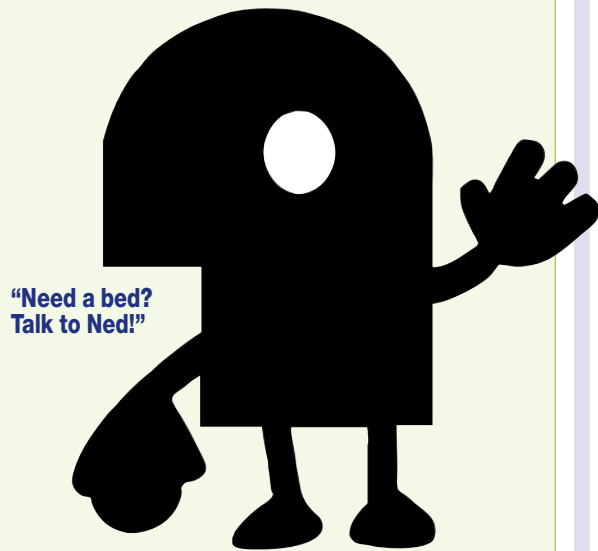


New hotel reservation site



DID you talk to Ned before you booked your last hotel stay in Ireland? If you didn't, you'll wish you had. Ned is the animated character fronting www.hotelsinone.ie, the new hotel reservation site, which is set to become the most visible and obvious choice for people when looking to book a hotel stay in Ireland.

With his mantra, "Need a bed? Talk to Ned!", Ned has the inside track on the best hotel deals in the country. A self-proclaimed "consummate networker", Ned already has his own page on Facebook, Bebo and You Tube — check out the cheeky chappie under Ned Needaded.

Unlike most hotel reservation sites which only sell rooms, www.hotelsinone.ie offers pampering packages, special offers, concert/sporting event offers, group bookings and other requirements across more than 120 hotels which are currently signed up to Hotelsinone, and this number is growing by three a day.

Hotels listed on www.hotelsinone.ie include Choice Hotels, Carlton Hotel Group and Holiday Inns. April/May offers include hotel rooms from €79 per night and two nights B&B, one dinner from €99 per person sharing.

For the latest deals, check out...

www.hotelsinone.ie



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HIGH SOCIETY: Irish hotels are giving guests better deals and an evolved service by capitalising on sat nav and the internet.

Customers don't just want to book a room, says **John Hearne**



More than a travel site

THERE has been a subtle shift in the way tourists are using the internet. Social media sites are taking over from travel sites as the main pre-booking research tool.

"Two or three years ago if you were to look at the top travel sites in the world, they would have been dominated by Expedia and Travelocity," says Des O'Mahony of Bookassist, a leading hospitality booking services and online marketing partner. "Last November, The Sunday Times published the top 100 travel sites in the world, the top 20 of which are social media sites, nothing to do with travel booking."

Tourists are using these non-travel specific sites to do the research, then they're going direct to the service provider to book.

"We have some hotels that started off doing a handful of bookings and now, two years later are doing 30% to 40% of their bookings directly on their own website. For hotels, the main distribution systems of travel agents and the travelocities of this world are receding, and direct business is coming on stream.

"As an example, take the Marriott Group in the US. They went down the route of trying to promote their own website and push their own brand online. If you get a customer directly to your site, it's the best value customer for you; the customer is staying the same but your margin is an awful lot higher on the direct customer.

"The Marriott Group gets in excess of 80% of their bookings directly through their own website. They



PARTY PEOPLE: Internet users look to social network sites rather than travel sites to book hotels, says Bookassist managing director Des O'Mahony.

don't have the reliance on third parties like Expedia, Travelocity or anyone else. From a hotel's perspective it's very good and from a customer's perspective, they know that they're dealing with the real thing and if that's serviced properly then it's a one-to-one relationship."

In order to make that relationship stick, O'Mahony believes hotels have got to provide a richer suite of

online services and add-ons so that the customer doesn't drift off to non-branded third-party sites.

Bookassist has been partnering with Irish hotels in developing what's known as Travel2.0 functionality, delivering not just an advanced booking engine, but multiple language and currency functionality as well as a range of additional services.

Hotels can now use their website to show customer-generated reviews or display their location on their website using Google maps. There's also additional scope to present the visitor with lots more, O'Mahony explains.

"If we've populated the database with information like local monuments, time-dependent information like concerts next Friday in this particular location, all of that can be displayed dynamically on the hotel map as well."

Dublin's Mercer Hotel has been the first to trial and go live with this enhanced functionality from Bookassist.

"We are delighted with Bookassist's latest integration of maps, genuine customer reviews and e-vouchers within the booking engine software suite," said Michelle Doherty, Irish-based group sales and marketing manager with the Great Southern Hotel/Mercer Accommodation Group.

"We hope that this first step towards integrating Travel2.0 within booking engine software will benefit our customers and will enhance their booking experience greatly."