Hello and welcome to this December edition of our Owner News bulletin.

2016 has been a hugely eventful year with many political and worldwide events impacting both the wider leisure and our cottage rental sectors. As the recent US election has shown, it feels the year is determined to keep us all on our toes!

Having had a really strong end to last year with more advanced bookings for summer 2016 than expected, the early part of this year was slower paced. Easter fell early and was followed by a generally poor start to the summer’s weather. Coupled with the natural disruption of the EU referendum and the Olympics, the year has ended with a decent, but not exceptional result.

The Brexit vote and resulting shift in currency value have brought about a general sense of domestic holidays being a good bet and a beautiful Indian summer has meant that the year ended very strongly indeed. Riding this wave of positivity for domestic holidays, we are deploying more marketing than ever before (for more on this, see page 5) and we’re well advanced with 2017 bookings too.

Our new website cottages.com is celebrating its first birthday and we’re delighted that it’s now out-performing its predecessor cottages4you. Great news for you and us!

We closely monitor demand trends and this has helped us to shape a number of exclusive...
deals on key facilities that we know customers are looking for, including hot tubs and luxurious home comforts. You may be able to improve earnings from your property by investing with this in mind and we’ve negotiated specially discounted rates which you can read about on page 10.

The rapid pace of change in technology has made it easier than ever before for holidaymakers to book their break wherever and whenever they want. Over 30% of our customers are now searching on smartphones and tablets so we’ve optimised all our websites to adapt accordingly and it’s rewarding to see our conversion rates reflect this investment and hard work.

Rapid change in customer booking trends has driven soaring demand for non-traditional arrival days and holiday durations. You might already be aware of our new flexible arrivals scheme which we rolled out during late Spring this year. It’s been a huge success, so if you’d like to find out more, take a look at page 6.

Finding new ways to make managing your holiday property easier is at the heart of everything we do, and so I was delighted to be able to officially launch our new look owner website last month. It features some fantastic new tools, I am sure you will agree that this is a great step forward. If you’ve not been on line to try it why not take a look here: www.cottageowners.com.

Our eyes are firmly set on making 2017 a fantastic year for you and us alike. We recently commissioned some research to help us plan for the season ahead which showed an impressive 76% of people planning to take their holiday in the UK next year and almost 30% intending to take more than one UK break. We’ve got some of our best marketing activity yet scheduled for the coming months, including a TV campaign, so keep an eye on your owner website for the latest news.

Thank you for your continued business and for giving our mutual customers such memorable holidays. It’s so rewarding to see Reevoo scores running at a record high, such a great reflection of your ongoing commitment to quality and our market leading customer service.

I hope you enjoy reading this newsletter and if you have any feedback about any of the articles or the format, please let us know.

With all good wishes,

Simon Law
Sales update

The market

Strong last minute demand drives a late booking market

Despite some difficult trading conditions, the first six months of the year saw some strong sales, with bookings finishing slightly ahead compared to 2015. The market-wide trend to book at the last minute has been more evident than ever this year and we’ve commissioned our tactical marketing activity accordingly. This has driven some fantastic highlights including August bank holiday week which was 20% up compared to 2015 and a year on year increase of 10% for bookings in September.

The late Autumn period is very busy, again largely driven by late demand. To date, weeks are up approximately 4%.

Our festive focus

After a slower than normal start, demand for Christmas and New Year has picked up at a great pace. Short breaks for the festive period (subject to your individual contract terms) are available so that customers can now search and book for durations of 3, 4 and 5 nights.

We’ve also released two additional arrival days (where contracts permit) - Friday 23rd December and Friday 30th December. This has helped us fulfil an additional 25% of search demand and has already increased bookings by 13% year on year.

We’re already looking at search demand for Christmas and New Year 2017 to make sure that we have the optimum arrival days available to maximise your bookings. If we see an opportunity to add an additional arrival day, we’ll let you know about this straight away via the owner website, www.cottageowners.com.

Christmas Low Deposit offer

Our September initiative gave customers the opportunity to book a festive break for a low deposit of just £50, a really positive eye catching message for our PR and marketing campaigns.

Looking ahead to 2017

We’ve had a great start to the new season with our extra marketing spend driving significantly more bookings year on year. Key highlights include February half term which is up almost 20% and Easter which is up nearly 10%. We’ve done lots of promotion to help secure these all important early bookings and drive new traffic to our websites, including a £25 low deposit offer, no booking fee on holidays booked before 31st October and a special flash offer to save £50 on selected 2017 breaks.

No more credit card fees! To make our customer pricing more transparent and to be more competitive than many other agencies, we plan to remove all credit card fees for customers. We will continue to charge a booking fee which, for 2017, will be £39 irrespective of duration.

Many customers are already searching for availability to take a short break over May Day bank holiday weekend. To capture this all important early demand, where contracts allow we’ve now released this period for standard short break bookings.
Marketing update
Improving the customer experience

Search option based around drive time
With as many as a quarter of all bookings now made within one month of departure, we're continually looking at ways to make it as easy as possible to for customers to organise a last minute break away. ‘Search by drive time’ allows customers to enter their home postcode and the maximum length of time they wish to drive for.

In addition, we've also launched “cottages to match your budget” which enables customers to define a maximum amount that they wish to spend.

Shopping cart reminder emails
Capturing every booking opportunity is crucial and so we are continuing to invest in new website technology to help us do this. We now have the facility to send an email reminder to customers who begin the booking process for their chosen property but do not go ahead and complete. These simple, polite emails remind customers of the property they were looking at and enable them to resume the booking journey from where they left off.

We're also personalising our customer emails, using their home town as a basis, to show them a selection of properties within a set distance. This has seen great results in pushing short breaks and last minute getaways.

Smarter emails
To keep our regular customers engaged and show them properties which are most likely to suit their needs, we now use the information stored from their previous searches to help us personalise our emails to them. This helps us to promote properties more effectively and saves the customer time when they are searching.

Social proofing
Our property pages now show the number of people who have browsed and booked the cottage within the last 7 days. This helps convert enquiries to bookings by creating a sense of urgency.

Special offers
Customers are always on the lookout for a great deal, so we’ve made our special offers more visible through a new eye-catching panel, highlighting promotional messages and pushing key arrival periods. This helps us to avoid over-crowding the home page of the website with lots of different tactical messages. It might surprise you to hear that less than third of customers actually land on the website homepage and so using a ‘Special Offers’ page is a more effective way of securing bookings.

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Making the most of every booking opportunity

Keeping up with the rapid pace of change in the holiday market is more important than ever before. Customer demand for alternative start days and durations has increased significantly over the past couple of years and this has led us to introduce a brand-new scheme to cater for this new requirement for greater flexibility.

We’re now offering you the option of signing up for any start day, any duration (1 night upwards) for dates outside the main school holiday periods. In the first six months since launch, we’ve already seen some great results.

The scheme is open to any property in any region, as long as we manage your pricing through the dynamic system.

Want to find out more?

Please visit www.cottageowners.com or call your Owner Services team who can answer any questions and help sign your property up.

A new initiative to boost your bookings

As you’ll know, we work with a number of partners to drive business to your property and we’re delighted to let you know about a brand-new source of bookings.

Wyndham Rewards is the hospitality industry’s number one loyalty programme, giving members the opportunity to earn and redeem points across a huge range of accommodation across our wider group. Wyndham has now expanded the portfolio of accommodation within the scheme to include not just hotels, but also self-catering holiday rental properties.

This market-leading initiative brings additional exposure for your property to almost 50 million Wyndham Rewards members, boosting your bookings not only from scheme members, but also from recommendations to their friends and family.

Any bookings made through the Wyndham Reward scheme will be processed through the reservations system in the normal way so there won’t be any differences in your payments or terms and conditions.

The scheme will be developed and enhanced over the next couple of years so keep an eye on the owner website and in future newsletters for more information.
Improving the online experience

As with all businesses, the way our customers choose to interact with us is continually evolving and it’s clear that staying at the forefront of digital technology is key to the success of our business and yours. Our marketing teams are expert in identifying exactly how people find, choose and book their holidays, and respond accordingly, to make sure that we can increase sales and safeguard your owner income.

For 2017, we’ll no longer be producing a traditional printed brochure for our Country Cottages and Welcome Cottages brands. We’ll continue to target our customers throughout the year with smaller, more individually tailored pieces including inspirational emails and mini-brochures, with selections of cottages which are most likely to interest them, at a time when they are likely to book.

Our online marketing budget now exceeds £9.5m per year and we’re extremely proud to have some of the industry’s biggest and most effective online campaigns. Read on below for more information:

More than

80% of bookings are now made online

Less than

1.5% of bookings come from a brochure

84% of customers who receive a brochure go on to book a property that is not actually in one.

How do we maximise our online marketing?

We have a dedicated team of online marketing experts who manage our paid web search campaigns, helping us to make sure that our spend delivers the maximum amount of bookings. Keeping up to date with the latest innovation is really important in this respect and we have a fantastic working relationship with both Google and Adobe, giving us priority support and exclusive access to industry insights and developments from these marketing giants.

Our online adverts are presented over 300 million times each year to people searching for a self-catering break.

We have over 800,000 paid search ads in our adverts.

We target over 1 million keywords in our adverts.

In 2015, our paid search delivered over... 16 million visits to our websites and this year we are on track to beat that considerably!
Introducing Mark Clipston

We’re really proud of the long service within our business and we’re delighted to let you know that one of our most experienced team members is now leading our Earby based Owner Services department.

Mark Clipston joined us almost 25 years ago in Sculthorpe, Norfolk, as part of the original team at English Country Cottages. As the business evolved, Mark and his family relocated to Earby in 1996 and since then he has worked within our Operations team, serving customers and owners alike.

Mark has a huge amount of experience and understanding of the holiday cottages business: “The biggest change I have seen is the move to a more digital journey. Our new owner website is a great example of this and we’re continually taking on board feedback from owners to help us shape new developments on the site going forwards”.

Gas Safety

Please keep an eye on the expiry date of your Landlords Gas Safety Certificate, as your property may not be let if a current valid certificate is not available. We also require a working, audible carbon monoxide detector to be fitted in a suitable location according to the manufacturer’s instructions.

Window blinds

All window blinds must comply with the new 2014 standard, which aims to protect children through limiting cord length and ensuring the provision of a cord safety device. For more information please see cottageowners.com.

Christmas reminder

If you decorate your holiday cottage for the festive season, please take a picture and email it in to us so that we can add it to your website images. For guidance on images and how to submit them to us, please check the owner website.

We’re predicting high demand for late availability this coming Christmas and New Year. Please take a few moments to check your booking calendar and let us know if there are any dates when you would not be able to accept a booking. Our Christmas arrival days this year for 7 night bookings are Wednesday 21st and Friday 23rd December and for New Year, Wednesday 28th and Friday 30th December.
Since launching at the end of last year, cottages.com has proved itself to be a market-leader in the holiday letting industry. Our first TV advert achieved approximately 400,000 online views and the brand now has more than 200,000 social media fans and followers across its six networks. We have created unique destination content for nine UK regions within our Inspire & Explore travel guides and achieved more than 300 pieces of coverage since January, more than half of which appeared in national newspapers.

Look out for more TV advertising!
We’ll be relaunching our TV advertising campaign over the course of the next few weeks. Click below to see the advert:

**Bookings made**
132,671

**people have holidayed with us**
476,861

**tails wagged on holiday with us**
34,499

**kids had a family adventure with us**
87,456

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Exclusive owner benefits

We keep a close eye on what customers are looking for and this has helped us to shape a number of exclusive deals with carefully researched suppliers, who can offer you fantastic service and quality products at an affordable price. For a full list of offers and preferred suppliers, please take a look at the Benefits page on www.cottageowners.com.

Hot tubs (43% of searches)

Consistently the top clicked feature on cottages.com! Properties with a hot tub are particularly popular in the couples and large groups market where we see increases of around 3 weeks per property and significant improvements in owner income.

Luxury (6% of searches)

Today’s holidaymakers really value comfort, style and quality in the rental properties they choose. They want a ‘home from home’ – somewhere that looks good, feels relaxing and offers enough luxury to make their visit special. We know that offering properties like this doesn’t just increase bookings and return visits; it often means owners can increase their prices too. In fact, already for 2017, properties in the luxury collection are enjoying almost double the number of weeks and up to 20% more income than non-luxury cottages.

Jacuzzi® Spa & Bath Ltd

With over 50 years experience and as the most widely recognised hot tub brand, Jacuzzi® offer a range of complete packages which include:

- Choice of hot tub styles and sizes
- Smart steps
- Temperature lock set
- Insulated cover and lifter
- Choice of shell colours and panels

To claim your discount visit www.jacuzzi.co.uk for help deciding which product is best suited to your property. To order or for more help, email marcus.hawtin@jacuzziemea.com and quote WYND/HC. Please note you may only claim your discount by ordering direct through Jacuzzi Ltd.

John Lewis for Business

John Lewis for Business are able to help with all your purchasing needs. Bringing you the quality, value and service you’d expect alongside the following business benefits:

- Competitive discounts on orders over £1000
- Payment via bank transfer
- Dedicated account manager
- Design support
- Convenience of a one stop shop for all your items

Alternatively if you shop little and often, why not look into a John Lewis and Waitrose Business account card where you can receive tiered discounts based on your spending over a 3 month period.

For more information, please call the John Lewis team on 0345 603 7979 (Monday- Friday, 9am-5pm) or visit johnlewis.com/business.

Terms and Conditions

Delivery and installation is only available to the registered rental property address and is subject to pre-installation conditions being met, including access without a crane, electrics in place and the site prepared for installation. *Discounts of 10% available on J200 series only and 15% on J300 series only.
Managing your holiday property is a breeze with cottageowners.com

Keeping up to date is now easier than ever with your newly enhanced owner website www.cottageowners.com. We’ve been working hard on a number of new developments including making the site tablet and smartphone-friendly so that you can stay in touch 24/7, even when you’re on the move.

User-friendly features include:

Live booking information
Your property calendar shows you new bookings as soon as they are made, including customer contact details and email address.

Property features
Quickly and easily check the facilities and features for your property. You can also view the photography selection that we have available and send us extra or replacement images.

Reevoo feedback
Read the latest feedback and scores from your customers and submit your responses straight to our team.

Health and Safety advice
If you need guidance on the latest health and safety advice then the owner website is a great place to start. Use the keyword search feature to quickly locate the topic you are interested in.

Caretaker access
Your keyholder, cleaner or caretaker can also access cottageowners.com to keep up to date with forthcoming bookings and any special requests.

More fantastic developments coming soon...
We’re still adding to the site and there’s more to come in the New Year, including viewing your financial statements online and tools to help you monitor your property’s performance.

How do I get started?
Visit www.cottageowners.com
• Click on “ACTIVATE ACCOUNT”
• Enter the email address that we use to send you your booking updates and confirmations.
• Click on “SEND PASSWORD”
• We’ll email you a password so you can log in. To do this, simply return to www.cottageowners.com and enter your email address and the password.

To start straight away, click here.