

How to choose an

ONLINE BOOKING & PAYMENT SYSTEM

A guide to selecting online booking and payment system for Entertainment and Leisure businesses:

- Indoor Trampoline centres
- Go Karting tracks
- Paintball parks
- Rock climbing centres
- Escape rooms
- Tour operators
- Fishing charters
- Roller skating rink
- Barefoot Lawn Bowling
- Horse riding
- Flight Simulators
- Mini Golf
- And many more

WHY YOU SHOULD READ THIS BOOK?

Read this ebook to learn how to choose an online booking and payment system for your entertainment and leisure business

- 1** WHY YOU NEED AN ONLINE BOOKING & PAYMENT SYSTEM
- 2** ADVANTAGES OF ONLINE BOOKING & PAYMENT SYSTEMS
- 3** HOW TO CHOOSE ONLINE BOOKING & PAYMENT SYSTEM

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CHAPTER 1

WHY YOU NEED AN ONLINE BOOKING & PAYMENT SYSTEM

Online booking & payment systems gives you all the tools to accept online and offline bookings & payments, manage your customers and capacity.

#1 Your
customers
want the
option to
book & pay
online

- **It allows your customers to see availability at a glance**, making it easy for them to book a date and time they want. Real-time online booking & payments is one of the best features as it allows customers to view what sessions are availability on a date and time they want. Availability and capacity are automatically updated simultaneously and instantly.

They can pay for their session online and receive an instant confirmation of their booking. All with the touch of a button. When the automatic booking confirmation is delivered, your customers will only have to worry about how much fun they are going to have.





#2 Online
booking &
payment
software
makes your
life easier

- **You get your money quicker.** With instant and secure payment options, you receive the money faster than you would if customers were paying on arrival at your location. This allows you to better budget your business expenses and affords you the opportunity to reinvest and grow your business.

- **At the end of the day, you are happier and your staff are happier.** A better work environment means happy customers and happy staff. You will find that because the daily tasks are streamlined, your staff will have much more time to devote to more important tasks. They can concentrate their efforts on providing a great customers experience.

- **Your business is on for 24 hours a day, 7 days a week for bookings**

Previously, businesses were limited by their business hours and ability for staff to respond to phone calls and email inquiries.

- **It simplifies the booking process.**

Customer can book themselves with no risk of over-booking your sessions. Also, as customers can view availability at a glance, you will receive less tedious email and phone enquiries.

- **You can implement a cancellation policy**

This means that your business costs are still met even if a customer cancels their session last minute. You can decide what your cancellation policy will be depending on the type of business you operate.



CHAPTER 2

ADVANTAGES OF HAVING AN ONLINE BOOKING SYSTEM

We now live in an age where practically everything is online including business. It's now crucial that every business - no matter the sector - has a web presence, because Google has replaced the phone book. Not only does online technology help Entertainment and Leisure businesses get found online, it also helps them convert visits into money through online booking & payment.

“That’s a fancy way to say that a booking & payment system will let you accept online bookings & payments for your session 24/7.”

There are three main reasons why you should use an online booking & payment system:



It puts you a step ahead of your competition

In the online driven age it is crucial for businesses to have a web presence. The internet provides small and medium businesses with opportunities that help them match large corporations.

But the decreasing cost of website creation and the popularity of internet directories makes it hard for businesses to stand out. There's a multitude of Entertainment and Leisure businesses operators out there who have a website and are on Google Places, but very few already have an online booking & payment system in place.

By having an online booking system, you're one step ahead of the game, tipping the scales in your favour when customers search the web and compare your offerings against your competitors you need to stand out. Whether the business site is for Rock Climbing Centre, Indoor Golf Simulator, Trampoline Centre, Go Karting or Paintball Park, website visitors will not be converted to customers without online booking & payment system. An ability to instantly secure a booking & make payment through your online booking system makes a difference and gives your businesses an advantage over competitors in the area.

Of course, the presence of an online booking & payment system itself is not enough to make or break the sale. You still need to make sure the other aspects of your website are top notch (mobile friendly) to minimise the amount of visitors that bounce off it.



#2

It's convenient and easy for you and your customers

Most of your potential customers are browsing the web outside business hours and like to act immediately. Online booking & payment system on your website allows customers to book within seconds 24/7. While you dream of being the best Entertainment and Leisure businesses there is, customers are going through the process of finding your website, browsing through its offerings, and making a online booking & payment.

Customers prefer websites that support online bookings & payments because not only is it easy, but they usually find some great discount deals, too. They can read up on your business, look at your offerings, and finally make a booking & payment. Your work load is minimised, without frustrating and time consuming phone or email enquiries. Having an online booking & payment system in place is an essential step to increase your business's potential.



#3

It speeds up your cash flow

Online booking & payment system speeds up your cash flow just by being there. There's less capital outlay on your end because you don't have to hire staff to manage customers or pay rent for a physical space. Also, once customers book the payment is secured. Customer are more likely to show if they have made a payment upfront.

In terms of sales, if your website can't take their card, then you risk them taking their business somewhere else. Online booking payments allow instant credit/debit card authorisation for people who want to book a session. That's why having payment

processing that accepts all kinds of cards can directly impact revenue. Online booking & payment system already have this capability integrated, making it even easier for you to be organised. Online payment processing are beneficial because:

- **It keeps your customers happy.**

Recent research shows that more and more customers are booking online because it's easier for them, and that's where the best deals are. They can search, browse and book with a few clicks of the mouse or taps, no matter where they are.

- **Customers can book sessions and buy your promotions while you sleep.**

It doesn't matter what time it is. Your business is always open for online bookings & payments, meaning it doesn't close when your sessions end. Your business is always on 24/7.

- **Customers need to pay to get a confirmed booking**

Integrated payment processing ensure that a booking is not confirmed until successful payment has been received from the customer.

You Get Paid Without Much Hassle

- **You can trust online payment gateways.** It's secure, so there's little risk for credit card fraud or scams. Sensitive data is protected by a 128 bit, SSL, industry-standard encryption system. Make sure the booking and payment pages have a SSL certificate and uses https so your customers know it is secure.

- **More money in your pocket.** The fact that you're selling in online means there's less capital outlay on your end, as you don't need to pay rental space or hire an extra hand to manage your bookings.

- **Automated calculations are more reliable.** Since the software calculates the total amount your customer has to pay, there's less room for error, especially if you want to use a coupon code or discount offer. You can set up coupon codes and discount offers without triple checking whether you got the maths right.

- **You get paid faster.** As a customer pays upfront at time of booking you get the money faster. Instead of waiting for a customer to arrive to make a payment, your cash flow is up to speed.

“The online booking system you choose should have an “SSL certificate” and use a https link on all booking and payment pages to not only protect the payment details but also to protect the privacy of customer details.”

Take time to make your decision, because it will completely change your business processes. Even though this change is for the better, it will take time to train everyone to adapt to it. Make sure you free trial a few of them, and that free trial conditions include no lock in contract, no booking fees, no commission.

Then you should be able to make a decision, backed up by your experience with the software, on whether it will benefit your business. We recommend using the system for a quarter at the very least - otherwise it's just not long enough to calculate the benefits to your business.

CHAPTER 3

HOW TO CHOOSE AN ONLINE BOOKING & PAYMENT SYSTEM

It can get frustrating when in your search, you find that most of these system programs are catered specifically to appointment scheduling for health practitioners. Because of this it can be difficult trying to figure out where to start - is there activity centre operator system out there that's perfect for your business' needs? Use these tips to help you find the perfect online booking & payment system for your activity business.



Know the costs involved with online booking & payment systems and nail down your budget.

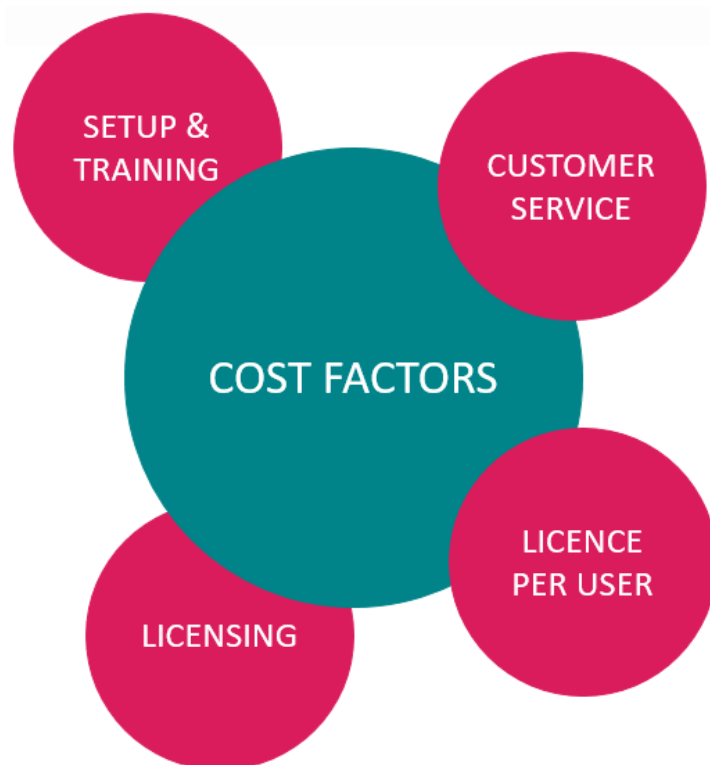
It may seem easier and better to choose a free online booking system at the start of your search, but you might find that a paid system is worth the investment.

“Understanding the difference between paid and free online booking & payment systems”

- Free systems are available but they often are very basic and designed for health based industries for booking appointments and do not have a lot of features with most lacking the ability to process payments. While there are ways of making this work for you, it does not offer the best experience both for you as the operator and for your customers – and good reviews of your company come out of only the best experiences.
- Paid systems will offer you not only the best features but also customer support so that you can get the help that you need when you need it, and get the most out of the booking system. Going with a paid online booking & payment system ensures you get the service and security you need when working with your own valuable customers. But before you invest you will want to make sure you choose the online booking system that will work for your business.

Cost factors that often have to be considered include:

- The licensing cost. Licensing costs typically are paid either monthly or annual (once a year), depending on the booking system you choose. Sometimes it is commission-based (per booking) but we do not believe that this is a good strategy as it will hinder your business as you grow.
- Cost of customer support. Customer support can be an additional fee, but this is not always the case with all online booking systems.
- Cost of setup configuration and training. Paying to get the booking system configured correctly and getting remote training may be the best option for your business to get you up and running quickly.
- Licence per user. Some booking system providers charge per number of staff you have. Not all your staff members will be able to use the same login.



Fixed-fee subscription vs booking fee pricing structure: What's better?

It's important to note that there are two types of paid online booking & payment systems:

- **A fee-based subscription** is going to cost you a set fee every month, no matter how many bookings you make
- **A commission-based system** will take a booking fee for each booking which will cut into your profit margin. A booking fee is an additional cost to card processing fees

Which pricing structure will make your business most profitable?
Here are advantages and disadvantages to help you evaluate.

Fixed-Fee Subscription Pricing Structure

Advantages

Most fixed-fee systems will have a set fee that you are locked into for the duration of your agreement. Typically this is a low monthly rate that you can afford, and as your business grows it will not cost you more in fees. Some providers offer a discounted annual payment which could consider after using the software for 3 months.

While it may cut into your profits during slow months, you will not see a reduction in your profits during busy times. Ultimately, the goal is to eliminate paying commission fees to third parties. You will want to see more profits from your business rather than more bills and higher overhead costs.

Disadvantages

You will have to pay this bill no matter what. So this means that if you have a month where you receive no online bookings through your system, you will still have to pay for the software. This can be difficult, especially for businesses that are just starting out in the industry.

Booking Fee Pricing Structure

Advantages

You only have to pay when you get bookings. This is especially beneficial if your business is just starting out and every cent counts. It can be helpful to only pay a fee on each bookings that you get, rather than have a bill every month.

Disadvantages

A Booking fee is not ideal for an established business who has a steady stream of customers, because a fixed-fee subscription provides the same services for less costs.

Especially if your business is booming, a Booking Fee can cost you more money than it is worth. Your competitor who is using a fixed fee subscription is paying less for the same services, and they are getting just as many bookings as you are.

Remember, the more bookings you receive the more money you will pay to your system vendor in booking fees. The more money you put out booking fees, the less money you will have to reinvest in your business and grow.

As an industry that is constantly changing, growing and developing, you will want to have cash on hand to keep up with your competitors.

“Don’t confuse a booking fee with payment processing fees”

A booking fee is charged by the booking system provider while a payment processing fee is charged by a bank or payment gateway for the transaction. If you are taking online payments you will always need to pay a payment processing fee (also known as merchant fees). For example PayPal charges a payment processing fee of 2.6% + 30 cent a transaction.

Which pricing structure suits your business needs?

It is important to note that just because a specific online booking system has a different payment set up than another program does not mean that it has different features. Many of the fixed-fee subscription systems and booking fee based systems have the same features.

You will find real time booking on most of these systems, as well as easy ways to manage session bookings and capacity. Most online booking systems provide payment processing integration as well.

The difference literally lies in how much you want to pay for this service.

A fixed-fee subscription system will still provide you with all of the quality features both you and your customers want and need.

Now that you know a little bit more about the different online booking systems and their costs, the time has come to choose the system that is right for you. This can be a difficult decision, but it's important to evaluate your current needs as well as where you see your business is in the future.

If you are just starting your business, you will see some growing pains along the way. A booking fee based system may be the most viable choice for you at this point in time, but as your business grows keep an open mind to fixed-fee subscription systems. But the more successful you are, the less you will want overhead costs that continue to climb. You will want to see some profits after all of the hard work and effort you have put into your business.



If you have reached this point in your business endeavour, it might be time to look into a fixed-fee subscription system. It's the best way to provide the online booking system that your customers want while still maximizing your own profits. A fixed-fee subscription system will not hinder the growth of your business, and it will not put a damper on your cash flow either.



Decide which features will be best for your Entertainment and Leisure businesses.

Here's our pick of must-have features that all businesses should look for when considering which online booking system will best suit them:

#1 Quick and easy booking process

The booking and payment process needs to be quick and easy for the customer to complete. Avoid systems that are complicated and difficult to use. Limiting the amount of customer data collected during the booking process make the process quicker and easy. Collecting unnecessary customer data slows down and annoys the customer. Why should I need to enter my data of birth or gender when booking to play Mini Golf.

The customer booking process should be responsive to smartphones and tablets. Customers prefer to use these devices to browse the web, book and pay online.

The customer booking process only need to collect the information that is needed. Some booking systems force collection of data that is not needed. For example if your business in an Indoor Trampoline Centre you don't need to get the customers address or date of birth. The booking system should have the option to set what customer data needs to be collected.

#2 Secure Payment Processing

This is a safe and secure way for your customers to pay for session bookings. It increases your validity and proves you value customer privacy and security, and at the same time allows you to get instant, guaranteed payments from your customers. The best online booking system will provide integration to industry compliant Payment Processing.



#3 Credit Card Storage Options

In addition to offering safe and secure ways to pay, booking & payment systems also offer the ability to store credit card details on the integrated Payment Gateway. This allows customers to store their credit card information in a safe and secure manner, and is especially helpful if the customer is planning to book more than one session with your business.



#4 Real-Time Booking

Real-time booking features allow your business the freedom to choose when and where you will offer specific sessions. At the same time, customers can book and pay for sessions when it is convenient for them, and they receive immediate confirmation of their booking and payment. This gets rid of the hassle of answering phones with availability enquiries.

#5 Availability Calendar

Old style booking software use a standard calendar for customer to select a date and then find a time that is available to be booked. This approach has been used for booking health sector appointments but does not really work for booking session for multiple people for Entertainment and Leisure businesses. This process is not efficient and can be confusing to the customer.

An availability calendar only display dates and times where there is availability, this makes it very clear to the customer when sessions are available to be booked as it does not list dates and times when there is no sessions available.

#6 Social Media Integration

People who are looking into your services for an upcoming vacation will probably want to stay on top of your latest deals and promotions, which you likely advertise via social media. Social media integration in your booking system allows your customers to quickly link to your social networks such as Facebook, Instagram and Twitter.



#8 Access to the Cloud

Chances are, your days aren't spent sitting in front of a desktop computer all day. You probably manage your business over your smart phone or tablet as well, so ideally you will want to have a booking system that works with 'the cloud'. 'Cloud'-based system allows you to manage your business remotely, while you're on the go and working with customers at the same time.



#7 Online Support and Phone Support

As with any technological addition to your business, Entertainment and Leisure businesses might need support when it comes to their online booking & payment system. When you are taking advantage of the many free trials out there, test out the helpfulness of their support team. Make sure you invest in a system that offers both online customer support and customer support over the phone.

Ask your staff for suggestions

Talk with your staff and have them try out the system to make sure they think it is functional and useful as well. You will want to make sure the system fits in with your business goals and helps your staff operate the business more efficiently. For example, a list of customer name in a session would be useful to check customers in on arrival.

The purpose of any good online booking & payment system is for the customer to be able to book sessions with ease, and for the provider to manage their business in the simplest way possible. An organized, cohesive and functional online booking & payment system is essential to surviving in the ever-growing Entertainment and Leisure sector.

As customer will be able to book sessions and pay anytime anywhere you will want to make sure your online booking & payment system has all of these features at the very least, as it makes the experience better for both you and your customers.



10 More Must-Have Features of Online Booking system.

We previously discussed the major features that every online booking & payment system requires to support your business. However, those were the bare minimum. For Entrainment or Leisure that are growing fast and need to scale quickly, you will have more complex needs that your booking system must fulfil.

#1 Email Customisation *#2 SMS & Email Automation*

You should be able to customise each email that your booking system sends out, so that it matches your business' branding.

This should include everything from your customer's invoice details and booking confirmation to the emails leading up to the session. Also, if you're allowing customers to buy sessions as a gift, you should be able to provide the voucher code and booking instructions.

Sending out emails and texts that are standard procedure (confirmation, reminder) takes up too much time. It is tedious administrative work that many booking system will allow you to automate.

Besides automating this for your customers, your booking system should allow you to be notified in the same way when a booking is made.

#3 Consolidated Customer Communications

Things can get confusing if communications with your customers are not stored in the same database being managed by your booking system.

You should be able to send personal-style emails & SMS.

#4 Voucher & Coupon Code Management

The ability to assess your marketing campaigns is wholly dependent on your system's ability to manage coupon codes and vouchers.

Having it tied to your booking system means that you can not only set up parameters for each promotion, but you can also track how many bookings you received per marketing campaign.

#5 Customer Management

Growing your business with repeat customer visits relies on up to date and accurate customer data for your marketing campaigns.

Your booking system should cater for customers to supply this information at time of booking or purchase. The data is more likely be accurate when customers enter it themselves compared to collecting the information by phone or email.

#7 Availability Management

Your business is not always available to take bookings, you may need to close for maintenance or holidays. Managing future availability should be as simple as a few clicks to remove a session time or a date range.

#9 Integration With Other Online Services

You should look for booking systems that have the capability integrated with online services to provide functionality such as Dropbox. At the very least make sure your booking system allows you to export all your data as this can be used marketing (Mailchimp) or your accounting software (Xero).

#6 Capacity Management

Maximising revenue without overbooking is always an issue if your booking system cannot manage your scheduling and capacity for you. Your booking system should automatically adjust your availability every time a session is booked, so that you never run the risk of overbooking.

#8 Detailed Sales Reports

Your booking system should allow you to slice and dice all the information you have on booking & purchases. Whether its coupon code, package sales, or even staff members, you want to be able to analyse your business from an operational standpoint. Otherwise, how will you be able to make those key decisions to grow your business?

#10 Access levels

The booking systems must have the capability to set different access level for different type of users. Staff roles need restricted access compared to Managers and the Administrator.



Assess the system vendor to see if they are truly aligned with your business needs.

As more and more customers book & pay online, Entertainment and Leisure businesses need to know what their options are when it comes to online booking & payment system.

Option #1: Custom Built System

Custom built system can be created specifically for your business by a web application development professional. This is the most expensive option, but if your business is large enough it might be worth the investment.

Advantages

- The system can be designed to your exact needs. This means you have complete and total control over the project.
- You decide how you want the back end to look, and you help to make sure the portal for the customers is as straight forward and easy as possible.
- You decide which functions are best for you, and you can create features that work best for your business. For instance, if you are a Go Karting park you can include features that

Disadvantages

- First and foremost, this is a very expensive way to go. While you will have complete control, you also are responsible for the entirety of the costs.
- You will take on the responsibility for maintaining the system. It's important to recognize that there won't be a 24/7 customer support line that you can call when things go wrong. You will have to contact the developer.

Implementing this system as well as fixing any bugs that crop up can be time consuming, so don't expect to get it all up and running quickly. Many businesses consider it all worth it in the end, but it definitely

allow customers to choose a specific Kart.

has to be considered when thinking about the type of online booking & payment system that you want.

Option #2: Ready-made Online Booking System

Booking systems that are already designed and ready to go is often the easiest way to implement an online booking & payments. This booking system is designed to address the general needs of most Entertainment and Leisure businesses. So it is often a good choice as it will deliver most of your functionality you need.

Advantages

- This type of booking system can be implemented and put to use in a very short period of time. It takes you minutes instead of months to get going.
- It provides a variety of features that you can decide to use if you wish.
- It is a more affordable option, but at the same time does not inconvenience the customer.
- The customer still gets a professional and convenient booking experience, and you usually only pay a set monthly fee.
- One of the huge benefits is the fact that there is customer support available whenever you need it, so no one is left hanging when they want to make a booking with you.

As you are making this important decision regarding your online booking system, take the time to consider exactly what it is your business needs at this point in time. Some of the most important factors to consider are the amount of time you are willing to invest in your online booking & payment

Disadvantages

- You won't be able to custom create features that sound cool to you, but you are able to suggest them to booking system developers. These vendors will take suggestions from all their customers, and add them to their system.
- Because of this it can be very practical for the small business owner.

If you have no restrictions on your time or budget, the custom route may be the choice for you. But if you are a busy business that simply wants to be working with your customers and providing them the best experience possible, you might want to consider a ready-made booking system.

system and also how much money you are willing to spend.

The most important thing is to find an online booking system that it meets most of your needs.

- **Choose a company that is going to offer you good customer service.** You will want to make sure that you have customer support when you need it.
- **Choose a company that will be providing continuous updates and constantly working on the latest and greatest features**

Get the right booking system for your business sector. Appointment online booking systems are great for health services businesses but might not have the booking and payment functionality that you need. Don't settle for a generic model that doesn't work well for you. These companies won't care about you as an individual, and they won't be thinking about features that work best for your industry.

You will be investing in this booking system and you want it to work for your business.



Take the time that you need

to find the perfect online booking & payment system for your business.

Take advantage of free trial offers and test the different systems that are available to you. This gives you a chance to see how each booking system works on a day-to-day basis, and allows you to discover which features you love and which ones don't work for your business.

- **Take notes and evaluate each program** as you are using it. Consult your staff.
- **Use this trial period to talk with the customer service support** as often as possible, so you get an idea for how they are going to work with you once you purchase the system.
- Booking systems offer a lot of functionality and the configuration and setup requirement can be different for each business. Some companies offer setup and training for a small fee that could be valuable to you to get the system configured the right way. Getting a good understanding of the system will save you time in the long run

It may seem like a time-consuming process, but it will be worth it in the end when you get the online booking & payment system that truly works for your business.

You will find your business runs as efficiently as possible, and your customers will find it easier to make the bookings and payments.