



GET BREXIT READY

GENERATING LEADS

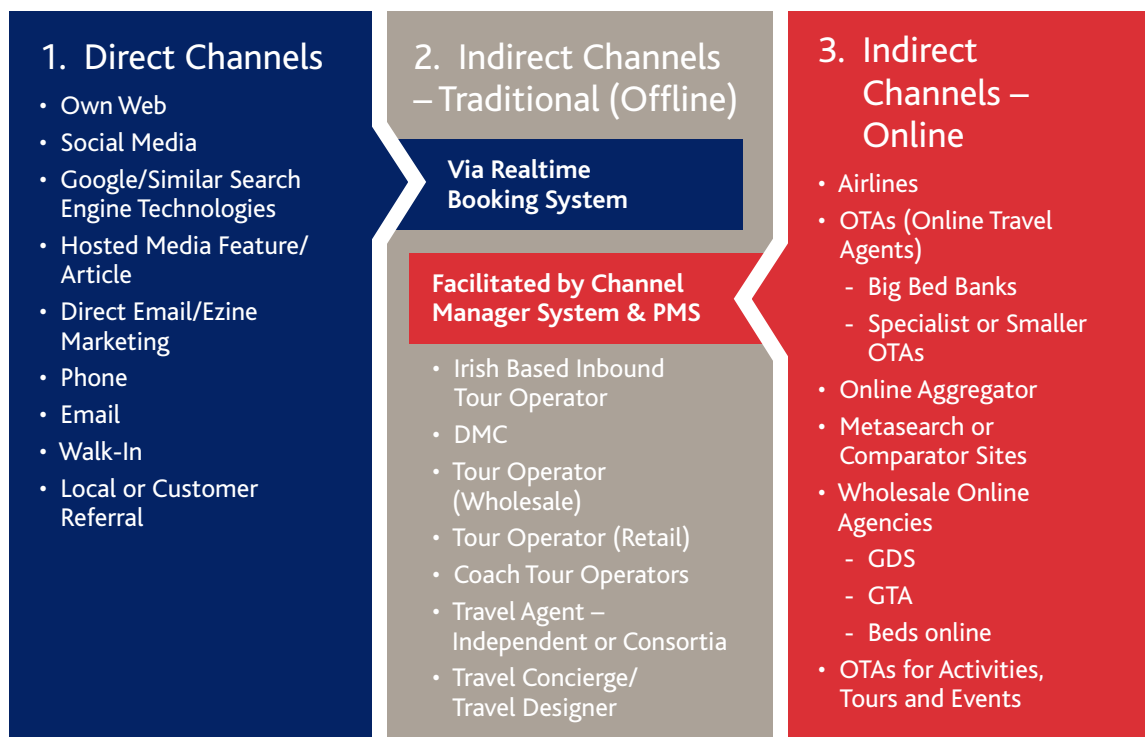


Fáilte Ireland
National Tourism Development Authority

Lead generation is the process of identifying customer or buyer prospects who may be interested in buying your tourism product, service or experience. This work of exploring possible sources for new business or what we term 'business prospects' is an ongoing demand on any business. This must be done alongside the continuous evaluation of the current business levels and sources of business you currently have, to ensure they are nurtured, maintained and if they continue to be a match for your business.

This resource focuses on the key channels to investigate to help you to identify possible business prospects and is structured as follows:

1. Direct Channels
2. Indirect Channels – Traditional (Offline)
3. Indirect Channels – Online



1. Direct Channels (Online and Offline)

Online Direct Bookings Through Your Brand Website

Bookings received directly through your own online booking facility are usually achieved at a lower cost than the fees and commissions charged to 3rd party online booking channels such as OTAs. These customer bookings serve as valuable leads for future business. It is important you capture important data about them that allows you develop an ongoing relationship targeting them as repeat customer prospects, presenting the right fit offers at the right time to stimulate repeat business or to incentivise referrals to family and friends to drive new customers to you.

Leisure Guests as Potential Corporate Leads and Vice-versa

Your customer's responses help determine how best to process that lead for further business. For example, if the customer ticks yes for business, that lead should be passed to the sales person responsible for converting corporate repeat business.

In many tourism businesses, reservation personnel and sales and marketing personnel sit side by side in the same office. Yet, referral leads are seldom exchanged. However, a corporate customer may also be a future leisure prospect so the customer data could be placed in both databases. The corporate customer at check-in could be invited by reception staff to leave their business card or you may have a corporate customer competition for a leisure trip reward.

With a simple competition, you could further profile them for the type of leisure break that would most appeal/suit their personal circumstances or interest. Using a simple application form to capture personal information such as address and inviting them to choose which type of leisure break would most appeal to them (e.g. Couples romance break, Family relaxing getaway, Foodie themed weekend, Active break etc.). This can provide you with greater insight as to their profile and therefore the offers or thematic events, festivals or experience packages that would best stimulate them to book, if they received a compelling invitation and priced offers. Ideally that is time bound, so it stimulates a specific booking window to drive an action to book now! Equally, if you run an activity centre/immersive experience you may find leisure visitors have corporate professional corporate roles and therefore it may be worth inviting leisure guests to leave corporate business cards for a competition reward, thus allowing you follow up their contacts with possible corporate event client opportunities (subject to the customer opting in to this in a competition form).



Phone and Email Enquiries and Bookings

Similar to online bookings, reservations received by phone and email come from a variety of sources, including:

- ➔ Generic online search – generic google search terms
- ➔ Brand search online (specific search for your business name – always consider having your contact telephone and email detailed in your metatag data generated in search results, for ease of those with mobiles)
- ➔ Geographical online search – Google Maps (is your business listed on google maps?)
- ➔ Repeat customers – what system do you have for recognising and rewarding past customers for booking with you directly instead of an OTA or other?
- ➔ Word of mouth referral or social review websites/recommendations
- ➔ Sales, marketing and advertising activity – online or offline
- ➔ Referral from third party sites
- ➔ Response to media feature/article
- ➔ Direct from your website: structured enquiry form allowing you capture personal, telephone and email details

In handling telephone or email enquiries the tone of reply/response is crucial in turning enquiries into confirmed bookings. Customers view your frontline staff as a reflection of your overall business personality/ethos. Friendly, welcoming, professional and timely responses which thank the customer for their enquiry, makes a conversion more likely.

Staff handling these enquiries are best placed to garner sufficient background information. Taking the time to discover the customer needs and motivations can improve conversion and sales revenues. Understanding the customers background, motivation to travel, numbers in the party, country of origin and the nature of their trip is really important. For example, for an Anniversary celebration, front line staff may upsell a celebration package such as to a Junior Suite with chocolates, flowers or bubbly in the room on arrival. Likewise, if part of a two week holiday trip to Ireland, exploring what the customer hopes/plans to do when in Ireland, may well result in your front line staff managing to sell a two night stay. If staff can demonstrate your location is an ideal base for a range of experiences, thus giving them the comfort (by selling the benefit!) of not having to pack up every day of the trip and move accommodation, they may even book a dinner package too! Special celebration information is also important to have on file for booking arrival so they can receive personalised congratulations and welcome from the General Manager on behalf of the hotel team. The positive response of customers to such small thoughtful touches is often the source of personal referrals to family and friends generating new business prospects.

If the telephone or email enquiry comes in at a time when the relevant team is not available to respond (e.g. Corporate Meeting enquiry coming in at weekend) a structured system for a prompt and detailed handover to ensure timely response on the next working day is vital. Keeping the customer informed as to when they can expect this response is also vital. Likewise if there is a system for generating a holding email, thanking them for their enquiry and offering additional factsheet or conference facilities and delegate rate options, which they can research while awaiting the specific team members response, is also effective to hold the interest of the enquiry until the more detailed response can be presented by the relevant team member.



Walk-In Customers

Reception teams are charged with managing unexpected, walk-in customers. Whether you can take their booking or not, a professional and friendly response is always a must to create a positive impression. Reception staff and frontline ticketing staff in attractions and experiences are in prime positions to convert prospects to actual business. Gathering and recording important customer enquiry data and handing this to whomever is responsible to drive new business ensuring it is added into the business property management or booking system is key. As noted previously, there are a variety of creative ways to incentivise customers to share their personal details with you.

In the event you have a customer walk in which you cannot service it can be hugely helpful to offer them an alternative recommendation, thank them for considering you and invite them to leave their details with you, so you can consider them for future offers and customer rewards. Some businesses may even have a system of offering a customer an incentive to book at another time, if they were unable to service their booking on this occasion. Deals with discount vouchers that can be emailed or posted on to a prospective customer to incentivise them to attempt to book again with you directly or refer a friend, by leaving their personal details with you, is a great way to capture an enquiry you were not able to convert as a future prospect, rather than lose this prospect lead altogether.

2. Indirect Channels – Traditional

Tour Operators/Travel Agents/Coach Operators/ Group Bookers

International tour operators, coach operators, group travel bookers and travel agents are important B2B business lead prospects. Different tour operators specialise in different markets.

Tour operators can generate business in a number of ways including:

- ➔ Ad-hoc group or special interest group bookings in response to specific enquiries (may or may not be event related, could be a social group with similar hobbies, sport, social or cultural)
- ➔ As a tour series – with a number of group booking dates of the course of a year/season
- ➔ Individual FIT bookings, not connected with a group, but who may have services of transport and or guide as part of their trip

How to Source, Identify and Qualify B2B Traditional Tour Operators and Travel agents Leads/Prospects

- ➔ **In-Ireland Sales Events** These are usually in the form of workshops hosted by Fáilte Ireland such as Meitheal – Ireland’s largest global travel trade workshop with more than 300 international tour operators attending. Others include the likes of the British Coach Tour Operators Workshop. Some events may offer the opportunity for a Networking Event where you meet operators and agents in a more informal soft selling situation. The schedule and summary details of In-Ireland Events are uploaded and continually added to throughout the year as more event opportunities are confirmed in the calendar on the Fáilte Ireland Trade Events Portal. Application to these events is by way of *registering your business on the Fáilte Ireland Trade Events portal* so you will receive alerts of In-Ireland events See <https://tradeportal.failteireland.ie/> for more information or contact your Fáilte Ireland representative if you need further advice about this on which events would best suit you.
- ➔ **In-Market Trade Events:** such as World Travel Market, ITB Berlin, GTM USA or Tourism Ireland led Sales Missions. Application to these events is by way of registering your business on the Fáilte Ireland Trade Events portal so you will receive alerts of In-Ireland events hosted by Fáilte Ireland and In-Market events engagement led by Tourism Ireland See <https://tradeportal.failteireland.ie/> for more information or contact your Fáilte Ireland representative if you need further advice about this or which events would best suit you.

TOP TIP

Tour Operator Lead Generation – Where to Start

- 1 Work out the markets that matter to you and best fit your business offering(s)
- 2 Identify the tour operators that are key to those markets
- 3 Investigate the business type(s) and volume that each operator brings and how this fits to your business requirements



- ➔ **ITOA (Incoming Tour Operators Association of Ireland)** The ITOA represents a large volume of overseas business coming into Ireland on behalf of in-market operators. ITOA members are a good source of B2B traditional offline business for those who may not have the resources or be of sufficient scale to go directly into market themselves. The ITOA website offers detailed profiles of their tour operator members when you click on each individual listing in the members' directory. See ITOA members at www.itoa-ireland.com/members-list/. This allows you conduct the all-important research of each business profile to see if they focus on the market(s) and business types that your offering could be a match for. The ITOA holds an annual workshop in March each year, where you can promote your experience or offering. For more information on how to register to attend this event, see www.itoa-ireland.com/workshops/ This allows Irish Industry for a reasonable registration fee come to meet the operators, introduce your product offering to them and explore ways in which you may be able to work together to have your product or experience profiled with the business itineraries they service.
- ➔ **Employing a leads researcher or business representation company in the market:** This tends to be more relevant for businesses who are already experienced in a market or want to grow their customer base from a specific market and have the budget to do this. Occasionally groups of business come together to help share the cost of investment. Various business representation companies operate in key markets that have a large portfolio of operators and agencies that they may be able to introduce you to or facilitate you to meet. This can be a costly exercise but is quite popular among more luxury providers who are entering a certain market for the first time or who have a new accommodation property they want to get early awareness of and drive sales conversions from a specific international market.
- ➔ **Discussion with your Fáilte Ireland local contact:** Getting a better understanding of the market or B2B channels your business wants to develop is an important first conversation with your local Fáilte Ireland contact. This can help introduce you to other expertise and sources of advice in Fáilte Ireland to guide you as to what strategy to take to identify and develop tour operator leads based on your budget, resources and product. A starting point is to firstly consider establishing face-to-face meetings with In-Ireland operators. Some of these are ITOA members and can be reached through their website. However, not all tour operators for Ireland are ITOA members, so a complimentary step to this is to engage with Fáilte Ireland's Business Development Unit through your local Fáilte Ireland contact to gain insights into other operators in Ireland.

Equally Fáilte Ireland's Enterprise Development Unit offers a range of supports – from webinars, online tools, seminars and training workshops to prepare and refine your B2B offer which is an important element of preparing to go to market. Applications for In-Ireland events can open from 6-7 months ahead of the event (3-4 months for other events), so it is important to register well in advance at www.tradeportal.failteireland.ie and to watch out for email alerts when events open to accept expressions of interest to attend. Respond promptly on the day the alert issues, as demand for events always exceeds availability in terms of places. It is also important to ensure you have discussed wanting to attend these events with local Fáilte Ireland representatives so they can ensure you are suitably prepared and your sales pitch is best placed to win you business. You can also discuss with them about putting your business forward with the Fáilte Ireland Trade Events and Business Development team to be considered to participate in a buyers Fam trip. For further details on engaging in Fam trips, see separate resource document on *Using Site Visits and Fam Trips to Convert Sales*.



- ➔ **Discussion with Tourism Ireland market office:** The market teams in Tourism Ireland can offer you advice on ways you can reach out to In-Market buyers, be that through In-Market events, In-Ireland events or dedicated sales missions. See www.tourismireland.com/Whos-Who for further details of who to contact in each market office.
- ➔ **Discussions with other local industry suppliers:** It's always easier to develop a business relationship with tour and coach operators and travel agents who are already programming itineraries in your geographical area. If you are an experience provider, activity or attraction, then maybe it is worth approaching your local accommodation partners to ask them in confidence who are the tour operators that they are working with, so you can consider reaching out to them through appropriate structured events such as Meitheal, ITOA or relevant In-Market events to introduce your business offering to them.

Researching Tour/Coach Operator or Travel Agent Lead Prospects – Before you Meet

Before and during any initial meeting or first approach with a market-based tour operator or travel agent, it is really important to have carried out advance research about the operator you are meeting. Ways to do this include:

- ➔ Do a Google search for new articles and company information
- ➔ Review their website and their social media channels about where and what they sell and the customer types they cater for
- ➔ Analyse their LinkedIn Business Profile or search their employees LinkedIn profiles
- ➔ Ask Fáilte Ireland or Tourism Ireland if they have a business profile on them (assuming they have engaged with Ireland at In-Ireland or In-Market events).

Preparation is key and needs adequate time set aside to do it before you meet in order to understand:

- How they contract business:** Many overseas travel agents and tour operators book through In-Market operators and many In-Market operators' book through an Irish tour operator or DMC. In this case your route to market is through these intermediaries, not directly with the In-Market operator. You should still develop an amicable relationship with the international In-Market tour operator and arrange to meet them, to ensure they are educated and excited by your product or experience offering enough to consider your offering in a new itinerary. However, if you have not engaged with their contracting partner and they don't know about you, you are unlikely to get business from the In-Market operator or agent. When meeting international tour operators who use this approach of buying through another intermediary, always ask who their tour operator partner is.
- If they programme Ireland for groups and/or FIT:** Understand the balance of their business mix between both with regard to group business, is it on an ad-hoc enquiry basis only or do they operate group scheduled departures with specific dates? This will help to determine if there is an advantageous partner to seek to develop business with and you know how to present your offering & supporting B2B fact sheet and rate card – be it for group or FIT or separately for both.

TOP TIPS

Winning Tour Operator Business

Do your homework!
Demonstrate you want to understand and meet their needs!

You need to demonstrate how your product or service provides them with a solution they need.

Tour operators' feedback to Fáilte Ireland is that they really value and are most trusting of a relationship with a supplier that begins with this approach. Do not attempt to deliver an over-rehearsed 'generic' (one size fits all) sales pitch that fails to appreciate the Unique Selling Point (USP) of the tour operator's business and what is most important to them and their clients.

Research the operator's business online, their destination portfolio, customer profiles and itinerary types, typical experiences, itinerary routes and trip price points before you determine you should meet them. Consider what questions you need to ask them to better understand their needs and how you need to prioritise in your sales pitch. If you follow this approach and have a context for what they may ask and why, you will be more prepared and come across as more professional in dealing with likely operator questions.



- c) **Where they currently programme in Ireland:** Know their entry and exit airports or ports. This can often be determined from their website and or social media channels. It is important in categorising or ranking leads in terms of fit for your business to determine if they currently offer holidays in your geographical area. For example, if the operator does not programme any offerings in the North East of Ireland and that is where your business is based, it is going to be more challenging to convince them to add something completely new to their itineraries.
- d) **Their typical client profile and the types of programme experiences they feature:** For example, if the operator largely runs coach tours for clients aged 70+ and you offer high adrenalin or very active adventure, then it may be unlikely that they are a possible source of business (unless they deal with specialist activity group travel) or a realistic lead/prospect for development.

If you cannot access some of this data before you meet you can always check with an In-Ireland Tour Operator or industry member who may know of them. Equally, you can ask them for clarification on the above aspects of their business model when you meet, but you should be able to show you have done your homework, to demonstrate your interest in building a valuable working relationship with them. If they contract through Inbound Irish Operators, it is not appropriate to get into detailed discussion on B2B rates as this is a conversation you need to have with their contracting partner. Your time with the in-market operator should be optimised to excite them about your product, listen and ask questions to ensure you understand their business priorities and demonstrate you have experience in dealing with their profile of customers.

If the International In-Market Tour Operator, Agent or group buyer contracts directly with Irish suppliers, it will be appropriate for you to meet them and discuss details of your offering and rates. In this case, you contract directly with the International Tour Operator and they provide all sales directly. Very large, English speaking (e.g. Great Britain and United States) International Tour Operators with dedicated Ireland programmes are more likely to contract directly with Ireland.

Indirect Traditional Offline Channels Require a Long-term Investment in Building and Nurturing Relationships

Many businesses who meet tour operators and travel agents at events, despite 1-2 follow up communications usually asking for business, find that business does not follow soon after. Don't get despondent and drop continued communication with a lead. This is a common but costly mistake to make in lead development to grow business. Remember people buy from people, so relationship building is key in lead development, and this can take time, so be prepared to work on this for the long term.

As a rule of thumb we advise that given the fact that traditional offline business is largely based on building relationships and developing trust, you may find it takes 2-3 years of meeting an operator at In-Ireland or In-Market events before they feel they know you well enough to trust you to do business with them. It is important that in between these meetings you keep them informed of relevant news that will increase their knowledge

TOP TIP

When Researching the Tour Operator Know How they Contract Business

You must clarify if an international tour operator contracts:

Via a local Irish tour operator or directly with Irish suppliers

This enables you to choose the correct option for lead generation and will also inform your pricing and contracting decisions.



2. INDIRECT CHANNELS – TRADITIONAL [CONTINUED]

of your destination and your business as it is relevant to their customers' needs. A regular or short seasonal product newsletter or eblast, designed specifically for B2B and talking to buyers can be an effective way to do this.

B2B focused Buyer Newsletters (2-3 per year) is a great way to keep contacts warm and develop them as future hot leads for business conversion. This should help to educate the buyer about your area, what's available for guests (not just in your business) and also help buyers to get to know the team at your property who will be looking after their clients. This can be in online or in print.

Some businesses prefer print as it has greater potential to be seen and read and used as a desk resource with buyers and their sales team. Having different news features presented by different key staff players possibly with a head shot image of them, is also a valuable way for the buyers to get to know not only your business but the all-important people/team behind the business.

Topics for a 'Buyer focused' News Update might include:

- ➔ **New/changes in air access routes** or airlines/schedule or connecting service at the main international airports servicing your area (relevant to a market you are targeting with your newsletter)
- ➔ **New road infrastructure or new transport links or public transport services** most relevant for buyers who sell B2B or self-guided packages
- ➔ **New experiences in your area** or on your resort/business. Attractions, activities, public amenity
- ➔ **A news feature on a festival or event** in your area that has programme elements or ticketed events popular for tourists
- ➔ **Food news** – New dining/café operators in the area, new food trails or immersive foodie experiences like a food foraging or cookery school experience that offer short 1-2 hour offerings, new relationships with local producers in your area or whom you are working with, or a new seasonal menu with a feature from your chef
- ➔ **Seasonal entertainment programme/news** at your property or in the locality
- ➔ **New facilities in your property**, such as room refurbishments, upgrades, buyer booking offers/benefits
- ➔ **Social, sustainability or corporate responsibility news**, possibly an investment in a sustainability feature in the property or the area, or a local area development project/charity project your business or staff team are involved with. This is often best presented by the relevant section head leading this initiative, as it helps buyers to get to know the team behind the business. Also corporate social responsibility does give buyers insights about your corporate values which help them get to know and trust you.



Using LinkedIn for Research Purposes

While many of us are familiar with LinkedIn and actively use it to develop our professional profile for future business and career opportunities, or to support our staff recruitment endeavours, this channel offers huge opportunities to research and explore future business prospects, be they corporate or leisure. For example, there are several online business groups you can join on LinkedIn to share insights, expertise and engage in discussion groups, that allows you connect with targeted professionals in the travel industry from tour operators to travel agents, corporate meeting and event planners. The platform also offers sales navigator programmes and tools (some free and others paid) which allow you to specifically target and reach out to business prospects via this channel.

Social, Community Business Sites, Professional Groups and Associations

Other online communities, professional travel and C2C peer discussion forums and travel professional communities, can be a great source of buyer and consumer leads. Channels such as Facebook, Travel Massive, Tript as well as International Associations such as ATTA (Adventure Travel Trade Association), BETA (British Education Travel Association), WYSETC (World Youth Student Educations Travel Convention) and others like University Alumni Associations help to access leads. While some have strict criteria to join, and some even require paid membership, others are free to join and can be a great source of lead generation prospects, many of which have delivered strong business to Ireland.

Tourism Ireland's community blog <https://community.ireland.com/> is another additional resource and tool that can be an effective source of business leads. It offers a 24/7 community forum resource for buyers, travel consumers and Irish industry with a knowledge of Ireland to share holiday experiences through this live community blog. By way of information share it offers prompt advice and provides recommendations to buyers and consumers queries when they are considering or planning travel to Ireland.

The key is of course to capture these contacts and develop ongoing relationships and communications with such leads to drive business conversion.

In-Ireland or In-Market Sales Events or Sales Missions

In-Ireland events hosted by Fáilte Ireland or access to participate as a supplier on an Ireland stand/presence at In-Market events (such as ITB, WTM and GTM) provides excellent opportunities to meet a large number of buyer-led prospects in a single space over a defined period of time. See listings of these events and how to register at <https://tradeportal.failteireland.ie/upcoming-events/>

Despite the fact that these events offer limited time to meet and explore business potential with buyers, they are a great source of large numbers of new leads/prospects with business potential. How you engage with them at events, and in detailed and continued follow up conversations on and offline to grow the relationship after these meetings, is critical for success in converting business. See separate resource *Maximising Success at Trade Shows and Events* for business success for further guidance on this topic.



Corporate Leads Generation Sources

Corporate leads can come from a variety of sources including:

- ➔ Incentives to have leisure guests share their business cards
- ➔ Visits to locally based corporate business parks
- ➔ Internal leads passed to the sales person either by reception or events department
- ➔ Fee-based databases (e.g. Data Ireland, Kompass)
- ➔ Free online databases (e.g. Irish Times Top 1000, IDA Company Listing)
- ➔ Google Maps search (by industry and by location)
- ➔ Networking events (Chamber of Commerce, Sales Institute, Marketing Institute)
- ➔ LinkedIn searches, LinkedIn business groups
- ➔ National and international associations and agencies

Note: Global corporations generally assign a Travel Management Company (e.g. AMEX, CWL, HRG) to manage their travellers requirements. Therefore the sales person must identify who their travel agent is, and attempt to establish a relationship Travel Agent. GDS Representation companies can provide a booking report on globally based travel agents, which includes the email address and telephone number of the Travel Agent.

MICE Business Leads (Meetings, Incentive, Conferences and Events)

While Business Tourism Service Representative Companies such as DMCs (Destination Management Companies) and PCOs (Professional Conference Organisers) provide different forms of travel expertise and services to their business customers, they both sit under the umbrella of operating in the MICE space. Each has various levels of influence with Corporations or Associations they work for/on behalf of, as they service arrangements and logistics for meetings, or engage in full itinerary design and ground handling for incentive travel, conferences and events. Therefore they can act as a valuable source of business tourism clients. If your tourism business feels its product/experience offering can add value to business tourism organisers through DMC or PCO channels, then it should join one or more of the associations listed in the A-Z of MICE in Ireland *Everything you wanted to know but were afraid to ask* on our website: <http://www.failteireland.ie/FailteIreland/media/WebsiteStructure/Documents/Business%20Tourism/A-Z-of-MICE-2017.pdf>

www.meetinireland.com

Meet in Ireland is the global MICE (Meetings, Incentives, Conferences and Events) brand for the island of Ireland which promotes Ireland as a leading conference and meetings destination. Fáilte Ireland works collaboratively with key stakeholders who wish to grow their presence in the international business tourism industry. Make sure to review the website which has very helpful resources and information on trade supports.

3. Indirect Channels – Online

OTAs

Online Travel Agents (OTAs) are a hugely important source of business, and it is crucial that you manage your relationships, rates, allocations and terms and conditions effectively.

While most tourism businesses are actively managing relationships to ensure they feature on a select number of OTA platforms (industry averages show majority feature on 5-10 sites), it should be noted that the management of high numbers of OTA channels and some who operate on a subscription model, can be challenging on business resources. This can affect the quality and attention to detail in the management of product or stock allocations and rates unless you have invested in channel management software to support you.

Fáilte Ireland research carried out in 2013 indicated that there is a lack of knowledge of what different OTA channels deliver and how to evaluate which channels are right for your business. It is important for all businesses to choose the right mix and number of OTA channels and to learn how to use them fully to maximise sales.

Leading online booking platforms engaged with by the Irish tourism market include: Booking.com (with 83% of hoteliers) and Expedia (69% of hoteliers). These two big bed banks also distribute stock throughout the brand family and are more recently adding ancillary experiences and products to push additional revenues. In using these OTA sites as a customer, you may have noticed since mid-2016, that after booking your accommodation and/or flight they often send you destination content eblasts about 2-3 weeks ahead of your trip. These prompt you to consider and plan things to see and do when on your trip. Through featured lists of top 10 things to see and do, and options for tours and attractions tickets you can buy before you travel, usually for a value add or saving money on the expected cost in destination. This is also a great way to push out products and services that have limited availability or may not be available when you get into a destination.

Equally, there are a number of OTAs that service specialists or try to recruit a loyal customer following through a membership such as Voyages Privé and Mr and Mrs Smith. In this case, these smaller and more bespoke OTAs tend to optimise the data they capture at recruitment of members stage to push/suggest content, destinations and products that best match their member's interests and holiday/leisure motivations in regular e-blasts. While these channels can charge higher commissions for the transaction, they often deliver higher conversions and lower cancellation rates. They can also deliver a higher value (greater spend) client for ancillary sales in-destination or on property than other more mainstream big bed bank channels do, so develop offers with them at key times when your advance sales are in need of a boost.



Lead Generation & Evaluation of OTA Channels

Before you consider engaging with OTA channels, it is worth spending sometime considering where your business most needs support with sales. Is it year round, due to lack of awareness and visibility about your product/offering or is it at key times of the year or key days when other perhaps more traditional channels are quieter? Mapping when and where your sales need a boost is vital so you have a clear idea of what you need OTA channels to provide a solution for. This way, your conversations with each respective OTA Channel Account Manager (OTAs that sell Ireland have a designated Account Manager or Contracts Manager for the destination) can be very focused. Make an appointment with the Account Manager and establish if there is a possible fit/solution to your sales needs creating a partnership opportunity. You can then develop a table of the pros and cons and investment cost versus likely return projections to allow you evaluate what are the right mix OTA partners to work with.

3 Key Factors to Consider in Evaluating each OTA Sales Channel include:

1. Nature of Bookings – Market, customer profiles & booking type and lead-time
 2. Cost of doing business with the channel
 3. Level of training, level of support and user friendly real-time reporting & analytics
- ➔ Their dominance/volume of customers by market and the type of customers (profiles) they typically reach in each market (For example, do they service more individuals or larger families travelling with children, is their audience more budget conscious or higher spending). Be sure to ask the OTA Account or Contract Manager for their global booking statistics and also ask them for a breakdown of the channel sources for their bookings, to allow you evaluate the other channels that feed their sales volumes on a market by market basis.
 - ➔ Investigate the different options available to you on how business offerings can be profiled on the site
 - ➔ Assess the level of conversions they typically have for properties you consider are similar to you in location, popularity and price point, as well as the typical spend (*i.e. volume of business that delivers more than 1 room booking or > 1 bednight and buys B&B rate versus room only*).
 - ➔ The extent, nature and pattern of client booking cancellations
 - ➔ The average lead time from booking and their sales mix from short-lead mobile bookings (*this could be important if you are looking for solutions that can support short quick sales such as on the day or 24 hours in advance, to sell off excess stock that won't sell through other channels at such short notice*)
 - ➔ The typical volumes of full advance payment bookings secured
 - ➔ Commission rate and the additional cost of having your listing prioritised on their site for certain days
 - ➔ The quality and ease of use of their instant reporting tools, to allow for constant analysis of booking patterns from the channel for your in-house sales forecasting and channel management team
 - ➔ The options for back end data analysis and training support for in-house team
 - ➔ Options for flash sales and cost of business featuring onsite even after availability/ allocation to the channel is no longer available (*this could serve to drive additional bookings directly to your web or continue to keep your property top of mind for regular or repeats customers to a destination*)
 - ➔ Other USP benefits they can offer?

Converting OTA bookings into Leads for Future Direct Business

Business secured from OTA channels should be properly captured in your PMS system, to allow you suitably target and stimulate future direct sales with these clients. Ensure your front desk staff seek to optimise all data at check-in as many OTAs mask important client contact details in their booking such as their email address. Be vigilant and capture all information so that these customers can be targeted for future bookings. You can offer a value add for them to book directly with you next time such as a free upgrade or €5 voucher towards onsite food. This can be a great way to ensure you benefit from additional/ancillary dining spend and the investment cost is usually far lower than another OTA booking commission. You may even have a system that offers a better rate for a valued/repeat customer with a voucher code when booking direct.

GDS

To sell your product on Global Distribution System (GDS) (see the resource *Routes to Market – An Introduction* for more information on this channel) you must:

- a) Have a real-time online booking system software solution and then
- b) Identify and source a suitable GDS Representation Company

You need to evaluate and clarify:

- ➔ Which platform/system they use to load content and rates
- ➔ Can you integrate your PMS system easily with this (e.g. Gallelio, Amadeus, Codeco etc.)
- ➔ If they offer sales management support by way of dedicated sales teams to load content or assist in rate management, to ensure your business can increase its potential for corporate Request for Proposals (RFPs) (option to quote for corporate room rates)
- ➔ If your staff are trained or can access training in the system and are familiar with the reporting tools such as revenue reports, rate performance reports and travel agent performance reports etc.
- ➔ What are the GDS feeds – for representation membership, fee per confirmed booking and any additional fees for sales support or reporting tools

The GDS can be a very effective source of international bednight bookings (leisure and corporate), usually preferred by larger properties with a lot of bedstock. However, as it offers a distribution network to so many travel agents and corporate bookers worldwide, it does come at a cost of distribution and should be evaluated in the context of the channel mix for your business.

- ➔ For example, non-negotiated rates are available via the GDS for leisure clients and for corporate clients without a negotiated rate agreement. Your business can then track travel agents booking these rates via GDS reporting tools and your sales person can then chase these leads to grow business.
- ➔ It also supports a lot of corporate business placed by professional corporate bookers on behalf of big global as well as domestic corporations like Amex, IBM, E Bay, Intel, Statestreet etc. It can also be very effective in driving year round volume, particularly for accommodation in urban and high demand areas.



Confirmed bookings from a booker based in a local corporate office are often the first step toward gaining access to a global RFP. But remember:

- ➔ In most cases, the bookers are PAs with very busy jobs
- ➔ They therefore choose to only work with tourism businesses that provide a hassle free, reliable service
- ➔ A booker likes to have an assigned sales contact (account manager) within your business. This person is their key contact for rate negotiations, special requests and should any issues arise.

Through a GDS representation company, you can also apply for a Consortia's annual RFP programme (fees usually apply). However, you need to measure and assess annually if the fee paid, was worth the revenue generated by the Consortia before re-investing for a new annual period.

GDS RFPs

Global corporations who have their corporate travel needs managed through GDS RFP (Request for proposal), will only be available to those who are invited to participate in an RFP and this can take years of active sales work before your business is deemed eligible or meets pre-defined criteria of the corporation or the GDS representation company.

Factors most likely to influence your business being considered for an RFP invitation include:

- ➔ **Location:** the global corporation must have a division/office within close proximity to you
- ➔ **Accommodation rating:** many corporations request a minimum accommodation rating (e.g. 4 stars)
- ➔ **Price inclusions:** many corporations impose price inclusions that MUST be met (examples include free car parking or breakfast included). Note: items like Free WIFI are now considered a must for corporates.
- ➔ **Local bookings:** History of confirmed bookings from a local/domestic corporate offices, as they help provide evidence that you are relevant/right fit to their needs.

TOP TIP

Growing Sales – Get serious about Lead Generation!

Include a 'Lead Generation' section in your Strategic Sales Plan, to ensure budget, time and resources are given to better ensure it is undertaken in a systematic way for optimal results.

This will also ensure you set monthly lead generation targets for the business and may also provide an incentive system for lead generation and measurement of conversion value right across your business. Everyone has the potential to identify a valuable lead so it should not be an exclusive remit of just the sales team!

Success from business leads requires prompt and targeted follow up from your skilled sales team. Monthly reporting on progress and barriers to getting meetings is useful to share with a wider team, as others in the business can have contacts that can facilitate introductions or know of alternative ways to get introductions, if securing a meeting is proving challenging.