

Visit Dorset Online Booking Industry Survey

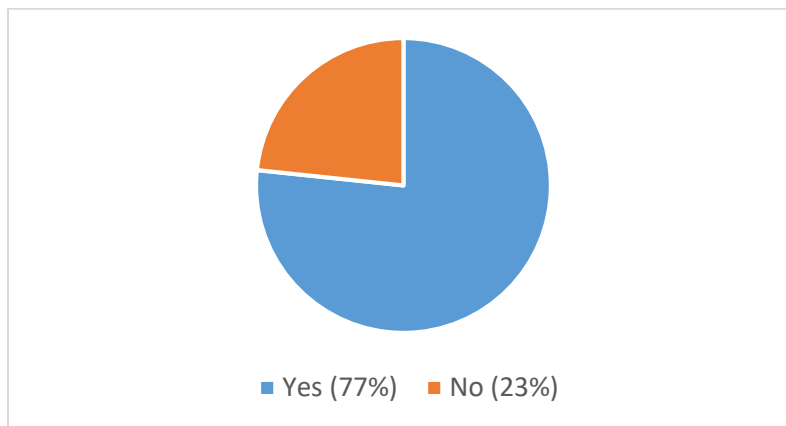
Visit Dorset ran a survey for two weeks from 14/6/18 to the 28/6/18.

The purpose of the survey was to better understand current industry attitudes towards online booking of accommodation, what platforms accommodation providers are using and how we can look at ways to develop online booking of accommodation via the Visit Dorset website.

The survey was distributed via email to 269 active accommodation provider contacts currently featured on visit-dorset.com of which 23% (61) completed the Google Forms survey.

Q1. Do you feel it is important that your accommodation is bookable online?

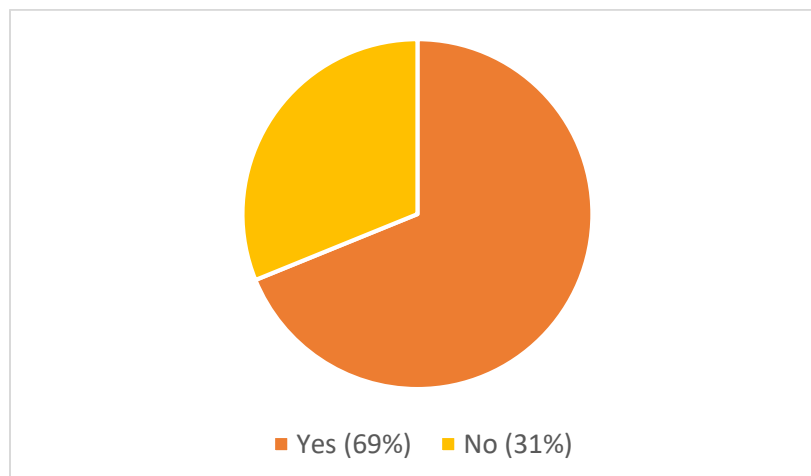
(60 responses)



This clearly indicates that accommodation providers understand the current climate and the importance of being bookable online.

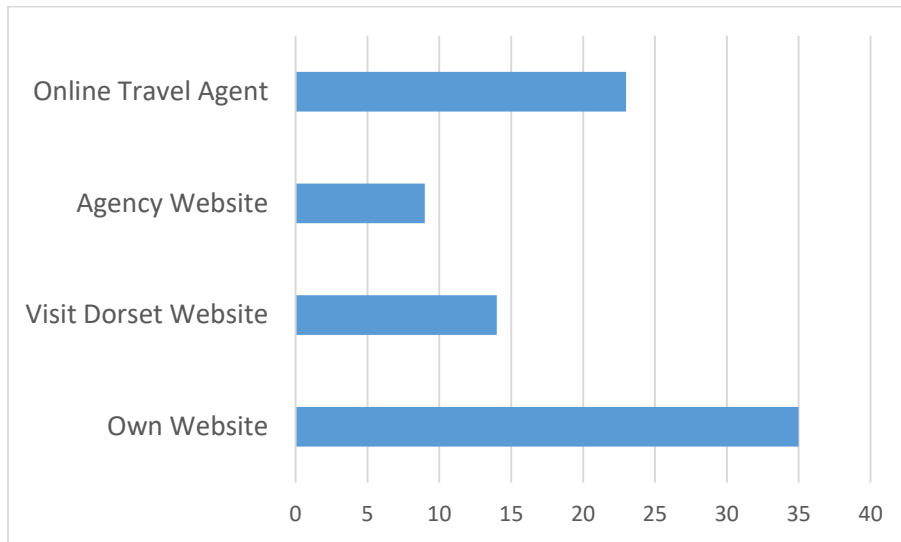
Q2. Is your accommodation currently bookable online?

(61 responses)



While the large majority of accommodation providers are set up to receive bookings online there are a significant amount of businesses that have yet to make the transition.

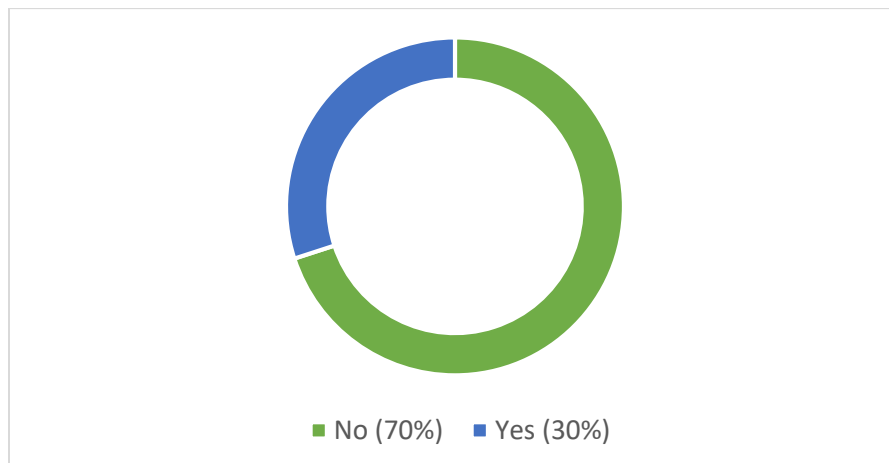
Q3. If yes. By what channel is your accommodation currently bookable through?
(44 responses)



Many accommodation have incorporated online booking via their own website as well as a considerable number utilising OTA websites (booking.com, Laterrooms, Expedia). Visit Dorset does currently have the ability to directly link to these OTA sites without additional commissions.

While some providers do feature online booking within their listing on the Visit Dorset website many could still benefit from linking to this channel.

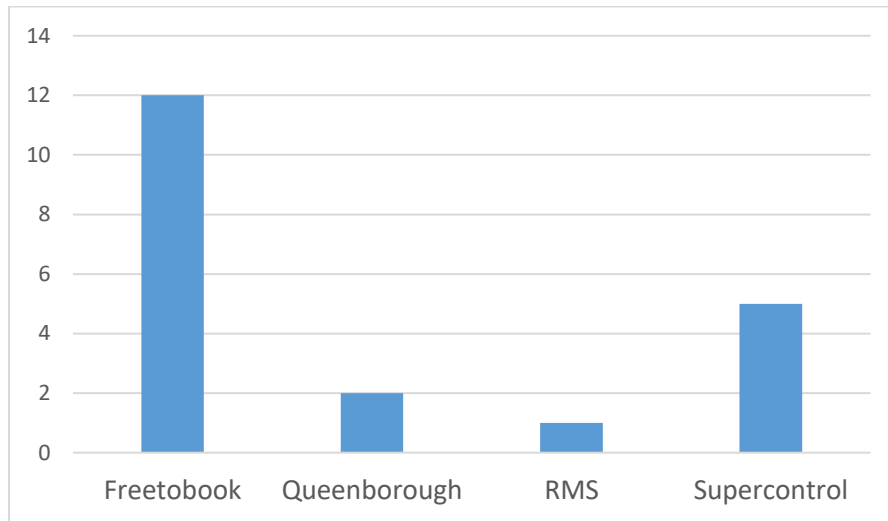
Q4. If no. Is this something you are considering?
(20 responses)



This would maybe suggest that businesses that are not currently offering online booking do not intend to, but nearly a third are considering making the shift.

Q5. Do you use any of the following property management systems (PMS)?

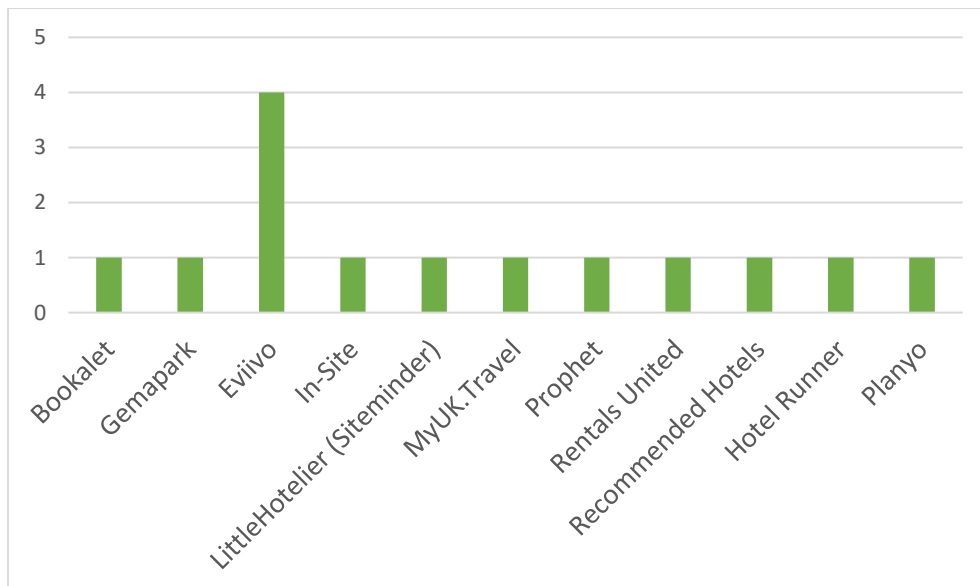
(20 responses)



From the 20 plus PMS options provided within the survey 4 returned results from users. Freetobook and Supercontrol seem to be very popular platforms for accommodation providers. Each of these PMS systems are currently linkable to the Visit Dorset website via Guestlink + Connect, although feedback from trade would suggest that providers would appreciate a direct link for these PMS systems to Visit Dorset.

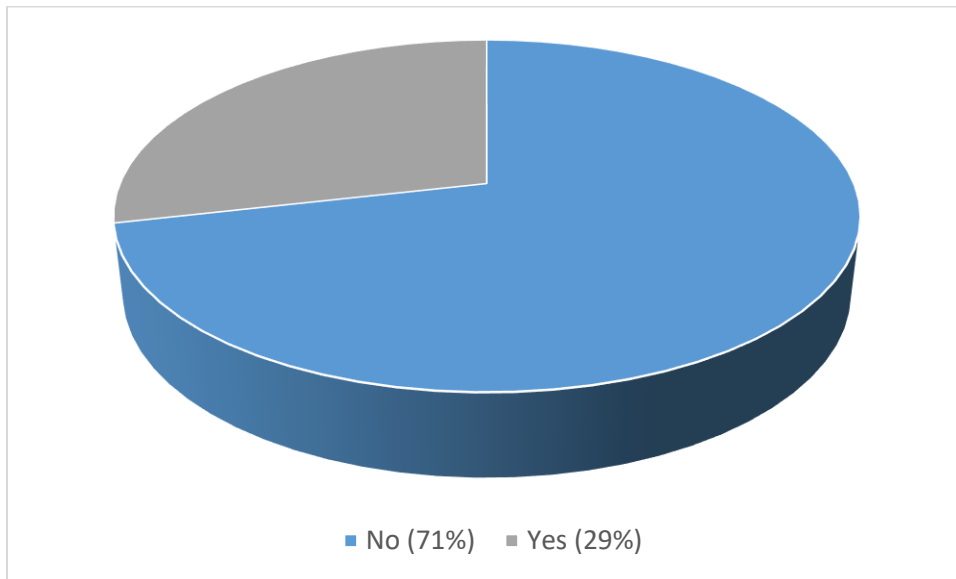
Q6. If you use a PMS system but it was not listed please let us know the platform that you're currently using?

(14 responses)



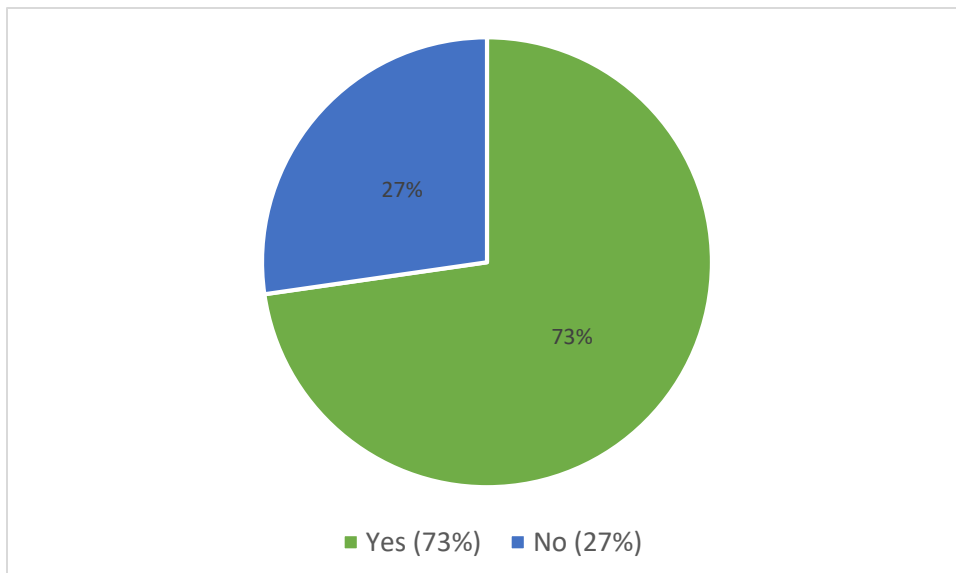
This again goes to highlight the number of PMS systems available for accommodations providers to use. The Eviivo platform seems popular and is a provider that can link directly to the Visit Dorset website with no extra fees or commissions.

Q7. Do you currently link your PMS availability to your Visit Dorset website listing?
(42 responses)



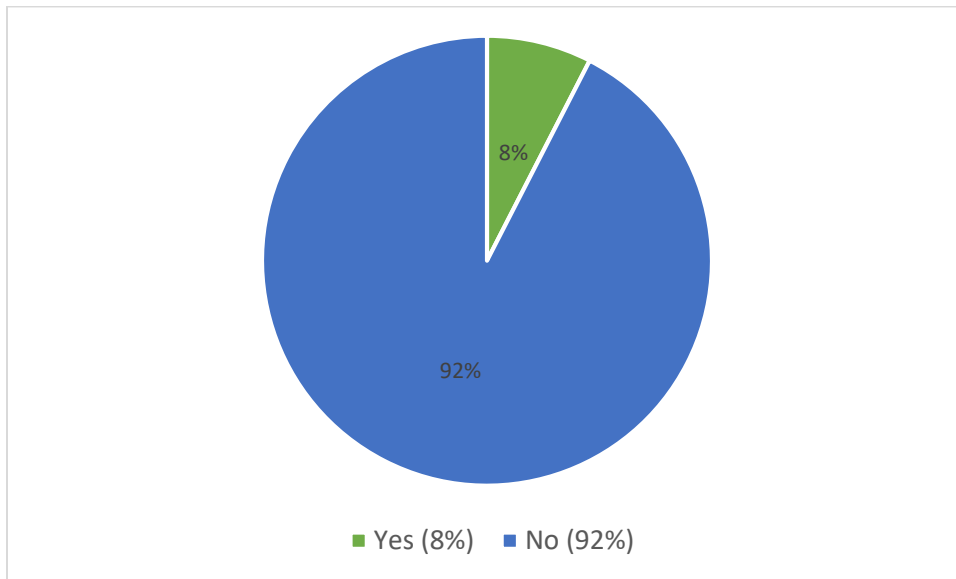
While there are large numbers of accommodation using PMS systems it seems very few are linking these to their listing on the Visit Dorset website. This could be attributed to a number of reasons; the provider isn't aware that they can link availability to Visit Dorset, linking of their current PMS system is not available or the providers feel that linking of availability is difficult or confusing to set up. Linking of some PMS system to third party sites can also incur commission fees for bookings made via external sites. These commission rates are set by the PMS provider.

Q8. Would you like to link your PMS availability to your website entry on Visit Dorset?
(33 responses)



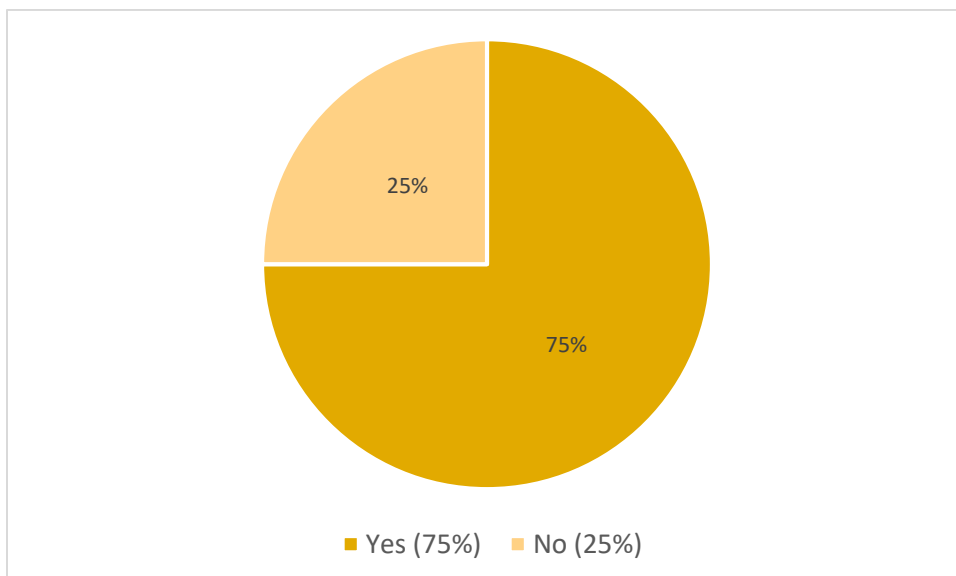
This further highlights the desire businesses have to link PMS availability to Visit Dorset and should highlight the need for greater direct connectivity of prominent providers.

Q9. Do you currently use the Global Distribution System (GDS) for your accommodation availability?
(53 responses)



Although the results would suggest that very few businesses are using the Global Distribution System, there are business using the platform. GDS provides a vast network that allows accommodation (mainly serviced) to feature on a number of booking websites including hotelplanner.com. Although not currently linked with the Visit Dorset site this is a potential platform that can provide a direct feed to the Visit Dorset website.

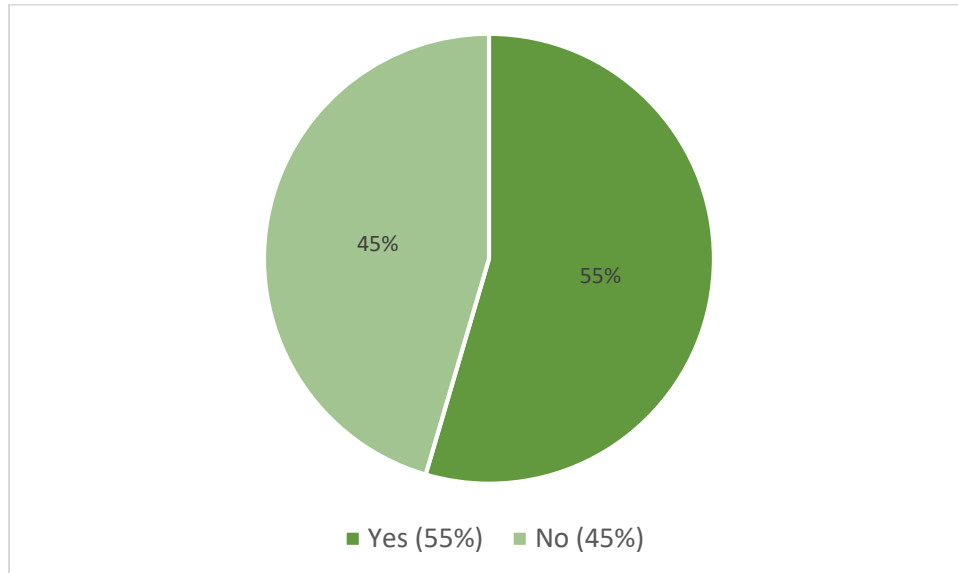
Q10. If yes. Would you like to link your GDS availability to your website entry on Visit Dorset?
(4 responses)



It's very clear that users of GDS would like to link availability to their Visit Dorset website listing. If accommodation providers do display availability on hotelplanner.com and would like to see this linked to their Visit Dorset listing please contact a member of the Visit Dorset team to discuss in more detail.

Q11. Do you currently use the Visit Dorset extranet availability system?

(55 responses)



It would appear that there are substantial users of the Visit Dorset extranet. Although originally set up to display availability for telephone booking via the website, this can now provide online bookable availability through the Visit Dorset online booking channel. The Visit Dorset online booking channel can be set up as a direct booking platform or as an enquiry tool giving businesses and visitors a 24hr window to accept or decline potential bookings. A 10% commission is applied to bookings made via this channel which is then reinvested to assist with future website developments.

Q12. If you have any comments regarding online booking for accommodation providers please let us know here.

(27 responses)

Selection of the survey feedback provided below.

'I want more direct bookings, commission free.'

'Commission rates often too high and trouble with compatibility between booking systems and OTAs in terms of having the API to allow availability to be up to date at all times.'

'Current guestlink system will not sync with planyo or use an ical feed. I have asked many times over the years and this is becoming such an issue that it makes advertising with Visit Dorset questionable in terms of value and customer experience.'

'I need a software integration between Visit Dorset and Supercontrol so that the bookings are all handled in one system. I also am unwilling to pay 10% for a booking.'

'We use Supercontrol for all online booking, so any online booking elsewhere has to be completely integrated with Supercontrol. We can't handle more than one system as they will clash.'

'Our accommodation calendar thru freetobook does not link with Visit Dorset so I have to fill in accommodation manually - it would be SO much easier if Visit Dorset linked directly with freetobook.'

'It would be great if you could link your booking calendar to QBook (Queensborough group)'

'We can only offer online booking through Visit Dorset if we can link our Freetobook calendar with the Visit Dorset site as we would not want double bookings.'

'If Visit-Dorset is to remain strong in this area it will need to integrate with the top PMS's. Guests want to know price, availability and use 'book now' button there and then.'

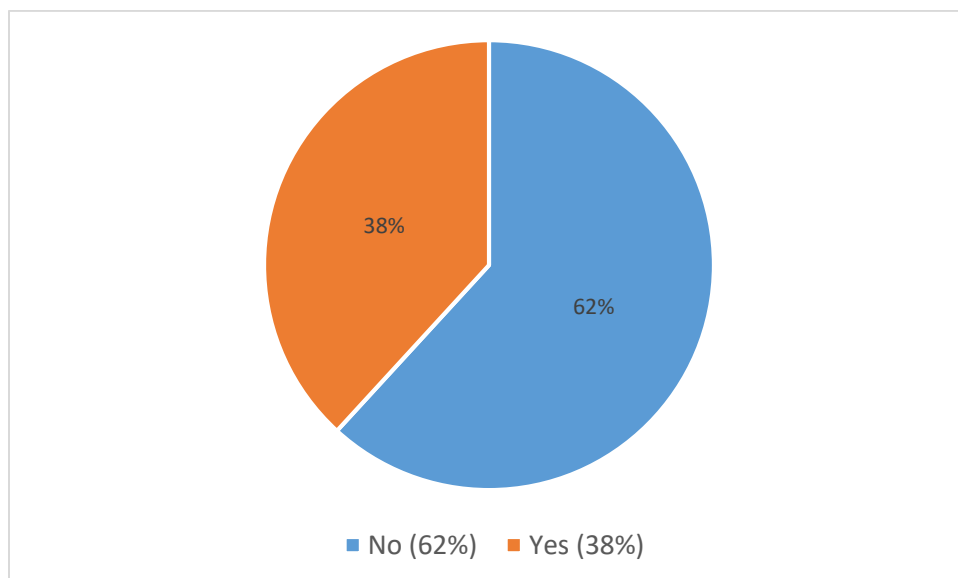
'Visit Dorset need to make it simpler to book online. Freetobook is free!'

'It needs to be able to update all avenues live from one PMS diary. Would like something more local that could really challenge Booking.com etc.'

All feedback received will assist the Visit Dorset team to develop our product. We understand that ongoing improvements are required to benefit both our members and the Visit Dorset website to allow it to thrive.

Q13. If we were to hold focus groups in the future would you be interested in being involved to assist with future developments of the Visit Dorset platform?

(55 responses)



It is pleasing to see that a number of members from across Dorset would be interested in joining potential focus groups. We understand that working closely with our members will give us a better understanding of their needs and allow us to improve our offer for the benefit of our members.

Q14. If yes. Please provide your name, accommodation and contact details below.

(20 responses)

20 accommodation providers left contact details to be invited to join potential focus groups in the future.

Summary

The findings demonstrate that accommodation provider's attitudes to booking online are changing with more and more seeing the benefits. Even for those businesses that have yet to make the channel shift to being bookable online a number are now considering this step to improve their interaction with potential customers and increase their booking potential.

The popularity of property management systems is very evident with large numbers of providers now utilising these platforms to manage bookings. The scale of the different types currently available for businesses to use is also apparent, although some systems seem to be attracting more users than others. Freetobook and Supercontrol seem to be popular with accommodation providers currently working in partnership with Visit Dorset.

Greater connectivity is certainly an area to be developed to allow more PMS users to link availability more easily. With 71% of accommodation providers using a PMS system and 73% of these would like to feed this directly to their Visit Dorset product listing.

Comments from the trade also highlighted the need for lower commission rates and free booking platforms. The Visit Dorset online booking channel currently adopts a 10% commission on bookings which is a lot lower than the major OTA channels (15% - 19%). A number of PMS systems do offer commission free booking platforms on the user's own site but commission rates and associated fees can be applied when feeding availability/booking information to third party external websites by the PMS provider.

The information gathered within this survey will be helpful in guiding future development of the Visit Dorset website to greater increase our accommodations providers booking potential. Many thanks to the members that took part in completing the survey, your feedback is extremely important to us and is vital for us in working in partnership with our tourism trade across Dorset.

If you would like to discuss any elements of the survey findings with a member of the tourism team email tourism@dorset.gov.uk

