

A GUIDE TO STARTING AND OPERATING AN ACCOMMODATION BUSINESS IN NOVA SCOTIA

MARKETING



Copyright © 2018 Tourism Nova Scotia

All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be republished without the prior written consent of Tourism Nova Scotia.

DISCLAIMER

The content of this Guide is intended for informational purposes only and does not constitute legal or other professional advice or an opinion of any kind. Users are advised to seek specific legal or other professional advice. Tourism Nova Scotia does not guarantee the accuracy of the information contained in this Guide. Users should note that federal, provincial and municipal laws and regulations change frequently and it is recommended that you check with the appropriate authorities, including representatives of Tourism Nova Scotia, Access Nova Scotia and your local municipal government to obtain up-to-date information on laws that may affect starting and operating an accommodation business in Nova Scotia.

The information and analysis contained in this Guide represents the research of the authors and is not definitive. This Guide is not an official or unofficial policy of any government body. Any reliance on the Guide shall be at the reader's own risk.

This document contains numerous website links. All links were active at the time of publication but some may have changed since that time.

Cover Photo: The Flying Apron Inn & Cookery, Dining on the Ocean Floor, Burntcoat Head Park, NS

CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION

MARKETING

MANAGEMENT ~ 2

BRAND ~ 4

MARKETING PLAN ~ 6

DIGITAL & ONLINE MARKETING ~ 10

PRINT ADVERTISING ~ 15

TOURISM NOVA SCOTIA ~ 16

MEASURING RESULTS ~ 18

TRAVEL TRADE ~ 20

PACKAGING ~ 24

GROUP AND SMALL MEETING BUSINESS ~ 25

PLANNING

OPERATIONS

TOURISM ORGANIZATIONS IN NOVA SCOTIA

MARKETING

MANAGEMENT

Marketing brings your accommodation to life for your potential guests. Understanding and communicating your brand through all touch points – from your website to your rooms – makes it easier for your ideal customers to find and choose you.

Every contact you have with your guest — from when they first view you on TripAdvisor to when they leave your accommodation — is a marketing opportunity.

Marketing can take many different forms. The tactics that work well for one operator may not be right for another — getting it right often takes a little trial and error. Yet all marketing efforts share one common goal: *to communicate a message that evokes a desired action.*

EVERYTHING IS MARKETING

If you wow customers with topnotch service and a memorable experience, they will happily sing your praises. They are looking for quality in every aspect of their trip. This includes your website, reviews and responses on sites like TripAdvisor, your service, and so much more.

BRAND COMES FIRST

Behind every great business is a compelling brand. Knowing who you are, what you do, and why people should care is key to creating an effective marketing plan.

KNOW YOUR STRENGTHS

Leverage your skills and resources wherever possible, and be prepared to invest some time and money into marketing. When you are out of your depth, consider consulting with a qualified expert to ensure you are on the right track.

CONTENT IS KING

It's easy to get overwhelmed by the social media platforms available today. Find out where your ideal clients are, and deliver great, engaging content. Many spend lots of time creating content but they don't put money behind it to push it out. Distribution is just as important as content creation.

MEASURE YOUR IMPACT

When brainstorming marketing ideas it is critical to set goals and measure your results. How else will you know if you succeeded?

“WE ARE WORKING TO GATHER FEEDBACK FROM GUESTS AFTER THEY LEAVE, CREATING A RAPPORT WITH GUESTS, SO WE CAN CREATE A WONDERFUL PLACE FOR THEM. WE KNOW WE CAN’T GET COMPLACENT.”

Lizzie Moore, Oceanstone Resort, Indian Harbour, NS



Josh Senman @sennysnap, Oceanstone Resort, Indian Harbour, NS

MARKETING

BRAND

Your brand is what your customers say it is. Brand essence comes from the feelings and experiences your guests receive when they interact with your business in some way – this can include everything from your website and social media, to how you greet them and the bed sheets you use. Everything you do and share through your business creates an impression. The sum of these impressions communicates your brand.

WHAT IS A BRAND?

Your brand is more than just a logo or the sign hanging outside your door. It's the promise your business makes to customers, employees and the community.

People often get branding confused with a logo. Quite simply, brand positioning is the place you hold in the public's mind relative to the competition (the high-end choice, the convenient option, the locally-focused choice, etc.). It's about the unique benefit your business delivers, and what sets you apart.

Once established, your brand must be consistent through everything you do and say.

CREATING YOUR BRAND

To create and establish your brand, it's important to get in touch with what is most important to you and your business. It requires some exploration to mine and determine what you want to reflect through your work. This is important in ensuring your brand is conveyed and received appropriately.

Questions to ask yourself in establishing your brand:

- What are our core values? (What do we stand for?)
- What is our purpose? (Why do we exist?)
- Who is our ideal customer? (Who are we talking to?)
- What do we know about them? (What are their interests, habits, demographics?)
- What unique value do we provide them? (What makes us special?)
- Why should they believe us? (What is the proof?)

- If our accommodation was a person, what characteristics would it have? (Is it friendly, welcoming, sophisticated, down-to-earth, etc.?)

HELPFUL LINKS

[“Start With Why”](#) TedTalk by Simon Sinek

[“How To Get Your Ideas To Spread”](#) TedTalk by Seth Godin

“PEOPLE DON’T BUY WHAT YOU DO, THEY BUY WHY YOU DO IT.”

Simon Sinek



North River Kayak Tours, Lighthouse Bites: Full Moon Adventure, Baddeck, NS

MARKETING

MARKETING PLAN

When you are starting your business, a marketing plan is critical to your success. This is how you will attract your ideal customers.

DEVELOPING A MARKETING PLAN

A comprehensive marketing plan should include the sections outlined below:

BUSINESS ASSESSMENT

This is an assessment of your situation and should include many of the same elements as your business plan:

- Summary of market research and analysis
- Analysis of the competition
- Assessment of market trends
- Description of your geographical location and physical site
- Description of your target markets
- Overall marketing budget

MARKETING OBJECTIVES

With the assessment completed, develop a clear set of objectives including the following:

- Sales volume (number of rooms sold and average room rate)
- Brand awareness/positioning (see page 4)

- Total revenues
- Profit

MARKETING STRATEGY

This is your overall approach to achieving your marketing objectives. It should outline in detail who you will target and how you will reach them. It should include:

- Brand (What is your concept? Who is it for? How is it different?)
- Description of your target market segments (age, gender, income level, etc.) See our [Planning](#) section for more information
- List of tactics that will be used to reach each market segment (Facebook, Instagram, e-newsletter, etc.)
- Description of execution of each tactic (Who is responsible? How will they do it?)
- Timeline (When will each tactic be executed?)
- Tactical planning items, such as key performance indicators (or goals) to show if a tactic was successful

When developing your marketing strategy, here are some communication channels and tactics to consider:

- Website, included integrated online booking engine and website analytics, such as Google Analytics
- What is your social media plan: what content will you post, how often, what does success look like?
- E-mail campaign
- Outdoor signage
- Cost effective ways to reach new and past customers
- Guides & directories (Doers & Dreamers, etc.)
- Promotional material (rack cards, brochures, etc.)
- Develop experiences: create your own or investigate providers in your area
- Google: own your business listing. Make sure your Google info is correct, including your mapping coordinates, etc.
- OTAs spend millions on marketing. Having inventory here will help sell your rooms to new markets



White Point Beach Resort, Stellar Beach Feast, White Point, NS

SUCCESS STORY

WHITE POINT BEACH RESORT White Point, NS

IMPORTANCE OF EXPERIENCES AND PACKAGES

By working with great partners, packages and experiences let us do more with less. They drive sales and increase revenues. They also help to differentiate us and make us a destination.

BIGGEST CHALLENGE

Provincially, we are focused on summer, but to be a viable business, we have got to start thinking in terms of a 52-week season. For industry investment, and for people to see careers in the industry, we need a year-round approach.

KEY TO SUCCESS

We do take a year-round approach and we know our guests. We try and consider them in our decision making – they are a big part of our business strategy. And we measure the impact of our progress.

BEST ADVICE

This is a lifestyle. It's incredibly rewarding but it's more than a full-time job. It's critical to know we can call on any other accommodation operator in the province – we are a family. Their success is our success and vice versa. The door is always open.

GAME CHANGER

With 84 years of building strong relationships with our guests, we had a framework in place to engage them in a meaningful way when we had a crisis. We built from that framework and our family really grew.

FUTURE THINKING

We are talking about how will we evolve well into the future. That includes trends for our guests. We are looking at infrastructure replacement and investment – making smart choices based on the data.

MARKETING

MARKETING PLAN

MARKETING BUDGET

Take the time to research the approximate cost of each tactic and to source necessary external resources (web developer, designer, photographer, etc.)

Things to consider when creating your marketing budget:

- Copywriting
- Photography
- Graphic design
- Web development and design
- Printing (brochures, tent cards, etc.)
- Promotional items (signage, t-shirts, etc.)
- Paid social media campaigns

ONE-PAGE MARKETING PLAN

The thought of developing an in-depth marketing plan can be intimidating. The key is to keep it simple. Your plan can range from very comprehensive to a quick one-page strategy.

What's most important is that you think strategically and develop tactics and campaigns that help you reach your objectives. Ideally, the plan is simple to execute and easy to

measure. [Small Biz Trends](#) offers a great example.

TEN MARKETING TIPS FOR ACCOMMODATION OPERATORS

"Marketing is no longer about the stuff that you make but about the stories you tell." - Seth Godin

Now that you have your marketing plan, here are a few good practices to keep in mind as you implement.

1. STAY CURRENT

Keep informed about new trends or useful tools that can help you enhance your accommodation's marketing plan. Reassess your marketing strategy on a regular basis to determine if you need to change directions or incorporate new information.

2. LEARN ABOUT SEO/SEM

Help prospective new customers find you online by learning more about Search Engine Optimization (SEO) and Search Engine Marketing (SEM). You may wish to own your own Google Business listing. You may also consider consulting with an expert through our [TNS Digital Marketing](#) program.

3. PUT YOUR WEBSITE TO WORK FOR YOU

Your website can be a powerful tool when used effectively. Great websites are easy to find (SEO), easy to use (functionality), compelling (engaging images and text), and encourage strategic engagement (conversions). They also include an availability calendar and easy online booking.

4. ENGAGE BLOGGERS

Many local bloggers are happy to review accommodations in return for a free meal or stay. The outside link will help with rankings, and the review (if it's a positive one) will help your reputation.

5. GROW YOUR E-MAIL LIST

When done well, e-mail marketing is powerful. But remember the golden rule of content marketing: Less tell. More show. Start growing your e-mail list by promoting signups through social media, on your website, and inside your accommodation, keeping in mind federal privacy and anti-spam legislation. For more information visit: <http://fightspam.gc.ca>

**“IN MARKETING I’VE SEEN ONLY ONE STRATEGY THAT CAN’T MISS –
TO MARKET TO YOUR BEST CUSTOMERS FIRST.”**

John Romero



Cape D’Or, NS

6. LEVERAGE SOCIAL MEDIA

Social media allows you to connect with your customers throughout the year, promote your brand, and encourage customers to share their stories. Those testimonials are priceless. Highly-targeted ad buys on Facebook can be done at a very low cost.

7. GIVE PEOPLE A REASON TO PAY ATTENTION

Create relevant, compelling content that will keep your customers interested and willing to share with friends and family.

8. GET OUT THERE

Make sure you have engaging, updated listings on

novascotia.com and the site of your regional destination marketing organization. We also have promoted listings on novascotia.com.

9. CONNECT WITH PARTNERS

Reach out to connect with other like-minded properties throughout Nova Scotia for potential referrals. It’s also a great idea to speak to the counsellors at your local visitor information centres to make sure they know how to promote your business, and which customers would appreciate your offering. Consider joining an association such as [Inns of Nova Scotia](#) or the [Nova Scotia Bed & Breakfast Association](#).

10. ENGAGE TRAVEL AGENCIES

Ensure your potential customers can find you easily. List your property online through travel agencies, such as Expedia or Booking.com.

HELPFUL LINKS

[A One Page Marketing Plan Anyone Can Use](#) by Small Business Trends

[Top 7 SEO Tips for Hostels, Inns, B&Bs, and Small Hospitality Businesses](#) by Kate Gathii

MARKETING

DIGITAL & ONLINE MARKETING

The Internet has empowered consumers to a degree never seen before – to the point that they are shaping, and even controlling, the marketplace. Social networks offer an amazing opportunity for you to connect with customers and respond to their expectations.

Important tips:

- Resist the temptation to ‘sell’ your business. Instead, inspire consumers to choose you through great imagery and content.
- Offer your customers useful information or tips as an added value.
- Promote the experience, not just the facilities and services.
- Focus on wants, not needs.
- Engage through all points of contact with your best customers.
- Stress value, not price.
- Use social networks to reinforce your credibility, engage with potential customers, and share your message.
- Create conversations and relationships.

YOUR WEBSITE

Your website can be a powerful tool when used properly. A well-engineered website should:

- Encourage bookings through your website rather than OTA sites; your business will earn more revenue this way.
- Stay true to your brand — both in design and content.
- Be mobile-friendly or responsive (provide optimal viewing experience on any device — cellphones, tablet, desktops, etc.).
- Highlight key contact information on every page (i.e., phone number, address, directions, link to Google Maps, etc.) and be clear about the length of your season.
- Post your room rates. If customers cannot find them quickly, they may leave your site.
- Use beautiful, engaging images that convey what visitors can expect.
- Inspire engagement (collect customer feedback, share testimonials, promote e-news signups or social media engagement, etc.).
- Develop SEO (search engine optimization) practices.
- Engage with bloggers.
- Host an availability calendar and the capacity for online booking.

A good website can cost you up to \$10,000, and beyond. Compare competitive or inspiring websites, so you have some idea of what you

want before you start working with a developer and designer. Once your website is up and running, it’s good practice to budget a small amount for monthly or yearly updates to keep your site up-to-date.

SOCIAL MEDIA

Social Media marketing is an easily accessible marketing opportunity. Anyone can create a social media page or account quite easily and posting to that account is free. However, effectively managing social media marketing is not without cost. But before you jump in feet first, it’s important to do your research and develop a strategy. You will also want to consider what social media channels will work best for you, what your goals are, and how often you can post.

Consider researching and using common hashtags to get your content viewed by other popular channels. For example #visitnovascotia will get your content seen by TNS.

Social media is a broad topic. And best practices are constantly changing as technology evolves. Be sure to review the helpful links at the end of this module. Visit our [TNS site](#) for more information.

TRIPADVISOR

There is no doubt that TripAdvisor and other review sites have quickly become essential resources for travellers in decision making and booking. In fact, "[TripAdvisor reviews are now so powerful they impact the tourist industry of entire countries.](#)" A recent TripBarometer survey (conducted by TripAdvisor) indicates 88 percent of global travellers say reviews on TripAdvisor are influential when choosing where to book.

So, how can small accommodation providers benefit from the reach and influence of TripAdvisor? To start, it is imperative that you maximize and optimize your online presence.

TripAdvisor gives you the capacity to monitor and measure online reviews and comments about your business, and offers an opportunity to encourage guests to share their experiences and write reviews on the site. It can help you build better relationships with your customers through engagement, increase customer visits, help you gain exposure, and price more competitively.

Review sites offer smaller accommodation properties an even playing field, with the ability

to market to millions of people worldwide. TripAdvisor, and other review sites, such as Expedia, Kayak, Trivago are essential resources to consider in developing your marketing plan.

IMPORTANT REMINDERS

1. THINK PEOPLE, NOT PLATFORMS.

There are A LOT of social media platforms and each one has a slightly different audience. Don't worry about learning them all. Just think about your ideal customers and choose the right platforms to engage them.

2. IT CAN BE TIME CONSUMING.

Social media is about building relationships. If you put the time in and plan for success, the investment will pay off.

3. ADD VALUE.

To earn a loyal following, you must create and share great content that will engage your ideal customers – that includes text, imagery and video. You don't necessarily have to be an expert. You just need to ensure you are conveying your brand message.

You also need to make sure the content is seen. With social media advertising, it is hard to live on organic reach alone. Simple ad buys can go a long way to building an audience and getting your content in front of the right people.

4. ENGAGE MORE THAN YOU SELL.

Social media can be an awesome promotional tool, but if you only use it to sell, you're missing the point. Engage always. Promote sometimes.

5. KEEP IT CONSISTENT.

Your social media presence should be consistent with your business's overall brand positioning — in design, writing style and personality.

Building a strong social media presence takes dedication and patience. It won't happen overnight, but if you put the time in and develop a plan, social media can be an immensely powerful marketing platform.

TIAN'S Tourism Summit workshops are developed with accommodation operators in mind. Find out more by emailing newsletter@tourism.ca. For information on specific channels, check out the resources below:

- [How To Use Twitter \(via Wiki\)](#)
- [How To Use Facebook for Business \(via Facebook\)](#)
- [How To Use Pinterest \(via Wiki\)](#)
- [How To Use Instagram \(via Wiki\)](#)
- [HubSpot's Marketing Blog](#)
- [How to use TripAdvisor](#)
- [Owning your Google Business](#)

TIP

Respond to reviews regularly. Use free tools provided by TripAdvisor to send invitations to guests to encourage them to leave reviews.

ONLINE ADVERTISING

Digital advertising can be a simple and cost-effective way to connect with prospective customers. Online ads offer the capacity to hyper-target your customers and an easy way to measure results.

POPULAR ONLINE ADVERTISING PLATFORMS

- [Google Adwords](#)
- [Facebook Ads and Promoted Posts](#)
- [Twitter Promoted Tweets](#)
- Web-based Publications (targeted outlets)

Like any form of paid advertising, online ads can be pricey if you don't do your homework. Do your research before committing to an online advertising campaign. Facebook, Instagram and Twitter offer inexpensive advertising options to let you test the waters.

HELPFUL LINKS

[*Online Booking Tips from TripAdvisor: What Small Hotels Can Do*](#) by Little Hotelier

[*How Hotels Can Get the Most out of Social Media*](#) by Marguerite Bravay

[*6 ways hotels can improve their Facebook marketing*](#) by Nancy Huang

[*How Hotels Benefit from Facebook*](#) by Hotelogix

[*Google AdWord Tips for a Small Budget*](#) by Vertical Response

[*5 Benefits of Facebook Ads for your Hotel*](#) by Sammi Raines

[*A Guide To Marketing Your Nova Scotia Tourism Business*](#) (Chapter 4) from Tourism Nova Scotia

You can also subscribe to some great newsletters to stay current on the latest marketing trends. Check out:

<https://www.emarketer.com/>
<http://ehotelier.com/>
<http://mashable.com/>
<http://www.socialmediaexaminer.com/>

HOW TO HANDLE ONLINE CRITICISM

Sometimes unhappy guests will complain in person, giving staff the opportunity to remedy the situation on the spot. But today, many will submit complaints via social media instead. Negative social media comments can hurt your business's reputation, so it's important to have a strategy for damage control.

Negative comments won't go away on their own, but if you handle the situation with professionalism and grace, other customers will take notice — and the reviewer may even feel obliged to remove their comments.

Below are some helpful tips and rules for handling negative social media comments.

STEP 1 MAKE IT EASY TO CONNECT DIRECTLY

Some guests complain through social media because they can't find an accommodation's contact information. To avoid this, ensure your website, Facebook page, and other social media platforms have up-to-date, easy to find contact information.

TIP

Regularly review postings about your accommodation on social media sites. A Google alert can help. Respond if appropriate and address issues as required.

STEP 2 SET UP GOOGLE ALERT NOTIFICATIONS

Monitoring every social media platform is time consuming (Facebook, Instagram, TripAdvisor, Expedia, etc.), and most small businesses can't afford an online community manager. Setting up a Google Alert with your accommodation's name will ensure you're notified when new reviews are posted.

STEP 3 READ THE REVIEW CAREFULLY

One advantage to receiving criticism online as opposed to in person is that you have time to read each comment thoroughly. Once you have done this, highlight the customer's complaints, and consider

how you'll mitigate the issue in the future. In your response, detail the measures you'll take to improve.

STEP 4 PRIVATE VS. PUBLIC APOLOGY

On many platforms, you can choose whether to respond privately or publicly. It's usually best to apologize in public. If you want more details on the complaint, request to continue the conversation in private (either by phone or e-mail or direct message). Never offer compensation in public.

STEP 5 BE POLITE AND ACCEPT RESPONSIBILITY

Some poor reviews can be downright harsh. Though your first instinct may be to go on the defensive, try to stay calm.

Customers expect a thoughtful apology, and it won't look good if you refuse to accept the blame. Remember that for every one reviewer there may be 20 more readers.

STEP 6 BE RESPONSIVE

Reacting quickly proves that you're listening and that you take customer complaints seriously. Know that there are some people that you are not going to make happy no matter what you do. These people sometimes end up on social media and are just looking for a fight. In that case, acknowledge that your property was not suited for them. Let it go and move on.

Risks to Ignoring Criticism

THE COMMENT IS VIEWED AS ACCURATE BY OTHERS

Social media reviews can be highly influential. Not responding to negative reviews could imply that the comments are accurate and that nothing is being done to remedy the situation.

AN OPPORTUNITY IS MISSED

Good or bad, social media comments are genuine customer feedback. Negative reviews can point to operational/staffing issues that require your attention. Think of negative feedback as an opportunity for improvement.

IT MAKES YOU LOOK UNPROFESSIONAL

Ignoring negative comments makes you look unprofessional and unconcerned with customer satisfaction.



Trout Point Lodge, East Kemptville, NS



Kluskap Ridge RV & Campground, Englishtown, NS

MARKETING

PRINT ADVERTISING

Larger properties or smaller accommodations appealing to specialized markets may wish to advertise in regional or specialty

publications. For example, those appealing to the meeting and convention market may wish to advertise in business publications

read by meeting planners. Print advertising can be a costly business, so make sure the investment is well worth it before you proceed.

MARKETING

TOURISM NOVA SCOTIA

Nova Scotia's marketing efforts are primarily directed at potential visitors in our target markets in Canada, the United States, Germany, the United Kingdom, and China. While the volume of visitors to Nova Scotia is far higher from the Canadian market, the revenue per visitor from international markets is higher, as they tend to stay longer and spend more on shopping and experiences, and in hotels and restaurants.

Our activity in each target market varies depending on awareness levels, proximity and transportation access, media costs and budgets, and the ability to leverage partnerships.

Profiles of Nova Scotia's identified target geographic markets and visitor segments are available in downloadable [reports](#).

NOVASCOTIA.COM

The TNS website, [novascotia.com](#), is a valuable resource for operators of any size. There are a number of ways to access our team's services and connect into their established network.

It's no secret that vacation planners use the Internet as their top source for travel information. In 2017, [NovaScotia.com](#) received more than 3.91 million visits, down slightly from 3.99 million in 2016 which was a 13% increase over 2015.

In 2017, tourism operator business listings on [NovaScotia.com](#) saw a 3.96% increase in website visitors clicking through to operators' business websites.

Learn how you can promote your tourism business or product on [NovaScotia.com](#) for free by visiting the following pages:

- [List Your Tourism Business](#)
- [List Your Experience](#)
- [List Your Package](#)
- [Social Media](#)

DOERS & DREAMERS TRAVEL GUIDE

The [Doers & Dreamers](#) travel guide, and its French sister publication, *Du rêve à l'aventure*, are the flagship fulfillment publications for all of Nova Scotia's tourism marketing programs.

To be eligible to participate in Tourism partnership programs,

such as the Doers and Dreamers Travel Guide and [NovaScotia.com](#), operators of accommodation properties must:

- Participate in a recognized Quality Standards Program: NS Approved or Canada Select/Camping Select.
- Submit an annual Tourist Accommodation Licence renewal with full payment.
- Submit monthly occupancy reports to Tourism Nova Scotia.

VISITOR SERVICES

Our visitor service counsellors are our frontline representatives for Tourism Nova Scotia, working directly with tourism industry operators and visitors. On a daily basis, they recommend the memorable products and experiences that inspire people to enjoy the best of our beautiful province. The team provides expert knowledge and friendly,



Jost Vineyard, Malagash, NS

personalized service to give our visitors the most incredible and memorable experience of Nova Scotia.

Visitor Services is a wonderful resource for operators, offering opportunities to promote your accommodation and/or advertise through the VICs. To learn more about how you can benefit from this relationship, visit the [Visitor Information Services](#) on tourism.ca.

PHOTO AND VIDEO ASSETS

Imagery and video are essential to creating compelling content on your website and through social media. Nova Scotia tourism operators can take advantage of Tourism Nova Scotia's extensive library of high quality visual materials to help promote your business and region. Register to access photos and videos

from our online library by visiting barberstock.com/novascotia.

The [TNS Inspiring Content Program](#) is a great resource.

MARKETING

MEASURING RESULTS

Before you begin investing time, money, and effort into marketing, it is important to have a strategy for tracking success. Without measuring your results, you could be throwing money out the window.

Each marketing tactic you consider should be measurable. And with today's technology, it's easier than ever to collect and analyze key metrics about your business.

Here are some questions to ask yourself in order to gauge the effectiveness of your marketing efforts:

- How did new customers hear about you? (If visitors are flocking to your accommodation because they read about it on TripAdvisor, you'll want to encourage more customers to write TripAdvisor reviews.)
- How effective is each marketing tactic? (How many people saw your Facebook ad?)
- What are your social media engagement results? (Are you creating conversations?)
- Based on your online surveys, how satisfied are your customers?

- What are your busiest months of the year? (Or when, during the year, would you like to see improvement?)
- When analyzing your results, the most important thing to consider is customer satisfaction. No matter how many people you attract, you won't earn repeat business if customers aren't satisfied.

There are a number of helpful tools available for tracking and responding to questions and complaints. Equally as useful are the built-in analytic tools in each of these resources, which will provide you with insight into trends and patterns in customer experience.

Tracking tactics year over year will provide you with benchmarks to measure your success. Keep track of what you did, measure it and try and do better next time.

HELPFUL TOOLS FOR MEASURING RESULTS:

[HootSuite](#) monitors social media channels by providing analytic reports of reach and engagement.

[ChattBack](#) allows you to view and reply to all customer messages and provides analytic reports of trends in your service.

[SurveyMonkey](#) allows you to create surveys or use existing survey templates to gather customer feedback. It also provides data analysis tools to gain insight into customer trends.

[TripAdvisor](#) allows you to view comments, engage with customers and evaluate and implement opportunities for improvement.



SUCCESS STORY

MAISON FISET HOUSE INN/AUBERGE Cheticamp, NS

IMPORTANCE OF TOUR OPERATORS

As a small business, we find online booking agents aren't personable enough. We like dealing with tour operators – people who have done the research and know specifically what their clients are looking for, so we can both deliver.

BIGGEST CHALLENGE

When we started, I had carte blanche to make decisions – good or bad, I learned from those decisions. Now that we have more confidence, our biggest challenge is our employees. Every year is a struggle to get good staff who will come back.

KEY TO SUCCESS

The key is working hard and making sure that guests get what they are looking for. It's all the little things you do to make guests feel and know they are important.

BEST ADVICE

It's probably one of the most rewarding jobs, but you can't please everyone. If you spend too much energy on people who you just can't make happy, you won't have energy to spend on those who are worth it.

GAME CHANGER

I was given the opportunity to learn and grow as the business grew. You have to be open minded and listen to what your guests are saying, we can make those changes easily because we are small, agile and responsive.

FUTURE THINKING

We want to keep improving our quality. Each guest is different but the one thing we ensure is that people get what they really want.

MARKETING

TRAVEL TRADE

The term travel trade refers to the various organizations involved in the distribution system in tourism, particularly tour operators. They help people buy travel products and engage operators, like you, to connect with consumer markets.

The travel trade can be a great resource and promotional channel for accommodation operators with limited resources – exposing your product to other markets and generating sales through marketing activities.

TNS works with tour operators and the travel trade to showcase Nova Scotia's travel-related products and services, and facilitates partnerships between 'the trade' and Nova Scotia's tourism operators.

Great reasons to work with the travel trade include:

- Accessing new markets, more business
- Extending your reach
- Connecting with a recognizable brand
- Developing relationships with sophisticated marketers
- Being responsive to market shifts

HAVE YOU GOT WHAT IT TAKES?

Generally, tour operators are looking for the following features and

requirements:

- Unique experiences that originate from the destination's natural and cultural heritage – attractions, events, entertainment, culinary experiences, unique accommodations.
- Exclusivity – special features that are arranged for clients, such as a behind-the-scenes tour, meet the chef, etc.
- Value-add to the tour operator's program.
- Net rate pricing, allowing them to add the necessary mark-ups to recover their costs.

It's important to note that some tour operators will ask for a guaranteed block of rooms. Smaller properties should consider whether this will work for them. If the rooms are released, you may not be able to re-sell them.

Tour operators usually have specific requirements of accommodations, such as:

- Convenient location relative to the program's itinerary.
- Clean, well maintained facilities.

- Parking onsite or adjacent.
- Breakfast service onsite open at least one hour before departure for groups (keep in mind that breakfast is a hot meal eaten quite early for many Europeans).
- Competitive price with net rates available.
- Good service.

For group tours, additional needs include:

- Ability to handle groups: baggage handling; keys in packets on arrival; two double beds per room (with some king beds available); rooms similar in size and design; complimentary services for the tour guide and driver (where there are 15 - 20 passengers or more on motorcoach tours, or 10 or more on smaller groups).
- Private bathrooms.
- Reservation protection for late arrivals.
- Industry standard cancellation policy.
- Safety and security features.
- Ability to accommodate clients with mobility issues.



SUCCESS STORY

THE HILLSDALE HOUSE INN Annapolis Royal, NS

IMPORTANCE OF MARKETING:

Demand for accommodations fluctuates in our region throughout the season. It's important that we employ various forms of marketing to increase awareness of our property, and, ideally, become top-of-mind for visitors.

BIGGEST CHALLENGE:

As a small business with limited marketing funds, it's difficult to take on the challenge of encouraging people with little or no knowledge of our area to choose our destination over areas that are better resourced.

KEY TO SUCCESS:

We are very hands-on, and do everything that we can to ensure we provide a high-quality product and excellent (often individualized) service, which leaves our guests with a very positive, memorable experience.

BEST ADVICE:

Research! Understand what you are taking on. Many underestimate the amount of work that is involved in running an inn. Do an honest assessment of your capabilities and ask yourself if you have what it takes.

GAME CHANGER:

Increased product offering and customer service. We changed the way we were delivering the product and launched a new website.

FUTURE THINKING:

We are continuing to invest in our property and embark on the development of new experiential products that can draw visitors to our area who, ideally, stay with us. It provides a new revenue source for the business.

MARKETING

TRAVEL TRADE

COMMUNICATING AND BOOKING

It's critical that the tour operator is able to easily communicate and book with you. They must be able to:

- Connect with you on a year-round basis, and receive responses within 24 hours on business days.
- Provide your product or service over the course of the tour operator's own season.
- Avoid 'blackout' periods that block their access to inventory during particular periods.

An online availability calendar can help tour operators determine where you have space available when they are doing their planning.

STRATEGY

Connecting into the travel trade network can be a challenge for smaller operators. There are several different stages to consider and

levels of effort involved. Here are some important opportunities for you to connect into the travel trade:

- Destination marketing organizations (DMOs) are at the centre of the travel trade system. In North America, they are often a first point of contact for tour operators looking for advice on products that might fit their program. DMOs can be very influential in steering buyers to appropriate products, including accommodations.
- Talk to your local or regional DMO about how they work with the travel trade and how your product might fit into their trade marketing program. If there is no active DMO for your destination, talk directly to the trade sales team at [TNS](#) and check out our [website](#).

TNS and your local or regional DMO are, without question, your most important allies in getting your product in front of tour operators, and connecting you with partners

where they see an alignment between your accommodation and the buyer's program.

You can also talk to your local/regional DMO about being considered for [familiarization visits \(FAMs\)](#) for tour operators in your region. It's important to note that FAMs are opportunities to show your product for free or a reduced rate. They are not revenue opportunities.

HELPFUL LINKS

[Building Travel Trade Business – Opportunities for Nova Scotia Operators](#)



SUCCESS STORY

OCEANSTONE RESORT

Indian Harbour, NS

IMPORTANCE OF EVENTS:

Through our events, we create a magical, unique experience for guests. It creates a desire for them to come back and keep coming back.

BIGGEST CHALLENGE:

We have two little ones at home, but Oceanstone is our first baby. It's been a challenge trying to find a good balance.

KEY TO SUCCESS:

We have an amazing team who take care of people and love what they do. They are just as passionate about Oceanstone as we are.

BEST ADVICE:

If this is your dream and you are passionate about it, there is a way to achieve it. A really strong team, and family support, is so important.

GAME CHANGER:

Social media helped in a big way! It took time to develop our reputation.

FUTURE THINKING:

We're really working on social media, working with travel bloggers and influencers – to get them here, get them excited and talking about Oceanstone.

MARKETING

PACKAGING

By creating a package to offer your guests, you can encourage bookings that result in multiple night stays. These can include packages available throughout your season (such as whale watching or a romance package) or for special events (theatre tickets, festivals, wine pairing dinners). You can learn more about creating packages in our [Operations](#) section.

STANDING OFFER PACKAGES

Packages that are offered throughout your season should be well defined on your website. If you are using a reservation system, make sure to include a link so your guests can book their package online. If you are working with a supplier, ask them

to cross promote your package on their website. And make sure to use compelling photos and content to entice your guests and encourage sales.

SPECIAL EVENT PACKAGES

The most effective ways to promote your special event packages are through an e-newsletter and social media platforms. Be sure to link the package to your reservation system to make it easier for your guests to book.

Depending on the frequency of your special events, you can send out a regular newsletter to your database to provide advance notice and get people excited to buy their

tickets. Engaging content, including photos or video, always helps. And encourage guests to contact you if they require more information.

Promoting your special event packages on social media is a must, and each event should be promoted separately. When posting on Facebook, encourage people to share your event with their friends.

If you are working with other suppliers, you can ask them to cross promote the event on their social media channels. You'll be surprised by the size of the audience that you can reach by being a little creative.

You can list packages or events for free on [NovaScotia.com](https://www.novascotia.com) via our Partner Portal.

MARKETING

GROUP AND SMALL MEETING BUSINESS

Group business – such as weddings, family reunions and small meetings – is an excellent way to generate room revenue, especially during your slower months. These events can also attract people who may not be familiar with your property and give you exposure on social media to new markets at no cost to you.

Creating a page on your website to encourage group business is money well spent. Make sure to provide enough detail to encourage potential clients to contact you for further information. This allows you to customize each event to meet the

needs (and wants) of your client and what works best for your property.

When it comes to small meetings, you might want to get in touch with local business owners to promote your space. Often they will bring in groups from outside the area for meetings, which can also attract out-of-town attendees and result in additional room revenue.

When it comes to wedding events, it's a great idea to cross-promote with local businesses that provide wedding services, such as florists, caterers, photographers and others.

They can also help with additional costs that can be expensive for your small business. Weddings are an excellent way to attract multiple guests for multiple room nights; they can be time consuming, however, so charge accordingly. There are many helpful websites available to help you market your property as a wedding venue.

HELPFUL LINKS

<http://www.hitched.ca>

<https://www.weddingwire.ca>

<https://www.eventective.com>



Oceanstone Resort, Indian Harbour, NS

For more information, please check out our [Planning](#) and [Operations](#) sections.