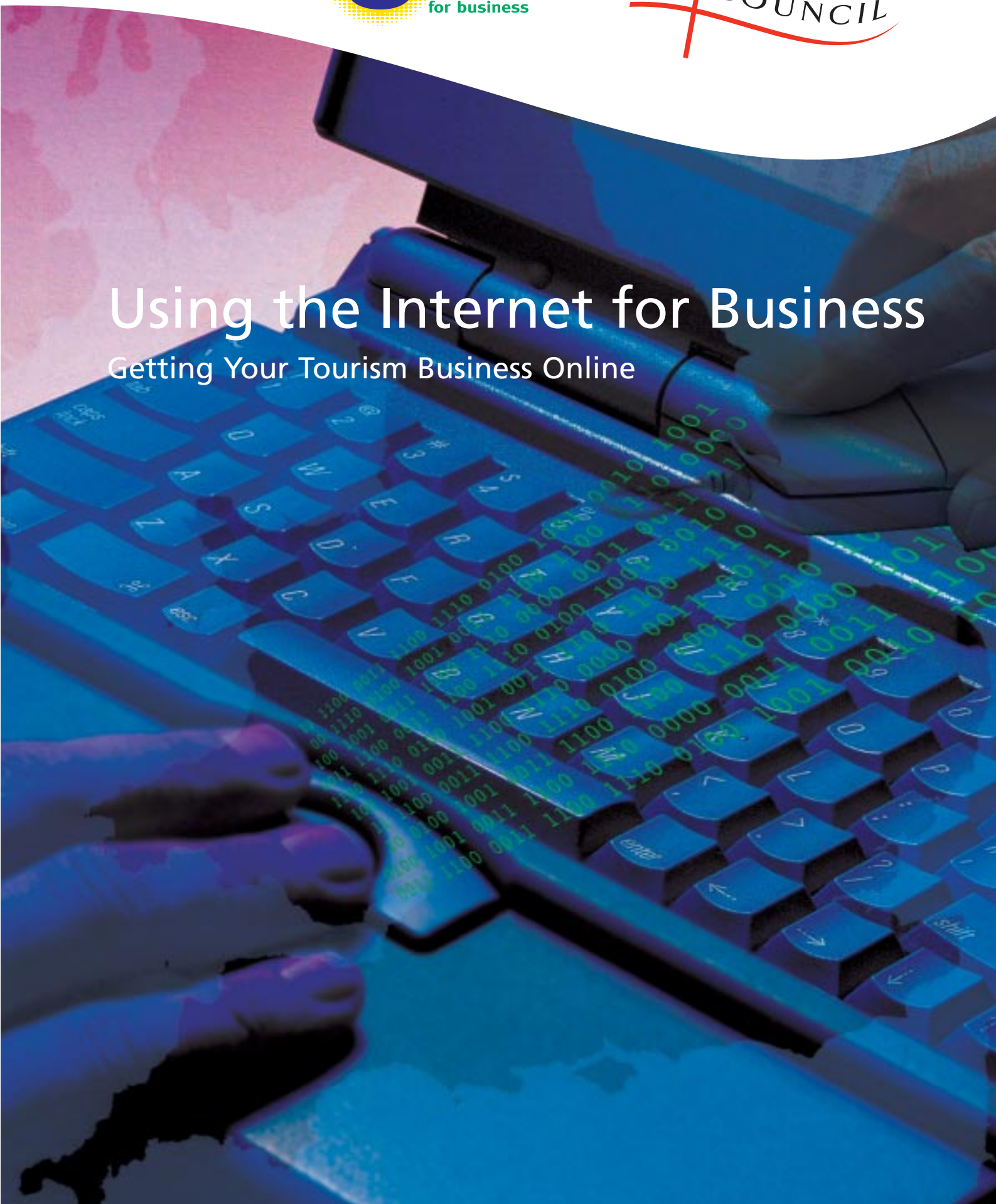




Using the Internet for Business

Getting Your Tourism Business Online



About this helpsheet

The Internet and email can be used as mechanisms for effectively reaching and servicing customers worldwide, at a low cost. Using a computer in your business will enable you to take bookings, maintain a customer database, keep accounts and produce promotional literature.

This helpsheet is designed to be a basic guide on how you can get started in promoting your business and communicating with customers using computer technology. You can also enhance your understanding of e-business through the free publications, e-commerce pack and briefings on various business topics offered by *UK online for business*. This is a Government initiative to encourage e-commerce uptake among small and medium-sized businesses. For further information about *UK online for business* products and services please visit www.ukonlineforbusiness.gov.uk or telephone the Infoline on 0845 715 2000.

Gaining Internet Access

The Internet is a global computer network made up of hundreds of smaller networks and linked together by the international telephone system. To gain access to the Internet initially, your computer needs a modem that connects it to the telephone network.

The second step is to subscribe to an Internet Service Provider (ISP). An ISP completes the connection of the computer to the Internet in the same way that a telephone company connects your telephone to the telephone network.

There are three main types of ISP:

- Unmetered or inclusive call service providers: for a modest fee, or by moving your telephone account to them, they offer unlimited access free of call charges, for basic dial-up access.
- Pay-as-you-go or 'free' service providers: offer Internet access without a subscription charge, but still incur call charges ranging from 1-3p per minute depending on your telephone company and the time of day.
- Business ISPs: offer a higher level of service, with better connection speeds and dedicated business content. You can expect to pay £15-£50 per month plus local call charges.

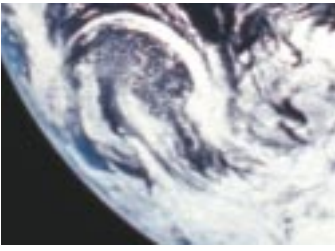
Your ISP will provide you with a CD for you to run in your computer's CD-ROM drive. It will automatically prompt you to take the steps required to set up your Internet access account. Once this is complete, you will be online. Most retailers will have already pre-installed their preferred ISP for you when you buy your computer.

In most cases you will probably disconnect when you are not using the Internet. However, if your business needs to be connected to the Internet 24 hours a day, it is possible to do this through an Asynchronous Digital Subscriber Line (ADSL) which is an open line on to the Internet. This means you do not need to connect and disconnect each time you access the Internet.



"Sykes Cottages now does 70% of its business over the web, and this percentage has continued to increase. Interest and bookings has been attracted from all over the world, in countries as far afield as Indonesia, Turkey and Peru."

Clive Sykes
Owner
Sykes Cottages



"Although the Internet is obviously an excellent way to get your company noticed globally, it is important to get good advice. A web site needs to look good, but it also needs to be very user friendly, so that people will visit again."

John Womack
Managing Director
Otter Watersports

Using email

You need to be able to connect to the Internet to send and receive emails. To use email on a computer, it is common to use an email software application, such as Microsoft Outlook Express. Using this method, you are only required to be connected to the Internet when you are actually sending or receiving emails. You can read and write your messages without being connected at that point, which means you are not paying for time on the telephone network.

An alternative method is to use a web site-based email service, such as Microsoft Hotmail (www.hotmail.com). You are required to be connected to the Internet for the duration you're using this service, which might result in high telephone costs if you spend a lot of time sending and receiving emails. However, a big advantage is that you are able to connect to services such as Hotmail to access your emails from any computer connected to the Internet.

Promoting your business on the Internet

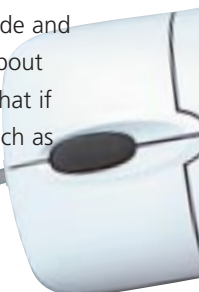
To give your business a presence on the Internet, you should ensure that your business is listed on tourist boards' web sites, such as the British Tourist Authority's VisitBritain and your Regional Tourist Board's (RTB's) own site. If your accommodation business has been inspected as part of one of the national inspection schemes (ETC, AA or RAC), your property's details will automatically be displayed unless you have asked for them not to be. This can include a photograph and a link to your web site and email if you have these. Events and attractions must fulfil other criteria to be held on the database. If your Local Authority or Destination Management Organisation (DMO) has a tourism web site – most do – you should also ensure that your business is promoted on the site. There are many commercially operated web sites, and you can get good exposure on some of them. However, make sure it is a credible site. Ask about how often information is updated, how many visitors the web site regularly has (as opposed to 'hits', which can be a very misleading figure), and whether, for accommodation listings, it only includes inspected properties.

In addition to a presence on the various types of web sites listed above, you may feel it is viable for your business to have its own web site. The first step to promoting your business online is to devise a marketing plan and budget. This should address:

- The need for your web presence to match the quality of your other marketing material in terms of professional appearance, accuracy, relevance and updating.
- The fact that your web site will be of no value unless potential customers visit it. To achieve this, ensure that there is sufficient conventional marketing activity promoting visits to the site, such as including the web site address in any printed literature, business cards, etc. Also, ensure that your web site is linked from as many other web sites as possible. Start by contacting your RTB and DMO. Finally, make sure that your web site has been registered with search engines.

A web site can give you more control over what is written about your business and you will be able to go into greater detail about what makes your business unique. You can either get a web designer to build a web site for you, or if you have your own computer, it is possible to build one yourself. However, be wary that the results may not be as impressive unless you are prepared to invest a lot of time, and/or you have good web design skills. Guides on how to build web sites are available online, and many colleges offer training.

If you decide to have a web site you need to choose what information you would like to include and how the sections will link together. If someone else builds the site, the more detail you give about what you want, the easier it will be for the company to quote a cost to build. It is important that if you pay a developer to build a web site, you can change relevant content of your web site, such as prices and opening times quickly, easily and at low (or no) cost.





"Being off the well-beaten tourist track is no longer an obstacle to getting visitors through the door of historic Boughton House - the world is tempted to visit the House through its interactive web site."

Michael Hiley
Project Leader
De Montford University

Points for great web design

- Choose a simple web address that is easy to remember, such as www.thegreathotel.co.uk.
- Ensure your web site can be loaded quickly by not using too many large graphics or pictures. Slow downloads will put people off entering your site.
- Brand all your pages by putting your logo on each page, so the user recognises they are on your web site.
- Make sure all information is clear. Use short sections of text and do not use lots of pictures or graphics in such a way that they clutter the look of your site.
- Provide a site map to show the user how to get around and what your site offers.
- Keep information up-to-date and accurate, especially prices, facilities and ratings.
- Make it easy for people to contact you, by including email addresses and telephone numbers.
- Consider including enquiry forms that can be used to make reservations. Valuable marketing information can also be collated from these forms.
- If you decide to use links to other sites, keep your links the same colour, size and font.
- Don't use too many flashing banners or animations as these could distract visitor concentration.
- Remember, bad usability = no customers.

Web site domain names

To set up a web site, you will need to register a domain name (unique web site address) with one of the many companies on the Internet which offer domain name registration (if you are commissioning someone to build a web site for you, they will be able to do this for you). For this you need to pay a registration fee, which means that once the name is registered, the name belongs to you. It is advisable that the name of your web site has some significance to the name of your business. You can get free domain names with some ISPs, although there are often restrictions on the names you can use, and may not necessarily be able to represent the name of your business.

This domain name should next be registered with as many search engines as possible, such as Google or Excite, to make sure they pick you up in searches and get as many links to your site from other sites as possible.

Finally, look at how web sites of competitors are set up to point out potential ideas or flaws in your own web site design.

Glossary of terms

Asynchronous Digital Subscriber Line (ADSL) - A high-speed digital telephone connection, which means that unlike modem connections, you don't dial a number to connect to the Internet.

Cable Internet access - If you already have a cable TV, you will be able to use the same fibre optic cable for accessing the Internet in the future. Cable access is also potentially the fastest access to technology available at the moment – nearly 200 times faster than the average modem.

Cookie - A cookie is used by some sites to record information about your trip to the site, the type of browser you are using and the way you move around within the site. Cookies can be useful and time-saving, recording the fields of a database you have shown interest in and on subsequent visits give you information relating to those fields without you having to specify them all over again.

Domain name - The unique name that identifies an Internet site. It will always have two or more parts, separated by dots, e.g. www.english-tourism.org.uk

Email - Email consists of simple text files and attachments sent from one person to another. An email address always follows the same format, two parts separated by "@", e.g. b&b@isp.net





"Technology is a great leveller,
it enables us as specialists to
compete with the big boys.
Up until three years ago LEI
promoted their holidays through
telephone and teletext, but now
they also use the World Wide Web.
While advertising on teletext costs
£500 per page per week, their
Web pages cost £60 per quarter.
Teletext still generates more
sales than the Web but the ratio
is decreasing."
John Neilson
Chairman
Leisure Estates International

Glossary of terms

Home page - The welcome or index page on a web site.

Internet - The Internet is a vast collection of inter-connected networks that all use the same protocols. The Internet now connects over 100,000 independent networks into a vast global Internet.

ISDN - Integrated Services Digital Network lines offer the user two lines at once, one for the Internet and the other for your telephone.

ISP - Internet Service Provider, such as AOL, Freeserve etc.

Link - This is an area of text, image or icon on a web page that connects to another page or file. Also known as hyperlink or hypertext.

Modem - The modem sits either inside or outside your computer. It connects you to the Internet or to other computers around the world.

Search engine - This is a searchable online database of Internet resources.

URL - Uniform Resource Locator, the address of a web page.

Web browsers - A browser is a program used to view web pages and 'browse' web sites. Netscape Navigator and Microsoft Internet Explorer are the main competitors, and are considered the industry standards.

Web server - This is a powerful computer permanently connected to the Internet. Specifically it 'hosts' web sites, i.e. it has them stored on its disks. A single web server can host many sites each with their own address.

Web site - A web site is a collection of web pages arranged together to provide information, entertainment or advice. It can consist of text, graphics, sound, video or a combination of these.

World wide web - The Web is an electronic system of pages composed of graphics, sound, text and user input together via the Internet.

WAP - A new generation of mobile phones that can receive selected content from the Internet like emails, cinema listings, news bulletins and share prices. Although useful, WAP phones are slow and the amount of information you can access is very limited. You can't browse web pages for example.

For any other Information Communication Technologies (ICT) terms, use search engines on the Internet, such as www.google.com. Type in the term or simply type 'IT glossary' to bring up a list of sites where glossaries can be found. Computing magazines also produce useful IT glossaries.

Further help

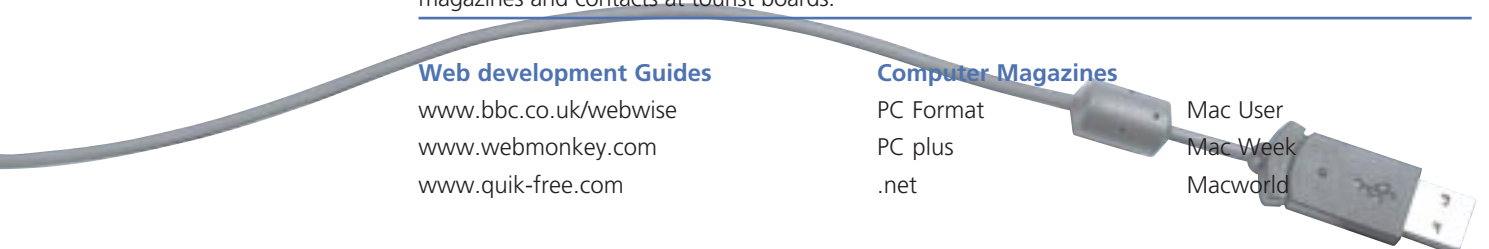
This guide can only offer pointers as to how to use technology in your business and the information provided is by no means definitive. Other good sources of information include the following web sites, magazines and contacts at tourist boards.

Web development Guides

www.bbc.co.uk/webwise
www.webmonkey.com
www.quik-free.com

Computer Magazines

PC Format
PC plus
.net
Mac User
Mac Week
Macworld



Business Information

www.ukonlineforbusiness.gov.uk or call **0845 715 2000**; set up by the Government's Department for Trade and Industry (DTI) to provide small businesses with impartial advice on using information and communications technologies

www.businessadviceonline.org or call **0845 600 9006**; provides businesses with practical advice on how to get started in e-commerce or e-business

www.telecomsAdvice.org.uk An independent web site for small businesses who need to know about using telecoms and the Internet

www.trainingzone.co.uk Aims to focus on the needs of individual learners, giving information on resources, IT training, news and lots more

www.englishTourism.org.uk The English Tourism Council's tourism advice web site

www.tourismtrade.org.uk or call **020 8563 3186**; or email tradehelpdesk@bta.org.uk Information from the British Tourist Authority for Tourism Industry Professionals

www.hmso.gov.uk or call **020 7242 6393**; for information on the Data Protection Act

www.hm-treasury.gov.uk/budget2000 or call **020 7270 5000** for information on IT capital allowances

Other sources of information include your local **library, college** or **TIC**. Your **Local Authority** or **Destination Management Organisation** may also offer help, training and possibly software as part of their Destination Management System. Your **RTB** is also a source of help in getting online; contact details are listed below.

Regional Tourist Board Contact Details

Cumbria Tourist Board

Contact: Mike Andrew
Tel: 01539 440425
Fax: 01539 444041
Email: mjandrew@bta.org.uk
www.golakes.co.uk

Yorkshire Tourist Board

Contact: Walter Van Opstal
Tel: 01904 773361
Fax: 01904 701414
Email: wvanopstal@ytb.org.uk
www.yorkshiretouristboard.net

London Tourist Board

Contact: Stephen Faloon
Tel: 020 79322022
Fax: 020 79322013
Email: sfaloon@londontouristboard.co.uk
www.londontouristboard.com

Northumbria Tourist Board

Contact: Nicola Boyne
Tel: 0191 3753028
Fax: 0191 3860899
Email: boyne@ntb.org.uk
www.e-northumbria.net

Heart of England Tourist Board

Contact: Alison Powell
Tel: 01905 761149
Fax: 01905 763450
Email: alisonp@bta.org.uk
www.hetb.co.uk

South West Tourism

Contact: Kirsty Cumming
Tel: 01392 353203
Fax: 0870 4420840
Email: kcumming@swtourism.co.uk
www.swtourism.co.uk

North West Tourist Board

Contact: Rob Martell
Tel: 01942 821222
Fax: 01942 820002
Email: rob.martell@nwtb.org.uk
www.nwtourism.net

East of England Tourist Board

Contact: Trevor Hayward
Tel: 01473 822922
Fax: 01473 823063
Email: thayward@bta.org.uk
www.eastofenglandtouristboard.com

Southern Tourist Board

Contact: Marilyn Fletcher
Tel: 02380 625400
Fax: 02380 620010
Email: mfletcher@southernntb.co.uk
www.southernntb.co.uk

South East England Tourist Board

Contact: Susan Leader
Tel: 01892 500321
Fax: 01892 511008
Email: susanleader@seetb.org.uk
www.tourismsoutheast.com

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