



Marketing Tourism Online, Part Two: Attracting Visitors to your Website

by Bryan Wilson; travel marketing consultant; partner, Leave Home Productions;
email bryan@leave-home.com

This is part two of an article series which will introduce some basic strategies, considerations, elements, and techniques for marketing tourism products online. We plan to update and refine these articles as situations change and when we have new knowledge to present. You can request to be notified when a new article in the series is available.

Getting the word out

Your site does no good if nobody visits. Put your website address on everything you produce that goes in the hands and in front of the eyes of your customers, distributors, and other audiences: in your email messages; on your brochures; on your letterhead; on handouts at presentations; on company vehicles; etc. Mention the address when you are speaking with potential customers and in audio communications.

Search engine marketing

Optimize your website for indexing by search engines, and above all, get other sites to link to yours. Most of the popular search engines, including Google, base their rankings on key word and phrase relatedness to the search and the popularity of your site as measured by the number and popularity of the sites that link to it. You'll usually need to be in the top 20-30 results for the most important related search terms to really benefit.

The other major determinant in search engine ranking is the amount of content on the site that matches or approximates the search terms...so, a site with more content is likely to be ranked higher.

Make sure search engine "spiders" or "robots" can crawl through your pages (follow links to all the pages on your site). If your site is built entirely in Flash or another multimedia plug-in (offer a plain HTML version!), with frames, or generates most pages dynamically, you will need to take special steps to ensure that your site can be indexed.

Get your site listed and linked in portal websites covering tourism sectors, destinations, and lifestyles related to your offerings—generally, for free. Trade links with related sites. These activities not only help with search engine rankings, but will be a source of visitors by themselves.

There are many factors that affect rankings, and they are weighted differently by each engine. Despite these differences, you will be on the right path if your site has plenty of content that contains the search words or phrases your customers will use, if you include key search words and phrases in the page text and in the TITLE tags in your HTML pages, and if you can get a

few dozen pages on related sites to link to your site. It can help to bold or italicize some of the main key phrases in the text of your web page and to put them in heading tags (<h1></h1>, etc).

Generally, you do not need to bother resubmitting your site to the major search engines once you have done this for the first time. They will continue indexing changes to your site as they are made. Check your site access logs—you'll see that their robots keep returning to your site! It may not be worth your time or resources to keep returning to some of the minor engines that are slower to update without your involvement, unless they are important to a target market! The major ones are used worldwide and have multiple language versions.

Consider buying pay-per-click advertisements in popular search engines like Google and Yahoo!, or using Overture. You'll never pay more than you specify per click and per day, and these can be very effective while you are still working to build a search engine ranking that puts your website on the first page!

Beyond search engines

Include tools on your site for visitors to tell others about your website, products and destinations! Consider using electronic postcard tools or offering subscriptions to free email newsletters (which should, of course, contain links to your site!). The topics of email newsletters and multimedia tools will be covered in subsequent articles in this series.

Consider writing articles for submission to Web article banks, sites which offer free articles for use in websites, email newsletters, and other communications (You may be reading this article via an article bank submission!). In return for use of your article, you receive a listing of your name and company and a link to your website. This can also be a good way to establish yourself or your organization as an "expert" in your field or tourism domain.

Also consider frequenting relevant Usenet discussion lists (e.g., rec.travel.japan) and Web-based bulletin boards, or joining email discussion groups, to offer advice in your area of expertise or about your destinations. Don't spam and do follow their rules of "netiquette", or online behavior. Do include your Web address and a short business description with your "signature" at the bottom of your responses. Not only will you attract visitors to your site, but you'll learn about the concerns and interests of potential customers. You can incorporate questions (paraphrase or attribute) and your answers into an FAQ (Frequently Asked Questions) section on your website!

Paid Web banner advertising can be cost-effective if properly targeted and timed, and if the message is right. The same holds true for ads in print and other media (but these are outside the scope of this article).

In conclusion

There are many techniques for attracting visitors to your website. Make sure you cover the technical basics like search engine optimization, but don't focus on technical tricks or spam methods—you may be removed from search engines and turn away potential customers. Offer quality content, find online partners to share links, and be a bold online networker!

The next article in this series will present (Sept 2004) guidelines for the creation and use of websites.

Leave Home Productions provides marketing services and tools to tourism-related businesses and organizations. Our clients benefit from strategies, tools, and creative concepts developed to clarify their needs, make use of their resources, and help them achieve their goals. We specialize in promotions, online communication, distribution and the creation of multimedia and Internet tools. Leave Home also supports marketing with traditional media formats and personal communication. We work to develop solutions that support healthy growth for our clients' business and sustainable tourism for the host communities and environments.

(www.Leave-Home.com)

Terms of usage: If you would like to include this article in your website, newsletter, or other publication, please contact the author at bryan@leave-home.com. We require attribution and a link to our website. You can also sign up to be notified when there are significant new articles and other resources on Leave-Home.com, using our contact page at <http://leave-home.com/contactus.htm>. This will be a very low traffic email list. If you find this resource useful, please consider hiring us as consultants, referring business to Leave Home, or linking to the Resources page at <http://leave-home.com/resources.htm>. Thank you.