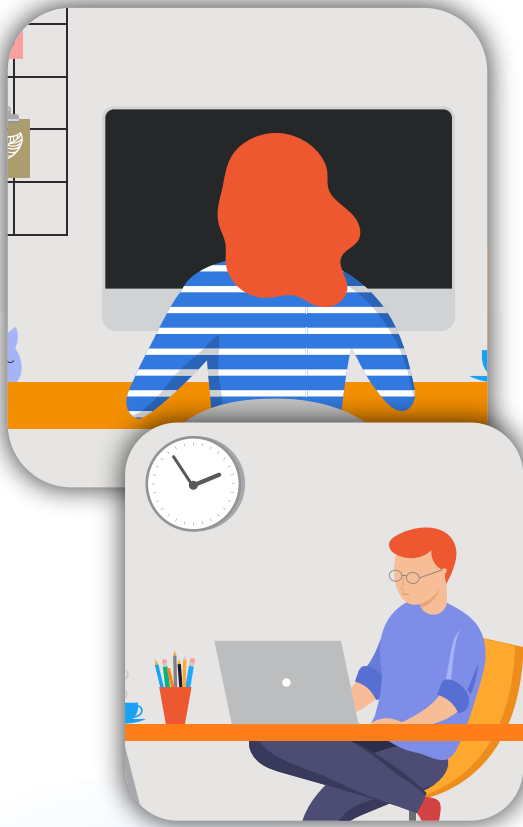


# 7

**Creative ways to  
grow bookings in  
the low season**



No matter whether you manage vacation rentals in a resort area or whether you operate short-term rental apartments in an urban market, some months are slower than others. Property managers around the world must adjust their prices, policies, and promotions to remain attractive during those slower periods.

The **Rental Scale-Up** team has created for you this checklist packed with actionable and creative ways that you can use to grow your vacation rental business during the off-season.





Every market has busier months and slower months. The months that see more or less business vary by city and region, and even markets within close proximity may experience different patterns in seasonality.

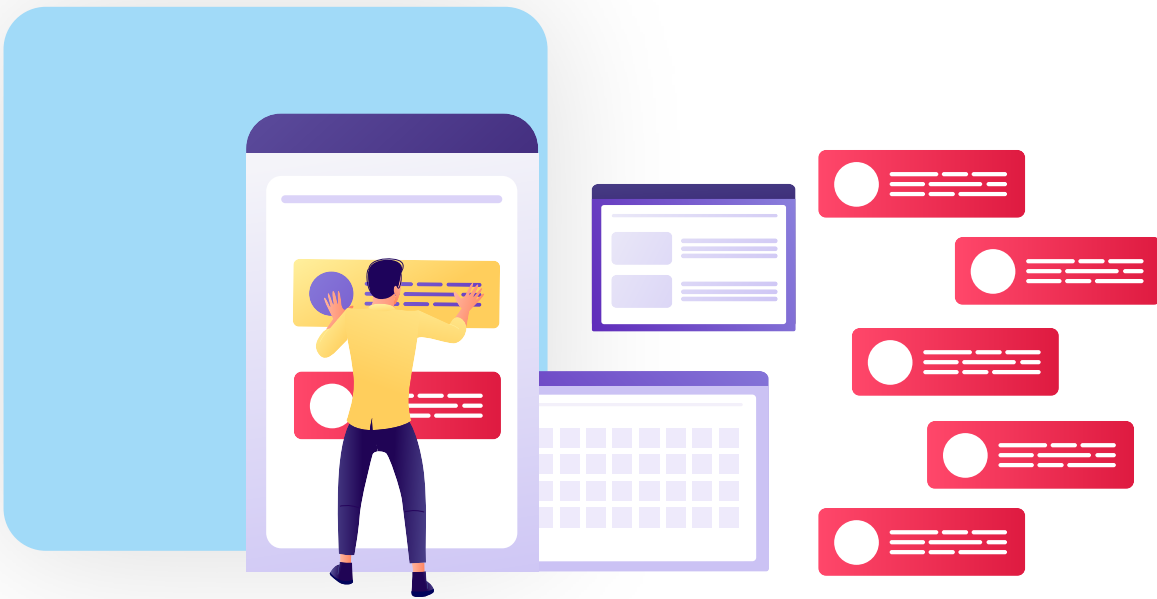
A market may also see a difference between the high season for booking reservations and the high season for travel. For instance, if a market welcomes the highest number of guests during June, July, and August, the time of year when guests are making those bookings may be several months prior, maybe in March or April. Summer then be a high season for your operation, but the high season for your marketing department will be Spring. It seems simple, but it can help mobilize your team at the right time, instead of having to create last-minute discounts to fill up properties.

Seasonality may also vary by travelers' countries of origin. Different countries celebrate holidays at different times of the year; therefore, they have different travel patterns. For this reason, it's important to leverage marketing opportunities on international sales channels and to be listed on online platforms that are popular in various regions of the world. For instance, European travelers will be using Booking.com a lot, while Vrbo's local brand called Stayz is strong in Australia. It's also crucial to understand the travel patterns that occur in your largest feeder markets. For example, French properties may be interested in reviewing these characteristics of Chinese travelers visiting France.

In addition to reviewing historical reservation data, properties can utilize market trend reporting tools from several sales channels. HomeAway's MarketMaker and Booking.com's Pace Report are two examples of market-wide reports that properties can access. These

**Determine when your low season is and who your guests are**

1



One of the most valuable resources to any rental business is your past customer base.

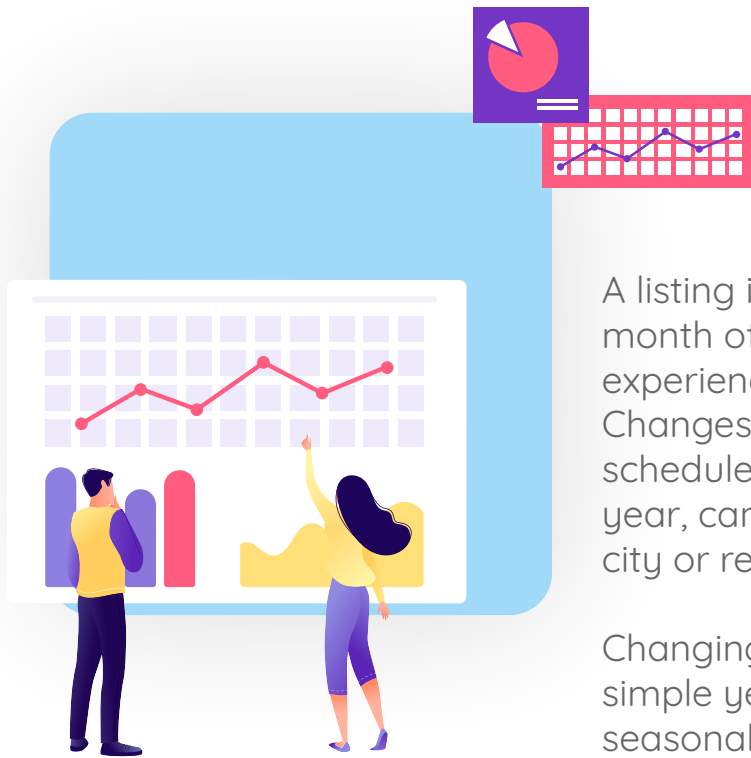
During the low season, properties can reach out to past guests with targeted marketing offers. In addition to guests who stayed at the property in the past, contact guests who inquired but didn't end up booking, guests who cancelled, and even asking for referrals from past guests, perhaps with an incentive offer.

**Leverage your customer and lead base**

Retargeting past guests doesn't have to be through traditional marketing methods like email; try utilizing social media marketing tools to advertise seasonal offers. By uploading a list of previous guests' email addresses to Facebook, properties can easily retarget these guests with relevant Facebook Ads. Capture their attention while they're scrolling through their Facebook news feeds! As a bonus, guests may even share the ad with someone they think might be interested.

2





A listing isn't always relevant for every month of the year, especially in markets that experience dramatic seasonal changes. Changes in weather, school and work schedules, and major events during the year, can change the purpose of travel to a city or region.

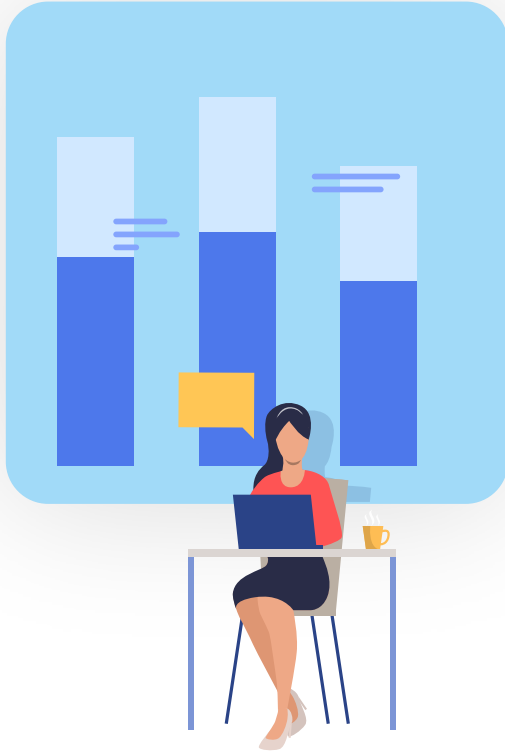
Changing the featured or default photos is a simple yet effective way to give a listing seasonal update. For example, photos of snowy mountains are certainly compelling during winter months for a property located in a ski market. But those same photos aren't too helpful when encouraging guests to book during the summer. Instead, a mountain property could upload photos of hiking trails, pools, or restaurants during warm weather to showcase low season activities and amenities.

Some sales channels also have seasonal amenity options that further highlight seasonal changes. Cottages.com, for instance, offers a "decorated at Christmas" option.

Remember to update listings based on the average booking window! If guests usually book their Christmas reservations during August or September, make sure to have any holiday verbiage and content updated by that time. If you are using a channel manager, talk to your account manager to see whether there are ways to simplify or automate these photos updates across your portfolio of properties in bulk.

**Update your listings strategically**

**3**



Instead of reducing rates across the board, add policies that warrant the discount. For example, instead of adding a deep discount to a refundable rate, try to instead also offer a lower-priced non-refundable rate that has fewer extras included. Do some of the properties you manage include meals? Try adding a lower-priced option that has no meals included. Some properties have as many as four different rate plans with four different policies.

During the low season, guests are more flexible in their travel plans and therefore have more negotiation power. Experiment with your policies to learn what your guests value most. Do they prefer to pay a lower price with less flexibility (a non-refundable rate, for instance)? Or would they rather pay a little more to have the ability to cancel anytime? As the arrival date approaches, guests are usually more confident in their plans, so properties see success by offering non-refundable rates within a few days of arrival.

In addition to adjusting cancellation policies, properties can also take advantage of the slower months to optimize communication with future guests. Sending a personalized email to the guest right after they booked is an excellent way to build a relationship before arrival - and may even reduce the chance of cancellation.

**Craft low  
season  
policies**

**4**



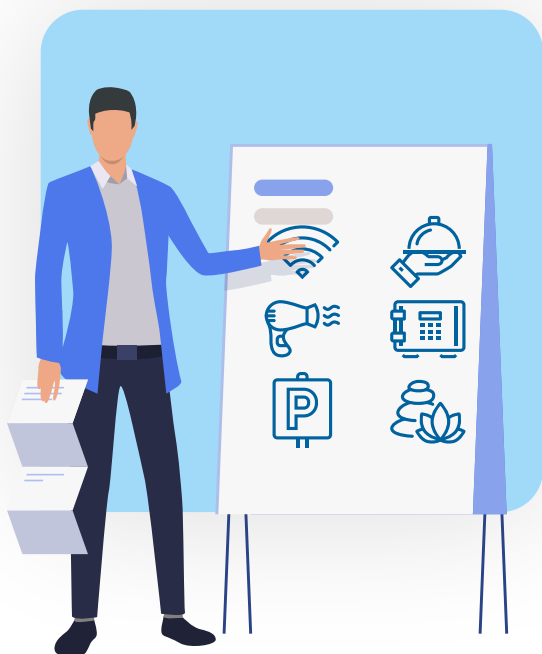
During the off-season, guests may have fewer days available for travel, or you might find that guests prefer a property that is more flexible on their arrival and departure dates. By making check-in available on any day of the week, a property can become more attractive to these bookers. If a property usually only offers check-in on weekends, for example, that same property may be able to increase low season business by offering a mid-week check-in option too.

Property managers may be tempted to incentivize low-season bookings by offering discounts for bookings made for this period at any point during the year, but this strategy may be counter-productive. Depending on the booking window, some people could have booked the property at full price. By studying historical booking trends for your individual property and the market as a whole, you can craft a discounting strategy that doesn't eat into the full-priced business.

For example, a property manager in London learned that their guests book, on average, 28 days in advance. By adding a 15% discount for guests who book more than 40 days in advance, they were able to gain incremental business from guests who book far in advance while protecting their full-rate, last-minute bookings.

**Incentivize  
weekday bookings  
- without over -  
discounting!**

5



If a property sees a drop in business year after year during the low season, it may be time to consider investing in amenities that will make the property more attractive in those slower months. According to Tripping.com, a hot tub can increase a property's nightly rate, and a hot tub would certainly make the property more compelling for couples planning a romantic getaway!

If you are managing properties on behalf of property owners, it may not be easy to convince them to make some capital expenditures. A tip to convince them: Platforms like Airbnb, Booking, and Vrbo show in their interface a list of top recommended amenities, usually tailored to the region where the property is. Show these lists to homeowners and explain how these amenities show up on websites and convert more bookings.

Some markets experience less-than-desirable weather during the low season. Even small investments in board games, blankets, or warmer bed linens can make a difference! Just remember to update any amenity information on every sales channel to ensure guests are aware of the new amenities. A best practice is to always maintain a content score of close to 95% on sites like Booking.com.

**Add amenities  
that convert well  
in the off-season**

6





If tourists flock to a given market during the high season, it may be worthwhile to think about other types of travelers during the low season. Business travel patterns often complement tourism trends nicely. Is your market bursting with visitors during the weekend? Maybe business travelers who come during the weekdays can help you fill those mid-week gaps.

Some online travel agencies are now offering special programs for business travelers. Two examples are Airbnb's Airbnb for Work collection and Booking.com's Business Bookers program. In order to join these programs, a property must have certain amenities that make the space suitable for a business traveler, such as free wireless internet, an iron, and a hairdryer.

**Expand your reach to new types of travelers**

**7**



## It's your turn! How will you grow your off-season business?

Every market is different, just like every property is unique. The best way to learn what works best for your business is to experiment with a few strategies. Mix and match some of the recommendations listed in this article to see what is most effective for you.

Networking with other property owners and managers - as well as industry experts - is also a fantastic way to discover new ideas to grow your business. Check with your local vacation rental / short-term rental managers association chapter. Visit Rental Scale-Up's website [www.rentalscaleup.com](http://www.rentalscaleup.com) to read about best practices from people like you who are making their vacation rental business grow.





## About Rental Scale-Up

Our goal is to share the right information and best practices to help the owners and managers of short-term rental businesses grow their revenues, become more profitable, and save time in their business.

We publish articles, hold online conferences, deliver reports and share content aimed at vacation rental managers in resort areas, short-term rental operators in urban markets, as well as closely-related businesses such as independent operators serviced apartments.

**Visit our website to get  
more actionable tips**

**Get more tips**

**Thank You!**