

Welcome Signals Impacting the Visitor Experience

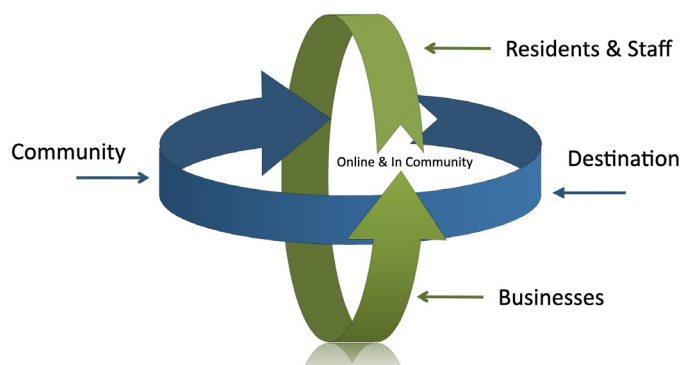
Industry Topic Specialist

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Specialist Highlights

- Visitors are looking for welcome signals. They want to feel invited and have clarity regarding hours of operation and COVID-19 protocols.
- We all have a role to play in welcoming guests, building trust, and providing consistent messaging that signals to guests they are safe and welcome.
- Review your experience design, visitor flow, and all touch points in the visitor journey to consider any modifications needed for today's health and safety conscious traveller.
- WTTC's #SafeTravels stamp is an opportunity to show region and business alignment with international health and hygiene protocols.
- Updated, time stamped information indicates a business that keeps up with the current situation and as such can impart a sense of safety/comfort to potential customers.

Welcome Signals Come From Many Places



Discussion Ideas & Tips

Everyone has a role to play in welcoming guests. A wide range of industry ideas pertaining to how we can do an even better job in welcoming visitors were generated through seven Ideas Labs held in Ontario, British Columbia and Saskatchewan 97 tourism professionals to date.

The new ideas generated in the latest RTO 8, Ontario session are:

- There is a need to balance messaging. Travellers from areas with a high number of COVID-19 cases may be looking to escape the constant COVID messaging from media and the government. Using a softer tone with messages at key points in the customer journey, and providing clear indicators on site of what to do is important, a barrage of messages is unlikely to be helpful (tune out), neither is going above and beyond the required protocols.
- Touchless is a direction businesses are investing in such as: contactless check-in procedures, digital receptionists in VICs and QR codes to provide information (e.g., menus in restaurants, general visitor information).
- Potential customers are more likely to register and act on an offer when referred by a friend than if only seen in their social feed / inbox.
- Connection and community are increasingly important during the pandemic; connecting emotionally may help cultivate relationships; personal phone calls were described as an effective approach, especially with an older customer.
- Travellers are checking community and business websites to understand if they are welcome. Message alignment is likely to enhance traveller trust and confidence.

Here's additional industry input from previous sessions!

1. Setting Visitor Expectations

- Communicating everything guests need to know in advance of their arrival such as reservation policies, what to bring (e.g. their own mask), outline expected behaviours of visitors and staff, highlight operational and staffing limitations, etc. helps set expectations from the start.
- Greeters at the entry of an establishment are providing visitors with human contact and can be a differentiator for the business. Plus, in helping people feel comfortable, local customers may be more likely to return and therefore spend more money, potentially covering the additional staffing cost.
- It is important that staff communicate and address differences in protocols and expected behaviours when guests move from one activity to another.
- Ensure a current website, incorporate seasonal messages, COVID-19 updates for travellers who may be looking to book for the future. [Tweedsmuir Lodge](#) includes information on their business, the [destination](#) and the First Nations community.
- Update photos and videos to include COVID-19 appropriate images (e.g. physical distancing, wearing masks) to reflect current realities. Consider using video to present your COVID messaging and help guests visualize the new experience as [CMH Heli-Skiing](#) and the [Fairmont Empress Hotel](#) have done.
- For the foreseeable future, welcome signals are inexplicitly linked to safety signals. From a legal perspective, operators have been told not to say something is "safe" as it can't be guaranteed (hence the use of waivers and consent forms). It is important to maintain a shared responsibility for safety with guests.
- Be conscious and address negative influences such as plate and mask shaming and other emerging activities if and as they emerge.
- A Statement of Understanding can be effective in helping visitors understand what is expected of them. [Spirit of the West Adventures](#) and [Wildcoast Adventures](#) are two examples. These could even be used as a base for developing a sustainability, or responsible travel pledge.

- Flexible cancellation policies are one way operators can be welcoming; however be prepared for guests to continue to want this. [Grouse Mountain's Pass Protection](#) may stimulate ideas.

2. Experience Design

- Creatively redesign visitor experiences to factor in the safety needs/ expectations of guests regarding distance, touchpoints, use of masks and new ways to stage activities. Review the visitor flow to identify touchless opportunities.
- Microsoft's MSGBOX application is being used to provide guests with the ability to reserve times for the in-house restaurant and other activity bookings as well as to answer frequently asked questions. This functionality has the ability to ease staff workload and improve the guest experience.
- Attracting domestic customers may create an opportunity for new partnerships that are better suited to delivering a memorable experience and create win-win benefits for all.
- Creatively addressing pain points in the customer experience as a result of backlogs and wait times can be enhanced with a storyteller to engage guests as they wait. [Kalala Organic Estate Winery](#) had the owner welcoming visitors, providing information and maintaining control before guests could move to the next stage of the experience. In July, [Weiwaikum House of Treasures](#) had an elder outside sharing stories as customers waited to enter the store with a 2-person limit. Personal connections may also increase the desire to purchase.
- Selling tickets for specific timeframes, such as is done by [museums](#), [art galleries](#) and attractions such as the [Chilliwack Corn Maze](#), can create even better experiences (no crowds) for the customer.
- For restaurants moving to take out meals, food kits that come with videos that allow the customer to cook/mix along with the chef and bartender offers a new way to engage with customers, especially when restaurants must close at 10pm (the [Globe Cafe](#) at Big White will be doing this this season).

3. Message Tone

- Asking questions, in a relaxed and conversational tone, that allow an operator to provide a more personalized experience, can help guests feel special and cared for.
- Communicate sensitively and with confidence – echo Dr Bonnie Henry’s calm leadership. “You are welcome; please take these precautions.” Be respectful of the communities in which you operate, appreciate each community must decide if they are open to guests.
- Take a positive tone and focus on being helpful, instead of “Don’t help yourself” flip it to “We are happy to serve you”. A great example is how vendors in French markets wait on customers; you do not help yourself, the vendor picks out your produce based on your requirements.
- While prior to COVID-19 unprofessional videos may have resulted in poor visitor perceptions of a company, at this time customers value current information and in-house videos made using a phone, especially as a means of providing updates on COVID-19 related protocols are likely to be viewed positively.

4. Consistent, Aligned Messaging

- Consistency in COVID related policies and expected behaviours, front and back of house, shows caring for guests and staff alike.
- Vertically aligning communication channels among businesses and partners helps ensure clarity and increase travellers’ confidence to ‘choose you’.
- Consistent communications and protocols within a community are helpful in reducing mixed messages for visitors. Proactive municipalities such as Whistler that provide businesses with materials and have signage regarding the need for mask wearing and have hand sanitizer stations throughout the village help visitors feel safe.
- Bringing like-minded people together to address issues in your sector or community provides leadership and provides a base expectation for the visitor. The kayaking community on Vancouver Island has come together to develop consistent messaging in their sector and the ski industry has developed best practices for low risk skiing and snowboarding at Canada’s ski areas.

- Continue to let your community and customers know your plans and how you are keeping your staff and the community safe.

5. Current Information is Essential

- Current, time stamped, COVID messaging helps potential customers know you are on top of things.
- Keep customers informed; be transparent and provide best estimates on opening dates; collecting customer contact information may help to kick start bookings.
- 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 up front and center when potential customers read the reviews.

6. Personal & Staff Development

- Investing in training to help staff address inconsistent guest behaviours related to evolving COVID-19 protocols can help build trust and confidence with staff and visitors.
- Staying with or booking an experience with tourism operators leading in the implementation of COVID-19 protocols and welcome signals can be helpful in understanding how they handle things and could be motivating.
- Thinking broadly on how to keep staff working, provide a benefit to the industry and your business can produce unintended dividends. Maple Leaf Adventures, closed to guests this year, and five companies from the Small Ship Tour Operators Association used their fleet and staff to clean-up ocean debris. The clean-up was true to their values, contributed to the community and environment and garnered positive press.

7. Looking to the Future

- Even when closed welcome signals are given out. Review and modify your website and other customer touch points to ensure the signals you are giving out are inviting and address things such as when reopening, how addressing new protocols, etc.

- Many consumers want to travel and are starting to look and plan for 2021 – opening bookings for next summer now shows potential visitors you are ready and want them to visit and can provide a base layer of business for next spring and summer.
- Solo travellers continue to be a growing market and solo-friendly policies show they are welcome.
- Developing new experiences during seasons when not typically open is a way to build up business, especially this year. Additionally, doing this could bring a greater diversity of tourism

product, opening the doors to repeat visits (same visitor for a different experience at a different time of year) as well as new customers who might prefer to visit at a non-traditional time.

- Businesses are shutting down as move into the shoulder and winter seasons, which can create a poor visitor experience (i.e., no where to eat). Collaborating to trade off the days they will be closed is a possible approach to ensuring visitors are not left in the lurch; lodging properties taking orders for meals with bookings for guests in-house on these days could be another option.

Additional Helpful Links

[WTTC Safe Travels Initiative](#)

[Tweedsmuir Park Lodge Safety Protocols](#)

[Community COVID-19 Guidelines - Example from Bella Coola Tourism](#)

[Public Health Ontario – COVID-19 Surveillance Highlights & Data Tool](#)

[Government of Quebec – COVID-19 Health Alerts](#)

[Google Guidance for Businesses Affected by COVID-19](#)

[Wilderness Tourism Association of BC Wilderness Pledge](#)

[Destination Canada and Destination British Columbia – Resident Sentiment Surveys](#)

[Destination Think Blog Post – Safety & Empathy: DMO Communications Tips for 2020](#)



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