



Omni-Channel Marketing The Ideal Approach for Tourism

Marketing Has Changed!

We've all bought from Amazon. Once you make a purchase and return to their website, their platform recognizes who you are because they collected information while you browsed their website on a previous visit. Welcoming you back, they expect you will again be their customer. Driven by the mission "to be the earth's most customer-centric company; to build a place where people can come to find anything they might want to buy online," Amazon's primary strategy as a massive technology-powered product distributor, is focused on featuring the products you want, at the prices you want, and treating you in such a way that you will want to return and shop again. If you viewed an item and did not purchase it immediately, they have a cadre of marketing partners that facilitate re-marketing, so when you access another website, voila! There is a reminder to purchase the item you viewed.

For the most part, Amazon never loses or misplaces your information and follows you around from place to place, capturing the internet trail you leave behind. In spite of all this information collection, or perhaps, your lack of awareness that it is happening, you are happy Amazon recognizes you, and personalizes your future visits. Likely you will buy from them in the future. Amazon has spoiled all of us to expect this level of marketing and customer service savvy from everywhere as we compare Amazon's experience to other organizations we purchase from.

Increasingly, It's Omni-Channel Marketing

Amazon's marketing and operations are one of the best examples of omni-channel marketing achieved by any organization and will continue to set the tone for similar responses from others. The Kellogg School of Management of Northwestern University, America's premier university marketing program, states that

“increasingly, buyers around the world, whether B2B or B2C, expect to be able to discover, research, communicate, and purchase, what they want, when they want, where they want, and how they want.

Disconnected, disparate, and isolated buying and communications channels are frustrating for those who become aware of a purchase they want to make on one channel and have to move to another to actually make the purchase. To solve this issue, marketers are turning to omni-channel marketing as the go to marketing strategy to connect marketing, advertising, sales, and customer service. This approach is in response to a study cited by Kellogg and others produced by Salesforce, that found 74% of customers used multiple channels to complete a transaction, and 76% prefer using different channels, depending on what they are searching for or buying.

Says the author of *Mastering Omni-Channel Marketing*, “customers today embark on a journey that spans multiple channels, each offering a unique set of interactions and experiences. From initial awareness to the final purchase decision, they may traverse a variety of touch points including e-commerce platforms, social media, websites, physical stores, mobile apps, offers discovered through email marketing, experiential marketing events, customer service centers, and more.” Understanding the cross-channel journey visitors proceed through as they search for the experiences they want to participate in, is going to be essential for crafting a cohesive strategy that ensures a consistent experience throughout access to each of the platforms involved.

Inbound Marketing

One of the core tenets of omni-channel marketing is the inbound marketing approach, which works to deliver a cohesive experience through online channels, placing information where and when visitors want it, to “pull” them into the communication instead of “pushing” marketing messages at them. The intent of inbound marketing is to capture the interest of potential visitors with great content, delivered in places where they are actually looking. Instead of just making visitors aware of the available experiences, inbound engages them through good storytelling, the cornerstone of any effective marketing program to increase the possibility of their booking.

The foundation of pull marketing is a website designed to convert website visitors to actual visitors, coupled with a relentless program of appropriate and inspiring content delivered through multiple vehicles that constantly drive viewers to the website.

Unfortunately, Amazon’s technology-facilitated customer focus is an example of just how far behind the marketing curve that organizations in the tourism industry find themselves. When visitors return to a community’s website, much less to the community, they want to feel tourism recognizes they have been there before. Yet so often in tourism, visitors find websites deployed for locations strapped for marketing cash, completely lacking in any online experience, and Facebook the only social media platform they are using.

A Multi-Competitive Arena

The technology gaps now occurring in the tourism industry are accompanied by an historic level of competition. In a world where DMMOs once reigned supreme as nearly the sole source of information about their particular location, the vast number of suppliers, content marketers, bloggers, content aggregators, RSS (real simple syndication), blogs, audio, video, forums, listservs, wikis, mobile, podcasts, ebooks, webinars, and more, that visitors have become accustomed to interacting with in other parts of their lives, all muddy the waters.

Technology innovations have also rebalanced the entire industry to the point where any DMMO supplier member, or any business for that matter, can now reach visitors directly employing their own either free, or low cost electronic tools. Visitors can find anything they want without ever accessing the DMMO website. The number of electronic communication avenues have now expanded so far beyond the traditional social media platforms that visitors in some areas can walk down the street and be presented with information, offers, ticketing, and directions, right on their smartphones, all delivered directly by suppliers. It is also difficult for non-profits and small businesses to compete for marketing attention with for-profit locations that can be light years ahead in the deployment of technology and fueled with bigger budgets.

To further complicate things, the once safe, dedicated world non-profits, small communities and remote locations have been invaded by tech savvy people seeking experiences and authenticity, expecting they will be treated like Amazon treats them. It's amazing that Apple devices can run an entire life, yet not even half of DMMO websites are mobile friendly.

How is Omni-Channel Marketing Implemented in Tourism?

Omni-channel marketing may be a new word in the marketing vocabulary of tourism organizations, yet is it not a new concept. It is what tourism marketing should have been all along, the perfect marketing approach for tourism programs that have a combination of physical locations, digital marketing programs, websites, multiple social media platforms, and more, all ways in which they get their message to, and interact with visitor markets.

The most important difference between the multi-channel marketing approach in place at most DMMOs, where all the channels are independent of one another, and omni-channel marketing, is that within omni-channel marketing all of the channels work together. All recognize the same visitor and capture all the interactions the visitor has with the tourism marketing effort. Visitors can move seamlessly between the various channels and the tourism team is able to recognize the visitor wherever they appear.

Three Strategies to Interact with Visitors

The Kellogg School goes on to say that there are three basic types of strategies to engage visitors in the digital world. An Engagement Strategy is focused on generating the largest marketing reach but results in an anonymous relationship with social and digital visitors. This is the approach is supported by a multi-channel approach within tourism programs that are trying to expand their marketing reach as far as possible with likes, connections, and other social media transactions.

By contrast, a Nurturing Strategy, the second type, focuses on higher value prospects from whom the organization seeks to elicit some sort of response. An Integrated Marketing Communications strategy, the third level up, actually engages participants in a deep, holistic database-driven relationship, as part of an approach to communicate and interact with their highest value market.

The majority of DMMOs operating at the multi-channel environment stage do indeed use mobile marketing, engaging social media platforms, and well designed websites, but messages and operations are not synchronized, connected, or coordinated. At times, they do not even appear they are from the same organization. Remaining at the engagement strategy level trying to develop the largest marketing reach on the platforms as possible, they generate little actual communication, and often times do not really even respond to that in real time.

For the most part, DMMOs will ultimately have to move through the nurturing strategy and arrive at the integrated marketing communications strategy where they communicate and engage with with visitors and potential visitors on a regular basis, because past satisfied visitors, potential visitors who have reacted in some way, and current visitors all represent a high value market. This approach is precisely what omni-channel marketing is all about. In addition, DMMOs that embrace the omni-channel approach can coordinate the marketing of suppliers for greater synergy and marketing reach, while at the same time handling conversations within a single view of the visitor who may be dealing with multiple supplies. Doing so requires the ability to personalize the path each visitor takes through the visitor decision journey and engage with them, based on the premise

that all visitors, guests, attendees, or whatever the purchasers are called, are their customers.

Within that view, the DMMO will once again become the “keeper of the information,” yet that information will have to include all the experiences available in the community, not just those of selected suppliers who pay to play. They must also integrate strategic insights revealed through integrated analytics to make the visitors experience better. This comprehensive approach to marketing and communication will make the DMMO a critical player in experience delivery, a linchpin in the economic development success of the community, and a valued partner to the suppliers to whom they deliver more business.

Visitor Just Want an Enjoyable Travel Planning Experience

Today's visitors are multi-channel shoppers for whom a shopping platform is increasingly becoming the FIRST touchpoint where information about places to visit appears. They are also smart consumers who want transparent, honest offers that are creative and not same old, same old.

Even though all visitors fall somewhere within the scope of the visitor decision journey, visitors consider themselves “explorers” rather than “tourists” and want to engage in a collaboration between themselves and the authentic experience the community offerers. To do so, they want information that empowers them to build their own personalized experience, which the DMMO has facilitated in seamless online and offline content, and easily be able to navigate their own path through it. They want this because this is the approach marketers in other industries are offering them.

It's very important to keep in mind that visitors are seeking an enjoyable leisure experience and the search and purchase part of the journey has to be enjoyable as well. If not, they will go elsewhere which considers the visitor decision journey part of the overall experience and a lead up to the experience on the ground. The omni-channel marketing approach can effectively be used to make this so.

The Tourism Omni-Channel Approach

Implementing omni-channel marketing in tourism is going to require that DMMOs do things completely differently than they are accustomed to doing. And tourism organizations envisioning starting a tourism program will be at a different starting line than they would have been in the past. Traditionally considering visitors the customers of others, most DMMOs lack the tools required to put the approach in place. There are two parts to the equation. The “martech” marketing technology part of omni-channel marketing implementation is covered in Chapter 45. The strategic approach is covered here.

Adopt the Strategic Position that Omni-Channel Marketing is Valuable

The same as a vision, mission, and goals require conscious implementation, embracing omni-channel marketing will require the same level of conscious decision. As each marketing action is planned and designed, it will be important to have a benchmark against which it can be evaluated.

Become Visitor-Centric

Before embarking on implementation of an omni-channel marketing strategy, it is important for the DMMO to also consciously declare an intent to become visitor-centric and embrace the idea that positively influencing the visitor's experience while they are in the community is part of the DMMO's job. Within this approach marketing actions are focused on delivering information to visitors where they want it, when they want it, and how they want it and facilitating the experiences visitors have in the community in every day possible, as opposed to focusing on the priorities of members and marketing partners. Marketing priorities become the actions that make saying yes to a visit for visitors as easy as possible.

Make Visitors Part of the Marketing Team

DMMOs engaging in omni-channel marketing can also make past visitors, potential visitors, and current visitors all part of the marketing team. Every time a satisfied visitor receives a communication, it will bring back positive memories about their previous experience in the community. Even if that visitor is not in a position to return immediately, the communication can be forwarded to family and friends and reposted on social media. Plus, if the DMMO has established a relationship with that visitor, the communication could advance the idea that the community is the visitor's "destination of choice" where they are comfortable to return, relax, and re-energize because tourism recognizes their needs.

View The Community As a Brand

Adopt the viewpoint that the brand of the community is the experience that is delivered to visitors (covered in Chapter 27), and express that brand through

marketing communications and actions that support the brand holistically, rather than being a kit of pieces and parts of supplier locations.

Implement Multiple Methods to Collect Visitor Information

Give visitors and potential visitors as many reasons as possible to provide their email addresses and other information. The process to obtain information about current visitors illustrated in Chapter 20 will have laid the foundation of visitor information that will include demographic information and the primary radius from which visitors are arriving. Collecting visitor information within omnichannel marketing takes that process one step further, getting down to the granular level of the individual customer with their name and email address as the starting point, to which more details can be added as they are collected.

Utilize a CRM - Customer Relationship Management System

As single view of the visitor is only possible if their information has been collected in a customer relationship management (CRM) system. An integrated CRM such as HubSpot not only enables collection of information, but also has robust marketing tools powered by it to communicate with visitors.

Identify the Online Locations Where Visitors Spend Time

DMMOs appear to be extremely hesitant about expanding online marketing to include multiple platforms where visitors actually spend time, yet it is imperative to get beyond Facebook and Instagram, and appear in the places where visitors are accessing information. One study of the digital marketing programs of 200 DMMOs pointed out a collection of 12 platforms being used effectively to deliver

marketing information. No DMMO used all 12, but many were using a collection that extended well beyond where “everyone” appears and the obligatory Facebook page to be able to state one is using social media.

Create Typical Visitor Profiles

Profiles of typical visitors will enable development of messages oriented to particular visitor markets such as families, couples, solos, those interested in heritage and cultural tourism, nature tourism, or farm tourism, groups, bleisure travelers, and other lifestyle aspects.

Utilize Geo-Spatial Analysis to Expand Visitor Knowledge

When the characteristics of current visitors are clearly defined, geo-spatial analysis will enable identifying where similar visitors live. When the characteristics of current visitors are overlaid on the publicly available database organized by US county that includes demographic, economic, educational, and other descriptors, the action will reveal where additional similar visitors are congregated.

Define and Support the Visitor Decision Journey

Defining the visitor’s decision journey as it applies to the search and purchase of the particular experiences offered in the community will enable identifying all of the touch points where visitors interact with the DMMO, the website, social media, and other online locations as they plan, book, and experience their visit. Record the communication vehicles that do or can impact each touch point, and the information those touch points should include to make the visitor’s experience as satisfying and enjoyable as possible.

Modify the Website with Needed Approaches

Identify the information needed on the website to facilitate selection of experiences and other elements of a visit, and re-organize the website to suit the actual visitor journey that is occurring. Eliminate the long lists of suppliers that say nothing, provide descriptions of every location being promoted including complete contact information, images of everything, details about accommodations properties, dining, service locations, and every other type of location visitor may need while they are visiting. It is important to equip the website with all the information needed to facilitate a visit, not just promote one to occur.

Develop Consistent Messages Over All Channels

Create content with specific messages for each target market on each of the platforms and marketing channels where visitors and potential visitors spend their time.

Establish Goals and Implement

Develop a series of 3-5 goals for omni-channel marketing. Specific, detailed, and concrete goals, with hard numbers to achieve. To implement the omni-channel effort, begin by engaging in the process described in the following chapters in this section: re-identification, development of inspiring stories, defining the brand as the experiences delivered, segmenting and targeting visitor markets, and development of a content marketing archive with messages that resonate and inspire visitors. It will certainly not all happen overnight, but over the long term, visitor satisfaction will increase dramatically, and members and marketing partners will benefit greatly from the approach as well.