
- How much will it cost?
- Who would want to use it?
- Would they pay for it?
- Will you build a web, native or hybrid App?
- What mobile device are your visitors using?
- Which mobile devices will you support?
- How will you build it?
- Who will build it?
- When will it be ready?

- How will you market and distribute it?
- How will you test it?
- How often will you update it?
- How will you measure its success?

Right, so you've planned what you are going to build and prepared your Development Brief. This will keep you focussed and allow you to identify and communicate the essential elements of work, features and functionality that you need to achieve your aims. You now you have several options:

If you have the necessary skills in-house you could develop and code your App yourself using the tools and programming languages for your chosen App market place.

Online tools are also available (some of them free of charge) which will allow you to develop and publish your mobile App – with little, or no technical or programming knowledge needed. Using a search term, eg 'review mobile App builders' in you favourite search engine will provide you with a list of these. You will also find online courses (some of them free) that will show you how to build your App.

If you have a great idea for an App, but do not wish to build or develop it yourself, you could use a carefully selected external company who specialises in App development. Your Development Brief will have helped you to gather the information needed by suppliers to quote accurately and provide you with an App that stands out, meets the end users' expectations and your business needs, whilst keeping within your budget and time schedule.

It's important to find a reputable company who will work effectively with you to develop an App that

meets all of your business needs plus of course the end users' needs. You will need a company experienced in producing Apps for tourism businesses – hopefully within Wales.

Help is at Hand!

The Centre of Excellence in Mobile Applications and Services (CEMAS)

CEMAS is part funded by European Regional Development Fund (ERDF) established at the University of South Wales. www.cemas.mobi

CEMAS is able to help eligible Small and Medium size Enterprises (SMEs) and start-up companies in Wales develop, test and find a route to market their App through a fully funded development programme. The dedicated team of developers at CEMAS are able to help eligible companies develop their App on a range of platforms including iOS, Android, Blackberry and Windows Phone.

The support for businesses is aimed at reducing the initial risk associated with developing new applications and services, as well as allowing innovative companies to use the centre's resources to create the first version of their product.

CEMAS also set up the Mobile Innovation Network (MINe) which hosts a range of informative events to support Welsh businesses and helps to promote the ICT, mobile and creative industries in Wales. http://www.cemas.mobi/about/downloads-all/cemas-business-support-programme-download/

If you would like to find out more about the work of CEMAS or for details on how they can help you to develop your App idea you can visit their website http://www.cemas.mobi/support-programme/about-su email cemas@southwales.ac.uk and one of their Project Team will contact you, or you can phone the Project Team on 01443 654265.

Software Alliance Wales

Software Alliance Wales is funded by the EU's Convergence European Social Fund through the Welsh Government.

Software Alliance Wales supports innovation and growth amongst the ICT and Software Sector within the Convergence areas of Wales. They provide a range of workshops providing practical information about the design and development of Apps.

The project is led by Swansea University in partnership with the Universities of Bangor, Glamorgan, Aberystwyth, and University of Wales Trinity Saint David.

For more information and contact details visit http://softwarealliancewales.com.

What Are Virtual Tours and Could I Use Them?

Good visual content is an indispensable part of an online presence, nowhere more so than in tourism.

Virtual tours, using composite photographic images, make for a useful addition to the photographic palette by engaging users in a dynamic process that allows the viewer to pan, tilt and zoom through a 'wrap-around' view of a landscape or interior.

This Guide steers you through the process of creating an Internet based virtual tour, using cost-free software and hosting.

An Introduction

Have you been onto sites where you have been able to have a virtual tour of the rooms before you booked, viewed the paintings around the walls of a gallery or seen the view from a mountain? This used to be something that a professional would have to create for you, but no longer. Here we explain how you can create your own virtual tour, using some freely available software. So, how might you use this to show off areas of your tourism business or local environment?

Virtual Tours add distinctive content to web pages. Stand-out visuals are increasingly important as online communities focus more and more on imagery.

Microsoft's Photosynth, in conjunction with Microsoft ICE, allows photographic panoramas to be hosted with the Photosynth Internet community. Panoramas can be either partial or full (360°). The latter allows 'endless' panning through the full panorama. Microsoft ICE stitches together overlapping images, that are captured by rotating the camera around a fixed point. Once uploaded to Photosynth, panoramas can be shared or embedded in web pages, they are susceptible to discovery by search engines and form part of Photosynth location 'clusters'.

For a preview and examples, see the March 2013 article in the Share Wales Blog. Click here (http://www.sharewales.com/index.php/virtual-tours-free-and-easyish-2/).

Note: although Photosynth is available as an app for iOS and Android mobile devices, the necessary precision for professional panoramas can only be achieved by using a tripod to create a fixed viewpoint. Hand held cameras / smartphones are not suitable.

Preliminaries

The Camera – Even low-end digital cameras produce good quality images, that are more than adequate for online applications. Most digital compacts, or Digital Single Lens Reflex [DSLR] cameras, are suitable for 360° panoramas, so long as they have a tripod screw fixing. DSLRs have the advantage of interchangeable lenses and a wider range of functions, some of which are useful in difficult conditions.

For 360° panoramas, use the widest angle lens or zoom lens setting available. An 18mm focal length lens will give approximately 70° vertical coverage when shooting in "portrait" (vertical) format.

Use a lens hood to avoid flare. Panoramas will frequently include shooting towards the sun. "Flower petal" lens hoods are recommended to avoid vignetting (cut-off of the image margins in the long dimension) and will work with lenses up to, say,18mm. Always check for vignetting before shooting. For wider angle lenses (unless a tailored lens hood is supplied) the lens hood must be abandoned – but a little flare can add to creative impact from time to time!

The Tripod – A tripod is indispensable for good 360° panoramas. The camera must revolve around a fixed axis in a fixed spatial plane. The ideal is a robust tripod with a pan-tilt head, with inbuilt spirit levels so that the camera can be mounted exactly in the horizontal (180°) and vertical (90°) planes.

Software – To create 360° panoramas using this cloud-based system you will need two pieces of free software, with a third to enable viewing by the originator and third parties. Instructions for use come later in this Guide.

Microsoft Image Composite Editor [ICE] is the software required to stitch together images into a panorama and upload the completed panorama to Photosynth. ICE sits on your hard disk as a ready-to-use package. To download a version compatible with your PC, click here (http://research.microsoft.com/en-us/um/redmond/groups/ivm/ice/).

Microsoft Photosynth is the cloud based hosting community that creates a dynamic 360° panorama from your stitched images. The result can be

viewed online with full pan, tilt and zoom functions. Photosynth also creates html code for embedding in web pages. You will need a Microsoft account (previously known as a 'Microsoft Live ID') to join Photosynth. To create a Microsoft account (if you don't already have one) and to join Photosynth, click here (https://login.live.com/login.srf?wa=wsignin1.0&rpsnv=11&ct=1361100006&rver=6.1.6206.0&wp=LBI&wreply=http:%2F%2Fphotosynth.net%2Fview.aspx%3Fcid%3D227d4da2-0aef-4c5b-ac9c-668228f98ff9&lc=1033&id=257769). For more information on Microsoft accounts, click here (http://windows.microsoft.com/en-GB/windows-live/sign-in-what-is-microsoft-account).

Microsoft Silverlight Viewer. This is the application required to view dynamic panoramas, whether directly in Photosynth or via panoramas embedded in web pages. New users are automatically prompted to download the free Silverlight software.

Shooting Panoramas – Step-by-Step

Selecting the viewpoint. Wide vistas and distant views do not necessarily make engaging panoramas. Viewpoints that take in foreground and middle distance detail give depth and interest to the dynamic (zoom and pan) experience. Remember that the finished result will cover a full 360 degrees, so check that all aspects from the viewpoint are viable as individual shots.

Set up. Mount the camera on the tripod for 'portrait' format – i.e. with the long dimension of the frame upright. Use the spirit levels to ensure that the camera is mounted true in both horizontal and vertical planes. Lock in place, leaving the pan head free to rotate. Adjust the height of the tripod (NOT the tilt head) to give optimum vertical coverage of the

subject matter. Test the full circuit of the intended panorama.

Camera settings. Use 'Auto' settings for both focus and exposure. If available, select the 'Aperture Priority' auto setting and stop down to, say, f8, to improve depth of field. [Note that the larger the f setting, the smaller the lens aperture. The smaller the aperture, the greater the depth of field – i.e. the more of the image, from foreground to infinity, will be in focus.] To avoid camera shake use a remote shutter release or the camera's self-timer, set to, say, 1 or 2 seconds delay.

A tip for shooting interior panoramas: There may be instances (e.g. where shots take in a blank wall or other featureless subject matter) where the auto focus hunts for a focus point and fails. Switch to manual focus temporarily.

Shooting the Panorama. Photo stitching software works by matching texture in overlapping photographs. Best results will be achieved by the greatest overlaps of the greatest number of photographs. To shoot the panorama, use the pan head to rotate the camera through the full 360° field of view, ensuring that each photograph overlaps the last – a shot for, say, each 10° of rotary movement will ensure adequate overlapping coverage. ENSURE THAT THE LAST FRAME IN THE SEQUENCE OVERLAPS THE FIRST. A typical panorama set will use between 30 – 40 images.

Stitching Your Images

Create and name a new folder on your computer and download the images from your camera in the usual way. If you shoot in RAW+Basic, it is best to convert the RAW files to TIFF in a new folder while saving the originals. If you don't know what this means, don't worry. Just carry on with the steps below.

Using Microsoft ICE

- Open the Microsoft Image Composite Editor.

- At top left of ICE, click on the 'File' dropdown menu and select 'New Panorama.

- Use the pop-up window to search your hard disc and open the image folder.

- Use your mouse to select the full range of images and click on 'Open'. Or use the 'drag-and-drop' feature.

- You will see the message "Reading source images" and a download bar showing progress. Once loading is complete, the message changes to "Compositing images" and loading will continue until the stitched image appears.

- Save the stitched image:

   o Under 'Export' move the Quality slider to 100 to save as JPEG or (recommended) select TIFF from the 'Format' dropdown menu.
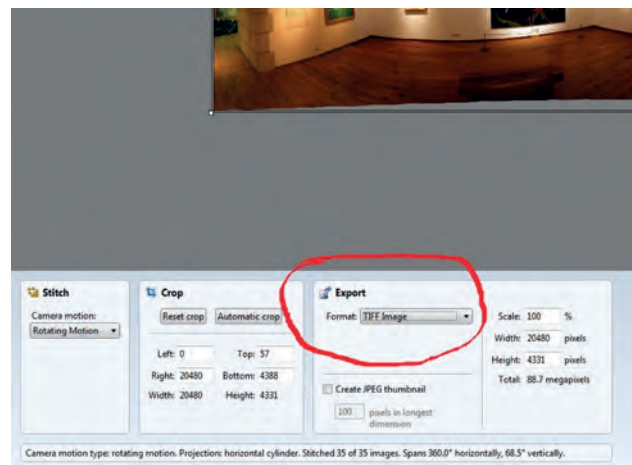

   o On the right hand side, click on 'Export to disk'. This will save the image to your panorama folder as a JPEG or TIFF file.
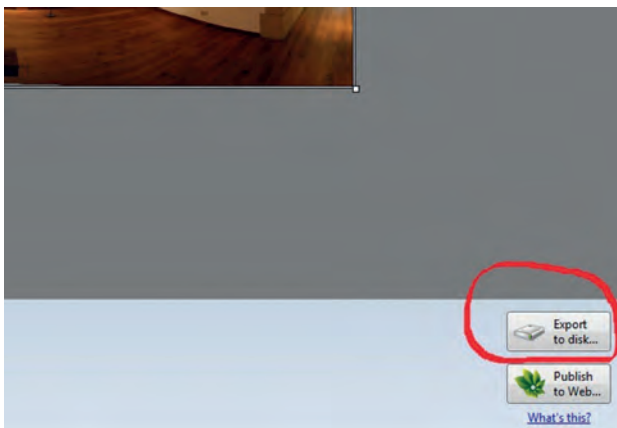
Uploading to Photosynth

To upload your panorama, simply click on 'Publish to web' (see the above image). You will see a "Compositing for Photosynth" message and a bar showing progress. With the composite complete an "Upload Panorama" window will appear. Before uploading go through the following steps.
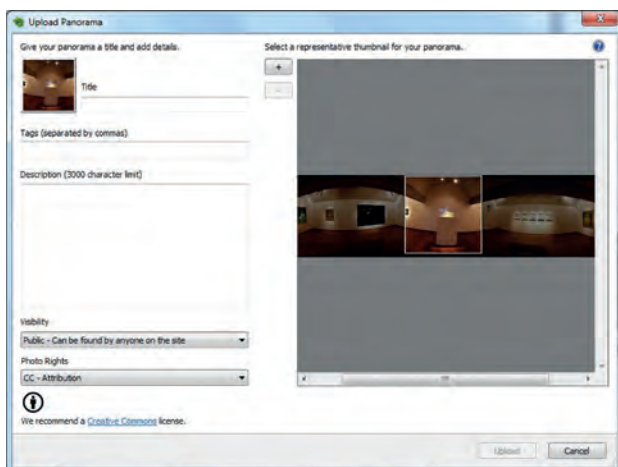
- Give your panorama a title

- Insert tags for search engine optimisation. We recommend that you follow the tagging guidelines for the Share Wales Flickr Group, followed by your own additional tags if desired. For Share Wales tagging guidelines, Click here (http://www.flickr.com/photos/visitwales/6169029262/in/set-72157628035375957/)

- Add a description, bearing in mind that good keyword rich content attracts search engines

- Select 'Public' visibility for unlimited access to the panorama

- Choose from 'Photo Rights'. Any one of the 'Creative Commons' licences will allow third parties to share your work online. Note that your licence choice cannot be changed once the pano has been uploaded. To change the license you will need to repeat the uploading process

- Select a 'Representative thumbnail' using the image slider and zoom. This will set the landing page image for your pano

- Add a location (see below)

- Click 'Upload' and a window will appear showing progress. Once complete, click on view and sign in to your Photosynth account

- Congratulations, you have just created your first Photosynth panorama

- When you exit the program you will be prompted to save the project, which will appear with a partially fragmented tile icon in your folder

Adding a Location

- Click on 'Visibility – Listed /Share with Bing Maps'

- Open the 'Location' tab and pan and zoom in to the location of your viewpoint or subject on the global map

- Drag the pushpin to the desired location – you can zoom in to the extent that the pushpin can be placed with accuracy of one metre. The example is Oriel y Parc, at the National Park Information Centre, St Davids. Use the 'Alignment' feature to fully orient the map

- If appropriate, enter a business or landmark name

Editing and Embedding

All of the information you have entered will be visible to visitors to the main Photosynth web site, whether via web searches or by links from other sites and social media.

The information accompanying your panorama can be edited at any time by opening the panorama and clicking on 'Edit this panorama'.

To embed the panorama in a web page, click on '<> Embed' and copy the HTML code into the page. The pano will appear showing the 'representative thumbnail' you selected after uploading, the Photosynth icon and a 'Click to view' button. Clicking will prompt new Photosynth users to download the Microsoft Silverlight Viewer.

To share via Facebook, click on the FB icon, add your text and click 'Share Link'.

Note that your 'Saved' panorama image can be treated as a conventional photograph and can be cropped selectively to produce wide format images suitable, for example, as banners on web pages. And your original photographs can be used, individually, in any way you wish.

What is Augmented Reality and How Can You Use it?

Augmented reality changes the way we see and experience the world around us. It's a great way of sharing knowledge and data in a fresh new, interactive and exciting way. It could greatly improve your visitors' experience and can be adapted to all sorts of situations in Welsh tourism.

It's not quite time travel, but it can bring together different worlds, times – historical, or futuristic. It can allow a user to re-enact events, or visualise archaeology, architecture, people, flora and fauna and more, within a given space or landscape. Romans at a heritage site, Dinosaurs on a beach, Alice in Wonderland characters on the street or a visualisation of how a landscape may change. All are possible with Augmented Reality.

What Is Augmented Reality?

You may already be familiar with the concept of virtual reality, in which simulated environments are created by computers. In virtual reality computers provide sensory data such as sound, video, graphics and smell. These sensory environments are frequently found in video games and in computer generated content on film and TV.

Augmented Reality (AR) takes this computer generated sensory data and integrates it with the real world, creating an enhanced view of reality. This enhancement occurs in real time and can take various forms. The visitor can then perceive both the real world and a computer generated element simultaneously.

By way of example – a visitor to a heritage site could be offered a then and now view of a banquet room, with overlaid graphics that relate to the site as it was in a specific period of history.

Augmented Reality is a fantastic promotional tool and if used correctly can create a great 'WOW factor' for our visitors to Wales.

If these graphics played out as a series of computer-generated images on a fixed screen, in for instance a gift shop area, showing the room as it was 200 years ago this would be an example of virtual reality. If, though, those graphics were viewed through a smart device as the visitor stood in the actual room that the images related to and the images move with their line of vision they would be experiencing Augmented Reality (AR) as the visitor would be able to perceive the reality of the room as it currently is, as well as the computer generated historical view.

Whilst it may not be a new concept, advances in the technology of televisions, computers, tablets, projections and smart phones mean it's becoming more and more interactive and taking a far greater role in our lives. Welsh tourism can use AR to promote interest, interaction and participation. It's a fantastic promotional tool and if used correctly AR can create a great 'wow factor' for visitors to Wales.

You may enjoy this example of a National Geographic AR campaign in a shopping centre: http://player.vimeo.com/video/31479392?title=0&byline=0&portrait=0

Different Kinds of AR:

Marker based AR – an AR result can be experienced utilising the camera on your smart device to scan a visual marker, an example of this can be seen here is the Wales Coast App AR Character, "Derek the Dragon". The 360 degree 3D animation that we see here (as if looking at a smart device) is generated from a 2D image on a Marker shown here in the form of the Wales Coastal App Logo held in front of and converted through the devices camera. It could equally be a 2D image of a landscape or skyline, which could then become a 360 degree 3D image when viewed through a smart device.

Markerless AR – This type of AR does not rely on a marker and is usually location or position based. The AR content typically works from your smart devices GPS system or compass. This technology is more dependent on your devices capabilities. An example of which can be seen here from the Alice in Wonderland White Rabbit App showing the Mad Hatter character sat here in a wooden chair.

Pre-built AR Browser Apps such as Junaio, Wikitude and Layar for a smart phone will display AR content from pre-existing AR Channels. It is possible to build AR content in to an App without the need for an AR browser – the Wales Coast App and the Alice in Wonderland White Rabbit Apps are both examples of tourism apps that include AR content using both Marker and Markerless triggers that do not require an AR browser to be present on the device.

Here are the links:

www.layar.com
www.mixare.org
www.argon.gatech.edu
www.junaio.com
www.wikitude.com
http://www.google.co.uk/mobile/goggles/#text

Why Use AR?

Augmented Reality is a great way of sharing knowledge and data. It can greatly improve the visitors' experience in an exciting way, and can be adapted to all sorts of situations in Welsh tourism.

It's updatable, so once you have an infrastructure or program in place, you'll be able to update this according to new developments. For example, adding visitor offers to the program according to seasons, promotions or anniversaries. You can add this additional information/content as it's discovered or remove it as it becomes no longer valid, without the need to start from scratch.

You can create varying levels of interaction and amounts of information, so that the user can dictate their visitor experience. The following page contains a number of examples of this.

Using AR in your tourism business shows that you are moving with the times. AR is a fast growing and creative technology, working with good developers and having great ideas for the use of AR can create unique tourism experiences that people will want to be a part of.

Examples of this type of app include the Alice in Wonderland White Rabbit App, Portmerion App, Romans in Carmarthenshire App. These are all examples of the digital trails for visitors that contain significant amounts of Augmented Reality content.

Augmented Reality can refresh, renew and reinvigorate. AR helps people to explore, view and interact in different ways within existing spac es.

Time travel! Well not quite… but you can help an AR user to experience a specific time or place, be it historical or futuristic. Re-enacting events, archaeology, architecture or visualising how new items or buildings will look in a space or within a landscape.

How is AR Accessed?

AR used to be the domain of the technologically savvy, but with rapid developments in consumer technology such as smart phones and tablets it's become more affordable, user friendly and accessible. AR doesn't just exist in smart phones and tablets though, it appears in many other forms, people can wear glasses or contact lenses that can create AR or heads up displays on car windscreens can allow you to view information and the road simultaneously. Whilst neither of these are in the mass consumer market at the same level as smart phones and tablets it's only a matter of time before they will be. So why don't you watch out for these developments and be amongst the first tourism businesses in Wales to offer this exciting technology to your visitors?

There are a number of companies who can create AR apps for smart devices and a host of organisations who can help build and supply the media content for them. Many organisations will work with one developer to complete the entire project but you may find that working with an AR app developer and a media company will get you the results that you are looking for. Often there are existing infrastructures in place that can be used off the shelf to save on cost. Companies have developed free software to help create AR experiences, which are openly available on the web. Be aware that some of these free apps rely on the user having access to specific media software such as Adobe Photoshop or Flash.

How Tourism Businesses Are Using AR

The tourism industry has been quick to adopt AR technology and there is a wealth of downloadable tourism apps available. Tourists are increasingly choosing to travel independently and want up-to-date information, yet by the time a traditional travel guide is published the contents can already be obsolete.

Markerless AR technology offers an alternative to printed tourism guides, identifying points of interest, attractions, places to eat, transport links, directions etc. This information can be constantly updated and layered with additional images, ratings and reviews. This allows your visitors to make up to date informed decisions on accommodation, eating, points of interest etc and then upload their own updates and experiences as well for the benefits of other visitors. Markerless AR has also been used to recreate historic events, architecture, characters and landscapes, augmenting a visitors real world view with overlaid 2D or 3D images, sound, simulations or video content of course all this will greatly enhance your visitors' experience!

A marker based AR trigger example would be the Wales Coast Path Logo, which when used with the Wales Coast App and the App is pointed at the logo the logo triggers the Wales Coast dragon 'Derek the Dragon' to appear and fly around the visitor.

The development process of AR in tourism can provide an opportunity to engage with communities and visitors. An example of which is the Denbighshire County Council app a film about which can be found here: http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jNn-ebUsA9g.

This works in a similar way to the London Museum app but includes local people talking about their experiences of historic places. Community engagement in the development of AR can help fuel interest in a project and provide a document for the future.

Here are a number of examples of how AR is currently being used within the tourism sector to encourage and inspire you:

http://www.museumoflondon.org.uk/Resources/app/you-are-here-app/home.html – GPS based Street Museum App that enables you to access archive images and information

http://travellll.com/2011/12/05/scottish-tourism-launches-augmented-reality-mobile-app-for-visitors/ – Visit Scotland app

http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ePhvwxPV9Lc – Example of free TourWrist app which creates 360 degree visual content that can be used in AR applications.

http://www.sharewales.com/index.php/virtual-tours-free-and-easyish-2/ – Share Wales article which shows how you can create your own 360° panoramas using a digital camera and free Microsoft software.

http://www.sharewales.com/index.php/augmented-reality-what-goes-around-2/ – Share Wales article which tracks the development path of AR and viewing devices, with examples.

How Could I Incorporate AR?

There are many ways you can obtain AR for your tourism business – from free software downloads and pre designed infrastructures, to organisations that will develop content and program from scratch. Often, as with many IT

developments, there will be existing infrastructures that can be purchased and developed further to fit your needs and to save starting from scratch. The content is often the specific element, and this can be anything from facts or technical data, through to 3D battle re-enactments or a virtual tour guide. There are also ways of creating striking results using some of these existing infrastructures, by being clever with ideas and content. At the other end of the market, there is no real ceiling as to how far you want to take things. As it's a developing technology, developers will be looking for projects to help fund advancements in the technology.

Considerations/Problems Arising From AR

Not everyone has a smart device. Whilst they are increasingly affordable and popular, they are still a luxury item. This could be addressed by costing in smart devices into your AR project, creating non-AR alternatives, or AR installations that do not require a smart device.

Not everyone wants to use technology. This is unavoidable, but may be addressed in part by keeping user interfaces simple or offering varying levels of AR to allow for both simple and more complex interactions. Crib sheets, training workshops and supported experiences are other options to consider.

If your AR program relies on 3G or 4G data transfer, be sure to check the reception in the area where it's required. Also do bear in mind that data roaming charges can be very expensive for visitors.

Legal issues – as law is reactive not proactive and AR is a fast developing technology legalities are often a grey area. Key considerations are privacy, copyright, liability and negligence.

Administration – if you are using an interface that allows people to upload content such as a tagging system, reviews or ratings, you will need to consider who will take on the administrators' role and what their remit is. Users could for instance upload inappropriate content, use the site for promotion or advertising or embed links to other unapproved content.

Whatever provisions you take, AR will not appeal to everyone. You'll need to view it as part of a larger toolkit to engage with your visitors.