



An Essential Guide to Choosing the Right Booking Engine Provider for your Business



The whole point of having a high functioning booking engine is to throw the net over as many direct bookings as you can. You wouldn't bake a cake without flour (or a gluten free alternative!) – the same way you wouldn't devise a book direct strategy without a booking engine. The cake would have no base, and without a solid base, what purpose is there for the other ingredients? They end up being a little lost.

Your booking engine defines how you allow your guests to search for availability and book directly on your hotel website. The more intuitive and user-friendly it is, the quicker conversions will pile up.

Nearly one-half of hotel booking revenues are projected to be online by 2022, and while OTAs are absolutely helpful as part of your overall revenue strategy, it's very important that you prioritise selling rooms through your own booking engine/website first – and think about OTAs second. This is why metasearch is such a hot topic right now. With Google Hotel Ads performing better than ever, you're catching people at that precious initial search stage, and as long you have saved the best rate for your own booking engine/website, you won't lose any business unnecessarily.

What does the right booking engine do?

You need a booking engine provider that will:

1. Aid in brand promotion
2. Capture bookings at a lower cost compared to your other online channels
3. Increase the lifetime value of your guest
4. Retain the loyalty of your guest

What platforms is your booking engine used on?

1. Your direct hotel website (including the mobile version of your website)
2. Meta search
3. Social media sites like Facebook for example

What makes a booking engine the right one for your business?

The right booking engine provider has to have a number of features in order for you to consider them:

1. Smooth integration with your channel manager
2. Compatibility with mobile and social media sites
3. Flexibility in regards to your hotel's needs
4. Intelligent data collection
5. Features that will help you build your customer relationships
6. Solid customer support
7. Prevalent book direct message
8. Marketing and website services included
9. Built to drive conversions
10. The right booking engine for the right property



1. Smooth integration with your channel manager

In order to prevent a mix up in which unavailable rooms are booked by new guests, it's very important that your booking engine integrates seamlessly with your channel manager. This will ensure that room inventory across all of your online channels is automatically updated, leaving no room for shoddy mistakes and guest upset.

In a space where you can have potentially hundreds of different channels selling your rates, you need a way of managing and centralising your online strategy.

With all of your availability and rates in the same place, you can then continually hone your rate strategy and get quick, easy insights into how channels are performing.

Your booking engine provider should link in with a large variety of channel managers to make your job easier.

At Net Affinity, we facilitate integrations with all major channel managers and PMS systems. Part of our service is to fully support these integrations to avoid any issues throughout the process – but more on the importance of customer support later!



2. Compatibility with mobile and social media sites

Mobile traffic and revenue has been climbing steadily over the years, and our most recent mobile data trends report in July 2021 showed that mobile revenue had soared to 60%. Mobile traffic came in at 77%, also the highest we have ever seen.

Mobile bookings will continue to grow and should be a huge consideration for you as you decide on a booking engine. It is unnegotiable that your booking engine be fully responsive, capable and optimised for mobile, just like your website. It simply must be.

You should be able to see your performance on mobile separately from your performance on other devices. This should help you to continually hone your mobile strategy with accurate data. Devices are used very differently (think about how you use your mobile compared to your desktop) – this is why you need a booking engine that is customisable for every type of device. While all booking processes should be simple and concise, those via mobile need to be even more so, as we tend to use our phones on go and the screens are much smaller.

The explosion of mobile customer engagements creates a tremendous upside opportunity for smart hoteliers who invest in and take advantage of this rising tide of mobile-obsessed travel consumers.

People are booking on mobile – don't lose them by using the wrong booking engine that doesn't take this properly into account.

3. Flexibility in regards to your hotel's needs

What are your hotel's needs? Well, they come back to the guest and what the guest needs.

Firstly, look at your data and consider where your guests come from. Does your current booking engine display all of the potential languages your guests speak, and does it provide the currency they pay with? Secondly, do you have successful voucher sales? If so, does your booking engine provide online voucher redemption?

Perhaps weddings make up a large contingent of your guests (or, they did pre-Covid – and are starting to pick up again now!) If this is the case, does your booking engine provide wedding and corporate booking modules? These are just a few questions that you should ask yourself when carefully considering whether your booking engine is providing you with everything you need to secure the bookings you should be getting.

A few other questions to ask yourself as part of your booking engine's capabilities and flexibility:

- Does it display your hotel's logo?
- Does it offer unlimited creation of tariffs, room types, special offers and discounts?
- Does it show a pooled inventory?

4. Intelligent data collection

Your booking engine should be providing you with ongoing, easy to access, transparent and in-depth insights into your hotel's performance.

These insights should include direct conversion rates, bookings via desktop compared to mobile, average length of stay (ALOS), and revenue from packages and promotions.

Ideally, you should be able to use your booking engine reports to find demand and booking patterns that will help you with your revenue and marketing strategies. To complement the reports, your booking engine provider should be supplying expert advice and recommendations based on your ongoing data.

The data in your booking engine data should be used to build confidence in your property. In fact, one of your booking engine's key strengths in driving conversions is accurately tracking the overall search patterns for future dates. We are just beginning to exit a very turbulent time globally which has shaken up our industry like all others. However there are still patterns to be found and it's more important than ever to pay attention to the data as domestic travel continue and the future of international travel hangs in the balance.



5. Features that will help you build customer relationships

The better your guest gets to know you, the more likely they are to stay again in future. Now, more than ever, personal relationships are essential for driving direct bookings and your booking engine should actually enhance and drive these relationships by allowing you to build rapport through the likes of personalised email communication.

For example, you should be able to send automated pre-stay emails with information about your guest's stay several days before arrival. Similarly, post-stay emails should be available and should include an invitation for guests to review their stay.

Net Affinity's booking engine provides opportunities outside of the booking process for you to communicate with your guests.

6. Solid customer support

It's not enough to provide you with a booking engine product and then send you off on your merry way. Your booking engine provider needs to be there to support your journey on an ongoing basis, recommending changes based on reports, discussing best practises based on changes in the market and so on.

Back again to reporting – your booking engine reports should be transparent, in-depth, and should give you full insight into your hotel is performing. This is part of the support you deserve as your booking engine provider's customer.

Often, it may be that your booking engine provider has extensive hospitality experience themselves. If they know the industry well, they know hoteliers like you, perhaps they were one once upon a time. They know guests, they know what they want. They have connections with third parties, they know what you need as part of your hotel tech stack in order to increase bookings and take the complication out of your day. A knowledgeable team is an invaluable asset.



7. Prevalent book direct message

Your hotel website is the channel that will provide you with the lowest cost-per-acquisition. This makes it the most profitable one.

While we know OTA bookings are still valuable (especially at certain times) you cannot be reliant on them. They are ruthless in their thirst for growth. This is why you always need to put your best foot forward.

Direct bookings come with a much lower CPA, even when you account for marketing costs. Growing your direct bookings simply means growing your revenue.

There are a large variety of tactics that can improve your book direct strategy – some of these include providing a clear, compelling reason to book direct to your guests, giving them the best rate, and managing your rate strategy properly across all your online channels.

[We can help if you'd like to chat more about this.](#)



8. Marketing and website services included

Ideally, your booking engine provider is skilled and knowledgeable in more than just one area, and they can provide you with a holistic book direct approach that includes digital marketing and website services.

Digital marketing drives high volume and high quality traffic to your website, and booking engine.

A smart marketing team will be able to guide you and help refine your strategy so that you're getting the best out of meta search, Google and social media platforms. At Net Affinity, our marketing team have years of experience with all of these things and also with SEO, which helps hotels gain more organic exposure via search engines.



9. What about your website?

Having a perfectly built, mobile-responsive booking engine that does everything it's meant to do, but with a website that's no good, is not going to get you very far. Like trying to sell a car that's had an engine makeover, but still looks old and battered on the outside, it's not very appealing and doesn't make for an altogether seamless journey.

Your website is your storefront, your online front of house. It needs to be enticing, simple, clear, representative.

Take a look at our [website builder product](#) – and consider us if you are thinking of redesigning.



10. Built to drive conversions

Your booking engine built to persuade guests to convert. Done correctly, conversion rate optimisation makes your hotel more money. That revenue allows you to grow your brand and get more exposure while keeping your hotel full and your ADR high. Think of CRO as a set of guidelines for success, which must be refined for the industry and the market. That's where your booking engine provider steps in.

Your booking engine should be constantly improving, and dedicated to finding out where, and why, users aren't booking. Then, they need to figure out how to fix it. At Net Affinity, we follow best practices and track user behaviour to make sure that our booking engine works for your guests – we are always reviewing, always improving.

Our conversion team are 100% dedicated to testing our booking engine, tracking how users move through the process, and constantly bettering the technology.



The right booking engine for the right property

Make sure your booking engine provider is equipped to manage the type of property you are. It's no good signing up for a booking engine that only cater to country guesthouses if you are a larger city centre hotel.

If your booking engine provider has a healthy, extensive, variety of properties on their client list, that's a good sign they can handle your hotel with care. If you have any concerns, speak to them first.

[Book a 30 day free trial with our booking engine today.](#)