

How I Converted 60%, Then 80% Of Enquiries To Bookings

Summary

In this short eBook for holiday rental owners and vacation rental owners, I reveal my secret process for converting 60% and often 80% of my enquires to bookings, and why it works.

I explain the psychological triggers in customers' minds that make the process successful, and I tell the story of discovery of the 'rapid response' process.

Topics covered

- 1. Conversion – who cares?**
- 2. The psychological triggers driving conversion**
- 3. How I stumbled onto the process**
- 4. Case studies**
- 5. Vital preparations**
- 6. Getting family understanding**
- 7. The rapid response process in a nutshell**



If you just want the bottom line, jump to the end (7) for a concise summary of how the process works.

1 Conversion – who cares?

You can have all the enquiries in the world, but if they aren't converted to bookings you are operating way below your potential.

More enquiries converted to bookings give higher occupancy, more revenue.

There is also the benefit of spending less time responding to enquiries. Time that can be spent on further improving traffic to your holiday/ vacation rental.

2 The psychological triggers driving conversion

It is important to understand the customer's state of mind when enquiring for a holiday rental.

Over the years I've asked enquirers how they found us. Some will give a razor sharp reply, describing precise Google searches of 6 keywords, but this is quite rare.

I was hoping to understand the search keywords they used. ***Instead, I found something far more important.***

There is often a picture of confusion. A typical reply is "I really have no idea how I found you. I've been searching for hours, and I've made several enquiries. Which house are you again?"

There is a fairly typical progression. The customer has decided they need a getaway from their busy city life, usually deciding on a destination.

They start their search with optimism. Soon there is an extensive array of confusing choices, different pictures, different features.

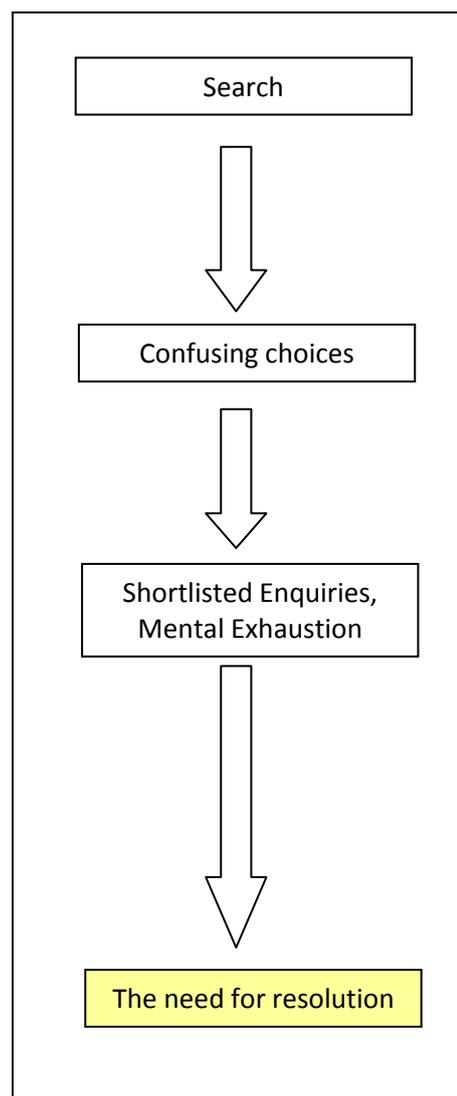
Eventually they have narrowed down their search to a shortlist, and they fire off their enquiries. Then they wait.

What is their state of mind at that stage?

Some are mentally exhausted, and just want to make a booking and get on with their life.

Others are excited. They have found several properties they like. They have already gone to the destination in their mind. They are keen to get there.

There is another group, usually men who want to give their partner a special time away. The mind journey is not so important. They are pragmatic. They want to make a booking and get on with something else.



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In all three cases there is a similar psychological end state. They've done the work, they need to get to a resolution. In the words of the salesperson, the customer is hot to trot, right now! ***There is a psychological trigger ready to fire.***

There may also be a lingering doubt - is the property really what it is claimed to be on the internet? Maybe they have seen some guest reviews, but it would help if they can talk to the person they are dealing with.

In another few hours, life will start to get in the way. Work, uni, kids, chores, deadlines. In another day, memories fade. If there are several choices tomorrow, they may have to reload the brain, figure out what house was what, struggle though a decision, maybe start all over.

So here is our opportunity as property owners: How can we get into our customer's head when they are still in an aroused psychological state seeking resolution?

It is fairly simple. If we get there first, we have a damn good chance of getting the booking!

3 The story of how I stumbled onto the process

I am constantly experimenting with new ways of running my holiday rentals. It drives my partner crazy!

For years I have wondered how I could waste less time answering enquiries, and convert more to bookings. In 2013, I decided to try some experiments.

The Pink Effect

I nearly fell off my chair in mid-2013, when I saw a whole lot of pink on my listing dashboard. Here is how it looked:

Type	Received	Guest name	Status	Details	History
	9/8/2013 09:00pm	C loach, Rainer	Confirmed	3184CH_4/10/2013-4/10/2013	Archive this
	5/8/2013 08:20am	B y, Lauren	Confirmed	EN_308/2013-1/0/2013	Archive this
	2/8/2013 06:40am	G y, John	Confirmed	24_13/0/2013-1/0/2013	Archive this
	1/8/2013 12:50pm	E Caled	Enquiry	14_308/2013-1/0/2013	Archive this
	29/7/2013 06:50pm	C ia, Leon	Confirmed	10A_208/2013-2/0/2013	Archive this
	28/7/2013 06:20pm	T y, Kelly	Confirmed	110_208/2013-2/0/2013	Archive this
	28/7/2013 12:40pm	F iard, Claire	Enquiry	14ARD_19/11/2013-19/11/2013	Archive this
	27/7/2013 12:40pm	B ia, Michellec	Enquiry	114_16/0/2013-16/0/2013	Archive this
	25/7/2013 09:50am	K yone, Holly	Enquiry	16ONE_24/0/2013-20/0/2013	Archive this
	24/7/2013 03:20pm	C o, Stella	Booking Request	180_238/2013-31/0/2013	Archive this
	24/7/2013 03:20pm	C o, Stella	Booking Request	180_238/2013-31/0/2013	Archive this
	23/7/2013 10:30am	A y, Katrina	Enquiry	10N_28/12/2013-4/1/2014	Archive this
	21/7/2013 05:20pm	B oth, Jasmine	Confirmed	1400T_18/0/2013-3/0/2013	Archive this
	19/7/2013 09:10pm	V an, Simone	Enquiry	10EN_22/11/2013-24/11/2013	Archive this
	16/7/2013 03:00pm	C an, Joanne	Enquiry	141_25/11/2013-27/11/2013	Archive this

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Pink for me is good, it means a converted booking. There were 9 converted bookings out of 15 enquiries - 60%, and the most recent enquiries were all converted to bookings - that is all the pink at the top.

Over the following weeks, the number varied from 60% to 90% and for one short day it was 15 out of 15 or 100%. It averaged about 80%.

I had been changing my standard script and timing in the prior weeks, but hadn't realised it was working so well. What was I doing?

First in the Brainspace

I had already worked out the psychological need of my enquiring customers (Enquirers) to get to resolution described in the previous section.

I thought that if I could get into my customer's brainspace before anyone else, I would have an advantage. I also wanted to get a conversation going before anyone else.

To do this I would do two things:

- send an email reply within a few minutes of the enquiry
- make a call one minute after the email.

I had some self-doubt. What if I came across as too pushy and turned people away?

The only thing to do was try it.

I would get organised so I could reply quickly. Then I would make a 'Courtesy call' checking if there were any questions.

What Happened?

I would send off a templated email reply, and call a few minutes after the enquiry. "This is just a courtesy call, in case you have any questions?"

The enquirer would typically say, "Oh, wow, that was quick, thank you so much for calling, I've just been reading your email. No, I don't have any questions...(pause) .. um, .. how far are you from the beach? ... Do you have a fire? .."

That pause is important, to give time to think and for the questions to surface.

Soon they were having a natural conversation with a real person. Any doubts were answered, and I was the first one in their brainspace.

About a quarter paid their deposit on the spot, clearly a relief to finish the whole holiday search. About a half checked with their partner and booked within a day, others took longer or didn't book. So far so good. And NOBODY was terse about the call, quite the contrary, they were grateful for me calling. Whew – what a relief!

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It was easy, because I wasn't selling anything, I was just helping answer any questions.

The fast response was also important because I could catch them while they were still at their desk and before they went off to a break or a meeting.

Sometimes the phone doesn't answer ..

But what happens when there is no answer to my telephone call – how can I get into their brainspace? Sometimes the mobile is somewhere else in the house, but the customer is still at their PC. Hmm. An SMS wouldn't work.

I developed a script for a brief email that said: "I tried to call you in case you have any questions, but there was no answer. Please call me if I can answer any questions."

This is all done within 10 minutes, often 5 minutes of the initial enquiry.

Often, there would be a follow up call, "Sorry, I had my mobile off, thanks for following up. Can you just confirm you are available for my dates ..." Again, the natural conversation has begun and I am in their brainspace. About the same conversion ratios as for those who answered immediately.

Now what about those who had to check with other parties before confirming the booking? It was clear from many conversations that sometimes folks enquire but then life just gets in the way before they can make a decision.

The final follow up

If there is no quick decision, I write the status in an email to myself that stays within the Gmail thread. Eg 'negotiating with the boss for the time off that weekend'. Then I decide based on gut feel when it would be the right time to follow up *again* for that specific customer, usually 2 days.

For this I use a tool called Boomerang to schedule a reminder that pops up in my inbox in 2 days time. (Boomerang is a free Gmail extension. It may also be available for Yahoo too, I'm not sure.) The big advantage of this is that the email is removed from my inbox, and does not divert my attention from other tasks.

On the appointed day, the reminder pops into my inbox. I send a simple email that says – "Are you still interested in booking with us?"

About a third of these will result in a booking.

In short my 'rapid response' process works for me. I'm still averaging about 60% conversion.

I have also found that if I am converting most of my enquiries I'm not wasting time on enquires that go nowhere. It is a better use of my time.

4 Case Studies

The 24 hour 'quick' response

I mentioned my 'rapid response' method to a colleague in the industry, whose eyes glazed over a little. "Oh", she said, "I'm already responding quickly, I do all my enquiries at night, and always get back to the customer within 24 hours, but it doesn't really work."

There are some folks whose lifestyle doesn't suit calling the enquirer back within minutes. If they are going to wait 24 hours, they will struggle to get into the customer's brainspace before their competitors.

It is also a mistake to think that doing all the replies at once in a batch is effective. Doing a batch does mean each reply is handled quickly, but by that time the customer has often gone to a competitor.

Reaction to my talk at the 2013 Stayz Summit

In 2013, I gave an address to about 300 other property owners at the annual Stayz Summit in Sydney, Australia for owners and included the 'rapid response' method of handling enquiries.

It struck a chord with many people. Several told me they changed their enquiry process after the talk, and have found it useful.

A week after the conference, I got an email from one: "Thanks Rex - much appreciated. I wanted to tell you that I have already put some of your techniques to work. I resolved to phone my very next enquiry, and this morning it resulted in a seven-night booking. I owe you!!"

"I'm Day two"

Inevitably, others have worked out their own version of my 'rapid response' method of handling enquiries, well before I spoke in the public domain.

I was chatting to a very organised property manager in a break at the Stayz Summit. He manages over a hundred houses. Yes, he used a similar system based on a common Gmail account for all office staff, and a rapid response. And he was achieving a similar conversion rate to me.

He had established a star colour code for incoming emails, with the colour changing as the enquiry stepped through the process. Everyone could tell what stage the enquiry was up to by the colour of the email, and everyone in the office could handle a step in the process. At this stage his wife had joined us, and said with a twinkle in her eye, "Allow me to introduce myself, I'm Day Two. I handle day two in the process!"

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Our consumer experience

In late 2013 we decided to take a trip to a USA city, staying at a vacation rental. After several hours of research we sent off 12 enquiries. After a day, we had 2 replies with properties available; 6 replies saying that individual apartment was booked but they had a vague alternative; 4 non-replies.

No one called us. [I call an overseas enquirer if the time difference is OK.]

We booked the first property that replied that was available as advertised.

The rest wasted our time and theirs.

This was actually a better result than in early 2013 when we sent a similar number of enquiries for a USA trip and none replied in 2 days, so we booked a hotel.

When the SMS alert failed.

One week, I sensed that something was wrong. I was getting no alerts to my mobile for four days. (The alert sound inside my iPhone had somehow been disabled.) There were still enquiries for our properties drifting into my inbox, but without the alerts, I was taking 4-6 hours to reply. I ended up only converting about 10% of the enquiries.

When my laptop battery went flat

The usual mobile alert went off while I was travelling, but my laptop battery was flat, so there was no chance of a templated email reply.

I called the enquirer anyway, answered some questions and took the booking.

Sometimes just calling is all it needs to get the booking!

No alerts when travelling

I had a tricky experience travelling overseas in Cuba where the nearest internet was 500m from our hotel, and my phone didn't get reception. I had no alerts. I would reply to enquiries in batches but converted under 10% of enquiries to bookings.

In contrast I had good hotel Wifi reception in Nassau, a similar time zone to Cuba, with no alerts, and I converted about 30% of enquiries to bookings.

5 Vital Process Preparations



For the 'rapid response' method of handling enquiries to work effectively, you have to be well organised so you can reply to enquiries quickly, literally in minutes.

Here are the things you need to have prepared:

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- **Templates for your email replies.** Just fill in the dates, name and price, and fire off the email
- **An alert system** that sends you an SMS the instant any of your property names are mentioned in any email. (I describe how this works in the breakout box below)
- **Your calendars** need to be up to date, so you reduce enquiries for dates that have already been booked
- **Your Pricing** needs to be clear to enquirers so they know exactly how much they will be paying, before they enquire. No wasting time telling an enquirer the actual price is different from the assumed price.
- **Great photos** on your listing and an accurate description of what it contains
- **Several recent reviews** on your listing

Setting up an instant SMS alert.

In Gmail, you can use filters to detect an incoming email that has the name of any of your properties in the subject line. Once it is detected, Gmail can send an email to your SMS provider (in my case SMS Global), and the SMS provider sends an SMS to go to your mobile. The mobile will have a sound to alert you that an SMS has been received, probably an enquiry.

Using this system, if your email is turned on, you will be alerted to an incoming email for your property, anywhere in the world that your mobile has reception, even if your main PC is turned off.

Although some listing sites already have an SMS alert system, it only works for their system for the first enquiry. It doesn't work for subsequent emails or for other listing sites.

6 Getting family understanding.

It may seem weird to your family when you get an SMS at a cafe and you get up and go outside, or you are driving, the SMS goes off and you pull over and open your laptop.

This is not normal human behaviour.



However, if you explain to your family that responding quickly will only take a few minutes and it is very beneficial for the family business, they are likely to be supportive.

7 Rapid response in a nutshell

The idea is to quickly respond to an enquirer, while most receptive to receiving your offer. Section 3 above has all the detail. You need to have your listing up to date, and your email system set to send an alert to your mobile when an enquiry arrives (see section 5 above).

An audio alert will be heard wherever you are while your mobile is on.

Step 1 When the mobile alert tells you that an enquiry has arrived, you use a template and some personalisation to send an email reply within a few minutes.

Step 2 You follow up a few minutes later with a telephone call. You are *not* trying to convince the enquirer to book. You are simply making a courtesy call to see if you can help by answering any questions they may have.

It usually develops into a conversation and they get to know you. They may decide to book then, or they may need to come back to you later. It doesn't matter, because by now they know about you and your great property, and you are firmly in their brainspace ahead of your competitors.

There is another possibility in the contact process here, because the enquirer may not answer their phone, for any number of reasons. This brings us to:

Step 3 If there was no answer, you immediately send a brief email saying that you tried to call, and if they have any questions to call you. Another little step to get into their brainspace.

Step 4 You use your gut to decide when you should make a final follow up, usually in two days time, and you set a reminder of some kind. (In section 3, I explain how I use Gmail and Boomerang to do this.)

Step 5 When your final reminder goes off, you send a one line email asking the enquirer if they are still interested.

That's the process, and steps 1-4 take about 5 minutes, plus any bonus time talking with your enquirer / customer.



Along the way you have been in the enquirer's brainspace up to 4 times. And along the way you will often get your booking!

Will the enquirer be irritated that you rang so quickly? After doing this many times, I have never had anyone irritated, rather the opposite. The overwhelming majority of enquirers will thank you for your courtesy in calling!

If you found this eBook useful, you can send a copy to friends or colleagues, provided it is not altered in any way.

About the Author

Rex Brown is the founder and publisher of Holiday Rental Mastery, which can be found at www.holidayrentalmastery.com

Rex runs three different holiday rental Properties in Victoria, Australia. *Sea Zen* and *Treetops Wye River* are both located on the Great Ocean Road at Wye River where he lives , and the third *Alto Richmond* is in inner Melbourne. He has been operating holiday rentals since 2000.



Please send any feedback or questions to rex@holidayrentalmastery.com

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