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**Lomond &
Rural Stirling
LEADER+**

a handy little guide to
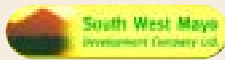
e-tourism

LEADER+ is a programme of European funding which promotes economic and community development in rural areas. As a European Union Community Initiative, LEADER+ encourages and supports projects for local rural development with a strong emphasis on co-operation and networking between rural areas.

Lomond & Rural Stirling LEADER+

South West Mayo
Development Company Ltd.

C A R D

rural
Development Programme

LEADER+

Foreword

Will everything end up e-something some day? E-commerce, e-business, e-government, e-enabled, e-bay… and now e-tourism. That's what this little guide is about, e-tourism, or how you can make it easy for tourists to find your business on the web… and once they do, how to make sure they like what they see!

It has been developed with the assistance of small tourism businesses from Armagh and Craigavon in Northern Ireland, Mayo in the Republic of Ireland and the Loch Lomond & Trossachs area in Scotland. During February 2006 these businesses took part in a joint cooperation and training project aimed at improving their internet marketing, and building on a shared heritage. This training booklet is the culmination or fruits of that collective labour.

The businesses have provided many of the case studies, feedback on concepts, and a testbed for much of what follows. The three LEADER groups in the areas: Craigavon & Armagh Rural Development (CARD), Lomond and Rural Stirling LEADER+, and South West Mayo Development Company have provided funding to enable this to happen, but just as importantly a vital coordination and facilitating role and our thanks go out to them.

Each chapter is self-contained, so you can read it from cover to cover if you're really keen or better still dip into it to find the information you need on a specific subject. However you use it, we hope you find it interesting and informative.

Oh and we've done our best to make it e-asy!

Canice & Jamie
www.initiative.ie

Background to Project

This Best Practice Guide was developed as a result of a transnational training programme organised by three LEADER+ Groups located in The Republic of Ireland, Northern Ireland and Scotland.

LEADER+ is a European Community Initiative for assisting rural communities in improving the quality of life and economic prosperity in their local area.

The aim of the LEADER+ programme is to encourage and support rural actors to think about the longer term potential of their area. It seeks to encourage the implementation of integrated, high-quality, original strategies for sustainable development designed to encourage experimenting with new ways of:

- **Reinforcing the economic environment, in order to contribute to job creation.**
- **Enhancing the natural and cultural heritage.**

After a series of meetings and exchanges between the three areas in 2002 and 2003, the businesses of Strathard (rural Stirling), the Birches (Craigavon and Armagh) and the Tochar Valley (County Mayo) formed a partnership as a means to seek joint solutions to shared problems.

In 2003, the work of the partnership resulted in a transnational LEADER project involving Craigavon and Armagh Rural Development Company (CARD), South West Mayo Development Company, and Lomond & Rural Stirling LEADER+ comprising a series of facilitated workshops to improve the marketing skills of 18 local B&B operators.

The feedback following the workshops was very positive from the businesses that participated, not least because of the transnational learning that took place. During the workshops, e-business was identified as an essential component of effective marketing and one requiring further support.

The LEADER+ groups who funded the original project were therefore keen to build on the momentum gained and to expand the number of beneficiaries. As a result they decided to explore the development of a follow-on transnational project, encompassing a cross-section of small tourism businesses.

Research was carried out in each of the three areas. This research found that many tourism businesses believed that their knowledge of the possibilities and practicalities of e-business was weak, but they remained very receptive to tailored and targeted training on a transnational basis. The three LEADER+ groups therefore decided to target this identified need and developed a training programme which was then delivered across all of the areas.

Contents

The Internet and Tourism

The Internet has had a massive impact on the tourism industry, probably more so than any other industrial sector. The way people research, book and pay for their travel, accommodation and entertainment needs has fundamentally changed, especially so for non-sun holidays (the kind people in Scotland, Republic of Ireland and Northern Ireland sell!). So if you don't benefit from 300+ days of sunshine a year, read on.

The good news for the small independent operator is that, as long as you can be found, the trends are pointing in your direction. In addition, as the Internet is a level playing field, with a well-designed website, smaller businesses can market themselves just as professionally as their larger competitors.

Some of the most striking things that came out of the first meeting of the group were:

- **The average percentage of new bookings generated over the Internet stood at over 70%!**
- **The days of people booking from accommodation guides produced by national or regional tourism bodies are gone ……. Oh and the level of bookings from tourism board websites is very low as well;**
- **Email, not the telephone, is how we communicate now;**
- **Unanimous belief that the pace of change is quickening.**

Some trends to consider:

- **There will be a definite increase in domestic holidaying;**
- **People are taking short breaks, and more often;**
- **People are increasingly cash rich and time poor, but value for money remains very important;**
- **There is more impulse purchasing, so we need to make it easier to buy.**

Choosing and Registering
a Domain Name

A domain name is the unique web address used to identify your presence on the Internet. So www.amazon.com, www.initiative.ie, www.bbc.co.uk and www.wikipedia.org are all examples of domain names.

The .com, .ie, .co.uk, and .org tells us/you certain things as well. .com lets us know it's a commercial company, .ie tells us it is based in Ireland (but not whether it is a commercial company or not-for-profit), the .co.uk tells us it's a commercial company based in the UK, and .org tells us it's an organisation (but no hints as to where it's based). Your choice of which to use should also depend on your target market (i.e. world-wide tourists go for .com).

So if you are based in the United Kingdom or Ireland you have basically got 3 choices .com, .co.uk, or .ie. So which should you choose? Our advice is to go for a .com, mainly because its easy to remember and if guessing, it's the one most people will try first. If your preferred .com domain name is gone, then go for either .co.uk or .ie

What to look for when choosing a domain name:

- **Short**
- **Easy to spell**
- **Easy to remember**
- **Passes the telephone test**

Top Tip!
The telephone test. Try to tell someone over the phone these addresses:
www.ideas4gifts.com
www.french-food-and-wine.com
www.mayoaccommodation.ie

If you have to spell it, it has hyphens, dashes or numbers in it, it fails the telephone test.

! CASE STUDY
When we first set up our company about 10 years ago, www.initiative.com had already been registered. But it was available to purchase.... At $100,000!

We went for www.initiative.ie instead.

Registering a Domain

You never actually "own" your domain. You rent it usually for two years and then renew it every year afterwards.

You can check if your chosen domain name is available on www.allwhois.com. If it is taken it will tell you who registered it and when its due for renewal. It may be worth trying again after the renewal date as it may become available again! There are a wide range of domain registry companies on the Internet, see the 'Feeling Brave?' box opposite.

Costs are fairly standard, so expect to pay:

.com   - £20 excluding VAT for 2 years
.co.uk - £5 excluding VAT for 2 years
.ie   - €45 excluding VAT for 1 year
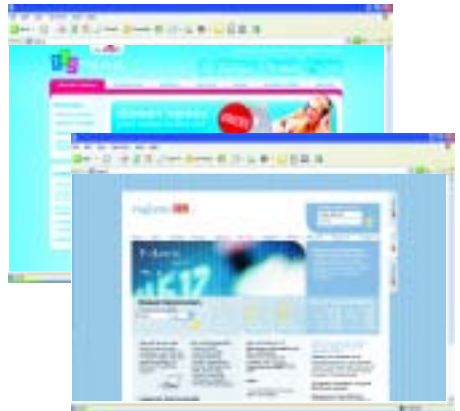
Top Tip!
Always make sure your domain name is registered to you with **your** address and contact details, especially your own email and not that of the web company who may be building your site. That way you'll have no problems if you change web companies and will always be kept informed when your renewal is due.

Good Website Design

In our opinion good website design covers four main areas:

- **The layout and navigation of the site;**
- **The aesthetic appearance of the site;**
- **The content or words you use, and finally;**
- **Is your site search engine friendly, or - to use the technical term - search engine optimised?**

These last two areas are closely linked and very important, so we have a separate chapter covering them – Chapter 6 Search Engine Optimisation.
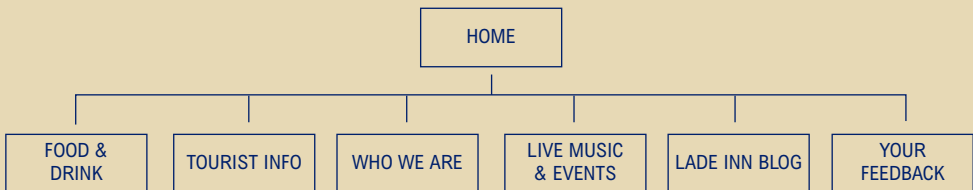
Layout, Navigation & Features

Your site is your salesperson, so you want to make it easy and intuitive for visitors to your site to easily find the information they are looking for.

You also want to "sell" them on the benefits of choosing your area and, more specifically, choosing you. So as well as details about your business, providing some information on things to do and see in the area is important.

A good starting point is to develop a site map. This will make sure that all the areas that have to be covered, are covered, and ensure that the different pages of your web site link to each other. Here's an example from project participant Frank Park of the Lade Inn.

Case Study - Participant www.theladeinn.com

```
                          ┌──────────┐
                          │   HOME   │
                          └──────────┘
    ┌──────────┬──────────┬──────────┼──────────┬──────────┬──────────┐
┌────────┐ ┌──────────┐ ┌──────────┐ ┌──────────┐ ┌──────────────┐ ┌──────────┐
│ FOOD & │ │ TOURIST  │ │ WHO WE   │ │LIVE MUSIC│ │LADE INN BLOG │ │  YOUR    │
│ DRINK  │ │  INFO    │ │  ARE     │ │& EVENTS  │ │              │ │ FEEDBACK │
└────────┘ └──────────┘ └──────────┘ └──────────┘ └──────────────┘ └──────────┘
```

Aesthetic Appearance of Your Site

It's a cliché, but true nonetheless: you never get a second chance to make a first impression - and never more so than with a website.

That first page, those first few seconds will determine what impression the potential customer has of your business: warm, friendly, professional? Or, run of the mill, dated, amateurish?

Photography

Good photographs can transform your site. If you are a good amateur photographer, then take your own, if not use a professional and expect to pay £100 - £150 / €150 - €220 for a two hour shoot. With a bit of planning, a couple of hours should be all you will need. Get images shot in digital format at high resolution and supplied on CD Rom. Plan what shots you want: outside of building, views from bedrooms, welcoming hallway, bedrooms, sitting room, atmosphere shots (see 'Top Tip' below).

Top Tip!
Take some atmosphere shots (e.g. a freshly sliced wheaten loaf, a floral display). Use such shots to set the mood and create the desired feel for your site.

The "Right" Image

Think about why your customers choose you - what they enjoy most - and this will go a long way to helping you decide what is the "right" image to portray on your website.

If you are a Bed & Breakfast provider it may be things like a warm, welcoming, authentic experience. If you're an equestrian centre it may be a fun, caring, and professional experience.

Whatever words you come up with, that's the impression you want to convey through your website.

FEELING BRAVE?

Log on to your own website and honestly ask yourself:

What impression does it give? Better still, ask a friend for their "honest" feedback. Does it match the reality of your business? Is it spot on or does it sell your business short?

Good graphic design is about *communicating*, and a well-designed site communicates the right image.

Ask yourself: Does your site have the WOW factor? There are a lot of badly designed small tourism sites out there, ones that say "run of the mill" or amateurish, and amateurish does not communicate homespun, welcoming or authentic! The bad news as well is that many web developers are programmers, not designers (no offence guys).

Don't worry though, you have a number of options:

- **Find a web developer with good design skills (ask to see examples of previous sites they've produced);**
- **Pay a graphic designer to develop a visual style for how your site should look, then bring that to a web developer to programme (or if you are feeling brave, test your own web development skills and try it yourself);**
- **Do your own research to find sites you like and that communicate the same impression as you want, then ask your web developer to draw on (not copy!) that for your own site.**

Check if your website is accessible at **http://webxact.watchfire.com**

Check if your website has valid HTML code: **http://validator.w3.org/**

Top Tip!

- Make sure your site works on a 800 x 600 screen resolution (see www.microsoft.com for more details);
- Make sure your website is not built using frames, as search engines won't be able to read your site. We can't stress this enough!
- Pages should download quickly, with the optimal page size not exceeding 60 kb.
- Avoid large photo files - use "click to enlarge" instead.
- Use commonly available fonts consistent throughout the site.
- Remember that "The power of the web is in its universality. Access by everyone regardless of disability is an essential aspect." Tim Berners-Lee, W3C Director (important guy!).
- Search Engines prefer websites with valid HTML code.

Pennywise, Pound Foolish

Consider your website as an investment, one which if you put the time and resources into, will repay itself many times over.

However, the bar is being raised and you can be sure your competitor sites are getting better. If your site looks amateurish then enquiries and bookings will drop.

Yes, you can do a website on the cheap, but are you being pennywise and pound foolish?

Teach Philbin - Old Website

Teach Philbin - New Website

Website Hosting and Statistics

A website needs to be hosted on a web server to make it available to the Internet.

The main things to look for when choosing a web hosting company are:

- **Reliability** - your site should be available 24/7;
- **Sufficient bandwidth** - Bandwidth is the allocated amount of data transfer per month that your website, email accounts etc will utilise. For example, if you're going to be sending huge email attachments or expect many visits to your site, this will affect your bandwidth usage. If your site is not online towards the end of the month, you may need to purchase more bandwidth;
- **Good support** - is there someone you can phone or at least email if there is a problem?
- **Value for money** - expect to pay around £10 or €15/month for a good quality package. Allow an extra £5 or €8/month if you want website statistics (which you will!).

Changing Your Web Hosting

If you are not happy with your current web hosting or feel you are being charged too much you can change your web hosting as follows:

- **Ensure that you have a copy of all your website files, either on your computer or on CD Rom. Your web developer should be able to provide you with these, otherwise you should request your FTP (file transfer protocol) details from your current hosting provider and use an FTP program to download them. The following are recommended FTP programs: Smart FTP, WS_FTP;**

- **Now that you have your website files, research the offers available from the main hosting providers (Ireland – Blacknight Solutions, Hosting 365, Novara; UK – PIPEX, Fasthosts, Easyspace) and considering the factors above determine which is best for your site;**

- **Your new hosting company will provide you with new FTP details which you can use to upload all your website files to your server using the FTP program;**

- **If you speak nicely to your web developer and provide them with the new FTP details, they may be willing to transfer your files to your new web server.**

Top Tip!
Irish companies should choose a web hosting provider whose servers are based in Ireland such as *Blacknight Solutions*, *Hosting 365* or *Novara*. This will help your search engine ranking when users select to search within Ireland or search Irish sites.

Website Statistics

Your website statistics are a mine of useful information… if you know how to read them! They are a vital tool in helping you to market your site better, yet many people have never looked at their site statistics.

Top Tip!
'Hits' are a pretty meaningless statistic - look instead for number of visitors per month. If this figure is rising your enquiries and bookings should be rising as well!

A good website statistics package will allow you to view your site statistics online and also to download them. They will also present the information in tabular and graphical format as illustrated.

What To Look For

- **'Number of unique visitors'** - this figure should be rising. If it's falling there is a problem with your site and/or web marketing;

- **'Number of first time visitors'** - this tells you the number of different people who visited your site for the first time.

  If you are in the tourism business you want this figure to be pretty close (say 75%) to the figure above as you'll want a steady stream of new people looking at the site. If it is low compared to the number of visitors then you have a problem.

Top Tip!

If you undertake even a few of the activities we outline in the search engine optimisation chapter, it's reasonable to expect the number of visitors per month to your site to double! So check what it is now and start reading the 'search engine optimisation' chapter. Important things to consider include:

- **On which day is your site busiest?**
  If you've done some promotion, maybe an email newsletter or radio advert, you can check how successful it's been by viewing the statistics for the following days.

Top Tip!

Search engine strings. Your statistics should also tell you the keywords/phrases that visitors were searching for (i.e. typing into the search engines) that led them to your site. As you see in Chapter 5 using these words more often and in more variations on your site will lead to even more people visiting!

CASE STUDY

A tourism promotion site (who shall remain nameless) found that over 70% of visitors were spending less than 30 seconds on the site!

A change in design, improvements in content quality and more updates means 70% now spend 3 minutes at least.

- **Top referers.**
  This tells you which sites visitors are entering your web site from. This is especially useful information to have if you are paying for weblinks from some sites.

Internet & Search Engine Marketing

There are innumerable books and articles written on Internet and search engine marketing, and indeed a whole industry of search engine consultants and firms (one of the best and our favourite is Steve Johnston www.johnston.co.uk).

As we only have a few pages and you only have ten minutes, we've tried to distil that collective "wisdom" down to just key priorities. Implement these and we guarantee that visitor numbers to your site will at least double, or we'll give you your money back… What do you mean, "you got the book for free!".

Oh and if you have more than 10 minutes there are enough quality links to keep you reading (and learning!) for a day. What follows has some corny links to famous lines from our favourite movies, indulge us, there's method in our madness.

"Let's Start at the Very Beginning"

To quote Julie Andrews "Lets start at the very beginning, a very good place to start".

So what is a search engine?
Well basically it's a computer programme used to catalogue the Internet and create a database of available sites which can then be searched by users.

Google.com is the best known and most widely used. Others include Yahoo, MSN, AOL, Ask, Altavista, Excite and Lycos. Between them these 7 account for over 90% of all search engine queries per day, with Google alone accounting for over 70% of all searches in the UK and Ireland.

Yahoo is slightly different in that it is a "directory", so an actual person will review your site. However all the others are just computer programmes.

They use algorithms, or formulas, to determine how closely your site matches the search requirements of the user. These algorithms are closely guarded secrets (especially Google's!), however there are three areas you need to concentrate on if you want online success:

- **Content** - the words you use on your site;
- **Reputation** - the number and quality of links to your site;
- **Indexing** - does your site make it easy for Google or other search engines to catalogue?

"If you build it, people will come"

Content

The key word here is "it" …but build "it"?... Build what?

Well the "it" is what people are interested in. So if you're in the tourism business the "it" is likely to be "holidays". But not just "holidays"…. "vacations", "breaks", "getaways" - meaning that "it" is likely to include "accommodation", "farmhouse", "bed and breakfast", "hotel", and every permutation therein. You catch our drift?

The key is to think of, and also to **research**, the typical search words that a potential customer might use and then to **build your web site around these words and phrases**.

Think of it like building a house: the words and phrases people search for are the bricks, blocks, windows and doors - they are the building materials you are going to use to build your website, sorry house! The more words and phrases you use, in different permutations, the more your house will stand out and the easier it will be for search engines to find it.

We can't stress this enough. Most small tourism businesses are horrendously bad at building the words people actually search for into the words (or copy) on their website. So, if you're a self catering cottage in Ballinrobe in County Mayo, Ireland, for example, then "self-catering", "cottage", "self-catering cottage", "cottage accommodation", "thatch cottage", "thatched cottage Ireland", "thatched cottage Mayo", "Mayo", "County Mayo", "Ireland", "West of Ireland", "Ballinrobe", "holiday in Ireland", "holiday in Mayo", etc, etc. all need to feature on your site.

The knack is to write the copy featuring all these generic words and phrases without it becoming too repetitive for the reader. But, in practice, people viewing web pages scan, rather than reading like a book, so you've quite a bit of leeway!

FEELING BRAVE?

www.wordtracker.com is an excellent tool for researching keywords. There's an excellent free trial and their paid-for services start at less than €7 or £5. Money well spent we say!

Other keyword analysis tools include :

Overture Keyword Tool
(Discover how many times your keyword and related terms were searched for in the last month).

http://inventory.overture.com
Google's online tool (Discover keyword variations that you may wish to include)

https://adwords.google.com/select/KeywordToolExternal
SEO Book (Discover the monthly search volume for the Big3 Search Engines - Google, Yahoo and MSN)

http://tools.seobook.com/general/keyword

"It's Okay, I Wouldn't Remember Me Either"

Reputation

The number and "quality" of sites that link to yours is an important factor in how a search engine will rank your site. Think of it as a popularity contest, more sites that link to you must mean that you have something interesting, informative, useful, funny or controversial to say. Thus, as far as a search engine is concerned, you're likely to be a better-bet, quality wise.

But what do we mean by a 'Quality Website'?

We suggest using Google's PageRank statistic as a measure of a website's quality or link popularity. The statistic is a score out of 10, where 10 is the highest.

Top Tip!

A link from a website with a PageRank of 4 is better than 10 links from websites with a PageRank of 0.

FEELING BRAVE?

To get an idea of a web page PageRank, simply download the Google Toolbar from http://toolbar.google.com.

When installing the program, be sure to check the optional features of which PageRank is one of them.

When you arrive at a website, place the cursor over the PageRank icon on the toolbar, and the green bar will expand and a label will popup giving the numeric value of the page's PageRank (as illustrated above).

What is a good PageRank value?

Reputation

There are very few sites that achieve a PageRank of 9 or 10. These would include sites like BBC News, Microsoft, MSN or Adobe (which have huge numbers of valuable sites linking to them).

For SMEs, a value of 4 or more is a good target. Therefore, you should approach websites with a value of 4 or 5 to request a link to your own website. Once you have achieved that level of ranking, higher ranked sites become easier targets.

Increasing the number of quality links to your site is a very efficient technique you can use to increase traffic to your site and boost your search engine rankings. The benefits are two-fold:

Firstly, your site will start to receive a stream of qualified visitors, with the added benefit that incoming visitors may perceive your site in a better light, since they found it via a recommendation (link) on another site.

Secondly, increasing the link popularity will significantly improve your search engine rankings - Why?

- Search engines have found that judging a site by who links to it is one of the best indictors of site quality. After all, not many webmasters make a habit out of linking to bad or less than useful websites.

- In the past, search engines have played a continual cat and mouse game with many webmasters who try to "trick the engines" or "beat the system". Link popularity is one of the few factors which is very difficult to abuse (a webmaster would have to have control of tens or hundreds of different sites located on different servers). As a result, it is a safe bet that the major engines will continue to rely on link popularity and reward "well-linked" sites in the future.

So how do you go about getting people to link to you? (And don't forget it is a person who will create the link!)

Quality Content

Interesting, up-to-date information that is visually appealing. It could be a page on things to do or see in the area. It could be a regularly updated "what's on?" section. It could just be a "nice site" with good comments in your guestbook. Somewhere that another person is happy to recommend.

Regular Updates

Keep your site fresh. Add a **blog** (like an online diary/noticeboard). Blogs are a great way to keep your site updated. They are easy to set up and, believe it or not, fun to maintain.

If you are in the tourism business write about tourism things - the upcoming great festival, the new restaurant, the fantastic weather, the celebrities seen wandering about.

A well maintained site will get more links than a neglected one.

FEELING BRAVE?

Set up an online blog at www.blogger.com or www.blog.com or download a blog to install on your website - WordPress (www.wordpress.org)

CASE STUDY
Check out the blog of project participant Colin at www.bike-and-hike-scotland.blogspot.com. It boosted his Google PageRank (a measure of the importance Google assigns to his site) from 3 to 4 in less than two months (no small feat). Plus, it's a very good read!

Do Your Research

Identify other quality sites you would like to have links from. These could be local community group sites, local news sites, other tourism sites, other small businesses in your area, other businesses with a similar market but not in the same geographic area.
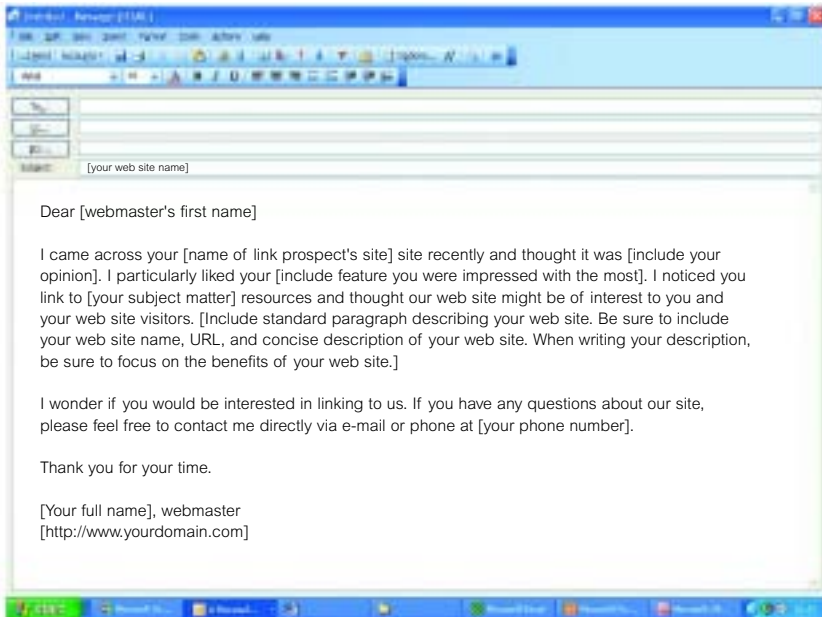

Link to Other Peoples Sites

Where a link would be really useful, offer to create a link from your site to theirs (you may have to do this anyway). This is known as **reciprocal linking**.

Join a Network

Join a network, or create a network, of relevant non-competing sites, with individual and unique ownership. Then link to each other.

Ask for a Link

Ask for a link to your site. Approach the webmaster of each site you want a link from (there will usually be a link on the site to them) and professionally explain the benefits of linking to your web site. You can make it easy for their webmaster to create the link by emailing the necessary code. Add your details in here and use the following:

[your web site name]

Dear [webmaster's first name]

I came across your [name of link prospect's site] site recently and thought it was [include your opinion]. I particularly liked your [include feature you were impressed with the most]. I noticed you link to [your subject matter] resources and thought our web site might be of interest to you and your web site visitors. [Include standard paragraph describing your web site. Be sure to include your web site name, URL, and concise description of your web site. When writing your description, be sure to focus on the benefits of your web site.]

I wonder if you would be interested in linking to us. If you have any questions about our site, please feel free to contact me directly via e-mail or phone at [your phone number].

Thank you for your time.

[Your full name], webmaster
[http://www.yourdomain.com]

Register with Directories

Search engines place a great deal of importance on well-known directories as authoritative sources of links. These are few and far between, but are rated as reliable because each and every link is checked by a human! Appearing in these sites is indispensable, so get submitting!

The Open Directory (dmoz.org)

Dmoz.org is the largest human directory on the web. It is staffed by volunteers and taken very seriously by Google. Submission is essential, free and can take a while, just read their rules first!
www.dmoz.org/add.html

Yahoo Directory (search.yahoo.com/dir)

You pay an annual fee for entry in Yahoo but this is typically worth it for most businesses.

Industry Sites

The tourism industry, like most industries, has its authority sites, www.visitscotland.com, www.discoverireland.com. Frequently these sites require a fee to be paid before a link will be placed, but they are usually worth it.

Also don't forget about the many local council business directories and community group sites which are usually rated authoritative and often free to get a link from.

FEELING BRAVE?

Learn more about linkage strategies at **http://www.link-popularity-guide.com** or **www.linkingmatters.com**

We would point out that the linkage algorithms (Google's in particular) are very sophisticated and do a great deal more than merely count links. However, as a rule of thumb, more and good quality links to your site will improve your search engine ratings. To learn more about linkage see below.

"It's better to be looked over than overlooked"

Visibility:
A new web buzz word for you (and one you are going to hate us for!), visibility is about making sure that your website is developed in such a way that takes into account the limited abilities that search engines have in order to gain access to and interpret the content.
Gee thanks we hear you say!

OK, it's technical and probably best left to your web development company, however a good starting point to allow you to give them a good grilling is www.google.com/webmasters.

Other major points to bear in mind are:

Web Standards

Make sure your site is developed to best practice web-standards (www.webstandards.org/learn/faq/) as this will make your site extremely search engine friendly. If your web company doesn't know what web standards are, then maybe it's time to find a new web company?!

Minimise Domain Use

Ensure the content of your site is within as few domains as possible. Google considers a website to be a domain and different domains to be different websites. So if you spread your content across different domains, you lose impact and ratings.

Hidden content is words on a page that can be read by a search engine but not viewed by a web visitor. Search engines are highly suspicious of such hidden content as it may have been used to boost key word or relevant content.

Do Not Use Frames

Many older sites (3+ years) were developed using frames or framesets. These are not search engine friendly and should be avoided. Besides, if your site is older than 3 year old, it needs to be redone!

First Come, First Served

The order of the content within your web pages, as read by search engines, is important. The most important content should come first.

Meta Tags or Meta Data

Meta Data, Meta Tags, Meta Keywords are the words used by you or your webmaster to describe that page, they are not visible however to the web site visitor. They are not used by search engines to rank pages, despite what you might have been told to the contrary! Trust us, it's hidden text and as such is considered suspect.

FEELING BRAVE?

Learn more about Meta Data, Meta Tags and Meta Keywords at www.well.com /~doctorow/metacrap.htm

Well how did you do on our movie lines?

"Lets start at the very beginning"	The Sound of Music
"If you build it, People will come"	Field of Dreams
"Its okay, I wouldn't remember me either"	Kevin Spacey in American Beauty
"Its better to be looked over than overlooked"	Mae West in Belle of Nineties

Online Advertising

One of the more interesting developments in online advertising has been the ability to "buy" a high search engine ranking on sites such as Google or Yahoo.
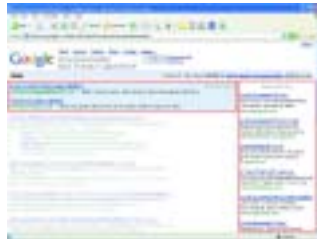
CASE STUDY

Dermott owns and runs Hillview Lodge, a bed and breakfast in Armagh www.hillviewlodge.com.

He started his Google advertising campaign after learning about it on the course. He purchased a variety of words "Armagh", "County Armagh", "Bed and Breakfast", "B&B", "Accommodation", however he structured his advert so that only people searching for accommodation or Bed and Breakfast AND the term Armagh would return his advert.

After running the adverts for several months, Dermot had spent less than £20 and each click through to his site cost him 11 pence and while they didn't all book, **some did!**

In google for example you choose keywords which are words or phrases related to your business. So if like Dermot from www.hillviewlodge.com in Armagh who was a course participant you might choose "bed and breakfast" "accommodation" and "armagh".

When people search on Google using one or more of your keywords, your advert appears next to the search results. Either at the side or along the top. (as illustrated)

If people click on your link to find out more, or make a booking you pay for the advert, if they don't click, you don't pay! The prices of keywords vary, but see Dermot's case study for an indication.

Top Tip!

You want to weed out the browsers as much as possible, afterall every click costs you. So summarise your key message as part of your advert. For example if you are a country house at the upper end of the market (and priced accordingly) make this clear, you don't want budget priced accommodation seekers clicking on your advert.

FEELING BRAVE?

Learn more about Google advertising at www.google.com/adwords

Online Booking

To include on-line booking or not? That is the question facing many small tourism businesses, particularly in the B&B and self-catering sector. Our view? In our time poor society, where many don't have the indulgence of two or three emails back and forth, then it's a "yes". In two or three years time it will be a necessity.

The Plus Points

People are going on more spur of the moment, last minute breaks. Your ability to provide an instant on-line availability check and confirmed booking facility, will help you get a share of this market.

People are used to booking their hotel accommodation online, so it will help you compete with this market sector.

You have a credit card number, so you have some comeback in the event of a no-show or last-minute cancellation.

The Minus Points

You will have to maintain a live booking record on your computer (i.e. when you receive a telephone or email booking you need to manually update your booking database).

Depending on the system you choose (see later in this section), you may have to pay a percentage of the value of the booking.

The Technical Aspects

The perfect solution for online reservation requires a bespoke system whereby your company website is linked to a secure database that manages information about your rooms, rates and availability. The same database would also be linked to from a desktop reservation programme (running on your computer) where you would enter details of all bookings taken over the telephone. This ensures that the room information shown on both your desktop application and website display a 'real-time' true reflection of your accommodation's availability.

Nevertheless, such systems require bespoke web programming and cost thousands of pounds - budgets that smaller accommodation providers simply do not have. As a result, there are systems that provide the technical specification of an online booking system without the prohibitive costs. Generally, you complete information about your accommodation and are then provided with HTML code (hypertext markup language - the text and other information that make up much of a website) that you simply paste into your website code. The drawback however is that every time you receive a booking over the phone you need to log-on to your online database and update the availability.

We recommend the following system:

Bookassist.com
Bookassist is an online reservation system that allows accommodation providers to make their rooms and rates available online for the public to book. It is a large database that accommodation providers have access to and where they can indicate the number of rooms they have available at any time and the rates they are charging for those rooms. The database is stored on bookassist's secure server and therefore all aspects of online security are covered. Once you have signed up and entered your business' information, you will be provided with HTML code that you use to paste into your website's code. Bookassist charge a 4% commission on all bookings that are made via their system.

So that's it, and if you've got this far, well done!

*We'd just like to stress again that **e-tourism** provides a great opportunity for you to successfully compete against bigger (and usually richer!) competitors.*

Hopefully you've found this guide useful and are sufficiently enthused to implement some, or all, of what we've talked about. We've gathered together some useful weblinks overleaf to help you on your way.

We would love to hear your comments or feedback, so email us at ***canice@initiative.ie*** or ***jamie@initiative.ie***.

Oh, and remember... If it was too e-asy, **e-verybody would be doing it!**

Canice & Jamie

Useful Websites

www.allwhois.com

www.123-reg.co.uk

www.iedr.ie

www.register365.ie

www.microsoft.com

http://webxact.watchfire.com

http://validator.w3.org

http://inventory.overture.com

http://adwords.google.com/select/KeywordToolExternal

http://tools.seobook.com/general/keyword

www.wordpress.org

www.johnston.co.uk

www.wordtracker

www.blogger.com

www.blog.com

www.bike-and-hike-scotland.blogspot.com

www.dmoz.org/add.html

www.search.yahoo.com/dir

www.visitscotland.com

www.discoverireland.com

www.link-popularity–guide.com

www.linkingmatters.com

www.google.com/webmasters

www.webstandards.org/learn/faq

www.google.com/adwords

www.bookassist.com

South West Mayo Development Company (Lead Partner)

South West Mayo Development Company encompasses the whole of the south of Co. Mayo with the exception of the Tourmakeady Gaeltacht. This is an under-performing rural tourism area with the exception of Westport and its immediate hinterland. The area is very well served with natural resources, which have huge tourism potential. This potential has not developed as well as it might have due to a lack of investment in tourism infrastructure and in training and skills enhancement for the tourism industry.

Craigavon and Armagh Rural Development (CARD)

Craigavon and Armagh Rural Development (CARD) are responsible for the administration of the LEADER+ Programme within the rural areas of Armagh City & District Council and Craigavon Borough Council. CARD recognised that the area had huge tourism potential which was not currently being exploited. Although there is a strong accommodation base in the area with excellent service provision, the use of the internet to market this sector had not yet reached its full potential.

Lomond & Rural Stirling LEADER+

The Lomond & Rural Stirling LEADER+ Programme supports projects that improve the quality of life in the local area. The two overriding characteristics of all projects it supports are their bottom-up nature and their innovative or pilot approach to tackling a particular issue. The e-business project developed in response to an identified local need, and was innovative in the way in which it coupled this with the learning gained through co-operation with likeminded people in other countries.