

A new frontier for marketing

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Over the past three years, the business of marketing has drastically changed. Evolving technology and digital platforms, such as the acceleration of the Fourth Industrial Revolution (4IR), and the Covid pandemic, which has changed socio-economic and lifestyle circumstances, has changed audiences' appetite for content.



Supplied. Stephanie Aboujaoude, senior area director of Marketing & Communications Middle East & Africa for Radisson Hotel Group, says the business of marketing has drastically changed

In the hospitality and travel industry, fluctuations have been par for the course with travel bans and restrictions heavily impacting the ways in which companies communicate, create and engage with audiences.

A flexible, consumer-centric approach

Gone are the days when marketers could plan a year in advance. Now, as industries continue to grapple with the effects of the pandemic, marketing plans must be reviewed at least on a quarterly or monthly basis.

Strategy and foresight remain integral, however, room for flexibility has been – and will continue to be – key.

For a company that operates in various markets, such as Radisson Hotel Group, the opening and closing of borders has presented one of the biggest challenges when it comes to planning and activating campaigns.

And this is not likely to change in the near future as world events and the probability of other epidemics continue to present volatility to markets and businesses. To that end, marketers, and business leaders, should maintain strategies and plans but remain vigilant and flexible in revising these in real-time.

Additionally, consumers have become increasingly price-sensitive and rate-, discount- and value-driven offers should not only be a focus during heavier traffic times, but must become a central component of any marketing plan.

To connect with consumers, marketers must learn to emphasise and highlight the more human and inspirational – aspirational, even – side of their offerings.

In the hospitality and travel sector, consumers are almost always in the dreaming phase, i.e. the phase before planning a trip that could take place any time from next week to next year.

By recognising this, marketers can focus on offerings that tie directly into inspirational content. At Radisson, this has meant moving away from the aspirational idea of ‘Take me there’ when consumers were in lockdowns and isolation, to the more connected ‘Time to take a break’, which alludes to working from anywhere or being more flexible with their time.

This means our marketing efforts are less focused on tactical or seasonal messaging and more on the feeling, experience and willingness to travel at any time.

Social and influencer marketing is still big – but more centralised

Hate it or love it, social media will remain a key aspect of the marketing playbook. While social media has been around for a few years now, many brands are still uncertain as to how to approach these platforms. The surest way: Knowing your online audience.

Take the time to review your existing audiences, those who already follow and engage with your brand on social media, and focus on providing relevant content regularly and not just when you have promotions or a product to sell.

In 2022, this means content that focuses less on speaking to an audience and more on engaging with audiences. A brand's social media strategy must hone in on organic content that engages, paid content that targets customer acquisition, and influencer collaboration.

The latter can be a pain point for many with unreliable statistics and less engaged audiences being key challenges to influencer marketing. That said, influencer marketing remains one of the most credible forms of marketing and it is extremely important that industries capitalise on that.

Key to this is being more strategic about the objective for working with influencers, with an important aspect being the reach influencers are able to provide a brand. Radisson's strategy has been to view influencers more as brand ambassadors and to maintain a small but loyal network of influencers that we partner with to experience our properties across the globe.

It's also important for marketers that plan on regularly working with influencers to invest in tools that can track their credibility – from their following to their engagement and quality of their content. In this way, marketers can hone in on influencers that perhaps have smaller followings but have carved out a niche with an audience that is engaged and will guarantee the partnership has an impact on the business.

Traditional marketing is not going anywhere

Digital and social have certainly evolved and have taken more of the marketing budget, but there is still a case to be made for more traditional marketing avenues such as public relations, print and broadcast media.

No matter the brand, the overarching objectives, the types of marketing activities planned and the key performance indicators (KPIs) will dictate the kind of marketing strategy that will be employed.

For example, in South Africa, radio is an important driver for awareness and engagement for Radisson in terms of both hotel occupancy and food and beverage. This may not be true for other markets where billboard advertising in well-known, established airports or content in print media will produce better results instead.

The consumer archetype is also a traditional marketing tool that is often overlooked yet immersing yourself in knowing your customer during periods of transition, such as the one we're currently experiencing, will stand marketers in good stead.

Two key trends that have developed from knowing the hospitality consumer, for example, is that of bleisure – people travelling for business but extending their trip to a leisure stay – and workcations – where remote and flexible working policies allow people to visit a destination for a holiday but stay for an extended period of time while working.

The last two years have certainly changed the ways in which consumers engage with content and brands, but a strategic marketing approach that utilises all channels and maximises reach and output will be the deciding factor for success.

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