

Connecting travel brands in a meaningful way

By  Natalia Rosa

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Once upon a time, 800 words on a page with a stunning image were enough to inspire customers to travel to a destination, stay in a resort or visit an attraction. Travel was one of those high-ticket items one didn't get to experience before it was bought. We were content not to experience what we were being sold, relying on the vivid pictures painted in words to entice us to crack open our passports and venture to far-off lands.



Natalia Rosa, Director, Big Ambitions

It may have taken forever for that to change, but when it did, it happened fast. And travel marketing and PR is still evolving quite quickly – every year bringing a new tool or method into the mix. The mantra for professionals in this industry right now is integration and meaningful connections.

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The future of travel PR

In the changing Travel PR landscape, we say goodbye to impersonal, promotional press releases and mass media pitches, and say hello to integrating PR, social media and online marketing with meaningful messages.

If you feel like a chief cook and bottle washer in this new world, you'd be right. The future travel PR professional is agile and proactive, looking for hooks and what's trending so they can piggyback off or create new conversations across a variety of platforms – social media, mainstream press, newsletters and more.

The days of five-page press releases with no news hook and purely promotional content are gone. Content now needs to be written from the departure point of the audience. That means, more often than not, *exclusively for the media partner to which it is being sent so that the information is relevant, informative, inspiring and fosters trust.*

Content that hits the spot is that which shows that you understand your audience, what their pain points are and how they consume information. Audiences are different, their needs are different, so why would you send a press release about Iceland to a press contact whose audience is interested only in local travel?

It's better to be seen as a thought leader

It's much harder to adopt this exclusive approach. One needs to listen to a lot more conversations, do a lot more research and generate a great deal more content, written with the end consumer in mind when you have your paying customer nipping at your heels to position them in a positive light across as many platforms as possible.

Travel brands don't always recognise that it's better to be seen as a thought leader by their target market than to send out press release after press release for the sake of keeping to a schedule. It's a bit like the guy in the room who talks

constantly, yet has nothing to say. Sooner or later, we stop listening.

The same extends to social media. When we create content in the new travel PR world, we do so with various platforms in mind, including social media, and we do so meaningfully. Our new travel PR world requires us to think about connecting a customer with their audience on the platforms where they are 'playing' with content that tells them clearly what's in it for them.

A meaningful approach

A more meaningful approach in travel PR these days is to listen and engage. Today, we spend hours listening to what people are saying about travel and travel brands, engaging in these conversations and contributing if we have something meaningful to add. We build relationships with influencers in our space and leverage their power to connect travel brands with their audience.

Our role in travel PR is to influence behaviour without overt selling. Our interaction with our customers should be to show value in our content and help them solve problems so that they trust that we're interested in more than making a profit when we send them on a holiday or business trip.

Visuals a non-negotiable

Sometimes that trust comes with seeing something with your own eyes, which is why visuals have become an absolute non-negotiable in travel PR. Video, augmented reality, slideshows, etc., are the mainstay of our content today. Why say in 1,000 words, what you can say in five beautifully created video scenes? Why write about the delicate mother-of-pearl and semi-precious stone floral inlays of the Sheikh Zayed Grand Mosque in Abu Dhabi when you can show them?

Finally, before you're tired of ticking off tasks and running the treadmill of travel PR, take a moment to look, critically, at what you've done and how it has achieved your goals of integration, listening, connecting and being relevant. There is no reason why the new age of travel PR cannot be meaningful and fulfilling, not only for your customers and their audience but also for yourself - the new-generation travel PR professional.

ABOUT NATALIA ROSA

Natalia Rosa is the MD of Big Ambitions, a specialist travel and tourism communications and marketing organisation which helps tourism and travel organisations connect with their members and customers.

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