

5 Tips for Marketing Your Tourism Business Online

In order to take advantage of people's travel desires, you need to represent your brand in the online space. When you're a small tourism or hospitality business or a new tourism or hospitality business, you are unlikely to have a huge budget put aside specifically for marketing. The great marketing conundrum of the universe is this: (brace yourself for profound insight) this is when you most need to market your business. Without growing your customer base, you can't grow your business and without marketing you can't grow your customer base. And so it goes on in a great cyclical whirlpool of hopelessness and despair.

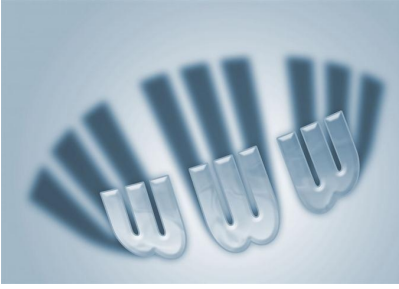


Ok, so maybe that last part is a mild exaggeration. Fortunately, the advent of the Internet has yielded many ways to market tourism brands without the need to take out a second mortgage on your house or dip into your youngest child's college fund. Here's how...

1. Network Online

Even people with a pea-sized marketing brain have jumped on the social media bandwagon. It's pretty far from the cutting edge these days. That doesn't mean that it isn't important or necessary. It is, however, what you do with it that really counts. For travel sites, social media plays a huge role in online marketing success and it's virtually free. While it's great to have a Facebook Page, a LinkedIn profile and all that jazz, when it comes to travel, it's equally important to join and participate in travel forums and organisations. The key things to remember are:

Be authentic in all of your interactions and disclose your position. Contribute meaningfully rather than promotionally. The odd bit of blatant self-promotion is fine but intersperse it with insights, opinions and advice that are separate to your brand and beneficial to your audience. Monitor what people are saying about you (insert well timed BrandsEye punt here) and how they are responding to your communication with them. Remember, success in this area is about relationship building rather than acquisition.



2. Don't Underestimate the Value of WebPR

No, I am not talking about the ubiquitous press release. In a recent survey, Burst Media reported that over 90% of the travellers they surveyed plan to use the Internet to plan their summer vacations. I don't drive 50 km from my front door without Googling my destination. If you write good valuable content about the travel destinations your business focuses on, people will read it. Among the factors that interested them when researching travel were the sites they would see, the best way to travel and whether discounts or specials were available. Make this your starting point and submit your content far and wide for maximum impact. While on the subject of content generation, a blog is also a great idea. There are free blogging platforms, they rank well in the SERPS. All it takes is some hard work and maintenance and you will have put together a great resource for your customers, both existing and potential.

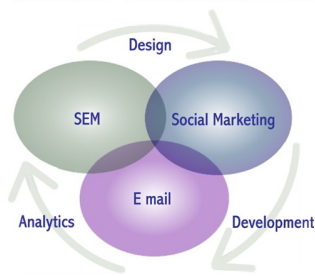
3. Search Search Search Search Search Search

If all of these people are out there researching travel online, it doesn't take a genius to figure out that that you need to make damn sure they find you. To the person who told me earlier that there is more to online marketing than search – take that (joke – of course there's more to online marketing than search). Anyway, find yourself some keywords (and for small businesses, I'd go for the long tail, more niche keywords that won't see you pitted against brands like The Hilton) and ensure that your site and your content are optimised. This will ensure that at least you aren't starting out at a disadvantage.

4. Email Marketing Is Awesome (provided you do it right)

Travel and tourism is a pretty unique industry for a variety of reasons that make it ideal for the use of Email Marketing. First and foremost, most people (your target market anyway) aspire to travel. So, as long as you're providing content that's of value, you are at a huge advantage. Who doesn't want to read all about the latest happenings of their favourite destination and scroll through glossy pictures of the landscape, people and attractions? There are a few things to remember though – make sure yours is a genuine opt-in database. No one likes a spammer. Also, you need to do more than promote your destination – your mailers need to be enticing because their copy is interesting, unique and a pleasure to read. Part of being a great host (whether for your friends or for paying customers) is cultivating the impression that your guests are missed in their absence and that they are always welcome back again. Email Marketing has the potential to do just that and instill the warm nostalgic sensation one gets when looking forward to or back on a holiday.

INTERNET MARKETING PLAN



5. Target Your Efforts

If your marketing efforts reach no one except an overweight, underpaid 40 year old couch potato who lives with his mum, then (for tourism at least) you must be doing something wrong. You need to make sure that you are reaching the right people with your efforts. Part of this is finding the right channels through which to market yourself. The other part of it is being able to use those channels to communicate with the people who are likely to spend money and at some stage travel to your destination. The first step is knowing who you should be targeting. If you're a snowboarding resort in the Rockies then our friend above is probably not the persona you're speaking to. If you run a cruise ship specialising in providing the ultimate mother-son quality time for 30 – 80 year olds, then maybe you're doing the right thing.

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