Blogs for The Digital Agency etravelseo.com – Online Travel Marketing

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The objective of this thesis was to evaluate how marketing is becoming increasingly digitalized, which online channels are best used for online marketing, as well as showcasing relevant blog pieces that have been written for a digital travel marketing website. The viewpoint of the thesis was emphasized on the travel and tourism industry. However, despite that the focus of the thesis is primarily on the travel industry, the key findings and prevailed best used digital marketing practices can be used as valuable insight across any industry looking to incorporate digital marketing strategies.

Furthermore, this particular topic was chosen due to personal interest of the author as well as the topic being very current and interesting. The thesis correlates into adapted digital marketing practices that have been used on my own digital marketing agency, such as through the example of published blog pieces on the important relevant topics that relate to this thesis. The concept of digital marketing is evolving and improving all the time and it was interesting to also do comparative desktop research to conclude which digital trends and most widely used marketing strategies travel companies should be implementing for future success.

The thesis is divided into three parts - theory about digital trends, digital marketing, and examples of blog pieces from my own agency website that complement the theory. In section chapter 4 of the thesis, it particularly provides an overview of the essential digital marketing strategies travel and tourism companies should implement, followed by the blog pieces written for the agency website found starting in chapter 5. The blogs written for the website can be used as insightful information regarding digital marketing strategies and which digital marketing strategies are best used for travel and tourism companies today.

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1   Introduction

Travelers are moving quickly. They surf the internet for information through a wide array of channels, browse on multiple devices, switch from one app to the next, and expect a personalized service and booking experience. As hotel and travel companies integrate online strategy and adapt to new digital trends, targeting potential travelers through a myriad of marketing channels available today brings the need of fragmentation and understanding of which digital direction companies should take in order to reach their ideal target audience and gain better online exposure and growth. Particularly reaching to the new generation of young millennials and gen Z travelers, incorporating digital marketing strategy is going to be key to success.

Within only the past recent years digital marketing and trends have evolved immensely and the travel and tourism industry is one that has and will need to harness new ways to reach to where the majority of consumers are. From major digital trends to online marketing practices such as search engine optimization, paid search campaigns, blogging, content marketing, to social media marketing from Facebook, Instagram, to the Chinese social media platform WeChat, and more. These digital trends and marketing practices are what is shaping the tourism industry today to become more digitalized.

1.1   The Aim of the Thesis

The aim of this thesis is to provide research overview collected by industry influencers regarding how the travel industry is becoming digitalized, as well as to present blogs that I have written for one of my own digital marketing agency websites that provide useful information relevant to the thesis topics.

In correlation to the desktop research made for the thesis on digital trends and marketing, the blogs are included in the thesis to complement the topics that prove the importance of each aspect mentioned.

1.2   The Structure of The Thesis

The thesis has been broken down into 7 chapters, each of which relate to each other. In short, the thesis is divided into 3 main relevant topics - digital trends, digital marketing, and presented blog from my website that correlate to the various topics within the thesis such as digital marketing strategies. The first chapter is the introduction to the thesis topic in a generic way. The second chapter will focus primarily on digital trends and give explanation and insight on the desktop research findings, then by chapter three which flows into

the topic of digital marketing, followed by digital marketing strategies in chapter 4. The 5th and 6th chapter present the agency website's blogs which are particularly relevant to the main thesis topics. Lastly, the 7th chapter will be the conclusion for this thesis. It will tie up the key findings and also offer some general suggestions and valuable insight for businesses looking to implement digital strategy. It will also evaluate the outcome of the thesis along with a list of all the references used in the paper.

2 Digital Trends

This chapter discusses about how digital trends have influenced consumers of today and why it has become so important for companies to adapt and consider new changes that impact the way modern day, forward thinking businesses operate.

2.1 Overall trends

Digital transformation has reshaped the way businesses nowadays operate. While digital technology continues to evolve, business transformation will require careful planning, collaboration, adaptation, and inclusion of many digital aspects to each area of operational business. The digital transformation has moved away from simply a trend to more of a vital component to the way we do modern day business. With that said, we are continually seeing new emerging technology, digital platforms, and digital methods to reach consumers, which then gives businesses the challenge, yet opportunity to be up-to-date and keep up with the flow of digital integration for better success. Companies that do not adapt to digital advancement will face more of a challenge to reach consumers due to the fact that a majority of consumers are now online. (Newman, 2016)

Globally, digital immersion has become significantly transformative on a very large scale, global forces that define the future world with their far reaching impacts on businesses, societies, economies, cultures, and personal lives.

According to Newman (2017), DeMers (2017) in an article in Forbes and Language-Wire.com (2017), the main digital trends are:

Adaptability is vital to success: Change is always happening and the digital transformation is not going to slow down. Enterprises succeed when they adapt to the industry and the marketplace shifts, trends, and incorporate new technology and digital strategy into a company's everyday operations to lead to more success of an organization. (Newman 2017.)

Importance of user experience: The ultimate goal of digital transformation is the customer/user experience. Customers are more cautious than ever before and pay more attention to brands that go according to their values and needs. A superb user experience is one of the best ways to keep customers engaged with your brand and involved. Just about anywhere customers should be able to interact with your business and the experience must be consistent and positive. The use of analytics to find out where customers are coming from (i.e website, social media, blogs etc) and can see the interaction in those

high-traffic areas. Regardless of where the users are on their journey, the user experience should be there. (Newman 2017.)

Along with user experience, customer experience also importantly goes hand in hand. Customer experience is the core of marketing for every industry. (Newman 2017.) While it's always been considered as the main marketing focus, modern day businesses are discovering new and various innovative customer experience design platforms and methods to connect with consumers such as CX design innovators, [Feedbackly](#).

Conversational experience: Messaging apps and live chat are becoming very popular and widely used. The adaptation to chatbots are primarily used by major social and messaging platforms such as Facebook, Google, Skype, Slack, Twitter DM, WeChat, WhatsApp, and Kik to name a few. There are numerous amounts of daily users of these messaging platforms engaging with brands brands in the feeds, these platforms will serve as an opportunity for marketers to be creative and do 1-to-1 engagement. Live chat via official company websites are also becoming more common and an excellent way to provide efficient and effective customer experience and user engagement. (Newman 2017.)

Immersive Content and Virtual Reality: 2017 and onwards is going to be a pinnacle change for the way audiences interact with video content. Through the success of Oculus Rift, HTC Vive, Pokemon Go on Unity, virtual reality and augmented reality have become important technological breakthroughs. From this we can anticipate significant improvements in immersive devices as well as software. (Gabay 2017.)

For example, the huge success of Pokemon GO AR app, signals to nearly any business that has yet to venture into augmented reality or virtual reality. The first thing that comes to your mind may be the idea of gaming, however going beyond that there is so much potential and now easier to implement than ever before. The connection to consumers with AR and VR offer customers a unique and engaging experience. (Gabay 2017.)

Application program interfaces: The need for agility is in demand and application program interfaces (API's) are like the secret sauce to digital integration. Companies like PayPal have relied very heavily on these type of technologies, and it's allowed them to manage a significantly high volume of transactions.Many companies today are starting to jump on the bandwagon and merge the best API's to their business. API's will create opportunities for fast, flexible and efficient solutions for companies interested in adapting to technology that create the best user experience. (Newman 2017.)

Analytics and Big Data: For some big data may be a daunting thought and because of this few companies are using big data to their advantage in the best way possible. Firstly, analytics drive business by showing how customers behavior, the way they think, what they want, and how they view your brand. Fortunately for the digital transformation, nearly everything can be measured. Big data and analytics will be a key aspect to the way businesses operate. Decisions can be made by analyzing data alone for better success of tomorrow. (Chaffey 2016.)

Data visualization is also another rising aspect to digitalization and visualization tools are widely expanding. For marketers, data is essential. It's quantitative information that indicates who's buying what, where, when, why, and which digital channels are most effective. Nowadays, understanding data has become much easier for us to analyze by means of user-friendly, comprehendible, sophisticated, visual data tools that are now out there and easily accessible today. Just about every business will want to be using them to scope in and use them to their advantage. (Chaffey 2016.)

Implementing Innovation for Growth: Innovation is (and always will be) one the best ways to stay competitive in the ever changing market. New technology needs to be acquired, tested, analyzed, and judged quickly. Businesses want to implement tools that will only offer real value. For some, some innovative projects, tools, and designs can work well immediately, while others may have a learning curve. However, the quicker a business can implement an idea, the more it can look forward to opportunities to transform and even change markets. As adaptation has been mentioned, companies who are forward thinkers of innovation, the higher those companies will have of success. (Newman 2017.)

Trend of the remote workforce: While millennials are moving into the workforce, many of them prefer flexibility. Faster bandwidth and mobile technology are enhancing which allow businesses to connect with talented individuals around the world. Contract work and freelance jobs are now common, most of which individuals can work from home or just about anywhere with a wifi connection. With globalization on the rise, perhaps new opportunities for businesses to expand in remote locations could be more common in the near future as well. (Newman 2017.)

Ad Blockers and the rise of Sustainable solutions: Ad blockers is on the rise for many internet users and businesses will have to find sustainable ways to put their brand where the customers can see it. According to a recent study made by Global Web Index, 3 out of

4 mobile users globally are using ad blockers or at least are interested in using them. It's quite a big number considering many businesses rely on pay-per-click (ppc) ads to reach their customers, and this trend is likely to increase, thus bringing the challenge to those using ppc. (Newman 2017.)

To add to this trend, many brands are catching on that they need better ways to get their content in front of their audience. Content that's more engaging, eye catching, entertaining, and valuable so that it connects with the consumers. But the real solutions to ad blockers is simply sustainable content practices that people can actually find, enjoy and share. For this, many businesses are investing more on search engine optimization (SEO) as it provides organic search results in the search engines, as well as the ability to target a certain audience. (Newman 2017.)

2.2 Digital Trends in the Travel Industry

On a global scale, the travel and tourism industry faces a unique array of challenges driven by particular industry trends. For these travel companies hoping to stand out from the crowd and attract the attention of consumers, they must address to some of the digital trends that are happening on a globally. This means that the need to continuously cater more to the needs of guests and passengers both in-person and online across multiple channels and ways of interactions. For travel professionals to achieve this, they must monitor digital trends happening around the travel industry and also adjust their digital strategy as customer behavior and preference change. (O'Neill, 2015)

According to a research conducted by Statista, it is estimated that during 2016, the total retail travel sales globally will reach $22.0.49 trillion, up 6.0% from the previous year. By 2019, the online travel industry is forecasted to grow to 762 billion U.S dollars. (Gaby, 2016)

These statistics not only indicate the growth of GDP, but also clearly showing that the travel industry is also growing at a very fast rate. This also means that the travel industry will be one that will have to adapt to digital trends and strategies to keep up with consumers.

Nowadays, the majority of consumers typically use several websites during the travel planning phase, whether it's to search for destination information, read reviews or purchase travel online. A research published by Association of British Travel Agents (ABTA) discovered that in 2016, 76% of UK internet users had booked holidays digitally in the

past 12 months. Moreover, in the United States, 52% of travel bookers use online platforms to make bookings, according to Emarketer. This goes to show that at a growing rate of online immersion, marketing techniques such as SEO, social media marketing, customer experience design (CX), user experience design (UX), and content marketing will be significantly important and crucial for success. (Gaby, 2016)

Through comparative desktop research and studies made by marketing platforms such as from BizmolMarketing, SmartInsights, and various industry experts from industry influencers such as Nick Hall from Digital Tourism Think Tank and Frederic Gonzalo a tourism industry marketer and speaker. Though not in any particular order, here I will prevail the major digital trends impacting the travel and tourism industry today and for the near future according to research found.

2.2.1 Digital Self-Service and Personalization Based on Preference

Looking back about 10 years ago, the travel landscape has evolved beyond recognition. It used to be that consumers would go directly to one service provider to handle all of their needs and desires to plan and book a holiday or travels somewhere. Nowadays, consumers are all over the "digital map" jumping from one channel to the next but without really stopping at one place to asks for directions. They gather information on one channel, book on another and expect service on yet another, leading to an omnichannel experiences. Consumers swiftly move across these industry specific omnichannels, from online travel agencies (OTA's), tour operators, official tourism websites, destination marketing organizations (DMO's), to hotel and airline booking tools. Real human service interactions fade away in importance as digital omnichannels emerge, shaping the behavior of consumers today. (O'Neill, 2015)

While some channels are more profitable than others. The key would be to capture the traveller's attention long enough on one particular channel for them to book through so that profit margins increase but also enhancing the travelers experience while booking. In order for businesses to maximise on this opportunity, travel businesses should offer an online experience that brings forth the same level of service of which a physical "in-store" service would provide. By doing so, offering a user-friendly rich experience on the device or online platform that the traveler is using and across the many channels that are connected. Businesses now need to excel at providing cross-channel digital integration. (O'Neill, 2015)

One outcome of omnichannels is the fact that travelers are overwhelmed by the many choices available online. With the amount of hotel rooms, airline seats and cabin classes, and attractions to choose from, it's crucial for travel businesses to optimize their offerings. Digital omnichannels are inevitable, however the variety and amount of choices need to be served in one sort of format so travelers remain their buying journey with the brand. (O'Neill, 2015)

How can travel brands keep up with the adaptation to digital omnichannels? By using data collected online about the travelers, sites can actually deliver specifically targeted information that consumers actually want. The first approach is to deliver a tailored experience and engaging with content marketing techniques through visuals, images of destinations, properties, details about amenities, all based on the travelers profiling, demographics, navigation choices and other digital indications. (Gonzalo, 2016)

For example, travelers seeking luxury honeymoon holiday rentals can skip through the numerous amount of listings of family property rentals to focus on the high-end, all-inclusive resort that actually fits their needs and desires. Personalization based on preference and digital self-service is an important aspect to the current state of the travel industry and something that is certainly being sought after by consumers. (Gonzalo, 2016)

2.2.2 Multi-Channel Marketing Becomes the Norm

As consumers move more and more online to find information, services and for simply everyday use, traditional businesses are more or less forced to also move online to reach these consumers. In a report made by SmartInsights, driven by digitalization, the online travel industry is expected to grow and an annual rate of 3.8% over the next 10 years to $11.4 trillion, thus creating a large market place four times the size of the current UK economy. (Gabay, 2017.)

Due to the global digitalization and consumers reliance on the use of multiple online platforms and mobile devices, online travel agencies (OTA's) remain resilient and are thriving in regards to digital adaptation. As such, In 2016 the well known OTA, Expedia's second quarter gross bookings for that year grew by 25% (year-to-year) to $18.8 billion and expected to continue to increase. In most countries or regions around the world, online bookings are seeing healthy growth. According to Market Realist, online bookings are accounted for more than 40% of total travel sales. And while many studies seem to refer mostly to countries like US and UK, the digital boom has impacted the travel and tourism industry on a very global scale. (Gabay, 2017.)

2.2.3   The Influence of Millennials and its Impact on Digital travel Trends

Millennials are considered as the travel industry's most influential customer and have very important role to play as they are predominantly responsible for the changing way we travel and consume products and services from the industry today. Millennials, also known as Generation Y, born between 1980s to mid 1990s are a generation that are the biggest influencers on technology today. A generation that is also referred to as "digital natives". (Bergman, 2014.)

Companies are paying close attention to the way Millennials are shaping the industry as they are very well impacting the digital travel trends that we see today. According to Expedia's Future of Travel Study, 49% of Millennials plan and book trips on their smartphones, use apps that deliver reviews, last-minute discounts and are closely monitoring flight statuses, influencing the where, when, and how aspect of travel more than ever before. More than 40% of Millennials share a travel experience on social media during and after their trip, delivering first-hand rates, service and experience through the swift ease of online platforms. (Bergman, 2014.)

New Innovative Apps, Digital platforms and websites Targeting Millennials

The decision of travel planning and booking is faster than ever before due to Millennials having everything that their fingertips. With this trend in mind, start-ups and travel companies are creating mobile apps such as Wi-Fi Finder, Hotel Tonight and City Maps 2Go Offline Maps, emerging on the market at a fast rate to provide travelers with very useful information just within the reach of their smartphone. Moreover, companies such as Virgin America and spending more efforts in optimizing their website to be more responsive and targeted to specific travelers. (Bergman, 2014.)

As mentioned in the above text, digital self-service and personalization based on preference become the norm. Millennials are perhaps impatient, yet self-reliant and service oriented, which then brings the opportunity for many new startups to enter the industry and change things for the better moving things forward and adapting well to the current market trends. (Bergman, 2014.)

Keeping up with generational demands will be crucial more than ever before. As technology and digital savviness increases, the demand of easy-to-use apps, platforms and

streamlines websites are only the beginning. The trend for the near future will be expected to have faster response times on these platforms, multiple touch points and more of a personalized experience. As travel companies adapt to the influence of Millennials on digital trends in the travel industry, companies should be aware and be open to new ideas but also look to solutions that will be for long-term objectives in their business. (Bergman, 2014.)

In conclusion to the Millennials and their influence to shaping digital travel trends, following these trends is not always easy to do. However, it's crucial that companies look beyond what's working not only for today, but what will work for the near future.

2.2.4 Mobile Disruption

Mobile has impacted our everyday lives, including how we interact with each other and how we consume in general. Although mobile has been around for years now, in the travel in industry, mobile has significantly disrupted online distribution, marketing, customer service, and the general decision-making process. (Gonzalo, 2016.)

As social content sharing has been evident in the travel industry, the disruption of mobile turns to collaboration. A good example of industry disruption are service providers such as Airbnb or Uber. These providers are creating a 'sharing economy' which is disrupting the traditional service providers for accommodation and transportation i.e taxi companies. As we start to see more and more of these disruptors, especially the more popular ones, travel companies will need to incorporate mobile technology and consumer behaviors into their strategy. Mobile impact the travel industry significantly. Increasingly, travelers are researching and looking up information about destinations, holiday ideas, and places to stay all via mobile. This is clear that innovation needs to be considered for the way travel suppliers interact with customers before, during and after their trips. (bizibl 2017; O'Neill, 2015.)

So what would be an example solution? Faster and more user-friendly sites, enhanced customer experience, and responsive design should be the priority. Part of this would include integrated booking functionality into mobile offerings. Travel businesses need to provide new ways for travelers to have a more enhanced customer journey, a self-guided journey that converts across multiple devices. For example, the customer journey via mobile could be booking a flight on the way to the airport or ordering room service while in a meeting. Mobile integration could be on smartphones, tablets or at a kiosk at the airport or

even at the destination. The key opportunity for travel brands is to make use of the mobile solutions and new ways for innovative strategies via mobile. (Bizibl 2017)

Customer experience design via mobile (or any) is now crucial for travel brands to take opportunity of. Travelers are looking for an experience and what better way to do so than share the experience through mobile innovation. Thinking outside the box can make the travelers trip much more memorable. PhoCusWright research shows that 25% of all travel bookings in the US will occur via smartphones in 2015. (Bizibl 2017.)

2.2.5 Mobile Payment Processors

In addition to mobile disruption, payment processors via mobile have also become a part of the big trend. Payment processors are becoming much more widely used and travel companies are starting to jump onto the opportunity to integrate them with their online integration. As big brands such as Apple and their payment processor, ApplePay continues to expand operations globally, Google has also announced the plans to expand to Android Pay (starting in 2015). Meanwhile, other big payment processor brands such as PayPal continue to thrive very well in the online sphere. (DigitalTravelPort, 2015)

The start-up company Feedbackly hase also created a unique payment processor tool that ensures a smooth payment process for customers, proven to dramatically increase the rate of successful conversions and turning leads into instant sales through smart upselling tactics. This sort of tool would be of particular interests to many businesses in the travel sectors and would certainly be beneficial to drive sales and customer engagement. Travel companies and airlines have a large opportunity to increase new and existing mobile revenues by bringing on new payment processor tools and strategies for better travel retail experience. According to Feedbackly, clients who use their payment processor tools can sell over 20% more with integrated payment process feedback. Income can increase per online payment processes with customer experience survey, instant upsell offers via integrated payment processing, online widget/plugin and POS feedback. This alone is a great example of a company who has harnessed the innovation of today's mobile payment processor trends and the need of it industry wide. (DigitalTravelPort, 2015.)

Emarketer published an article predicting that three quarters of online travel search will come from mobile, generating 51% of online travel revenues. Although, mobile is not exactly a trend anymore, the disruption of mobile and it's need for integrated solutions is still very well apart of the trend and significantly shaping consumerism in the travel industry. (DigitalTravelPort, 2015.)

2.2.6 Digital Experience Optimization

With the amount of internet resources and amount of online channels for consumers to absorb, consumers look for comprehensive and quick ways to understand the market. Travel meta search for example will continue to grow and is one of the fastest moving trends, according to digital researchers L2, 39% of Millennials source their travel via metasearch rather than traditional online travel agencies (OTA's). Travel agencies will need to move beyond just travel listings and consider to communicate in a cross-cultural context to serve to travelers on a global level. Consumers will view OTA metasearch as an efficient and quick way to get a quick view of the market. (O'Neill, 2015.)

Furthermore, both Local search results (Local SEO) and "international" organic search engine optimization (SEO) on such as Google, Bing or Yahoo is one of the best and sustainable ways to bring forth search results to exactly what travelers are looking for online. Organic search is (in 2017 and beyond) the biggest source of digital traffic and lead generation. So long as Google exists, it will continue to drive highly targeted users to billions of search queries every single day. The tourism industry alone is one of the fasted growing industries most of which relies solely on the internet. So another words, travel brands must incorporate SEO best practices. Google not only ranks websites based on keywords, links and relevant content, but also considers the site experience to the visitor along with social media signals. In a nutshell, SEO is what helps rank sites higher in the search engines, and Google determines how well brands are on the the value provided to the relevant audience based on how the content is viewed and shared across social media channels. (O'Neill, 2015.)

According to Mckinsey & Company.com and Bizibl (2017), businesses should have an innovative approach to the consumer decision journey, focusing on three main areas:

Discovery stage

- Developing strategies by analyzing customer experiences and behaviors with the business brand, including indications from social media data and mobile interaction

Design

- Designing engaging and tailored customer experience that matches with the decision making journey of the consumer.

Delivery stage

- Engaging with travelers with a personal approach at every point of the customer journey by ensuring collaboration and communication between cross-functional teams or digital tools.

For travel companies to succeed in today's competitive online marketplace, it's crucial to address these trends on their own sites and also third-party sites presenting information about them. Travelers will simple choose the brands who have optimal customer experience through omnichannel strategy, taking the necessary steps to understand customers and tailor to their preference. (Bizibl 2017)

2.2.7   Social media advertising

Social media has played a significant role in shaping the travel industry online and influencing consumers. And while most of the popular social networks are free to create accounts and company pages, some of these popular platforms are now moving towards a paid service for company brands to use. Having an online presence across these various social media channels is still possible, i.e via Pinterest or Twitter without having to reverting to ads. Many travel brands, hotels and attractions still do a great job at managing their accounts on places like TripAdvisor, Google Reviews, or Yelp without having to revert to paid options. (Gonzalo, 2016.)

But as we see more and more popular brands taking the opportunity to use social media as a form of free marketing, it's more than likely that many of these social media platforms will start to require brands to spend money on marketing. Facebook, one of the biggest and most widely used social media platforms now requires companies to have some level of marketing money to be spent on their service in order to reach the ideal target audience through Facebook. In addition, platforms like Instagram are decreasing in organic engagement levels (non paid advertising), meaning that paid social media advertising will be more on the rise for these popular used platforms in order to reach the ideal target audience. We can expect to see more marketers to include a marketing spend on paid social media advertising. (Gonzalo, 2016.)

2.2.8   The Rise of Content Engagement

In correlation to digital trends, content is and always will be vital. However, it's importance to the travel industry is significant and being a key driver for user engagement and brand awareness. (Vivion, 2013.)

Firstly, digital content refers to any sort of digital media, whether it be through visuals, videos, or writing. While each of these aspects of digital content are highly important when reaching to a certain target audience. Visuals have become foremost important in the digital era and travel is especially suited to visual media online. (Gonzalo, 2016.)

Today, we are seeing that multimedia content is being shared across various digital channels, but on the downside, being difficult to penetrate through the clutter of "noise" throughout the internet. For example, on Youtube there is more than 300 hours of content downloaded every single minute. Over 8 billion video views daily on Facebook. More than 350 million photos shared on Whatsapp. This is only an example of a few but it's a strong indication that content is what drives user engagement. (Gonzalo, 2016.)

However, due to the amount of content there is on the web, consumers (especially Millennials) have less patience and attention span because they are exposed to the dense amount of content on a daily basis. This includes videos, images, blogs, news, web series, promotions, ads etc. So while patients must be embraced, travel brands must determine how to stand out from the crowd and get their message across. A mix of both original content and also paid media will be necessary to any digital marketing approach. (Gonzalo, 2016.)

2.2.9   Video Marketing & Drone Photography

In relation to content, storytelling through compelling videos and images is by far one of the best ways to do marketing. Whether it be a destination, an attraction, or for a hotel telling a story through visuals is key. This is a trend that's increasingly on the ride and travel brands, especially destinations are using this as a way to enhance the audience engagement. (Allen, 2016.)

A picture may be worth a thousand words, video is worth a million. Reading about a destinations may be informative, but nowadays travelers want to immerse themselves even more by getting a real feel for what they may experience. Thus, delivering multi-media and especially video plays a crucial role in attracting and engaging with travelers worldwide. (London.wtm.com 2017.)

Travel brands can embrace these stories created by employees, clients, or locals and this concept of storytelling can be done through videos or photos shared by users on Facebook, Youtube, Instagram or Pinterest for example. Brands can then forward these user-generated content onto other content platforms such as other social media accounts, websites, blogs or newsletters. (Allen, 2016)

For example, Marriott hotel had done video marketing through the eyes of the traveler while experiencing Latin America and the Caribbean where many associated properties lended a GoPro to travelers so they can share moments in their own view. Video marketing is often seen as costly, however with the trend of drones now in the market, the travel industry is seeing drones as another way for affordable marketing. Depending on the service provided, drones can be quite affordable if looking to get nice captivating aerial footage. (Gonzalo, 2016.)

With the increasing popularity for people to use drones, it's also becoming popular for tourists to use them while on a holiday. The selfie-stick is becoming a trend of the recent past and the drone is taking over. Although drones are much more expensive than a selfie-stick, drones can give some amazing aerial footage that no camera or phone could otherwise capture. While this trend quickly picks up, destinations and travel brands jump on board to use drone video capturing and photography as a way to do new style marketing. (Shu, 2016.)

According to Octoly reports, user-generated videos about brands were viewed 10 times more often than official branded videos on Youtube. According to Youtube, 80% of posted content comes from outside United States.(Bizible 2017.)

The aim is to a deliver multimedia experience quickly, otherwise travelers will look elsewhere from the brand and site. Furthermore, according to Octoly's report, studies had shown that nearly 50% of consumers expect a webpage to load in two seconds or less. This is one reason why video marketing is a good way to capture a user's attention and ultimately lead site visitors into customers. Internationally, video traffic on the internet will be 55% of all consumer online traffic in 2016 (Cisco 2017;Bizible 2017).

2.2.10 Remarketing As an Increasing Digital Travel Trend

Remarketing, or also referred to as smart advertising is one of the trends today that travel brands are seeing to be very useful in terms of marketing. The problem that many travel companies may face is keeping visitors returning to their website. And despite all of a company's efforts, 92% of visitors will never return to your website, with an offer to bring them back. Although remarketing is not anything new, the travel industry is using this more and more to target potential customers to come back to their site and lead to higher conversions. (Gonzalo, 2016.)

Remarketing is something that, as apart of these digital trends, is a marketing method that should be implemented. There are even tools such as Ve Interactive that create a pop-up offer that remains open on the user's computer. When the user closes the web browser, later on that day, the pop-up is still there with an offer to entice them the user to go back to the site. Retargeting is simplifying target the potential users into leads, and from leads to conversions, and from conversion into sales. (Gonzalo, 2016.)

3 Digital Marketing Trends

This chapter discuses about the connection between digital trends and the way businesses specifically do marketing online, in 2017 and beyond. Today, marketing has been reshaped by global digitalization and companies today look to innovative ways to stay ahead of the competition for future success industry wide. This now brings me to the way businesses will harness a new approach to digital trends and online immersion. Marketing. Traditional marketing to digital marketing. First let's define fundamentally what the meaning of marketing is.

3.1 Definition of digital marketing

According to Wikipedia (2017) **"**Marketing is the study and management of exchange relationships. The American Marketing Association has defined marketing as "the activity, set of institutions, and processes for creating, communicating, delivering, and exchanging offerings that have value for customers, clients, partners, and society at large."

Digital marketing Hubspot (2017) defines like: Digital marketing is an umbrella term for the marketing of products or services using digital technologies, mainly on the Internet, but also including mobile phones, display advertising, and any other digital medium."

Compared to about 10 years ago, marketing trends in businesses have changed significantly, or at least for those who have adapted to current trends. Marketing is a field dominated by those with the foresight to plan ahead and anticipate changes and digital integration has become a crucial aspect to the way marketers reach to consumers. The merge from traditional marketing to digital marketing has simply become a necessity, especially for those where the majority of their audience is online. (Olenski, 2017.)

Visibility is one key aspect of marketing that will not change, ever. Pre and post digital transformation revolves around how consumers see your business or brand. Focus is also important and is considered often be a challenge. Bigger businesses will most likely have a larger and more diverse customer base and having data for this is a big advantage. But the challenge faced with focus is how to properly use the data, and how to increase conversions. However, paying attention to what's happening on the internet can offer some valuable insights for the future. (Olenski, 2017.)

Predicting digital marketing trends is difficult. However, certain online commentators, researchers, and online marketing experts have been able to foresee digital marketing in-

sights and techniques based on research made from marketers around the world. The online industry is moving fast and only to move faster. But based on research made, digital marketers can prepare accordingly. So let's look at current trends in digital marketing. (Languagewire 2017.) Figure 1 shows that ad blockers are increasing and thus the importance producing of organic content is crucial.
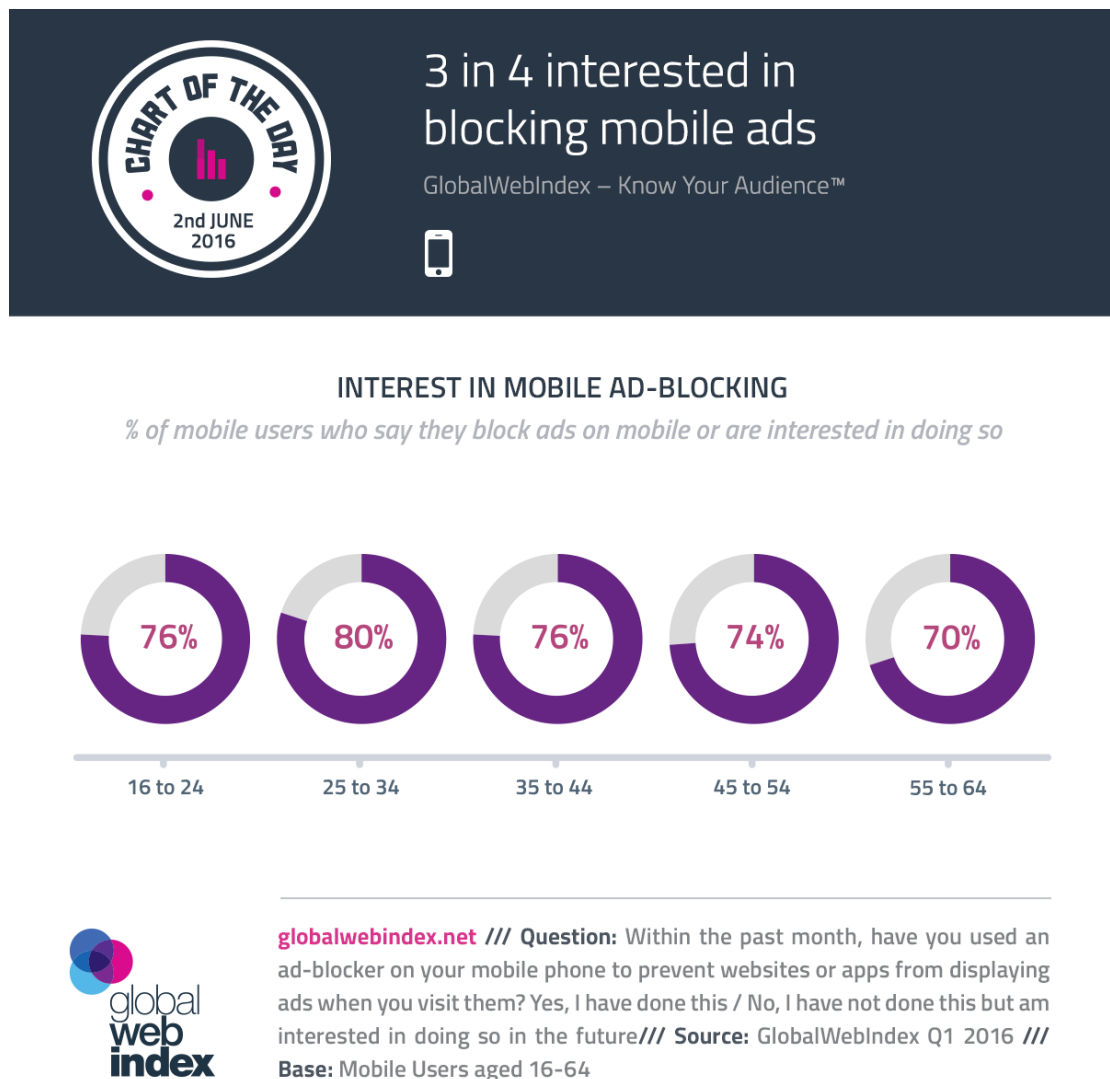

Figure 1. Content as a digital trend (Languagewire 2017)

Content is King: Content is king and always will be, but the demand for better content will continue to grow as more people spend more time on multiple devices, actively searching for content of their interest. However, there is a shift in the types of content that people want to engage with digitally. People often want to connect with a brand, but they also want content to really speak and connect to them personally. Visual content is a very

good example of better content that people want more of. According to Hubspot, here you can see their report on the future of content marketing.
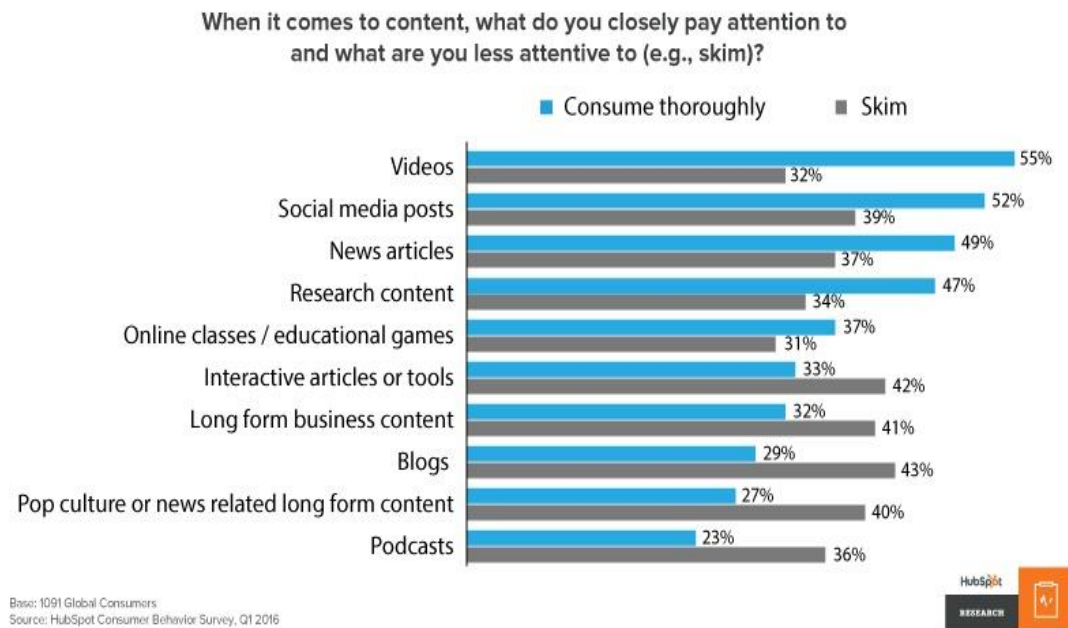

When it comes to content, what do you closely pay attention to and what are you less attentive to (e.g., skim)?

■ Consume thoroughly   ■ Skim

	Consume thoroughly	Skim
Videos	55%	32%
Social media posts	52%	39%
News articles	49%	37%
Research content	47%	34%
Online classes / educational games	37%	31%
Interactive articles or tools	33%	42%
Long form business content	32%	41%
Blogs	29%	43%
Pop culture or news related long form content	27%	40%
Podcasts	23%	36%

Base: 1091 Global Consumers
Source: HubSpot Consumer Behavior Survey, Q1 2016

Figure 2. Content consumption trends (Hubspot 2016.)

In terms of digital marketing and being noticed, content is one of the number one factors and it's what drives search engine results, more content the better. However, producing quality and relevant content is now more important than ever and keeping up with the cloud of competition make it challenging to really retain the audience. (Languagewire 2017.)

3.2   Digital Marketing and It's Importance to Travel & Tourism

Since the boom of the internet and its rapidly fast growth just over the recent past 10 years, not only have digital trends sprung out into popularity, but also the new form of marketing which takes place online. New ways to reach consumers, connect and promote brands, products and services in ways that would have never been possible before. While many companies today are still catching up to digital integration and trends, many of these companies are still using traditional methods. It's important to note that traditional methods should be discarded, however digital marketing has simply become an absolute necessity for companies looking to reach out to consumers of today. (Behl, 2016)

Here below are brief reasons why digital marketing is necessary (ITU 2017):

The potential For Reach: In 2014, nearly 3 billion people has internet access. Nearly 1 out of 3 people in the developing world are online. When these 3 billion people need a solution for a problem, they turn to search engines, like Google. A business needs to be visible online when someone searches for information, products or services. Travel and tourism relies quite a lot on the internet due to the massive online audience via multi-media channels available. (Serpshake 2017)

It's Effectiveness: Digital marketing can be a lot more effective than traditional media, i.e. print ads or billboard ads. With digital marketing, you can reach an online audience on the go (also now that more than 80% of people use a smart phone). You can also establish an audience or following via social media sites, email lists and re-targeting options. Tradition-al marketing is no of course still very important for the tourism industry, however without the immersion of online presence and strategy, reaching online customers will become difficult without it. (also Serpshake 2017)

It's Return on Investment (ROI): The cost of internet marketing compared to traditional marketing makes internet marketing more ideal. For example, a 30-second ad during a big sporting event such as the Olympic games could cost millions of dollars. A TV ad could cost tens of thousands of dollars. But neither of these will exactly reach the ideal target audience. However, with digital marketing, it's highly targeted towards potential customers which are online and costs a less than traditional media advertising. (also Serpshake 2017)

4   Digital Marketing Strategies in Travel & Tourism

This chapter presents digital marketing strategies that a travel business can incorporate to stay current among the big trends happening. Below I will explain about some of the most essential digital marketing solutions and strategies that every travel company can benefit from and should consider including. (Leena 2016, LoreDigital 2017)

4.1   Website

Having a website is going to be the first and foremost obvious necessity to having any sort of online presence and it all starts with that. Your website is essentially your business card on the internet, it's what sets you apart and displays who you are, what your business does, what your business offers, and where customers will go to find your brand online, etc. (Espley, 2014.)

Gone are the days where "just" having a website live on the web is good enough. Nowadays, your website needs to be user friendly, informative captivating, and attractive bringing quick attention to users or travelers and not losing their attention. Your website is fundamentally where you make sales and gather prospective leads. So, having a website is the basic ingredient for any online marketing strategy. Another important aspect of having a website is to make sure that it's quick to load, responsive and viewable on all devices and screen sizes. If your website is not functioning properly or is too slow to load, your website visitors will quickly steer away and move elsewhere, perhaps even onto your competition. (Barone 2011: Mills 2014.)

In today's competitive online space, websites should come with various digital strategy (more on this below). Hotel and Travel websites should be equipped with a blog, Google maps, integrated social media, booking engine and payment processor (if applicable), and of course the essential main pages you would include on any website, i.e nice looking home page, about page, contact page, and any pages for services and products. (Espley, 2014.)

Having a website is the backbone to any digital online presence and when having a website, you can then expand your digital presence through relevant marketing strategies which are explained below. (Espley, 2014.)

4.2   Search Engine Optimization (SEO)

Now that we've briefly established the importance to having a website, the next crucially important strategy to put in place is search engine optimization (SEO). What's the purpose of having a website if no one can find you online right? This is where search engines come into play. Search engines such as Google or Yahoo are where users will typically go to type in a certain keyword or phrase when looking for a particular source of information, service or product online. After a search is made, a website would then appear according to the search. People are searching for information literally all the time and that's what makes search engines such a powerful tool. While a website is the core ingredient to having any online presence, SEO is going to be what helps your website get found on the search engines. SEO is considered as the "umbrella" that supports all else for digital marketing strategies. (Moz 2017.)

Over the recent years, SEO has become complex and consistently changing due to Google's algorithms, making it more technical to understand. Though, in a nutshell, SEO is the process of optimizing your website's content with strategically selected phrases, terms and keywords. The goal is to increase a website in the SERP's (search engine results pages), increasing the site to the first page of results via Google and or Yahoo for example. In some cases, it's quite possible to increase a site's ranking to the very first entry. (Tater 2017.)

When analyzing SERP rankings, search engines analyze both off-site and on-site factors. On-site refers to the many various aspects of web page design which includes on-page content, internal content links, and title tags and more. The off-site factors include external site that channel to the site, such as backlinks from blogs, social media profiles, product or service review sites, directory listings, from other relevant websites, citations or even unaffiliated websites. (Tater 2017.)

For instance, a backlink is a link pointing to your website from another website and Google sees this as a "referral" or "vote" that your site is worthy of ranking. So, the more high quality backlinks you have from other relevant travel industry sites the higher you will rank. Ideally, your website needs to be positioned at the top of Google results for as many keywords and phrases related to your industry as possible, i.e your business+location, or service+location. This aspect to SEO is also known as link building. (Serpshake 2017.)

The way Search engine results work are based on mathematical algorithms that analyze and compare the qualities of other competing sites. These methods determine how well a site ranks according to relevant phrases, terms and keywords that have been searched and entered. The algorithms from search engines such as Google, crawl these sites and find the data and signals that make a site relevant and point to other sites as well. The main objective of SEO is to ensure that a website appears with the best search matches possible. Ultimately, the website should attract potential targeted viewers to visit the site, which could potentially increase leads, sales and conversions. (Tater 2017)

It's important to ensure that your website and other related content ranks well in the search engines like Google. A lot of SEO determinants relies on how attractive and user-friendly your content is for the search engines (i.e content that's made for real humans to read and makes sense) and as mentioned how well structures your site is and how relevant content is. (Tater 2017.)

For example, if someone were to search the term 'Best Travel Package to Phuket', it's natural that the user will click on the website that shows up as the first page result in the search engine results pages (SERP's). Google's algorithms decide which websites will rank on the SERPs based on authoritative relevant content, so by this it's important to optimize your website accordingly. One method is to incorporate strategic keywords into the site text to enhance the relevance of your website to users. (Muriah, 2015.)

Simply put, SEO is very important for travel and tourism. Because the travel industry is very competitive, especially online, targeting a word like 'holiday' is simply not enough and will be too hard to rank for among the dense noise of competition. Instead, more specific words should be targeted, like 'Ski holiday in Finland' for example. So, for travel companies, a long-tail approach - focusing on specific and relevant keywords and phrases with lower search volume but lower competition levels (if possible) is a great way to reach your audience. (Muriah, 2015.)

Here is a brief description and visual diagram of what's involved in SEO practices (Etravelseo 2017):

ON-SITE
- **On-site Content** - Keyword optimized content that is relevant and informative.
- **Content links Internally** – Links to other relevant pages on-site and off-site (to other sites). This gives credibility and authority to a website.
- **Title Tags** - title tags which include relevant keywords, phrases and terms

- **Canonicalization** - ensuring that the search engine bots are able to crawl the site and understand the website with no errors.
- **Site structure and Sitemap** - to enable search engine bots to crawl your website effectively and efficiently

<div align="center">

OFF-SITE

</div>

- **Backlinks** - Backlinks that direct from external site sources to the main site to give a website credibility and also drive web traffic.
- **Social Media** - active social media presence to ensure site traffic, brand loyalty, and improve brands online authority
- **Off-site citations** - citation reference to a website, i.e directory listings, review sites, and other local sites that point signals to the website.
- **Site structure and Sitemap** – ensures the search engine bots to scan and crawl a website properly so that the site is set up for the search engines.

Figure 3. Process of search engine practices (Etravelseo, 2017)

4.2.1   SEO as a Sustainable Practice For Online Travel Marketing

SEO is vital to any online campaigning and for long-term search results. Organic search is (in 2017 and beyond) the biggest source of digital traffic and lead generation. So long as

Google exists, it will continue to drive highly targeted users to billions of search queries every single day. The tourism industry alone is one of the fasted growing industries most of which relies solely on the internet to reach consumers. (Serpshake. 2017.)

With the amount of internet users rapidly growing at a massive rate, every tourism related business (or any) should spend a portion of their marketing budget on obtaining top search results for keywords related to their business (because if your customers cannot find you, you're simply losing business to your competition). (Serpshake, 2017.)

The more keywords and phrases that you rank for, the more traffic you will receive. What happens if users search for a product or service that you offer but you don't appear in the search engines, or your competitors outranks you? The outcome is simply that you lost a potential sale that clicked right onto your competitors site. (Serpshake 2017)

Additionally, search engines are also increasingly targeting social media content. Many travel companies will hire an SEO expert or seek out a specialized digital agency to work on on-going SEO for them. However, given the time, patience, understanding and re-sources, there is also plenty of cost-free methods that can be put into practice to ensure stronger SEO, but the ultimate importance is that it's vital to create good content that peo-ple are actually searching for and will share with friends and connections. So in conclu-sion, search engine optimization is an absolute necessity for travel companies today and for tomorrow. (Espley, 2014)

4.2.2   Local SEO

Using search engine optimization as a marketing tool is pinnacle to online success. With it you can increase rankings in the search engine and even market directly to certain search queries. However, what if a business wants to target local customers? This is now where local SEO strategies come in. It allows local businesses to make the most out of their search engine marketing by focusing efforts on a specific geographic location. For exam-ple, if a hotel is situated along a major traffic route in the city, or main demographic are repeat local customers at a casino or tourist attraction, local SEO is certainly an asset and smart activity to focus on. (Meriah 2015; Hulleman 2015)

Benefiting from local SEO is suitable for any size business or expertise, especially those that operate within a 10-30 kilometer radius, it helps them focus on customers within their locality and it can also help businesses who operate nationwide by assisting them increas-ing traffic from specific areas of the country. (Meriah 2015)

The travel industry is quite unique compared to many other industries in regards to search engine optimization. The challenge for many travel companies is facing the dilemma between "local and international" SEO. Whether the business is a travel agency, tour operator, hotel or resort that caters exclusively to travelers and tourists, and based on budget and resources, the decision should be made as to whether or not the focus should be targeting local search, or a wider geographic area, or even both. (Meriah 2015),

4.2.3 How Hotel and Travel Companies Can Benefit from Local SEO

As mentioned previously, if a hotel or travel businesses operates from a physical address then optimizing for local SEO is crucial so that location based results show up and also appear on the Google maps displayed on the top of the search results page. (Meriah 2015),

In order to gain these results, certain measures should be implemented such as the examples listed below (Meriah 2015):

- Set up Google My Business Page
- Ensuring that the hotel or travel business name/address/phone number are listed in local online directories and is the info aligns exactly to what's on your website's contact page
- Optimizing site content for specific keywords
- Obtain positive online reviews from customers
- Obtain backlinks from authoritative websites in the region, i.e online local newspaper, blogs, local directories etc.

Another beneficial aspect to local SEO applies to travel agents functioning independently within a franchise travel agency office environment. And for those individuals, attempting to rank on search as an independent travel agency in the same manner as a real estate agent would when they would work under the branch of a real estate agency. (Meriah 2015)

For the travel agency, the brand will want to establish itself on the search engines at the same physical address just as the agencies own travel agents would have on their business cards. In a situation such as this, a Google My Business profile page must be set up for each individual personal agent and a separate page specifically made for the agency

brand (both of which would reside at the same address). Moreover, it's important to note that an individual must not attempt to pass themselves off as the office, but rather the office manages it's own page. In addition, there should be no duplication of brands at the same address within Google My Business page titles. (Meriah 2015)

Here is an example of what a travel agency and travel agent Google page should look like:

- Agency (correct G+ page title): Holiday Travel Trips - Melbourne VIC
- Agent (incorrect G+ page title): Jack Williams, Travel Agent, Holiday Travel Trips - Melbourne VIC
- Agent (correct G+ page title): Jack Williams, Travel Agent

As for Travel businesses that do **not** have physical office, then it's very important to establish certain targeted keywords that are targeted to the niche that the travel agency specializes on. If the business operates and manages as an online travel business that can serve a wider geographic area, then it becomes more about the end-consumer rather than the proximity of the local businesses and thus would benefit from organic SEO. (Meriah 2015),

This would then be more focused on reaching a certain type of traveler. Nowadays, competition online in the travel industry is fierce, so going up against the big top-tier brands such as Expedia, Orbitz, Booking.com, or Hotels.com, is going to be a challenging task which is why travel agencies operating within a niche are much better off. For example, a travel company offering tailored packages on luxury holidays, eco-tourism, or jazz club tours etc. and does not need to have a physical presence in a certain postal code area to gain a strategic advantage on Google. (Meriah 2015),

So for this type of SEO strategy, the aim would be to optimize the travel business's site for the demographic of luxury seeking tourists, the traveling jazz enthusiast, or the niche in eco-tourism, and so on. Various SEO implementation and strategy such as optimizing title tags, meta descriptions, heading tags, keyword research, and updated content via blogging. This is just a glimpse of some SEO that should be addressed to reach the targeted consumer. (Meriah 2015)

Lastly, in regards to SEO, regardless of the category that a travel business will pursue whether it be Local SEO strategy or organic "international" SEO strategy. It will also be beneficial to have content specific landing pages to enhance online search for various

locations or service/product offerings. A good example for this would be a tour operator and activities company that focuses on music and cultural tourism that say for example sells tours to different jazz venues and museums around New York City. So if serving the New York City center area, a good strategy would be to create unique pages for Manhattan, Lower Manhattan, Brooklyn, Queens, Midtown, and Harlem, and optimize unique content for each page. The reason being, is because the tour company operating out of i.e Manhattan can still capture visitors searching for information on Jazz Club Tours around the New York City area. (Meriah 2015)

Another very useful example would be for a tour company that specializes in eco-tourism for example. The travel operator selling eco-tourism tours would want to create unique pages for each geographic region that they offer packages for, however for each category, i.e coastal, glacial, rain forest etc. It's important to internally link each of these unique pages to one another, allowing for not only user flow, but also allowing Google to see this as relevant and authoritative within the travel niche that's focused on. After Google analyses this, a site will then start naturally improving its rank in the search results pages. (Meriah 2015)

4.3   Social Media Marketing in the Travel Industry

Social media has changed the way that many companies communicate with and market to their consumers. Across all travel and tourism sectors, the rise of the internet and increased popularity of social media platforms has truly altered travel and tourism marketing and the way consumers use it to influence travel. It's also fair to say that social media has no longer become simply a trend or a fad but a part of our daily lives and will most likely continue to be considering it's huge impact it has made globally. (Sanfilippo, 2017)

Right from the way travelers research and plan a potential destination to the activities they wish to partake in, to deciding which restaurant they will dine at. The new ways that consumers use social media to make purchasing decisions and influence others, as well as engaging with travel brands has really impacted the travel and tourism industry in many ways. (Sanfilippo, 2017)

For travel brands looking to reach consumers, social media has a wealth of opportunities. Today, we can see that travel can influence users by a review or travel tip from a friend, an in-flight selfie on Instagram, or a tweet with a hashtag of the hotel you are staying at, these travel consumer trends are influenced in customers through these various given

social media channels. Travel brands can easily use social media as a marketing tool to not only connect with travelers but also promote their brand and even sell services through a tactful way. (Sanfilippo, 2017)

Social media posts for example can be used to drive targeted traffic to a site and also help boost a site's SEO. Digital agencies such as The Content Factory have seen a single link on Reddit drive over 20,000 visitors in one weekend and links submitted to StumpleUpon go from only a few visitors a day to hundreds. This is one huge indication that travel brands need to capitalize on social media marketing strategies. (Contentfac, 2017)

While social media is great for engaging with followers and users, it has a huge benefit to SEO. Using The Content Factory as an example again, here is a quick case study that they had done: Astroglide is one of TCF's clients, and in less than a year The Content Factory got the website significantly to the top 100 SERPs for 15,000 new keywords. As a result, traffic the website has increased dramatically. A solid and consistent presence on Facebook Twitter and other social media channels were a big part of that success. (Contentfac, 2017)

Although The Content Factory's case study was not conducted on a travel or tourism brand, it's still a good example of how social media marketing can be significantly used draw attention to a brand and it's search engine optimization efforts. (Contentfac, 2017)

4.3.1   Social media strategies for Travel brands

The point of social media platforms is for social sharing and connecting in a social community online. But as a travel marketer, it's beneficial to use social media channels to keep the following audience engaged on content that is being posted. Relevant industry travel news for one is a good way to keep audience attention. For example if you are a flight comparison site, it may be good to share related economic news from aviation stories. The same goes for hotels or tour operators, they need to keep their followers in the loops when it comes to important local events and new attractions in the local region. (Sanfilippo, 2017)

Visualizations are crucial. Picture and video heavy platforms like Youtube, Instagram, Facebook, and Pinterest are very useful to use. Many consumers may not have heard of your company or may not be actively looking for your company, which is why social media

is one way to show them what they are missing out on, or at least build up a following. (Sanfilippo, 2017)

Social media is now so widely used that it's sometimes hard to stand out from the crowded, even though visuals, which is why travel brands need to think outside the box when getting the message out there. (Sanfilippo, 2017)

Especially for tourism destinations, many of which would like to target global foreign markets, using social media is becoming a must have, but which many often perhaps forget about is the most successful emerging markets that are quickly developing in the travel industry - China. (Sanfilippo, 2017)

We often think of Facebook as the most widely used social media platform, and although it is an important large network, China's leading social media platform Weibo has over 100 million daily users, according to eMarketer. This of course, is just one example of a very popular platform which surprisingly is not so well known such as in Europe or United States. However, while it may be difficult to tap into some of these foreign markets through social media marketing in places like China, the most important approach is for travel brands to put content in the right places that's most relevant to the target consumer. There are so many different social media platforms, and while having a marketing strategy on many is beneficial, it's also important for a travel company to find that one/s that works best for them. (Sanfilippo, 2017)

4.4   Content Marketing

"Content marketing is a strategic marketing approach focused on creating and distributing valuable, relevant, and consistent content to attract and retain a clearly-defined audience — and, ultimately, to drive profitable customer action. Instead of pitching your products or services, you are providing truly relevant and useful content to your prospects and customers to help them solve their issues." (Contentmarketinginstitute, 2017)

Content marketing is one of the most important elements that fuels the search engines. It's the creation of engaging content that attracts new and returning customers on the internet, delivering the right message, to the right audience, at the right time. Content is what influences people to visit a website. If there is great content on a website that's rele-

vant to the audience, people will remember and want to come back to visit it. Websites that also have great content typically rank well in the search engines, which is why content marketing plays an important part of Search engine optimization and reaching out to online visitors. Content Marketing can be in the form of articles, blogs, images, videos, social media posts, and industry news for example. (research.skift, 2017)

As digital marketing trends develop, innovative travel marketers leave behind traditional advertising and lean more towards the value of storytelling and reaching the specific target audience through engaging content and establishing long term-relationships. Although the use of content marketing is not new, it is increasingly important now that consumers have access to multiple channels which influence travel decisions. (research.skift, 2017)

Furthermore, content marketing is a powerful tool that helps build communities, enhance brand engagement, increase visibility, user-time spent on a company's site and drive shareability of the travel brand and its message. Like social media, content marketing is also about sending the right message at the right time, to the right audience. (research.skift, 2017)

However, a key factor to successful content marketing is to treat content marketing with "soft selling skills". Content marketing is about building the customer relationship, while not directly selling something to them. Most importantly, understanding the customer habits, concerns, and interests vital. It's all about the customer journey when doing content marketing. (Domke, 2017)
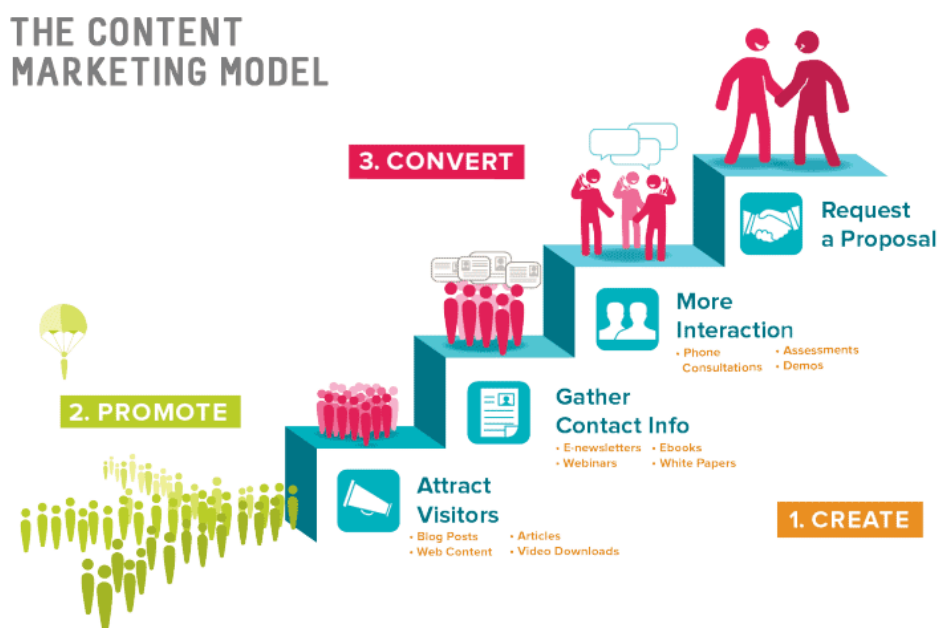
Figure 4: Content marketing process. (travelbounddigital, 2017)

The travelers purchasing journey is complicated. Travelers visit 22 different sites on average of 9.5 sessions before making a purchase, according to Google. However, this is where content marketing plays an important role. (Domke, 2015)

Figure 5 provides a guide to the types of content at each stage:
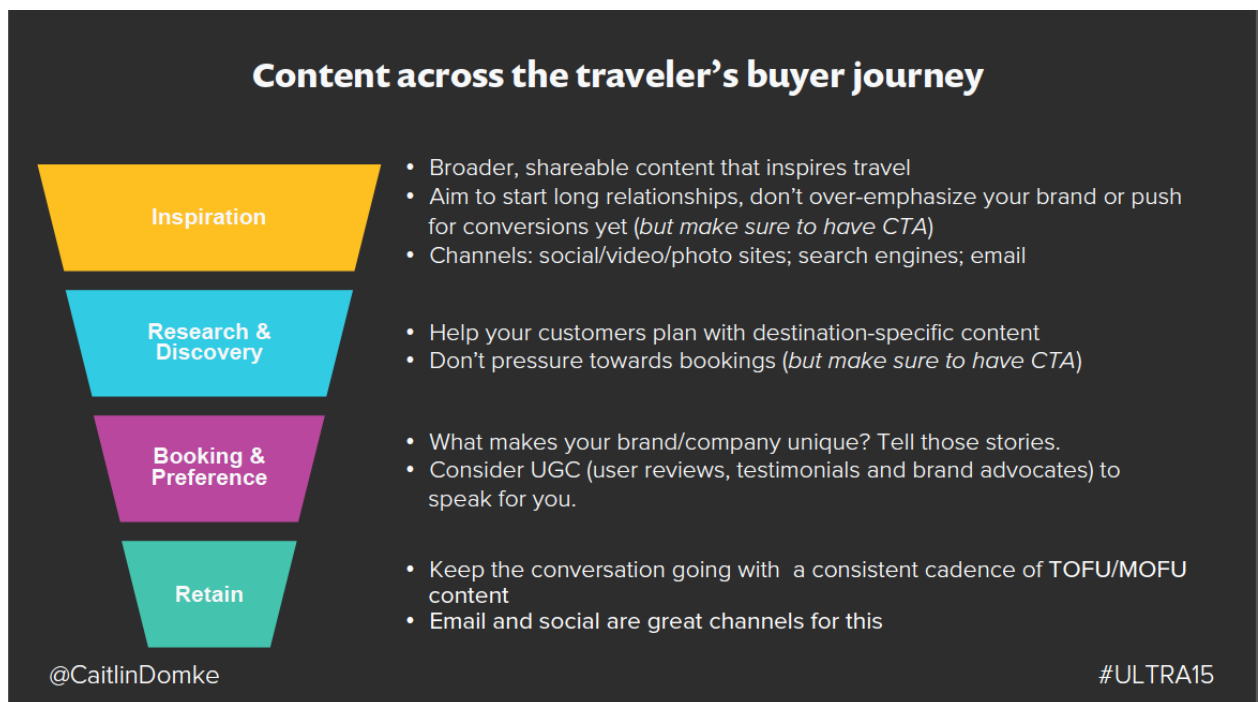
Figure 5: Content process during the buyer's journey (Domke, 2015)

According to Google Insights (Domke,2015):

- 51% of travelers are searching terms related to destinations when starting to plan their travels
- 49% of travelers are searching terms related to activates when considering different ideas for traveling.
- 49% of travelers are searching for terms related to pricing when considering ideas for travel planning

User generated content is another aspect to complementing to content marketing. User generated content is defined as more or less any form of content such as blogs, discussion forums, posts, chats, wikis, tweets, images, review sites, and any forms of media that

has been created by users of an online system, most often made on social media web-sites. (Domke,2015)

The advantage of using user-generated content is really a way to promote positive things about a travel brand. According to Chase Card Services, 95% of travelers will read travel reviews before booking. Review sites are the second most trusted online form of advertising, due to the fact that it's based on customers opinions and experiences. As we have discussed that millennials are having a large impact on digital trends in the travel industry, according to Neilsen, 97% of millennials post on review sites and social networks, sharing experiences with friends while traveling. (Nielsen, 2017; Domke, 2015)

Last but not least, content marketing is about continuously keeping the audience en-gaged. It's important for the travel brand to put content marketing strategy in place. Whether it be in a blog management strategy publishing articles or blog posts every week or few times a month, to sending out newsletters, and or utilizing social media channels on an on-going basis. Travel brands should utilize content with existing customers while also ideally aiming to attract more. (Domke, 2015)

4.5   Paid Search Advertising (PPC)

The next digital marketing solution for any hotel or travel brand to implement is a pay-per-click (PPC) advertising campaign strategy.

Firstly, pay-per-click (PPC) or also known as paid search advertising, is a model of online marketing in which advertisers pay a fee for each time one of their ads is clicked. Funda-mentally, it's a way of buying visits to your site instead of attempting to "earn" the visits through organic search. It's very useful for especially hotel and travel brands because it allows the advertiser to bid for an ad placement in the search engine's sponsored links when someone searches for a certain keyword that is related to the offering that the ad-vertiser selected. (Kim, 2017)

For example, if a tour operator that provides African safari's bids on the keyword "African safari tours" that tour operator's ad might show up in the very top spot on the Google re-sults page, thus leading to instant search results. However, every time that ad is clicked, sending a visitor to the tour operator's website, a small fee charged from the search en-gine (Google) would occur. When a PPC campaign is done well, the potential for return on

investment can be worth it. For example, if a click is $4 per click, but the click results in a $400 sale, then there is a nice profit to be made. (Kim, 2017)

In order to do a PPC campaign well, certain measures need to be implemented, from keyword researching, putting the keywords into well-organized campaigns and ad groups, to setting up landing pages that are optimized and set up for conversions. Search engines like Google reward advertisers who can produce relevant and tactful targeted campaigns by charging less for ads clicks. So therefore, it's important that PPC is strategically done well. (Kim, 2017)

Unlike organic SEO, PPC will bring forth instant results. However, there are pros and cons to both. As mentioned, PPC can potentially give instant results, but a fee occurs per click and the fee can vary depending on the campaign and keyword. Meanwhile, organic SEO provides long-term sustainable results, can be found on the top results of the search engines, but takes much longer time to rank. (Kim, 2017)

Here are two example snippet images of results for both paid search ads and organic search results:

Figure 6: Examples of pay-per-click (PPC) search ads, as displayed in the red box.

As you can see in these two images, the search results that are not shown surrounded by the red box are organic search results, which take time to rank. Moreover, the results shown in the red box are paid ads (PPC).

Furthermore, targeted paid search (PPC) advertising campaigns can be one of the most cost-effective ways to receive leads and create awareness of a brand or for a new business. The way PPC works is that you only pay when someone clicks on your ad. Pay-per-click advertising has the ability of high ROI and may also be costly for some. PPC also gives you the tools to target to a certain demographic of people to help get your website on the first page of Google, for example in the Google keyword planner when using Google Adwords. PPC is particularly a good marketing strategy for new businesses starting out, but of course also very useful for older established brands. Many businesses use PPC search ads for short-term campaigns, selling products or services. Ideally, longer the campaign, the more conversions you can potentially receive. (Chris, 2015)

The main platform tool used in PPC is via Google Adwords. However, with big popular social media platforms on the rise, platforms like Facebook can be used to target consumers through paid ads as well. For some travel brands, Facebook may be more suitable as the customer targeting and profiling can be more specific. (travelbounddigital, 2017)

PPC advertising on the social media platform Facebook very popular and important in regard to paid online marketing. With its cost-efficient PPC model, as it allows brands to connect to potentially millions of Facebook users. Facebook is the world's largest social media network and has a ton of opportunities for business of all size to build brand awareness and promoting products or services. For one example, Facebook PPC advertising allows you to use tools which can segment an audience by interest, age, gender, and geographic location. Also, the millennials and youth are heavily connected on Facebook than most other social media channels, which brings the opportunity to promote your hotel or travel business (or any). (travelbounddigital, 2017)

A few reasons to use Facebook PPC advertising (travelbounddigital, 2017):

- Targeted audience segmentation
- Ability to promote products, service on a low budget
- Reporting tools and display the PPC campaign results
- The potential to reach audience via mobile
- Majority of the audience is youth/millennials
- Over 1.35 billion monthly active users, most widely used social platform

4.6   Email Marketing

Popular established online travel agencies such as Orbitz and Expedia have created smart ways to target travelers looking for the best rates, travel deals, and promotions all through the strategy of email marketing and it's one of the most direct ways to reach existics customers and also receive a potentially high amount of site traffic. (aweber-static, 2017)

Whether the business operation is a hotel, traditional travel agency or online travel site, email marketing campaigns brings direct contact with your site visitors, ensuring them to revert back to your brand the next time they are planning a holiday. According to a study made by Eplison, 63% of customers who signed up for emails from a travel site are more likely to do business through them for future trips. The study also showed that 86% of online customers sign up for emails from travel websites to seek out exclusive offers. (aweber-static, 2017)

These findings show that email marketing is a very useful way to reach customers and receive prospective leads. It also helps to build a relationship between the travel business and the customer and influencing them to come back to the site to plan and book a trip. Without email marketing, you have to depend on your customers to remember your site and visit it when they want to book a holiday or flight. The nice thing about email marketing is it places the message right in the customer's email inbox which they will see your brand on a regular basis and remember you. (Adweber-Statistic, 2017)

Here are some of the best practices used in email marketing (Kiefer Lee, 2012):

1. Ensure that it's easy to subscribe. The signup form should be on the home page and somewhere easily noticeable. The signup form could also be in the site's blog and social media pages i.e Facebook or via Youtube.
2. Let subscribers know what to expect. Subscribers don't always give out there email so easily, so it's important to briefly describe what to expect out of the email signup.
3. Welcome emails after signup. It's a good idea to welcome new subscribers and build the customer relationship at an early stage. Without spamming of course, exclusive content or a special offer could be sent after the initial sign up.

4. Make your newsletters portray your brand. Customizing an email template to make it look more attractive is a great way to capture those leads. One important way would be to have the logo and company colours in the header.

5. Keep it short and sweet. Many people receive several emails a day, so it's good to ensure that your email gets read, and the email content is easy to read and scannable.

6. Responsive Email Templates. Different email platforms and mobile devices display emails differently. It's important to send and test emails out first to see it's received on multiple devices or platforms. According to a study made by ReturnPath, 63% of Americans and 41% of Europeans would either close or delete an email that's not optimized for mobile.

7. Make it Shareable. In the age of social media, shareable content is key to getting the word out there. Ensure that the email content is easy to share and by doing so, include social media links, i.e Facebook and Twitter links to the newsletter so readers can share the content.

8. Keep track of stats. Last but not least, keep track of stat reports to analyze open and click rates. With this you can keep an eye if your numbers are going up or down and you can also determine what works best and what doesn't.

Having an email list is one of the most valuable resources, and if you learn how to treat it right, the cost of doing so will pay for itself. If you can imagine that each person on your list is worth high value, then you can understand immediately how losing several hundreds or simply not even having an email marketing list and strategy could be dangerous to your bottom line. However, implementing an email marketing strategy is nevertheless highly beneficial to an online marketing campaign. (Kissmetrics, 2010)

5   Blog Writing Process and Contribution to Digital Agency Website

In relation to digital trends and marketing strategies in the travel industry. The need for digital marketing services are in demand. For this reason, many new digital marketing agencies are emerging online. However, there is not many currently out there that either have the expertise and knowledge of the travel industry or providing digital marketing services that focus exclusively to the travel and tourism industry.

In correlation to this factor and gap to be filled in the industry today, I have decided to launch my own digital marketing agency that provides services exclusively to the travel industry which specializes in search engine optimization, lead generation, and content marketing. Beginning with first researching what the overall travel industry needs most in regards to digitalization, planning, putting together a team of experts who specialize in specific marketing techniques (as well as my own expertise), and most importantly, creating an agency website, followed by a blogging content strategy for it for viewers to read and follow.

As I have discussed earlier about the importance of content and blogging strategies, content and blogging plays a key role in branding, providing information for those searching for solutions, and also the fact that content determines how websites rank in the search engines. For this reason, blogging has been an important strategy to launch my website.

To first define what a blog is, a blog (or also referred to as weblog or web log) is a site that contains posts (or entries) which appear in chronological order, starting from the most recent entry post. Typically blogs feature text content that site visitors will read, featuring also comments and links to increase user interactivity, as well as contributing content in the search engines when internet users search for information. Blogs are also created by using publishing softeware, which is usually free and accessible through website platforms. (Gunelius, 2017)

According to Susan Gunelius (Gunelius,2017) There are three main terms when referring to the definition of a blog:
Blogging: writing a post (or entry) for a blog
Blogger: A person who writes content for a blog
Blogosphere: The online community of bloggers and blogs

On the internet, today there are over 100 million blogs and more being created daily. It's become important online and offline impacting the world of business, politics, and society.

Today businesses are recognizing the potential of blogs and bloggers as online influencers. With the free tools available, a blog can be easy to create. Nowadays, blogging has become an essential aspect to having any online presence. (Gunelius, 2017)

Blog writing first starts with research, planning, structure, and also personal experience and knowledge of the content to be created. The planning phase starts with doing a basic desktop research and comparing sources, i.e what are people searching for and which keywords are they using to search, what solutions and answers can be provided. For example, travel professionals may be searching on Google 'how to rank my travel website higher in Google' or 'best ways to get more bookings for my travel agency website'. These are just two examples of what a user could possibly be searching for and based on keyword planning, I create my blogs so that over time, my blogs will appear in the search engines so that those searching for that key term will come across my site. My blogs are intended to be informative and also lead to potential customers who would like to use my digital marketing service for their travel related business. (Gunelius, 2017)

The table below shows an overview of my blogs written for my website etravelseo.com. The blogs were written between September 2016 – January 2017.

Table 1. Overview of the blogs

Blog Piece 1	Importance of Online Marketing SEO For The Tourism Industry	http://etravelseo.com/the-importane-of-online-marketing-seo-for-the-tourism-industry/
Blog Piece 2	SEO For Travel & Tourism: How SEO Will Help Bring More Customers To Your Travel Website	http://etravelseo.com/seo-for-travel-tourism-how-seo-will-help-bring-more-customers-to-your-travel-website/
Blog Piece 3	10 SEO Tips For Your Travel Business Online	http://etravelseo.com/10-tips-seo-for-your-travel-business-online/
Blog Piece 4	How To Increase Your Google Ranking For Your Travel Website	http://etravelseo.com/how-to-increase-your-google-ranking-for-your-travel-website/
Blog Piece 5	Blogging For Business and Marketing. Is Blogging Necessary?	http://etravelseo.com/blogging-for-business-and-marketing-is-blogging-necessary/
Blog Piece 6	The Essential Tips To SEO For Tourism Marketing	http://etravelseo.com/the-essential-tips-to-seo-for-tourism-marketing/
Blog Piece 7	Adwords vs SEO: Which One Is Better For Your Travel Website	http://etravelseo.com/adwords-vs-seo-which-one-is-better-your-travel-business/

Blog Piece 8	15 Online Travel Marketing Tips For Independent Hotels And Resorts	http://etravelseo.com/15-online-travel-marketing-tips-for-independent-hotels-and-resorts/

When writing the blogs, I relied on comparative internet sources such as relevant travel and tourism industry authoritative sites and industry reports, from sources such as Tnooz, Skift, European Travel Commission, NewMediaTrendWtach.com, Digital Tourism Think Tank, Tourism Review, Forbes, Moz.com, Google, and more.

At the end of each blog post via the website, my author description can be viewed as:
About the Author

Founder at eTravelSEO, Matthew Roblin is a content creator, entrepreneur, and travel enthusiast. He has worked as a travel coordinator for UNU-WIDER and currently works as project assistant for ToolBox-Travel Marketing & Consulting. He has a University Bachelor's degree in Tourism & Hospitality Management. Matthew is originally from Toronto, Canada and currently lives in Finland. He loves Jazz music, loves to travel and also has a slight obsession for marketing.

6   The Blogs

This chapter presents the blogs in chronological order, starting from the oldest. In this chapter, the blog pieces comprise of eight different blog posts. The blogs are original written content directly copied from my own digital travel marketing agency website, www.etravelseo.com and to contributed for www.travelbounddigital.com

6.1   The Importance of Online Marketing & SEO For The Tourism Industry

As continuous use of the internet seems to rapidly increase significantly, competition to be noticed on the web has also become quite challenging for many businesses. The travel industry is one that highly relies on consumer engagement via the internet and by doing so implementing digital strategy has become a necessity. Whichever player you are in the travel related industry, the following information in this brief case study will apply to you…

A massive 86% of travelers use search engines in their planning process, search engine optimization (SEO) and search engine marketing (SEM) play a crucial role in driving traffic to travel related sites as well as creating awareness. This is more of a gateway than a decision driver (Mediapost.com). A study made recently by the European Travel Commission, **60% of travel industry** marketing experts consider rank search as the number 1 way to drive traffic, according to statistics from EyeForTravel's "Travel Distriburtion & Marketing barometer report.

For online travel marketing, organic search is the most influential marketing channel followed by paid search (PPC), then email marketing, social media marketing, mobile marketing and lastly, meta search. For optimised websites, visit duration is increased by 78%!

Insight to Having Online Presence
In an ara of information overload, many destination marketing organizations (DMO's) find it challenging to provide information online while understanding the tourists online information preferences and search engine behavior. The DMO's goal is to promote the destination, however DMO's should also aim at promoting hotels, resorts, tourist attractions, theater, cultural events, sporting events, holiday rental property, and even restaurants in the destination itself.

Ideally, DMO's should go where the consumer is rather than convincing the consumer to come to them, so to compete with other commercials channels and sites, DMO's will need to have quality websites that give visitors enough information to act as a "one-stop-shop".
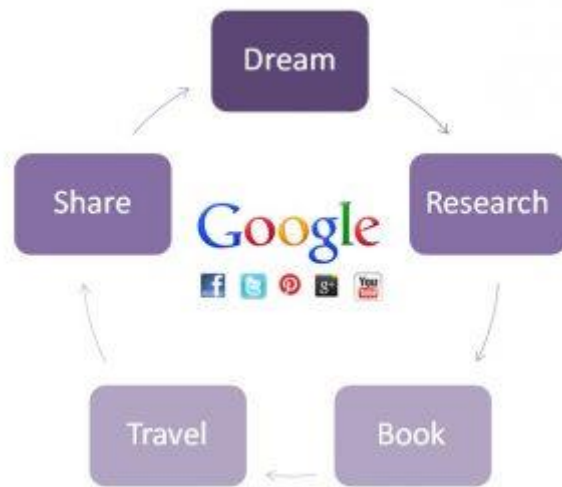
Five tips for DMO websites:
1. Be Noticed!
Have a good looking, simple, easy to read and easy to navigate website. Creative web design is about having a website that is not only visually attractive to the user, but ensures a good user flow while browsing through your site. Ultimately, you want returning visitors and not ones that will immediately click away elsewhere.

2. Content is King!
Content has always been and will always be crucial. It's simply a must have for your online presence. Having quality and diverse content is your way to portray your brand and message.

3. Get Social!
Engage with your audience and understand the social activity of your visitors. Also, be active with review websites, travel-related forums and very importantly, social media.

What we want to achieve:
- Create brand awareness for you.

- Increase site visitors and traffic.

- Increase conversions and online bookings.

- Encourage returning and repeat visitation.

How will this build customer relationship?
- Establish and strengthen connection with the user.

- Increase knowledge of your destination or travel product.

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4. Search Engine Optimization (SEO)
Search engine marketing in the travel industry can be very challenging since competition is very large, however without an optimized site, you could be standing behind your competition possibly unseen or at least have a much harder time with conversions. Every travel website has its own wide range of products, services and solutions, all of which are desired to be placed at the top of the search engines in order to be found and that is where SEO comes in.

The difficulty with SEO in the tourism industry is that particular searches on travel related phrases and keywords are quite high in the search engine counts i.e Google and Yahoo etc. Therefore, travel related website require hard work, strategy and consistent implementations to rank as high as possible in the search engine rankings.

5. Focus on Conversions!
In order to turn a visitor into a buyer, a conversion strategy would be beneficial. For example, your website design, content, social media, and very importantly your SEO strategy should all be in the mix for your digital marketing strategy.

All of this means more than just selling tickets to attractions and accommodation, but also importantly to many other relevant products and services such as walking tours, city passes, souvenirs and even restaurants etc.

Understanding Travel SEO
Search engines continues to lead the travel industry online. Google reports that 64% of leisure travellers and 65% of business travellers use search engines to research and begin their travel planning. This also goes to show how keyword search marketing really is (tnooz – talking travel tech).

So What is SEO Exactly?
Fundamentally, SEO is the process of proving the value and relevance of certain websites, products and services for a particular search phrase or keyword. The goal is to boost these terms up in the search engines, i.e Google and Yahoo. With the significant use of the internet today, travel SEO should be of high importance for any travel related business trying to succeed online.

Essentially, the core of SEO is not to just rank and be found on Google, but more importantly also to have a user journey flow that influences customers into buyers. This is connected with the ability to research, review and share information.

The customer journey is quite broad and this is also the challenge that is faced by SEO. Ranking for the keyword "holiday" or the word "travel" is simply not enough, due to high competition of those exact key terms or of those words simply being too vague.

Travel SEO depends on thinking outside the box and expanding more down the line. For example, someone searching the term "locksmith" is probably in needs of a locksmith and likely needs one immediately. So when someone searching the term "travel" they could most likely be going through a wide range of paths to actually booking something or finding exactly what they are looking for. This is why it is important to narrow the search terms down to target the user.

Long tail keywords are very important for the travel & tourism sector, phrases like "holidays in Ireland", "where is the best place to stay in Toronto", "couples romantic holiday", "winter holiday in Finland"…..The possibilities can go on and it is important that there's an understanding of the target audience and their search behavior.

Link Building for Travel SEO

SEO for Travel is highly reliant on quality Link building. In the beginning stages of researching, the potential customers are likely to search off-site to what they may feel is 'unbiased' opinion or experience, so a link from a trusted source such as from top-tier publications would put you in a good position. Review sites such as TripAdvisor is a great example for travel related recommendations and can even be used as a marketing tool. There are a ton of sites out there and while TripAdvisor has become a giant in the industry there are also other popular sites such as, Lonely Planet, The Guardian Travel, Tourism-Review, Tripwolf and The Culture Trip to name a few.

Each of these example links would be valuable to any travel business due to the fact that they have strong domain authority and are quite reputable. Through methods of link building and guest posting, there requires further research into the brand to gain further insight of the audience or business. Each sector of the tourism industry has its own value and within it there are desired specific links to be able to reach potential customers.

Travel SEO and Social Media

Social media plays a huge role in travel SEO. To rank well in the search engine results, your site needs to have a level of engagement by using various metrics such as analysis of on-site activity, amount of time spent on site, bounce rates and page per visits. With social media, engagement such as followers, likes, retweets, shares and so on. For SEO purposes, you want to harness the engagement of both on-site (your website) and off-site, through various social media platforms.

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As an example, the image to he left written and posted by VisitCopenhagen, features a popular leisure "touristy" activity and travel brand, Goboat. The post not only promotes Copenhagen as a destination, but also uses a link that brings people directly to the brand and regularly updated Facebook page for further awareness.

You may notice that this post has made 1.1K 'likes, 94 'shares' and has 18 comments, which the brand also responded to. Having this type of engagement will signal to search engines like Google that users are interested in what a certain brand has to say, and thus the brand becomes relevant for search queries.

Conclusion

All social media and blogging channels play a very important role for search engine marketing. In a nutshell, if you want your audience to find your business online, it's an absolute necessity to have SEO, and if you need SEO, you will need to have content, if you need content then you need relevant strategic content solutions that generate organic traffic from online channels such as on-going blog posts, well made webcopy and social media to name a few.

Still stuck on SEO, optimizing your website, creating engaging content? No worries! Subscribe to our newsletter or check out our other blog posts for more insight. If you're in need of consultation, just get in touch with us!

6.2   SEO For Travel & Tourism: How SEO Will Help Bring More Customers to Your Travel Website

Travel and tourism is a massive and highly competitive industry. Internet marketing has grown to a whole new level across many online channels, giving direct marketing agencies a full-on challenge; not just within organic search, but also across paid search channels along with many other services provided.

With so many companies eagerly competing to get into the "spotlight" for the top place in the search engine rankings, SEO for the travel and tourism industry has become simply vital for the success of any business online.

Why is SEO needed for the travel and tourism industry?
So, we know that the immersion of the internet has exploded and that's where a majority of prospective customers are, which is also going to increase even more over time. The majority is also not just made up of a younger audience "hanging out" online, it's just about all ages too.

Nowadays, the internet is the preferred choice for booking a holiday, planning a trip and finding travel inspiration. This is great news for travel brands trying to focus on digital marketing and promoting quality content about travel ideas, tips, and destinations.

However, with the importance of the internet in travel planning and research, this also means that tourism industry in particular is very competitive, featuring some of the largest and most popular names in ecommerce. The industry is also widely varied, from flights, accommodations, and many niche services such as activities and tours. This is why you need a strategic and focused approach to SEO that will give you much more online exposure and sustainability.

What makes SEO for Travel & Tourism Unique?

Search Engine Optimisation (SEO) has changed over the past recent years. In today's competitive online market, SEO is the practice of demonstrating a website worth and value based on the useful content it provides, while in correlation between it's value to the users and search ranking positions (SERPs).

"SEO is more about earning visibility instead of outright buying it"
In 2016, simply having an online presence is no longer enough. Any travel business looking to be successful online needs to be constantly reaffirmed and consistently updated in order to stay relevant in order to maintain those desired high rank positions.

One of the unique features that SEO harnesses is the user journey and the potential customer.

Typically, most users won't land on a website at the final conversion goal of purchasing a product, service, or booking a night at your hotel. The user journey, in terms of booking a trip, consists of multiple site visits, and thoroughly researched, which can also take place with a number of devices, locations and across a length of time.
The user journey is an important aspect to consider. It is the multi-visit and multi-channel experience that gives the main advantages of using an [SEO agency](#) who [specialize in the travel and tourism industry](#). Optimizing a site accordingly to suit the user journey is of crucial importance to an effective and efficient SEO strategy for your travel business.

Example of SEO Travel Methods & Approach
First things first, understand your target audience and think of the user journey. Trying to rank for a position in Google for the term 'vacation' isn't enough. It's important to take into consideration the multiple factors involved when the user is planning their journey both offline and offline. The typical user will perform multiple searches across a wide range of terms and keywords to seek out their desired type of vacation, destination, accommodation type or even the type of car rental they'd like to have.

An important aspect to an SEO campaign for a prospective travel customer is to analyze the user at the optimum stage of the user journey, meaning their search behavior and interests.

The chance of capturing users that search terms such as 'couples scuba diving holidays', 'spa getaway holidays' or 'family friendly resorts with outdoor swimming pools' are acquiring much more customers to the path of conversions than the simple search term 'vacation'.
These are known as 'long-tail' search phrases and are very important for SEO in the travel and tourism industry. Travel companies that understand their target audience well will have an easier time generating a list of long-tail keywords and phrases. Optimizing these terms increases the sites positive results.

Capturing the audience
You may be wondering how your travel brand can get noticed within that multi-site search process that the user journey takes to search for travel ideas, tips or services that your company offers. This is where off-site sources with high reputations come in.

This multi-site journey of the user includes 'off-site' sources, many of which are on popular blogs and top-tier publications. A travel website with external links from a high authority, unbiased, and relevant source will rank you highly in the search engines that a certain site does not.

Links from reputable industry related publications will put a travel website in considerably good position in terms of search engine rankings. Some of these publications could be from sources such as Lonely Planet, The Huffington Post and the Tourism-Review to name a few. This is a great way to get traffic and conversions right to your company's website

What Do Your Customers Have To Say About You
One useful way of providing information is to utilise review websites. Some of the big names for example are Tripadvisor, Money Saving Expert and FeeFo to name a few. Positive reviews of a travel brand is always great, however it can also benefit the website's SEO. The search engines pick up a format called 'rich snippets' so that it gives users an understanding why the ranking of particular content is relevant to them. These rich snippets are often in the form of 'likes' or 'star ratings' and are between the search results term or title. Using rich snippets as a method to improve your SEO is certainly beneficial.

Get Social
Social media is important to engage with your audience, however it also plays an important role for SEO. Social media should not be left out of the marketing mix and SEO strategy. As mentioned previously, a sites value and its search rankings are based on the engagement and interaction with the user, social media is included in this.
Still stuck on SEO, optimizing your website, creating engaging content? No worries! Subscribe to our newsletter or check out our other blog posts for more insight. If you're in need of consultation, just get in touch with us!

6.3   10 SEO Tips For Your Travel Business Online

SEO will be an integral part of your online travel marketing strategy. If you want to increase the chance of your web content being found by your audience, you will need a focused and strategic approach to search engine optimization (SEO). To do so, you need both short-term fixes and long-term changes for the best possible ROI.

By using relevant SEO-enriched content that the users will enter into the search engines i.e Google and Yahoo for example. By having optimized content, this means the higher up your site will appear in the search engine results. In some cases when SEO is done really well against the cloud of competition, it's possible to even reach top of the page results.

When you have higher search engine rankings, this often means that you will receive increased traffic driven to your site, which ultimately leads to higher conversions. For those businesses that go up against fierce competition, say for example specializing in selling guided tours in a large city with many competitors, using SEO and SEM tactics will help put you in a higher position.

Another great solution is to use pay-per-click ads to ensure that your message appears on the first page of the search engine results. There are many strategies you could invest using to boost your online presence, generate leads, increase conversions, improve your search rankings and portray your brand message. Here at eTravelSEO, we have put together the following tips and strategies to help you with SEO for your travel business online.

Get Noticed. Get Connected.

1.Establish a unique content style that displays what you are all about. Your style is what will set the tone that's written for your target audience using long-tail phrases and keywords to reach out to them.

2. Make sure that your content is original and organic. What we mean by this? Well, simply do not copy and paste. Google can indicate if content is 'duplicated' from other sources on the web and this can even lower your website ranking.

3. Create fresh and consistently updated content. The search engines crawls your content on a regular basis and increase site rankings for those that have updated and fresh content. Be sure to include social media with this as well.

4. Add video and social feeds to your site. Considering that Google owns Youtube, it plays a big role in the search engines. If you have video content hosted on Youtube, put it also on your site. This will not only help you rank higher, but also give the user a visually engaging experience about your travel related content.

5. Avoid 'stuffing' keywords. This is when certain keywords are mentioned to often. This can be a challenging one or some, however try not to go over three times per page.

6. Titles and Tags. Be sure to include page titles and also tag site videos and images with your selected keyword or phrase. The higher up the page your keyword is, the better. It's a good idea that your title is often used as the keyword.

7. Include a site map. The search engines crawl your site which helps to increase your search engine ranking. When you have a site map submitted to Google, your site will also run faster.

8. Site Performance. Check your site performance often and install Google analytics so that you can keep an eye on your site data, keywords keywords, user flow, amount of visitors coming to your site, how long they spend on it, which geographic location they are coming from and which paths they take to make the purchase decision and so on. It's also important to try and integrate all of your online platforms to monitor overall performance.

9. Drive traffic to your site. There are many strategies to do this, however here are two tactics. Use SEM by outbidding competitors for paid advertising listings so that you will boost your traffic coming to your site even more. Backlinks are also a great way to gain traffic to your site. Backlinks can be purchased and placed on third party sources such as high authority sites, blogs and top-tier publications. These backlinks will help bring targeted one-way traffic right to your site to lead to increased conversions and leads.

10. Be sure that your site is responsive across multiple devices, i.e tablets and mobile. It's important to remember that your audience will most likely be using more than one device as apart of their customer journey.

Still stuck on SEO, optimizing your website, creating engaging content? No worries! Subscribe to our newsletter or check out our other blog posts for more insight. If you're in need of consultation, just get in touch with us!

6.4 How To Increase Google Rankings For Your Travel Website

No Matter if you have a sleek looking website, or impressive portfolio you won't get very far if you're lacking sufficient SEO. New travel businesses and established companies within the travel and tourism industry have an increasing number of competitors when selling their products and services online.

With the fierce competition online and Google pushing organic search results down the search pages in favour of paid listings, it is becoming difficult for travel brands to be noticed online without having to pay Google to get in the spotlight.

The search engines, i.e Google are quite objective when it comes to the important details within a site such as alt tags, keywords, and sitemaps to name a few. Google's algorithms are constantly changing making SEO a daunting task. However, one of the most important factors when determining Google's rankings are most often based on the links that are placed on a site.

Your site gets indexed and crawled by Google and also determines the value of your site by the links that come from authoritative and relevant websites. For example, an article piece written and featured on a popular publication site about the topic 'Top Holiday Destinations Of The Year', and in that article there are specifically placed links that direct to a certain website, say for example a travel agency or tour operator site. This is not only a tactic to build traffic and conversions but also of high value to the search engines.

Unfortunately there is no magic button or quick and easy way to make your website all of a sudden get more links or even rank on the first entry in the Google search results.
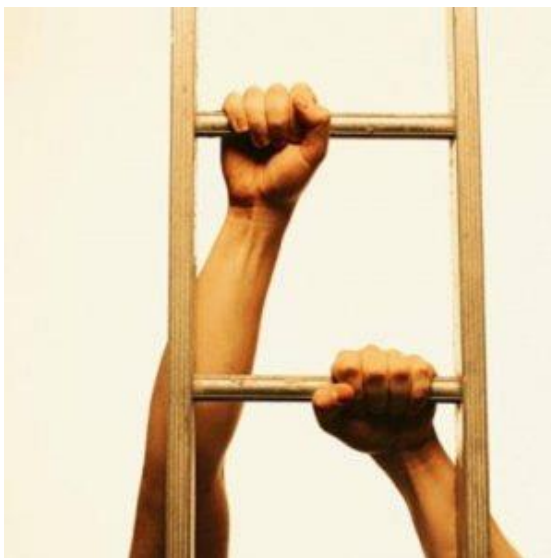
Let's Begin. What is SEO?

SEO (Search engine optimization) is the process when traffic to your website is improved from search engines such as Google, Bing, and Yahoo via organic or algorithmic search results from major search engines.

The higher up a website appears in the search results pages, the higher number of visitors the page will receive from the search engine that's being used. Bare in mind that

keywords are very important in a search the process, which means that people won't necessarily be typing in your website url address in the search query, but rather likely using keywords where your site may come up under a certain search term.

There are various tactics you can use to improve your page's ranking. Listed below, and not in any particular order, here are some ways that we believe are an absolute must to implement.

Competitor analysis

Find out who your direct competitors within your industry are. Since the travel industry is not only very large, it's also very competitive and many other travel businesses will have a similar idea as you to build a travel related website done well!

Many of your competitors may be better than you in terms of SEO or other online marketing aspects, so find out what makes their brand so popular. Thoroughly check out their website and try to understand the tactics being used such as who their target audience is, target locations, and keep an eye out for the links they use on their site. These links are referred to as backlinks which help build traffic.

Keyword Research

Keyword research will help you to get to know the industry search behavior trends and which keywords are trending the most in searches. You can also check out your competitors websites to find out their targeted keywords within their web content, this will give you an idea of which keywords you can also target. Be sure not to target keywords that are too general, for example the word 'holiday'. Try to narrow it down and focus on specific targeted keywords, for example 'winter holiday resort with sauna'. This is known as long-tail keywords and will be easier for you to target your audience.

On-Page Metrics

Once you have done a bit of research from the above mentioned you can start to put action to your own website by implementing on-page metrics such as keyword optimization, writing unique content, header tags, meta tags, image alt tags, adding Google analytics code, implementing Google search console codes, schema markup codes, sitemap.xml, url structures, website speed, 404 custom page, 301 redirection and canonicalization to name a few.

For some this may be a little overwhelming, however by implementing these changes to your site, you will notice significant changes sooner than you realize.

Off-Page Metrics

Now onto off-page metrics. Once you have conducted the on-page metrics you can then move onto off-page submissions for keywords. This is very important to do because this is where you will start building traffic to your website and increase its ranking.

Here are a 6 tips for off-page metrics

1. Choose the keywords which you desire to rank for. By doing this early on you can avoid confusion later on.
2. Implement local SEO. **Every** website should have local SEO done. For local SEO you need to optimize your chosen keywords with locations. Google My Business

Page is one of the essential steps for this and needed if your website has multiple locations.

3. Seek out submission sites that are relevant to your industry niche. Since we are focusing on travel, you will need to submit your travel website to sources such as travel related directories.
4. Focus on link building. Links are like the currency of the internet and this is where a large portion of your traffic will be coming from. This can be done through guest posting, article submission, travel directories, business listings, travel forums, social bookmarking, press releases, profile creations and so on. Do note that when building backlinks, it's important that you focus on quality rather than quantity.
5. Make use of social media as much as you can. This will be one of the best places to gain traffic as well as creating popularity and brand awareness to your audience.
6. Blog posting is another great way to help you rank in the search engines as well as engaging with your audience. When someone searches for a certain term, your blog topic may be relevant and even pop up as one of the first within the search results since they act like additional pages on your site which Google indexes. Always remember to keep your content fresh, organic and updated as often as possible. Posting blog pieces as often as possible, i.e few times a month or even every week will help ensure a healthy position within the search engine results.
7. As mentioned earlier, links are like the currency of the internet. For your travel website, try and reach out to travel bloggers with high domain authority and convince them to link back to your site. This is known as backlinking and it's very important for building traffic along with building customer relationship too.

There are many ways you can build traffic and improve your Google ranking for your travel website and these are just some of the most important methods you could use.

Unfortunately, there is no quick and easy way to boost your website right to page one or on the first search results. However, you can always use an SEO agency specialized in travel that will help carry out these activities for you on a consistent basis which even most big companies often use for online success.
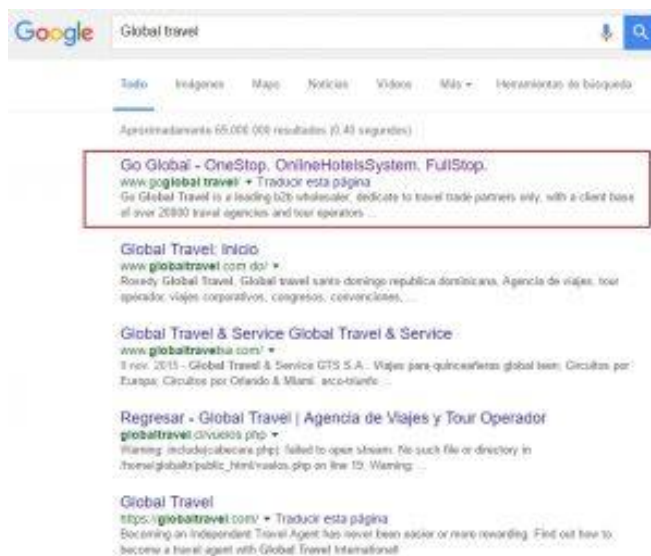
Still stuck on SEO, optimizing your website, creating engaging content? No worries! Subscribe to our newsletter or check out our other blog posts for more insight. If you're in need of consultation, just get in touch with us!

6.5   Blogging For Business and Marketing. Is Blogging Necessary?

In short, that answer is Yes. If you want to increase web traffic, ensure long-term online growth and engage with your audience online that is. Having a blog for your business is a must for any content marketing efforts.

Blogging is by far one of the best ways for online success for any size business of all types.

To put it straight, blogging should come before social media, your website and email marketing, (more on this as we go along). Blogging actively is what is going to help fuel audience engagement, brand awareness, search engine ranking and so much more.

Blogging shouldn't be just another thing on the marketing to do list and it's not just for hobby and fun, although it is fun to blog! Blogging is widely used as a marketing tool to reach out to a large audience online, right down to a particular niche within your industry even. If your business doesn't have a blog, you should really consider starting one right away…of course after you are done reading this blog post here.

Before we get into the nitty gritty, I'd like to first emphasize that blogging has a ton of benefits. So regardless of what industry you are in, whether it's in the travel industry, real estate, or events industry, having a blog will only benefit your online growth. In this blog post you will gain a better understanding of the power of blogging for business.

Why is Blogging For Business Important and How Can You Benefit From It

Actively blogging to market your business is one of the easiest and effective ways of online marketing. It provides direction and focus to all of your other marketing efforts and leads to your content marketing, social media and also SEO efforts. Think of your blog as a content hub, the heart of where you content marketing starts from. You write about a certain topic, targeting a particular audience if you wish and then you can share it across multiple channels fueling traffic and conversions.

Blogging for your business also takes the role of sales and customer service, giving you the chance to have numerous sales conversions all through the ability of your communication efforts.

How Is Regular or Personal Blogging Different From Business Blogging?

There are a ton of people out there in the wild who have personal blogs, some that even bring in money by selling ad space and or affiliate links to earn a commission. However, business blogging is different, why? Firstly, a blog for your business is not exactly a hobby and secondly, it's not the primary way for your business to make money.

Your business blog is more of a marketing channel, just like email marketing, social media marketing etc. It helps enhance business growth by driving traffic to your website while also allowing that traffic of web visitors to convert in some way or another, ideally into customers or leads.

Different businesses may convert traffic differently from one another, some with the intention to turn web traffic into leads and pass them over to a sales team, while others may intend to convert the traffic into customer directly through online purchasing transaction. The primary goal however is for your business to gain conversions which in turn drive more business for you.

How Does A Blog Drive Traffic?

In terms of online users, how and which ways do people usually find your website?

Maybe they search your site name into the web browser i.e Google. But that's only an audience you already have established and that already know who you are. This doesn't exactly help you gain more traffic with these type of visitors.

There are many ways to build traffic coming to your site. Buying traffic is possible, but I really don't recommend that. It's costly and also illegal. So what next then? You can build a huge ton of traffic with paid ads and listings which is NOT illegal but it certainly can be expensive and not budget friendly.

So that leads us to our most recommended alternative. Simply put, by having a content marketing strategy through blogging, using social media and search engines.

More Pages. More Leads

The title says it all, and it's true. The more pages you have, the higher your chances for gaining more leads. The more pages that are indexed by Google means the more potential for leads you will receive.

On your website you have pages of course such as the about page, contact us page, services pages etc etc. But you probably don't have too many pages, at least you have the pages that are most needed. Keeping your content updated as often as possible is very important to fuel SEO efforts. But to be fair, how often can you update your About Us page, nor do you probably want to change it, especially if your content is firm to business website.

Having an active and constantly updated blog will solve this.

As just mentioned, the search engines index and crawl your web pages and see when new content is published. So every time you write a blog post, it's another page that the search engines such as Google will index which gives you opportunity for your site and pages to appear in the search results, thus driving traffic to your site.

Blogging should be the heart of your content marketing efforts, it should even come first before social media, email marketing and your website even. The reasons being is that every time you write and publish a blog post, you not only create another opportunity for your site and page to be found, but it also creates a chance for people to share your content across multiple social networks i.e Facebook, Linkedin, Twitter and so on. This builds brand awareness and engagement with new and frequent customers of yours.

So now that you are aware of the impact of blogging, now you may be wondering about capturing leads. Capturing leads can be done in many ways through online marketing both on-site and off-site. But while we are focusing on blogging right now, leads will usually take place by the form of call-to-action or lead generation.

On a blog, there are all sorts of creative lead generation strategies. It most often works by offering something to your web visitors in return for some of their information, for example their email address.

Blogging Establishes Authority and Trust

A good blog helps your readers to answer questions or concerns that they may have. Providing organic, useful and relevant information is key a successful blog that your audience will read and follow. Not only that, but a blog is a useful customer service tool which can be used by answering and conversing with any questions that people leave in the comment box on your blog.

Investing in Blogging For Long-Term Strategy

Blogging can be time consuming and you may find it hard to keep up with, it's understandable. But don't give up! It's impact and effect for the long-term is quite beneficial.

On your first few blog posts you may only get a few or a few 100 views along with a few leads. The next day you may get half of those views and leads on the same blog post. Maybe some of your visitors even subscribe and share your content via social media. But after a little while the hype may be lost. However, it's not!

Remember, each page gets indexed, therefor it gets ranked in the search engines. This means that over time, such as in a few days, few weeks, few months and even years from now your blog posts will get seen and continue to get traffic and also leads from that single blog post you published ages ago. So think of it as an investment for your businesses online growth.

Here is an example graph of how blog traffic and leads grow over time:
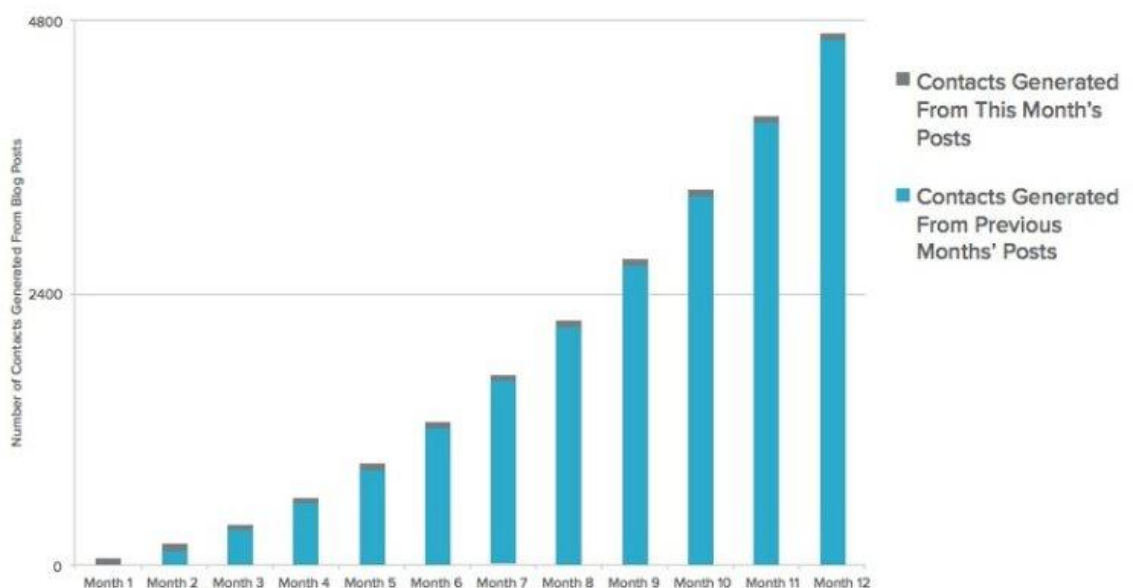
So there you have it. Blogging is certainly valuable and worthy to start doing for your business, regardless of the business type or size. It's a must for your **content marketing strategy** and for online success.

Blogging may not give you immediate results, but over time you will see significant amounts of traffic and leads coming right to your site. If you are too busy to handle a blog at this time, perhaps you could consider finding **specialized writers** for your business to contribute to your blog on an ongoing basis. Regardless of how you go about it, get blogging, what are you waiting for?!

6.6   Essential SEO Tips For Tourism Marketing

If there's any industry out there today that has massive competition among competitors, then it's undoubtedly the travel and tourism industry. Today, any well-established travel company that has a strong online presence will understand the importance of online marketing and it's ROI potential.

Many of these big name players in the tourism industry depend on search engine optimization (SEO) to fuel their marketing efforts so that they out reach out to potential customers finding them online, as well as creating brand awareness. In today's online world, just about any company that is on the internet can benefit from SEO. So whether you are a new business on the market or even if you are a business that's been relying and running on traditional off-line methods, consider implementing SEO to your website, of course if you have a website that is. I'm not saying that off-line methods are a thing of the past and not needed, but having a strong online presence will really benefit your business now and in the long-run.

SEO is one of those words that make most travel marketers cringe and wish that the internet had never existed! Although to be to be fair, it's really not surprising that SEO causes so much panic among many.

Just about every SEO agency or individual personal usually has their own approach when implementing SEO by a daunting mix of many needed elements from keywords, phrases, backlinks, descriptions, titles, title tags, alt text, site code, and so on. On top of that, these important concepts continue to get more complex and confusing as Google continuously changes its algorithms to ensure updated and stronger search results. For many, staying on top of SEO can just be overwhelming and not knowing how to go about it.

So you there you have it, the word SEO can indeed be like hearing nails on a chalkboard! But before you whip your laptop out of a window like a frisbee or take a hammer to whatever computer device you are using, i'm here to tell you that SEO doesn't need to be as confusing and complex as it seems.

So what are your options if you don't hire an SEO expert or find an SEO Agency?

Or what if you simply don't understand these constantly changing and complex Google algorithms? It's as simple as this, you go back to the basics to understand how SEO works. One of the best sources to understand overall SEO is from [Moz.com](Moz.com) and their downloadable PDF, Beginners Guide to SEO.

One of the problems many travel markers face is that they just get caught up in the technicalities of SEO and they end up optimizing their travel site for the search engines and not people. After all, your audience are real human beings that are reading your content, not just "robots" crawling and indexing web content. Most often when this happens, the quality of their brand, website, products, and reputation are often diminished in the efforts to over-optimize a site to suit the search engines.

SEO is not only for the search engines, it's especially for those searching the content,such as your travelers.

When it comes to the travel and tourism industry, the travel planning process can be quite a lengthy process. So by providing useful information that they may be looking for at every stage of the travel planning process is very crucial. The intention of search engines are not meant to make your job harder but instead their purpose is to serve and benefit the traveler and the destination or business as they try to match the search terms of the user to the most relevant and highest quality search results possible.

Google for example, favours sites with fresh, quality content, active social media presence, and a good amount of inbound links coming to your website. The search engines value a site almost the same way a user would when determining if the site it good or not. So don't get too caught up with SEO jargons or technical concepts and try to break it down into a simple way you best understand it.

Here are a few tips:

Quality Content and Keywords

Having a mix of keyword rich content will be vital to any inbound strategy. The is one of the important ways to build a connection with any prospective customers so that you can ultimately direct them to your site so that you turn them into customers.

Focus on what your audience is actually looking for every step of the way during the travel planning process and combine this with strategic keywords that resonate with your audience which they'd be searching for. Try not to stuff keywords into your content, believe it or not Google will notice this and it won't benefit to your site ranking well.

Lastly, keep your site fresh and updated with engaging content so that you will have new and returning visitors. The best way to do this is to have a blog.

On-Site Backend Optimization

This is referring to more general content within the back end of your site, so for example title tags, alt tags, meta tags and make sure it's optimized and makes sense to you and the searcher.

Having A Blog For Your Travel Site

If you don't have a blog, consider starting one. As you create fresh and engaging content on a blog, it's yet another page for the search engines to index, thus giving your site an opportunity to rank higher and for particular keywords in the search results. Not only does blogging give you a chance to engage with your audience and providing up to date information for travelers, it helps to showcase your brand, bring visitors to your site and or destination.

If you'd like to know more about blogging, check out a blog I wrote on [blogging for business](#).

Getting Your Message Out There

As you connect with your audience, it's important that your content is sharable. Make use of call-to-actions or buttons to prompt visitors what to do, i.e subscribe to newsletter, share, connect, "like", "follow" etc. Having social media incorporated is an important part for your site and for shareable content to reach out further to your audience. Google also takes social media into account, the more your content is shared, the more Google will boost you in the search results, seeing that it's valued content.

Also, select the most relevant social media platforms that suit the most to your site and content and make sure there is a visible "share button" on your site for your visitors to pass onto others.

Creating Brand Awareness

You may wonder how this might be relevant to [SEO](#), but believe it or not, having a strong brand matters a lot to the search engines such as Google. Travelers often take to a reputable brand and is also usually connected with a product or travel experience. This leads to the importance of a travel business or especially a destination to ensure that an online branding strategy is prevalent.

Still stuck on SEO, optimizing your website, creating engaging content? No worries! Subscribe to our newsletter or check out our other blog posts for more insight. If you're in need of consultation, just [get in touch with us](#)!

6.7 Adwords vs SEO: Which One Is Better For Your Travel Business

Companies of all types and sizes are realizing the importance of online marketing, especially through the search engines i.e Google, Yahoo etc. But with the fierce competition of businesses online fighting to get noticed, it can be daunting to know which is the best marketing channels to invest your money on.

An ongoing debate has been whether SEO or Adwords is better for driving traffic and value for your business. However, search engine optimization (SEO) and Adwords, also known as pay-per-click-advertising (PPC) really depends on the nature of your business. If it's done correctly, both can get you on the front page of the search engines for targeted terms and in front of your desired targeted audience.

At our agency, we specialize in travel & tourism and among many travel businesses this is a common sought after topic, especially if your business operates within the tourism industry this will apply to you as both marketing methods are very important for online success.

Before going further, let's first define SEO and Adwords so that you have an idea of which would work better for your specific marketing objectives.

What is the difference between Adwords and SEO

SEO utilizes techniques that is meant to adjust with the Google algorithms so that a website will have a good ranking on the search engines. Many of these techniques are by using relevant keywords, linking content to authority sites and also other related sites using meta descriptions.

Adwords on the other hand uses paid advertising where owners of the website such as yourself, will pay a search engine such as Google to place a website at the top of the search results. Adwords is done through a pay-per-click type system so that you will have to pay every time someone clicks on your ad.

Exposing your business online

Below is an image comparison of SEO and Adwords. This is your typical 1st page search results, the blue represents the organic search results (via SEO) and the yellow represents Adwords. The graph shows the average click rate of each result type (more on this below).

As mentioned previously, both can deliver significant results. However, organic search results are usually viewed as more trustworthy by the ones searching and therefore your

site would lead to higher conversions than pay-per-click Adwords. But before you already make any decisions on which is better for you, let's do a comparison.

Adwords vs SEO

Firstly, you probably want to know about the price and the expenses that may occur. Initially, SEO is free, aside from the time and effort put into it of course. To do SEO correctly, you need to do it well and be aware of the best SEO techniques to use for your website. But as your business grows, along with your competitors, your SEO efforts will also become more challenging and will take more time and effort than in the initial beginning phase.

You may look to professional SEO services to manage everything for you and boost your site to stay on top of things. SEO companies such as eTravelSEO is a boutique agency that specializes in search engine optimization and tailors particularly to the tourism industry. Going through an agency will ensure that your business gets the attention it needs while reaching out to the right audience.

Unlike SEO, Google Adwords works differently to target traffic. As mentioned above that Adwords uses a pay-per-click type system, meaning that you will need to have an ideal budget available. Simply put, the more people you can get, the more you will need to pay. It can indeed be costly, however if you compare it to traditional marketing i.e print ads, it may be worth the investment.

ADWORDS

Paid Searches
Limited Clicks
25% Traffic
Short Term Results
Very Expensive
$0.01 - $15.00 a Click

SEO

Organic Searches
Unlimited Clicks
75% Traffic
Long Term Results
Very Affordable
Free Clicks

ON AVERAGE SEO HAS MUCH HIGHER ROI

Amount of views, conversions and leads.

In terms of return on investment, it's important to consider the possible number of viewers or leads that both SEO and Adwords can offer. Both of them can give a significant amount. However, if we want to focus a short period of time, then Adwords can get you more viewers or leads. Now for long term, SEO is going to be a better option and you will find that people will look to organic results since that is what they are ultimately looking for.

In short, Adwords is best for the short term "fix" and will give you viewers or leads but it is not nearly as sustainable as SEO since SEO that's done well will provide more viewers and leads over a accumulated period of time.

Time Is Money

For fast results, Adwords is a good choice. For long term growth and sustainability, SEO is the way to go.

SEO doesn't happen overnight and you can't expect get immediate results. For your site to rank it can take time for people to see your content in the organic search results, however it is indeed more affordable to go down that route. SEO done well ensures that your website is relevant and ensures that your desired target market will find your content.

Which is the best for Investment?

In addition to the possible expenses, another important factor when deciding between Adwords campaigns or ongoing SEO packages is the duration of the campaign. As mentioned above, It depends on the nature of your business, so for example if you a travel company running a promotion or having an event, then Facebook or Google Adwords/PPC advertising could be a good choice.

However, if you'd like to permanently list your business on the first page of Google for the fraction of the cost, then SEO will be the best option as it will allow you to be found when someone searches for your product or service. By using an ongoing SEO campaign, your site will also appear in more places with more keywords and visibility increasing over time.

In terms of investing in online marketing, SEO should be considered as the foundation to any campaign as you will find that it has the highest ROI and the lowest ongoing cost. Of course you can have a combination of both SEO and Adwords, after all integrated marketing campaigns yield the best results. Just be sure to set your KPI's and continue to measure the success of each segment of your marketing efforts.

Now that you have a better understanding of each, which one is better for your business? Want fast leads in the shortest amount of time, then Adwords is for you. However, if you'd like for your business to have steady growth, then it is crucial to have proper SEO implemented.

Still stuck on SEO, optimizing your website, creating engaging content? No worries! Subscribe to our newsletter or check out our other blog posts for more insight. If you're in need of consultation, just get in touch with us!

6.8   15 Online Travel Marketing Tips for Independent Hotels and Resorts

Do you manage an independent hotel or resort? Are you looking to attract more customers and keep them coming back to your hotel? Do you want your place to be accessible, visible, likable and attractive both online and offline? Whether your resort or hotel is located in the downtown core of a city or in a distant and remote location, here are 15 online marketing tips tips for any independent hotels or resorts out there looking to attract more attention more tourists from near and far while also growing your business at the same time.

Hotel reviews

From TripAdvisor to Google ratings, reviews are crucial and key to success. It's important to have ongoing reviews on the property's **Google listing**, **TripAdvisor** and other hotel listing sites. Of course you can't push your customers to leave a review on every site out there, so focusing on at least these two popular review sites are a great start.

Online PR

Whether this PR comes through bloggers or travel sites, every mention of your hotel or resort counts and can potentially mean more than the amount of spending on advertising that you would otherwise be doing. You want to get as many reputable and influential bloggers and travel related sites to write about you and your offerings, as well as having a link back to your site. Check out popular names such as Lonely Planet, Travel+Leisure, Matador Network, Buzzfeed Travel, and National Geographic Traveler to name a few.

Start blogging

While reaching out to established travel bloggers is great, it's time to also take matters into your own hands. Starting your own blog for your hotel or resort can server as a very useful content hub within your website, where your target audience can read interesting stories, articles and other content about your place as well as about themselves. A useful blog can even attract thousands or even millions of visitors to your website.

Here are some things a blog can also help your business achieve:

- Increase the number of your site's indexed pages in the search engines. This will result with increased search engine visibility and organic search, especially for certain keywords.
- In the form of blog posts you can share your content via social media to encourage viral marketing, as well as establishing your brand identity.
- Collect feedback, reviews, insights and any other important data from your audience.
- Establish and maintain good relationships with your existing and potential customers.

Read this articles to learn more about business blogging:

http://etravelseo.com/blogging-for-business-and-marketing-is-blogging-necessary/

Blog about the top tourist attractions in your location, hotel or resort

Tourist attraction such as beautiful beaches, scenic surrounding mountains, historical landmarks and cultural festivals are some of the main motivators tourists are attracted to your city or region. People will typically search information about these things using search engines and referrals from social media.

Here are a few examples of some titles or headlines you can use for your blog posts to attract guests to your place.

- 12 reasons why you should visit _____.

- Top 20 things to do in _____.
- Top 10 tourist destinations in _____ (insert your city, region or country).
- 20 amazing photos that will make you want to visit _____ right now.
- 6 reasons why you should experience the _____ (insert the festival held in your location).

Optimise titles and meta description on your website

This might seem like a simple suggestion, but it can make a significant difference. If your hotel's website already ranks on the first page of Google, then you simple need to ensure that you clearly say who you are and what you do. Create your title and description for your customers, not only for the search engines. Avoid using descriptions like 'We are one of the best hotels', this will not bring real-time users. Just be honest and deliver what you promise to your prospective customers.

Local SEO

Search engines such as Google answer numerous searches per year. This indicates that Google is still the top place on the internet to seek for consumer goods and services. With that said, a business such as yours needs to target a portion of these searches that are relevant to the hotel or travel industry. If you search for "Hotels in Lisbon" in Google, the search engine will give you the following results.

According to these results, hotels that are shown on the top of Google results receive more visitors than those that are displayed at the bottom or at the next search engine results pages.

If your hotel is not displayed in the top or in the first page of Google's search engine results page (SERP) for relevant keywords or search queries, then you're losing web traffic and leads. To help improve the search engine visibility of your hotel and drive relevant traffic to your site, you have to establish local search engine optimization (SEO).

Here are a few local SEO tips you can do:

- Add keywords to your page titles that identifies your location. For example, "Name of Your Hotel – Hotel in Lisbon" or "Name of Your Resort – Resort in Orlando".
- Be sure to Include your local address and contact numbers, not only in your homepage and contact page, but also in all your web pages.
- Add a map to your website.
- Add a map to your Facebook page.
- Add your business to Google My Business, Bing Places for Business and Yahoo Local, (don't forget to verify your address!).
- Get your accommodation listed in TripAdvisor and or other relevant review sites.
- Add your property at Expedia, Booking.com or Agoda.
- Add photos of your hotel or resort to your business listings.

- Ask reviews from your guests.
- Publish blog posts using local keywords in your titles.

Email marketing

Don't ignore email marketing in the age of social media. Email marketing is still a direct marketing channel to message to an audience using email. It is one of the most effective ways to reach out to guests by using information that you already may have. Include content that appeals to each individuals needs. Personally targeted email marketing is much better than sending mass emails also considered as spam to the receiver. When gathering information, try and get as many details including email address from your customers, age, gender and so on. Emails not only help by building loyalty but also in your Google Adwords campaigns (PPC) as well as in your social media.

Segment your list of audience

Simply put, segmentation is the process of dividing an an already existing list on the basis of various criteria put inter different segments. You can create these segments based on the customer's location, age, gender, time of visit, duration of stay, area of interest, single/couple and so on. By this you can communicate with your customers uniquely

Request for feedback and review

Send an email within 15 days of the customers checkout for a survey and asking for a review on TripAdvisor and or Google Listing. This seems to actually work quite well! You could even request for some pictures from during their stay which you could use later on social media (with their permission).

Have your guests revisit online

Send emails on occasion about happening near by festivals or cultural events. Let them know what's happening in the area or at your hotel that they stayed at. No better way than reminiscing someone about their good times. This tip could also be including in a blogging and social media strategy.

Use Database for custom Audience targeting

With a database for custom audience, you can upload the email IDs or mobile numbers of your customers to Facebook Ad's account (create a custom Audience by using PowerEditor). You can also run personalised campaigns for your already existing customers by offering them exclusive coupons or discounts on their next visit for example.

Wisely Choose Audience Interest / Demographics / Behavior

Choose a targeted audience in Facebook ad manager can be quite savvy. There's even a Travel Filter (found under the Behavior title) which includes, every frequent traveler, business travellers, commuters, those who are returned from a trip one week ago, or two weeks ago, those who use travel app, and the list goes on. Using this manager tool can help you segment your target audience with ease and is certainly beneficial.

Use plenty of visuals and images

Not only should you use images to show your hotel or resort, but also post images from around the surrounding area to entice visitors to come to the location where you are situated.

Promote online channels to your guests offline

Placing a simple banner or card in the reception or hotel lounge area for social media follow can go a long way in helping share the word. Discounts on check-in or even accessing hotel-guest wifi via Facebook could be a good idea to spread the word. There are many ideas out there to help easily spread the word and often your guests are happy to do it.

Share a story using video campaigns

I've seen many hotels using video ads, some which have been very creative and enticing. In the hotel niche, visuals and video ads should be more personal and share a story and not just be about your rooms that you offer. Instead, engage with the prospective customer, share about where your hotel is situated, the cultural events around the area, hospitality, facilities, staff, and then of course your service and what makes your place so unique.

So to wrap it up, these were some of my thoughts and tips in regards to marketing a hotel digitally. I'd love to get your insight and ideas too! Feel free to write in the comment box below.

7   Conclusions

The aim of this thesis was to provide research overview collected by industry influencers regarding the travel industry and how it is becoming digitized. The impact of digitalization has significantly transformed the travel industry and how consumers and travelers behave through multiple online channels. In addition, one aspect to digital marketing strategies have been proven through the practice of search engine optimization (SEO), blogging and content marketing. In this thesis, I have showcased my own blogs that have been written and published by two digital travel marketing agencies. These blogs provide current relevant and insightful information and suggestions for travel companies looking to incorporate digital strategy for their future internet marketing efforts. The blogs tie in very well in correlation to the desktop research for the thesis and relevant topics discussed.

Throughout the thesis, it is discussed how many digital trends and online marketing can be quite difficult to define and tap into. For one aspect of digital marketing, many travel companies today are simply unaware of the return on investment potential digital marketing can have. Meanwhile, some companies struggle to integrate or properly understand how and which marketing channels they should really be using to connect with consumers online.

For example, travelers typically search many travel websites before the purchasing decision is made. So, it's important that travel agencies or tour operator businesses show up in the search results in search engines like Google during the travel planning and booking phase. While pay-per-click display ads are becoming very important for online campaigning, the challenge faced is that many competitor enterprises are increasingly investing more and more into digital marketing to reach consumers. Therefore, the challenge here is that many travel businesses simply get left behind or lose out on business by not implementing digital strategy.

While digital trends are emerging, the main issue faced is the understanding of how to reach targeted customers and why digital marketing practices are important to consider.

All in all, the thesis process has been a success. The objectives were met; material was collected by my own portfolio work, theoretical and academic points, findings from influential industry influencers, as well as with desktop research collected to support the work. The challenge of the thesis was that the topic became quite wide, so it was somewhat of a challenge to find the topic and keep it all relevant. With digital trends and marketing, there are many avenues to focus on or approach with, so finding the most important aspects

and comparative sources were needed. In the beginning, the objective was to showcase my own blogs written for a digital marketing agency and present it as a portfolio. However, while the thesis as a whole still became a portfolio style thesis, in order to explain the purpose for the blogs written, I found it necessary to expand on the whole thesis topic and go into further detail regarding digitization and how it's relevant to my blogs presented as a method for marketing. Each part to the thesis elegantly connected to each other as very relevant topics and the objectives were covered and discussed in the thesis, therefore meaning that the thesis was a success.

As mentioned in the beginning of the thesis, digitization has transformed the travel and tourism industry, and digital integration is a growing part of the industry. Moreover, what makes digital marketing so important is that is it has a large potential for return on investment and has the power to reach to where the majority of consumers are; the internet. Digital marketing is a great way for travel companies to reach a large volume of customers at a relatively affordable price as compared to traditional marketing. As with any marketing efforts, it is important for any size company to plan their digital marketing strategy well.

It will certainly be interesting to see in the future how digital trends and marketing methods will evolve online for the travel and tourism industry, especially from the customer relation point of view and consumer behavior of the modern-day traveler. I hope that this thesis can be of help for someone such as a travel professional, or any business looking at the opportunity to integrate digital marketing strategies as a way to grow their business online, as well as to consider my portfolio blog pieces as material for possible ideas, solutions and inspiration.

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