

IDEAS LABS

PEER-TO-PEER LEARNING

Appealing to and Engaging with Regional and BC Travel Markets

Industry Topic Specialist

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Specialist Highlights

Actions taken by TPL/BCHS to attract BC Residents:

- Updated booking and cancellation policies for 2020 and 2021.
- Easy to find COVID protocols on the website (provided on multiple pages).
- Build trust by participating in the Safe Travels program.
- Reached out to past customers & those who previously inquired.
- Promotional price for BC residents.
- Highly targeted digital marketing campaign.
- Focus on the future – kept travel trade up to date and continued to take bookings.
- Continued to develop awareness in international markets.

Discussion Ideas Tips

A wide range of ideas from industry pertaining to what businesses can do to appeal to and engage with the regional and BC travel markets were generated through the four Ideas Labs held with 59 tourism professionals as of Oct 20, 2020. The ideas emerging from these discussions are organized into six categories, each of which plays a role in attracting visitors from within Canada.

Understand the (new) customer

- Challenge assumptions – what you think you know about the local consumer. There are many BC residents who would love to go on a bear safari or hike with a guide. Possible targets for such experiences include new Canadians, urban residents interested in the outdoors but unfamiliar with an area and who feel unsafe on their own, activity novices.
- Consider attracting similar markets/customers as your core international travellers, but who live in BC, i.e., if you traditionally attract Chinese visitors, look for opportunities to attract Chinese Canadians living in the province.
- Think about the opportunities presented with the local market – locals make great repeat customers. Develop and sell experiences that allow you to invite guests back over and over (e.g. a series of experiences in a consistent format but change theme).
- Take advantage of the opportunity to shift away from focusing on a single market to diversify your customer base and make your business stronger and more sustainable. Maintain experiences suitable for the international market, but balance and add to your product offer to include Canadians.

Remember there are likely many Canadians for whom your experience is a bucket-list item that they have not been able to get to because of your focus on the international traveller. Geo-targeted social media advertising using relevant, compelling content promoting your bucket-list experience can help find and cultivate new customers in new markets.

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(Re)Develop Experiences

- Take a locals perspective and review experiences to identify the elements that are of less value and can be eliminated without eroding the value of the key selling features that are differentiators:
 - Eliminating airport shuttles that are not needed by drive markets, can reduce costs and allow a reduction in price point without discounting.
 - Base packages with a la carte options for meals & activities deliver personalized value to visitors while allowing a business to cut costs, potentially reduce prices and maintain critical profit margins.
- Breaking multi-day experiences into smaller pieces or day trips to 'bubble groups' may be appealing to local audiences looking for shorter getaways.
- Demand for outdoor experiences has grown and is anticipated to continue growing. During the winter months this may mean increased interest in cross-country skiing, snowshoeing, sledding, tubing. Incorporating these activities may be a way to attract visitors in the winter months.
- Providing blankets, using heat lamps and putting up sparkling lights are ways businesses and destinations have made the outdoors warmer and more inviting for visitors in colder months.
- There is a growing trend related towards health consciousness; experiences that incorporate and position benefits related to health and wellness benefits could be of more interest.
- Providing touchless processes (i.e., online menus) can foster confidence and trust with customers.
- Timed departures for self-guided experiences (i.e., the [Chilliwack Corn Maze](#)) can help spread people out so they feel safer.
- Rather than focusing on increasing guest volume, creating experiences for small/private (bubble) groups at a premium price could help to increase yield/revenue per guest.
- Developing virtual experiences may layer on a new revenue opportunity and entice past and potential visitors to return/visit once business is open.

Promotional Pricing

- Discounting represents a tactical and strategic opportunity, but can result in a 'race to the bottom' that doesn't benefit anyone. Alternative options may include:
 - Reframing 'discounts' as 'incentives' and offering Early Bird Specials, Last Minute Specials, [Special Offers](#) [Residents Rates](#).
 - Frequent purchaser card (10th time free, or at a lower price) to attract repeat business.
 - Value-added incentives. Look for items that customers will find valuable that are not a high expense, e.g. a ski hill or golf course could offer early/VIP access.
- Being transparent and explaining the importance of staying open for the staff and the community can be helpful in managing guest expectations related to lower prices now and not in the future.

Develop New Partnerships

- Exploring new partnerships and collaborations can help create different value propositions, packages, visitor offers and price points.
- There is a strong 'support local' trend and guests will likely appreciate local partnerships that help the larger community.
- Sector marketing partnerships can be effective in addressing specific issues, i.e., the guiding sector addressing the value proposition of using a guide.
- Non-traditional marketing partnerships, especially for those offering strenuous outdoor adventure experiences, with fitness centres, trainers, clubs could be an opportunity to find customers that travel for their passions (i.e., hiking, cycling, skiing, kayaking).

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Communications

- Clear & consistent communications to your customers is key, especially in relation to COVID; customers are unlikely to read everything sent to them or see your COVID communication in all channels where it has been made available.
- Safety messaging is a priority to travellers currently. Clearly communicating your safety protocols up front will be appreciated.
- For more remote regions communicating that the area provides an opportunity to escape the busyness of other more highly visited/populated areas can be effective.
- Getting to your location can be stressful – travellers want to know where there are open washrooms, places to buy food, etc. Working with RDMOs and Drive BC to ensure messaging is consistent helps alleviate the stress.
- Past guests can provide a prime opportunity; letting them know what is happening may entice them to visit or recommend you to others.
- Sharable social media posts and engaging website content (videos, pictures) can build awareness now and inspire potential customers to consider visiting.
- Updated photography showing guests physically distanced, wearing mask and highlighting other COVID-19 protocols helps build visitor confidence and trust.

- Leverage the power of targeted digital marketing campaigns: [Google Search Ads](#), Facebook and Instagram. Know your customer profile and align your targeting with these characteristics for the best return on investment.

Plan for the Future

- Time stamp COVID messaging so that potential customers know things are up-to-date.
- Even if unsure of future business plans, being transparent and providing best estimates of opening dates can be helpful to potential customers. Keeping lists of people interested in booking / providing advanced booking opportunities can provide a kick start once open.
- Keep your [TripAdvisor](#) profile, social media channels and [Google listing](#) current with COVID updates. It demonstrates that you are keeping up to date on the situation. In addition, if reviewers have commented on protocols that have changed, reply directly and note the change so that this information is front and centre when potential customers read the reviews.

Additional Helpful Links

[Tweedsmuir Lodge - Marketing to BC Residents Video](#)

[Post Media's Grant Program](#)

[WTTC Safe Travels Initiative](#)

[Digital Marketing Workshop - Destination BC](#)

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