



Part 1: Getting Started



Image courtesy of Explore Kent

Rural Tourism Business Toolkit

About this toolkit

This .pdf is the first part of a fully featured resource packed full with useful information and advice for new and existing rural tourism businesses. It is designed to help with business evaluation, market identification, development of effective communication and marketing strategies, and is intended to encourage initiatives that offer great visitor experiences whilst nurturing the environments that create them.

This toolkit has been created as part of the COOL Tourism Project by the COOL Partnership and tourism development charity Hidden Britain.

The COOL Tourism Project

The COOL Tourism Project is a European partnership of 11 local authorities and organisations, based in the east and south of England and in the north of France, who are working together to help each other compete effectively in the global tourism market.

COOL Tourism aims to address the need for market research, product development and business support in the partners' areas, and to encourage rural tourism businesses to make use of the rural areas' environmental assets and local distinctiveness to attract visitors.

The project is being delivered with the support of the European cross-border co-operation Programme INTERREG IV A, France (Channel) – England, co-funded by the European Regional Development Fund.

The project partners include; Norfolk County Council, Essex County Council (Visit Essex), Kent County Council (Explore Kent), Visit Kent, Somerset County Council, West Somerset Council, Sedgemoor District Council, Exmoor National Park Authority, Pas-de-Calais Tourisme, Somme Tourisme, and Pas-de-Calais Gîtes de France.





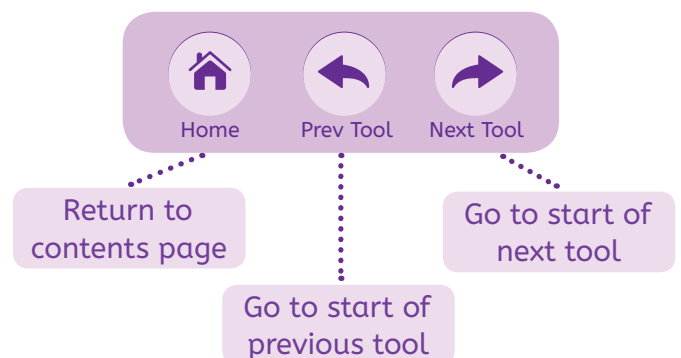
Contents

Introduction	Page 4	Go
Effective business plans	Page 5	Go
Analysing Your Business	Page 7	Go
Researching your market	Page 10	Go
Assessing your performance	Page 13	Go
Understanding your customers	Page 19	Go
Developing your brand	Page 25	Go
Financing Your Business	Page 28	Go
FAQs	Page 32	Go

How to use this Toolkit

This toolkit has been designed to allow you to dip in and select the tools you need.

You'll find navigation buttons on every page to help move back and forward between the tools and you can easily return here to the contents page by clicking the **"home"** button at any time.





Home



Prev Tool



Next Tool

Starting at the beginning

This Toolkit provides lots of advice and guidance on a variety of subjects, however to really use it to its full potential you need to have a clear picture of your business and an understanding of a few key fundamentals.

Why the basics matter...

Without the core understanding of your business and context, any decisions or investments you make could be based on assumptions or shaky ground.

This section will help you explore the key elements of your business, incorporate them into your business plan and provide a solid basis for moving on with the rest of the toolkit.

Where you should be before you begin

Before you use any of the information and tools in this section, we would suggest you have an understanding of the following:

- Your product
Having a clear idea of what you are trying to sell and the location you plan to sell it from.
- What you are trying to achieve
Knowing what you term as “success”, and your goals for the business over the next 18 months.
- Your financial position
Awareness of how you are financed, what your overheads are and your pricing policy.
- Regulatory requirements for your business
Understanding of the legal requirements in your business.

If you need help with any of these then try the following sources of further help:

- www.greatbusiness.gov.uk
- www.visitengland.org/busdev/bussupport/
- www.business-survival-toolkit.co.uk/
- www.gov.uk/browse/business

Disclaimer

This toolkit is an in-depth resource but it cannot address every specific need. Therefore feel free to tailor the guidance or use it as a starting point to research further for your own business.

Also remember - things change, websites disappear and new trends arrive, use this toolkit alongside your own research to ensure you are right up to date...



Effective Business Plans



Home



Prev Tool



Next Tool

Having a solid plan

All businesses should have a solid business plan, it's the blueprint that prepares you for the road ahead, ensuring you focus your energies and keep your business on track.

Differing businesses will be at different places in their development and, even if established, may not have considered all the aspects and components a business plan requires.

Therefore take five minutes and run through the following checklist of items that should be covered in an effective business plan:

Your Goals

Do you have an end goal for your business? *A clear articulation of what success looks like (e.g. to "make money" or "gain a reputation").*

Have you set objectives to help you reach that goal? *No more than 4 specific plans to help you realise the end goal. (e.g. increasing repeat customers)*

Can you easily measure progress against your objectives? *All objectives should have some kind of measure built into them and a specific deadline.*

Further help

www.business-survival-toolkit.co.uk/stage-two

www.dummies.com/how-to/content/set-goals-and-objectives-in-your-business-plan.html

Business Environment

Have you analysed your own strengths & weaknesses as a business?
Provide a clear and critical assessment of the business from your viewpoint

Have you analysed the environment you operate in? *Assessment of the market, the characteristics of customers and the impact of wider factors.*

Have you measured your business against the competition?
Include some analysis of how others operate and what that means for your business.

Further help

www.business-survival-toolkit.co.uk/stage-one

www.mindtools.com/pages/main/newMN_STR.htm

What you do

Have you clearly outlined your product or service? *A clear section stating what your product(s) is and how it works in practice for your customers.*

Do you have a clear pricing policy? *A clear statement of what you intend to charge and a reasoning for the price point.*

Have you set out who your target audiences are?
Who your product is intended for and an analysis of their needs

Further help

www.learnmarketing.net/marketingmix.htm



Home



Prev Tool



Next Tool

Effective Business Plans (cont.)

Your Strategy

Have you identified methods of reaching your customers with your product? *Include a marketing plan on how you intend to promote your products, including budgets.*

Have you set out a clear plan to resource the business?

Show how the business is managed, the roles and management structure

Further help

www.marketingdonut.co.uk/marketing/marketing-strategy

www.toolkit.smallbiz.nsw.gov.au/part/20/100/457

Finances

Have you clearly outlined how your income is composed? *You should be able to provide specific percentages and annual figures on the sources of your income.*

Do you know the operating costs of running your business on a monthly basis?

You should have an exact figure for overheads and a solid estimate for any variable costs

Do you know your cash flow needs on a monthly basis?

You should know the exact figure that will cover all outgoings every month.

Do you know your margins? *You should know how much you need to make on any product or service over its cost to you.*

Have you clearly explained how your business is funded? *State clearly how you are funded (retained profits, loans, overdraft facility) and how secure it is.*

Have you set out a forecast and final projections for the life of the business plan? *You should include profit & loss and cash flow forecasts as well as a budget forecast for the business.*

Further help

www.business-survival-toolkit.co.uk/stage-three

www.greatbusiness.gov.uk/financing-a-business-growth-plan/

Risk Analysis

Have you outlined how you will deal with some of the key risks to your business? *An analysis of the pinch points that could hinder your plan and how you will address them.*

Further help

www.business.qld.gov.au/business/running/risk-management

Useful Hints & Tips in creating a business plan

- Set aside enough time for business planning. The time you spend will save you far more time after your business is up and running.
- Write a plan that people will read. Ensure you create a plan that's complete but concise and readable.



Analysing your business



Home



Prev Tool



Next Tool

Looking strategically at what you do

An important aspect of starting or developing any business is to gain a wider understanding of both the environment you are intending to operate in and, if you have already traded, how you are performing so far.

“Strategic Analysis” can seem like a scary phrase, but essentially it boils down to looking at your business objectively and drawing conclusions and recommendations from a comprehensive look at your operating environment.

SWOT Analysis

A S.W.O.T. analysis is an easy way of analysing your business and is simply an organised list of your business’s greatest strengths, weaknesses, as well as the opportunities and threats it faces in the marketplace. The simplest and most useful method of compiling a SWOT is in a 2x2 table with a specific cell assigned to each element:

<p>Strengths Internal, positive attributes, both tangible and intangible within your control</p>	<p>Weaknesses Internal, negative factors that detract from the value you offer or put you at competitive disadvantage</p>
<p>Opportunities External, positive factors that represent reasons your business is likely to prosper.</p>	<p>Threats External, negative factors beyond your control that could place your strategy, or the business itself, at risk.</p>

Use the questions in the template below to refine your thoughts and complete a SWOT for your business:

Strengths	Weaknesses
<p><i>Are you located in a positive position?</i></p> <p><i>Do you have a team with relevant skills, knowledge and experience?</i></p> <p><i>Do you have a well established network of suppliers, support and contacts?</i></p> <p><i>Do you have a well established reputation?</i></p> <p><i>Do you have significant capital in the business?</i></p> <p><i>Do you have an established customer base?</i></p> <p><i>Do you have effective distribution or communication channels (e.g. website)</i></p> <p><i>What advantages do you have over your competition?</i></p>	<p><i>What areas need improvement to accomplish your objectives or compete with your strongest competitor?</i></p> <p><i>Is your business in a poor location?</i></p> <p><i>Does your team lack essential expertise/skills?</i></p> <p><i>Does your business operate as efficiently as it could (think technology)?</i></p> <p><i>Does your business have limited resources?</i></p> <p><i>Does seasonality affect your business model?</i></p> <p><i>Is access to your business difficult without private transport?</i></p>



Home



Prev Tool



Next Tool

SWOT Analysis (cont.)

Opportunities	Threats
<p><i>What opportunities exist in your market or the environment that you can benefit from?</i></p> <p><i>Is the perception of your business or market segment positive?</i></p> <p><i>Has there been any recent market growth or other changes that create an opportunity?</i></p> <p><i>Has there been effective marketing and/or development within your wider destination?</i></p> <p><i>Have there been wider trends or interest in society or the media for your specific sector?</i></p> <p><i>Have there been any legislation changes that encourage favourable operating conditions?</i></p>	<p><i>Who are your existing or potential competitors?</i></p> <p><i>Are there challenges created by an unfavourable trend or development?</i></p> <p><i>What situations might threaten your marketing efforts?</i></p> <p><i>Has there been a significant change in supplier prices?</i></p> <p><i>Could there be shifts in consumer behaviour, the economy, or legislation that could reduce sales?</i></p> <p><i>Could any new product, technology or trend make your products or services obsolete?</i></p> <p><i>Is your customer base sustainable?</i></p>

Simple tips to get the most from a SWOT

- 1 Apply common sense and tailor the SWOT to your business, some things generally held as a weakness may actually be a strength for you.
- 2 Be honest and critical, make sure to properly address your weaknesses as well as the external threats.
- 3 Make it clear why you have included certain points - why they matter to your business and provide the evidence they are based on.
- 4 Prioritise the elements within the SWOT with most important first
- 5 Include all those within your business in creating the SWOT - different perspectives can contribute valuable insight.

Using a SWOT

You can use the SWOT to develop specific plans and strategies for your business by maximising the positive influences and minimising the negative ones.



Getting hands on...

Image courtesy of Ian Brodie & Somerset County Council



Analysing your business



Home



Prev Tool



Next Tool

TOWS analysis

The simplest way to do so is to use a TOWS analysis, which looks at how the elements of the SWOT could interact with each other and develop suitable plans.

	Opportunities	Threats
Strengths	<p>Strength-Opportunity strategies <i>How can your strengths be used to maximise the opportunities you have identified</i></p>	<p>Strength-Threats strategies <i>How can you use your strengths to minimise the threats you have identified?</i></p>
Weaknesses	<p>Weakness - Opportunity strategies <i>How can you minimise your weaknesses using the opportunities you have identified?</i></p>	<p>Weakness - Threats strategies <i>How can you minimise your weaknesses to avoid the threats you have identified?</i></p>

The resulting actions and ideas can then form the basis of your focus over the short or long term as you develop the business.

Other Models

There are plenty other tools you can use to complement or enhance a SWOT. Two of the most well known are included below:

PEST

A P.E.S.T. analysis is similar to a SWOT but solely focuses on the external context your business operates in (Political, Economic, Social and Technological). This can be used to help generate the Opportunities and Threats element of a SWOT or used in its own right.

www.businessballs.com/pestanalysisfreetemplate.htm

Porters 5 forces

This analysis looks at the competitive strength a business has (or how effectively it will be able to compete against similar businesses). It is a more complex tool but can particularly help identify areas for concern in the business model.

www.businessballs.com/portersfiveforcesofcompetition.htm

Researching your market



Home



Prev Tool



Next Tool

Understanding your environment

The purpose of market research is to provide relevant data to help pre-empt problems or inform strategies within a business. It provides an important backdrop and context to all your decisions.

Secondary Research

At this stage secondary research (information and data sourced from others) is vital as it saves both time and money, and often offers a wider perspective. Make sure to check the following sources:

- www.visitengland.org/insight-statistics/
- Localised tourism data held by Destination Management Organisations (DMOs), Local Authorities or Protected Landscapes
- Business groups (e.g. The Federation of Small Businesses)
- Trade associations in your specific sector
- Educational establishments

Be sure to look for the following kinds of information:

Size and scale of the market	<input type="checkbox"/>
Recent growth (or otherwise) trends of the market	<input type="checkbox"/>
Particular barriers to entering the market	<input type="checkbox"/>
Forthcoming opportunities that could help the market grow	<input type="checkbox"/>
Issues and potential threats to the market	<input type="checkbox"/>



Hike Help

Case Study

Hike Help

Before starting Hikehelp in 2012 Andrew & Karen undertook extensive research which helped identify the gap for a luggage transfer service on the long distance footpaths in Norfolk. Research that paid dividends as the business continues to grow.

[Find out more](#)



Researching your market



Home



Prev Tool



Next Tool

Competition analysis

A key element of research for any business includes looking at the competitors operating in that specific market. The first step is to identify who your competitors actually are, this may not mean those closest to you in terms of location, rather look for businesses who are:

- Offering a comparable product
- Operating at a similar price point
- Offering an experience of comparable quality
- Operating in a similar location in relation to their customer base

To get started; find three businesses that fulfil the above criteria and assess them using the profiling tool below:



Image courtesy of Norfolk County Council

1. Product

What are they offering (core service & added value services)? What capacity (rooms/covers etc) do they have? When are they open (hours/days/seasonally)?

2. Price

How much do they charge for a comparable product/service? How much do they charge for added value services? Do they offer discounts or other incentive offers?

3. Marketing

Who specifically are their customers? What channels do they use to communicate with them? How successful are each of those channels?

4. Reception

What do their customers say about them? How loyal are their customers (do they get repeat business or recommendations)? Are they proactively interacting with them to promote loyalty?



Home



Prev Tool



Next Tool

Competition analysis (cont.)

5. Resources

How many staff/team members do they employ? Do they contract any external experts? Do they use any specific technology or innovation?

Where to find the information

You can obtain this information from numerous sources but don't forget to include:

- 1** Their own websites - a mine of information on what a business is/does and how it presents itself, including prices and how they market themselves.
- 2** TripAdvisor - a useful resource for understanding who a business's customers are and their thoughts and feelings.
- 3** Social Media - Channels like Facebook and Twitter can give real insight into additional services, special offers, personnel and methods of communicating
- 4** Personal visit - For a true experience of a business, go as a customer yourself!



Assessing your performance



Home



Prev Tool



Next Tool

Looking from a customer's perspective

One, if not THE key measure of performance is how your customers perceive the service you offer and how loyal they are. This tool comprises three approaches to assessing your performance from your customer's perspective. Remember to use these tools with a degree of common sense, you should tailor them and apply the parts that are relevant to your business.

1. Profile & compare your own business

The simplest method of assessing performance is to compile a profile of your own product. If you have worked through the previous tool on Competitor Analysis you can simply apply the same tool and criteria to your own business. Once complete you can construct a Competitor Array to assess your performance against others for specific criteria. To do so you need to:

- 1** Determine a small handful of key success factors in your industry
- 2** Rank the key success factors in order of importance by giving each one a weighting - The sum of all the weightings must add up to one.
- 3** Rate yourself and each competitor on each of the key success factors out of ten (higher number is better)
- 4** Multiply each rating in the matrix by the factor weighting.

This can be displayed on a table with competitors along the top and key factors down the side, as in the example shown below:

Key Success Factors	Weighting	Your rating	Your rating weighted	Competitor 1 rating	Competitor 1 weighted
Factor 1	.4	6	2.4	3	1.2
Factor 2	.3	4	1.2	5	1.5
Factor 3	.2	3	.6	3	.6
Factor 4	.1	7	.7	4	.4
Totals	1.0	20	4.9	15	3.7

Key Success Factors	Weighting	Your rating	Your rating weighted	Competitor rating	Competitor weighted
Totals					



Home



Prev Tool



Next Tool

2. Review Customer Feedback

An alternative method is to base your assessment on what your customers say about you and what they report or share with others.

The first step of course is to gain customer feedback, consider the following to do so:

- Encourage reviews on TripAdvisor or other review sites
- Encourage contact from customers through tools like social media after their visit
- Offer incentives to obtain feedback and testimonials (free business card draw)
- Make it obvious (visitor books, feedback cards) and ask!

For more in-depth tips on gaining and using feedback take a look at the Word Of Mouth tips in **Part 2 of the Toolkit - Communicating.**

For any customer feedback you collect, use the following checklist to help gain valuable insight:

Is the data representative? <i>Context is important, particularly be aware of collating feedback obtained during a busy event alongside that obtained during quieter periods.</i>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Are you looking at trends rather than specific responses? <i>Rather than individual views you are looking for sentiments being echoed across multiple instances of feedback. It's easier to pick these out by reading a lot of responses together.</i>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Are you looking at negatives equally? <i>No-one likes to receive complaints, but they have been made for a reason - and they have bothered to share it with you. Take each seriously and investigate.</i>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Are you using in-depth methods to analyse the data? <i>Detail is important in customer feedback, try to avoid using averages or simply lumping positive and negative views together. The key is understanding why a view was given.</i>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Can you pinpoint and verify the feedback? <i>It is vital to be able to cross-reference any feedback to the time and place related to it, including any staff member, equipment or other specifics of your product.</i>	<input type="checkbox"/>



Customer feedback

Image courtesy of Visit Kent



Assessing your performance



Home



Prev Tool



Next Tool

3. Mystery Visit

The third method of assessing your performance is to set certain criteria or standards and test the reality of a visit to see whether you achieve those criteria, or indeed identify other issues that may need to be addressed. You can either complete this yourself or ask a friendly volunteer to do so.

It is impossible to provide a single checklist that would apply to all business types, therefore use the key principles, tailor the tool to your business and define your own criteria.

How to score

- A. = Good** - Your business is performing well for this criteria. Focus on maintaining this standard
- B. = Average** - Your business is passable for this criteria, look for ways to improve performance
- C. = Poor** - Your business could improve significantly on this criteria, look urgently for ways to improve performance



Mystery Visit

Image courtesy of Ian Brodie & Somerset County Council

1. Booking / Arrangement of experience

The contact a customer would have with your business prior to arrival should be efficient, friendly and provide all the relevant information a customer needs.

a) On booking were you provided with?

- Instant Email confirmation	<input type="checkbox"/>
- Detailed directions to visit the business	<input type="checkbox"/>
- Information on the wider area	<input type="checkbox"/>
Scoring: A= 3/3 B=2/3 Otherwise C	Your Score

b) Was the contact you had during the booking process?

- Handled with courtesy and politeness	<input type="checkbox"/>
- Accurate and sufficiently detailed	<input type="checkbox"/>
- Offered suggestions and ideas to improve your visit	<input type="checkbox"/>
Scoring: A= 3/3 B=2/3 Otherwise C	Your Score



Understanding your customers



Home



Prev Tool



Next Tool

Understanding your existing customers

In order to develop an appealing product or service we need to know something about the target audience we're trying to attract.

Your existing customers represent your current success, these are the people who understand your business and have chosen you to spend their time and money with. It's important to understand who they are in more depth.

Profiling

Use the information you already have about them (factual or anecdotal) to answer the questions below for your current customers:



Image courtesy of Visit Kent

How old are they?

Male or Female?

Are they family groups, singles, retired people, groups of friends etc?

Do they live close by or are they coming from farther away?

How much do they spend with you on average per visit?

What do they do when they're in your area (visit friends and family, shopping, studying, just passing through etc)?

What do they say they like about your product or service?

Do you get repeat business from them? If so, how often?



Home



Prev Tool



Next Tool

Finding new audiences

Your existing customers are a great place to start but you might also decide you need to grow your appeal and attract other audiences.

It may not be obvious who these audiences might be so use the following tools to help.

Understand who you want

Firstly answer the key questions below to create the base criteria for your business:

1. What do I offer?

This should be a combination of your product and the benefits it provides, e.g. “we offer high quality, rural accommodation to customers looking to escape the hustle and bustle of modern life”

2. What am I looking to achieve?

This should be an honest distillation of your business objectives e.g. “encourage more out of season visitors” or “increase the average spend of current visitors”

These criteria are the lens you should view all the potential audiences with as you are looking for people who will respond to your offer and meet your objectives.

BUT, bear in mind that unless you are fundamentally changing what your business offers, new customers are unlikely to be significantly different from your current customers.



Marsh Farm

Case Study

Marsh Farm

Traditionally targeting families at weekends and school holidays, Marsh Farm needed to develop a more consistent audience base. To do so they have expanded to offer specific incentives for pre-school children and parents midweek as well as school visits.

[Find out more](#)



Understanding your customers



Home



Prev Tool



Next Tool

Researching potential audiences

Forearmed with your criteria, the next step is to research and look into who the potential audiences could be. Below are some suggested sources and ideas to explore.

- Visit Local Authority or DMO websites for reports, statistics and insights. Make sure to look as local as you can rather than at a national level.
- Contact your local business group, Chamber of Commerce or tourism association to see if they have similar research to share.
- Look into audience segmentation tools and models available concerning the visitor economy. e.g. The [Ark Leisure model](#) from Arkenford (GB visitor market) or review sites like [VisitBritain](#) and [VisitEngland](#) for larger trends
- Contact membership and interest groups like the Ramblers Association. They can help you understand more about their members interests and profiles.
- Hold focus groups with people representative of potential customer groups
- Design and send an online questionnaire asking for opinions from potential audiences.
- Conduct face to face interviews in your local high street or at local visitor attractions
- Simple footfall analysis to assess who is visiting your area, when and what they're doing

Health Warning - conducting research is a science and should be done either with an experienced research partner or at least with the support of someone with relevant experience.

Profiling potential audiences

With your research and key criteria in mind, answer the following questions to create a profile for each of your target audiences . You can describe as many audience groups as you think are relevant but be realistic!

How old are they?

Will they be in couples, family groups, sole visitors or as part of other groups?

What kind of income will they have?

What kind of interests, hobbies, preferred activities do they have?



Home



Prev Tool



Next Tool

Profiling potential audiences (cont.)

What will their expectations be of your business? (What do they want or need you to provide)

What will they expect from your place? (What needs to be close by or in your area to make them come)

How far will they come to enjoy your offer?

How will they get to you?

Prioritising your target audiences

If you've got this far you probably have a good number of audiences (both existing and new) to choose from. However, unless you have huge budgets and lots of resources, you're unlikely to be able to focus on all of them simultaneously.

The next task, therefore, is to prioritise the audiences and funnel your energies where you can make the most difference. Use these questions to help you prioritise a maximum of three or four target audiences.

- 1 Who is easiest to communicate with?** Can you get a contact database easily? Do they all have a shared interest that you could use to talk to them altogether?
- 2 Who has the most money to spend?** You need to target groups that have the desire PLUS the cash to make your efforts worthwhile.
- 3 Who will be interested in your offers all year round?** Is there a group that will be keen to spend time and money irrespective of the season?



Deepdale Farm

Deepdale Farm

Case Study

By knowing and understanding their customers Deepdale provide not only a range of accommodation but also a complex of related shops and other facilities. They have equally been able to identify which events appeal to their customers and which not to pursue.

[Find out more](#)



Understanding your customers



Home



Prev Tool



Next Tool

Prioritising your target audiences (cont.)

- 4** **Who will be drawn to your place as well as your business?** When used as an integral part of your marketing, your location can make your offer even more attractive.
- 5** **Who will find your case studies and testimonials most relevant and appealing?** What other customers say about you is very powerful so who will be most impressed?
- 6** **Who is already coming to businesses locally?** If people already visit your area you can develop referral opportunities - a cheaper source of business.
- 7** **Who is most likely to recommend you?** A technically savvy audience will use review sites like TripAdvisor, so it never hurts to consider who will drive word of mouth for you.

Building an audience map

Now you have an idea of who your priority audiences are, it's useful to keep all the information in one place for quick reference. Thinking even further ahead, it's important that we can articulate for each audience:

- Their key characteristics
- Their most important wants and needs - the things they want from a business like yours
- Their key triggers - the tangible things that you have that make them respond to your offer
- The emotional benefits you can offer them - the things they feel about spending time and money in your place and your business. These are really powerful motivators in terms of decision-making beyond basic price and physical descriptions

Once you have developed these, you can create core messages that can be used in your marketing and conversations with the audiences to tie all of these points together.

The audience map tool overleaf is for you to use once you've completed the above sections (or if you already have the answers you need about your target audiences). We've included a couple of examples so you can see how it works.



Pool House

Pool House Woolavington

Case Study

Pool House positions itself for an upmarket boutique audience. They tailor not only their offer and facilities but also how they present themselves in their communications, the type of advertising they use and incorporate the essence of luxury and quality into all their messages.

[Find out more](#)



Home



Prev Tool



Next Tool

Building an audience map (cont.)

Target Audience	Characteristics	Wants & needs	Triggers	Benefits	Resultant Messages
Active retired couples	<p>Have income to enjoy short breaks and holidays</p> <p>Enjoy British countryside</p> <p>Interested in outdoor activities but not hardcore</p> <p>Might consider bringing grandchildren if suitable</p>	<p>To have arrangements sorted in advance</p> <p>Good value for money (not just cheap)</p> <p>Relaxed atmosphere</p> <p>Choice of things to do without having to travel too far</p> <p>Potentially, good public transport links</p> <p>Things to do if the weather is bad</p>	<p>Comfortable rooms with views of the landscape</p> <p>Good website with easy availability - checking, booking facility and links to local attractions and other information</p> <p>Competitive price</p> <p>Good quality, locally sourced food and drink</p> <p>Close to local museums, cinema and shopping</p>	<p>Feel relaxed and active spending time outdoors but safe as they are using organised walking trails</p> <p>Happy that the arrangements were sorted before arriving so they can enjoy just being there</p> <p>Indulge in both countryside and top quality local produce</p>	<p>Enjoy a weekend drinking in the best of our countryside along safe walking trails with amazing views. Or indulge your cultural curiosity with local ghost stories in the town museum.</p> <p>Whichever you choose, reward yourselves with the tastiest local specialities from our welcoming pubs and restaurants.</p>
Mountain bikers	<p>Keen interest in their sport</p> <p>More male than female</p> <p>Higher than average incomes</p> <p>Likely to come in small groups</p> <p>Will recommend a great experience to others</p>	<p>Secure storage for bikes</p> <p>Hearty, high energy food</p> <p>Something to do in the evenings</p> <p>Great off-road cycling experience</p>	<p>Bike wash down facilities and a secure storage shed</p> <p>Special offers for cycling club members</p> <p>High energy breakfast and picnic options</p> <p>Good local night-time economy</p> <p>Organised cycle routes</p> <p>Local repairs shop</p> <p>Located close to the start of great rides</p>	<p>Can get into the great outdoors easily and quickly</p> <p>Feel genuinely welcomed and that their needs are met as mountain bikers</p> <p>Happy that their expensive bikes are safe</p> <p>Relaxed as there are organised routes available if wanted</p>	<p>We know what mountain bikers need to have a great time so come and get muddy happy in the knowledge that your gear is safe, that you'll really challenge yourself on our trails and that you've earned the excellent local food and beer at the end of your day.</p>



Developing your brand



Home



Prev Tool



Next Tool

Getting the core message right

The previous tool helps you start thinking about what your visitors want and how you should start to communicate with them, however it's key that you have a consistent and clear way of doing so. Your brand is therefore the core of your marketing and the yardstick to prioritise activities to develop your business. It is THE key tool to help everyone understand about you.

Your Brand?

Your brand is a statement of intent, your elevator pitch and the supporting content that backs it up, tailored to meet your customers' expectations. It is built of two separate elements:

Who you are	Why people choose you
<p>A succinct phrasing of who you are to your customers. This is the core of the brand and needs to encapsulate:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> → What your product is → What your business objectives are → What your customers are looking for 	<p>Something that differentiates you from the competition. If your audience knows they want a product like yours, this is the extra element that makes them select you. It needs to be:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> → Something important to your audience → Something that you do better than others → Not necessarily unique!

Defining your brand

If you have completed the preceding sections in this toolkit you'll have the building blocks already in place, but to put this together powerfully follow the steps outlined below:

- 1** Pull together all the key features of your product or service.
- 2** Prioritise them by which can help you achieve your goals as a business
- 3** Prioritise again based on the elements most attractive to your customers
- 4** When you have reduced the list to no more than 3 or 4 key features, use the following table to plot the features against the benefits they provide.

Rational (features)	Emotional (benefits)
<p><i>Physical things you brand e.g. Beautiful rural environment Tranquil and peaceful Locally sourced produce throughout Variety of activities on the doorstep</i></p>	<p><i>What the visitor gains from the features e.g. Get away from it all, be inspired Feeling of safety, relaxation Invigoration, healthiness, exclusivity, fulfilling, stress-free to plan</i></p>



Home



Prev Tool



Next Tool

Defining your brand (cont.)

5 Use this to compare yourself to what your competitors are offering and look for your competitive edge. See the previous tool on **Assessing your performance** for tips.

6 At this point it's always worth pausing to review your brand and test it against a few fundamental questions before pushing forward.

Is it clear? <i>Would the man from Mars understand what you are all about in less than 30 seconds? The best brands are simple and clear, if it needs explaining you need to simplify.</i>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Is it accurate? <i>Does it actually reflect what customers will find when they visit you? Making promises of being family-friendly means ensuring you can provide that service 24/7 and 365 days a year.</i>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Does it make you stand out? <i>Have you articulated something that sets you apart, or are you just generic? This is possibly the hardest aspect but you do need to leverage some form of competitive advantage.</i>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Will your customers care? <i>Have you tailored the brand so it appeals directly to your customer base? It should factor in something they as a segment want or need on both a rational and emotional level.</i>	<input type="checkbox"/>

7 If you are happy with your brand, you should then construct your core brand messages, using the following format.

Benefit	Feature	Trigger
What the visitor gains from your business	Detail on what you offer that provides the benefit	Why they should choose you over another business
<i>e.g. A chance to taste the freshest fruits of field and forest</i>	<i>e.g. Our menu of delicious local food and drink changes every week depending on what's fresh right now</i>	<i>e.g. We stock 23 local cheeses, the largest selection in Exmoor</i>

8 Now bring them together in a few short paragraphs, the more succinct the better to create a compelling brand.

Keep all the elements of the messages you compile, different parts may be useful in different situations or to promote different elements of your product to specific audiences.



Developing your brand



Home



Prev Tool



Next Tool

Presenting your brand

Once you are happy with the content of the brand you need to bring it to life and lay out clearly the key elements of how it should be communicated. This is particularly vital to ensure internal consistency amongst staff and your team, so make any guidance simple, straightforward and concise.

Use the checklist below to make sure you have all the right ingredients:

<p>Elevator Pitch <i>A paragraph that ties the brand together to explain what your business is all about. Consider presenting variable lengths of copy or break it into key themes.</i></p>	<input type="checkbox"/>
<p>Evidence. <i>Include a few examples and facts that back up the brand. Awards, detail on products, number of happy customers can all make your brand real and reinforce your communication.</i></p>	<input type="checkbox"/>
<p>Your Core Values <i>Work out what your business stands for. What are the five or six key values that matter most to you? Make sure they're realistic, that your team and your customers buy into them.</i></p>	<input type="checkbox"/>
<p>Context. <i>Is there something about your place that is uniquely appealing to customers and visitors? If so, try to distil it down into one or two statements. Work with others in your area to agree a commonality and strengthen all of your marketing.</i></p>	<input type="checkbox"/>
<p>Audience Needs. <i>Outline the key audiences your business is aiming for. Select the two or three key needs and hooks from your audience map for each.</i></p>	<input type="checkbox"/>
<p>Tone of voice. <i>Look at your values and derive a tone of voice from them. If a person held your values, how would they talk? Professionally, in a friendly way, or as an expert?</i></p>	<input type="checkbox"/>
<p>Photos and video. <i>Find a bank of images and video that reflect what your business is all about. Refresh these over time making the most of seasonal changes, events you undertake and especially focus on those showing customers having a good time with you. However avoid clichés and don't use images that promise something you can't deliver.</i></p>	<input type="checkbox"/>
<p>Style. <i>If you have a logo, make sure it reflects your values and supports your objectives. Use a design that is easily readable at all sizes and make sure you have it available in numerous formats for a variety of uses including; print quality, web optimised and greyscale for black & white publications. Even if you don't use a logo, you should set out a specific colour palette and no more than three typefaces to be used as a standard.</i></p>	<input type="checkbox"/>

The Golden Rule - Make sure everything you do and everything you communicate about your business reflects your brand consistently.

Financing your business



Home



Prev Tool



Next Tool

Finance in a business

Businesses are usually financed by any or a combination of:

- Equity - retained profits in the business or investment, either by you or from external sources
- Debt - loans, leasing or overdrafts, usually secured against the assets of the business
- Grants - generally public money or from charitable trusts towards delivering a specific activity or development

The most suitable financial package for development of your business will depend on many factors, including; your business type, what you need the money for, your location, assets within the business and many more. Therefore treat this section as guidelines only and make sure to research for your particular circumstance.

Sources of Finance

This table contains guidance on the most relevant sources of finance for SME rural businesses.

Source	Notes	Considerations
Bank Overdraft	<ul style="list-style-type: none">→ A temporary credit facility provided by the bank you hold a business account with→ Limit needs to be agreed with the bank	<ul style="list-style-type: none">→ Simple and flexible way of raising capital→ Fees and interest charges vary→ Not appropriate for medium or long-term finance→ Repayable on demand
Links : www.moneyadviceservice.org.uk/en www.bba.org.uk (British Bankers Association)		

Source	Notes	Considerations
Bank Loan	<ul style="list-style-type: none">→ A credit you borrow and repay over a period of time→ Interest will be levied on top of the loan amount→ You may need to use assets within the businesses to secure the loan	<ul style="list-style-type: none">→ Guaranteed money for the whole term of the loan→ Rates can vary widely→ You may have to pay charges for early repayment→ Failing to keep up with payments risks losing your security
Links : www.gov.uk/business-finance-support-finder www.moneysupermarket.com/loans/ www.fundingcircle.com/businesses/business-loans		



Financing your business



Home



Prev Tool



Next Tool

Sources of finance (cont.)

Source	Notes	Considerations
Venture Capital / Angel Investor	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> → Involves selling a stake of your business in return for capital → Investment can be provided by a firm or an individual (angel investor) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> → Need to show growth potential and return on investment → Investor will often want a say in how the business is run → Investors will generally look to sell their stake for a profit after a certain period (5 years or so)

Links :

www.bvca.co.uk/ - British Venture Capital Association

www.ukbusinessangelsassociation.org.uk/

Source	Notes	Considerations
Social Investment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> → Similar to venture capital but focused on seeing social benefit as a return → Financial return not always essential but looked favourably upon 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> → Need to be able to show a social outcome from activity → Likely to be for specific activity

Links :

www.gov.uk/government/collections/social-investment

www.uksif.org/

www.bigsocietycapital.com/open-funds

Source	Notes	Considerations
Grant Funding	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> → Receiving funds from public bodies or charitable trusts → Generally given for delivering specific activities or outcomes → Schemes & criteria vary widely → Many schemes exclude businesses 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> → Often heavy competition → Many have to be match funded with other money → EU funds for tourism are limited by state aid rules → You often need to expend then claim back the grant → Applications can be difficult & time-consuming

Links :

www.j4b.co.uk - General funding and finance search (requires registration)

www.gov.uk/rural-development-programme-for-england (RDPE & leader portal)

www.naturalengland.org.uk/grantsfunding/findagrants/

www.lotterygoodcauses.org.uk/funding-finder

www.nationalparks.gov.uk/lookingafter/sustainable-development.htm

www.entrust.org.uk (landfill communities funds)



Home



Prev Tool



Next Tool

Sources of finance (cont.)

Source	Notes	Considerations
Crowd funding	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> → Raising funds over the internet from a large number of people → Funders are given either a reward or a share of equity in the business → Numerous platforms to choose from 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> → Smaller projects (up to £10K) are most successful as the targets seen as realistic → Fees of 3-5% often apply → Have to be proactively managed to gain support → Social media is key
Links : www.ukcfa.org.uk/ www.crowdingin.com/ (Nesta compiled directory for the UK)		

Other sources of finance may also be available depending on what you do as a business, where you are located and the type of structure your organisation has.

Further help

www.greatbusiness.gov.uk/financing-a-business-growth-plan/

Fit for Finance Checklist

Before approaching any of the above sources of finance you will need to put your case together. Whilst each type of finance will ask for differing information, use the checklist below to make sure the fundamental bases are covered:

Have you provided detail on what you need the money for? <i>If you are looking to fund a specific activity, have you clearly specified it and how it relates to your business model? If it is for working capital have you provided cash flow and profit/loss projections?</i>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Have you justified the case for finance? <i>You will need to make a clear and structured case for the need, the costs involved, stages of implementation, risks and the outputs and outcomes likely from the investment.</i>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Have you modelled the scenario for not receiving investment? <i>It can be just as important to show any potential finance source the impact of not receiving the investment on your business. The differential can be a useful tool.</i>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Have you planned how to promote new activities resulting from the investment? <i>Any finance source is going to look at how you intend to market the object of the investment, by providing this you give confidence in your ability to make the investment work.</i>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Have you developed a "Plan B"? <i>Your initial attempt to gain finance may not succeed, so line up alternative strategies to ensure you don't lose momentum and show potential investors you have confidence in the idea.</i>	<input type="checkbox"/>



Managing your finances

Once you have secured finance or are trading it is vital to keep track of what is happening and how your business is performing in financial terms.

You can do this by:

→ **Preparing a solid business plan**

This should include financial projections for profit and loss and cash flow and provides you with a framework to compare performance against

→ **Setting and monitoring budgets**

Setting out a projection of what you will receive and expend financially over a given period. This is best done at the start of a year and then monitored on a monthly basis.

→ **Keeping financial records**

You need to maintain accurate and up-to-date records in order to assess performance (and compare to your projected budget). You do not need a complicated system so best to discuss with your accountant (although do look at software like Sage or Quickbooks).

→ **Introducing effective accounting procedures**

For a small business this can just be a case of monitoring Cash Flow, minimising cash requirements in the business, controlling costs, managing any stock and being able to monitor all of these on an ongoing basis.

Financial Difficulties

Everyone starts a new business with high hopes of success, however, large numbers of small businesses do fail each year. A wide variety of reasons can be responsible, but they usually involve failing to generate sufficient income at the right time to cover costs, or that the income generated does not meet the needs and/or the expectations of the operators.

It can be hard to recognise when things are starting to go wrong, but don't ignore early warning signs, such as:

- A decline in turnover
- Difficulty in settling bills on time
- Inability to maintain cash flow
- Significantly underestimating cost forecasts

If you know that there are financial problems, it is extremely important to take urgent remedial action. Discuss the situation with your financial advisers at an early stage and be prepared to take advice.

If you reach the point where your liabilities (what you owe) are greater than your assets (what you own), the business is insolvent. You must then seek legal advice on a way forward immediately.



1. How long should my business plan be?

Forget lengthy tomes, instead a good business plan should leave a reader a good general idea of its main contents even after only browsing the main points, in 15 minutes. As a rule of thumb aim for no more than 20-40 pages of well-spaced text, formatted with bullet points and illustrated with charts and tables.

2. How often should I update my business plan?

You should view your business plan as a living document, a tool you use to run your business more effectively. In that vein you should be inputting actual figures into the plan and adjusting your forecasts as you go. Of course your business plan should be for a defined period, so you should plan a full review once that date is reached or if things change radically.

3. Who can help me put my business plan together?

Involve all of your team and employees in the business planning process, they will have different insights and ideas and can help share the load. Once you've completed a draft of your plan, have it independently reviewed. Choose someone who can offer independent, constructive criticism – perhaps an accountant or business adviser. Your local [Chamber of Commerce](#) or [Enterprise Agency](#) might be able to help.

4. How do I find about regulation affecting my business?

There is a raft of legislation and rules affecting tourism businesses but you need to be aware of some key ones such as; holding insurance, health & safety, environmental regulations, discrimination, data protection, employment law as well as whether you need a licence to operate. Start off by reviewing:

www.startupdonut.co.uk/startup/business-law

www.visitengland.org/busdev/bussupport/legislation/

5. What sort of activity is eligible for grant funding?

Firstly grant funding will be generally only being available for defined activities rather than general running costs for a private business. Secondly businesses can attract grants if they are delivering activity in line with the funder's key objectives; however it varies vastly depending on the funder and scheme. Best advice is to work out what you want to do then review the links in the [Financing Your Business Tool](#) to gauge your options.

6. Why is a brand important to my business?

Your brand sums up what you are and gives your customers a firm idea of what they are buying before they buy it. Your brand can help you stand out in a competitive market, encourage confidence and trust in your service, help you increase sales and are your business' promise to clients and customers. See the [Developing your brand tool](#) for more.



7. Do I need a logo for my business?

Not at all, logos can be expensive and divisive. You can survive just as well with a consistent style of typeface, colour palette and image choice. If you have the resources by all means create a logo but do ensure it fits your brand, appeals to your audience, and is easily reproducible in differing sizes, orientations and mediums.

8. How do I define my target market?

Start by researching the market you operate in. Review the [Researching your market Tool](#) to get started. From there start with understanding your existing customers and then if you feel you need further target markets look for new ones. The [Understanding your customers Tool](#) contains all you need to know.

9. How do I know if my product is right for my audience?

If your product is in place, then the simplest way of testing is to see how it is received by those who already come. The [Assessing your performance Tool](#) offers tips and guidance on doing just that. The toll also includes tips on looking at your competition and seeing what works for them. If it's a new product you need to undertake some research and the [Understanding your customers Tool](#) provides some ideas and inspiration for doing so.

10. What other overheads should I consider that I might have forgotten?

Overheads will vary from business to business, but don't neglect core ones like; insurance, accounting, bookkeeping and payroll, rent, licenses and regulatory fees and utilities. You may also need to consider elements of value to your customers that could have a cost, like wifi provision (think broadband, router, signal boosters, extra bandwidth etc).



Rural Tourism Business Toolkit

About this toolkit

This .pdf is the first part of a fully featured resource packed full with useful information and advice for new and existing rural tourism businesses.

This toolkit has been created as part of the COOL Tourism Project by the COOL Partnership and tourism development charity Hidden Britain.

The project is being delivered with the support of the European cross-border co-operation Programme INTERREG IV A, France (Channel) – England, co-funded by the European Regional Development Fund.

