Online Booking Systems Vendor Selection Guide

30 April 2024

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1. Introduction

Any online booking system should allow you to take bookings through your website. But a 'Connected' Online Booking System (COBS) is also capable of processing back office or walk-up bookings, as well as bookings through coach and tour operators, Online Travel Agents (OTAs), or other resellers. In short, a COBS enables you to manage all your inventory in one place while servicing all your booking channels in real time.

A 'connected' system can also transform your business in other ways. It can make your operations more efficient by streamlining or automating functions such as resource management, payments and refunds, or customer communications. And by bringing all your sales and customer data together into one set of reports, it can help you monitor your performance and make informed decisions about your marketing and distribution.

With so many booking systems out there, choosing the one that's right for you can seem daunting. But this is an important decision and it's worth taking some time to look at your needs and the options available — so you can make an informed and well-considered choice.

Some visitor experience businesses choose to build their own booking systems. However, this can be very expensive, technically complex, and time-consuming — and often results in solutions that are less capable than off-the-shelf software. Choosing a proven system from an established vendor allows you to benefit from the experience of specialist software developers and the combined investment of hundreds or even thousands of visitor experience providers.

This document is intended to help you take your first steps towards selecting and activating an online booking system that meets the unique requirements of your business. It introduces some of the essential features that all visitor experience providers are likely to require and provides lists of vendors whose software has been approved for activation as part of the Digital that Delivers programme.

Your choice of system will ultimately be based on the types of products you sell, on how you intend to distribute those products, and on how you run your operations or reporting. You will need to identify the particular features that your business needs and conduct your own research to determine which system might be the best fit for you. Throughout this process, you will be able to draw on support provided both by your Digital that Delivers Project Coordinator and by your assigned Booking Systems & Distribution Lead Consultant.

2. Essential Criteria

To be eligible for support through Digital that Delivers, a system should include certain **essential** features**.** These are features that all visitor experience providers are likely to need in 2024 — such as product information management, scheduling, online bookings and payments, booking confirmation emails, and sales reporting. We have provided a list of these essential features below.

All Online Booking Systems featured on the approved panel, undergo assessment by our Agency partners. They must meet the below essential criteria to be eligible for selection by businesses in the Digital that Delivers programme. Businesses that meet all these essential criteria are designated as COBS.

Note that your particular requirements may be more sophisticated than the minimum features defined in this section — and you may also need your system to support a number of **situational** features such as those outlined in **section 3**.

Each of the 'connected' online booking system vendors listed in **section 4** of this document have provided evidence that their system includes *all ten* of the **essential** features in the table below. In **Section 5**, we have provided a separate list of vendors whose systems meet all the requirements below *except* the requirement to have demonstrable live connections to OTAs and third-party resellers.

Essential Criteria	Description
'Product Information Management' (PIM) and Scheduling	Upload information about your day tour, activity, or admission products (including names, descriptions, and prices) and define schedules and rules that determine which time slots customers can reserve.
Payment gateway (online payments)	Process payment transactions between you as the 'merchant' and your customers. Your platform should be capable of securely capturing and managing customer payment details and processing payments or refunds.
Website Integration	Allow visitors to your website to book your experiences through a web browser. You (or your website developers) should be able to integrate this functionality with your website via methods such as booking 'widgets' or iFrames.
Back office bookings	Enable your back office staff to process phone or email bookings (as well as amendments or cancellations) on behalf of customers through the system back-end.
Reseller Connectivity via API	Establish secure, automated connections to resellers or other third parties via documented Application Programming Interfaces (APIs) — either directly or using integrated 'channel manager' software. *Before a system can be approved as a COBS, the vendor needs to demonstrate this feature by establishing and maintaining at least one connection with an online reseller (e.g. a major OTA).*

Essential Criteria	Description
Customer Details	Stores information about customers who book through your system, such as their names, addresses, or email addresses.
Email Confirmations	Allows you to communicate with customers who book directly with you — e.g. to send automated booking confirmation emails when a customer has completed a booking through your website.
Reporting	Enables you to report the number of bookings, quantity of products sold, and revenue broken down by dimensions such as date, product category (e.g. 'tours'), and booking channel (e.g. 'online').
Google Analytics integration	Allows anonymised data about online bookings (or other online transactions) to be shared with Google Analytics 4 via ecommerce tracking methods.
Help desk support	Includes direct support by 'help desk' staff to help you get set up on the system, onboard your products, and address initial technical issues when activating or integrating the system — e.g. when adding booking widgets to your website.
Accessibility	Meets internationally agreed standards (min. WCAG 2.1 Level A compliance) for website display and development.
Privacy	The system captures, processes, and stores customer information in compliance with the EU General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) and the GDPR Compliance Statement and/or Privacy Policy is published online.

3. Situational Features

Depending on your specific mix of products, booking channels, and operational requirements, you'll likely need your system to offer more than just the essential features listed in the previous section.

If you operate a kayaking experience, for instance, then you may want a system with a built-in resource management module that allows you to limit bookings based on the number of instructors, kayaks, paddles, or life jackets you have available. Or you may want a system that supports your membership programme. Or one with a module that allows visitors to sign digital waivers before participating in an activity.

We refer to these as **situational** features — since they are specific to you and may or may not be required depending on your particular situation. We've collated a list of some of the most-requested features among our Digital that Delivers participants. Please bear in mind that these features may or may not be relevant to you and this is not an exhaustive list.

Given that every COBS should include all the **essential** criteria, these **situational** features will likely play an important role in your decision about which system is right for your business. To help you determine which systems may offer the best fit, we have included a matrix showing which situational features each system offers in the vendor lists in Sections 4 and 5.

Ultimately, you will need to decide which situational features you can or can't operate without — or which ones may help your operations run just a bit more smoothly. Please make sure you understand what each feature is and what it could do for you before flagging it as 'not required' or just 'nice to have'. If in doubt, please ask the booking system vendor for more information, review the **Connected Distribution toolkit**, or contact your Project Coordinator to arrange a meeting with your Booking Systems & Distribution Lead Consultant.

The vendors listed in Sections 4 and 5 of this document have provided evidence as to which of the following **situational** features are supported by their software:

Situational Feature	Description
B2B Portal	Create special accounts for your resellers and provide those resellers with a facility to book online at special rates. This feature can reduce the amount of time you need to spend processing reseller bookings through your back office.
Affiliate Sales & Tracking	Create unique 'referral' or 'promo' codes for local partners (such as hotels) who regularly refer customers to you. Many systems will allow you to embed these codes within links — streamlining the customer journey while letting you see how many bookings each of your partners is generating for you.
Gift Vouchers	Sell vouchers that customers can purchase to give as gifts to friends or families. Gift vouchers can also provide an attractive alternative to refunds in case of cancellations.
Retail (add-ons)	Sell merchandise or other products as add-ons to your experiences. Note that most off-the-shelf connected online booking systems are only designed to handle a small number

Situational Feature	Description
	of add-ons. If your retail or food and beverage offerings are more complex, you should discuss your needs with your Booking Systems & Distribution Lead Consultant.
Customer Relationship Management (CRM)	Manage detailed information about your customers (including their past booking behaviour), define customer segments, analyse customer behaviour, and send personalised or targeted communications. Some systems include built-in modules, while others may be integrated with specialised CRM systems.
Resource Management	For visitor experience providers, a 'resource' can be anything that constrains your availability, from a member of staff to a seat on a bus or a piece of equipment such as a bike. Managing these in your COBS rather than in a separate system allows you to link availability directly to your resource constraints — which can significantly improve your efficiency while allowing you to use your staff and assets more efficiently.
Digital Waivers	If you offer experiences that involve a degree of risk (e.g. adventure activities) then you may need visitors to sign a waiver. Choosing a system that supports digital waivers can reduce check-in times while addressing insurance requirements.
Offline Bookings & Check-In	While it's always preferable to maintain a live internet connection with your booking system, where possible, some systems can process bookings and checking in guests even when you're offline. This can be useful if you're in a remote area with limited internet connectivity.
Memberships	Sell memberships and offer different pricing or other benefits to members when booking online or interacting with you during their visit.
Continuing Support	Support is one of the most important factors that will determine how satisfied you are with your booking system — especially if you're new to online bookings or have complex requirements. Some vendors may point you to their online knowledge base, offer support only during (their) business hours, or charge extra for one-on-one sessions. You will need to check the level of support offered by your vendor and ensure it is adequate to your needs.

4. Approved 'Connected' Online Booking System (COBS) Vendors

The table below lists the vendors whose systems *all meet* (based on the information supplied to Digital that Delivers by the vendor) the **essential** requirements for COBS — including the requirement to have established at least one API connection with an online reseller.

This list constitutes an open vendor panel for the Digital that Delivers programme. This panel of approved vendors has been established to support and ensure the effective delivery of the Booking Systems and Distribution workstream. Participants will be supplied with a list of these vendors (below) and are required to select a vendor from the below list when procuring the services of a Booking System (subject to the below).

Applicants who wish to engage a vendor who is not a member of the panel should ensure that those vendors are admitted to the panel (subject to meeting the qualifying criteria) prior to engaging them to complete work as part of the Digital that Delivers programme. A vendor may apply to join the vendor panel by emailing digital.delivers@failteireland.ie

Important Note: All information provided below is as supplied to us by the relevant vendors. Inclusion on this list does not constitute an endorsement of these systems by Fáilte Ireland and/or the Digital that Delivers programme. You are solely responsible for conducting your own research, following public procurement guidelines, choosing a system that meets your specific requirements, and selecting a vendor. Furthermore, you are solely responsible for discharging the vendor's fees. Grant payments in respect of the vendor's services/fees will be made in accordance with the scheme guidelines and/or the Letter of Offer, based on eligible expenditure actually incurred and paid by you as the grantee.

List of 'Connected' Online Booking System Vendors (13 March 2024)

Vendor	Vendor Website	Vendor Contact	Vendor Contact Email	Situational Features										Pricing Model
				B2B Portal	Affiliates	Gift Vouchers	Retail	CRM	Resource Management	Waivers	Memberships	Offline	Continuing Support	
Adventure Tech	adventuretech.no	Frode Myrseth	frode.myrseth@adventuretech.no	X	X	X		X	X				X	Percentage of Sales
AnyRoad	anyroad.com	Bryan Grobstein	bryan.grobstein@anyroad.com	X	X				X	X		X	X	Fee/Subscription Combo
Beyonk	beyonk.com	Dean Spencer	dean@beyonk.com	X	X	X			X	X	X		X	Fee per ticket/booking
Bokun	bokun.io	Daniel Hasselbach	dhasselbach@tripadvisor.com	X	X	X		X		X	X	X	X	Fee/Subscription Combo
Bookeo	bookeo.com	Giovanna Roncali	giovanna@bookeo.com		X	X			X		X		X	Monthly Subscription
Checkfront	checkfront.com	Sales	Advait.gupte@checkfront.com	X	X	X	X		X	X			X	Multiple Options
DigiTickets	digitickets.co.uk	Luke Fletcher	Luke.fletcher@digitickets.co.uk	X	X	X	X		X		X	X	X	Multiple Options
FareHarbor	fareharbor.com	Adrian Courtney	adrian.courtney@fareharbor.com	X	X	X			X		X	X	X	Fee per ticket/booking
FuseMetrix Group	fusemetrix.com	Callum Knight	cknight@fusemetrix.com	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X		X	Monthly Subscription
Palisis - TourCMS	palisis.com	Eduardo Marti	eduard.marti@palisis.com	X	X	X						X	X	Fee/Subscription Combo
Prioticket	prioticket.com	Ramon Vrieselaar	ramon@prioticket.com	X	X	X	X			X	X	X	X	Fee/Subscription Combo
Rezgo	rezgo.com	Jessica Bence	jessica.bence@rezgo.com	X	X	X		X	X	X			X	Fee per ticket/booking
Roller	roller.software	Lily Young	lily.young@rollerdigital.com		X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	Annual Subscription
Secutix	secutix.com	Richard Hilton	richard.hilton@secutix.com	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	Monthly Subscription
Smeetz	smeetz.com	Nick Fenton	nick.fenton@smeetz.com	X	X	X	X	X		X	X	X	X	Annual Subscription
Spektrix	spektrix.com	Mike Powell	mike.powell@spektrix.com	X	X	X	X	X		X	X		X	Annual Subscription
Tessitura Network	tessituranetwork.com	Rachael Easton	rachael.easton@tessituranetwork.com		X	X		X	X	X	X	X	X	Annual Subscription
Ticket Tailor	tickettailor.com	George Follett	george@tickettailor.com		X	X	X			X	X	X	X	Fee per ticket/booking
Ticketsolve	ticketsolve.com	Paul Fadden	pfadden@ticketsolve.com		X	X	X	X		X	X	X	X	Fee per ticket/booking
Total Ticketing Limited	totalticketing.com	Martin Haigh	martin.haigh@totalticketing.com	X	X	X				X			X	Fee per ticket/booking
TrekkSoft	trekksoft.com	Gabriella Porcu	gabriella.porcu@trekksoft.com	X	X	X	X		X	X			X	Annual Subscription
TripAdmit	tripadmit.com	John Maguire	John.maguire@tripadmit.com						X			X	X	Fee per ticket/booking
Turitop SL	turitop.com	Vincent Walshe	vincent@turitop.com	X	X	X	X		X				X	Monthly Subscription
Universe	universe.com	Nuala Skeffington	nuala.skeffington@ticketmaster.ie	X	X		X			X	X	X	X	Fee per ticket/booking
Vennersys	vennersys.co.uk	Stuart Ward	stuart.ward@vennersys.co.uk	X	X	X		X	X		X	X	X	Fee/Subscription Combo
Ventrata	ventrata.com	Holt Lau	holt@ventrata.com	X	X	X	X		X	X		X	X	Monthly Subscription

Connected Online Booking Systems

5. List of 'Non-Connected' Online Booking Systems

The Digital that Delivers programme recommends that businesses activate a COBS with all of the essential features outlined in section 2, including a proven connection with at least one online reseller.

Choosing a system that is capable of connecting with online resellers via an API or channel manager software is a crucial step to future-proof your business. Online Travel Agencies (OTAs) are the fastest-growing sales channels in the tours, activities, and attractions sector and are increasingly choosing to work only with suppliers whose systems are capable of sharing live availability and processing bookings automatically in real time.

Online connectivity is also an important requirement if you wish to sell your experiences through online marketplaces such as destination websites, or to combine and cross-sell your tours, activities, or attractions with experiences from local partners.

However, if you do not intend to work with online resellers then you may choose to expand your research to include the 'non-connected' online booking system vendors listed in the table below. These vendors have been assessed as meeting all the essential requirements from section 2, *except* the requirement for demonstrable OTA connectivity.

If you select one of these 'non-connected' systems as part of Digital that Delivers programme, your Project Coordinator will ask you to join a meeting with your Booking Systems & Distribution Lead Consultant to confirm that you understand how your choice of a system without proven connectivity may limit your ability to work with online resellers or marketplaces.

List of 'Non-Connected' Online Booking System Vendors (13 March 2024)

Vendor	Vendor Website	Vendor Contact	Vendor Contact Email	Situational Features										Pricing Model
				B2B Portal	Affiliates	Gift Vouchers	Retail	CRM	Resource Management	Waivers	Memberships	Offline	Continuing Support	
Access Group			Data not submitted											
Bike.rent Manager	bikerentalmanager.com	Jordan Edwards	jordan@bikerentalmanager.com	X	X		X	X	X	X			X	Annual Subscription
Bloowatch	https://www.bloowatch.com	Olivier Duperray	oduperray@bloowatch.com		X		X	X	X			X	X	Annual Subscription
ClearBookings	clearbookings.com	Ciarán Flynn	ciaran@clearbookings.com	X	X	X	X	X		X	X	X	X	Fee per ticket/booking
eola Ltd	eola.co/business	Owen Davies	owen@eola.co		X	X			X	X	X	X	X	Other (please specify)
Future Ticketing			Data not submitted											
Great Visitor Experiences	https://business.greatvisitorexperiences.com/	Ivan Tuohy	ivan@greatve.com		X		X	X		X		X	X	Fee per ticket/booking
Retail Integration Ltd	retail-int.com	Paul Clarke	p.clarke@retail-int.com	X	X	X		X		X	X	X	X	Project Dependant
VisiSoft	visisoft.co.uk	Lee Drew	lee@jugosystems.co.uk			X	X	X			X	X	X	Monthly Subscription
WeTravel	https://www.wetravel.com/	Chris Richards	chris.richards@wetravel.com										X	Other

Connected Online Booking Systems

6. Selecting the Right System for your Business

It's easy to get swept away by what technology can do. But you want to pay for solutions to the real problems you face every day — not for features you don't need and never use. It is important that you involve all aspects of your business in the selection process to make sure it fits the purpose of all functions.

You might want to break down your requirements and possible solutions as follows:

Area	Description	Solution
Products	List your experiences (e.g. tours, activities, admission, events), along with any other products such as merchandise, food and drink, donations, or accommodation. Which do you want to sell online? Do you want to combine them?	You will need a system that allows people to book (i.e. reserve and pay for) the types of experiences you offer. If you sell other types of products — and especially if you want to sell them in a single 'basket' with experiences — then this may further narrow the field. Of course, you may decide to use separate systems for other product types.
Consumers	Who buys your experiences? Are you targeting families, school groups, domestic visitors, foreign independent travellers, or 'enthusiasts'? How do you think they behave — e.g. are they likely to book online, using mobile devices, at short notice?	Consider which features are essential to meet people's basic needs and which ones could improve their experience — e.g. Apple / Google Pay, mTickets, partial payment, or easy rescheduling.
Operations	What problems do you face in running your experiences and managing resources such as time, staff, or equipment? Do you sometimes struggle to manage capacity? Where does your time go?	Online booking systems can't automate every task, but they might help you streamline some of your most common or time-consuming processes. For instance, if you run kayak activities, have limited seats on a bus, or have multiple guides on staff, consider using a system that includes a resource management module.
Distribution	What problems do you face in processing and keeping track of bookings or other transactions — whether through your direct channels or through tour operators, OTAs, or hotel partners? Do you struggle to manage schedules and pricing across different systems or distributors?	You want a system that can power all your channels, not just your website. Do you take bookings via your back-office or in-person? Could promo codes, a trade portal, or a channel manager make it easier to service and report third party bookings?
CRM - Customer Relationship Management	How do you want to engage with your customers and manage information about them?	Do you need a solution that can send real-time emails or texts to customers based on their booking behaviour? Or that can dispatch email campaigns to specific customer segments?

Area	Description	Solution
Finances	How do you process payments or refunds from customers and manage payments to your staff or suppliers? Do you manage your own finances, or do you leave this for a bookkeeper?	Could a system that is capable of generating receipts, tracking payments and refunds, or paying contractors reduce your workload?
Legal	You need to ensure that your products and services (including your website and booking system) are accessible. But what other legal requirements do you need to address — e.g. do you require visitors to sign a waiver before taking part in a tour or activity?	While all online booking systems should be accessible, it's up to you to ensure that they are — and to ensure that you manage your product information and integrations to support access. Could options such as digital waivers reduce your workload?
Reporting	How do you need to report on sales — e.g. by category, channel, and/or customer segment? Do you want to track users through your website? Do you want to simplify your reporting process?	Online booking systems vary greatly in terms of reporting capabilities — ask vendors to take you through the process and provide sample reports / a demo of their reporting dashboard. Fortunately, most systems now support Google Analytics ecommerce tracking.
Technology	What systems do you already have in place to manage your website (e.g. WordPress), Google Analytics, customer data, finances, ePOS, email campaigns, or access control? Are you willing to change those systems, or are they locked in?	Do you want your online booking system to integrate with or to replace other systems? While the former can increase cost and complexity, some systems may integrate out-of-the-box or via add-ons.

Once you understand your requirements, here are the next steps you should follow:

1. **Do your own research** - review the list of vendors and see which ones look right for your business.

2. **Create a shortlist -** Select 2 or 3 (maximum 5) vendors that fit your requirements.

3. **Send your shortlist to your Lead Consultant -** they will review and make sure the selections meet your Booking System requirements.

4. **Demos** - Schedule live demonstrations with your shortlisted vendors to learn more about the system capabilities and offerings. This will assist in your decision making. Ensure you have representatives at all levels of your business (especially operations) on these demonstrations.

5. **Make a decision** - You may wish to score each vendor against your requirements, or you may find that one vendor stands out above the rest. While making your selection, use feedback from all representatives in your team to come to a decision.

6. **Inform your Project Coordinator -** Once you have made your decision, let your project coordinator know who you have selected. They will work with you on next steps, including on-boarding and go-live.

Connected Online Booking Systems