

online bookings scaled to grow

 By [Cari Van Wyk](#)

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Changes in customer behaviour coupled with a growing trust in online services have bolstered the growth of e-commerce. Travellers are more likely to book a holiday, flights or accommodation online than make their way to their closest brick and mortar travel agent, providing an ideal environment for online booking companies to thrive. We spoke to Tom Williams, COO of online booking site [SafariNow](#), to find out how e-commerce has changed the way business works.



■ What is necessary for e-commerce success?

Tom Williams: Successful e-commerce businesses are ones that are able to scale as your site traffic expands, so I would say that the biggest need is to build efficient, smart and automated processes. This will help your business scale as and when needed - rather than having to struggle to expand your workforce.

■ How has e-commerce changed the industry?

Williams: The paper based days of travel agents are gone. The industry has evolved into a self-service market where customers have direct access to all the tools and information necessary to make a purchasing decision, and can then book their holiday in real-time without picking up a telephone or leaving their computer.

As an e-commerce business, you need to make sure that your website contains all the information required by a customer in order to make a decision and secure a purchase.

▣ *What is the biggest challenge, for you, in dealing with e-commerce in business?*

Williams: The market has become very competitive, so in order to remain relevant and be the first choice for customers, you need to constantly adapt your business to the changing needs of the market.

With there being so much choice out there for consumers, we strive to concentrate on our customers' needs and do everything we can to ensure their experience with our site and brand is fantastic. That said, making sure a customer has a great experience is only half the battle, you then need to keep them engaged so that the next time they wish to purchase, your brand is top of mind.

▣ *What is the biggest concern in the online booking environment?*

Williams: As an online business, you need to diversify where your traffic comes from. Google and paid search are great ways of acquiring new customers but do not become overly reliant on Google for traffic as things can change overnight. Spend your time building your brand and make sure that once you have a customer, you keep them engaged so that they come back again and again.

▣ *What are the biggest advantages of working with an e-commerce platform?*

Williams: Being an e-commerce platform means that you have access to customers everywhere, so you're not only limited to customers who walk past your shop on the high street. Your reach is global and the opportunities are massive.

▣ *What are the biggest advantages your clients/customers can benefit from?*

Williams: SafariNow has the largest supply of accommodation options available in Southern Africa, catering for every type of traveller and for every budget - customers can book a houseboat, a tree house, a self-catering holiday cottage or a 5-star hotel on our website. It's up to them.

Adding to that, our powerful search filters allow customers to find exactly what they want easily and quickly, they can rest assured that their bookings are safe because all accommodation has been verified, that payments are safe and secure, and that in the event that anything does go wrong with a booking, we have a team on hand to sort out any issues. We also have thousands of verified customer reviews of our properties so that customers can make an informed choice before booking.

For our vendors, they have the benefit of listing with a major online aggregator that boosts their online visibility and Google page ranking. They also get access to an established, and captive database of trusting customers.

ABOUT CARI VAN WYK

Cari Coetzee is a contributor to Bizcommunity Tourism, Agriculture and Lifestyle.

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