

Topic | Social Media

Tutorial 50

Mobile Technology For Tourism

Mobile technology is fast becoming vital for tourism businesses. This tutorial explains how travellers are using smartphones and how you can meet their needs.

Reading time: 25 minutes

Prerequisite: None



1. Mobile technology for tourism businesses and why it is important

Holidaymakers are increasingly looking to take advantage of their smartphone's Internet capabilities to help them gather holiday information, find reviews and even book tickets while travelling.

The total number of mobile Internet users are expected to reach 134 million by 2013 as a result of the increasing rise in smartphone popularity according to the research firm, eMarketer.



2. How did smartphones come about?

What is a smartphone? The term is generally used to describe any mobile phone that combines **communication with sophisticated personal use technology such as access to the Internet and the ability to download applications**. The latest generation was introduced by Apple, in the form of its popular iPhone, in June 2007. Since then, a whole range of smartphones from competing brands using this technology have followed.

THE INTRODUCTION OF THE IPHONE (AND THE LATER SMARTPHONES) WAS EXTREMELY BENEFICIAL TO TRAVELLERS AND THE TOURISM AND TRAVEL INDUSTRY.

Desktop computers were well suited to the research, planning and booking of people's holidays before their trips **but did not offer portability and flexibility**.

Laptop computers were more portable but were cumbersome to take on long trips. While so-called "palm" computers were in existence, they were limited in their functionality and it wasn't until the iPhone was introduced, with its capability and user friendly nature, that travellers could take phones with them on holiday and use them to easily and quickly organise aspects of their trip while travelling.

One of the main benefits of smart technology mobile phones for travellers is the ability to connect to the Internet. In many ways an iPhone using a Wi-Fi (wireless) or 3G (mobile) connection can replace the use of a PC. Therefore it is important to make sure your website is optimised for smartphones.

Screen capture copyright: apple.com

3. Benefits of smartphones to my business

The increase in usage of smartphones by travellers means there can be many benefits for the small tourism operator.

AMONG THESE IS THE IMPROVED ABILITY TO CONTACT TRAVELLERS, BOTH THROUGH SOCIAL MEDIA BEFORE THEY BEGIN THEIR JOURNEY AND ALSO WITH UPDATES AS THEY ARRIVE.

While traditional information desks, leaflets and directories will always be important marketing tools of the small tourism businesses, more travellers are also using their smartphones to locate events, read reviews, book accommodation and discover places to visit.

Travellers combine smartphone technology with social media and send photos, share reviews, take and upload videos and update their favourite sites as they travel. This aspect of smartphone technology has great relevance to the small tourism operator. An active and well-compiled social media presence such as a Twitter account or Facebook Page may increase your chances of being seen by travellers using smartphones.

Downloadable communication applications such as iPhone apps also make it easy to monitor and communicate with potential customers.

Thanks to smartphones and iPhones your business' exposure can dramatically increase. For instance

- Your website is available to be viewed from any smartphone
- Your guests can leave comments on your Facebook Page via their Facebook smartphone or iPhone app.
- Anyone can read your TripAdvisor listing and post a review
- Smartphones even work as a GPS and let travellers find your location.

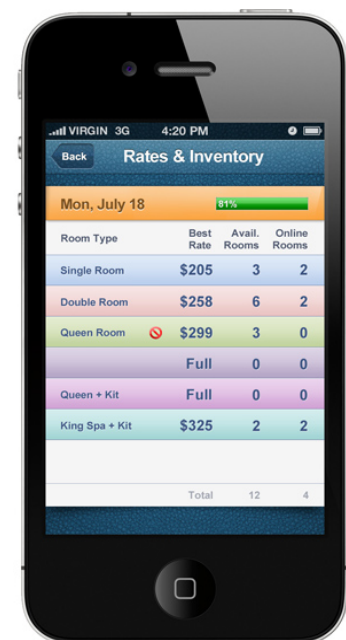
a) *Benefits of having a smartphone in the business*

Using a smartphone is not just restricted to travellers and can have many benefits in your own business. Among these is the fact that you can remain in touch with your business from remote locations where a connection is available and monitor your business name on social media while you're on the move.

Many Australian tourism operators don't realise how affordable iPhones and smartphones now are and do not have one themselves. A quick search on www.whistleout.com.au/MobilePhones/Phones/Apple/Apple-iPhone-4-16GB reveals that iPhones start at \$44 per month including calls, data (internet) and the iPhone phone (September 2011).

Having a smartphone will save you copious amounts of time by allowing you to:

- Check your emails from anywhere, respond and/or forward, archive or delete.



- Access your calendar (synchronises between your desktop, laptop and phone)
- Check your occupancy using your online booking system app (provided your online booking system has an iPhone application or a mobile-friendly layout)
- Take photos and post them on Flickr, Facebook and other sites
- Take videos and post them on YouTube, Facebook and other sites
- Manage your online reputation
- Check and post on your Facebook Page
- Do your online banking
- Answer your live chat system present on your website using an iPhone app
- Utilising a customer relationship management system
- Do your accounting online with programs such as Saasu or Xero.

Screencapture credit GuestPoint software

When asked, the majority of small business owners say that their smartphone saves them many hours of administration.. Portable, versatile and capable the smartphone is not just the future for travellers but also for small tourism operators who can tap into the changing face of tourist travel technology.

4. Optimising websites for smartphones

Optimising your website for smartphones will:

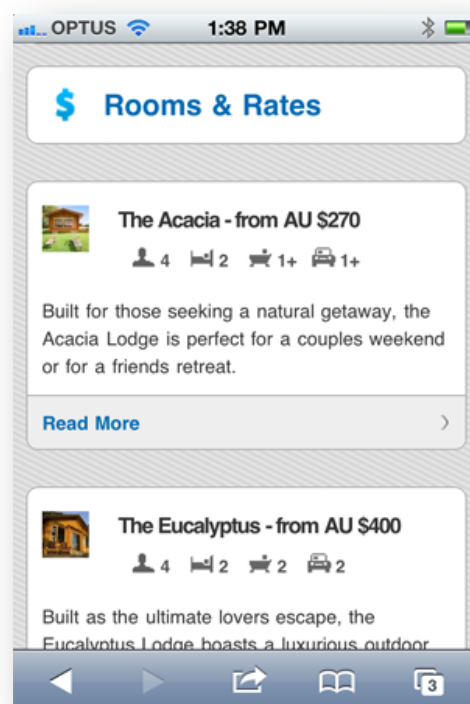
- Ensure it loads quickly on a smartphone
- Ensure the layout is clean and easy to use on a small screen. The layout doesn't have to replicate the layout of your existing website.

a) What could my website look like on an iPhone or smartphone?

Smart phones and iPhones do not display all websites in a reader-friendly fashion because of their small screen and programming requirements. It is therefore important to ensure and check your website and your online booking system render well on a smartphone. For instance, the example of a motel website below doesn't render well on an iPhone/smartphone. Let's compare it with a mobile-optimised site and load the both on an iPhone.



This website is difficult to read. The menu on the left is difficult to read and would require a lot of finger zooming. This layout seems to be the exact same one as the main website layout.

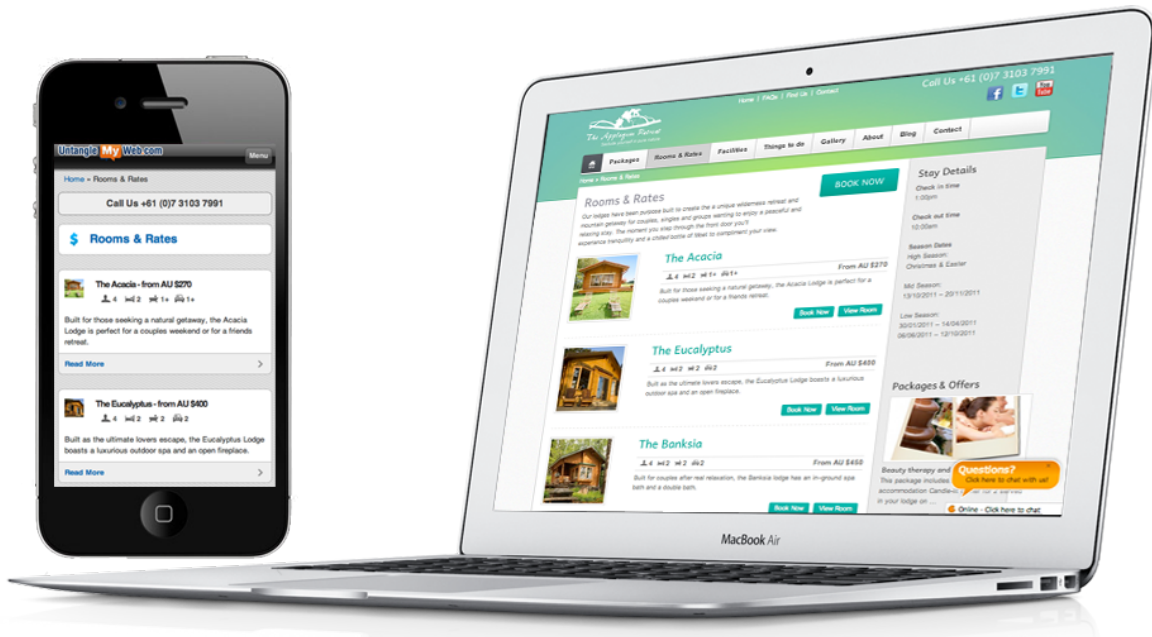


This website is very simple to read on an iPhone. It seems that the layout has been designed for a smartphone/iPhone and is different from the main website layout.

A website built for desktops and laptops may not be suitable for a smartphone. Adjustments to make it a “light” version may need to be carried out. It may even be necessary to build a “no frills” separate mobile phone version of the website (see example on the right above and example below).

If your website is using a reputable content management system there will be plug-ins that your web developer can use to achieve the mobile-friendly version of your site.

The below illustrations compare an iPhone/smartphone layout with a standard layout. Note how the content is the same but the layout is appropriate to the medium.



Screen capture copyright smartaccommodationwebsite.com

b) How can I check how many people view my website on a smartphone?

Go to your Google Analytics (www.google.com/analytics) and locate the Mobile report under the visitors menu. You will see a list of the different devices and the visits per device.

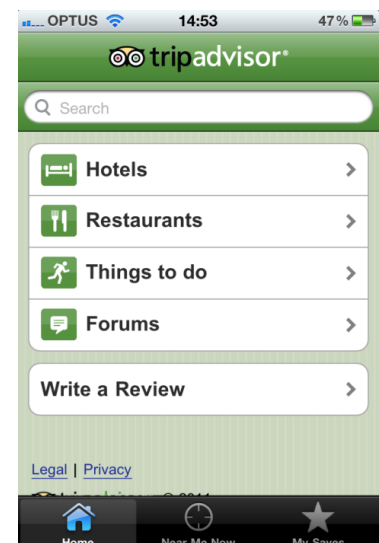
Viewing: **Mobile Device Info** Mobile Device Branding Service Provider Mobile Input Selector Operating System

Secondary dimension: **Select...** Sort Type: **Default**

Mobile Device Info	Visits
1. Apple iPhone	205
2. Apple iPad	89
3. (not set)	22
4. HTC Desire HD	7

5. Applications for iPhones and smartphones

Applications (apps) are the driving force behind increasing the capability of traveller's iPhones and other smartphones. Apps are small programs available free or for a few dollars. iPhone apps are by far more popular than other smartphones' apps. Skype, Facebook, TripAdvisor and the major banks are just a few of the hundreds of apps available. There is even an app that turns the iPhone into a torch.



There are many applications pertaining to the travel industry. For instance, there are apps which help tourists book airline tickets on the move, deliver restaurant reviews or check local films in the area they are staying. They are usually either free of charge or made available at a minimal cost.

Many travellers find it more convenient, less time consuming and more efficient to organise their holidays using such applications. There is also the convenience of being able to shop around using apps online and potentially snap up that last minute deal.

Popular apps such as that provided by the site TripAdvisor also help smartphone users with reviews of restaurants, hotels and attractions for travellers.

Screen captures copyright: Apple.com and [TripAdvisor iPhone App](#)

6. Key learning outcomes

- Smartphones are becoming more and more vital for tourism businesses with people on the move and the pure nature of “away from home” customers
- Your website needs to be optimised for smartphones as this isn’t done automatically
- There are a large number of tools and applications available for businesses who are looking to go mobile and cater for smartphone customers.

7. Related material

a) *Related tutorials*

- Social media for tourism
- Online reputation management
- TripAdvisor for tourism