

## How do your customers find a bed and breakfast?

During the last week of February, 2013, we surveyed a representative sample of about 1300 American adult internet users that were 18 and older to better understand their behaviors when making a decision as to which bed and breakfast they would choose. The methodology created survey results with a margin of error of less than +/- 2.5%.

We asked three questions that moved from the broader question of where visitors started their search, offline or online, and examined their behaviors as they moved through the decision process. The specific questions were:

**If you were looking to book a Bed & Breakfast where would you start your search?**

**If you were to search for a Bed and Breakfast on the Internet what would be most important to you?**

**If you searched for a Bed & Breakfast on Google, what would you do first?**



**Summary:** Almost half of all adult Internet users rely on search engines to start their search for a bed and breakfast.

Off line word of mouth, travel sites, a B & B's website and reviews were all important elements in making a final decision as to where to stay. Printed materials were a small source of customers and social media was an insignificant contributor. While social media sites are critical for customer relations they should not be viewed as a client acquisition source.

There were some age-specific behaviors indicating that Social Networks might be a source for visitors in the future, particularly among younger adults. Older adults were more likely to prefer travel sites as a way to locate a b & b and, while all adults preferred search engines, this was particularly true among younger ones.

### **Survey Question 1:**

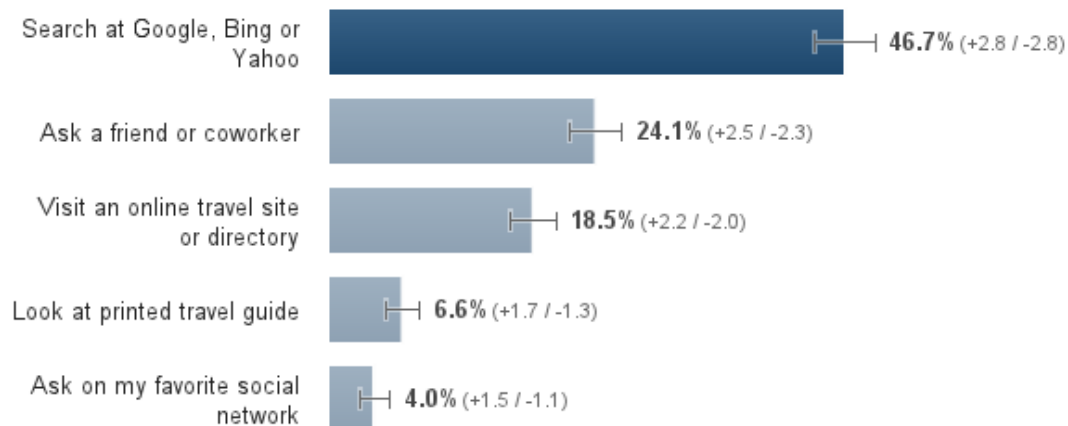
**If you were looking to book a Bed & Breakfast where would you start your search?**



SINGLE ANSWER

If you were looking to book a Bed & Breakfast where would you start your search?

Results for respondents with demographics. Weighted by Age, Gender, Region. (1287 responses)  
Order statistically significant.



Methodology: Conducted by Google Consumer Surveys, February 27, 2013 - March 01, 2013 and based on 1287 online responses. Sample: National adult Internet population.

Comments:

**Mike Blumenthal:** Print mediums are in decline in every industry and that's the case in the hospitality industry, as well In the B & B arena, social networks play a big role in visitor relationship and reputation management. Social networks, however, are not where you're going to find new customers that are anxious to book a room. That occurs at the search engines. Thus, your initial efforts should focus your initial investments on those areas where you get the biggest return; search engine visibility and relevant travel sites are where you focus your initial efforts.

**Mary Bowling:**

**Lisa Kolb:** Good placement in Google Search is an absolute MUST HAVE and Innkeepers that are watching their Google Analytics already know that these survey results are in line with what their traffic shows! Innkeepers today must have a quality, competitive site, one that loads quickly and follows Google Guidelines. Professional Photography and Social Media is required, along with a simple call-to-action to make an Online Reservation! You have to win the Guest over the first time they see your Website, especially in light of the direction of Google Personalization.



**Ed Reese:** Booking a reservation is a very complex decision for many travelers. Though search engines are where you would typically start your search, it's quite rare that online visitors make those reservations on the first visit. They'll go back time and time again looking at your website, reading 3rd party reviews, reviewing other places to stay (in addition to yours as a possible options), as well as checking on social media platforms. It's all important.

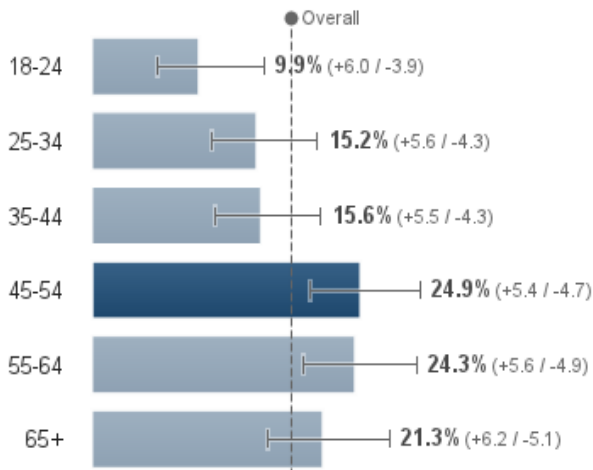
**Aaron Weiche:** Just as this question and feedback suggest, a search engine is often at the top of the funnel. Making sure your website plays well is a must. This also shows that a variety of methods are used at the start of the process so don't put all your focus into one. Keep your approach for online marketing holistic.

SINGLE ANSWER

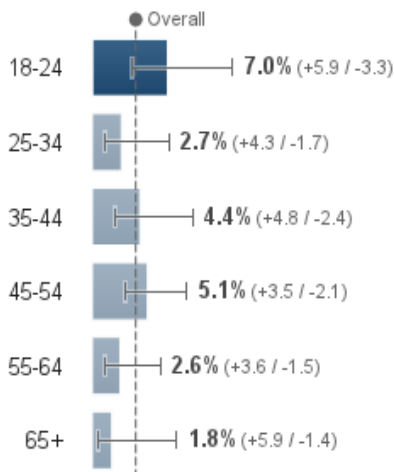
If you were looking to book a Bed & Breakfast where would you start your search?

Results for respondents with demographics. Weighted by Gender, Region. (1287 responses)

**Visit an online travel site or directory** (253 responses)



**Ask on my favorite social network** (49 responses)



Methodology: Conducted by Google Consumer Surveys, February 27, 2013 - March 01, 2013 and based on 1287 online responses. Sample: National adult internet population.

in the younger cohorts, more likely to change. While their usage of social networks is not a significant factor in deciding where to stay at the moment, this is a trend that bears watching over the next 2-4 years as it is likely that those under 35 will start utilizing social networks more for this task.

**Mary:** Its important to know which travel sites and social sites you should be listed on. Which online places are most popular among which age groups? Some of these places are obvious,

**Interesting Differences in Behavior by Age**

Comments about Demographic Differences:

**Mike:** For the most part, behaviors were fairly similar across income and regions. However, there were two distinct age-related trends that were worthy of note.

Firstly, those over 45 are likely to put more stock in travel sites than those in younger cohorts.

The youngest cohort, while using a search engine in roughly the same percentages as age groups, had a somewhat greater propensity to start their search at a social site than those over 25. User behaviors are very habitual and, in the



but others are not. Researching and evaluating travel sites and social sites will help you to discover the places you may want to be listed on. Then, you'll need to monitor referrals from those websites to yours and continually build on what's working.

**David:** Think about the demographic that

A) comes to your inn right now

B) is the demographic that you're primarily trying to attract

If both of those trend older, you should prioritize your time on travel directories like TripAdvisor, Expedia, and Orbitz, as well as on local tourism sites.

If both of those trend younger, you need to be putting serious effort into Social Media.

**Lisa:** I think that many innkeepers will say "RIGHT!" when they look at these results. Inns that successfully attract the younger Inn-going demographic already know this age group prefers Social-Media for such travel, and are already active in this area to encourage engagement through these avenues. For those Innkeepers whose guests are in the slightly older demographic, they realize that online Travel Sites and Online Directories are the choice of those Inn-goers. What does all this mean?

1) Innkeepers must be involved in Social Media, and

2) they need to be included in the best Directories for their Area, Inn Type, etc. and will be using Analytic tools to determine the referrals of each for their specific Inn.

**Ed:** You need to cover your bases. Look at your analytics, both within Google Analytics and via reports from wherever you are promoting your inn. You need to know where your traffic and leads are coming from. When I operated bed and breakfast inns, I was able to trim my advertising each and every year because I was able to see which directories/listings were working and which ones weren't. Trim the ones not working well and maximize the ones that are producing for you.

***Paid search tip from Ed:*** If you are going to use Google Adwords, definitely use Bing as well. A lot of people forget about using Bing for online advertising. Bing tends to skew to an older audience. With a lot of B&B reservations being made by travelers in the 55+ demographic, Bing is a great way to reach them since Bing is the default search engine for all Microsoft / Windows computers.



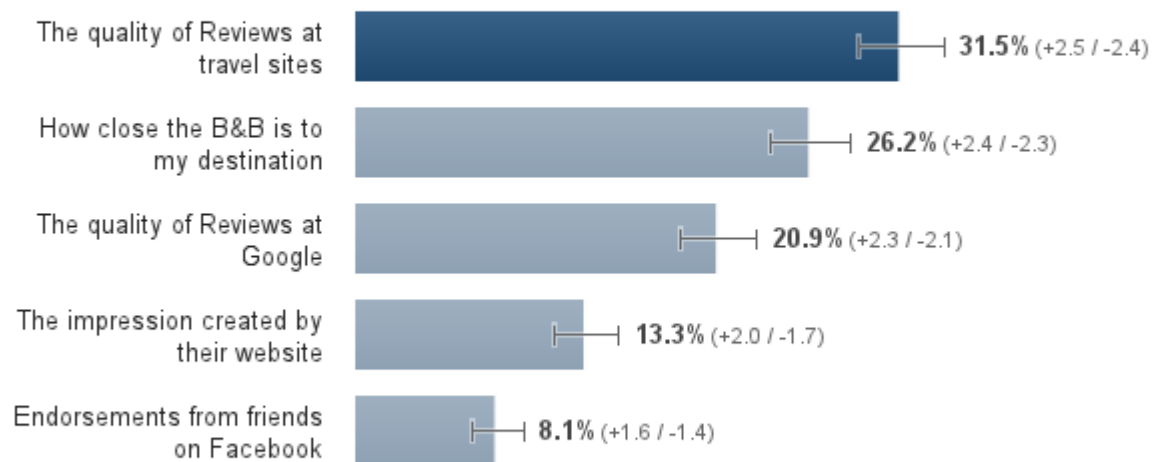
**Survey Question 2:** If you were to search for a Bed and Breakfast on the internet what would be most important to you?

SINGLE ANSWER

If you were to search for a Bed and Breakfast on the internet what would be most important to you

Results for respondents with demographics. Weighted by Age, Gender, Region. (1385 responses)

Order statistically significant.



Methodology: Conducted by Google Consumer Surveys, February 27, 2013 - March 01, 2013 and based on 1385 online responses. Sample: National adult Internet population.

Comments:

**David:** Wow--reviews are REALLY important. But at the same time, this slide crystallizes why you shouldn't put all of your "review eggs" in the "Google basket." Not only does Google seem to use third-party reviews (such as those on TripAdvisor) to judge rankings, but users are more likely to go directly to a travel directory than to Google for review information. Make sure that you're encouraging people to review you on these sites and that you're monitoring what they're saying about you.

**Mike:** I would say that the graph also points out why you need to think about reviews at Google (and other search engines) in addition to focusing on reviews from the travel sites. Review site diversity will help you rank better at Google. More Google reviews (10 or more) will result in a Zagat rating designations and will lead to more conversions at the time of search.

**Ed:** Actively engage in the main travel sites from a review standpoint. 3rd party reviews are more trusted. Period. Maintain vigilant reputation management from a review standpoint.



**Lisa:** As a retired Innkeeper, this statistic really speaks to me. Today's successful Innkeeper must be committed to providing the highest level of customer satisfaction to their guests. Inn goers today aren't just going to share their experience (good or bad) by word of mouth. It's going to be out there for everyone to see. These survey results are clearly showing that future guests want to "READ" review information as part of their Inn selection process, whether it be on Google or on other Review sites. Today's Innkeepers must be aware of existing reviews, have the confidence to mediate those that need attention, and be active in watching their online reputation into the future.

**Mary:** People appear to be most interested in staying at inns that are close to the things that attracted them to visit the area. Having a street address within the city or town being searched will also help you to rank when someone searches for *bed and breakfast + your town*. So if you are still in the planning stages of becoming an innkeeper, you should strongly consider where your inn will be located.

**Aaron:** Yes, reviews are important, but I'll read between the lines here and say that this is about users needing outside sources to form trust in you. The more content (photos, video, text) and details you give the user, the less need they have for outside validation of others. If a user can get a better feel for your property by reading reviews and other sources than they can on your site, it just tells me you need to improve your website.

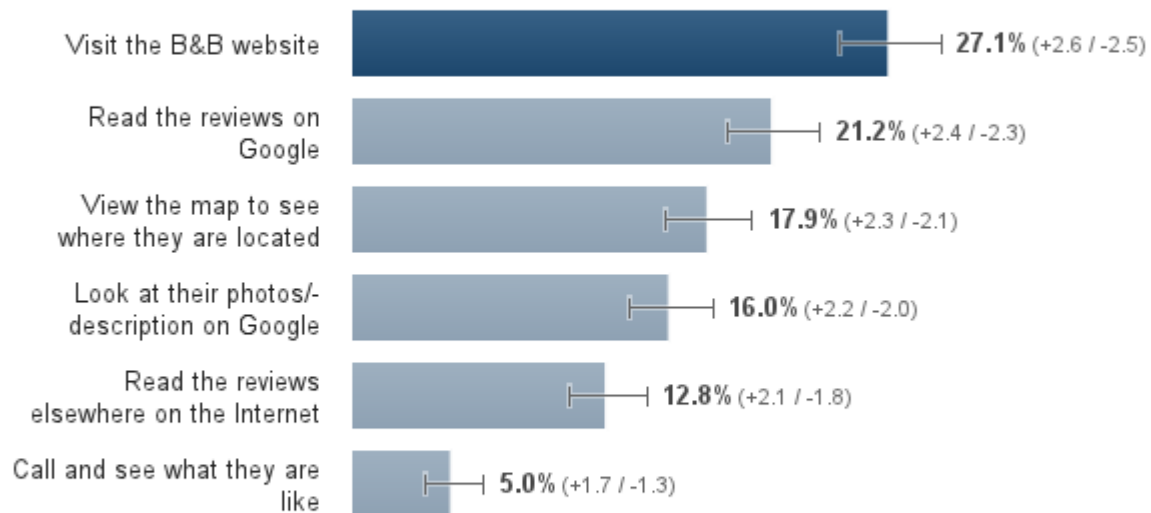
**Survey Question 3:** If you searched for a Bed & Breakfast on Google, what would you do first?

SINGLE ANSWER

If you searched for a Bed & Breakfast on Google, what would you do first?

Results for respondents with demographics. Weighted by Age, Gender, Region. (1268 responses)

Winner statistically significant.



Note: Only 5 choices were shown to any given respondent. Percentages may not add up to 100%.

Methodology: Conducted by Google Consumer Surveys, February 27, 2013 - March 01, 2013 and based on 1268 online responses. Sample: National adult Internet population.

**Ed:** When producing content (both on your website and on /review sites), it's important to put yourself into the mind of the searcher. They are planning a trip. They are planning ahead. This is a very logical process. This data supports how travelers prepare for their trip essentially in the same order:

- 1) What is it? and/or Will we like staying there? (have a compelling website)
- 2) Have other people enjoyed their experience there? (3rd party validation)
- 3) Is it logistically convenient for the trip we're planning?
- 4) If yes, they will then look VERY deeply into the website and reviews to make sure this is the perfect place stay for their. trip (great content, photos, reviews, etc.).

As a former B&B owner, I can speak from personal experience at the importance of having your own website in addition to being listed in the travel directories and via other paid advertising





options for you inn. Here are a few tips based on both the survey results and my personal experience.

- Build content to rank for long-tail keywords in addition to your *B&B + city/area*. This industry is one with numerous, detailed, long-tail keyword possibilities. It's more than just ranking for "Seattle Washington B&B," try ranking for terms like "Seattle Washington B&B with wifi and waterfront view" (or whatever is relevant to your inn).
- Reviews are pure gold. Create a review process to take advantage of how much your happy guests will want to share their positive experience.
- Look at your analytics to see what content your visitors are viewing and the keywords they're using to find you. This will help you decide what to write and if it's working to attract new customers

**Mary:** This tells me that every inn NEEDS to have its own website, regardless of what else they may be doing to market themselves online. Searchers also need to be able to find it easily in the search engines. This requires maintaining consistent branding online, as well as making who you are, where you are and what you do absolutely clear to the Search Engines.

**David:** Every inn needs a website that is focused on what users want. If 27% of people are coming to your website first, make sure it ranks well on Google in the first place, so that people can find you. Also ensure it:

- loads quickly
- answers the most common questions people ask you on the phone and *online* (note that 5x as many people will visit your website as the number that will call you)
- includes polished, high-quality photos of your inn
- conveys\*EXACTLY where you are and how to get there

**Lisa:**

Based on the survey results, and taking Google Personalization into consideration, all Innkeepers must have a Website that can be easily found in a Google Search and it must have the ability to win over the potential guest the first time they view the site. That means a quality, fast loading Website that is designed to follow Google Guidelines, professional photos and highly visible call-to-actions for Online Reservations.

**Mike:** Once a user is at Google (and remember half of all users start their search at a engine, so most of them are at Google), a very large percentage of those users (33%) will take some additional action at Google: look at reviews, look at photos, or look at the Map. It is important, given those numbers, that you have

- At least 10 recent reviews at Google
- A nicely done G+ Local page
- Accurate Map location



- Lots of attractive photos
- You might want to consider an “interior streetview” to really make your listing stand out from the competition.

I think it less important to have a social stream there, but you should take advantage of all the other enhancement options that Google offers.

**Aaron:** At every step of a sales or decision process, you have to win. You have to appear in the search results, then win the click and then, when they get to your website it must guide them to answers and completing their process.

**Conclusions:** Given that search engines are the single most important medium for visitors to find your inn, it is imperative that you make sure that you are doing basic blocking and tackling of local search:

- Have a good looking, properly optimized website
- Have properly claimed local listings at the major search engines, particularly Google.
- Have listings at the travel sites

Before you start any social campaigns make sure that:

- Your site is optimized properly for organic search and your location is optimized for local search
- You have implemented a review management, solicitation and monitoring process and are encouraging your clients to leave reviews at a broad range of both travel and search sites

You may want to view the complete survey results and explore the results for more specific detail: Bed & Breakfast Survey. While exploring the survey, you can drill into specific age and regional details to better understand behaviors.