

HOW TO...GUIDES

How to...Use Tourism Research:

'Research your idea. See if there's a demand. A lot of people have great ideas, but they don't know if there's a need for it. You also have to research your competition.' Magic Johnson, retired American basketball player

1. Why use research?

Research is an essential part of planning and managing your business. It provides the backbone to your business and planning decisions, and helps steer your business along in the right direction.

Ongoing research helps to improve products, services and business processes and to anticipate and respond to changing customer needs.

You need two types of research to help you plan, shape and operate in a competitive market – your own customer and market research, and any external research that's available.

2. Your own research

Tourism is a customer service industry. Visitor and customer research forms the backbone of all tourism businesses. Your own customer research, i.e. analysing your customers and knowing where they come from, how to reach them, and how to keep them coming back, will generate the 'bread and butter' for your business. Refer to *Tourism Toolkit – How To Guides – Marketing – Customers and where they come from* for further detail.

Whether you're a start-up or an established business, collecting and analysing data and statistics on a regular basis keeps you one step ahead of your competitors and helps you to shape your business model according to visitor trends and economic conditions.

3. National tourist boards

VisitEngland and VisitBritain both provide a wealth of insights and statistics, visitor trend analysis, regional information, and market intelligence, to help keep your tourism business on track and able to cope with fluctuating visitor demands – at www.visitengland.org and

www.visitbritain.org . Their visitor surveys will provide helpful back-up to your own customer analysis, and their 'what's new' research will help you keep up with latest visitor trends.

VisitEngland and VisitBritain have the following research material that will help your business planning:

- Visitor trends
- Key facts and figures, insights and statistics, about your region's and England's tourism industry
- Analysis of data from available tourism surveys, e.g. hotel occupancy surveys and 'how's business' surveys
- Market research into behaviour, perceptions, attitudes and expectations among consumers and tourism businesses
- Regional investment and development reports
- Regional performance data

4. Visitor trends

'Visitor trends' monitor the types of visitors who visit a particular region or destination, what they do when they're on holiday, where they go, where they visit, how much they spend and how good a time they have.

This information is crucial to develop a region or a destination, to attract higher spending visitors who want to stay longer and spend more, and to encourage businesses to develop.

This type of research can be used by a) local tourism initiatives and area tourism partnerships to inform joint marketing campaigns and identify areas for development, b) local authorities to invest in improving the visitor experience through feedback on areas such as signage, public toilets and car parking, and c) tourism businesses to find out more about their customers and cost up business and marketing plans.

Check with your regional or local tourism partnerships for up-to-date 'visitor trend' research, and also www.visitbritain.org/insightsandstatistics (detailed trend data for each region) and www.visitengland.org/insight-statistics/regionalinfo (regional trends analysis).

5. Key facts and figures, insights and statistics

Tourism facts and figures are excellent to use in business plans and proposals, and can be included on websites and in marketing materials and press releases.

VisitEngland provides a handy two-page 'English Tourism Factsheet' that summarises information about tourism value and volume, the accommodation sector and leading visitor attractions. There are also two more detailed factsheets: one for 'Inbound Tourism' and one for 'Domestic Tourism'.

Check out what's available for your region or local area. Most area tourism partnerships and/or local tourism initiatives will provide up-to-date 'key facts' for tourism businesses.

VisitBritain also provides 'Inbound Tourism Facts' based on the Office for National Statistics International Passenger Survey. Check them out at www.visitbritain.org/insightsandstatistics

6. Tourism surveys

Many regions or local areas, via area tourism partnerships and/or local tourism initiatives, will hold useful data compiled from: online surveys for accommodation providers, 'how's business' surveys that provide a regular gauge of business levels across the region, and hotel occupancy surveys etc.

VisitEngland publishes statistics and survey information, measuring and reporting on many different aspects of the tourism industry. These include:

- **Domestic Overnight Tourism** (GB Tourism Survey – GBTS) - A monthly survey that measures the volume and value of domestic overnight tourism, and provides detailed information about trip and visitor characteristics
- **Visits from Overseas Residents** (IPS – International Passenger Survey) – this survey, run by the Office for National Statistics, provides information about the volume, value and source market of international visitors to the UK.
- **Accommodation in England survey** – collects data about accommodation stock (numbers of accommodation establishments in England), monthly information about serviced accommodation occupancy, and results from VisitEngland's accommodation business confidence monitor
- **Visitor Attractions in England** – this is an annual survey of visits to visitor attractions in England, measuring visitor numbers across the whole sector. They also run a quarterly attractions business monitor, highlighting business performance through the year.

- **Day Visits to England** – periodic surveys have been carried out to measure the volume and value of tourism day visits to England. Fieldwork on a new Day Visitor survey began in January 2011, and results will be available in Spring 2012.
- **Bank Holiday Travel in England** – VisitEngland runs the ‘Trip Tracker’ – a short survey of consumer travel plans, before each of the three main bank holidays (Easter, August and Christmas/New Year).

7. Market research

Both VisitEngland and VisitBritain carry out market research and compile market intelligence reports relating to specific areas of tourism. These include:

- Research resulting from VisitEngland’s ‘domestic industry panel’ – qualitative interviews are carried out with senior representatives from the tourism industry to discuss past performance and expectations for the future, as well as wider issues affecting tourism in England.
- Research that has been carried out since late 2008 to understand the impact of the economic downturn on tourism behaviour, and to understand the causes and future potential of the ‘staycation’.
- Regular research that helps VisitEngland understand how their Quality Assessment scheme can best serve the needs of consumers and businesses.
- Sustainability research.
- Market segmentation research based on consumer values that help target marketing activities.
- VisitBritain’s market intelligence reports that enable you to find out more about visitor markets and their trends – which you can search either by ‘market’ or by ‘category’.

8. Investment & development reports

Investment and development reports help to capture data on tourism planning and development projects and

These reports identify opportunities for growth and development and produce action plans that help guide, build-up and encourage new business and investment. They are useful for

tourism start-ups including hotel and guest accommodation, self-catering providers, camping and caravanning parks, farm stays, and visitor attractions.

Check out organisations in your region including: area tourism partnerships that may collect this kind of data, your local authority, and the government's planning portal www.planningportal.gov.uk, as well as national agencies such as Natural England www.naturalengland.org.uk, National Parks www.nationalparks.gov.uk, and the Heritage Lottery fund www.hlf.org.uk.

9. Regional performance

Most of the research that VisitEngland carries out has a national focus, however many of the surveys can be analysed at a regional level.

Within VisitEngland's 'regional information' section there is a map for research and statistics from each of the nine England regions. Click on your region and you will be able to download helpful information sheets on tourism facts and figures, trends in inbound tourism, local authority and county analysis, and occupancy surveys.

Visit: www.visitengland.org/insight-statistics/regionalinfo for more detail.

10. Where to go for more help

- Your Area Tourism Partnership and/or Local Tourism Initiative
- Your Local Authority
- VisitEngland: www.visitengland.org/insight-statistics
- VisitBritain: www.visitbritain.org/insightsandstatistics
- Tourism KnowHow: www.tourismknowhow.com - free tips and advice on all areas of tourism with a section on Research that outlines 'different research methods' and why market research is essential for tourism businesses.