



Fáilte Ireland

National Tourism Development Authority

GUIDE TO BOOKING ENGINES

Overview of booking engines and details on how to choose the best booking engine for your business

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Introduction

This guide gives details of how to get the best use out of booking engines for your business. There are many booking engines to choose from and it can get quite confusing, this guide will help you select the most appropriate for your business.

Skill Level

Basic

All the topics in this guide are suitable for anyone who has basic PC knowledge.

Introduction to Booking Engines

Your clients are increasingly booking their holidays online with over 62% of all international travel reservations made using the internet. With the growth of social media this is destined to increase further as people share more details of their holidays and share more recommendations. This will further encourage more bookings online.

To include a link to a booking form or an e-mail contact on your web page is not enough to encourage potential customers to book with you. Ideally you need a facility within your website that allows them to book instantly. When potential customers fill out a booking form that doesn't stop them going off and looking for better deals.

A booking engine featuring instant confirmation is highly recommended if you really want to make your website a true "revenue gateway". Why? Simply because guests will most likely book rooms directly with a hotel website, as opposed to trusting a third-party website. The guest feels more secure in making a direct booking at a hotel website.

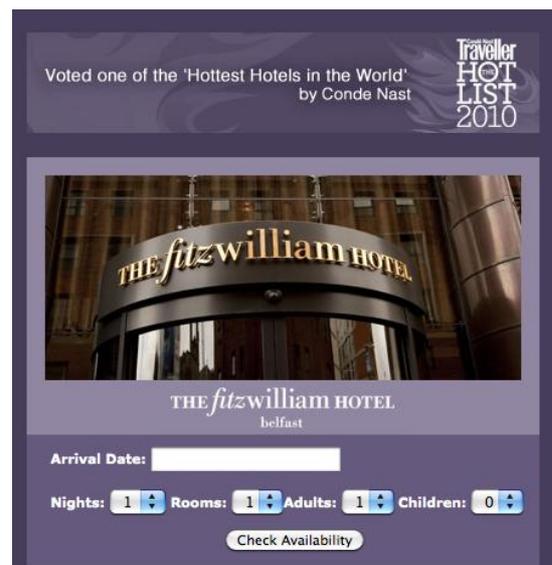


What is a booking engine?

A booking engine is a piece of software that enables you to accept bookings online either through your website or through a third party site. The following shows a booking engine within the Fitzwilliam hotel website. This is displayed on their front page in a prominent position.

Internet users are very impatient and on average only spent around 6 seconds on a web page so it's important that the ability to book is clearly visible. This should have a 'call to action' which is something that entices internet users to take the next step.

In this case the call to action is 'Check Availability'. When this is pressed then the internet user can proceed to book.

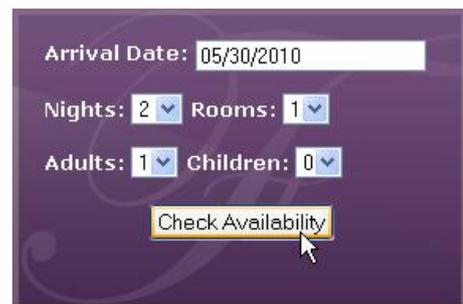


What do booking engines offer?

- They offer Secure Online Payment Facilities with an Automatic E Mail or SMS Confirmation dispatched directly to customers after booking.
- Customers must agree Terms and Conditions before a booking can be completed.
- Backend administration and management facility, where you can login directly, to add more available rooms, change rates, and so on.
- Discounts can be added with special promotions e.g. special offers for holidays or group bookings, a minimum stay can be applied to any or all days.
- 'Sold Out' Alerts can be automatically e-mailed to you when allocation reaches zero.
- Reports that show the details of all people who have booked online as well as full tracking and account management reporting.
- Manage special rates for different occasions or events (e.g. weddings, conferences)
- Handles Weekend/Weekday Rates and Corporate rates
- Provides promotional discounts at specific times or the year
- Retains customer and members details for future correspondence

What is the typical booking process?

If it's on a travel website such as Expedia, potential customers specify their requirements such as destination, arrival date, departure date and type, whereas on a accommodation providers website they might just specify arrival date, number of nights they plan on staying and the number of guests.



Once this information is received, the Booking Engine will offer a list of available rooms/ activities/packages/tours which the customer can then choose from.

Room Qty		Per Person Sharing (not en suite)	Adults	Children	breakfast	per person sharing per night from Sun May 2
1	Double Room Not En Suite	minimum 2 persons	2		Yes	€35.00
	Twin Room Not En Suite				Yes	€35.00

Cost of Stay €70.00 **BOOK**

The customer can then decide which option to select (if any) and proceed to book. They are then asked to enter their credit card details. At this point the booking is made and both the customer and the accommodation provider are sent a notification about the booking.

TIP: *It is recommended that you should not allocate all your products/services online and keep some available for customers who may call or drop into your business, this way you will reduce the chance of double booking.*

How do booking engines charge for their services?

Most booking engines are commission based, which means they charge you a percentage fee for each booking they process on your behalf. This can be anywhere between 1% to 30% depending on the booking engine. How this fee is collected differs between providers. In some cases they will deduct this percentage from the deposit that the customer pays at the time of booking, whereas other providers that do not take a deposit at the time of booking will simply invoice you on a monthly basis.

Most providers also charge the customer a booking fee to cover the credit card charges associated with processing the payment. Again this can be a percentage of the total cost but in most cases it's a flat fee per booking. This fee is generally paid by the customer directly to the booking engine provider at the time of booking.

On top of this they may also charge a onetime setup or integration fee or an annual fee for the service.

Here is an example of a typical transaction:

- Room cost is €150.00. The booking engine will generally ask the customer to pay a deposit of 10% to confirm the booking.
- The deposit charge is therefore €15 to the customer
- The booking engine will deduct their commission (%) from this deposit charge
- The booking engine will then refund the deposit fee less the percentage deduction.

Quite often the booking engine provider will set the deposit charge to be the same as the commission so that no money needs to be exchanged between the accommodation owner and the booking engine provider, saving on paperwork.

How do I add a booking engine to my website?

When you want to add the booking engine to a site you generally have two options:

- Option A – The company with the booking engine will provide you with a piece of code that you give to your web designer. They will add this code to your website and the booking engine will appear. The big disadvantage to this is that normally you do not have control over the look and feel of the booking engine so it may not look perfect on your website.
- Option B – The company with the booking engine will do the integration work with your website and/or design your website. Using this method there is normally more flexibility regarding the look and feel of the widget. The disadvantage of them designing your website with the booking engine built in is that you may have to change the website if you decide to use another booking engine.

Tips when Adding the Booking Engine to Your Website

Make your booking engine accessible on your website – Make sure your booking engine is visible on every page of your website. A clearly visible booking engine on every page of your website will increase your chances of receiving a booking at your property.

Be bookable at every step – Once the potential customer is ready to book, it is crucial that they find the 'book a room' option with ease to complete the process, otherwise they could easily venture to another site which will cost you.

Is it better to have the booking engine on your site?

Most booking engine providers normally have the facility for your customers to book through their travel website (e.g. Expedia.com, Booking.com, and so on) but you can also place the booking engine on your own website to allow bookings to be taken directly through your website.

It's important to have this facility on both sites as some people will search for a holiday and find the booking engine's site and others will find your website.

One of the key differences between customers booking through the providers website or through your own website is the commission that you will be charged. The commission for booking through the providers website (e.g. booking.com, GoIreland.com, Expedia.com) is significantly higher than the commission you will be charged when customers book through the booking engine on your property's website. So for this reason alone it is definitely advisable to provide a booking facility on your own website.

Choosing a Booking Engine

As well as the costs you should also consider the functionality available with the booking engine and how popular a booking engine is. If you are considering using a booking engine you will need to consider the facilities available to the person booking and what's available to you. The following outlines what would typically be required:

- Add or remove rooms for booking
- Group rooms where there are a large number
- Set up multiple administrators
- Add a selection of pictures to the rooms and ideally a video
- Set up e-mail for enquiries
- Print report of bookings
- Export the bookings to excel
- Users:
 - Book rooms online
 - How much will it cost
 - Optimising images.

Questions to Ask

Here are some questions to ask before you decide on what Booking Engine suits your business needs:

- Does your product offer booking engine for my sector?
- Do you charge a setup fee?
- Do you charge an annual fee or any other fees?
- What are your rates of commission (if any)?
- Do I need to host my website with you?
- Do you insert the booking system code into my website, or do you send code to me to deal with? Is there a charge for this?

- If I also choose your web design services and am at any stage dissatisfied with your booking engine service can I change to another booking engine provider?
- Can the system accept secure payment via major credit cards?
- Can the system accept payment via PayPal/Worldpay etc.?
- What other features make your product unique in the market?
- What support do you offer? Is it by phone / email /Livechat
- What are you operating hours for support?
- How long is the contract?
- What will the booking engine do to assist you to gain bookings?
- Does the booking engine offer any additional services?

To help you get started the section that follows provides some answers to these questions for the more popular booking engines.

Most Popular Booking Engines

As this information is constantly changing we have put together a booking engine comparator which is available on www.facebook.com/webcheck. If you go to this page you will see a tab which will allow you to view a full comparison of the main booking engine providers that gave us permission to include in this comparator. In total there are 10 booking engine providers.

Note: *Although this comparator is updated regularly we cannot guarantee the accuracy because of ongoing changes with each of the booking engines. So please use this as a guide but also check directly with the booking engine providers.*



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