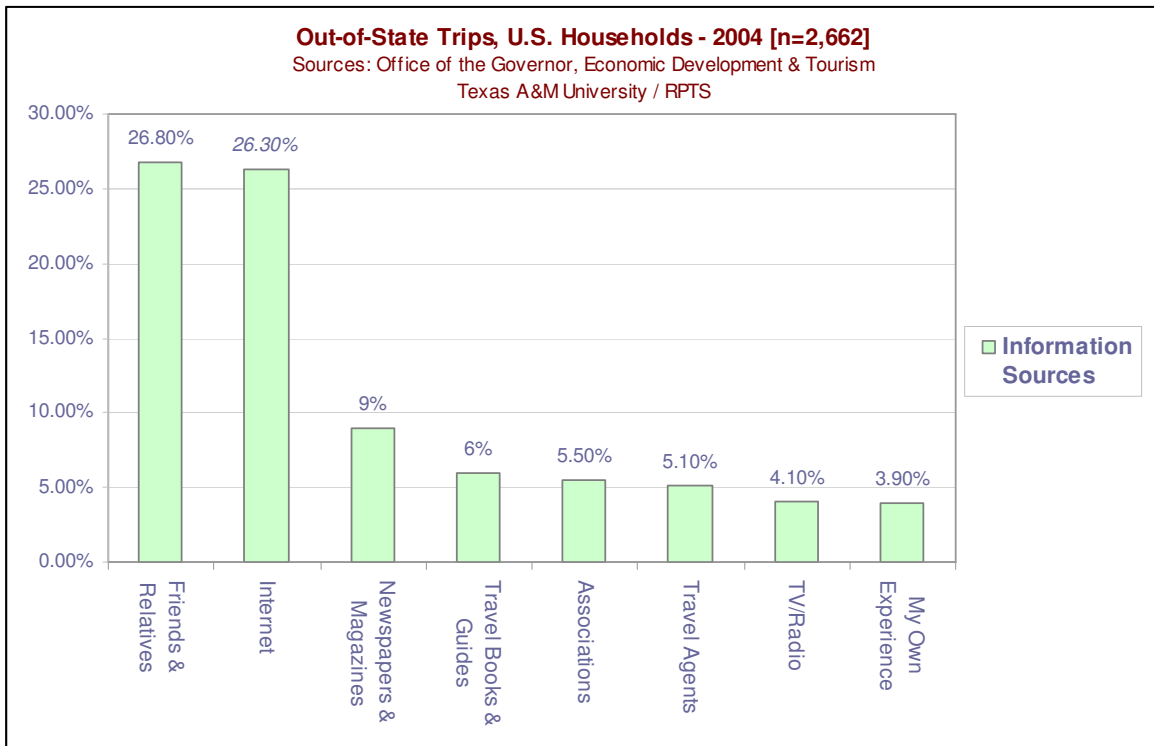


Nature Tourism Council :: Texas Travel Industry Association :: 2006 February Article

Title: Travel Trends Online: Enhancing Your Nature Tourism Experience with Effective On-Line Promotion – part one: A Comprehensive Web Presence Strategy.

During the course of our business and in support of our tourism industry customers, we always make a concerted effort to understand their greatest needs. Marketing support, particularly for those in the nature tourism sector of our industry, seems to always land at the top.

A recent study reported by the Office of the Governor, Economic Development & Tourism Division and Texas A&M University Recreation Parks & Tourism Sciences Department indicates that second to friends and relatives, the Internet is the primary source (by far) of information for Texas visitors.



An overwhelming majority of travelers do all their travel research on the web, and more than 50% of travelers actually book their travel on-line.

So, due to the ‘opportunistic’ and high-impact potential of on-line marketing, specifically for experiential tourism attractions, we would like to outline those items that, based on our experience, seem to be of particular importance to our nature tourism customers:

Know your customer base – Identify and profile the types of visitors that currently visit your facility, and equally if not more importantly, the type of visitor that you would like to have as

your ideal customer. Make sure you provide your target customer profiles as early as possible to your web development team.

Put yourself in your customers' shoes - Can your prospect customers find you on-line? What are the search terms that you would use to locate a facility like yours if you were planning a trip? Would you first access the website of the city you are visiting? If so, your business website should be associated to your specific region & activity, local chambers, CVBs and EDCs (Economic Development Corporations) are devising effective ways to incorporate business listings that you can benefit from. Once your website is ready, include your web address in all your promotional pieces (brochures, business cards, gift certificates, maps, guides), ask that your web address is listed in all your directory listings (local chamber, associations, sponsored events) and make sure your email address incorporates your website address (no need for you to promote hotmail or AOL in your business correspondence).

Make a good first impression – Use attractive pictures, maps, and illustrations - allow the travelers to ‘visualize’ themselves participating in your well crafted experience. Make it easy for travelers to research your attraction (list prices, availability, amenities, location) and book their stay. Accept payments on-line.

Use Testimonials (plain and simple) – Testimonials not only to promote the quality of your facility and customer service, but to also provide sample scenarios of how visitors enjoy their nature experience on your property.

Measure effectiveness (web analytics) – Make sure you have access to visitation metrics and website visitor sources (not only monthly but on a daily basis as well).

Select a reputable technology vendor – Someone that knows your industry and your market.

Keep your site up to date – Make it a point to visit your website, as if you were a prospect customer, on a weekly basis. Solicit feedback from your best customers, business associates and staff.

Be independent – Have the ability to update the key components of your site without depending on a 3rd party. Professional web design agencies provide access to easy-to-use on-line editing tools. If you do not want to manage your own site, select a vendor that will be able to implement changes within 24 hours.

Once your business is on-line, for the vast majority of your customers, your nature tourism experience begins on your web site. Ultimately, an effective web presence enhances your credibility and projects stability – resulting in increased sales.

Next month we will cover Online Search Positioning and Advertising.

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