

Hi and good afternoon.

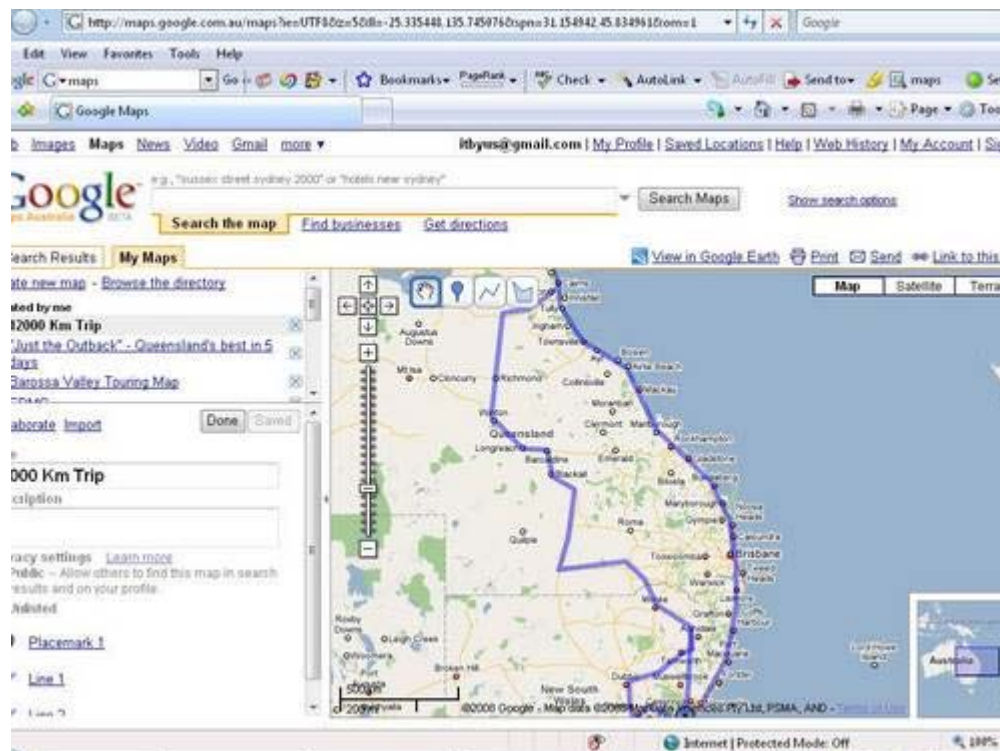
My name is Dave Upton and I have a technology company – **Itbyus**. To date, as mentioned earlier, we have developed about 500 websites for companies around the world - many of them in the travel industry. Recently, as an addendum to our Content Management System, we have built an online accommodation booking module – Accommodation Guru







Recently, I was invited to speak at the Queensland Visitor Information Centre Conference in Rockhampton to talk about Accommodation Guru. I took this opportunity to do a road trip up the east coast of Australia as far as Port Douglas - returning to Sydney by the inland route - via Winton, Longreach & Goondiwindi.



Over 6 weeks I travelled 12,000 kilometres and spoke with Visitor Information Centres, real estate agents with holiday accommodation listings, as well as companies & individuals thinking about starting up a niche online accommodation operation.

The aim of the trip was to understand more fully what is happening at the grass roots level.

**Martin has asked me to outline some of my findings that may be of use to you.**

I learnt, without a doubt, that regional areas are certainly embracing broadband technology. ADSL is becoming more prevalent in regional areas and this will continue at exponential rates under the new government's proposal to enable 98% of Australia to have **very fast internet access** in the next few years.

The feedback that I received throughout the trip was as follows.

- Many of these niches would love to **monetise the traffic to their websites** by offering an online accommodation booking service.
- They want to **represent the full range of properties and tours in their local area** – for both walk-in and online business.
- The full range of properties include - hotels, motels, B&Bs, farm stays and even campsites.
- They want to **earn commission** from their sales.
- They want a system that is extremely **user-friendly** for site visitors, staff and administrators.
- However, most importantly, they want an **affordable system** – with no expensive set-up or maintenance fees.

The **affordability issue is further exacerbated** by the **lack of funding available** to these regional information centres. As many of them are funded by councils, they struggle with expensive set-up fees, commission dilution by software providers, training fees and other costs.

- Also, what I found was that many of the smaller accommodation establishments - **those with less than 5 rooms** - are simply not finding their way onto the major reservation systems and are falling through the cracks. To provide full coverage of their areas, many of the niche operators want to represent these properties, as more often than not, they make up a sizeable chunk of their business.
- Currently, many of the regional visitor's centres **use the telephone** to enquire about what accommodation is available. Many find this **cumbersome and inefficient**. They would prefer an online solution in an endeavour to reduce the number of emails and telephone calls.
- To compete effectively, niche operators, in addition to being able to offer rates **365 days** of the year, also want to be able to offer **last-minute rates**.
- As well as offering accommodation, niche operators want to be able to **sell tours and event tickets online**. An example of this is a regional office wishing to sell tickets to a New Year's Eve Bachelor and Spinster Ball that attracts up to 3,000 people.

So, while this is what they want, in short, I found that that many accommodation booking centres and accommodation providers in regional Australia, are **disenchanted and discontented with current offerings**.

