

# CRISIS: SMART TOURISM BUSINESSES FOCUS ON INNOVATION



Stephen Hawking famously said that ‘intelligence is the ability to adapt to change’, and the coronavirus pandemic has made companies face a great change - including in the tourism sector. Words like telecommuting or remote work, virtual meetings, and tools like Microsoft Teams, Google Hangouts and Skype became the new normal in most work-related conversations.

What has become clear over these days of isolation is that in order to continue the professional activities in a more or less normal way, **companies need to become smarter, and start seeing these tools and advantages not as simple band-aids but as the start of an important cultural change.**

In this context, there are six elements that smart tourism companies need to consider, that is, gaining the ability to adapt to this new environment:

## **Agility: Speed Is the New Size**

It is often said that size is everything, but the speed with which an organization is able to launch products, services and solutions to the markets and how fast it reacts to new situations as well as its agility for developing will determine how competitive the organization is. The competitive advantage is no longer the size, but the speed.

These days, travel companies face nothing but problems, paused projects, less consumption, uncertainty about the future. But tomorrow will come, and the real challenge is preparing today.

Part of the strategy involves breaking down rank orders and bureaucracy, and being able to simplify the processes: less unnecessary meetings and foster creativity by coming up with new solutions that the current situation demands.

Breaking the mold and working across the board: guiding leadership towards responsibility and control. It is not about where people work from and how many hours a day, but about empowering them and making sure their efforts help the company advance forward.

## **Digital Intelligence: No Longer a Choice, But a Must**

Disruption, technology, data, applications... Adapting to the new digital environment is and will be the key to the success of any business, including smart tourism companies. Businesses need to become digital or they'll cease to exist. Therefore, it is essential that personnel are knowledgeable about technologies to respond to business challenges. Every day this becomes clearer as thousands of people work remotely and need to comprehend these technologies to make the most of them.

Incorporate new key capabilities to face digital challenges: encourage those with knowledge in the organization to share information with others and to take lead at this time.

Establish a culture that makes implementing the strategy easier by promoting internal talent.

Identifying new players as well as new business models: dedicate part of your staff's time to discover and study disruptive technologies.

### **Liquidity: Adapting to the Environment**

We are constantly adapting, or one might call it permanently running a beta test, and all suggest that this will become the new setting for the coming years: an unstable, complex environment in which not only is change constant, but the speed at which it occurs makes it more unpredictable. Having liquidity for companies and organizations will help us to adapt.

Just a few days ago, this scenario seemed theoretical, conceptual, and even far from possible. Today, it is more real than ever; and before uncertainty, change, fear, and risk, we can only do one thing: take action.

Work from the capacities of organization charts: telecommuting needs to be organized, but why not allow flexibility when it comes to capacities and goes beyond hierarchy responsibilities to facilitate talent development?

Multidisciplinary and empowered teams: first of all, telecommuting must allow and encourage working in smaller groups than usual (large meetings are usually counter-productive) so that we can set specific goals, empower teams to achieve them, and encourage personnel to incorporate talent from different areas of the organization.

Transformational and distributed leadership: It is the ideal time to set aside hierarchical and controlling leadership roles. Organizations should now be distributed entities in which leadership, and even decision-making, will also need to be distributed.

### **Opening: The New Look**

In this new setting, one may need to employ different approaches for different situations. The tourism environment is changing at an incredible speed, we are learning to face new situations day by day, annual business plans are no longer feasible, and the best thing we can project are weekly plans. New looks are necessary to identify new opportunities.

Staying connected to the ecosystem: this implies being prepared to collaborate, seek alliances, and explore new opportunities.

Be open to testing and experimenting, both outside and inside the organization. Why not try new work systems? Or have much shorter and result-oriented business meetings?

### **Creativity: Collaboration as a Tool for Growth**

The digital world has made its way into many industries, and this means that organizations are no longer capable of addressing those new needs on their own. The collaboration of tourism companies will be crucial to stay competitive in the future.

**Companies willing to face this unstable environment must constantly explore the market to offer value propositions.**

Since innovation is essential for the acceleration of business, today's product might not be relevant to the market in the future, so how can businesses focus on developing new solutions? By integrating new forms of internal collaboration, bringing in new teams with fresh ideas or identifying current

business opportunities.

Today, the tourism industry faces change, a shift of paradigms that has been discussed for years in the business world. Why not consider this as the beginning and not as something temporary? Remember, smart tourism companies can adapt to changes.

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