

The evolving role of the DMO in optimising tourism opportunities

 By [Enver Duminy](#)

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From the dawn of democracy in South Africa, we've had the pleasure of welcoming swathes of visitors from across the globe. Some came to see the remarkable country that Nelson Mandela did so much to promote, some came simply as part of curiosity and the travel bug biting them. In almost 25 years, the tourism industry here has experienced a period of rapid evolution, and it's time to examine just how effective our role is in encouraging tourism growth.



The digitally-inclined visitor

No matter what your reasons are for travelling, be it business or leisure, chances are you are joining the majority of visitors who research, plan, pay for and enjoy visits to destinations with the use of a device. This accelerated shift to digital has had an impact on the way hospitality professionals do business, from their marketing efforts to their social media channels.

Naturally, this affects how destination marketing organisations tailor their efforts in enhancing opportunities in travel. Cape Town Tourism, for example, produced the first mobile-first website on the continent with a view to speaking to this need. The Industrial Revolution 4.0 means more than just an updated website, though, it means that every aspect of how we do business needs to come under the microscope to see if we're reinventing to remain relevant.

Gone are the days of brochure-based tourism and paper-heavy marketing campaigns – it makes sense to capitalise on the cost-effectiveness of digital marketing and communications for the benefit of visitors and move to a paperless environment.

Shifting to become a DXO

DMOs reside in a constantly changing landscape. Whether it's keeping up with new marketing channels and trends or balancing the promotion of tourism with the concerns of the local community, the role and priorities of DMOs are in a constant state of flux. Looking forward into 2019 and beyond, we will endeavour to stay aligned with the ever-changing demands placed on us, by transforming our role from a DMO to what we term a DxO, where the 'x' will be defined by whatever the future demands of us.

Becoming a DXO isn't merely about technology, it's a recognition that the tourism industry has irrevocably changed. Nothing is as it used to be, except that people still want to travel. Perhaps there will come a time when tourists will conduct their visits virtually, but, for now, we're dealing with real humans who want to enjoy seamless, immersive experiences in a destination.

A DXO is better-equipped to manage disruptive business methodologies, to pivot when it comes to times of change and to be agile in the face of challenges. For example, A DMO in a time of water shortages cannot simply sit back and continue to market a destination as if oblivious to the challenge faced by locals and, ultimately, visitors. A DXO tackles the challenge head on, collaborating with relevant bodies in the private and public sector to drive tangible change, having a positive impact on the very environment in which tourism takes place.

Engaging with society

The DXO is more integrated with society, and that's part of the mandate we all have to practise sustainable tourism. We must engage with communities, seek ways to boost the economy, encourage strategies that lead to job creation and retention and protect the environment and resources on which tourism depends. While a DMO's capabilities in this respect are limited, being pigeonholed into a "just tourism" space, the DXO's input into a holistic, inclusive environment are welcomed and needed.

That way, we can have an impact on job creation, enhance the ways in which the boost to the economy translates to the betterment of our communities and drive innovative measures to attract visitors and retain them. Our task is to work with everyone, from large operators to SMEs and entrepreneurs to bring out their best and create a cohesive tourism environment.

Becoming a DXO means seeking ways to be less reliant on funding from local or national government; to achieve self-reliance that translates to job security and the freedom to strike out on uncharted territory with new ideas.

Are we there yet?

One thing's for certain, our shift to becoming a DXO is on the learning curve, but as we collaborate with other international organisations with similar intentions, we are learning from each other how best to apply this fresh thinking. There are some tourism geniuses across the world whose thinking is innovative; it makes sense to listen to what they're saying – overwhelmingly, it's a parallel to developments in our own thinking, almost a natural progression that's taking place.

More than being "digital first", we must become "society-first" in our strategies. Our capacity to effect change will be increased, and the impact we generate will attain a wider reach. It's no simple journey from being a DMO to becoming a DXO, but the challenge is invigorating – we're getting closer to where we need to be: a tourism sector that's relevant, growing and looking to the future.

ABOUT ENVER DUMINY

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