

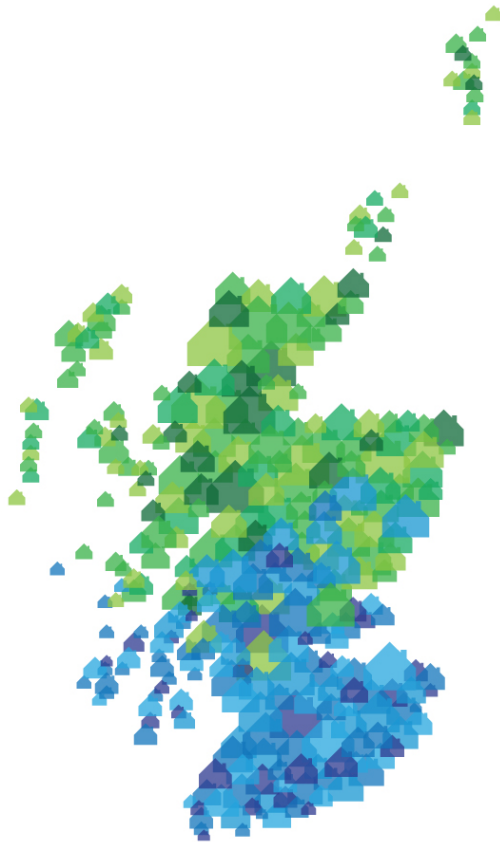


ASSC

Supporting self-catering in Scotland

Season to Date Survey

July 2015



Executive Summary

ASSC surveyed its members in August 2015 to get a picture of the season to date, but also to ask some more in-depth questions about the self-catering sector.

Almost 150 businesses from all over Scotland took part, from single property owners to multiples, and from new businesses to those with over 30 years' experience.

Although driving bookings for ASSC members is very important, the help and advice ASSC provides is valued more.

As in previous recent surveys, three quarters of members are doing as well as, or better than 2014, but a quarter of members are struggling. High levels of repeat businesses and the use of discounts help sustain the sector.

Most are quality assured although there is some confusion around ASSC's Committed to Quality scheme.

Almost 75% of this sample use online reviews, but there is confusion around this for those not yet taking part.

75% of this sample are online bookable. There is considerable resistance from those not yet adopting this.

There has been a massive change in the landscape with the arrival of the Online Travel Agencies (OTAs). Almost half of these businesses use an OTA to some extent. Roughly 45% are not taking commission bookings, but around 20% are taking at least half of their bookings with commission.

There is a sharp divide between businesses embracing the new digital technology and those not. There is a significant gap in webstat analysis, social media activity and an uptake of the digital skills. This reflects the lifestyle business nature of the sector, which also prevents a significant number from getting to tourism events.

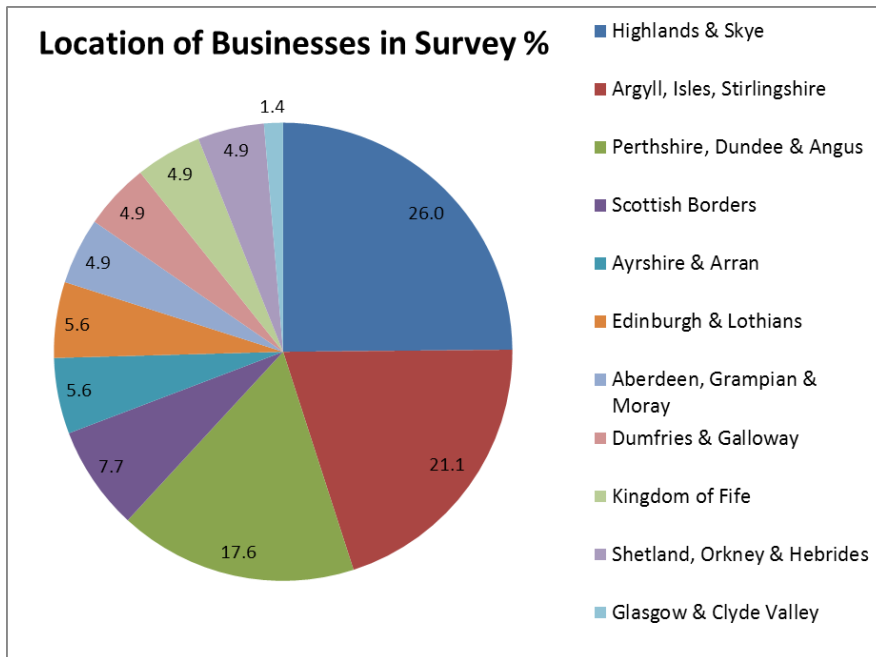
Many members belong to their local tourism organisations, and a few take part in the wider industry activities.

Rural broadband and mobile coverage is a significant issue. Some areas not covered, and it's still woefully slow for many.

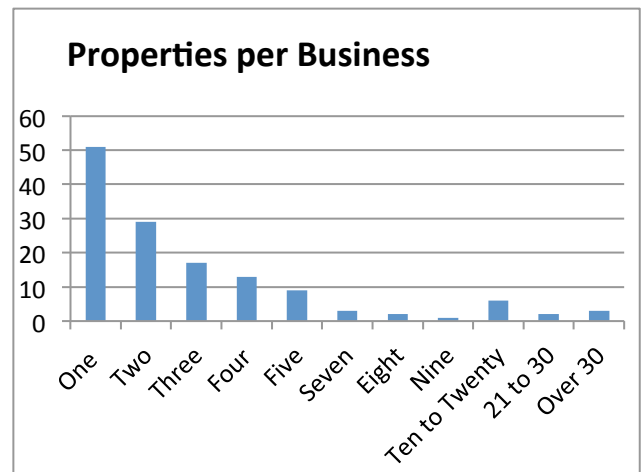
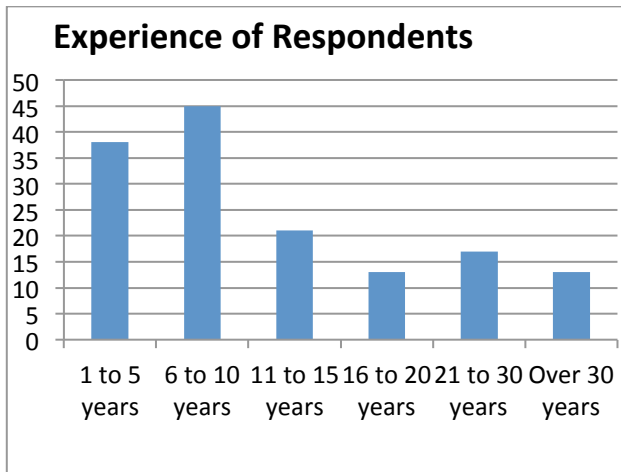
And finally, we examine what's in members' welcome packs for their guests.

Season to Date Survey

147 Businesses Responded

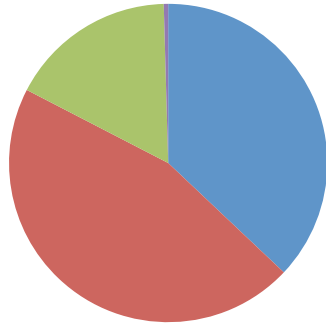


Respondents had 1886 years of experience between them and about a third of respondents were single property businesses.



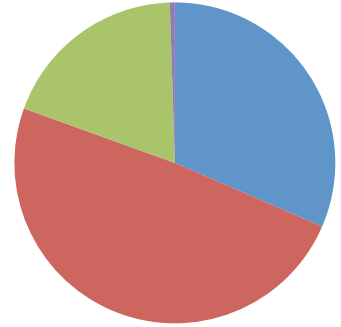
Reasons for Joining ASSC

- Marketing opportunities
- Information and support
- Representation
- Other



Reasons ASSC Most Valued

- Marketing opportunities
- Information and support
- Representation
- Other

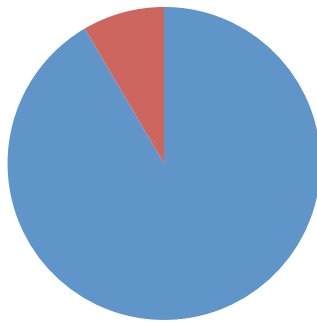


Reasons for joining are varied, from new businesses looking for start-up advice and support, existing businesses looking for up-to-date information and many looking for marketing through EmbraceScotland.

While support and advice has been positive, the experience with EmbraceScotland has been more mixed, with some delighted and some disappointed with many somewhere in between. Supercontrol links have been positive for many. The Forum is also popular with those who use this.

Do you market using EmbraceScotland?

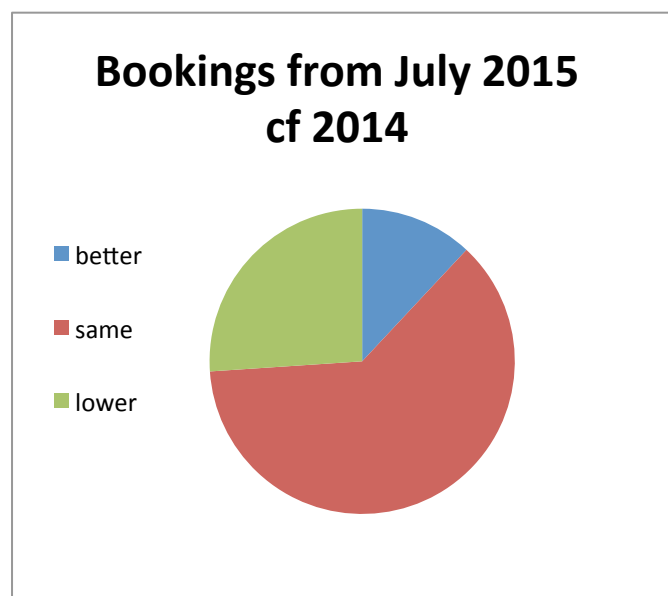
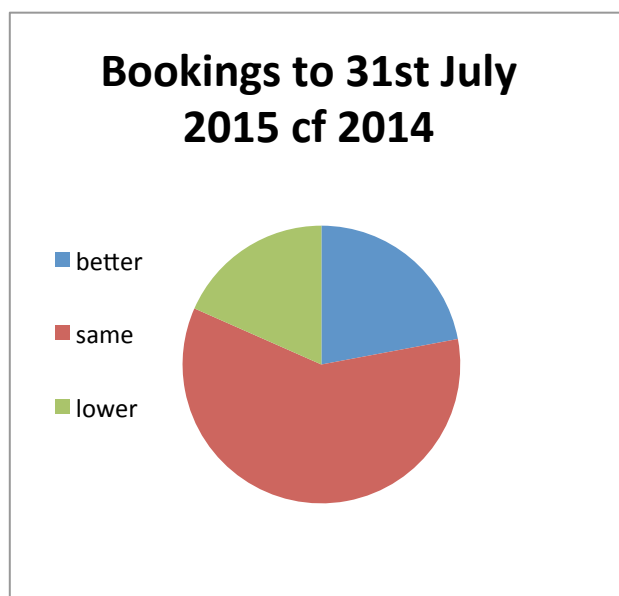
- Yes
- No



Most are using EmbraceScotland.

Reasons for not doing so are mainly Quality Grading related, although some are exclusively using OTAs. There is still some confusion round this and no mention of our CTQ scheme as an alternative.

Some using comments to flag up particular issues, and some disappointment with the site, although some say it is doing well for them.

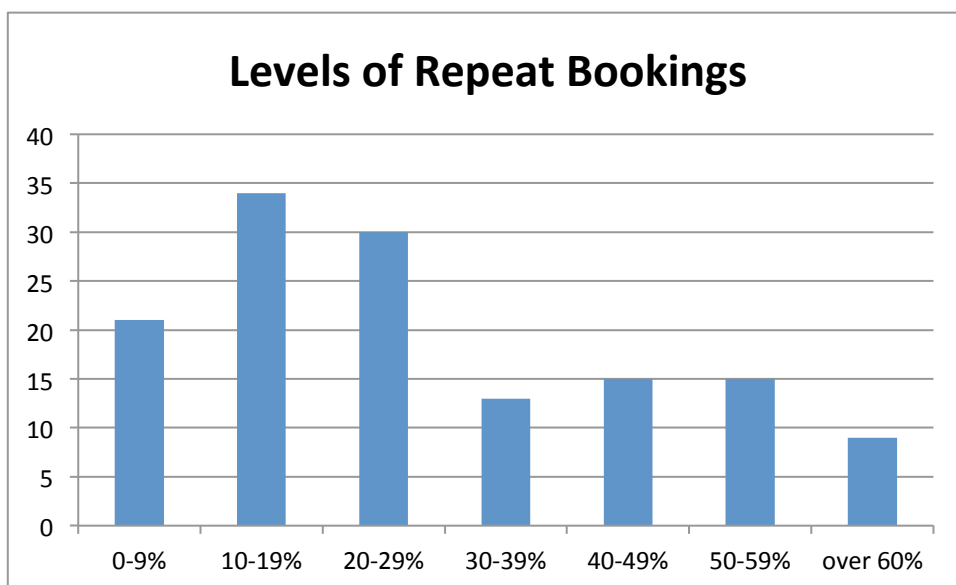


Bookings to 31st July a fairly optimistic picture, falling off slightly looking ahead. It is a mixed picture, although 75% are looking forward to 'same or better' with 25% struggling somewhat.

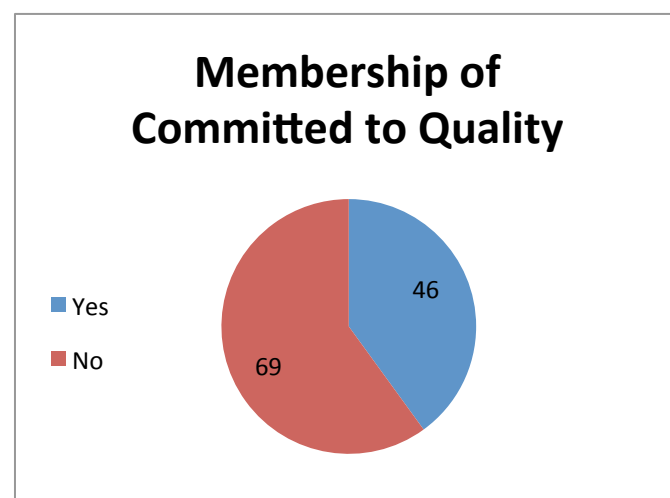
Reasons for those with a fall-off

Many reasons were given for businesses not doing as well.

- the Weather
- the Strong Pound,
- local self-catering saturation – too crowded a marketplace
- momentum built in 2014 was lost, simply because of less being spent on promoting Scotland. The Central Belt 2014 focus was also a gripe.
- Ferries – Calmac strike and high prices, although RET was seen as a positive.
- Businesses recognising that they need to update their websites, especially as Google penalises those not mobile-friendly.
- Several were worried that the Referendum had damaged Scotland the Brand throwing doubt on the Scottish Welcome.
- Changes as OTAs dominate and EmbraceScotland not as good as it once was for some.
- FHL changes making things more marginal.



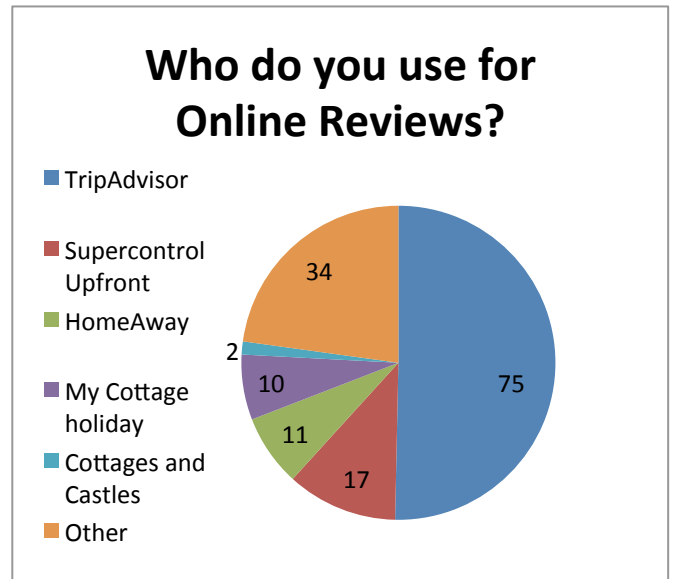
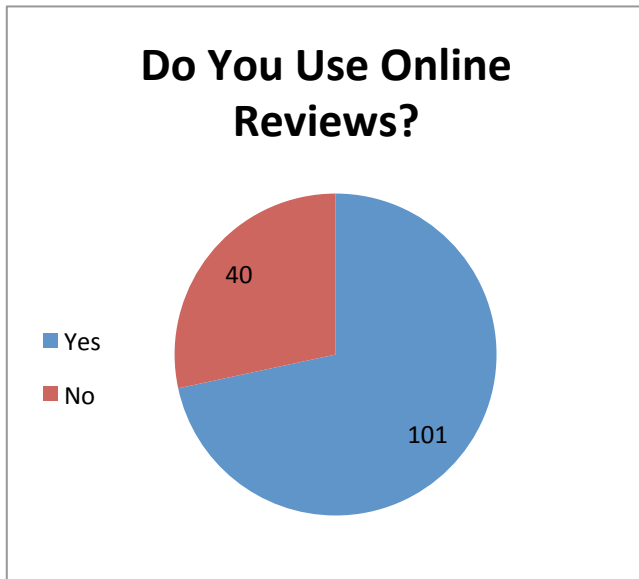
Many businesses enjoying healthy levels of repeat business. With 38 businesses in their first 5 years in this sample, some are scoring low as it is early days for them. 60% of our sample are enjoying repeat levels of over 20%.



We asked which star rating performed the best for those businesses operating across several grades. For most, there is no difference, but other factors like parking availability, whether detached or not, taking or banning pets, and simply sleeping numbers are things that make big differences between properties. Lots of 4 stars doing well, but little evidence that 3 stars are doing any less well.

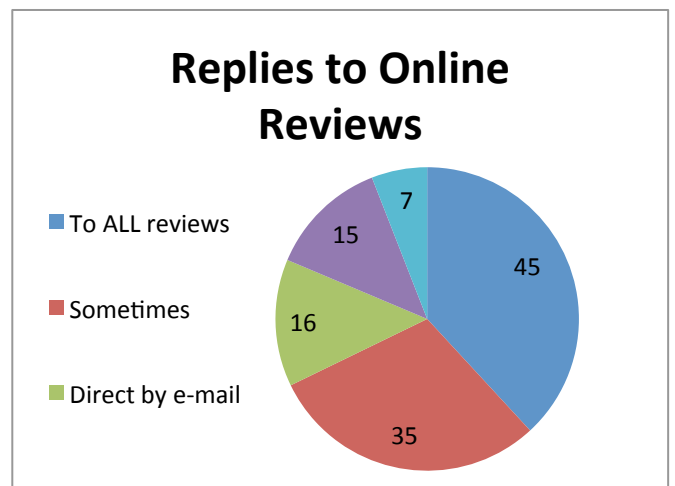
There is confusion about our Committed to Quality Scheme, introduced by ASSC to give non VisitScotland Quality Assurance (VSQA) businesses an alternative. Many businesses see their membership of VSQA as sufficient. Many don't see the point of another hoop to jump through, yet some have put it on their 'to do' list in terms of professional

development. Of the 100 businesses who replied about additional CTQ information, half are thirsty to know more.



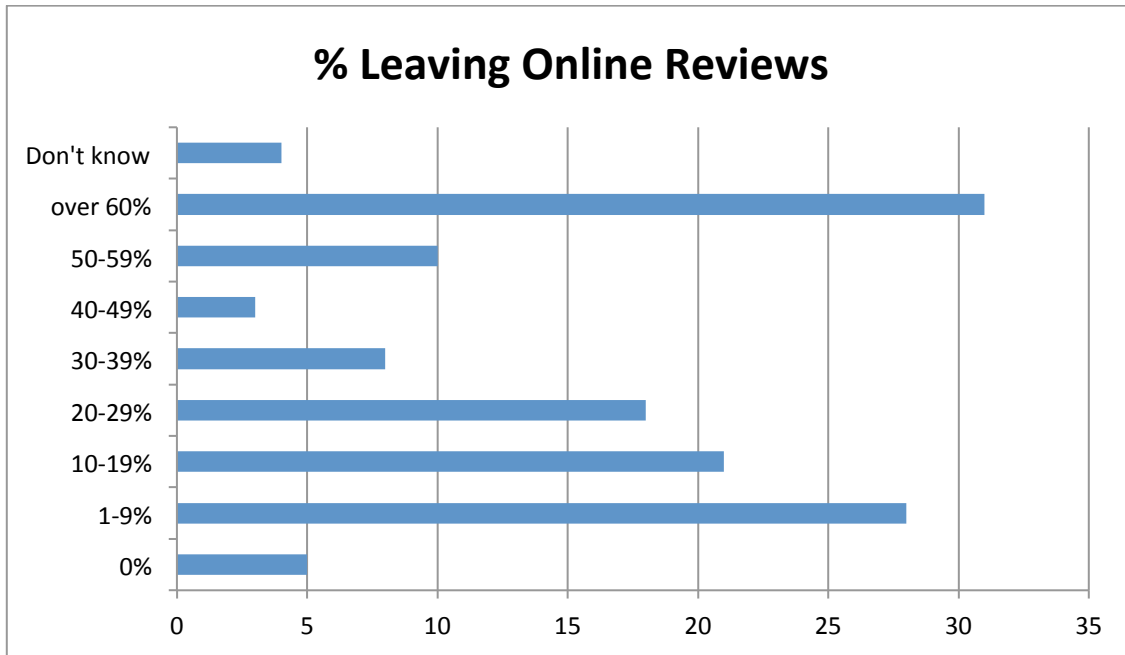
Other review sites being used include:

- AirBnB
- Freetobook
- Google
- Home trip
- Booking.com
- Reevo (Wyndams)
- Other agency e.g Sykes
- Facebook
- Owners Direct



For AirBnB, both guest and host **must** submit feedback. Many owners are running their own feedback systems, and relying on the guest book. Lots of evidence of personal responses to guests - away from the online world. Barriers to embracing online reviews are:

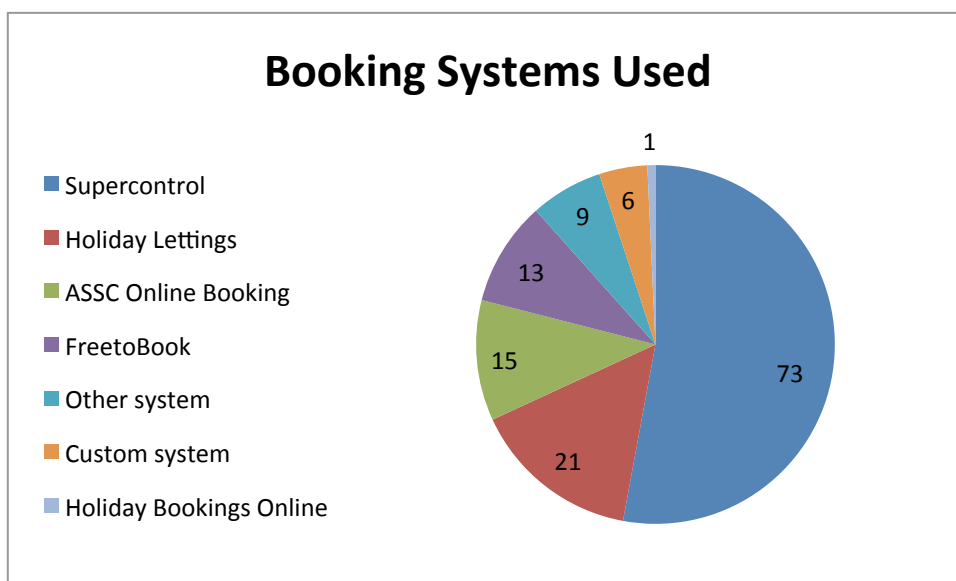
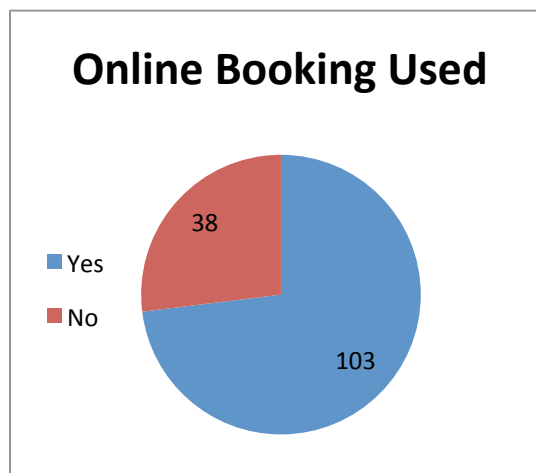
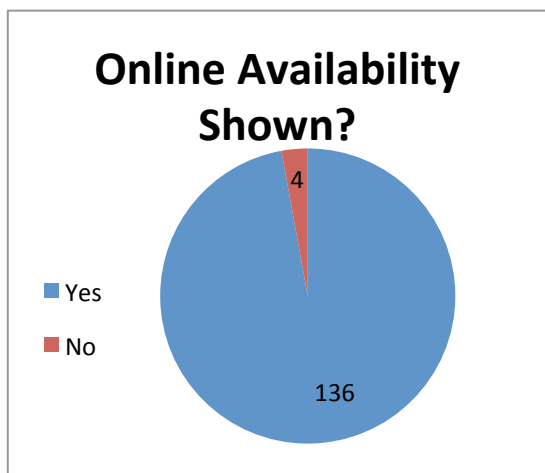
- Lack of trust - TripAdvisor, in particular.
- Risk of bad reviews
- Difficulty in getting guests to leave reviews
- Getting to grips with the technology.
- Running own/alternative systems successfully, so don't see the need.



117 businesses responded to this, and there was confusion with guest book reviews, and own systems but there was a large range of results. Quite a few in the over 60% range were closer to 90%. Given the high level of repeat business, there may be some resistance to asking regular visitors to go through the (rather impersonal) online review process. Although businesses generally realised online reviews were something they should be doing, there was confusion about the different benefits and reasons for online reviews and offline feedback.



- Some confusion with online reviews
- Some need to know more
- Benefits not clear
- Fear of it being time consuming
- Some not digitally confident enough
- Many had done one already
- *Done one* – doing most things already
- *Done one* – no Eureka moment
- *Done one* – a great help
- *Done one* – would like a follow up
- *Requested one* – it's still in the ether

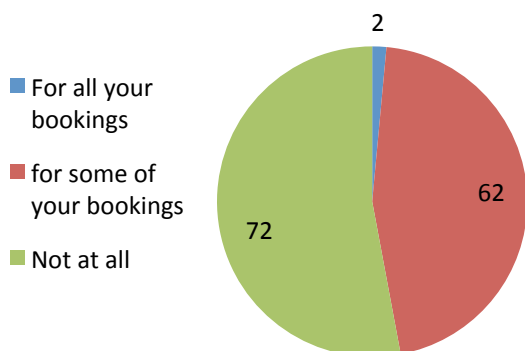


Very few are now showing online availability, and most have online booking with Supercontrol the most used system.

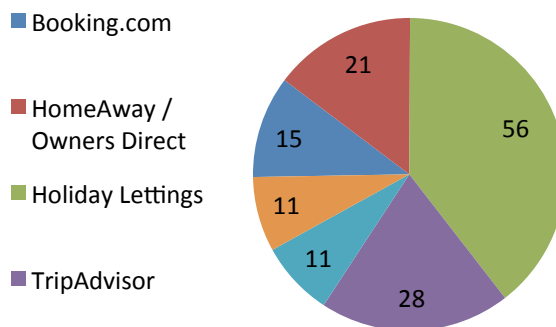
There is still considerable resistance to online booking as 50 businesses responded negatively. Many of these cite loss of personal/human contact as the main reason for not adopting this booking method. Barriers are:

- Loss of personal/human contact – cited by many.
- Loss of control of the process
- No demand from my visitors
- Lack of confidence in technical ability
- Fear of double bookings
- Fear of inaccurate prices being displayed
- Large home bookings need personal approval

Do You Use an OTA?

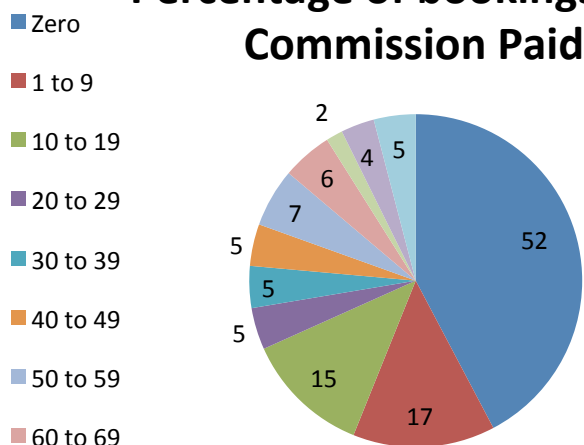


OTAs Used



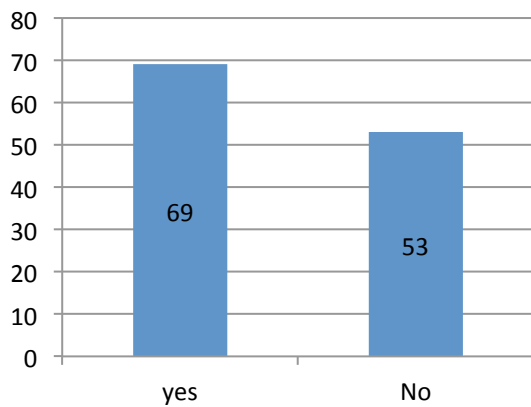
Other OTAs used include Flipkey, Laterooms and Expedia as well as agencies like Wyndams and TUI.

Percentage of bookings with Commission Paid



Roughly 45% of this sample not taking commission bookings, but around 20% are taking at least half of their bookings with commission.

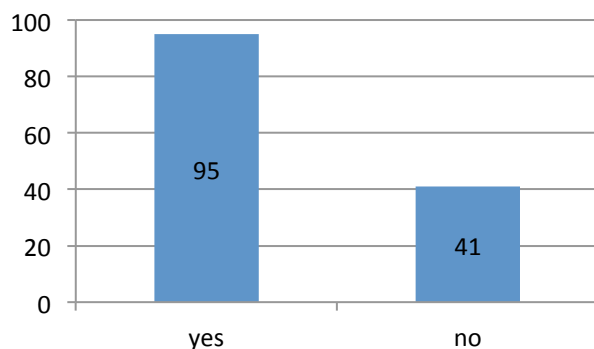
Do you use Booking Systems across Multiple Platforms?



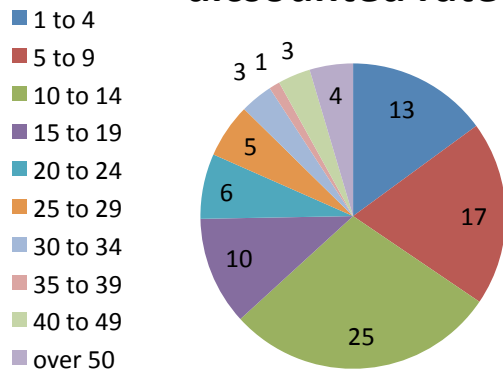
Multiple platforms means your availability is shown live on several websites at once, e.g. EmbraceScotland, VisitScotland, i-knowscotland and so on.

While many businesses are using this, a significant number of responders did not understand the concept.

Do you offer last minute discounts?

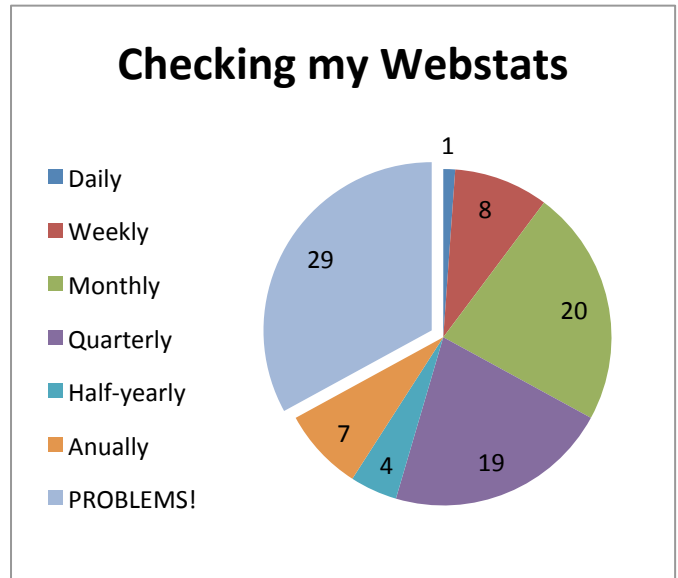
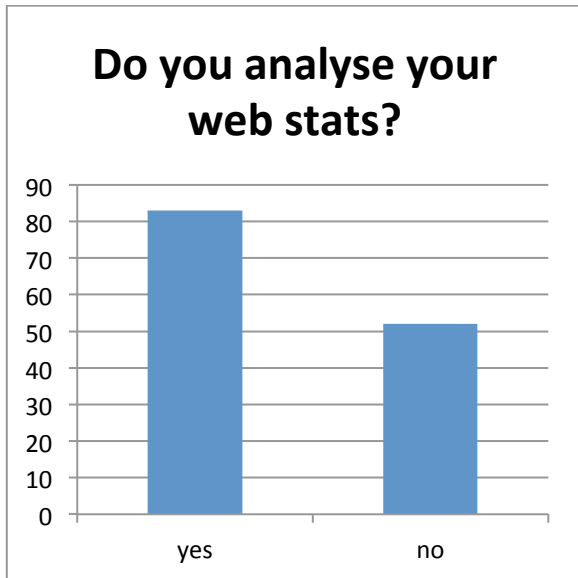


%age of bookings at dicsonted rate

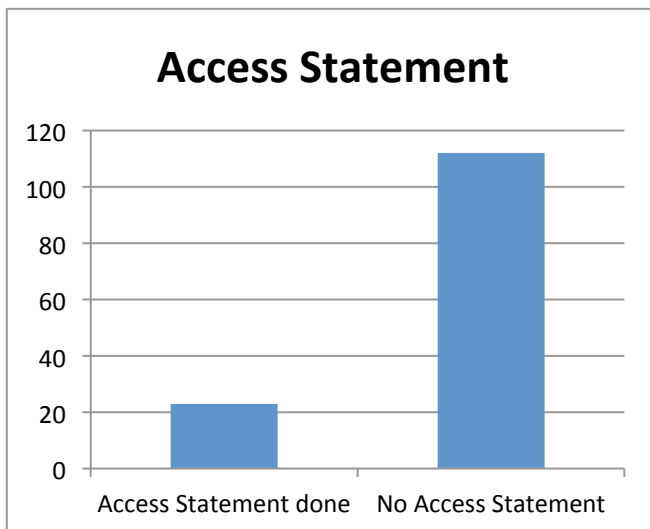


A significant number offering last minute discounts, with those who offer discounts commonly offering this to up to 15% of their guests. There was a little confusion over run-of-the-mill discounts like two-week bookings or low occupancy, and true last-minute discounts offered to secure bookings.

Many had fixed rate discounts for two-weeks and low occupancy, but not for last-minute, where individual negotiations held sway. There seem to be as many views on individual negotiations as there are self-caterers!

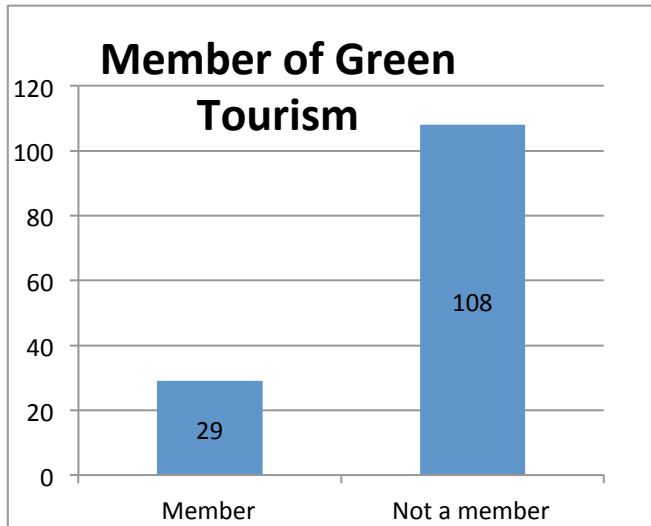


More business than not check their web stats, but there is room for improvement. The number with problems is significant, and includes lack of time and knowledge. Some businesses rely on others to look after their websites making checking by the business difficult.



Only 23 businesses in this survey have completed an access statement.

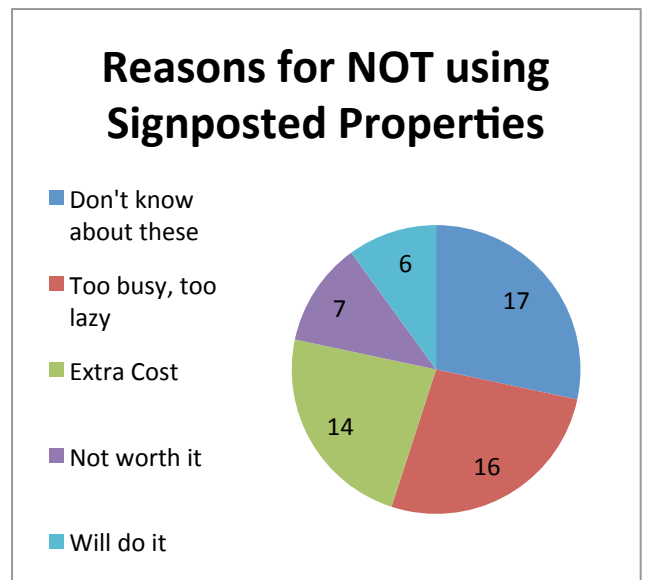
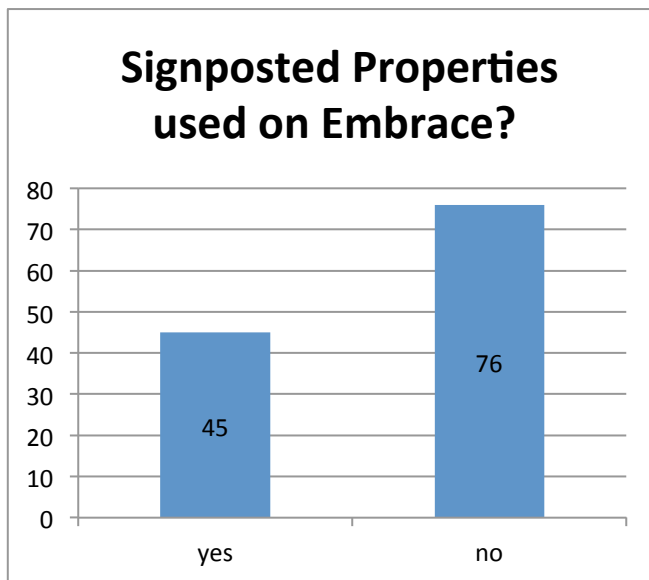
Many do plan to do this, but there is also a lot of confusion, with owners saying that their properties are unsuitable for disabled, which is missing the point of an access statement.

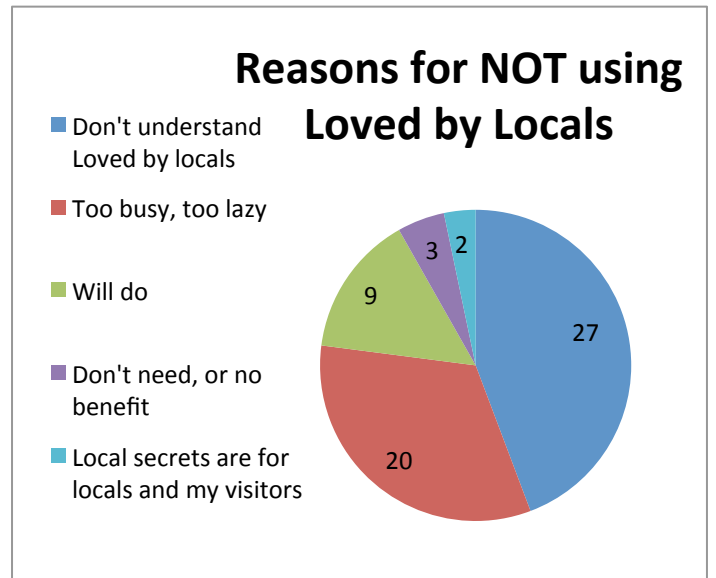
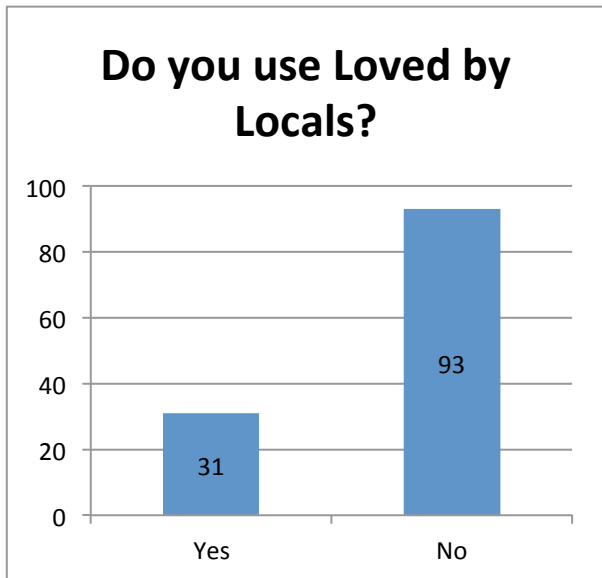


Most businesses in this survey are not members of green Tourism. Several have been in the scheme and have withdrawn due to cost and the disappointing response from visitors.

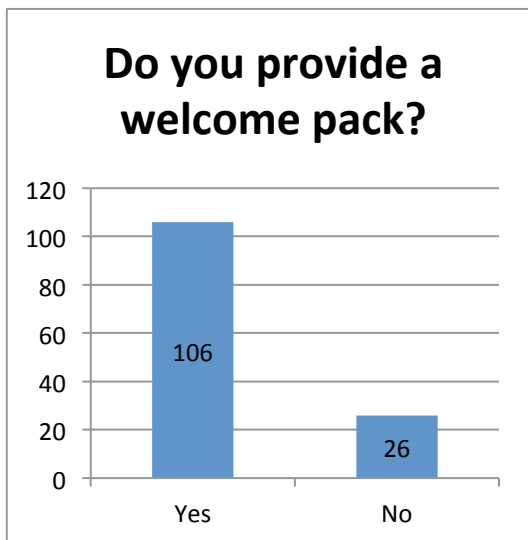
Also, *being green* has become more mainstream, and is now part of the VSQA scheme.

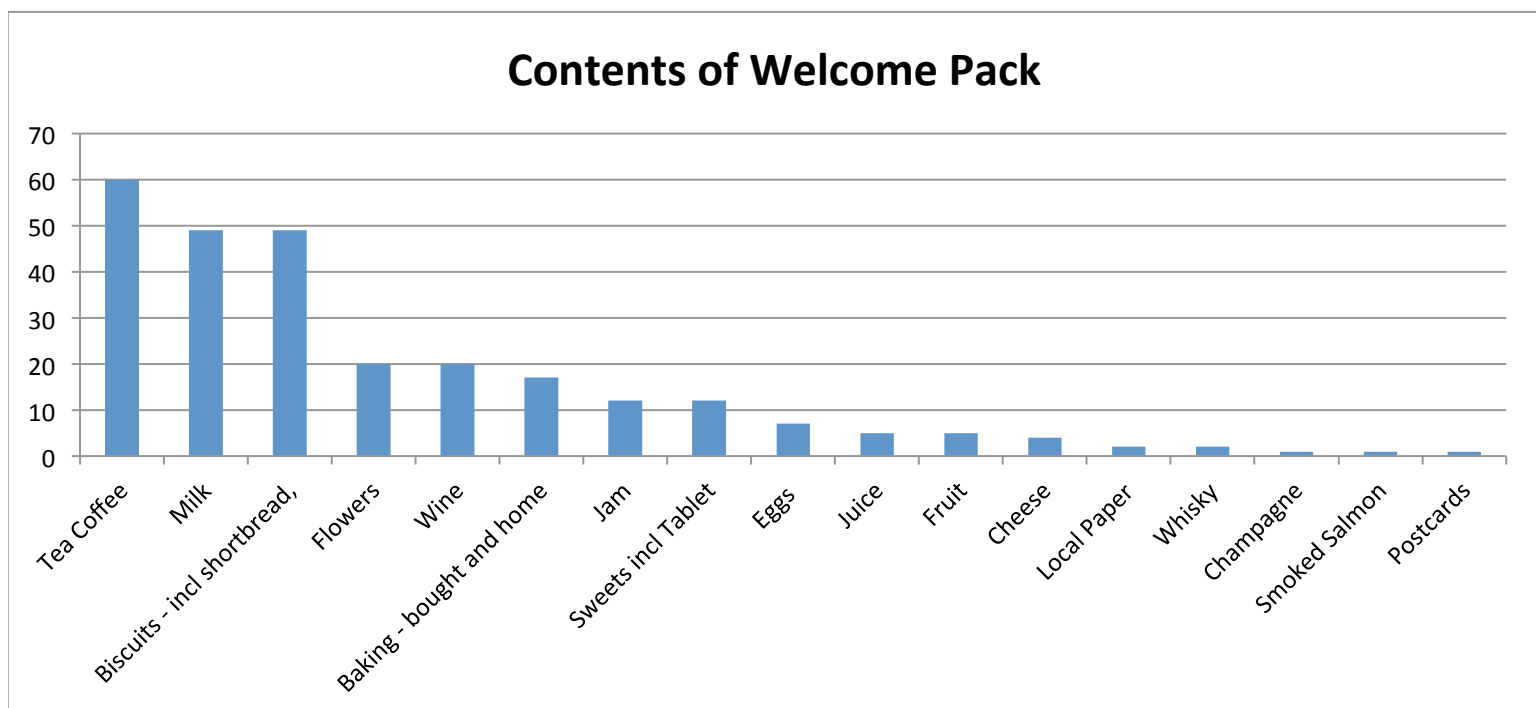
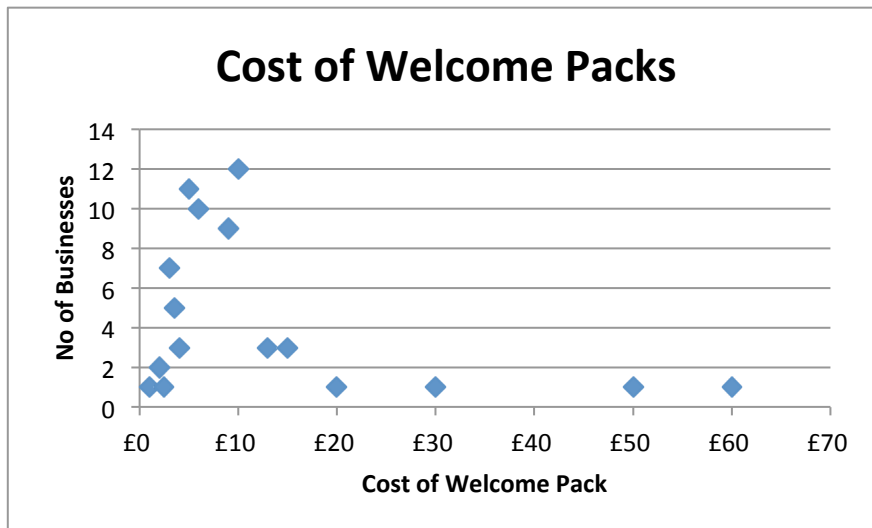
Some just dislike the scheme for a number of reasons.





There is the universal problem of tiny businesses simply not finding the time to do extra promotion, like **Signposted Properties** and **Loved by Locals**. The 'too lazy' tag may look a little harsh, but several respondents actually used the phrase. It is disappointing that so many are actually not aware of either, or clearly the potential benefits available. The extra cost of signposted properties is a barrier for some.





Welcome packs were very varied, and most businesses were supplying these. The Food and Hygiene as well as the Licensing regulations hover in the background, but that said, most provided tea and coffee with milk and sugar as a basic and many included biscuits and or baking with lots of emphasis on the importance of local produce. Most were spending around £3 to £5 on a welcome tray. Flowers, Sweets, free range eggs, fruit, local cheese and a local paper were also offered. A significant number were offering a bottle of wine, with one offering a bottle of Grouse and another, whisky miniatures. Some at the luxury end of the market were including a generous variety of quality produce. There was a bit of confusion over what constituted a welcome pack like loo rolls, kitchen towels, soap etc, as well as local information; this analysis mainly looked at food and drink.

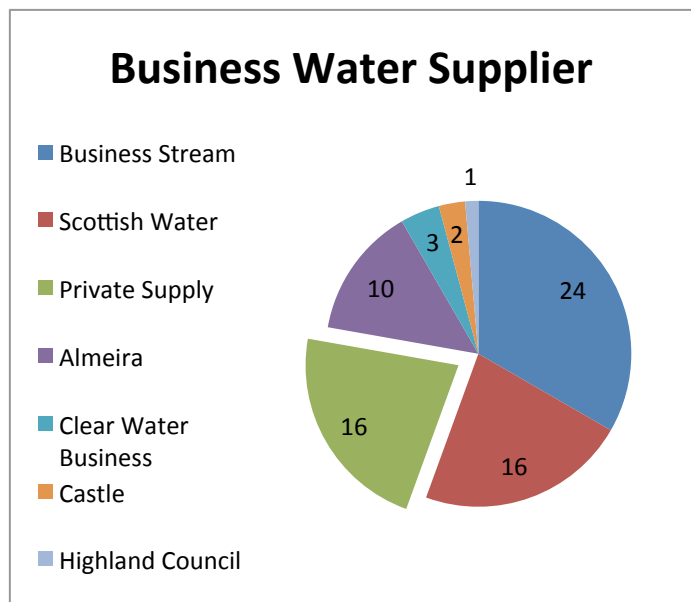
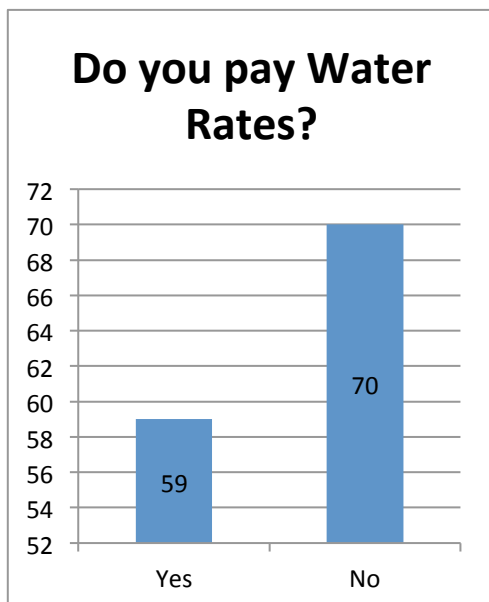
In terms of cost, those not offering wine were spending around £3 to £5 per welcome tray, with wine bumping things up to the £10 mark.



Lots of variety here: most signpost to local attractions, places to eat and drink. Some pre-arrival by links. Many are buying local, and encouraging their visitors to do likewise.

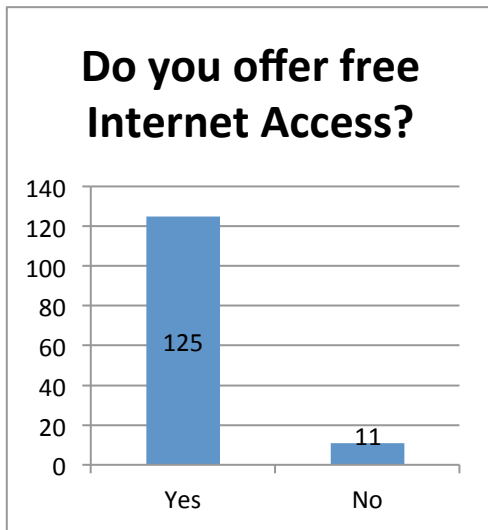
Some have managed to negotiate discounts with local attractions and restaurants, while others have tried and found it difficult.

Others have this on a 'to do' list.

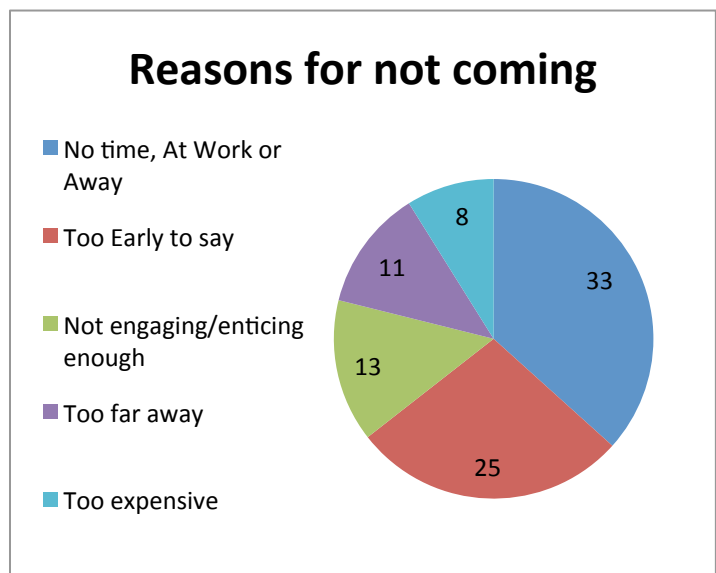


There are many with private supplies, which come at a cost to legally test and maintain. Those on public supply are mostly with Business Stream and Scottish Water, and any

comments on these suppliers are not favourable. Almeida is a significant supplier and attracts more positive feedback.

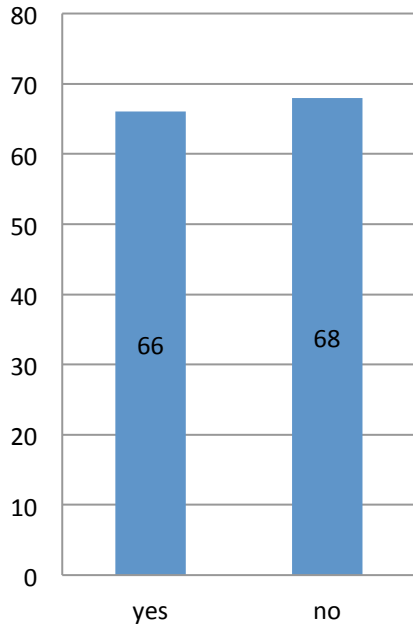


Most offer free access, and a few charge. Several businesses simply can't get internet access due to location. A few using satellite systems, but with limitations. A few are clearly using their own access for their guests to come and share, which is not ideal. Those not offering access realise that it will be a growing problem.

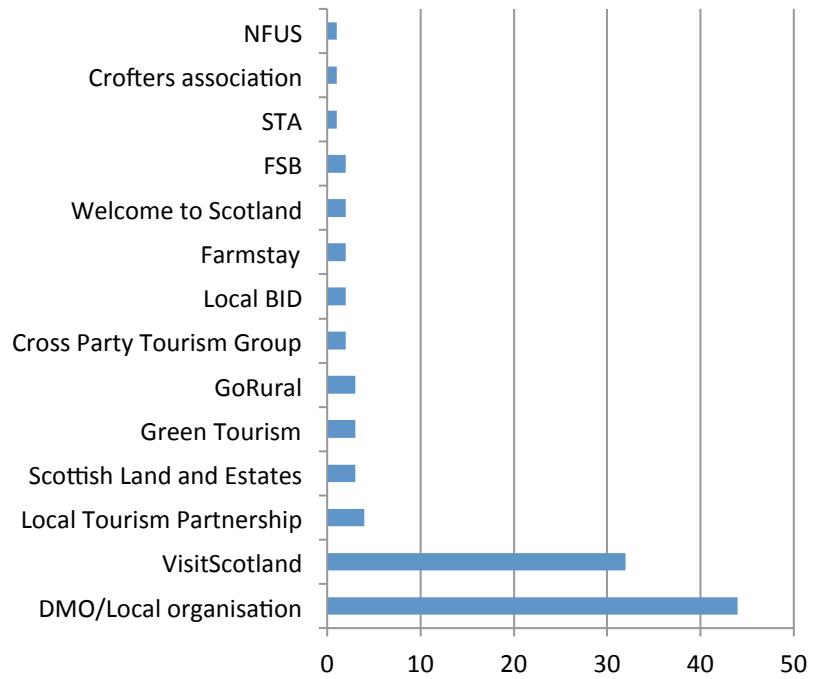


Many of our members have day jobs preventing them from getting to our Conference, and for some it is just a date clash. It is clearly too early for many to decide in August, despite early bird tickets. A few don't like conferences or don't find them engaging or stimulating enough. Cost and distance are also a factors for a few.

Do you belong to another tourism organisation?

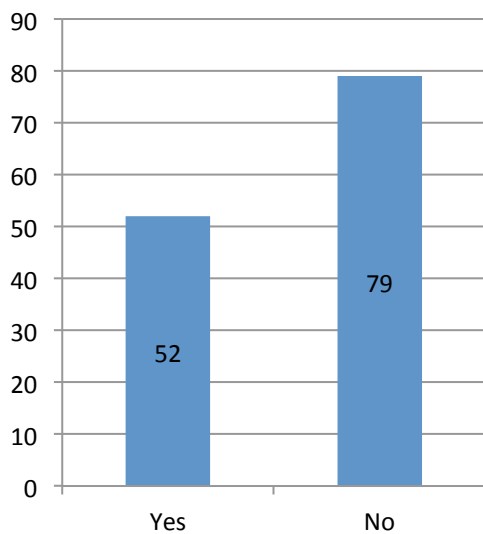


Other Tourism Organisations ASSC members join



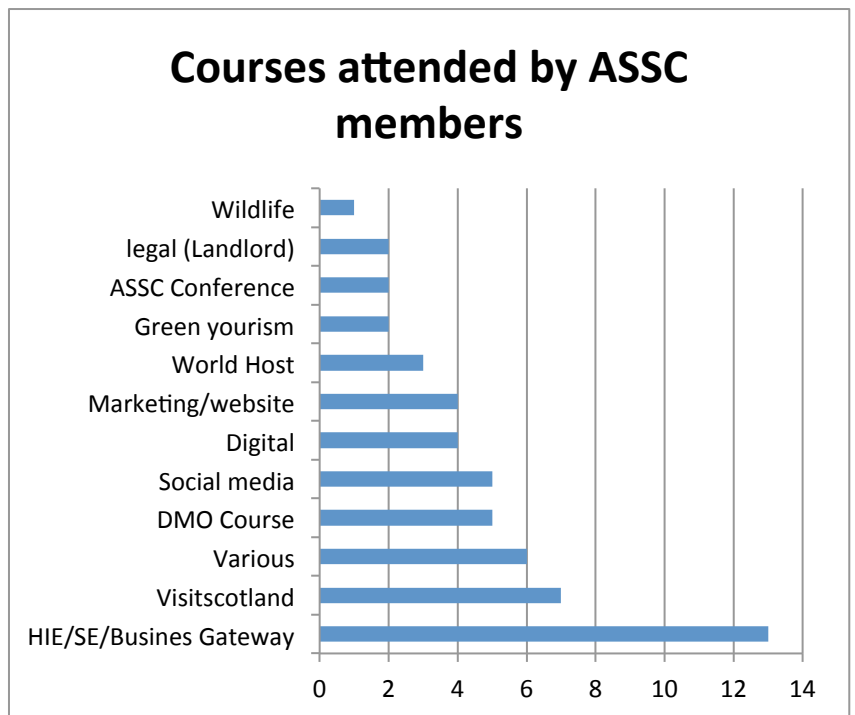
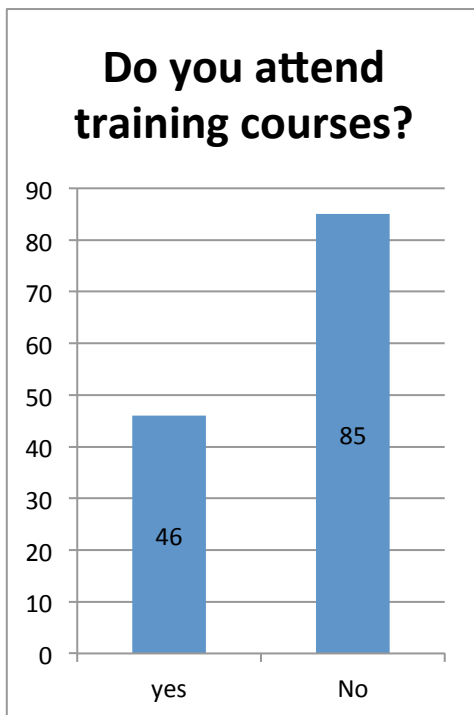
Many ASSC members belong to a local DMO, and VisitScotland (through QA).

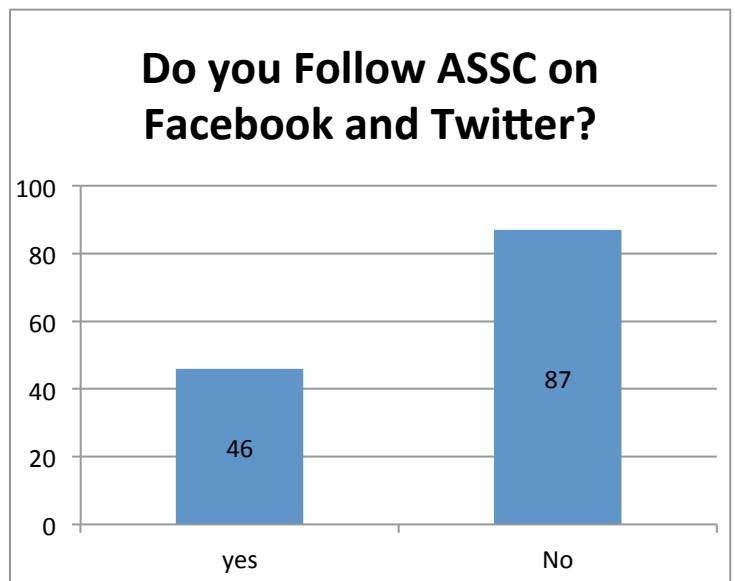
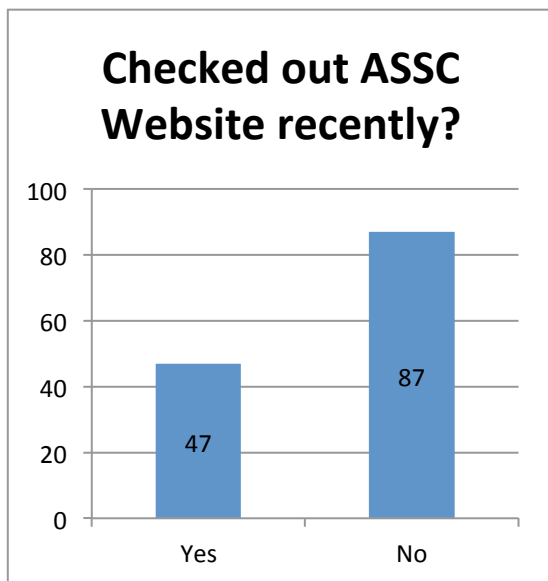
Do you attend other tourism events?



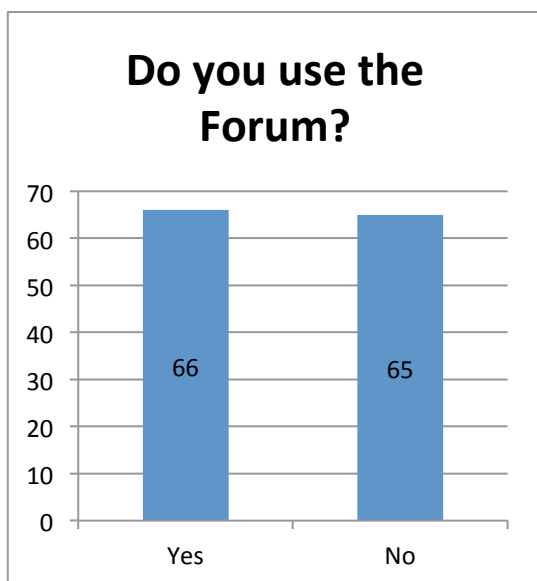


Local DMO events are the most popular, followed by VisitScotland. Some businesses go to several events. Distance a problem for some.





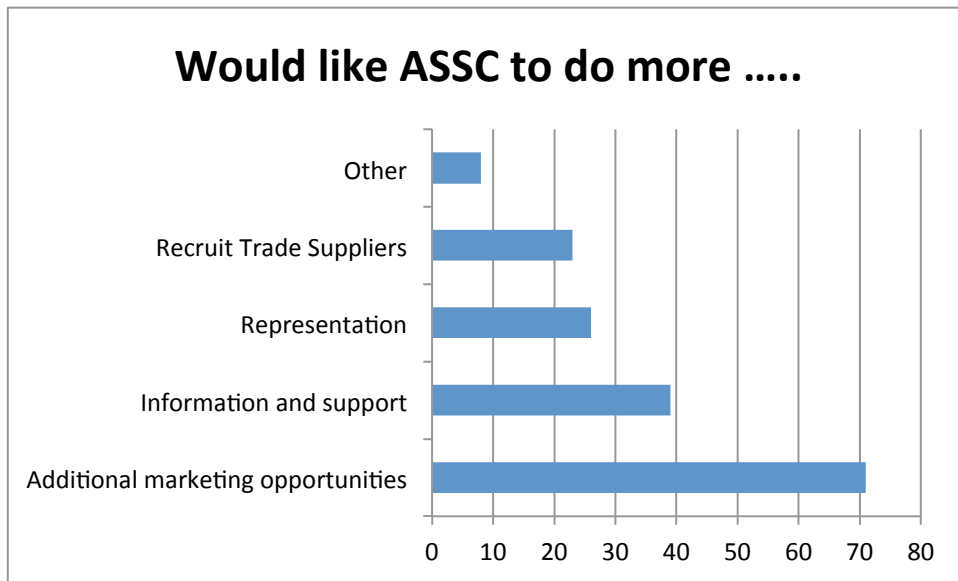
Of those who don't follow ASSC, a dislike of Facebook and/or Twitter was the main reason for not following. Many think social media is not worth the time in business terms. A few will now start following ASSC. It is interesting that several mentioned the e-news as a valuable and preferred source of information from the ASSC.



The Forum is popular with some 60 members.

Time constraints were a reason for not using, and a few did not know about the Forum.

Some wanted more active ASSC responses, and some thought an alert for a new post would be a useful development.



We asked members what they would like the ASSC to do more of, and anything ASSC can do to help and improve members' businesses.

Many members would like ASSC to bring them more bookings. They recognise the changed landscape where OTAs have moved in with commission models and big promotional budgets and know-how, but many are hanging on to being independent, and hence the need for EmbraceScotland to deliver as best as it can. Some calls for more paper advertising to keep up with bigger players.

Other suggestions were local meetings, education and training and provide a list of tourism trade events.

- Specific issues that members suggested ASSC address:
- Employment/Staff
- Legal/legislation
- Landscape (eg windfarms)
- Grading and QA
- Online calendars
- Rural broadband/mobile
- Tourism VAT

Happily, a good number of members were very happy with the things ASSC does, but as one member suggested, we always have to work hard to keep up to date.

Finally, a big thank you to all the members who completed this survey. Quite a few found it too long, but for others it was a push into action. The results are certainly interesting, and a valuable snapshot of the sector.

Further Information / Contact Details

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